

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA PART ONE – INTRODUCTION – A NEW LEADER FOR AN OLD PLAN

After forty dramatic years of leadership by one man, Moses, he was gone. After climbing up the mountain at the age of 120 ‘with eye not dimmed nor vigour abated’ to meet with God for one last time on earth, he had died and God had buried him but no-one knew exactly where so they could not even go to his grave to ask questions about what to do next.(Deut.34:5-7) The people of Israel were still in the wilderness, dependent on God sending manna from heaven every morning except Saturday. The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night still represented the presence of God and indicated the direction in which they were to go. The tabernacle which illustrated in great detail how to have a relationship with God through sacrifice had been built and was still the centre of their lives. But who could possibly replace Moses? They desperately needed leadership for the planned occupation of the Promised Land. Canaan was to be everything they needed but as they had known for a whole generation, there were huge obstacles – the big, fierce, well-armed men who already lived there!(Num.13:27-33)

God had been quietly preparing the answer for the past 38 years. Of the 12 spies who had explored Canaan at Moses’ instruction, only two, Joshua and Caleb, had the vision and faith to believe the land could be claimed under God’s direction.(Num.14:6-9) Since that time Joshua had been the servant of Moses,(Exod.24:13) who in turn was known as the servant of God.(Deut.34:5) How can being the ‘servant of a servant’ prepare us for leadership? Beautifully! Servant-hood is exactly what Jesus said Christian leadership is about.(Luke 22:24-27)

Like many key people in the Bible story, there had been a deliberate change of name. Joshua, ‘The Lord is salvation’, had originally been just Hoshea, ‘Salvation’.(Num.13:16) His task of saving his people would be entirely God’s work, not his. The name ‘Joshua’ is the Hebrew translation of the Aramaic ‘Jesus’, the name given to the Saviour in the New Testament to announce to everyone who He was and why He was coming into the world.(Matt.1:21) It will not come as a surprise therefore if we find that in many ways Joshua’s work for Israel foreshadowed that of Jesus. As Moses in the wilderness of Sinai had prepared the way for Joshua, John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea would prepare the way for Jesus.(Matt.3:1-3)

God showed Moses in his last days that Joshua was to take over from him and that He had filled him with His Spirit,(Num.27:18-23) which showed in his God-given wisdom.(Deut.34:9) So Moses handed over to Joshua but at the same time the Lord had to call him personally before his ministry could begin.(Josh.1:1) The year was about 1405 BC. Forty years of frustration was about to give way to years of fulfillment.

In the first nine verses, God set out His plan for Joshua and the conditions for success. His first task like that of Moses was to lead his people through water, in Joshua’s case the River Jordan. Repeatedly in the Old Testament the same message was spelled out. First it was Noah and the flood, then Moses led Israel through the Red Sea, later Jonah would be saved from drowning by a whale. In the New Testament, Jesus would be baptized in

this same river, inviting all of us to be baptized into Him by sharing in His death and resurrection.(Matt.3:13-17: 28:19)

God promised the whole land of Canaan to Israel. First He defined its boundaries as He spells out to us the extent of His promises. Notice how much greater were the boundaries of the Promised Land than those ever occupied by Israel at any point in their history. Bible study explores the boundless grace and love of God.(Eph.3:14-17; II Tim.3:16,17) Then He sets out the condition of possessing the land, that they actually stand on it, not just dream of what might be. Faith in God's promises must be worked out in action. It is not just a nice feeling.(James 2:14-17)

The two simple secrets of success will be God's presence and His word. The absolute guarantee that the Lord would never fail or forsake him is the same wonderful reassurance we are given about Jesus in the New Testament.(Heb.13:5,8) Three times Joshua was assured that on these grounds he would have strength and courage.(1:6,7,9) God's strength would enable him to do the seemingly impossible. God's courage would keep him going in the face of adversity and failure. The secret of Jesus' disciples in an even more difficult task would also be His presence and His teaching.(Matt.28:20) Joshua's instruction was to do three things with the word of God. First it was to be meditated on in his heart, day and night. Secondly he was to do it, all of it. Thirdly it was to be in his mouth as he taught the word. God's instructions have not changed.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. What similarities can you see between Joshua and Jesus? How does it help our understanding and Christian growth to have stories like that of Joshua? What other Old Testament stories of this kind have you noticed?
2. What would have been most difficult about the task Joshua took over from Moses? How might we face similar challenges in leadership today? Why do we often give up when we face such challenges?
3. What exactly according to chapter one did God promise Joshua? How do those promises picture God's promises to us? What would the future have been like for Israel if they had been too scared to trust God in this way? How does fear of failure also affect us?
4. What were the conditions Joshua had to fulfill to receive those promises? How are they also the conditions for us to enjoy God's grace today? How can we encourage these responses in one another as Christians?
5. Why did the two and a half tribes whose inheritance was east of the River Jordan have to bother to cross the Jordan with the rest? What does this teach us about effective Christian fellowship?