

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the book of JOSHUA. We will learn how it came into being, its character as divine revelation and its division. We will also consider the main messages of the book Joshua.

POINT 1. THE ORIGIN OF JOSHUA.

First. The name of the book.

The name of the main person “Joshua” is given to the book. Joshua was the leader of Israel and instrument in the hand of the Lord when Israel entered, conquered and possessed the land Canaan. The name “Joshua” means “the Lord is salvation”. It means that the salvation and welfare of God’s people is completely dependant on the Lord.

Second. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

When was the book Joshua written?

The expression “until *we* had crossed over the Jordan” in Joshua 5:1 and the statement “Rahab lives among the Israelites to this day” in Joshua 6:25, indicate that the writer participated in the events described in the book. However, the closing words of the book in Joshua 24:29-33, could not have been written by Joshua himself. Nevertheless, they were written not long after Joshua had died in 1387 B.C. The time between Joshua’s death and the beginning of oppression by a foreign king during the time of the judges cannot have been more than another 20 years (Jud 3:8). The writer must have written the book of Joshua soon after the conquering of Canaan, when Israel was still standing on a spiritual high level and had not yet sunk into idolatry as in the period under the judges. If he was about 35 years old when he crossed the Jordan into Canaan and lived until he was over 75 years old, he could easily have recorded everything written in the book of Joshua as his own experience. Thus, the book Joshua could have been written before 1367 B.C.

Who wrote the book Joshua?

The writer of the book of Joshua is not mentioned. The writer must have stood in close contact with Joshua, because he recorded the revelations that Joshua received from the Lord, his speeches and his commands. He could have written this book at the instruction of Joshua and could have made use of Joshua’s own written records (Josh 24:26). He could well have been one of the officials, who are often mentioned in the book (Josh 24:1). The word *official* in the original language is *writer*. While Joshua only had an indirect influence on the writing of this book, the authority of a Bible book is not based on the fact that some famous person wrote it, but rather that it has been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we conclude that the book of Joshua was written by a very close associate of Joshua.

Third. The character of the book.

The book Joshua is *a historical book*. It consists of well interrelated reports of historical events. How should a historical book in the Bible be read and understood? What is the permanent meaning and value of a particular historical passage? What does God want to say to us today in a particular historical passage?

One. The Bible is a unity.

The interpretation of a Bible book must reckon with the contents of the book itself and with the light that falls on it from the Bible as a whole. The Bible is an organic unit and every Bible book as well as its parts must be viewed as the members of one body. The Bible is also its own interpreter. The Old Testament has its supplement and fulfilment in the New Testament and therefore must be read in the light of the New Testament.

Two. The meaning of history in the Bible.

When we read the Old Testament historical books, we must be guided by a good insight into the meaning of *history* as recorded in the Bible. History in the Bible has *a holy character*: It is a history set apart from secular history, because God is the Maker of history in the Bible! History in the Bible is a part of God’s special revelation of himself and his thoughts to us, not only through words, but also through facts, events and people. History in the Bible is prophecy, not only through words, but also through events. History in the Bible is *God’s salvation history*: It reveals God’s plan of salvation. Thus, God reveals himself, his thoughts and will through the historical books in the Bible on the one hand and through the books of the prophets on the other hand. That is why the Jews call the historical books from Joshua to Esther “the early prophets” and the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi “the later prophets”.

Three. The Old Testament types and shadows.

The historical books of the Old Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit and included in the canon of the Bible not just to make known to us the history of the nation Israel. The historical books can only be understood correctly, when

“Israel” is seen as a *type of Jesus Christ and the New Testament Church*. A *type* is a person, thing or event that serves as an illustration. Important people like Melchizedek, Moses, David and Solomon have a typical character in the Old Testament. The history of Israel has the character of a *shadow* and an *example*: It is not the history of a nation among other nations, but the history of God’s people during the Old Testament period. This Old Testament period was a *divinely ordained period of time*. The Bible knows only two such divinely ordained periods of time: the Old Testament period and the New Testament period. The history recorded in the Bible really happened, but *points to another, higher reality*. The historical record must first be understood as good as possible as *history* and as a united story, even if it has clearly distinguishable parts. Therefore, the interpreter may not try to find a deeper meaning in each separate verse of a historical book, but he must give an account of the meaning of the whole historical book as a whole, and of certain parts that contain important events. Christians should only ascribe typological significance to a historical event or person when another part of the Bible treats it as a *type*.

POINT 2. THE DIVISION AND MAIN CONTENTS OF JOSHUA.

The book of Joshua may be divided into two main parts as follows:

The first part of Joshua consists of chapters 1 to 12. It consists of the conquest of the Promised Land.

The second part of Joshua consists of chapters 13 to 24. It consists of the occupation of the Promised Land.

POINT 3. THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST, IN THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

Jesus Christ is the Saviour; the One who fulfils what is prophesied in the book Joshua.

The name *Joshua* means “the Lord is salvation”. It means that the salvation and welfare of God’s people is completely dependant on the Lord. The name *Joshua* is the same as the name *Jesus*. *Jesus* is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua* (Mt 1:21). Joshua was permitted to carry this name as a promise that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would *fulfil* what his name *promised*. Not Joshua, but Jesus Christ would be the Saviour of his people!

Hebrews 4:8 teaches that although Joshua led Israel into *earthly Canaan*, he could not give Israel *rest*. Joshua was only a *shadow* of the coming Messiah. Jesus Christ, as “the author of their salvation” (Heb 2:10), would lead all his own people into the *heavenly Canaan*, which is the land of *eternal rest* (Heb 4:9-11). *The Sabbath-rest* is a term for *heaven*. When Christians have finished their life and work on earth, they will enter God’s rest in heaven and rest from their work on earth, just like God rested from his creation work on earth.

POINT 4. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

The main messages of the book Joshua are the deeper meanings of the historical events. The historical events in the book Joshua point to another, higher reality. Only when the book Joshua is read in the light of the New Testament, can these messages be understood.

First. The meaning of the crossing of the river Jordan.

In Joshua chapter 3 and 4, God said that he was present and would do amazing things. He would go ahead of his people into the river Jordan. Although the Jordan was at flood stage, God cut the river off so that the water stopped flowing down, but piled up in a heap a great distance away. Thus the people of God were able to cross the Jordan on firm and dry ground. This was a divine miracle. The prophet Micah reminds the people of God that the crossing of the Jordan had a special meaning. In Micah 6:5 he says, “Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.”

What was the deeper meaning of the crossing of the Jordan? This historical event followed the historical events of the first Passover, the Exodus out of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea and the forty years journey through the desert. *The first Passover* symbolised the death of the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, in the place of believers, so that they may be saved from eternal death (1 Cor 5:7-8). *The Exodus* from Egypt symbolised the salvation from the slavery of sin, which people experience in the world (Ex 20:2). *The crossing of the Red Sea* symbolised the dying together with Christ (1 Cor 10:1-2). *The forty years journey through the desert* symbolised the people of God on their way to the Promised Land of rest. Therefore, *the crossing of the Jordan* symbolised the crossing of physical death and the grave into eternal life in heaven (Heb 4:8-11).

The events in the Bible are not the same as the events in secular history. These events in the Bible picture God’s salvation history. They picture the beginning of the new life in Christ, the journey of the Church of Christ through this world, the death and resurrection of Christians and entrance to the new earth.

What was the deeper meaning of “the ark going ahead of Israel into the Jordan”? *The ark* symbolised the presence of the Living God in their midst (1 Chron 13:6). The floodwaters of the river Jordan prevented Israel from crossing into the Promised Land. But the ark of the covenant that was carried by the priests went ahead and was the first to descend into the river Jordan. It cut off these floodwaters and enabled the people of God to cross into the Promised Land. This historical event points to a deeper meaning: “The descending of the ark into the river Jordan” symbolised the work of Jesus Christ, who by humbling himself to die for the sins of his people, conquered death and opened the way into heaven. Thus, *these historical events recorded in the Old Testament are prophecies concerning Jesus Christ and the salvation history of the Church of Christ*. Just as Israel had to look towards the ark of the covenant as they crossed the

river Jordan into earthly Canaan, likewise we must look to Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection as we pass through this world and finally through our death and resurrection into the heavenly Canaan. What happened with Israel in the Old Testament period, the divinely ordained period of shadows, will in a spiritual sense be repeated and fulfilled with the Christian Church in the New Testament period, the divinely ordained period of realities (Heb 10:1-4). Joshua chapter 3 therefore promises that physical death has a definite purpose. Physical death enables Christians to take possession of their eternal inheritance in the new heaven and the new earth.

Second. The meaning of the annihilation of the original nations living in Canaan.

The destruction of these nations, as described in the book of Joshua, was intended to be carried out stringently. Israel was not very consistent in this and later regretted it. In Joshua chapter 6, Jericho falls and is completely destroyed. Joshua 6:21 says, "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." In Joshua chapter 8, all the people who lived in Ai were destroyed and the city was made a permanent heap of ruins. Joshua chapter 9 and 10 describe how Israel destroyed the cities in the south and in the north of Canaan. Joshua 10:22-27 describes how the five Amorite kings were captured. Joshua summoned his army commanders to put their feet on the necks of these kings. He said that this is what the Lord was going to do with all their enemies. He struck and killed these kings, hung them on five trees and finally threw them into a cave.

We may ask the question, "*Was all this not needless cruelty?*" The book of Joshua does not answer this question. But other parts of the Bible do give an answer to this question.

The Canaanite nations were descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham. They were very wicked and served idols. God had already warned them in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra, but they had not changed a bit. Leviticus chapter 18 describes the sinful practices and detestable customs of the nations in the land of Canaan. They committed incest, adultery, homosexuality and bestiality (6,20,22,23). Deuteronomy 12:29-31 and 18:9-13 describe how these nations did all kinds of detestable things which the Lord hates. They even burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. From Genesis 15:16 and all these other Bible passages, it is clear that God had tolerated the sins and wickedness of these nations for a very long time, and that by the time Israel entered Canaan, the sins of these nations had reached its full measure. As the righteous Judge of the universe, God himself decreed to annihilate these nations and to give their land as a possession to Israel. He did this, not because Israel deserved it, but because it was God's will to use the *army* of Israel as his instrument of judgement, just like he used the *flood* to judge the whole world in Genesis 6 and *fire* to judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorra in Genesis 19. The New Testament clearly teaches that it was God himself who drove these nations out of Canaan (Acts 7:45; 13:19). Therefore, the annihilation of the nations living in Canaan must be regarded as a judgement of God. It was a holy work, exercising the wrath of God over wicked nations. Israel was only God's instrument. Later, God used the Assyrians and Babylonians as his instruments to punish Israel (Isa 10:5-6; 13:3-5).

Thus, Israel functioned as *a type* for the Christian Church. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to show itself as *the Church militant* within this present world. Christians fight, not with physical weapons, but with spiritual weapons (2 Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-18). As far as possible, the Christian Church should cut off all the remains of sin in her own midst and should fight against all the powers of darkness around her. The Christians must realise that if they fail to do this, they will be excluded from inheriting the new earth. The successes and victories of Israel in the Old Testament period serve to encourage the Christian Church in the New Testament period. Although the enemies of the Christian Church are many and very strong, the Christian Church will nevertheless triumph over them. But the Church must remain faithful to Jesus Christ, keep herself from being polluted by the wicked world and fight in the power of faith only. The Christian Church may *never* fight holy wars or physically kill their opponents! According to Matthew 5, Christians may never take revenge on their opponents. They may not even react in sinful anger or in insults. Instead, they must do all they can to get reconciled to their opponents. They should not even resist evil people in their persecution of Christians. But the persecutors of Christians must be warned. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 teaches that at the Second Coming of Christ, God will judge the unrighteousness of people who opposed Christ and persecuted the Christians.

Third. The meaning of the division of the land.

Joshua chapter 13 to 21 describes the division of the land of Canaan. By casting lots, God sovereignly determined which part of the land each tribe received (Josh 14:2). This prevented jealousy and squabbling. God allotted certain portions of land to individuals like Caleb and Joshua (Josh 14:6-15; 19:49-51). The message is that God has planned a special inheritance for each individual Christian on the new earth (Col 1:12).

Fourth. The book of Joshua teaches that the Lord is the invisible General who leads his people from victory to victory.

The book of Joshua forms the bridge between the five books of Moses and the rest of the Old Testament, just like the book of Acts forms the bridge between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. There is a great resemblance between the books of Joshua and Acts. The people of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament are, as it were, at the peak of spiritual life and are therefore able to do great things in the power of God. Although the sin of

Achan in Joshua 7 and the sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 show that the people of God are vulnerable to sin, yet with the power of God and his Holy Spirit they are invincible! The message is that the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, fights in a spiritual way for his Church on earth and that he leads them on their journey of triumph throughout the world to the capital Rome and to the ends of the earth (Act 1:8). Therefore, Paul says in Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Judges 1-21. Next week we will introduce the book of Judges.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.