

Joshua

*“I will give you every place you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates . . . to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you”.*³⁴

Joshua ben Nun watched the dying rays of the sun illuminate the dark forbidding walls of the city of Jericho and wondered how God was going to have them breached. They were the most famous walls of the most infamous fortified city in the world. It was said to have been established either by Cain, the murderer of Abel, or by one of his admirers. Certainly, it seemed to have been cursed by wars and rapine and bloodshed more than most other cities in the region.

It was located strategically at the southern boundary of the land of Canaan, between the twin coastal and inland highways running north and south from Egypt to Babylon, a menacing citadel-fortress for invading armies and wealthy traders. For as far as the eye could see in the waning light in the valley to the distant encircling mountains the fields were luxuriant with a variety of crops watered

³⁴Joshua 1: 3-5

by irrigation ditches from the plentiful streams. It is indeed “*a land of milk and honey*”, thought Joshua, remembering the words from the time he and Caleb with the other ten spies had investigated the land forty years earlier.

Forty years! He was now almost ninety years of age, the divinely approved leader of God’s Chosen People of Israel, with a mandate from God to conquer the whole territory between the River Nile in the south to the River Euphrates in the north as the inheritance of God’s Promised Land for them. Well, he thought with an inward smile, Moses himself was eighty years of age when God called on him to deliver the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Forty memorable years for the Twelve Tribes of Israel now totalling well over two million men, women and children being miraculously maintained in the Sinai Desert by a unique Cloud-dwelling God.

Joshua turned to look towards the centre of the Israelite encampment where the *Shekinah Cloud* of the Presence hovered over the *Tent of Meeting*, grey-white during the day and fiery red at night. When the Israelites moved it went before them, and where it stopped at the end of the day they encamped. In this manner God had led them, providing food and water, clothes and shoes that never wore out, and no illnesses or miscarriages among them. This was the God who had brought them to the entrance of the Promised Land, no longer a distant God in heaven.

Joshua’s reflections were interrupted by the arrival of his friend, Caleb ben Jephuneh. The two elderly men were strangely alike, although Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb from the tribe of Judah. As generals of the Israelite army, they each wore the short-skirted military garb with leather belts at waist, and crossed over the shoulders, from which short swords in scabbards hung. Their faces were deeply tanned and seamed, framed by grey hair and beards, from forty years of desert living.

“Any further thoughts—or instructions—about Jericho?” Caleb asked Joshua as he sat down beside him, nodding towards the formidable walled city.

“Nothing”, Joshua replied. “Are the people ready to move?”

Caleb nodded affirmatively in reply. After they had crossed over

the River Jordan God had commanded Joshua to have all the Israelite males circumcised, a distinctive process that had been neglected in the forty years of wandering in the desert. With the death of the previous generation of rebellious Israelites who refused to go into the Promised Land because of fear, the new generation was showing by the commitment to circumcision that they were indeed God's chosen people. It had taken some days for them to be healed, and this is what Joshua had in mind with his question to Caleb.

"The two spies we sent into Jericho have returned," Caleb said, and Joshua's gaze sharpened in interest. "And ?—" he prompted.

"They say the city is ours for the taking," Caleb replied confidently. "The citizens have heard reports of our recent battles, and then the miraculous crossing of Jordan during the spring floods has really terrified them".

"But—?" Joshua queried sardonically.

"But—?" Caleb repeated questioningly, pretending surprise. "Why should there be a 'But'—?"

"There's always a 'But' —remember?" Joshua said provokingly. "We were twelve spies, two of us with good reports, But—"

"Ten with bad reports", Caleb finished with a smile. "Yes, you're right. This has a 'But'. Somebody informed the king of Jericho that there were two spies staying at the inn of a well-known inn-keeper near the wall of the city. The two spies thought at first it might have been the inn-keeper, an attractive woman with a 'certain reputation', as they say. **but**," he emphasised the word, smiling, and continued, "—instead she hid them under some bundles on the roof and lied to the king's officers. When they had gone, she released the two spies, and urged them to leave immediately. But, before doing so, she told them that she believed they would be successful in entering the city and conquering the Promised Land because of their omnipotent God, and she asked them to give her an oath guaranteeing the safety of herself and her family. The two spies did so, and they request that we honour that commitment".

"How?" Joshua asked with a frown. "Does she know what a battle in a crowded city is like?"

"Apparently, she does," Caleb laughed. "She had it all worked

out. She had helped the escape of the two spies by dropping them by means of a scarlet corded rope out of her window over the wall of the city, and she said she would have that same scarlet cord in her window to ensure her safety when the attack on the city happened”.

Joshua nodded appreciatively. “A clever harlot with integrity is worth saving. She didn’t also know when the attack would take place?” he added quizzically.

“No”, Caleb laughed, then sobering quickly. “Still no word from God about a plan?”

Joshua shook his head negatively. The two friends sat silently looking towards the darkening black walls of the city as the sun declined, now even more ominous against the luminous reddish-grey of the sky above the city. Both of them were skilled commanders, with long experience of battle strategies, and they knew that any plan they could concoct would require a long siege of the city with no guarantee of success. They needed a miraculous intervention from God such as they had just experienced in crossing the flooded River Jordan on dry land.

Joshua rose to his feet and stretched. “I am going to check the guards, and have a talk with the high priest about a possible message from God, before I sleep” he said to Caleb. “Will you alert the tribal leaders?” Caleb nodded his agreement, and turned away from Joshua’s tent to see the high priest.

The sky was now dark except for the early sprinkling of stars above the encampment and the light from some scattered fires. As Joshua strolled between the tents and fires, stopping occasionally to talk with the guards on watch, he recalled the words of God to Moses, his predecessor:

“When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the Lord your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army: Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be faint-hearted or afraid, do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”

“The officers shall say to the army: ‘Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or someone else may enjoy it. Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may marry her. Is any man afraid or faint-hearted? Let him go home, so that his brothers may not become disheartened too . . .’³⁵

As Joshua continued his walk around the camp on the day’s final tour of inspection, between checking on the guards he contemplated the recent remarkable events and the coming possibilities being planned by God. He was lost in these thoughts when he was startled by the sudden appearance of a stranger, accosting him with a drawn sword in his hand. As Joshua tried to identify him he was aware of some unique quality, and he recalled that, when he and Caleb had been on their spying mission forty years previously, in Hebron they had found the same disturbingly unique element in the resident notorious giant “sons of Anak”, or *nephilim*, the illicit offspring of demons and humans. Could this be one of Satan’s demon-followers like those?

“Are you for us or against us?” Joshua asked the stranger curtly. He and Caleb had not been afraid of them then, and he was not afraid of one now.

“Neither”, the stranger replied. “I have come as the commander of the army of the Lord”.

Joshua knew then that this was God-as-Spirit, the “Angel of the Lord”, human representation of God when He visited His creatures on earth in pursuit of some divine purpose requiring God’s presence. It was in this form that He had appeared to Adam, to Abraham, to Moses. So far, Joshua had only heard His voice in the *Shekinah Cloud of Glory* on Mount Sinai and in the *Tent of Meeting*, but, remembering Moses’ experience, he fell on his face in front of the divine apparition, saying, “What message has my Lord for his servant?”

“Take off your sandals,” the Angel-figure replied, “for the place where you are standing is holy.”

³⁵ Deut. 20: 1-20

So Joshua understood that God was now taking over His promised personal command of Israel in their first battle of Jericho in the Promised Land, as He stated earlier to Joshua:

“See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Make seven priests carry trumpets of rams = horns in front of the Ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, make all the people give a loud shout, then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in”.

A further command from the angelic commander of God’s host was that, once inside the city, all the spoils were to belong to God alone. Only Rahab the harlot and her family were to be spared according to the promise given to her.

The prostitute Rahab helped Joshua’s two spies to escape safely from Jericho, and in return she requested that she and her family would be spared in Israel’s anticipated victory. Later, her family would figure in the genealogical line of King David and Jesus³⁶.

As far as God was concerned, everything else in Jericho was accursed, nothing was to be spared, and any violation of this command would bring immediate death. The silver and gold articles were to be spared but only to be placed exclusively in the Tabernacle treasury. Every man, woman and child in the cursed city was to be put to death. This was holy ground, declared the Angel of the Lord’s hosts, God’s chosen Promised Land for God’s chosen people. A believing harlot could live here, but not an unbelieving king.

Joshua got up early the next morning, acutely aware of the unseen presence of the angelic hosts of heaven and their Commander as silent observers and unseen participants, and ordered the first circling of the city’s walls. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets took their place before the Ark of the Covenant, and blowing on their trumpets. Ahead of them went the generals and commanders of the armed men from the three tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, and a rearguard detail followed

³⁶Matt. 1:5, 6,16

behind the Ark. At the rear came the silent two million men, women and children of the Twelve Tribes in their tribal groupings of a slow and solemn march; the silence only broken by the sudden blast of the trumpets at the end of the city's encirclement.

For six days this was repeated as God had commanded, and the earlier shouts of ridicule and abuse from the city's inhabitants slowly died away in fear as they awaited the unknown but anticipated catastrophic climax. On the seventh day the pattern was broken as the Israelites, after completing the first circling of the city, continued for another six times. The earlier atmosphere of terror was heightened as the skies darkened and distant thunder rumbled in an imminent storm. By the time of the seventh circling of the city, the storm had reached its peak, thunder was reverberating overhead, lightning flashed, and the rain poured down. Into this nightmare scene the priests now blew their trumpet blast, and Joshua commanded the people:

*"Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in the house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring disaster on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury".*³⁷

At the combined trumpet blast and shouts from the Israelis, there was a thunderous roar and the massive walls of the city collapsed into the suddenly gaping network of earthquake crevices at their foot. The Israelis charged into the terror-paralyzed city, putting it to the sword and then burning it to the ground. Inside the ruined city the Israelite soldiers destroyed every temple, shrine and idol, and retained the items designated by God for use in their own religious ceremonies. Only the family of Rahab survived. Joshua had explicitly commanded the two spies who had entered the city to make certain that the inn-keeper Rahab and her family were saved from the carnage in observance of the oath they had given.

³⁷ Joshua 6: 16-19

But there was an unexpected cloud cast over the immediate Israelite victory celebrations. In keeping with his planned strategy of consolidating a foothold in the region of Jericho, Joshua immediately sent out spies to the next targeted cities in the area, Ai and Bethel, which lay on his route to the central highlands of Canaan. When the spies returned they said that Bethel was strongly fortified, but Ai could be easily taken with a small force of three thousand men.

But, incredibly, the Israelites were easily routed, thirty-six of them killed, and Joshua was mortified. What had gone wrong? Where was the Angel of the Lord's hosts? He cast himself down in anguish before the Ark of the Covenant in the *Tent of Meeting*, together with the tribal leaders, seeking an explanation from God, in anguished bewilderment:

"O Lord, what can I say now that Israel has been humiliatingly routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

God's reply was immediate and peremptory.

"Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my Covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable for destruction. I will not be with you any more unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction"

Now that Joshua knew the cause of their disastrous defeat at Ai his despair lifted. He called for Caleb and told him to call a meeting of all the tribes for the next morning. There, each tribe, each clan of the tribe, each family of each clan, and each individual in each family would be questioned under oath to find out who was the guilty culprit who had violated the *Covenant* of God. This would be decided and confirmed by God.

Right after dawn the next day the whole nation of Israel was

gathered in the doors of their tents in their respective tribes. The only sounds were the usual ones of birds and livestock, and the occasional voice of a child. Joshua stood in front of the *Tent of Meeting*, the *Shekinah Cloud of Glory* above his head, with the high priest on his right, and Caleb on his left. In the tense silence he waited for some sign, and when it came in silent communication with God he pointed to the leading tribe of Judah.

The leaders of the tribe stepped forward in front of Joshua, and he told them to call forward each clan, one at a time. When the clan of Zerahites came forward Joshua responded to the prompting of God and told them to wait while the others withdrew. Then he called the Zerahites forward by families. When the family of Zimri were before him he again responded to the prompting of God and dismissed the others.

The families of Zimri were the most affected in both appearance and conduct. Their gazes shifted from each other, to Joshua and the tribal leaders, and then to the gathered tribes around them; and their early confident manner slipped away into nervous shuffling. Joshua's piercing gaze moved slowly from family member to family member, settling on the family of Carmi a son of Zimri. Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken. The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken. Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. It appeared Achan's "sin" was that he stole 2000 shekels of silver, a wedge of gold and a rich Babylonian garment in defiance of God's commands that nothing of Jericho was to be taken as spoils by the Israelites.

Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan, son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. When Joshua reached the one he knew was guilty he finally spoke:

"Achan, my son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him

the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me”.

The man had seen it coming and was trembling as he responded stammering to Joshua:

“It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

Joshua ordered one of the family with soldiers to the tent to retrieve the articles and brought them back to Joshua, who placed them on the ground in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Joshua passed God’s judgement on Achan:

“Why have you brought this disaster on Israel today in violating God’s Covenant? Now the Lord will bring disaster on you and your family and all you possess because you have violated God’s Covenant. You and your family will be stoned to death, and then burned, like the things in the city of Jericho you coveted.”.

Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest of the family they burned them.”³⁸.

The disaster that Achan’s sin brought on Israel not only resulted in their immediately shocking defeat at Ai, but also in the resulting resentment of the tribe of Judah (Achan was a Judahite) at being made a public disgrace by association with Achan’s sin before the nation right at the start of their entrance into the long-expected Promised Land. Judah considered itself as the primary Tribe of Israel because of the prophetic blessing of Jacob/Israel, in which they were designated as being the one from which Israel’s future king would come. Joseph was Jacob/Israel’s favourite son, and he had designated Joseph’s younger son, Ephraim, as the inheritor of the family’s birthright. In addition, it was Joseph who had been the original saviour and benefactor of Israel during their early sojourn in Egypt, so there was always tension between the tribes of Ephraim and Judah for the leadership

³⁸ Joshua 7:17,18; 24-26

This act of purging sadly brought to a quick conclusion the celebrations of victory over Jericho. But it freed Joshua to go forward with his original plans. For a start, he ordered a return to Ai to wipe out the disgrace of their earlier defeat there. He mobilized all his armed men, sending out 30,000 of the best of them with orders to set an ambush secretly behind the city during the night. Meanwhile he and the main force would advance at daylight on the gates of the city and, when the Ai army came out of the city after Joshua, he and the men with him would retreat. When this happened the 30,000 waiting in ambush were to emerge and strike ruthlessly at the unguarded city.

The ruse worked with dramatic effect as the Israelites slaughtered 12,000 of the Ai army, and many others who had come from the larger heavily fortified city of Bethel, where Jacob had dreamed of the Ladder to heaven. So the route to the central highlands lay open to Joshua and his victorious army, the long mountain ridge that formed the spine of the southern region. The nearest highland people to the Israelites were the Gibeonites, a small tribal confederation who had settled around the watershed of the mountains to the north of the city of Jerusalem.

Before Joshua could take action the Israelites were visited by a delegation from Gibeon. When the Gibeonites had heard of the Israeli defeats of Jericho and Ai they decided to use guile instead of force. The delegation had dressed themselves in old clothes, carrying patched water-skins and mouldy bread, as if they had come from some distant territory instead of only a half-day's journey away. Joshua made the mistake of not enquiring of God and was completely deceived by this ploy, entering into a treaty of peace with them bound by an oath.

Three days later he discovered that his new allies were actually from the region of Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjath-jearim, cities which were directly in his route through the mountains. In retaliation for the deceit Joshua decreed that they would let the Gibeonites live because of the oath taken, but that from henceforth they would be the menial wood-cutters and water-carriers for the Israelites.

With the matter of the Gibeonites settled Joshua and the Israelites were ready to move forward again. However, the delay had given the surrounding kingdoms time to get together to discuss mutual strategy. The nearby King Adoni-zedec of Jerusalem, with his fellow-rulers Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon, marched together with their armies to engage the Israelites from Gibeon. The fearful Gibeonites sent an urgent message to Joshua to come to their aid under their mutual treaty, and Joshua responded immediately.

At nightfall, in order to surprise the five kings, the Israelites quickly covered the fifteen miles to Gibeon without being observed. As the sky lightened he was able to see that the walled city was built on a low rise in the well-cultivated valley, overlooked by the surrounding ridges where his forces were hidden. The five kings were not expecting an attack and were caught completely by surprise when the Israelites attacked right after dawn. There was total confusion in the loose confederacy of the five kings and the Israelites slaughtered their armies throughout the day as they retreated from the Gibeonite city and surroundings. Joshua discovered the five kings cowering in a cave and ordered them to be hanged on the spot. To add to the confusion and terror, God intervened on behalf of Israel as the armies of the five kings fled towards Beth Horon, Azekah and Makkedah by hurling a terrifying hailstorm on them from heaven, although it was not a usual storm season, in which more of them were killed by the divine hail than died from Israelite weapons. Intoxicated by the triumph Joshua prayed to God before the victorious Israelites:

*A sun, stand still over Gibeon,
O moon, over the valley of Ajalon.*

And the sun delayed setting for a day in response to Joshua's prayer, adding to the already formidable reputation of the Israeli's God among the resident tribes and kingdoms in Canaan. The Beth-Horon Pass down which the five armies fled was a major gateway into Judean territory, as was the Canaanite stronghold of Azekah, so with their victory the Israelites fanned out in all

directions into and beyond the sparsely settled central highlands of Judea, subduing in rapid succession the notorious Hebron stronghold of the *nephilim* giants which had so frightened the previous generation of Israeli spies, Kadesh-barnea and Gaza, Libnah and Lachish, Eglon and Debir. Wherever they struck they ruthlessly eliminated *All that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded.*

In their forty years= exile in the Negev Desert, the new generation of Israelites had been prepared under the direction of Moses, Joshua and Caleb, to be a rapidly moving and striking army in conquering their inheritance of the Promised Land, and with the threats of the two major super-powers of that time, Egypt to the south, and the Hyksos to the north, in decline the Canaanite resident peoples were not able to withstand the advancing Israelis. But behind the warriors skills of the Israelis was God Himself, *“the commander of the heavenly host”*, as He had re veiled in the Dream of Jacob’s Ladder.

With these victories Joshua and the Israelites now controlled most of southern Canaan, but still left most of the more powerful northern parts of the country to be conquered. The most important city and stronghold of the north was Hazor, acknowledged as *“head of all the kingdoms”*. Hazor was an ancient city, with a known history going back to 4000 B.C., and was one of the most populated in Canaan at the time of Joshua. During the former conquest of the Hyksos in Canaan they had introduced horse-drawn chariots into their battles, but also they had greatly enlarged their occupied cities to accommodate the chariots, with wide streets and vaulted gateways and broadened ramparts. Hazor was one of these greatly fortified and expanded cities, and was also an important centre of commerce and culture.

When the king of Hazor, Jabin, heard of the rapid advances of the Israelites in the south of Canaan, he sent word to the thirty-one kings in the northern part of Canaan to join him in a concerted attack on the Israelites. The combined army of King Jabin of Hazor and the kings was assembled on the narrow plains around the narrow gorge of the Waters of Merom, with the chariots in front. When Joshua heard of the mobilizing of the kings with their armies he knew it

would be a decisive battle for Canaan—for the Promised Land.

It was not an ideal place the kings had chosen for the use of chariots but they had agreed on the assumption that a huge force such as they had would quickly annihilate the much smaller Israeli army. The site was the meeting point of the major axis of communication of the northern Galilee region, from which all roads radiated from the central ridge of Mount Merom all around the countryside. Whoever controlled Merom controlled Upper Galilee, and the streaming military banners of the thirty-one kings fluttering over their respective armies declared their dominance over the regional territories.

It was the Israelis' first sight of chariots in battle and they were a frightening sight. The charioteers were accompanied by mounted bows and javelin warriors alongside them as the shock vanguard in the launching attacks. If Joshua had any fears about the coming battle they were quickly assuaged by the assurance from God that *"by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them over to Israel, slain."* For good measure He instructed Joshua in the tactics he was to use against the gigantic army: *"You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots"*.

As he listened to these divine instructions for the coming battle Joshua assessed the battlefield from a new angle. The narrow gorge, with its shelving plain provided little room for the customary room for maneuverings of the chariots, and if they were quickly eliminated as a threat they would be a tactical hindrance to the foot soldiers behind them—especially with uncontrollably wounded and terrified animals.

Joshua wasted no time as God had foretold. While the kings were still organizing their battle disposition Joshua launched all his troops against them in sudden assault. The specially trained strike force of Israelis from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh drove straight for the chariots and, as God had directed, they slashed the hamstrings of the horses, harnessed and un-harnessed, creating pandemonium among the animals. The confusion rapidly spread to the charioteers and their associated bowmen and javelin throwers, who were rendered useless in the closely crowded mêlée, and total

panic ensued during which the thirty-one kings fled back to their cities, leaving the Israelis to confirm their overall conquest of the north of Canaan. All that remained now was to conquer the coastal territories and the Promised Land of God was theirs.

On his death-bed Joshua acknowledged that it had been God who had provided them with the victories:

“You have seen everything that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you . . . The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no-one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

“But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you . . .”

Chapter 5

will be available on this site on the 1st June 2011