

SCRIPTURE READINGS: Selected from Joshua and Judges
TITLE: God remains faithful despite man's utter sinfulness.

INTRODUCTION.

We are still following the story of God's plan of salvation [redemption] as it unfolds in the O.T.

I do hope that you can now see the development of God's plan of Salvation in the O.T.

Today, let's look at Joshua and how this advances God's plan of salvation.

Let us first of all look at the background to Joshua.

◆ Who was Joshua?

He was born in Egypt. His father and mother were slaves.

The first time we read about him is in **Exodus 17:9** where we read: "Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.'"

In **Exodus 24:13-18** we see that Joshua acted as an assistant to Moses and on one occasion went up to Mount Sinai with him to meet with God. (Exo 24:12) The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction." (Exo 24:13) So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. (Exo 24:14) And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them." (Exo 24:15) Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.

It was Joshua was one of the *twelve spies* who were sent to explore the land of Canaan.

When they returned, it was only Joshua and Caleb who were prepared to obey God to go and take the land.

It is significant that his name was originally Hoshea, meaning, "Salvation".

Moses changed his name to Joshua, which means, "*The Lord is Salvation*" [Greek - Jesus].

This change of name was very significant as I will show you later on.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

To understand the book of Joshua we need to understand its historical context, where it fits into the flow of Israel's history.

Joshua begins with Israel *about to enter the land of Canaan*, some 40 years after leaving Egypt.

We have seen that because they did not trust the Lord, he would not allow the whole generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt to enter the Promised Land they died in the wilderness – recorded in Numbers.

Because they would not trust God, that generation was condemned to die in the wilderness.

A word of application: *when people in a country turn away from God, in judgment God brings curses on those people until there is a new generation, but sometimes the curse extends to the 3rd and 4th generation – now think of that in relation to SA's history.*

The whole book of Joshua obviously focuses on the possessing of the Promised Land.

The opening chapters show us Joshua as the leader through whom God will give the land to his people - he is the one that God is with and to whom he will grant success.

(Jos 1:1) After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, (Jos 1:2) "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.

(Jos 1:3) Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.

(Jos 1:4) From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.

(Jos 1:5) No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

(Jos 1:6) Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

(Jos 1:7) Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

(Jos 1:8) This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

(Jos 1:9) Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

(Jos 1:10) And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, (Jos 1:11) "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'"

r the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.'

(Jos 1:14) Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them ...

(Jos 1:16) And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.

(Jos 1:17) Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses!

(Jos 1:18) Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

Entry into the land is attributed to God's action and directly connected to the exodus as a component of redemption.

The book of Joshua tells us how God used Joshua to enter the land and take possession of it - date *1450 BC*.

Verse 3 describes the extent of the land. The rest of Joshua is about how the Israelites conquered or took possession of the land God had promised them.

◆ Division

Chapters 1-12 Conquest of the Land.

Chapters 12-22 Division of the land

Chapters 23-24 Challenge to faithfulness [Joshua's last charge.]

◆ Archaeological Support.

Archaeological discoveries provide further insight into the historical context of Joshua's conquest. Excavations in sites such as Jericho and Hazor have revealed evidence of destruction layers that correspond to the biblical timeline, although interpretations vary among scholars. These findings suggest that the events described in the book of Joshua have a tangible foundation in history, and they continue to be the subject of ongoing research and debate. The interplay between biblical narrative and archaeological evidence enriches our understanding of the period and the significance of the Israelites' entry into Canaan.

In 1887, an accidental discovery, led to the unearthing of an entire file of

ancient diplomatic correspondence at the site of **Tell-el-Amarna**.

A preliminary examination of these table showed that they were letters, numbering almost 300 and were appeals for help from the princes of Canaan to the king of Egypt.

These letters were a Canaanite version of the sequence of events connected with the conquest of Canaan by the armies of Joshua.

So much for the back ground to Joshua.

PURPOSE OF JOSHUA.

False routes - what this passage is not about

- ¶ Is the purpose of Joshua to show us God's power and that that he is the one who brings victory while we simply trust his word of promise – to encourage us to believe?

Now yes, this is clear in Joshua, and we can certainly learn lessons about faith from it.

The New Testament comment on the fall of Jericho clearly encourages us to trust God in all situations; to believe in his promises.

We read in Hebrews 11:30 that it was by faith that the walls of Jericho fell. (Heb 11:30) By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

However, we should beware of seeing this New Testament comment **as the guiding control** in interpreting the whole passage.

We need to see that this example is specifically related to the writer's purpose, which is different from the original setting.

The problem is that this approach ignores the larger context – how it fits into the unfolding and outworking of the whole story of redemption.

- ¶ Refer to my own example of using Joshua to teach us principles of spiritual warfare.

- ¶ A common approach to Joshua is to use it as a **character study** of Joshua or as a guide to leadership.

No, it is not meant as a **guide to leadership**.

Often preachers expound OT books focusing on the man of God and then applying lessons to us, for example, Nehemiah - a study in Spiritual leadership.

¶ Another frequently employed method is to utilize it as a framework for exercising faith; it serves as an 'example of faith' and encourages reflection through questions such as, 'What challenges are you currently facing?' or 'Which obstacles do you hope to overcome?'

If one were taking the exemplary approach, then the route to run would surely be that set out by **Hebrews 11** itself both in faith being specifically in God's promises and the forward looking nature of faith.

The question we must ask is how does Joshua fit into the story line?

What role does it play in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption?

It seems to me that the key theme that is developed – the main lesson that is taught is that **God remains faithful despite the utter sinfulness of man, in other words, his grace overcame man's sinfulness.**

We may of course say that this is the theme that is developed throughout the Scripture from beginning to end.

God's faithfulness overcomes man's failure, God's mercy and grace triumphs over sin.

(Rom 5:20) But the Law entered so that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,

(Rom 5:21) so that as sin has reigned to death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

What I want to do is to trace this theme through Joshua and Judges and show how it all fits into the big picture, the story line.

GOD REMAINS FAITHFUL.

To understand the significance of Joshua we need to go back to **Genesis**.

Not long after the flood, mankind again rebelled against God; remember the *Tower of Babel*.

At that moment in the history of humanity, God looked down on sinful

and lost humanity.

From a pagan culture, God called one man, *Abram*. He lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. "*Abram*" God said, "*I want you to leave your land, and I want you to go into a land I will give you, a land you've never seen before*".

God made a promise to him that He was going to bless him with a **Land and a Seed**, a people, a great nation.

And even more important, God promised that through him the whole world would be blessed. **[Gen 12]**

These blessings would ultimately be fulfilled through the Lord Jesus Christ, who would be born in due time.

He would be the Saviour of all men.

Abram responded to God's call and by faith he entered the land of Canaan. Abraham eventually had two sons, *Ishmael and Isaac*.

Isaac was the promised seed, the true heir.

Isaac had two sons, *Esau and Jacob*.

Jacob in turn became the channel through whom God would fulfil His promise to Abram.

Jacob had twelve sons.

One of these sons, *Joseph*, became the means through whom God preserved this one family from a famine and extinction and assimilation.

Joseph, who by this time was second ruler, under Pharaoh, arranged for his family to settle down in Goshen.

For about 400 years they prospered and grew from a family of 70 to a nation of about 2 million.

Initially, they received good treatment.

Then a Pharaoh came to power who did not know Joseph and who imposed harsh laws on the Hebrews.

He enslaved them because their number became a threat to him.

There followed a few hundred years of terrible slavery.

Finally, God sent a specially prepared leader, *Moses*, to bring God's people out of slavery.

Deliverance from Egypt came only by the direct and miraculous intervention of God.

The delivered slaves departed into the wilderness.

There God revealed Himself to them.

He gave them His law.

He prepared them to be His people.

But they consistently resisted and rejected God and Moses' leadership.

The result was that God condemned them to wander in the wilderness until that whole generation was wiped out.

Of course this comes as a sobering warning to those of us who profess to be Christians.

Faith in Christ that does not lead to faith in living for the Lord means nothing.

The problem was that the children of Israel hankered after Egypt – and they took God's presence among them and God's blessings for granted.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians used this as a warning,

HEB 4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

If we do not continue faithful to the Lord, committed to him, we will not experience the fullness of God's blessings.

Similarly, Paul warns the Corinthians ¹CO 10:1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. ² They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³ They all ate the same spiritual food ⁴ and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

¹CO 10:6 Now these things occurred as examplesⁿ to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were

Paul's admonition serves as a powerful reminder that outward participation in spiritual activities does not guarantee inward transformation or acceptance by God.

The Israelites had witnessed miracles and received divine provision, yet their hearts remained far from true devotion.

We, too, must guard against becoming complacent or allowing our desires to draw us away from wholehearted commitment to the Lord.

These examples challenge us to examine our lives and ensure that our faith is active, growing, and reflected in our daily choices.

Now God was at the point of giving them a land, the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey [Edenic picture].

It was a new generation that would experience the blessings of God, and who were now ready to enter the land God had promised to Abraham 400 year before.

But despite Israel's unfaithfulness and disobedience, God remained faithful to his promise.

This new generation, who had not seen God's deliverance from Egypt and had not been at Mount Sinai, now had to hear the commandments of God – much of the law in Exodus is repeated in the book of Deuteronomy.

When we come to the book of Joshua, Moses has died and God appointed Joshua to lead Israel into Canaan.

Look again at the way in which Joshua opens,

JOS 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites. ³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates--all the Hittite country--to the Great Seaⁿ on the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

¶ It is significant that in **chapter 2** we see how Joshua again sends spies to spy out the fortified city of Jericho.

Their encounter with **Rahab** is the stuff of adventure stories – the tension and the fear of discovery is all there.

It is interesting to hear **her confidence** in Yahweh – this comes from a pagan and stands in sharp contrast to the spies report 40 years previously,

(Num 13:25) At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land.

(Num 13:31) Then the men ...said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are."

(Num 13:32) So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height.

(Num 13:33) And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

(Jos 2:9) and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

(Jos 2:10) For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

(Jos 2:11) And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

(Jos 2:23) Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them.

(Jos 2:24) And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us."

We see some parallels with Exodus.

In **chapter 3** we see how God enabled the Israelites to cross the Jordan into Canaan, obviously it was another Exodus,

JOS 3:7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.' "

¹⁵ Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, ¹⁶ the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Seaⁿ) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

To remind the people and the coming generations of this great miracle

JOS 4:1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, ² "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³ and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."

For what purpose?

⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

They were now in sight of the first Canaanite city, Jericho with its massive impenetrable walls, but instead of immediately attacking Jericho, God told Joshua to have every male circumcised [Obviously they did not do this during the wilderness wanderings].

And if that was not enough, God told them to now celebrate the Passover [the first time in 40 years].

These are all echoes of Exodus – the purpose of Exodus is to be realized – that Israel would be planted in the mountain of the Lord's inheritance [Exodus 15:16].

It is significant that after the crossing of the river the manna stops in Canaan—the people need no more miraculous provision: the food in Canaan will be enough, a picture of back to Eden and this is underlined by that strange personage Joshua meets.

As Joshua approached Jericho, he met the figure of the '*commander of the Lord's armies*'.

Chapter 5.

(Jos 5:13) When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?"

(Jos 5:14) And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

(Jos 5:15) And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

There are several salient details to note:

- ¶ The connection between Exodus from Egypt is clear – as Moses encountered Yahweh in the burning bush and had to remove his

sandals, because of the holy ground, so Joshua is told to remove his sandals but in Joshua's case, he does not question God.

- ¶ This man with a drawn sword stands to the east of the land, as its entrance creating an intriguing connection between the land Israel is crossing over to possess, and the land from which Adam and Eve were expelled – the way to Eden was guarded at the east by a cherubim with a flaming sword – the way is open to Eden, Israel moves in the direction of the reversal of the curse – the divine residence is not at Sinai but in Canaan and the angel of the Lord does not bar the way to Eden as was the case with Adam and Eve – the angel is there to assist the Israelites in taking Canaan.
- ¶ The drawn sword is indicative of impending judgment upon the pagan nations; the land must be purified of evil – the seed of the Serpent must be crushed.
- ¶ The arrival at this stage and the grammatically emphatic announcement that 'I have now come', indicates the importance of the ensuing battle and that it is ultimately to be fought by God – it is God who crushes his people's enemies, who crushes the serpent and his seed.
- ¶ The identity of this commander as having the authority of God himself is clear; it is a figure very akin to the angel of the Lord. As the passage continues the distinction between this commander and the Lord himself evaporates.
- ¶ This divine identity is shown by Joshua's worship and the requirement to remove his sandals because it is holy ground (clearly alluding to Exodus 3:5).

His appearance explains the strange battle plan – conquest will not be through Israel's superior military power, of ingenious strategy – humanly speaking their plan was ridiculous, especially if you consider the description of Jericho's fortifications.

(Jos 6:1) Now Jericho was shut up inside and outside because of the people of Israel. None went out, and none came in.

The idiomatic double use of the verb 'to shut' (once active and once passive) is descriptive.

English translations must render it 'securely barred' or similar.

One commentator renders it, not only shut, but barred and bolted

Hence the question raised is how they will gain entry to conquer the city?

(Jos 6:2) And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor.

(Jos 6:3) You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days.

(Jos 6:4) Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets.

(Jos 6:5) And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."

(Jos 6:6) So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD."

(Jos 6:7) And he said to the people, "Go forward. March around the city and let the armed men pass on before the ark of the LORD."

(Jos 6:8) And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them.

(Jos 6:9) The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually.

(Jos 6:10) But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout."

And what a strange plan of attack it was.

The story of how Jericho was taken is well known – with not a shot fired, the walls simply collapsed and the city was taken and every living thing destroyed.

JOS 6:20 When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. ²¹ They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it--men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

RAISES THE QUESTION OF GOD'S COMMAND TO WIPE OUT THE PEOPLE OF JERICHO.

God was going to use Israel to bring judgment upon the people of Canaan:

(Genesis 15:13) Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.

(Genesis 15:14) But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

(Genesis 15:15) As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.

(Genesis 15:16) And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Possible Reason.

Wilderness wandering;

(Numbers 21:19) and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth,

(Numbers 21:20) and from Bamoth to the valley lying in the region of Moab by the top of Pisgah that looks down on the desert.

(Numbers 21:21) Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, (Numbers 21:22) "Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into field or vineyard. We will not drink the water of a well. We will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory."

(Numbers 21:23) But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. He gathered all his people together and went out against Israel to the wilderness and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel.

Another reason.

(Deuteronomy 20:16) But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, (Deuteronomy 20:17) but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, (Deuteronomy 20:18) that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God.

God's patience with the Amorities – 400 years from Abraham.

Plus 40 years and 7 days.

(Joshua 2:6) But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof.

(Joshua 2:7) So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

(Joshua 2:8) Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof (Joshua 2:9) and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear

of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

(Joshua 2:10) For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

(Joshua 2:11) And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

(Joshua 2:12) Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign

And that is the story of the conquest – one after the other the cities of Canaan were taken – not because Israel had a superior army, but because God delivered the Canaanites into their hands.

It was a miracle.

Now we read about a very disturbing incident – **Joshua 7** – the sin of **Achan**.