

Old Testament Personalities

JOSHUA

By Art Ferdig

At the beginning of the Exodus from Egypt, there was a man of high character, named Oshea, in the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8). He was about 45 years old at the time, and destined to become not only a leader in Ephraim, but in all Israel as well.

Moses recognized the younger man's talents and made him a personal assistant, bringing him to prominence as leader of the army when Israel fought with Amalek (Ex. 17:9). When the fighting was over, God told Moses to write a memorial of the battle and rehearse it before Oshea (verse 14). Moses changed the man's name to Jehoshua or Joshua, meaning "God is salvation" (Num. 13:16).

Joshua became a constant companion of Moses. He went up Mt. Sinai with him to receive the commandments of God (Ex. 24:13). He was present when God spoke to Moses in his tent (Ex. 33:11). He was one of the tribal chiefs sent to spy out the land of Canaan. He was extremely loyal to God and Moses, and was often referred to as Moses' minister.

Joshua given charge of Israel

When Moses was old, and couldn't enter the promised land because of his own sin at Meribah, he asked God to appoint a successor to lead Israel. Moses felt that he had spent 40 years training Joshua for this very day, but wanted God to confirm his choice, or select another. God's choice, too, was Joshua, for God knew his character. He saw that Joshua had the required faith, courage and dedication to lead

Israel in the conquest of Canaan.

God told Moses to lay his hands on Joshua (showing the transfer of authority) and place him before Eleazar the priest, and before the congregation of Israel. He would be Moses' successor (Num. 27:15-23).

And after Moses was dead, God spoke directly to Joshua. He exhorted him to be strong and courageous for the task ahead (the taking of Canaan), and to observe all the law taught by Moses (Josh. 1:6-7). God instructed Joshua to spend time reading and meditating on the book of the law, and to put its precepts into action. God promised blessings for him and Israel if he would.

Crossing Jordan

Now the children of Israel had been camped on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, and it was the time of year when the waters overflowed their banks and were treacherous. Yet God commanded them to prepare to cross. What better way to establish that He would work through Joshua than to begin with a difficult task — or, better yet, simplify the task with a miracle?

For the very minute the priests' feet touched the water (they were leading the procession), God held back the waters upstream and the riverbed became dry. The priests positioned themselves in the middle of the riverbed, and all Israel marched across on dry ground — just as their forefathers had done at the Red Sea!

And God "magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life" (Josh. 4:14).

Once on the west side of the Jordan, Israel set up camp. Here all the males who were born in the wilderness were circumcised as a token of

the covenant between God and the family of Abraham. Here, also, they kept the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They made the unleavened cakes from dried corn they gathered in the land, and God caused the supply of manna to cease, for they were finally in Canaan.

Then, as Joshua went out for a closer look at Jericho (for this was the first city they would attack), he was met by what he thought was a man holding a sword. Upon finding the being was no man at all, but the eternal God, he fell on his face and worshiped.

God told him exactly what He had first told Moses at the burning bush — to take off his shoes, for God's presence made the very ground holy. God's appearance was undoubtedly to give Joshua strength and encouragement concerning not only Jericho, but for all the many battles ahead.

God fights for Israel

The story of the elaborate march against (and around) Jericho, and how the "walls came tumbling down" is a familiar one. But that was only the beginning of an amazing military campaign.

Miracle after miracle followed the victory at Jericho. With the exception of Israel's temporary defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin (Josh. 7:1), God made Israel invincible. Joshua had a momentary lapse of faith after the Ai defeat, but quickly responded to God's correction (verses 6-13).

Joshua became so filled with faith that during a battle with the Amorites he commanded the sun to stand still until the enemy was thoroughly defeated. And God, at his request, held the sun and moon in their places to give the army of Israel sufficient light to pursue and conquer the ene-

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my (Josh. 10:12-14). For more information, write for our free booklet *Has Time Been Lost?*

So Joshua led Israel in battle, from their remarkable victory at Jericho to their final battle with the king of Tirzah (Josh. 12:9-24). Thirty-one kings were defeated. The wicked inhabitants of the land (Baal worshipers) were either killed or driven out of Canaan. And the children of Israel were literally rich! They harvested crops they hadn't planted. They inhabited cities they hadn't built. They captured livestock and goods and gained servants and bondmen.

Under Joshua, Israel took all the land from Lebanon on the north to Goshen in Egypt, from the east bank of the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. Yet God told them there was more to conquer! But because Joshua was old, he was told to divide the land among the tribes as an inheritance — even portions that weren't yet under Israeli control — and to continue driving out Canaan's present inhabitants. God warned the people that any heathen allowed to dwell in their midst would become a thorn in Israel's side forever.

Exhortation to serve God

Joshua was about 85 years old when he began to lead Israel; now he was nearly 110. He spent years leading the army in battle, but enjoyed several years of peace in his old age.

Joshua died at age 110 — the last great leader of the Exodus period — and was buried in the inheritance of Ephraim. And the people served God during the lifetime of the elders who had reaffirmed the covenant.

Afterward, however, Israel didn't continue to drive out the heathen inhabitants of their land, but began to hold them in tribute. And true to what was prophesied, they began to reject God and worship heathen idols.

God, as a result of their disobedience, withdrew His protection. Israel then fell victim to the stronger heathen nations and was forced to pay tribute itself. Then began what is called the period of the Judges. □