

## UNIT 1: JOSHUA AND JUDGES

### Lesson 1

# Joshua Begins Leading God's People

**God blesses those who obey Him.**

## THE LESSON OVERVIEW

This study opens with God's call for Joshua to lead Israel into the Promised Land. God assured Joshua that He would be with him as He had been with Moses. Joshua accepted this call and embraced the challenge of leading the tribes of Israel across the Jordan River to claim the land God promised. God repeatedly told Joshua to be strong and courageous (1:6, 7, 9), and the people also told him to "*be strong and of a good courage*" (v. 18). This lesson reveals the courage and obedience of Joshua following God's instructions throughout. It also shows the courage of Rahab, who helped the spies and saved her family because she discovered Israel's God was the greatest.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Joshua's given name was "*Hoshea*" (Deuteronomy 32:44), which means "salvation." However, in Numbers 13:16, Moses changed his name from *Oshea* (another form of *Hoshea*) to *Joshua*, which means "Yahweh saves." Previously, God had prohibited Moses from crossing into the Promised Land, so as he was nearing the end of his life, the anointing of leadership was placed on Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9). Joshua had been a faithful and loyal disciple of Moses. The Hebrew pronunciation of *Joshua* is *Yehoshua*, which is also the Hebrew pronunciation of the name of Jesus. Joshua was a "type" of Jesus, who is the salvation of Yahweh for all people.

## THE LESSON OUTLINE

### 1. JOSHUA RESPONDS TO GOD'S CALL *Joshua 1:1-18*

- A. God Is With Joshua (1-9)
- B. Joshua Begins to Lead (10-18)

### 2. RAHAB PROTECTS ISRAEL'S SPIES *Joshua 2:1-24*

- A. Rahab's Assistance and Her Request (1-14)
- B. Rahab's Words Encourage the Spies (15-24)

### 3. GOD PARTS THE JORDAN RIVER *Joshua 3:7—4:24*

- A. God Leads the Way (3:7-17)
- B. A Memorial for the Generations (4:1-24)

## DISCUSSING THE LESSON

### 1. JOSHUA RESPONDS TO GOD’S CALL *Joshua 1:1–18*

#### A. *God Is With Joshua Joshua 1:1–9*

After Moses’ death, God spoke to Joshua, informing him that Moses had died. God buried Moses in a secret place unknown even to Joshua. Unlike other religious leaders, such as Mohammed, with Mosque Masjid al-Nabawi built over his grave, no shrines were built as a monument to Moses. When Moses died, God informed Joshua and then told him it was time to cross into the land God had given the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God told Joshua the scope of this gift of land: *“From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and until the great sea [the Mediterranean Sea] toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast”* (v. 4). Joshua and Israel were on the east side of the Jordan River, and God told Joshua it was time to go west and take the land He had promised them.

Moses was dead, but his influence continued through his servant Joshua and through the Law that God had given Moses on the mountain. Moses’ name occurs fifty-one times in the Book of Joshua, including eleven times in chapter 1. God promised Joshua just as He had been with Moses, He would be with him. The Lord said He would never fail or forsake Joshua (v. 5), but there were two conditions. First, Joshua must be *“be strong and of a good courage”* (v. 6); second, he must observe and obey *“all the law”* God had given Moses (vv. 7-8). By observing these two conditions, Joshua and Israel would achieve everything God promised them.

#### B. *Joshua Begins to Lead Joshua 1:10–18*

After God’s encouragement, Joshua took the reins of leadership, commanding the *“officers of the people”* (v. 10) to tell the people to prepare their food and other supplies because in three days, they would cross the Jordan into the land *“which the LORD your God gives [them] to possess”* (v. 11). After the rebellion of their parents, at or near this same spot forty years earlier, it was time for the generation that had grown up in the wilderness to finally to go and take the land God had promised them. While walking in circles in the desert, it probably felt to some as if this day would never come. One can understand they were ready for a change and a better future. Joshua and Caleb had previously been to this point in the journey from Egypt. Now, however, there were no former slaves looking back to the *“flesh pots”* of Egypt (Exodus 16:3). This new generation had grown up looking ahead to the promise, not looking back to their past.

Some of the Israelites had already been given land on the east side of the Jordan—the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (v. 12). They were already occupying their allotments, but Joshua told them to send *“all the mighty men of valor”* (v. 14) to join their fellow tribes in conquering the land in Canaan. According to the Book of Numbers, all men who were *“twenty years old and upward”* (1:3) were expected *“to go forth to war in Israel”* (v. 45). The fighting men from these tribes were to fight side-by-side with their brethren until all possessed their allotted land. Then they could return to their own allotments and families (Joshua 1:15).

These three tribes agreed, saying just as they had followed Moses, they would follow Joshua because they believed God would also be with him (v. 17). They vowed if any from among their ranks rebelled against Joshua, that individual would be put to death (v. 18a). They had but one request of Joshua: *“Be strong and of good courage”* (v. 18b), which affirmed what God had already said to him. The people wanted and needed Joshua to be confident and courageous in the Lord as their leader.

## 2. RAHAB PROTECTS ISRAEL’S SPIES *Joshua 2:1–24*

### *A. Rahab’s Assistance and Her Request Joshua 2:1–14*

Joshua had been here before. Forty years earlier, he was one of the twelve spies Moses sent across the Jordan to check out the territory. He and Caleb trusted God to give them the land, but the other ten spies brought back a negative report. This time, again on the east side of the Jordan with the promise in sight, Joshua sent only two spies with specific instructions to spy out the land and specifically to assess the walled city of Jericho, which was the first major impediment to their advance. When the men came to the city, they slipped into the home of Rahab, whom the Bible refers to as a *“harlot”* (2:1). She was a prostitute and apparently successful in her trade, given that she owned her own home. Some commentators try to soften the text by saying she was an innkeeper, but neither the Hebrew language nor the storyline suggests this. The spies went to a place where they were likely to gain information: a harlot’s residence.

The king of Jericho was informed that Israelite men had been to Rahab’s home. The king recognized these men were sent to spy on the city and demanded that Rahab produce them. She was coy, saying she did not know they were spies (v. 4). She said they had left the city before the gate was closed, but if the king’s men pursued, they should be able to catch them (v. 5). In reality, she hid the spies beneath stalks of flax, which she had laid out on her roof. Sending the king’s men on a wild goose chase, Rahab returned to talk to the spies. She told them the entire city was in a state of panic because they heard that Israel’s God was empowering them (vv. 9-11). Recognizing the inevitability of Jericho’s defeat, Rahab shrewdly worked to make a deal with the men of Israel, asking them to show kindness to her and her family in return for her kindness to them (vv. 12-13). The men agreed that if she kept their whereabouts a secret, they would deal kindly with her and her family (v. 14).

### *B. Rahab’s Words Encourage the Spies Joshua 2:15–24*

After securing the promise of protection from the spies, Rahab helped them further by providing the means of escape from the city and telling them to hide in the mountains for three days to avoid being caught by the king’s men (vv. 15-16). In response, the spies again affirmed their promise not to harm her or her father’s household as long as they all remained in her residence, which was marked by the scarlet cord they used to descend from the window of her home (vv. 17-19). However, if any were not in her home when the city was destroyed, their blood would be on their own hands. A second caveat was that if she or her family betrayed the spies’ confidence, they would be released from their vow. She agreed and left the scarlet cord hanging from her window after the spies left (vv. 20-21).

Following Rahab’s instructions, the spies went into the mountains for three days until the king’s men returned to the city empty-handed. Then, the spies came down from the mountain and returned to Joshua with news of all that happened. With Rahab’s description of the city’s terror concerning Israel and their God, the spies told Joshua, *“Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us”*

(v. 24 NKJV). According to Rahab, the reason the people feared was because they recognized that Israel's God was *"God in heaven above, and in earth beneath"* (v. 11).

### 3. GOD PARTS THE JORDAN RIVER *Joshua 3:7 through 4:24*

#### A. *God Leads the Way Joshua 3:7–17*

The day came to cross the Jordan, and God was going to use this event to build Joshua's reputation and respect in the people's eyes (v. 7). Just as God was with Moses when they had to cross the Red Sea, God would perform a similar miracle with Joshua. All would see that God was with Joshua in the same way, with as much power and might, as He had been with Moses. This was important because the men going into battle with Joshua needed to be confident that God would be with them, just as He had been with them in their battles under Moses' leadership.

In total, the Jordan River is about one hundred and fifty miles long, covering sixty-five miles between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. During the dry season, it is very shallow and easily crossed at various points, but it can be quite formidable when flooded (v. 15). God gave Joshua specific instructions to pass on to the priests. The priests were to *"bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD"* (v. 11) and go ahead of everyone else. When they put their feet in the river, it stopped flowing and *"rose in a heap very far away"* (v. 16 NKJV). The priests bearing the ark proceeded to the middle of the riverbed and stopped while the people passed over to the west side, the land of Canaan (v. 17).

#### B. *A Memorial for the Generations Joshua 4:1–24*

After all the people crossed over, God told Joshua to have twelve men (one from each tribe) bring twelve large stones from the riverbed and carry them to the camp where they would stay for the night (vv. 2-4). Joshua did as the Lord instructed him, telling the people they would use the stones to create a memorial so when their children asked what the stones meant, they could tell them how God miraculously brought them across the river and into the land He gave them (vv. 6-7).

Joshua also set up a memorial in the middle of the river where the priests stood (v. 9). Except for the families of the tribes allotted land on the east of Jordan, all the people crossed over to the other side. Following this, the priests also finished crossing the river, and as they came up out of the Jordan and stepped onto dry ground, the waters of the Jordan began to flow again (v. 18). This moment—along with the cessation of the provision of manna (5:12)—represented the end of a chapter in the life of Israel. They came out of Egypt as a nation and wandered in the wilderness for a generation (forty years), but now they were in Canaan with their future ahead of them.

#### CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus came to earth as a man and showed us how to live as redeemed humanity. He gave us His example to follow, and His example was gaining victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave.

#### MINISTRY IN ACTION

Just as memorials were reminders of what God had done for Israel, we must encourage others by reminding them of the victories God has already done in their lives and the church.

# WORKSHEET

## What Do You Know About Joshua?

**The First Mention of Joshua in Scripture** is in Exodus 17:9-16. There it is told that several weeks after the Israelites had left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, and were nearing Mount Sinai, the Amalekites, an ancient nomadic people living in the Sinai Peninsula, attacked the Israelites. Joshua was commanded by Moses to lead the Israelites in war against the Amalekites (v. 9). They were defeated (v. 13), and ever afterward the Amalekites were regarded as enemies of Israel (vv. 14-16).

**Joshua Is Identified in Scripture** as Moses' *minister* (Exodus 24:13). Other Scriptures reveal Joshua was Moses' closest personal assistant (Exodus 32:17; 33:11), a position which, over the course of 40 years, prepared him to become Moses' successor as leader of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:14, 23; Joshua 1:1-5).

**Assuming Joshua Was the Leader of Ancient Israel** for about 25 years after the death of Moses, and Joshua being 110 years of age at the time of his death (Joshua 24:29), this would have made Joshua 35 years younger than Moses.

**Joshua Is Mentioned by Name** numerous times in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, 168 times in the Book of Joshua, and seven times in Judges, but nowhere else in the Old Testament except 1 Kings 16:34, which tells the fulfillment of a curse Joshua placed on whoever would rebuild Jericho (see Joshua 6:26). Joshua is mentioned only once in the New Testament, where He is called *Jesus* (Hebrews 4:8 KJV), the English word for the New Testament Greek equivalent of *Joshua*. More recent English versions (for example, the NKJV) correctly translate the Greek word in Hebrews 4:8 as Joshua.

**In Hebrew, Jesus' Name Is Joshua**, which means, the LORD is salvation. In Bible times, Joshua was a popular name for Jewish boys because of Joshua's fame as the successor to Moses who led the ancient Israelites in taking possession of the land of Canaan. Jesus the Messiah was named Jesus in obedience to God's will for His naming, revealed first to Mary (Luke 1:31), and then to Joseph (Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:21). God has made the name Jesus [*Joshua*] the name above all names (Philippians 2:9-11; Acts 4:12).

## Spiritual Heritage

1. Read Deuteronomy 11:24 and Joshua 1:2-3. How was Joshua to complete Moses' mission?
2. What spiritual lesson(s) can be gleaned from the fact that the Jordan River would not part until the priests stepped into the water (Joshua 3:13-17)?
3. God commanded Joshua and the Israelites to gather twelve stones from the riverbed as they were crossing over. These stones were used to build an alter that would serve for generations as a reminder of what God had done for Israel.
  - What are we doing to encourage our children to ask questions about their spiritual heritage?
  - What more should we be doing to prompt children's questions?
4. What testimony do you need to share with younger people in your life?
5. What was the ultimate purpose of the Jordan and Red Sea crossings (Joshua 4:24; Exodus 14:31)?