

Joshua (Yehoshua, יְהוֹשֻׁעַ in Hebrew) was Moses' successor who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. The Bible describes Joshua as a devoted student, a saintly man, and a brilliant military commander. Joshua led his people on all fronts, exhorting them to serve G-d and uphold the Torah, while at the same time leading them in military conquest. Born in Egypt in 2406 (1355 BCE), he led his people for 28 years until his passing in the year 2516 (1245 BCE). His story is recorded in the Book of Joshua.

A Faithful Disciple

Joshua, son of Nun, was from the tribe of Ephraim. His name was originally Hoshea (Hosea) but was changed by Moses to Yehoshua (Joshua). He was Moses' faithful attendant, about whom the Bible attests that he "never moved from the tent"¹ of Moses. He was devoted heart and soul to his master, and waited by the foot of Mount Sinai all while Moses was atop communicating with G-d. He formed an important link in the chain of transition, since Moses taught Joshua the Torah, and he passed on those teachings to the elders, who relayed the teachings to those who came after them.² And when Moses would go to the "Tent of Meeting" to commune with G-d, Joshua would accompany him. The first to stand up in defense of his master's honor, Joshua was infuriated when Eldad and Medad prophesied about Moses' death (read the story in the Bible here).

The Righteous Spy

Joshua's most notable exploit in the 5 Books of Moses took place during the episode of the spies (Numbers 13-14). He was chosen to represent the tribe of Ephraim among the group of twelve leaders who travelled to Canaan to scout out the land. Upon returning from their mission, ten spies frightened the people with tales of giants and "a land that consumes its inhabitants,"³ declaring it unconquerable. Only Joshua and Caleb ben Jephunneh (from the tribe of Judah) dissented, and attempted to no avail to convince the Jews that G-d would indeed deliver the land to them. The Jews believed the report of the ten libelous spies, so G-d promised that they would not enter the land, save the two righteous spies, Joshua and Caleb.

It was right before the departure of the spies that Moses, fearing the spies would fail in their mission, added the letter "yud" to Hoshea's (Hosea) name, changing it to Yehoshua (Joshua), which means "may G-d save you."

Moses' Successor

Before he passed on, Moses publicly appointed Joshua his successor, placing his hands on his disciple's head, transferring his spirit. And on the 7th of Nissan 2488, once the 30-day mourning period for Moses concluded, Joshua received G-d's command to prepare the children of Israel to cross the Jordan river. Three days later, Joshua led the people through the miraculously split river.

Joshua's mission was clear. He was to enter the land, conquer its inhabitants, and divide the land into portions for all the tribes. G-d promised him success in his conquest; "No man shall stand up before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so shall I be with you. I will not weaken My grasp on you nor will I abandon you. Be strong and have courage; for you will

cause this nation to inherit the land that I have sworn to their ancestors to give to them.” G-d also cautioned him to remain steadfast in his commitment to Torah and Mitzvos. 4

Joshua's Wife: Rahab

Immediately after crossing the Jordan, Joshua sent two spies, Caleb and Pinchas, to the city of Jericho, the Jews’ first point of attack. Disguised, the spies made their way to an inn owned by a woman named Rahab. When the spies were discovered and soldiers were dispatched to capture them, Rahab saved their lives. She asked them that just as she had saved their lives , so should they save hers and her family’s. She declared her faith in the Jewish G-d, and revealed that the people of Canaan were petrified of the Jews and that they knew the Jews would overcome them. The spies gave Rahab their word and snuck out of the city.

Later, after the Jews kept their word and saved Rahab and her family, she converted to Judaism. She was a very special woman, and our Sages teach that G-d seeks out righteous people from the nations and draws them to His faith, citing Rahab and Jethro as examples. So sincere and holy was she, Joshua eventually married her. Eight prophets, including Jeremiah, descended from their union.⁵

A Capable Military Commander

For seven years, Joshua led the people in battle, vanquishing the 31 kings and conquering their lands. And for the seven years after that, Joshua oversaw the division of the land amongst the twelve tribes, allocating a portion to each family. One facet of Joshua’s persona was of a devoted Torah student and another was his military acumen and pragmatic leadership skills. In fact, the very first time Joshua is mentioned in the Bible is when, shortly after the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt and were traveling in the desert, they were attacked by the Amalekites. Moses ordered Joshua to gather fighters and command them in battle. And while Moses prayed for their welfare, Joshua and his soldiers fought and defeated the Amalekites.

The Wall of Jericho and The Stopping of the Sun

In Joshua’s conquest of the Holy Land, G-d was with him every step of the way, and in certain instances the supernatural was clearly at work. The first city the Jews conquered, Jericho, had impenetrable walls. G-d commanded Joshua to circle the walls for six days and on the seventh to have the priest blow shofars. When they did so on the seventh day, the city walls were swallowed up by the ground and the Jews conquered Jericho with ease. Only Rahab and her family were spared.

Another time, when the Jews were fighting the five Emorite kings at Gibeon, night time was approaching and the battle was going to have to be put off. Joshua commanded the sun to stand still until his soldiers achieved victory. The sun stood still and the day was extended, enabling the Jews to defeat the Emorites on that day. G-d also hurled giant stones at the Emorites, smiting many. 6

A Leader’s Farewell

Like his predecessor had done before him, two years before his passing Joshua gathered the nation in Shechem. The future was uncertain, the land was not entirely settled, and pockets of enemies remained scattered throughout the land. There was the possibility of assimilation with the Canaanite tribes and the acquisition of their perverted practices. Joshua warned the people to guard against assimilation with the idolatrous natives. He urged them to apply themselves assiduously to the study of the Torah and to keep its precepts. Only by Israel's devoted loyalty to the Torah would they be assured a healthy national existence. The nation swore their fealty to G-d and his Torah.

Two years later, at the age of 110, Joshua passed away. He was buried in Timnath-Serah in Mount Ephraim, and was deeply mourned by his people. The Torah testifies that the Jewish People remained loyal to G-d, studied His Torah and obeyed his commandments for all the days of Joshua's life.

In addition to his roles as leader and warrior, Joshua is the second link in the chain of the transmission of Torah, receiving it from Moses and passing it on to the "Judges" who succeeded him.

A Special Leader

Whereas Moses was the leader of the Jews when they were in the desert, Joshua was a real-world leader. In the desert, the Jews were able to serve G-d easily since they had no worldly concerns. G-d's clouds of glory sheltered them, manna fell from heaven to sustain them, and a miraculous well provided them with water. When they entered the land though, things became difficult, physically and spiritually. They had to fight for their land, had to provide for themselves, and had to adapt to the grind of real life. When the going got tough, Joshua stood up to the task of leading them. He weathered the odds -on the battlefield and in the study hall-conquering and settling, all while inspiring his people to stay faithful to G-d.

The Talmud compares Moses and Joshua to the sun and moon, respectively.⁷ Moses was like the sun, the source of light, because he delivered the Jewish People the Torah and brought the light of G-dliness into the world. He represents a top-to-bottom approach to serving G-d. Joshua, on the other hand, is compared to the moon, which has no light of its own and merely reflects the sun's light. This represents a bottom-up approach to G-dly service; the idea of transforming and elevating the physical world into a "moon", a vessel for G-dly light. And although both approaches are necessary and complement each other, Joshua's mode has the unique advantage in that he achieved that the world itself should become G-dly, not just that it had G-dliness imposed onto it. ⁸