

March 10

Joshua 1 and 2
Joshua 3, 4 and 5

Finally! We start the book of Joshua! All this waiting in the desert and wandering through the Pentateuch can wear on a guy. So today! On to the Promised Land!

You may want to note that we have a 5 part sermon series on the five chapters we read today. SO if you really want to unpack it, you can go there for more info.

First off, Joshua gets chosen by God - not by Moses, or the people of Israel. God picked him 40 years ago and he had a good long apprenticeship. Imagine how hard it would be to step into the shoes of Moses. That's harder than coaching Notre Dame football after Lou Holtz!

But God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. Here is why:

- * He had God's presence "I will be with you"
- * He had God's word - only the books of Moses, but enough to obey well
- * He had God's promises - promises that went all the way back to Abraham.

- *"I am about to give you every piece of land where you will set your foot," - the Promised Land - "from the desert in the south to Lebanon in the north" - from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west - the promise, the ancient promise belongs to you."* By the way, the *"Euphrates River in the east"* is very far to the east of the present boundaries of Israel. In fact, it was only during the time of David and Solomon that Israel even came close to possessing all that they had been promised. It is just possible that the complete fulfillment of God's promise to Joshua awaits a time that will arrive with the return of Christ.

Joshua would have giants to face, walled cities to conquer, uprisings in his own people, fear and disobedience. He needed courage and he needed to obey God. Is there anything you need courage for? Are you facing any Giants? Then remember Joshua 1:9- "Be Strong and Courageous. Do not be terrified, Do not be discouraged - for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. " It is not about your ability. It is about God. And he can sure conquer any giants you face.

The other thing worth noting in this chapter is the rabid devotion of the people to Joshua. They promise to obey whatever he says and if anybody disobeys, they say, "Well kill him!". Wow! That is devotion to a leader! We need more of that in our church. (Not the killing people part, though). It is true that great things in this world are accomplished when a Godly leader is surrounded by radical followers who line up in obedience and work together as a team. I hope you have a leader you can follow with such devotion.

In chapter 2, Rahab responds in faith - She is a prostitute, but she believes in the God of Israel - and she swings a deal with the spies. In exchange for hiding them, they will save her family. She is saved by a scarlet cord hung firmly from her window. Everybody sees it and knows that her life is to be spared. It sure sounds a lot like the blood on the doorposts during Passover, doesn't it? You know what else it is like too.... It is like the scarlet blood of Jesus that saves us from the consequence of our sin. God uses a prostitute to symbolize our disobedience and a scarlet cord to represent the blood of Jesus. Put this in your journal under "Jesus sightings". Later in the Bible, in Hebrews 11, Rahab gets highlighted in the 'hall of faith' as one who was saved by placing her faith in God based on the small amount that she knew about him. She is an inspiration for us too!

On to Joshua 3, 4 and 5

Israel had to camp beside the Jordan River for three days before any specific orders were given to them by God. Humanly speaking there was no way to get two million people and all of their luggage and equipment across that river. There were no bridges or boats. Swimming it was unthinkable. After three days of mulling over the question of, "how are we going to get across", I am sure they were very anxious to hear what the answer might be. Finally, instructions came down from God to Joshua, but even then there was no answer to the basic question: - 'How will we cross?' - just some clear instructions. First, when you see the Ark, follow it; second, leave about 1000 yards between yourselves and the Ark as it moves; third, consecrate yourselves because tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you. The curious instruction about leaving a 1000 yard distance between the Ark and the people was probably a strategy designed to make certain that as they moved along and across the dry river bed every one would be able to see the Ark for themselves. Without that distance, it would very quickly have become a situation that only those in the very front of the line could see the Ark, and the rest would only be able see the heads of the ones who were walking in front of them. At the really critical junctures of our lives, it is tremendously important that we be able to see the Lord Himself, and not just look at the back of the head of the person in front of us. It may have also been that God called for that distance in order to emphasize the holiness of the Ark and of Himself, whose presence was represented by it.

Guess what the Israelites were thinking when the river dried up? You got it. "Red Sea". Now God is with Joshua just like he was with Moses. YES! Their confidence went way up! Practically, they physically got across the river, but spiritually this was so much more.

The memorials that Joshua ordered set up in the middle of the river were simple but powerful reminders of what the Lord had done for them. Twelve stones - one for each tribe - were piled on top of one another. They were left there to evoke for future generations that powerful question, "*What do these stones mean?*" The practice of erecting monuments was an important one to the Old Testament people of God. What do you do in your life to make your kids ask "What is this

monument or symbol or memory about.?" How good are you about remembering Gods goodness from the past?

Now that is pretty understandable, but you know what is weird? The circumcision at Gilgal. Hundreds of thousands of adult men with a flint knife, just before a major battle. Not a great strategy, unless you want to be immobilized!

Once again, God wants his people to be marked as his and totally dependent on him. That is because he is going to ask them to do things crazier than walking through a river.

You know, God calls us to radical risk. Joshua took a risk by becoming a leader, a risk in telling the people God's plans, a risk in stepping into the Jordan with the Ark. A risk in the circumcision at Gilgal. That is what the people of God do. They listen to Gods voice and obey, even when what he says seems like lunacy. He is with you. He will support you. He will show you his love. He is trustworthy. If he challenges you to take a risk. DO IT. That's where all the good stories come from. As a matter of fact, why don't you pray today that God gives you a risk to take. If he speaks... do it! You'll never be the same!

This is Mark Ashton - telling you to be strong and courageous - for the LORD is with you!