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Bridgeway Church
Joshua #1

Sermon Summary #1

Joshua: the Book and the Man Joshua 1:1-2

In November, 1963, I was in the 8th grade at San Jacinto Junior High in Midland, Texas. We were in the cafeteria having lunch when news broke that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas. After things quieted down a bit, our attention, somewhat surprisingly, turned to the question of whether or not Vice-President, Lyndon B. Johnson, known as LBJ, would be a fit replacement. I remember that somehow a rumor started that LBJ had himself suffered a heart attack, collapsing under the pressure of the moment and the prospects of becoming president following Kennedy's death. Although the rumor proved to be false, it didn't take away from our concerns for the competency of Kennedy's successor.

It's not unusual for this sort of thing to happen when a great leader dies or steps down from power. People understandably become anxious and fearful, wondering if the next-in-line will be up to the task that awaits him.

At no time in human history was this more relevant and pressing than when Moses died. This was more than merely the passing away of a significant leader. Moses was undeniably the greatest and most influential of all OT saints. Not Abraham, not Joseph, not David, Solomon, or Daniel, but Moses. Listen to what is said of him in the last three verses of the final chapter of Deuteronomy: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12).

Try to imagine the dismay, perhaps even the despair, that filled Israel upon word that Moses had died! *"What will we do now? Where will we go? How shall we survive? Who will lead us now?"*

The sad news, the bad news, was that Moses had died with the Israelites looking across the raging waters of the Jordan River into the land God had promised to give them, a land filled with powerful and perverse people who had no intention of leaving just because of a bunch of Jews told them to.

The good news, the great news, is that *God's promise of the land to the Jewish people didn't die when Moses did!* The good and great news is that God's faithfulness to his word and his power to fulfill it never hinges on any one person, not even Moses. The good news is that God had someone waiting in the wings, someone whom he had been preparing for this moment for many years. His name was Joshua.

But before we go any further, I need to pause and place this man and this book that bears his name in proper historical context.

Some of you are new Christians and may not be familiar with the story line of the Bible. I can hardly expect you to understand, appreciate, and benefit from the book of Joshua if you don't know where he and the events of this book fit in the grand narrative of God's purposes in history. In other words, if I were simply to airdrop you into this book without providing some historical awareness of the events that have gone before, you would struggle to understand who Joshua is and what the significance of this book is for your life. Simply put, *I need to briefly set the book of Joshua within the larger context of what God is doing in and through the people of Israel in redemptive history.*

The basic question is this: ***"How did the people of Israel find themselves under the leadership of Joshua, standing on the brink of entry into the promised land of Canaan?"*** The answer to that question will take us well back into the book of Genesis.

So come with me, for just a moment, to the year **2166 b.c.**, which is to say more than 2,100 years before the coming of Jesus Christ. A man named Abram is born in the land known as Ur of the Chaldees, or what is today southern

Iraq. God graciously singles out and selects Abram to be the father of a new nation. By the way, God will later change his name to **Abraham**.

The Lord calls Abraham to move to the land of Canaan, and promises him in rather dramatic fashion that he would become the father of a great nation through which all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). He also promises to Abraham a great and glorious land in which his descendants will dwell in peace and safety and prosperity.

The problem is that Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had no children. With the passing of years it became increasingly clear that if Abraham was to have an heir through whom the promises might come, something miraculous would have to occur. *Abraham was now 100 years old and Sarah was 90.*

But by God's supernatural and miraculous intervention Sarah conceived and gave birth to a boy whom they named **Isaac**. Isaac was born in the year **2066 b.c.** Sixty years later, Isaac and his wife Rebekah also had two sons, Jacob and Esau. **Jacob** in turn had 12 sons, one of whom was **Joseph**. Joseph was born somewhere around **1915 b.c.**

Are you still with me? Abraham . . . Isaac . . . Jacob . . . Joseph . . .

Joseph's brothers didn't like him, and for two reasons. First, their father, Jacob, loved Joseph more than the others. You can imagine that this didn't set well with them. Second, Joseph made the mistake of telling his brothers of two dreams he had in which they were clearly in subjection to him. He was ruler over them. In a jealous rage they conspired to sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt and lied to their father, Jacob, telling him that Joseph had been mauled and killed by a wild animal.

During his years in Egypt Joseph gained the favor of Pharaoh and rose to power and influence. In effect, he became the second most powerful man in the nation. In the meantime, back in Canaan where Jacob and his other sons and their families are struggling to survive, a *crippling famine* falls upon the land. Through a series of shocking events, Jacob and his family eventually make the journey down into Egypt where Joseph has wisely preserved enough food for them to survive the famine. *It is in this way that the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel, find themselves in Egypt.*

We pick up this story in the book of Exodus, chapter one, verses six and seven: *"Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land (of Egypt) was filled with them. Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph."*

Because the people of Israel had multiplied and prospered, the Egyptians were fearful that some day they might rise up in revolt and conquer them. So the Egyptians subdued the Israelites and subjected them to horrific slavery and oppression. *The people of Israel thus lived in slavery and submission to the Egyptians for 400 years.*

If you're wondering where we are in the timeline, it is now the year **1526 b.c.** It is in this year that a man named **Moses** is born. I won't go into detail about the life of Moses or the way in which he comes into leadership over the enslaved people of Israel. Suffice it to say that after 400 years of bondage in Egypt, God intervenes to deliver his people from the Egyptians and uses Moses to bring about their deliverance. You know the story of the plagues of judgment that he poured out on Egypt and of the preservation of his people through the waters of the Red Sea.

The problem is that although God has miraculously and gloriously set his people free from Egypt in the event we know as *the exodus*, they were prone to rebellion and unbelief and idolatry. So God compelled them to wander in the wilderness for an additional 40 years. *This wilderness experience of the people of Israel took place from 1446 to 1406 b.c. It was in the year 1406 that Moses died.*

So let's bring this brief historical survey to a close by reading together the last chapter of the book of Deuteronomy (**Deut. 34:1-12**) . . . And thus we find ourselves standing with Joshua and the people of Israel on the brink of entry into the land that God had first promised to Abraham so many years ago.

I must confess that in reading Deuteronomy 34 my mind is taken back to 1984 when I was in Israel, standing on the ruins of ancient Jericho, west of the Jordan River, looking back at Mt. Nebo, on which, according to Deut. 34:1, Moses himself had stood looking into the promised land.

Joshua, the Book

A few words about this book itself are in order.

(1) As someone once put it, Joshua is “the epic, swashbuckling record” of Israel’s conquest of the promised land. Seven powerful nations of considerable size and strength stand in their way. As we will see time and time again, it is only because God sovereignly intervenes on behalf of his people and fights their battles for them that Israel is successful in entering and taking possession of the land.

(2) The book of Joshua contains 24 chapters and 658 verses. 279 of these verses describe the dynamic history of battle and conquest through which Israel gained control of Canaan. 293 verses are devoted to listing the names of the people of Israel and the distribution of the land to its tribes. The remaining 86 verses record the closing farewell and conclusion. Our focus will be on the 279 verses of historical narrative, which means that *we will actually only be studying slightly over half of the book.*

(3) There is a sense in which Joshua is a book of *transition*. That is to say, it is a bridge book, linking the time of the birth of the nation, when the exodus out of Egypt occurred, to its settlement in the promised land. Some have thus compared Joshua to the book of Acts (which describes the transition from Jesus and the Gospels to the formation and establishment of the Church). Joshua describes God’s people Israel taking possession of the promised land. Acts describes God’s people, the Church, the true Israel, taking possession spiritually of the whole earth.

(4) Although Joshua is transitional and historical, it speaks directly to us in a number of ways.

First, the history of Israel’s gradual possession of the promised land is a paradigm or model of how we come into further possession of our spiritual riches in Christ. See 1 Corinthians 10:11. At its heart, this book is about the God of promise who always stays true to his word. That is why I have entitled this series, *Faith in the God of Promise*. What I hope that all of us learn from it is that *we can count on God, we can trust him, we can put our confidence in his promises that he will bring them to pass.*

Second, this is a book that reveals **God’s character** to us. The God who led Joshua and Israel to victory over their enemies and into possession of the promise is **the same God** we serve and love and worship. He makes promises to us, he does not lie, and by faith we will inherit whatever he has granted to us in the true “Joshua,” Jesus of Nazareth. Thus in Joshua we learn much about the attributes and characteristics and features of God’s personality and his will, truths that will sustain and strengthen us in the present day even as they strengthened Israel 3,500 years ago.

Third, Joshua is a book about *warfare*. We, too, are engaged in a battle, but not with flesh and blood, says Paul. Unlike Joshua who battled literal, earthly, human armies in order to enter into his inheritance, we battle principalities and powers, the spiritual forces of darkness in heavenly places, which is to say, Satan and his demonic hosts. The good news is that the same God who empowered and brought victory to Joshua and Israel will bring power and victory to us today!

Joshua, the Man

So who is this man Joshua, anyway? Why did God select him to succeed Moses? What qualified him for the job? And what lessons can we learn for ourselves from his life and his place in God’s purposes? Several things should be noted.

We know that Joshua was born in Egypt, the first born son of Nun. His grandfather’s name was Elishama (1 Chron. 7:26-27). This is more than a useless historical fact. Elishama, Joshua’s grandfather, was head or captain of the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 1:10; 2:18). He would have marched at the front of more than 40,000 people when Israel began

its exodus out of bondage in Egypt. Most likely his son, Nun, together with his grandson, Joshua, would have been at his side. This must have certainly shaped Joshua's perspective and formed his faith in God. See **Psalm 145:4-7**.

It's also important to know that Joshua didn't suddenly appear or leap into being like a jack-in-the-box following the death of Moses. When God put him in this position of leadership he was **80 years old!**

Are you ever impatient with God because he seems to have forgotten you? Are you ever frustrated because God's timetable for your life and ministry doesn't match up with yours? Are you ever disappointed when God doesn't give you a position of respect and power in the Church? Joshua waited over 40 years! You may be in a hurry, but God isn't.

It takes time to be prepared and equipped for leadership and responsibility. Joshua's assignment came after many years of understudy with Moses. I'm continually surprised by how many today want to bypass preparation for ministry. They don't realize that before one is elevated to a position of influence there must be a process of maturation and demonstrated faithfulness. So many today want to shoot directly to the top of the heap. They are often spiritually shallow and superficial, and scandal is the result (see 1 Timothy 5:22).

We need to observe how Joshua is regularly designated in the OT as "the servant of Moses"! He played "second-fiddle" for years and never complained. True spiritual leaders can be second, third, fourth, or sometimes not even in the lineup and still accomplish great things for God.

I'm not saying this to draw attention to myself, but simply as a point of illustration. I was in pastoral ministry for 11 years before I took on the senior leader role at a local church, and even then I don't think I was entirely prepared for what I faced. After 8 years as a senior pastor, I went to a much larger church and became an associate pastor once again, there serving for 7 more years under the leadership of another man. But I never viewed it as a demotion. I then served in various forms of ministry for an additional 8 years before coming to Bridgeway in 2008. I wouldn't trade those years of learning and growth in serving under another man's authority for anything in the world.

Here's a question for you: "What did your boss say to you on your first day of work at a new job?" Listen to what God said to Joshua: "**Moses, my servant, is dead!**" (v. 2a).

That's not the most comforting or encouraging thing to hear! Of course, Joshua knew this. God wasn't informing him of something of which he was unaware. This was an *exhortation!*

In effect, I think God was telling Joshua that the time and season for Moses and his leadership and influence was over. Moses is gone. You can't live any longer in his shadow. You can't allow yourself to be swallowed up by the lingering legacy of who Moses was.

This isn't to say we should ignore our predecessors. We should learn from them. We should humbly acknowledge what they've accomplished. We should honor their contribution and perpetuate their memory. But we can't afford to be held hostage by their personality or their way of doing things. Sometimes the people who precede us have set boundaries that were appropriate when they were alive and present, but are no longer helpful. People may have had expectations of them, but we can't be held hostage to them. We have to chart our own course. We have to embrace who we are and not try to be who they were.

There is perhaps also a sense in which God is saying to Joshua: "Don't compare yourself to Moses. Don't try to be Moses. *Be Joshua!* And don't blame Moses if things go wrong. You are in charge now. You are responsible for the people of Israel."

But let's get more specific. What was it that qualified Joshua for this awesome task? Several things are worthy of mention.

(1) First, Joshua knew from early on that his life was a gift of God's saving and redeeming grace. Remember, Joshua was the "**first born**" son of Nun. The significance of this is found in the 10th and final plague that God poured out on Egypt. See **Exodus 11:4-6**. In order to be saved from this judgment, God instructed the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb

and apply its blood to the lintel and the two doorposts of each house. When the angel of death saw the blood he would *pass over* that house and spare that child. Joshua was just such a one who was spared. He no doubt vividly remembered that night, and was reminded of it every year at Passover celebration. He would never forget the mournful wailing and the sound of death and realize that he had been spared because of the mercy of God and the shedding of blood.

This may give added meaning to the change of his name. Originally he was called *Hoshea*, which means “salvation” (Num. 13:8). But Moses called him *Jehoshua / Joshua*, which means Yahweh saves (Num. 13:16).

(2) Consider also his experience at Rephidim, described in **Exodus 17:8-16**. There the Amalekites attacked Israel and Moses sent Joshua to do battle with them while Moses interceded in prayer. As long as Moses’ hands were raised in prayer, Israel prevailed. When they fell to his side, Israel suffered loss. Finally, Aaron and Hur came beside Moses and held up his hands so that Joshua and his army might prevail. Joshua must have learned from this that *real power is in God, not in the military might of a nation*. Moses’ hands raised in prayer were a lasting symbol of the importance of utter dependence on God and the power of prayer in the life of his people.

(3) We must also look to his experience on Mt. Sinai with Moses, as described in **Exodus 24:9-13**. Joshua’s mind and heart must have been forever branded with a deep sense of God’s glory and beauty and holiness and splendor. If you are tempted to wonder why Joshua was so brave and courageous, perhaps it is because he had “seen” God and was captivated by the majesty of the One he served.

(4) Look also at Joshua’s experience at the tabernacle in **Exodus 33:11**. He was so overwhelmed by God’s presence he refused to leave! Much of what Joshua would accomplish can be traced to his sense and delight in the abiding presence of God.

(5) Then there is Joshua’s experience as one of the 12 spies whom Moses sent into the land of Canaan to learn about the people who inhabited it. How many are there? Are they strong or weak? What is the land like? When the spies returned, all but two said: “We have no chance against them. They are stronger than we are. Let’s go elsewhere!” The two who were confident of God’s superior power and had faith that he would bring victory Israel were Caleb and Joshua (Num. 13:27-28; 14:5-9). Clearly, *Joshua was a man of deep faith in the goodness and greatness of God, a man who feared nothing so long as he knew his God was standing with him*.

(6) Surely the example of Moses was a powerful influence in Joshua’s life. Joshua saw him succeed and saw him fail. He saw him in strength and weakness, in prayer and in power, in victory and defeat. He learned much from the model of Moses.

(7) Seventh and most important of all, *Joshua was anointed with power by the Holy Spirit*. See **Numbers 27:15-20**.

Conclusion:

What, then, do we see in Joshua that accounts for his courage and confidence and competency, the things that we pray by God’s grace would be found in us?

- A profound awareness of God’s redeeming grace
- A sense of the urgency of prayer
- A vision of God’s glory
- The pursuit of intimacy with God / abiding in his presence
- Faith in God’s power to fulfill his promises
- The example and influence of other godly believers
- The presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit!