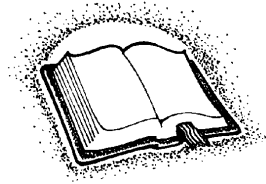


Unlocking the Bible (10)



CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE A look at the Book of Joshua

The five books we have already looked at are based on different aspects of the Exodus experience (with its picture of salvation from bondage through the Passover Lamb) and learning pilgrimage through the wilderness. Now, however, with that behind them, they are poised ready to enter the land; and Joshua is charged with taking them in. The book which bears his name is the account of how that task was carried out.

What lessons can we learn from it?

Joshua – the man

Before going on to consider the book as a whole, it is worth looking at Joshua the man.

As Moses' lieutenant, he had already proved himself. He had already accompanied Moses on Sinai and he was one of the two spies who saw the prospects of Canaan. Even so, experience on its own was not sufficient: he could not rely on his own achievements; there was no place for having 'confidence in the flesh. He needed God's empowering and presence. In his trepidation, he is assured that, '*as I was with Moses, so shall I be with thee*'. We, too, need that enabling presence and not trust in our history or attributes.

Joshua – the book

Now to the book, and in particular to two key phases.

The first concerns the challenge of conquest – reclaiming the land from enemy ownership. For example, cities were to be overcome, boundaries encroached, Jordan crossed, Jericho surrounded, Ai defeated and territory to be regained for the Lord's people. It was not an easy task and not without major challenges.

It is a parallel of Christian experience. Often, the language of 'victory' is used in relation to regaining territory for the Lord in our lives, as we realise that '*in Christ .. we are new creatures*' (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is only as 'overcoming' believers that we experience fullness of blessing and become the new creatures that God wants us to be. Christian growth is re-possessing that territory where Satan has long held sway. The Holy Spirit is there to make that a reality.

Secondly, midway through the book, Joshua is presented with a further challenge and responsibility. "*There remains much land to be possessed*". Though part way to possession, there are huge tracts of land still in enemy hands. The task is far from finished. They need to possess the remainder and to allocate responsibility appropriately. Complacency and lack of commitment based on a degree – but only partial – of accomplishment is dangerous. Residual inhabitants later become threats. Compromise – or lack of maturity - brings problems.

At the end of the book, having addressed this new challenge, Joshua then reviews the experience afresh. From his early days, he has proved God's wonderful power. But he has also encountered slackness and fear in others. Now, seeing the people again leaning towards compromise and complacency, he issues a fresh challenge: '*Choose ye this day whom ye will serve*' And then adds; '*but as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord*'.

That is also a challenge - and responsibility – we face. In this centenary year, what is our response?