

Joshua-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

You can't miss the book's theme – the vitality of Yahweh's ancient promise (Gen.12:6-7 and 10 more times): the gift of a land (2-4, 6, 11, 15). But at a funeral (1)? Now what? Against this backdrop, we see the faithfulness of Yahweh's promise. Moses is dead; God's promise lives on! Second, note how His presence is highlighted – *"I will be with you"* (5). The revealed name of God – *"Yahweh"* – carries this very meaning. Moses is dead; God is not! How might such assurances of God's presence encourage Joshua? More than merely grit his teeth and muster up, but to *"be strong and courageous"* because God is with him(6,7,9). Repeated a dozen more times in the book, this ought to sound familiar to the Christian (Matt.28:20; Heb.13:5). Nothing is more essential! Which leads us to the fulcrum of the entire story: Yahweh's Word (1:8). What might *"meditate"* mean? How is obedience related? Joshua 1 and Ps. 1 alike teach us that *"life in the kingdom of God must be lived out of the Word of God"* (Davis). Just saying... and so they said in unison (12-18). What say you?

Chapter 2

Nothing like creating literary tension: How will those spies get out of the city when the gates have been shut? (7) The tension is resolved (15), but not before our focus is directed to something far more important – Rahab's confession of faith (8-13). Think about the content of Rahab's faith: the *Might* of Yahweh (10), the *Majesty* of Yahweh (11), the *Mercy* of Yahweh (12-13). *"Genuine faith never rests content with being convinced of the reality of God but presses on to take refuge in God... not just a matter of correct belief but desperate need."* (Davis) So what is the net gain from the spies report (24)? The encouragement in Yahweh's faithfulness; His promises are *"Yes, and Amen"* (2 Cor.1:20) and certainly enough to bolster us. Now we have to ask: Why include the Rahab story? Because our attention is to be drawn to the *Beauty* of Yahweh's grace: the conversion of a pagan prostitute (9-10). How would she have heard? When? Where? The gospel knows no limits. *"The church is not a club but a refuge for sinners who have been touched by the grace of God."* (Davis)

Chapter 3

Ponder this *"you have not passed this way before"* (4). Uncharted waters for a new generation. Israel has been led by God to move up the East Bank for a closer look: a torrent at flood stage; no bridge, no ferry. But instead of the obstacles, their first look should be where (3)? And what's the big deal about the Ark of the Covenant that they should mark their steps? For Joshua, the upward demands a second look inward (5, humility, repentance and faith). Then *"set out,"* for when we step out, God steps in powerfully, faithfully... specializing in impossible situations! (Eph.3:20-21) Not only a closer look, but a careful listening (sequence of 7 and 9). They are not left to our own imaginations; Yahweh interprets himself and all his holy will (10). About a land, yes; but maybe about a life... about dispossession and possession... the life of God in the soul of man. Joshua was listening. Were they? Am I? Sounds familiar to the Christian (Jn.14:21). Now what? A courageous leaving (14-17). Talk is cheap. Strange methods, but He goes before us!

Chapter 4

The emphasis is on the remembrance of Yahweh's goodness. *"Getting through the river isn't the end of it all; you must remember what happened there"* (6,7 Davis). The greatest enemy of faith might be

forgetfulness (Deut.8), and it has implications even to our own families (7, 21-24). By the way, when is the last time you told your personal testimony to your children? Insisting on remember the day implies that this event was very unique. *“Yahweh’s method of retaining his people’s fidelity is not by frequent, dazzling displays of power but by faithful witness of those acts in which he had already demonstrated his care.”* (Davis) How might this carry over into the church? Now, what do *“the soles of the priests’ feet”*(18) have to do with anything? Perhaps as evidence of Yahweh’s hand? And note the insertion of the date: *“tenth day of the first month”* (19). What event occurred on the same day forty years before? (Exod.12:2,3). Perhaps such specificity is intended to teach that what Yahweh began he also brought to completion. (Phil.1:6) Israel had been a slave; now an heir!

Chapter 5

Taking the Land (ch.5-12). Immediately we think – *“What inefficiency!...a wounding and a worship service?”* (2-4) We are always in a hurry to do something, but God wants us to be something... and that explains the reason for circumcision (4-7). Israel was not ready; Yahweh had unfinished business begun 40 years earlier. The hope of entering into Yahweh’s promise, the hope of the gospel, is that one belong to a different cut (circumcision, 2-9). believe to a different cup (Passover, 10-12), and bow to a different captain (the Lord, 13-15). Signs and seals, as in circumcision and Passover (baptism and communion for the Christian), point to a greater spiritual reality of God’s grace toward His own. But note the warning (5,6; 1 Cor.10:1-5). *“One can have all the marks of the people of God but lack the response of the people of God.”* (Davis) That was the criticism of their fathers; will they be any different? Will we? At Gilgal, rolling away the foreskin and reinstituting the cup, God is saying what? Perhaps, *“You are not what you were; you are Mine!”* And then what (13-15)? This story is just getting good!

Chapter 6

You’ve heard the expression, *“There’s no ‘I’ in team”*? Maybe in sports, but the fall of Jericho was not a team effort – *“I have given Jericho into your hand...”* (2). And that’s the point! The chapter begins at he gates of ‘hopelessness’ (1) with *“the Lord”* and ends at ‘victory’ with *“the Lord”*(27). Maybe that accounts for the introduction of Joshua’s strange visitor (5:13-15). The whole battle highlights the strangeness of Yahweh’s methods, but as at the crossing of the Jordan, note that it is the Ark of the Covenant at center stage (repeated 10 times!). *“God’s normal pattern is to work through the instrumentality of His people,”* (Davis), so why this strange method? And why does Joshua hold the climax of the command to ‘shout’ (10, 16) until (20), and in between wax on in terms of protocol? Because obedience (17-19) is more important than what (20)? Even in victory, temptations lurk (Lk.9:35). It’s the *“strangeness of Yahweh’s methods, and the demands on Yahweh’s people, but also the salvation in Yahweh’s judgment”*(22-25, Davis). Never be surprised in the power of the gospel (Eph.2:13).

Chapter 7

“Goodness and severity,” two important attributes of God (J. I. Packer). Here we encounter the latter in the defeat at Ai. Was it over-confidence? The lack of prayer? Not if you understand the framing of the narrative (1, 26). What do you think? Calvin says *“it was the “secret counsel of God, meant to show a sign of his anger, but allowed the number to be small in order that the loss might be less serious.”* Strange as it might sound, we can find comfort and learn in Joshua’s perplexity (6-9). We have felt the same. But the complaint is one of despair not unbelief: he doesn’t know (we don’t know) yet what God knows (1). Also note the interplay of *“the people”* and *“Achan”* (1, 11/15, 24-25). Confused? Maybe we have a very tame view of God and of our sin. What could be more frightening than God’s wrath and the loss of God’s presence (12b)? Nothing comes across more crucial in the book than God’s

presence (1:5, 9; 3:7, 10; 4:14; 6:27). Grace, yes; demand follows – “*destroy the devoted things.*” What might this say to the church (Rev.2-3)?

Chapter 8

While the exact location of Ai might be indefinite to modern archeologists, this much is not: the definite help of God. “*Do not fear...*,” the grace of second chance (1, 18). Contingent upon what? Faith - “*You shall do according to the word of the Lord*” (8). Some call this “*the divine conspiracy*” (2 Cor.4:7, Davis). What is curious about the timing (after what in ch.7)? Then we must note the generosity of God (2). Sure makes our covetousness (7:21) look stupid! Sound familiar? (Gen.3, “*serpent theology*”) God is a debtor to no man; when His priorities are recognized, He gives to His people. What then of the solemn judgment of God (29)... barbaric? (Lev.18:24-25; Deut.9:4-5; 21:22-23) The gravity of His judgment ought to overwhelm us and reminds us of another King hanging on a tree (Gal.3:13). That none of the story be attributed to Israel’s cleverness, what is clear is the praise of God and the crucial word of God (30-35). This is God’s people’s first priority – always. For bonus points: what is so special about this ceremony at Shechem? (Gen.12:6-7; Gen.33:18-20; 28:13).

Chapter 9

201... that’s the number of verses of scripture using the word “*wisdom*” (not counting synonyms). Unfortunately, the church too often craves the power of God while it ignores the wisdom of God. And that’s the first thing this story is meant to impress upon us. The Gibeonites are clever: tangible evidence (4-5, 12-13), a realistic report (9-10), and even a spiritual testimony (9-11). All heartwarming and hard to confirm, right? What Israel need most they neglected (14; James 4:2). It is subtle unbelief that assumes, “*I have this under control.*” But there’s something more here, something good: the concern over the honor of God (16-21). The whole dilemma centers around what (18-20)? But Israel’s leaders are swayed by other considerations: to break the oath would be to offend and to dishonor the name of Yahweh (19-20; Ps.15:4; Matt.23:16-22). What should Israel do? They should live as faithfully as they could within that twisted situation. Often the Christian, too, must live obediently amidst the fruit of their folly. How then should we understand the Gibeonites future (22-27)? Might we see a silver lining?

Chapter 10

First Jericho, then Ai, and now Gibeon. The Canaanite king’s had reason for dismay – Joshua had cut a large swath between north and south. “*Do not fear,*” says the Lord once again (1:5), and all eyes focus upon Yahweh as the Warrior of Israel (8-11). “*Who is the King of glory? Yahweh, strong and mighty! Yahweh – mighty in battle.*” (Ps.24:8; Rev.19:11-16) But don’t overlook how that God’s reassurance does not sedate but invigorates his servant’s activity. We could learn something here! Maybe the main thing in view, however, is the miracle of prayer (12-14). Whether was for extended daylight or darkness, the uniqueness in view is that God listened to a man’s prayer, a command to elements under only God’s control. Breathtaking that God stoops and bends His ear (Ps.91:15). Who ever heard of a God like that? Then, the signs of victory (16-28), in an acted-out parable (24, “*feet upon the necks*”) gave assurance of how Yahweh would deal with all His and their enemies... but don’t lose your nerve (25)! So Joshua took the land (28-43), but did they dispossess and occupy the land? The story continues.

Chapter 11

Now the action moves from Dixie to the north – *Hazor*, a massive site on the main highway from Egypt to Mesopotamia and Syria. But why so much ink given to the opponents of God’s people (1-5)? Maybe the author intends to impress upon the reader how overwhelming the enemy is,

and how hopeless the situation is, in order that we might see again how the power of God shines more brightly. Now that's motivation, the energy of God's sovereignty (6-7)... never to sedate but only to invigorate (7, beat 'em at camp – *"the waters of Merom"* – negating any tactical advantage)! And how might hamstrung horses and burned chariots testify to the sufficiency of God's help (6,9; Ps.20:7; Isa.31:1-3)? Now what might we learn from the model of God's servant (12,15; Jn.8:29)? This will be a *"needed witness... not the size of his chariot force, but an obedience to God's commandments that leads God's people to be faithful."* (Davis) Thorough obedience, even in view of the demands of Yahweh's call (18), and the crazy hardening of hearts (19-20), and the fear of facing giants (21-22).

Chapter 12

Two sections: kings defeated by Moses and kings defeated by Joshua. What's the point here? First, to guard the unity of Yahweh's people (1-6). How so? Moses defeated kings in lands "beyond the Jordan" where the two-and-a-half eastern tribes settled. Might there come a time, after Canaan is settled, that they would be regarded as non-Israel by the western tribes (22:21-29)? "Don't forget Israel lives over there as well." A good lesson for the NT church: Jewish Christian and Gentile Christian, Calvinist and Charismatic, black and white, rich and poor, etc... (1 Cor.1:27-28). Secondly, maybe there's the fidelity of Yahweh's promise (7-24): 31 kings, *"a living picture of the goodness of God."* (Calvin) Each is a sign of God's power and a cause for Israel's gratitude. What God promised to Abraham (Gen.15:18-21) has been fulfilled (Rom.4:21). Here Israel sings their version of "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." We could learn something here: *"as faith gives thanks in detail, that faith is nurtured, encouraged, and takes on a fresh heart to expect more mercies."* (Davis) More so, the chapter serves both as a summary and a foreshadowing of what? (Rev.11:15)

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 takes us into another major division of the book: entering the land (ch.1-4), then taking the land (ch.5-12), and now possessing the land (ch.13-21). Possessing the land features the allotment to each of the tribes of Israel. And while we might be tempted to nod off early – *"Now Joshua was old and advanced in years"* (1) – the focus on land yet to possess calls our attention to a sufficient promise (1-7). This land lay at the edges, implying that Israel had achieved much. In the allotment (7), there's a reminder of how Yahweh's power... Joshua may be fit to retire, but God is not! And then note in the description of the land settled (east of the Jordan, 8-13), there's a dangerous sign of what (8)? Here is a testimony to all God's people: It's not always how you start that matters, but how you finish. In it all, note the repeated encouragement (8-33). Where – geography and topography? No. The repeated allusions to Sihon and Og, not to mention Balaam (victories under Moses) is meant to jog their memory and fortify their faith in the face of contemporary enemies. Yahweh's covenant-love persists, past-present-future!

Chapter 14

"I need a hero! I'm holding out for hero till the end of the night. He's gotta be strong, and he's gotta be fast and he's gotta be fresh from the fight. I need a hero! I'm holding out for a hero till the morning light. He's gotta be sure, and it's gotta be soon and he's gotta be larger than life." (Bonnie Tyler) Enter Caleb (6-15). Caleb's adventuresome faith is set to deliberately contrast the hesitant caution of others (13:8; 17:14-18) including my own. But don't miss, on your way to Caleb, that obedience in the 'ordinary duties' (1-5) is as important to Yahweh as in the more dynamic events. Now back to Caleb, a model of faith, in whom we see the devotion of faith (7-8), the anchor of faith (6, 9-10, 12), the perspective of faith (10-11), and the energy of faith (12). True faith always functions this way; it pleads God's promises; anchors itself upon

God's perfect track record or 'box score' (7-12). We forget sometimes that Caleb's faith, biblical faith, is not so much an amount but rather the object of faith. Enter Jesus.

Chapter 15

If some scholars see 'promise theology' as the heart and soul of the Old Testament, then here in ch. 15 is 'promise geography': the inheritance of the tribe of Judah. First, there are the details of God's promise (1-12; Gen. 12, 15). Concrete fulfillment – every town name and border point – no close-up description of God's gifts, God's fidelity, should ever be boring. We also get a closer picture of a vigorous faith (Caleb, 13-19). Talk is cheap; faith is costly; obedience is risky; and Yahweh granted him success. Lastly, note a pattern of God's realism (20-63). God's story is "*seldom about purely spiritual abstraction. The God of the Bible tends to be concrete. The inheritance He gives is not an idea but boundaries, not thoughts but towns; in a word, real estate.*" (Davis) Take another look at His incarnation as a great witness (Jn.1:1, 14)... the 'earthiness' of God. Take another look at the resurrected body in the new heavens and a new earth (Is.65-66; Rev.21-22). Maybe Israel's tangible inheritance in Canaan is a foreshadowing of our own?

Chapter 16 & 17

We continue in the tribal allotment of the Promise Land, now to "*the sons of Joseph*" (1), Ephraim and Manasseh (4). These two chapters are seamless and ought to be read together. We would be amiss in "*another careful land survey not to see certain notations, anecdotes, and repetitions here.*" (Davis) First, there is a reminder of Yahweh's ways (1-4): Joseph, then Manasseh and Ephraim according to birth order, right? Not so fast (5), for we recall Yahweh's sovereign reversal in Jacob's crossing of hands (Gen.48). Subtle, but a reminder of the strange ways of God (Rom.11:33). "*He is never the prisoner of what fallen man regards as normal.*" (Davis) Same with the primacy of Judah (ch.15) – it's not because of birth, favoritism, or virtue – simply the sovereignty of God. And that is the reason we worship Him. Secondly, we might be schooled by the '*sisters*' in the appeal of Yahweh's word (17:3-6; Num.27:1-11; 36:1-12). Isn't that what the writer of Hebrews teaches (Heb.4:16)? Thirdly, it doesn't take us long to hear of a degree of failure, a deviation from Yahweh's program (17:7-13; 15:63; 16:10), and it only intensifies. For example, how does Ephraim and Manasseh show they have already begun to lost the vision? And the root of their complaint (17:14-18)? Maybe a distrust of Yahweh's adequacy? Sounds too familiar.

Chapter 18

Details, details. But note first it's the dawning of a 'new day' (1). What did Shiloh represent to Israel (21:2; 22:9, 12; Judg.18:31; 21:12, 19)? Had not Moses said the day would come when Yahweh would choose a place where He is to be worshipped... the Land of rest? Here they were to worship faithfully (turning away from Canaanite hotspots and idols) and joyfully. Now Yahweh's dwelling place has been erected; there His name to dwell. But it was not the final 'new day,' was it? (Lk.1:74-75) Second, we note here a constant concern (5-7) that all Israel receive their share of the inheritance. How can the Christian profit from this perspective? Not elite but elect; same Father, same grace. (see Jn.1:14, 16; 1 Cor.12:13; Eph.4:7) "*It is not to deny diversity, only rebuking Christian snobbery. All God's people matter to Him; each one is an heir.*" (Davis) Thirdly, we note a dangerous laxity (3). Someone once said, "*We are all faced with a series of unprecedented opportunities cleverly disguised as impossible situations.*" Trust and get on with it! God's gift does not cancel human responsibility (2 Pet.1:3-11).

Chapter 19

So ch. 19 finishes out the allotments of the Land. Whether these last seven tribes will overcome their laxity and press their advantage by cleaning out their local inheritance is not yet clear, but Joshua has done what he was commanded to do. There are, no doubt, interesting discoveries if one were to take a closer look at the geographical-topographical details (dates and places verifying scripture's integrity). What may be more notable is the eloquent witness (49-50) to the authority and blessing of Yahweh. Two particulars to see in this: First, the account of land distribution for the western tribes (ch.18 -19) is bound together, beginning and ending, by references to Shiloh. And the point? Remember what Shiloh represents? Second, it is interesting to note the entire distribution of land (14-19 begins with Caleb and ends with Joshua. Knowing these two characters, their history and roles (Num.13:30; 14:6-9), what might this teach? Maybe it's *"the hymn 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' (Lam 3:23) in a different key"* (Davis); an eloquent witness that God keeps His promises, even if only by these two faithful men through thick and thin.

Chapter 20

Follow along with Dr. Davis' helpful analysis here. The business of Israel's inheritance is nearly complete, but note the finishing touches like the justice of Yahweh's justice (1-9). First, note who takes into consideration the motives and intents in the cases of manslaughter – Yahweh does! (Num.35:9-34; Deut.4:41-43; 19:1-13) Second, see the accessibility of Yahweh's justice (3,5, 7-8). The number and locations show how available God's justice was meant to be and how practical His ways. Third, we observe the values of Yahweh's justice (6), in that there is the sanctity of human life – both the perp's and victim's. Fourth, note the satisfaction of Yahweh's justice. Manslaughter was serious; there is no release from the city of refuge. Why? As blood shed pollutes the land, so also the lack of justice. There is no ransom payment that would allow the criminal to return (Num.35:32), except in the case where the High Priest dies (6). Hmm... sound familiar? (Heb.2:7) Lastly, we see the circle of Yahweh's justice (9). In what way? It is the wideness in God's mercy because He has included the sojourner within His love (Deut.10:18; Eph.2:13).

Chapter 21

Speaking of *'sojourners'* (yesterday, ch.20), here see a glimpse of Yahweh's sojourners – the Levites (priests). What better place than at Shiloh (2) to observe the authority they claim (1-3)? They had not forgotten, just as Caleb and Joshua had not; their bold request was an act of faith grounded in the God's Word. Should this not be the normal pattern for all believing prayer, that we seek what God has commanded? Yes, the Levites were set apart for a special ministry (Num.3-4), but they had very earthly needs. *"Oh preacher, now you're a meddlin'"*; God is not(1 Cor.9). Also, the Levites remind us of the parable they live – no inheritance, only cities to live – the status of sojourners (Deut.18:6). Maybe the parable is that all the people of God, are to live as those just passing through (1 Chron.29:15; James 4:15; Rom.8:23; Heb.11:13). And we ought ask ourselves just why the Levites were to be scattered in these cities. Lastly, don't miss the theological heart of the book of Joshua – Yahweh's fidelity (43-45). May we too enter into His prayer, *"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"*; and may we long for His final rest (2 Thess.1:7-10).

Chapter 22

The final section – Retaining the Land (22-24) – begins with Joshua summoning Israel. Remember how ch. 21 ended on a strong theological note of Yahweh's fidelity? Now comes the application: the only appropriate response to God's faithfulness. (Rom.1-11, then 12:1 *"Therefore...."*). A perfect antidote for the audience in Judges... and in Decatur. *"The main idea... is the pervasive passion for fidelity to Yahweh"*(5, 19, 29, 31; Davis). We witness this in Joshua's commendation of the eastern tribes (1-8). How beautiful and encouraging to catch the

people of God doing something right! But he's not finished; he commends and then commands. It should remind all God's people that obedience is a live option. Now what's this sound of war (12)? But also, a commendable example – a vigilant fidelity (9-20): one altar, one faith, one people (Deut.12). How might the western tribes' alarm actually be a sign of spiritual health? In all fairness, it was the eastern tribes' godly anxiety that they rushed to worship (21-29). Would that the church recover such a vigilance for God's worship! In the end, there comes a satisfying resolution (30-34); the wisdom of God prevailed; peace and purity secured.

Chapter 23

Staying on edge. It's one thing to get up for a good fight, it's another thing to maintain vigor and vision for the long haul. In this second of three final assemblies, Joshua sets forth an argument for the continued fidelity to Yahweh (6,8,11) in order to retain the land (13, 15, 16). First, He stresses the peculiar responsibility of Yahweh's witnesses (1-3): the leaders must spearhead fidelity to what they have seen and heard. They are Israel's anchors. If not, what then might happen? Second, Joshua underscores the confident assurance in Yahweh's help (3-5), which is the consistent biblical pattern. Third, we see the focus upon the careful obedience of Yahweh's people (6-13): the standard, the form, and the motives for obedience. But fourthly, note Joshua's continuation of threat and fear: Yahweh's judgment (14-16). We would have rather Joshua close with a poem and a prayer, but Yahweh's faithfulness is a two-edged sword (15) – covenant faithfulness both in grace and judgment. "The Scriptures hold before us 'the kindness and the severity of God' (Rom.11:22, "the kindness and the severity of God"... we forget either one to our peril.)

Chapter 24

Covenant renewal at Abraham's place - Shechem. It's a solemn occasion in this final assembly, and first is the review of covenant history (2-13): crisis points in Israel's history necessarily means the surprising (amazing) grace of God (2-3); the sovereign pace of God (3-4); the strange ways of God (4); and the power and provision of God (5-13). And about now, they should "*feel the gentle handcuffs of God's goodness slipping around the... heart!*" (Davis) How this the same for the Christian? (Jn.1:16; 1 Cor.6:19-20; Gal.2:20). Second, note how Joshua presses for covenant commitment (14-24). It's logical (14), exclusive (14-15), and therefore it must be a cautious commitment (16-18). Sound familiar? (Lk.14:25-28) "*The paradox must constantly stand, not to drive us away from Yahweh, but to Him.*" (Davis) Finally, the book and ceremony ends as it should – the wonder of covenant religion (25-28). OK, maybe not so much in the rules and writing and rolling of a stone. But note again the place – Shechem, "*the sanctuary of God.*" One only has to recall the promise (Gen.12:6-7), now 600 years in the making, to sense the wonder. But further still, the real wonder is that God should stoop to claim us, make us, mark us as His own! And your knee should bend and worship begin: "Who is a God like you...?" (Mic.7:18; 1 Kgs.8:23).

-Reflecting on Joshua-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Joshua. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Joshua before we move forward?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1.1

