



## **CHAPTER I - JOSHUA**

### **THE SERVANT OF MOSES**

The early history of the first Jewish conqueror in some respects is like the early history of the first Jewish legislator. Moses was rescued from a watery grave, and raised at the court of Egypt. Joshua, in infancy, was swallowed by a whale, and, wonderful to relate, did not perish. At a distant point of the sea-coast the monster spewed him forth unharmed. He was found by compassionate passers-by, and grew up ignorant of his descent. The government appointed him to the office of hangman. As luck would have it, he had to execute his own father. By the law of the land the wife of the dead man fell to the share of his executioner, and Joshua was on the point of adding to parricide another crime equally heinous. He was saved by a miraculous sign. When he approached his mother, milk flowed from her breasts. His suspicions were

aroused, and through the inquiries he set a foot regarding his origin, the truth was made manifest.

Later Joshua, who was so ignorant that he was called a fool, became the minister of Moses, and God rewarded his faithful service by making him the successor to Moses. He was designated as such to Moses when, at the bidding of his master, he was carrying on war with the Amalekites. In this campaign God's care of Joshua was plainly seen. Joshua had condemned a portion of the Amalekites to death by lot, and the heavenly sword picked them out for extermination. Yet there was as great a difference between Moses and Joshua as between the sun and the moon. God did not withdraw His help from Joshua, but He was by no means so close to him as to Moses. This appeared immediately after Moses had passed away. At the moment when the Israelitish leader was setting out on his journey to the great beyond, he summoned his successor and bade him put questions upon all points about which he felt uncertain. Conscious of his own industry and devotion, Joshua replied that he had no questions to ask, seeing that he had carefully studied the teachings of Moses. Straightway he forgot three hundred Halakot, and doubts assailed him concerning seven hundred others. The people threatened Joshua's life, because he was not able to resolve their difficulties in the law. It was vain to turn to God, for the Torah once revealed was subject to human, not to heavenly, authority. Directly after Moses' death, God commanded Joshua to go to war, so that the people might forget its grievance against him. But it is false to think that the great conqueror was nothing more than a military hero. When God appeared to him, to give him instructions concerning the war, He found him with the Book of Deuteronomy in his hand, whereupon God called

to him: "Be strong and of good courage; the book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth."

## **ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND**

The first step in preparation for war was the selection of spies. To guard against a repetition of what had happened to Moses, Joshua chose as his messengers Caleb and Phinehas, on whom he could place dependence in all circumstances. They were accompanied on their mission by two demons, the husbands of the she-devils Lilith and Mahlah. When Joshua was planning his campaign, these devils offered their services to him; they proposed that they be sent out to reconnoitre the land. Joshua refused the offer, but formed their appearance so frightfully that the residents of Jericho were struck with fear of them. In Jericho the spies put up with Rahab. She had been leading an immoral life for forty years, but at the approach of Israel, she paid homage to the true God, lived the life of a pious convert, and, as the wife of Joshua, became the ancestress of eight prophets and of the prophetess Huldah. She had opportunity in her own house of beholding the wonders of God. When the king's bailiffs came to make their investigations, and Rahab wanted to conceal the Israelitish spies, Phinehas calmed her with the words: "I am a priest, and priests are like angels, visible when they wish to be seen, invisible when they do not wish to be seen."

After the return of the spies, Joshua decided to pass over the Jordan. The crossing of the river was the occasion for wonders, the purpose of which was to clothe him with authority in the eyes of the people. Scarcely had the priests, who at this solemn moment took the place of the Levites as bearers of the Ark, set foot in the Jordan, when the waters of the river were piled up to a height of three hundred miles.

All the peoples of the earth were witnesses of the wonder. In the bed of the Jordan Joshua assembled the people around the Ark. A Divine miracle caused the narrow space between its staves to contain the whole concourse. Joshua then proclaimed the conditions under which God would give Palestine to the Israelites, and he added, if these conditions were not accepted, the waters of the Jordan would descend straight upon them. Then they marched through the river. When the people arrived on the further shore, the holy Ark, which had all the while been standing in the bed of the river, set forward of itself, and, dragging the priests after it, overtook the people.

The day continued eventful. Unassailed, the Israelites marched seventy miles to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, and there performed the ceremony bidden by Moses in Deuteronomy: six of the tribes ascended Mount Gerizim, and six Mount Ebal. The priests and the Levites grouped themselves about the holy Ark in the vale between the two peaks. With their faces turned toward Gerizim, the Levites uttered the words: "Happy the man that maketh no idol, an abomination unto the Lord," and all the people answered Amen. After reciting twelve blessings similar to this in form, the Levites turned to Mount Ebal, and recited twelve curses, counterparts of the blessings, to each of which the people responded again with Amen. Thereupon an altar was erected on Mount Ebal with the stones, each weighing forty seim, which the Israelites had taken from the bed of the river while passing through the Jordan. The altar was plastered with lime, and the Torah written upon it in seventy languages, so that the heathen nations might have the opportunity of learning the law. At the end it was said explicitly that the heathen outside of Palestine, if they

would but abandon the worship of idols, would be received kindly by the Jews.

All this happened on one day, on the same day on which the Jordan was crossed, and the assembly was held on Gerizim and Ebal, the day on which the people arrived at Gilgal, where they left the stones of which the altar had been built. At Gilgal Joshua performed the rite of circumcision on those born in the desert, who had remained uncircumcised on account of the rough climate and for other reasons. And here it was that the manna gave out. It had ceased to fall at the death of Moses, but the supply that had been stored up had lasted some time longer. As soon as the people were under the necessity of providing for their daily wants, they grew negligent in the study of the Torah. Therefore the angel admonished Joshua to loose his shoes from off his feet, for he was to mourn over the decline of the study of the Torah, and bare feet are a sign of mourning. The angel reproached Joshua in particular with having allowed the preparations for war to interfere with the study of the Torah and with the ritual service. Neglect of the latter might be a venial sin, but neglect of the former is worthy of condign punishment. At the same time the angel assured Joshua that he had come to aid him, and he entreated Joshua not to draw back from him, like Moses, who had refused the good offices of the angel. He who spoke to Joshua was none other than the archangel Michael.

## **CONQUEST OF THE LAND**

Joshua's first victory was the wonderful capture of Jericho. The whole of the city was declared anathema, because it had been conquered on the Sabbath day. Joshua reasoned that as the Sabbath is holy, so also that which conquered on the Sabbath should be holy. The brilliant victory was

followed by the luckless defeat at Ai. In this engagement perished Jair, the son of Manasseh, whose loss was as great as if the majority of the Sanhedrin had been destroyed. Presently Joshua discovered that the cause of the defeat was the sinfulness of Israel, brought upon it by Achan, who had laid hands on some of the spoils of Jericho. Achan was a hardened transgressor and criminal from of old. During the life of Moses he had several times appropriated to his own use things that had been declared anathema, and he had committed other crimes worthy of the death penalty. Before the Israelites crossed the Jordan, God had not visited Achan's sins upon the people as a whole, because at that time it did not form a national unit yet. But when Achan abstracted an idol and all its appurtenances from Jericho, the misfortune of Ai followed at once.

Joshua inquired of God, why trouble had befallen Israel, but God refused to reply. He was no tale-bearer; the evil-doer who had caused the disaster would have to be singled out by lot. Joshua first of all summoned the high priest from the assembly of the people. It appeared that, while the other jewels in his breastplate gleamed bright, the stone representing the tribe of Judah was dim. By lot Achan was set apart from the members of his tribe. Achan, however, refused to submit to the decision by lot. He said to Joshua: "Among all living men thou and Phinehas are the most pious. Yet, if lots were cast concerning you two, one or other of you would be declared guilty. Thy teacher Moses has been dead scarcely one month, and thou has already begun to go astray, for thou hast forgotten that a man's guilt can be proved only through two witnesses."

Endued with the holy spirit, Joshua divined that the land was to be assigned to the tribes and families of Israel by lot, and he realized that nothing ought to be done to bring this method of deciding into disrepute. He, therefore, tried to persuade Achan to make a clean breast of his transgression. Meantime, the Judeans, the tribesmen of Achan, rallied about him, and throwing themselves upon the other tribes, they wrought fearful havoc and bloodshed. This determined Achan to confess his sins. The confession cost him his life, but it saved him from losing his share in the world to come.

In spite of the reverses at Ai, the terror inspired by the Israelites grew among the Canaanitish peoples. The Gibeonites planned to circumvent the invaders, and form an alliance with them. Now, before Joshua set out on his campaign, he had issued three proclamations: the nation that would leave Canaan might depart unhindered; the nation that would conclude peace with the Israelites, should do it at once; and the nation that would choose war, should make its preparations. If the Gibeonites had sued for the friendship of the Jews when the proclamation came to their ears, there would have been no need for subterfuges later. But the Canaanites had to see with their own eyes what manner of enemy awaited them, and all the nations prepared for war. The result was that the thirty-one kings of Palestine perished, as well as the satraps of many foreign kings, who were proud to own possessions in the Holy Land. Only the Gergashites departed out of Palestine, and as a reward for their docility God gave them Africa as an inheritance.

The Gibeonites deserved no better fate than all the rest, for the covenant made with them rested upon a misapprehension, yet Joshua kept his promise to them, in order to sanctify the name of God, by showing the world

how sacred an oath is to the Israelites. In the course of events it became obvious that the Gibeonites were by no means worthy of being received into the Jewish communion, and David, following Joshua's example, excluded them forever, a sentence that will remain in force even in the Messianic time.

### **THE SUN OBEYS JOSHUA**

The task of protecting the Gibeonites involved in the offensive and defensive alliance made with them, Joshua fulfilled scrupulously. He had hesitated for a moment whether to aid the Gibeonites in their distress, but the words of God sufficed to recall him to his duty. God said to him: "If thou dost not bring near them that are far off, thou wilt remove them that are nearby." God granted Joshua peculiar favor in his conflict with the assailants of the Gibeonites. The hot hailstones which, at Moses' intercession, had remained suspended in the air when they were about to fall upon the Egyptians, were now cast down upon the Canaanites. Then happened the great wonder of the sun's standing still, the sixth of the great wonders since the creation of the world.

The battle took place on a Friday. Joshua knew it would pain the people deeply to be compelled to desecrate the holy Sabbath day. Besides, he noticed that the heathen were using sorcery to make the heavenly hosts intercede for them in the fight against the Israelites. He, therefore, pronounced the Name of the Lord, and the sun, moon and stars stood still. The sun at first refused to obey Joshua's behest, seeing that he was older than man by two days. Joshua replied that there was no reason why a free-born youth should refrain from enjoining silence upon an old slave whom he owns, and had not God given heaven and earth to our father