

## **Pioneering and Settling - Joshua 10:16 – Judges 3:7**

Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2011

I believe that God started speaking to me in the autumn of last year about preaching through Joshua; and I believe that it is God's Prophetic, living Word for us at the moment – both to individuals and to us as a church.

Over the last few years, I think our experience as a church has mirrored the Desert time of the Israelites in many ways. We have gone through hardship, many of us have felt the dryness of being in something of a spiritual desert, we've been tested, we've learned to endure and we have got to the end of our own resources; financial and emotional.

**But at the moment I believe we are on the edge of the Desert, and that we are coming to a border – a Jordan with the Promises of God shining in front of us, beginning to come into view. And for many of us, and for us as a church, we are imminently about to enter into a new thing that God is doing. I believe we are going to leave the Desert behind us and that God is going to bring us into a new season.**

**I believe that we will see some “then, suddenly's” and that God will move many of us on – so where we have been struggling with spiritual dryness, suddenly that will change; where we have been struggling emotionally or financially or physically with illnesses, we will see some breakthroughs and where we feel like we have been waiting and waiting, suddenly God will give us new vision and call us on to new things.**

**But with that comes new challenges that we need to be ready for, otherwise we could miss the things that God has in store for us.**

So for the last few months, we have been looking at the story of Joshua; looking over his shoulder and learning some of the lessons of entering into God's Promises; looking at what that process is like. I think it is very important that we look carefully at this and learn all we can.

I have felt such an urge to preach through this Book that I haven't been able to sleep some nights because I've been thinking so much about it.

And now I think I have 2 more things I want to preach about from Joshua, then I think I'll have said what I need to say.

So today I'm going to look at the last 14 chapters of Joshua, together with part of Judges 3; so that only gives us 15 chapters to cover in the next half-hour or so.

And rather than focusing on one incident, I want to try to paint the big picture and try to learn some lessons that are relevant for us – specifically about the lessons the Israelites learned when they were pioneers – breaking into the new Land; claiming the Promises; and the lessons they learned in settling.

So the Israelites have crossed the Jordan River into the Land; they have re-consecrated themselves to God – celebrated the Passover, re-read the Law, been circumcised; and then they have seen God win wonderful victories on their behalf – at Jericho, Ai and Gibeon. And they have been reminded about the need to keep choosing to live under God's Blessing.

The rest of the Book - chapters 10 – 24, tell the story of how they finish the conquest – taking possession of the Land, pioneering, fighting, trusting God and winning great victories; and then how they settle there.

I believe that there are some challenges for us to be aware of in this.

After winning the victory at Gibeon, and defeating the Kings of the south, the Israelites then attack the northern kings and defeat them.

As I said a few weeks ago, the Israelites defeated 31 kings and 7 nations over a 7 year period.

...But they didn't complete the job and drive out all the nations as God had told them to.

When Joshua had grown old, the LORD said to him, "You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over. (Joshua 13:1)

And, as we'll see later, this caused ongoing problems.

Despite the fact they hadn't fully finished the job, they had gained enough of the Land to allow them to settle.

And much of the rest of the Book of Joshua is concerned with that.

There are detailed descriptions of which part of the Land each tribe is to have as its inheritance – first the part of the Land east of the Jordan, then the part to the west.

Caleb – one of the original spies, along with Joshua, was given Hebron, which he inherited with the same trust in God as he had always had:

“...So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.”

Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. (Joshua 14:10-13)

The rest of the Land is carefully divided between the Tribes and then, towards the end of the book – after some years have passed, Joshua knows it is his time to die, so he calls the leaders of the tribes together at Shechem to say goodbye, and says this:

“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

“The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

“But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you,

whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you. (Joshua 23:6-13)

The place Joshua chose for his farewell speech was Shechem, which is near to where God made His Covenant with Abraham – and I think that is deliberate, because what he reminded them of was that very thing - God's Covenant with Abraham and then the Story of God's Faithfulness since then to His People. They all respond by renewing their Covenant with God.

Then Joshua died and was buried in the Promised Land.

When you're going through a Desert, you dream a lot about what it will be like when you get to the Promised Land.

For many of us, especially me - as we have been going through hard times, we have been dreaming about how life would be when we have a job; we have enough money; we are out of debt; God has spoken to us about what we're to do next; we've broken free of depression; we're healed.

And there is real blessing as God leads us on; but there are also new challenges and some risks.

For Israel, having been through this process of entering in, this was the high point – here they were, and where before they were God's People – now they were God's People in the Land He had promised to Abraham.

But within a few years they had turned away from God:

The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. (Judges 2:7-10)

Part of the problem is this; having lived in the excitement of living under the Cloud in the Desert – seeing provision every day and then conquering the Land – again, seeing God’s Power, they then had to go off to the allocation of land that they had been given and get on with life; plough your fields and build a house.

I believe there is a real challenge in this and it takes just as much grace as facing Deserts and great spiritual battles.

It’s not all exciting; it’s not all about day-to-day survival, and it’s not full of situations where your life depends on God coming through for you; But suddenly, there’s a new, more subtle temptation to stop relying on God like before in the middle of a crisis, and, then there is the big danger that once the pressure is off, they just settle.

In one sense that’s exactly what they were meant to do; but there is the act of settling and occupying, and there is the heart of settling.

And when you’re living in the Desert, it’s what you dream of.

But when we come into the Land God is giving us, there are three big dangers we face – and the Israelites failed on each of them.

I think they are real dangers for us if we’re experiencing the same challenges.

Firstly, they were not thorough enough in dealing with the Tribes in the Land, and that led to generations of problems

Secondly, they settled and got comfortable and forgot God and His Covenant, which was People – Land – The Nations.

Thirdly, they stopped trusting God.

Let me say more about these three mistakes.

**Firstly, they didn’t finish the job.**

God had clearly spoken many times about the need to clear out the nations that were living in the Land – because if they were still there, then they would mix with the Israelites and the shining, Holy example of God’s Nation living in God’s Land, would be polluted and watered down and lost.

And instead of being an example and a provocation and an invitation, they would just look no different.

And instead of being Holy to God, they would end up prostituting themselves with other gods – and instead of demonstrating God’s Blessing, they would walk under His Curse.

And within a generation, that’s what happened.

They possessed the Land, but didn’t possess it well enough or thoroughly enough and so they ended up missing out on the peace that was part of their promised inheritance.

Judges chapter 1, which continues the story after Joshua, has a list of all the Tribes who didn’t finish the job:

But Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan or Taanach or Dor or Ibleam or Megiddo and their surrounding settlements, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that land...nor did Ephraim...neither did Zebulun...nor did Asher...neither did Naphtai. And the Danites tried, but couldn’t kick out the Amorites. (Judges 1:27-36)

It’s tragic.

Instead of finishing the job God had given them, it was left half-done; their attitude was “That’s good enough; it’ll do”

Straight away they were ready to put up with compromise.

Then in chapter 2:

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them (2:10-12)

And then in chapter 3, unsurprisingly, it says this:

The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. (3:5-6)

All the contrast was gone – all the Holiness of being God’s own, set apart People was watered down and lost.

The truth is they were better off in the Desert. They didn’t have land to call their own, but they knew God.

So here’s our challenge; I truly believe that God is calling us on – we mustn’t be afraid of that and try and put down our roots and build in the Desert; but when we go in, we need to be thorough – ruthless with sin; not compromising; actively fighting to take hold of all that God is giving us.

Jesus said that if we start building and only build half a tower, then we end up looking stupid.

It’s not very popular to talk about it, but God wants commitment – people who will stand up and say I’ll do this whatever the cost, for as long as it takes.

### **Secondly, they quickly forgot God.**

Look at the difference between Caleb and, a few generations later, King Saul.

Caleb – God’s warrior; a man who had understood who God is and had lived his whole life wholeheartedly following Him. Even near the end of his life, picked Hebron as his inheritance – because that was where the giants were!

Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said. (Josh 14:12)

Later there is the story of Saul – Israel’s first king. He meets a giant too – Goliath, and he stands there petrified and it takes a young shepherd boy – David to remember God and see things with God’s perspective.

How does it go from an 85 year old chasing into a giant’s nest to one giant petrifying a whole army of God’s People?

There is a thing that can happen when everything is going well, which is that we start thinking it’s because of us and we forget God and we forget what God can do.

As I've said, I believe that we are going to see God bring us into new things – let's not forget who He is and what He can do!

When we're going through it, we need to pray for our daily bread – and when God answers and we see He is faithful it's amazing; we see His Power because we're desperate.

When life is easier, we start telling stories of what God used to do.

We need to use the Promised Land to go giant-hunting!

I'm sure Caleb had some amazing stories of what God had done – he had been one of the slaves in Egypt; he had seen the Plagues and the Passover; he had walked across the dry bed of the Red Sea; he had crossed the Desert; seen the Cloud; seen God's Glory at Mount Sinai; he had spied out the Land; now he had crossed the Jordan; seen Jericho fall; seen the sun stand still!

But I think even in his old age, he was after some new stories of God's Faithfulness.

When you enter the Land, don't forget...

**Finally**, I think that the reason that the Israelites got it so wrong is because **they forgot the Covenant** – well, part of it.

They had once not existed because their forefather and foremother Abraham and Sarah were old and barren – but God, because of His Promise, gave them an heir – Isaac, and from him came God's People.

Once they didn't have a land, but now God had given them the very land He had promised to Abraham – and here they were standing on the exact spot where God had promised.

And so they took possession of the Land and were given their allocation and planted vines and worked the fields and sowed and harvested and built houses – and settled down.

They were meant to settle the Land and take possession of it - but they weren't meant to be settlers and stop there; because there was still another part of the Promise:

“And through you, all peoples on earth will be blessed.”

Actually, it took from the Book of Joshua until the Book of Acts – from 1250BC to 33AD (nearly 1300 years) for them to get back on track with the third part of God’s Promise.

And without this sense of Mission (what we might call the Apostolic) people just settle down and make their allotted land a bit nicer.

And without the sense of Mission, we become inward-looking and end up arguing amongst ourselves.

So for us, as God moves us on, it is not for our comfort and convenience; it is for Mission.

If God provides for us, it’s not so we can get nicer and nicer stuff; it’s so that we can use our resources for Mission and to be a blessing.

If God heals us, it’s not primarily so we can be a bit happier; it’s so we can be active for His Kingdom.

If He pours out His Spirit, it’s not so we can ‘soak and fall over and wobble’; it’s so that we are empowered to be His Witnesses.

And as He brings more workers, it’s not so life will get easier for us – we’re not on the rota so often; it’s so we can bring in more of the Harvest.

We have a job to do – a Commission that’s so big that it will take us all the time God gives us – “Make disciples of all nations”

The Gospel will go to the ends of the earth...and then the End will come.

We’ve got a great job to do – still outworking the Promise God made in Genesis 12.

And that’s why He will, in His Time, move us on.

I believe God wants us to be ready; He wants us to fix our eyes on the Land He is promising us. But we need to know that it’s not a Land we’re meant to get comfortable in – it’s a base for Mission.

Maybe the first thing we’ll notice that will show us we’re in the Land is that we’re surrounded by giants!

Let's get ready!