

15 The Life of Joshua

About 3500 years ago, the children of Israel had moved down to the land of Egypt. There were now many thousands of people, but the Egyptians had made them slaves. God told Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. Joshua was Moses' assistant, and after Moses died, Joshua became the leader of the Israelite people.

Joshua was born in Egypt. He would have grown up as a slave like the rest of his people. He became a leader of his tribe, the tribe of Ephraim.

God led the people to the land of Canaan, the place we know today as Israel. It was the "Promised Land". It had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and their children. There were now many thousands of people called Israelites.

The twelve spies

As the people came closer to the land of Canaan, Moses sent 12 men to go into the land secretly. There was one man from each tribe. The men were to see what the land was like. Joshua was one of those 12 men. When the 12 men returned, they all said what a great place it was, and how it would be a marvellous place to live. However, ten of them said that the people there were very strong and tall, and the cities had high walls. They would not be able to go there, because the local people were too strong. The Israelites should go back to Egypt.

Joshua and Caleb, the other two spies, said that the land was good, and that with God fighting for them, the people there would be destroyed. You can read what they said in Numbers 14:6-9.

How did God feel about this? He was angry, and would have destroyed His people because they did not trust Him. Moses asked God not to destroy them. Read what he says to God in Numbers 14:17-19. God said that He would forgive the people as Moses asked. They would not be destroyed. God would still punish them. The people who had rejected God would die in the wilderness, and their children would go into the Promised Land. God would let Caleb and Joshua go into the Promised Land because they had trusted Him.

For 40 years the people wandered in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb also wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and when they were much older, they went into the land with their children and grandchildren

Moses made Joshua the new leader just before the 40 years were ended. Moses died in the wilderness, and Joshua took over as the new leader. If you have time, please read the 9 verses at the start of Joshua 1.

The Israelites defeated several kings on the eastern side of the Jordan River, and then they crossed over the River into the Land. You can read how it happened in Joshua 3:14-17.

Victory over the city of Jericho

After going over the river, the people set up a camp near the town of Gilgal. The big city nearby was called Jericho, and it was the first city they had to take. The city had high strong walls.

Joshua had sent two men into Jericho to spy on it. They visited a woman called Rahab. She lived in the wall of the city. You can read about Rahab in Joshua 2.

God would help the Israelites take the city of Jericho, but the way it was to be done was unusual. In those times, if an army wanted to capture a city with big strong walls, the army had to besiege it, that is, stop anyone or anything going in or out until the people inside gave up and came out.



Part of Jericho's wall and tower discovered by archaeologists.

God's way was different. For six days, the army of Israel was to walk once around the city in complete silence, except for the priests blowing trumpets. It must have been a strange thing for the people of Jericho to see! This was not what armies did!

On the seventh day, the army marched around again, but this time, they kept marching, and went around the city seven times. On the seventh time, Joshua told the people to shout as loudly as they could. What happened? You can read it in Joshua 6:20.

The city walls collapsed, and the soldiers ran into the city. Only the part of the wall where Rahab lived stayed up, and she and her family were saved (Joshua 6:25). The army of Israel killed the rest of the people of Jericho. All the silver and gold was given to God. The city was set on fire.

It was a great victory for Joshua. The Israelites looked on Joshua as their great leader.

Joshua's life after Jericho

The next city was Ai. You can read how Israel took the city in Joshua 7.

The rest of the book of Joshua tells how Joshua and the army, with the help of God, defeated most of the people who lived in Canaan, and took their land and their cities.

Later, Joshua divided the land so that the people of Israel could go and live in it.

Joshua called all the people together just before he died. He read the Law of God to them. He told them what would happen if they did not follow the God of their fathers. Joshua then went to his part of the land, and he died at the age of 110 years. He was a man who trusted the words of God that He would bring them to the Promised Land. When it was time for action, Joshua obeyed God and led the people to battle.

Why the inhabitants of Canaan were killed

People have asked why God helped the Israelites to take the land and destroy the innocent people who lived there. How can we answer this?

1. God promised the land to the children of Abraham many years before.
2. The people of Canaan did not worship God and worshipped idols and statues made of wood and stone. Their worship was based on human desires and greed, something that God does not want in His people. Some people also sacrificed their sons and daughters, something that God hates. Therefore, the people were not "innocent".
3. God gave the people many centuries to change how they lived. The people did not change, so God punished them. God spoke to Abraham about this in Genesis 15:16.
4. If the people of Canaan still lived there, they would make the Israelites turn away from God and worship idols. This is what happened, and the next book in the Bible, Judges, tells us about this time.

Summary

1. Joshua was an Israelite. He was born in Egypt as a slave.
2. He was Moses' assistant. He showed great skill as an army leader.
3. He was one of 12 men sent to look at Canaan. He knew that God would help His people to take the land if they would trust Him.
4. He spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness because his people did not trust God.
5. Finally, he led the Israelites into the Promised Land, and divided the Land up so that each tribe had somewhere to live. Israel was to be a nation ruled by God.