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Joshua, God's Practical Man

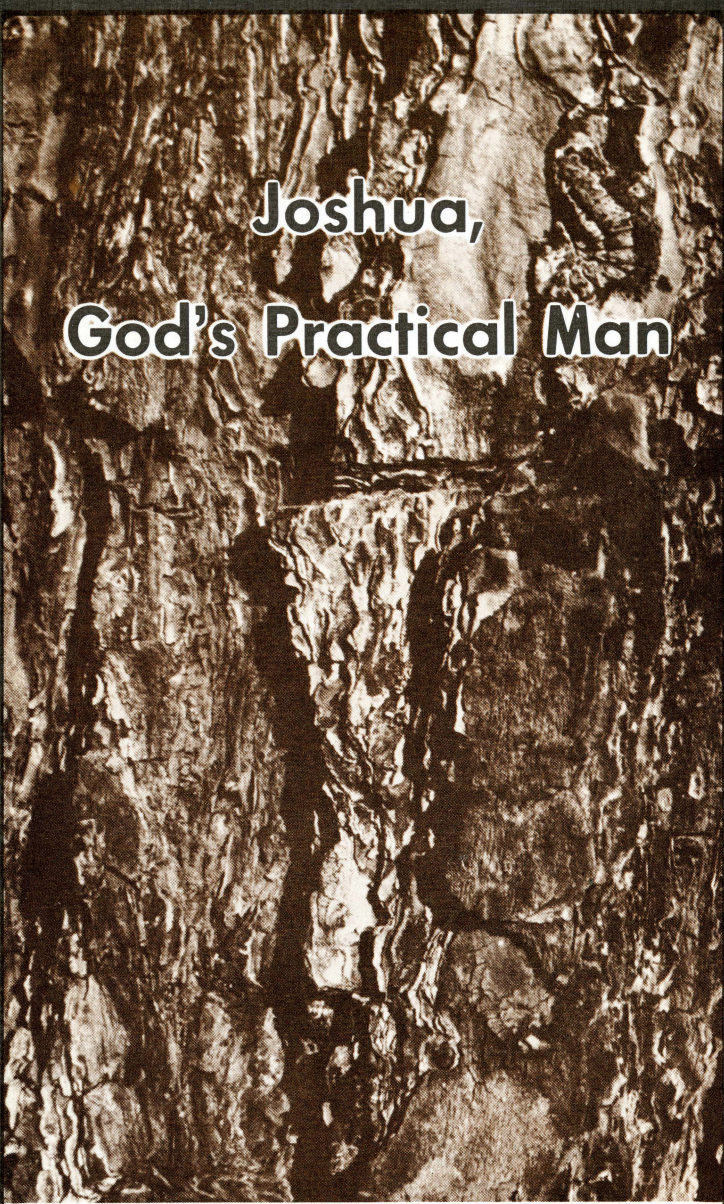
John Allen Chalk

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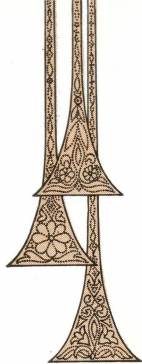
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Joshua, God's Practical Man

As Israel's first successful general, as Moses' assistant at Mount Sinai and the representative for Ephraim's tribe among the twelve spies who first surveyed the promised land, Joshua is one of the Old Testament's best known characters. Unlike Moses whom he assisted for many years, Joshua nevertheless was also a man of God. He certainly possessed none of Elijah's flair nor Ezekiel's dash, but he made his own distinct and vital contribution to Israel's development as a nation. And today he is still remembered as the soldier-citizen of Israel who took Moses' place at an extremely crucial time in the nation's history.

But this shouldn't surprise us! Joshua was publicly recognized and deputized as a leader of God's people. Toward the close of Moses' life God gave these instructions: "Take thee Joshua the Son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thy hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may obey" (Numbers 27:18-20). Moses' mantle was thus transferred before all the people and Joshua's responsibilities publicly explained. What a wonderful way to begin an effective relationship between the people and their new leader!

Moses also had some words of counsel and encouragement for his successor. Just before his death he called Joshua to him and publicly exhorted him: "Be strong and of good courage: for thou shalt go with this people into the land which Jehovah hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it" (Deuteronomy 31:7). Notice Joshua's leadership burden, as seen by Moses, "thou shalt cause them to inherit" the land.

God also spoke to Israel through Moses regarding their new leader. The congregation was to "encourage" Joshua, to support his efforts, and to strengthen him. Of course their own best interests were at stake, as God explained: "for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see" (Deuteronomy 1:38; 3:28). Now, after forty years of wandering, the children of Israel were at the threshold of the promised land. Their respected leader Moses who had led them all this time from Egypt would not be allowed to enter the country because of an earlier act of rebellion in his own life (Numbers 20:1-13). This was undoubtedly the most important time in the young nation's history. Who would lead them? Who would see that the new land was secured, occupied, and made safe? At God's direction, by Moses' public appointment, and with the help of all the people, Joshua took charge.

We not only see in Joshua a publicly recognized and deputized leader, but also a leader who knew God. At the time of the golden calf idolatry, Moses went to the tabernacle to worship and commune with God. The Bible says, "And it came to pass, when Moses entered into the tent, the pillar of cloud descended, and stood at the door of the tent: and Jehovah spake with Moses" (Exodus 33:9). After Moses' conversation with God, mentioned in the next two verses of *Exodus* 33, we learn that Moses left the tent or tabernacle "but his minister Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tent" (Exodus 33:11). The opportunity to be near God in such a striking way and place compelled Joshua to stay where God dwelled.

We also learn something of Joshua's spiritual life at the time of his appointment as Moses' successor. God told Moses to pick Joshua because, in God's words, he is "a man in whom is the Spirit" (Numbers 27:18). And at the time of Moses' death, when the first actual burden of the total leadership of Israel fell on his shoulders, Joshua is described as "full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deuteronomy 34:9).

Joshua's relationship with God was such that God promised him: "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses,

so I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Joshua 1:5). Another evidence of Joshua's spiritual life appears later in his leadership of Israel. After destroying Jericho, and then experiencing defeat at Ai because of sin in the camp, and after solving that problem and capturing Ai, we learn that "he (Joshua) read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners that were among them" (Joshua 8:34, 35).

In the valley of Aijalon during a battle with the Amorites, Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still, "And the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day," (Joshua 10:13). In the gigantic task of conquering the land of Canaan and in all the details of its settlement Joshua closely followed God's instructions. In the Bible's words, "he left nothing undone of all that Jehovah commanded Moses" (Joshua 11:15).

As a young man assisting Moses, in his own personal attitudes, by his actions as leader of Israel during the Canaan conquest, in his prayer life, and in his devotion to God's Word, we recognize in Joshua, a leader who knew God.

But Joshua was more than a leader who knew God. He was a leader who executed God's plan for God's people. All kinds of people, ancient and modern, have attempted to lead God's people in fulfillment of their own selfish plans. Joshua refused any such reason for accepting his responsibilities. He executed God's plan for God's people.

In at least four distinct situations we find this to be true. Regarding Israel's entrance into Canaan, Joshua waited after Moses' death until God said, "Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them" (Joshua 1:2, 3).

In the conquest and settlement of Canaan, Joshua listened carefully to Jehovah. He fought at His command and he also refrained at God's direction. "As Jehovah, the God of Israel, commanded," so Joshua worked in these trying years of resettlement (Joshua 10:40-42).

Some of the tribes were much slower about occupying their land than others. When the tabernacle was set up at Shiloh, seven of the twelve tribes were summoned by Joshua and asked, "How long are ye slack to go in to possess the land, which Jehovah, the God of your fathers, hath given you?" (Joshua 18:3). Then with his challenge still ringing

in their ears, Joshua wisely offered them a concrete plan for realizing the objective he had set before them, an objective, he reminded them, that God Himself had first set (Joshua 18:2-10).

Later the time arrived to mark off and construct the cities of refuge which would become a vital part of Jewish jurisprudence. Here again Joshua waited for God's direction and, in God's own time, the cities were constructed (Joshua 20:1-6).

In crossing the Jordan into Canaan, in conquering the land, in planning the settlement of all the tribes, and in building the cities of refuge, Joshua made sure of his directions from God. Once he had a certain word, there was no waiting. With dispatch he led Israel to honor God's way in every area of personal and national life. Joshua, unlike many strong men in history, executed God's plan, not his own, for God's people. This is why we call him "God's practical man."

This kind of leader normally does not have much to say. A deeply committed but highly practical man, Joshua would not, according to most standards, have been expected to speak effectively his convictions to Israel. Always busy with the details of the conquest, one would think Joshua not a public teacher. But the contrary is true. He was a leader with deep convictions about God's Word for Israel. And these convictions he shared in public meetings with the people. In two prolonged sections of the Old Testament book about his life, *Joshua*, chapters twenty-three and twenty-four, we hear him urge Israel to greater faith in and obedience to God.

Joshua's major speeches to Israel, at least of those recorded, occur in the closing days of his life. As an old warrior, an experienced leader of Israel during those crucial years of settlement in the promised land, Joshua surveys the past, comes to some timeless conclusions or principles of man's conduct before God, and encourages the nation's continued fidelity to God. Notice with me for a moment the first of Joshua's last two speeches.

He first calls on the assembly, that is, "their elders and their heads, and their judges and their officers," to remember what God has done for the nation (Joshua 23:3). As surely as He gave you this land, He will protect you and continue the successful settlement of all the lands promised (Joshua 23:5). But this help from God will come only as the people are courageous in keeping "all that is written in the book of the law of Moses" (Joshua 23:6). Furthermore, Joshua warns, Israel must be extremely careful not to worship the idols, the false gods, of her neighbors

(Joshua 23:7). Rather, you must "cleave unto Jehovah your God, as ye have done unto this day" (Joshua 23:9). Then, as if to sum up all this advice, Joshua urges, "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love Jehovah your God" (Joshua 23:11).

But the problem of unbelieving neighbors remained real. Joshua warned that any time the people accepted false gods, they could expect to lose all contact with Jehovah God and His help (Joshua 23:12, 13). Do not forget, he says, that Jehovah fulfilled every promise He made you, and as surely will He destroy you who do not continue to follow Him, as He has also promised (Joshua 23:14, 15). Jehovah will allow you to worship none but Himself, Joshua concluded (Joshua 23:16).

Joshua's last recorded speech to Israel also contains highly valuable advice. On this occasion all the tribes of Israel have been gathered at Shechem with all the "elders, heads, judges, and officers" (Joshua 24:1). There "they presented themselves before God" we learn (Joshua 24:1). At the point of death, their aged leader recounts some of Israel's history mentioning some of their famous leaders of former times (Joshua 24:2-12). Above all, Joshua says, you must remember that God gave you this land and provided you the power by which to conquer and settle it (Joshua 24:13). But you must give yourselves unreservedly to Him. Listen!

"Now therefore fear Jehovah, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt; and serve ye Jehovah. And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Joshua 24:14, 15). A mighty life of selflessness and service to Jehovah God underscored Joshua's charge to Israel: "Make a choice and then remain faithful to it," he counseled.

Joshua carried the day. The people responded decisively, saying, "Nay; but we will serve Jehovah" (Joshua 24:21). Israel committed herself to serve Jehovah to the exclusion of all idols and false gods. Joshua's last act of leadership thus brought God's people to total commitment to Him.

Then we read, "And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Jehovah, died, being a hundred and ten years old" (Joshua 24:29). God's practical man who had led Israel through some grinding

years of war and settlement was now dead. Even in his death he is called, "the servant of Jehovah."

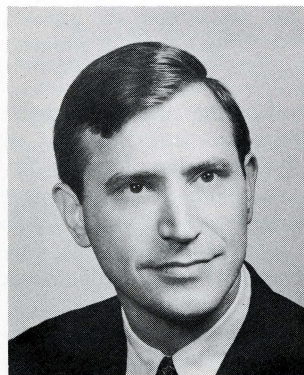
The best assessment of Joshua's life and accomplishments occurs at *Joshua* 24:31. "And Israel served Jehovah all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and had known all the work of Jehovah, that he had wrought for Israel" (*Joshua* 24:31). Joshua continued to influence Israel in her service to God for years after his death. A great leader whose tremendous influence continued beyond the length of his physical years!

Many things in Joshua's life in the Old Testament remind me of Jesus' life in the New Testament. Both were extremely practical men. Both lives were ruled exclusively by God. Both men gave themselves without reservation to the service of humanity. Both men focused clearly the imperative of serving God above all others.

But Jesus Christ was unique as God's only begotten Son, as the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Word made flesh, as God's full and ultimate expression of His love for mankind (*John* 1:14; 3:16; 20:30, 31).

Life eternal comes to all who will "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*John* 20:30, 31). Those who will "repent" and "turn again" have their sins wiped away and receive "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" (*Acts* 3:19). The New Testament also commands: "because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (*Romans* 10:9, 10). The "new life in Christ," union with our Lord, and participation in His spiritual body, the Church, is reserved solely for those who in genuine faith, repentance and confession are baptized into Christ (*Romans* 6:1-6; *Galatians* 3:27; *I Corinthians* 12:13).

You can be God's man, this very day, by obeying Jesus.



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.