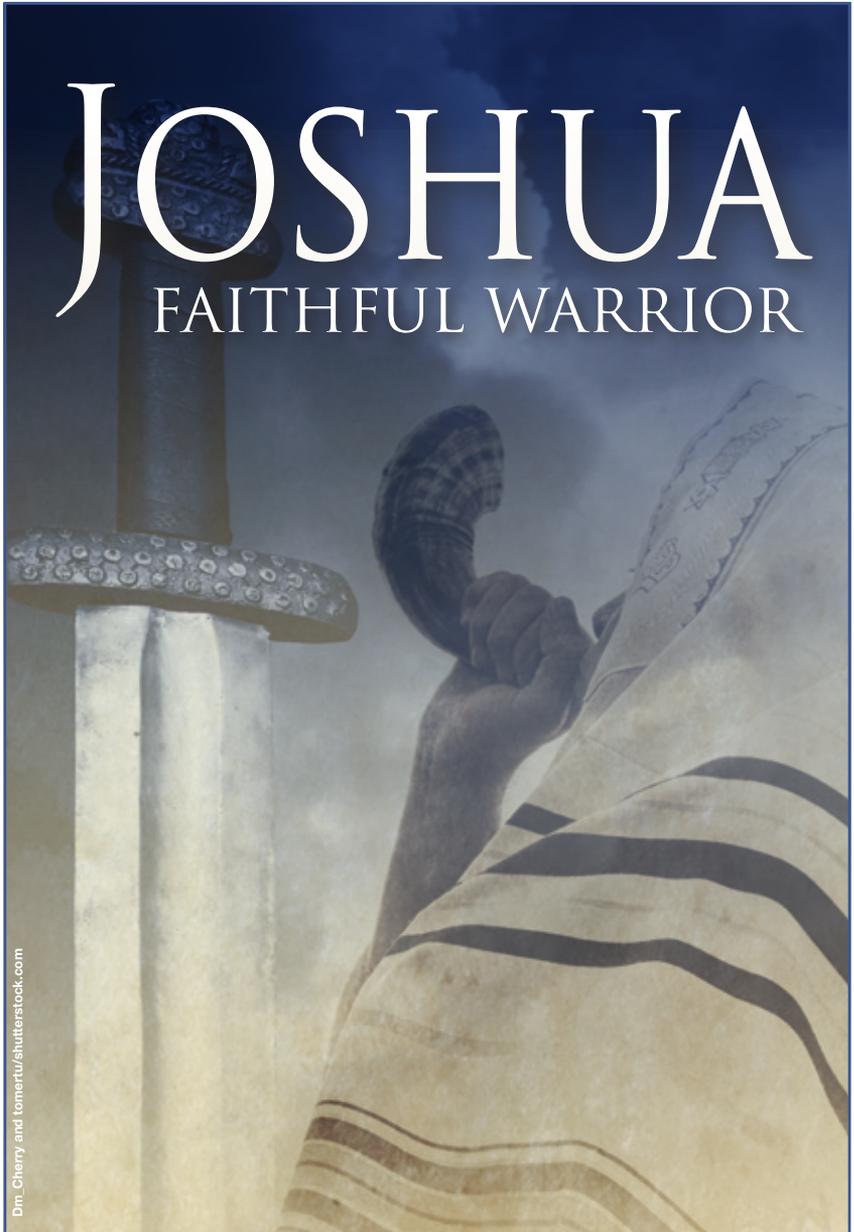


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JOSHUA

FAITHFUL WARRIOR

By Dr. Bill Adams, *National Field Director, Bridges for Peace USA*

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Compared to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Writings of the Apostles (New Testament) contain little about warfare and battle. Yet tucked away in Hebrews 11, “Hall of Faith” chapter, we find this roster of Israel’s illustrious war heroes:

“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets” (Heb. 11:32).

Though time would fail for full remembrance, the Holy Spirit-inspired writer needed to make sure that at least some faithful warriors received honorable mention. Meant only to be a partial roster sampling the long roll call of Israel’s soldier-leaders, it remains curious that a clear standout did not make the list. This esteemed leader trained under Moses, led the conquest of Canaan, and established peace for the Twelve Tribes in their God-appointed boundaries. He was the son of Nun. His name: Joshua.

LET’S GET RABBINICAL

Aware of Joshua’s conspicuous absence, it would be most rabbinical of us to ask, “Why was this great warrior not named with the others?” According to rabbinic reasoning, it is not that we need to find the answer so much as explore the question. It is the journey engendered by inquiry that moves us down the faith-building pathway of discovery. As is so often the case in biblical interpretive studies, clues to understanding are found in the immediate context, and in the preceding passage we find:

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith the

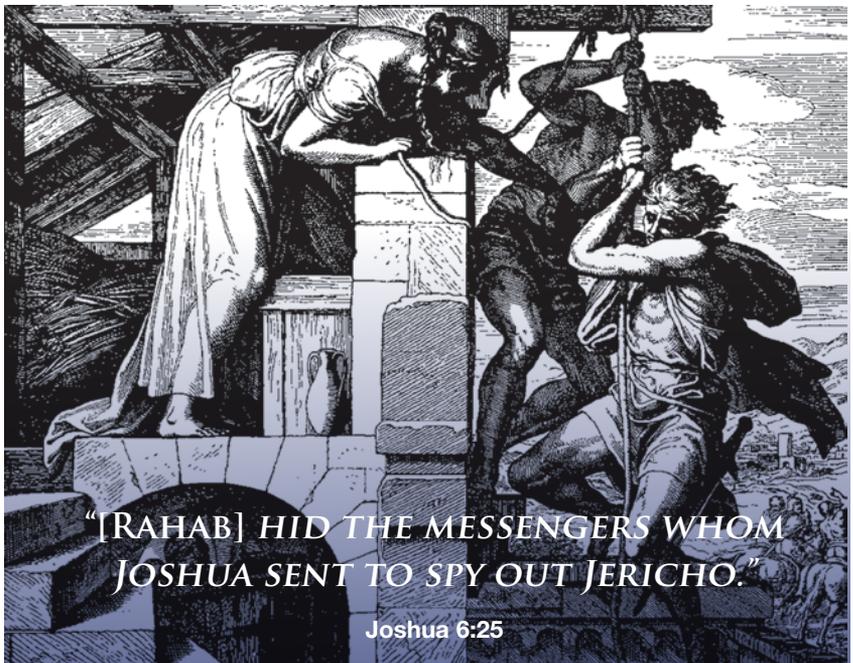
harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace” (Heb. 11:30–31).

Though not named in what I call the “Hall of Faithful Warriors,” Joshua readily comes to mind when we hear of the encirclement of Jericho. Joshua had accepted his assignment as Commander, Israelite Expeditionary Forces, Canaan Campaign and picked up where Moses left off in leading the Twelve Tribes across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land. He executed God’s own tactical plan as Israel’s armies rounded Jericho until, as the old spiritual puts it, “The walls came a-tumblin’ down!”

SPOTLIGHT ON RAHAB

Our discovery process raises another question: Why Rahab and not Joshua? Rahab played a key role in Israel’s redemptive story, but how does a woman of ill-repute get honorable mention when our hero Joshua is ignored? Those who hold to scriptural inspiration will readily assert that this was the way the Holy Spirit inspired the writer and that it comes to us just the way God wanted it transmitted. Yet we are still left with the question: *Why* did God want it that way?

One possibility is that by putting the spotlight on a heroic woman, God was upsetting the stereotypical male warrior mystique. Perhaps eyes are taken off Joshua to make sure we remember the source of the man’s success. This answer is consistent with the chapter theme that it was “by faith,” not by man, that the walls



of Jericho collapsed. Let us remember who wrote the book: “Moses’ books were accepted as normative at the time of his death; and by the time Joshua died, he had written another book and added it to the canon, which was the authority for God’s people” (Schaeffer). When Joshua wrote, he remembered faithful Rahab:

“And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father’s household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho” (Josh. 6:25).

FAITHFUL WARRIOR

Our next clue for the curious is found in the verses following the memorialized warriors. The Scripture declares:

“Through faith [they] subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Heb. 11:33–34).

Joshua’s exploits are replete in this summary of what Israel’s heroes accomplished “through faith.” In all arenas of warcraft listed in this passage, Joshua is the clear front-runner. Let us take a closer look.

JOSHUA’S EXPLOITS

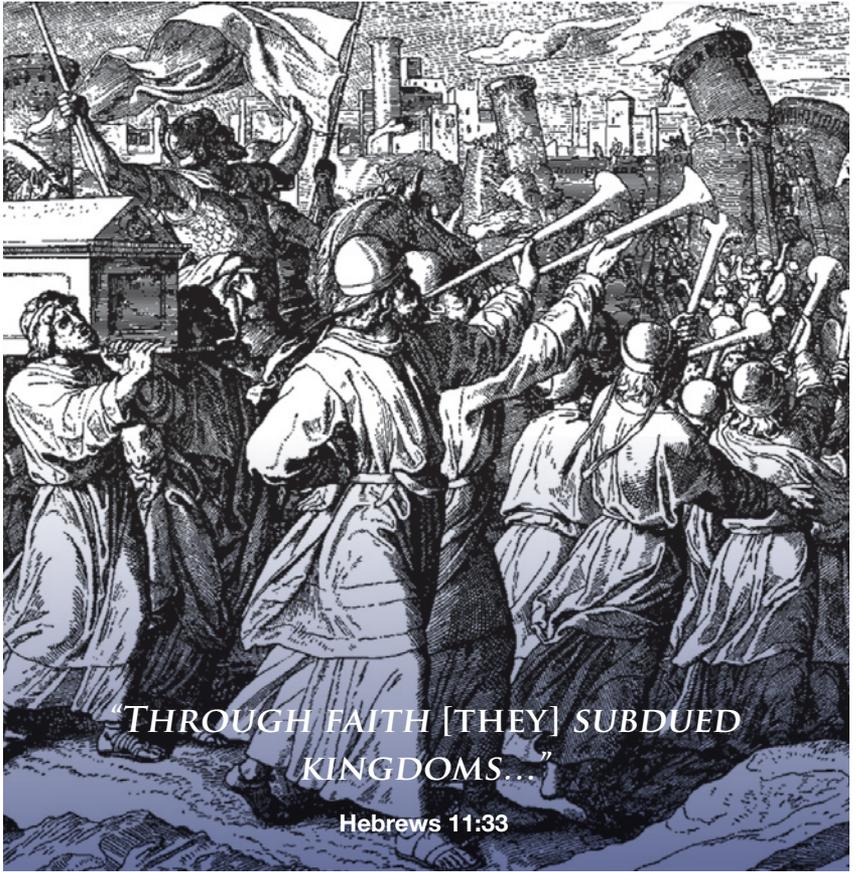
Subdued Kingdoms...No other leader in all of history comes close to Joshua’s record on the battlefield. His conquests eclipsed seven nations each more numerous than his own. The book bearing his name records 7 nations and 31 kingdoms subdued, *by faith*:

“These are the kings of the land whom the children of Israel defeated, and whose land they possessed on the other side of the Jordan toward the rising of the sun...And these are the kings of the country which Joshua and the children of Israel conquered on this side of the Jordan, on the west” (Josh. 12:1, 7).

But Joshua was modest. Under Moses’ command, he also led decisive victories over Amalek, the Amorites, and Bashan in operations that cleared the eastern side of the Jordan for Israelite settlement. Update that scorecard: 34!

Worked Righteousness... “[Joshua’s] whole life had been a demonstration of single-minded devotion to God. His loyalty had been of the highest order. His bold obedience had set a supreme standard for all to emulate. His faithfulness to the Lord in the face of formidable odds never wavered. His entire career burned as a flame of fearless faith for others to follow” (Keller). The righteousness Joshua worked is reflected in his iconic retirement speech upon conclusion of military service:

“Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:14–15).



Generations following have heard Joshua's call to righteous service and answered, "Yes, we will serve the Lord!" We should all prefer the way of peace over war, but there will always be those, like Joshua, who must fight to secure the peace we so cherish. As former US President Theodore Roosevelt pronounced, "If I must choose between righteousness and peace, I choose righteousness."

Obtained Promises... Joshua was obedient to Moses' orders and faithful to God's commands. As a result, he was blessed to lead Israel into the fulfillment of the covenantal and territorial promises established in the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.):

"When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you...nations greater and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them" (Deut. 7:1–2).

God's promised conquest came to fulfillment as, one after the next, pagan nations were delivered into Joshua's hands. This was always going to require a *by-faith* strategy since each of the seven nations were "greater and mightier" than Israel.



Quenched the Violence of Fire... Joshua fought fire with fire. At Hazor in the north, King Jabin had formed an axis of ten kingdoms, igniting them with fury to consume the smaller Israelite army advancing from the south. But at the waters of Merom, Joshua quenched Jabin's fire. Then he turned his gaze upon the Hazor headquarters:

"Joshua turned back at that time and took Hazor, and struck its king with the sword... And they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them... Then he burned Hazor with fire... but as for the cities that stood on their mounds, Israel burned none of them, except Hazor only which Joshua burned" (Josh. 11:10–13).

It should disturb us to hear of the utter destruction integral to the total warfare of Joshua's day. We are more accustomed to limited warfare that tries to contain excessive damage or loss of life, but total warfare assumed that annihilation equals victory. Joshua was merely leading within the norms of ancient warfare, yet here we find him mercifully limiting the destruction by burning only Jabin's headquarters and not the cities of the confederated kings.

Out of Weakness Made Strong... We tend to think of Joshua as inherently strong and courageous. If he was, then why did the Lord need to admonish him so much and so often?

GOD SPOKE COURAGE INTO JOSHUA ON THE EVE OF THE JORDAN RIVER CROSSING.



“Be strong and of good courage...only be strong and very courageous...Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:6–7, 9).

Think of Gideon who estimated himself weak and incapable, yet the Lord addressed him, *“You mighty man of valor!”* (Judg. 6:12). Likewise, God spoke courage into Joshua on the eve of the Jordan River crossing, a major military operation that was forty years delayed by Israelite obstinacy. Decades earlier Joshua had begun his military career as a lieutenant under Moses; he had already led the Israelites to multiple victories in battle, yet here we find him in need of a personal victory over fear. God spoke courageous leadership into the frail human vessel that was humble enough to receive.

Became Valiant in Battle... Joshua’s professional record is so clean you might think it whitewashed, until you remember that the Bible does not whitewash anything—it is brutally honest of leaders’ failures right along with their successes. That is why it is important we find Joshua with his face in the dirt after the crushing Israelite defeat at Ai:

“And Joshua said, ‘Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!’” (Josh. 7:7).

THE SUN STOOD STILL OVER THE AYALON VALLEY.



Joshua harbored the same doubts as his people, accusing God of bringing them so far only to deliver them into the hands of their enemy! But this faithful soldier-leader stood again to face God's rebuke and receive new marching orders. He then called Israel to repentance and led his army to victory. The resultant account of the Second Battle of Ai is remarkable in its tactical detail; no other fight in the Bible gets such an in-depth look as to the movements of assets across the battle space. This underscores how Joshua became valiant after overcoming fear and failure.

Turned to Flight the Armies of the Aliens...I have the privilege of leading a study tour over the battlefields of Israel. Tour group members eagerly anticipate finding historic Joshua around Jericho and the plains of Jordan in the east, but they are often surprised to encounter him battling through the Negev in the south and the Sh'fela in the heartland, all the way to Har Hermon in the north:

"So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes...All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" (Josh. 10:40, 42).

As armies faced the assaulting Israelites, they beheld Joshua's God casting down great hailstones from heaven and the sun standing still over the Ayalon Valley. They wilted before the edge of the sword of God's army and fell back in terror before the Lord of Heaven and Earth who went before Joshua in battle. It seems that Joshua the author wanted God's exploits, more than his own, to be remembered.

PRIME MINISTER BEN NUN

The God of Israel, working through His faithful servant, had brought His people through ceaseless warfare to a desperately needed rest:

"So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. Then the land rested from war" (Josh. 11:23).

Note that Joshua “took” then immediately “gave” the land. Throughout history, we have seen military might combine with political power to make a potent recipe for corruption. Power does indeed corrupt, but this man of faith never gave it place as he stayed faithful to God. He could easily have set himself up as Israel’s king, but Joshua judged himself the people’s shepherd to lead them to safe pasture.

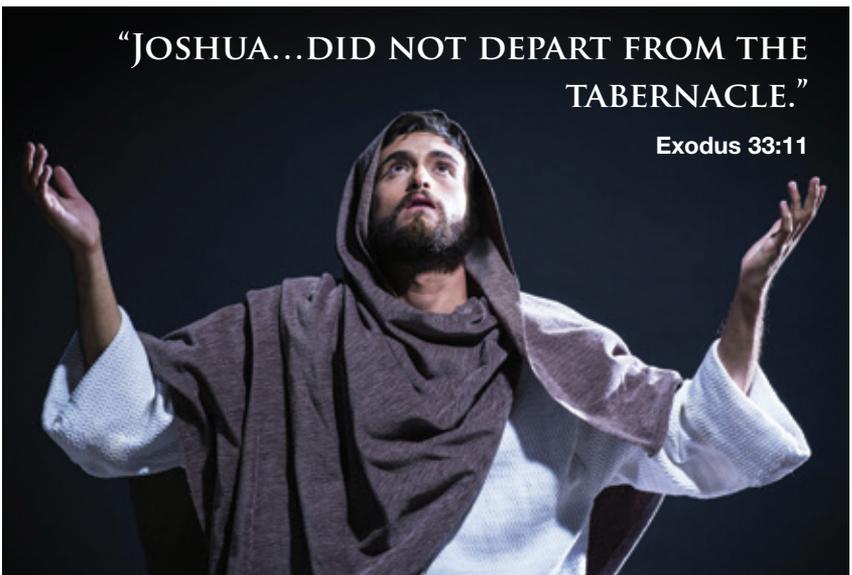
We might say that in his national-political capacity, Joshua assumed the civil service role of prime minister of the (original) State of Israel! With his first executive order, Prime Minister Ben Nun upbraided his tribal leaders for being slow to take possession of their portions of the land. He was loath to claim any conquered territory for himself, making sure his people received their inheritance first.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The young adult arm of Bridges for Peace is called *Zealous8:2*, a work that strengthens Christian millennials in pursuit of all God has for them, His kingdom, and for Israel. A role model for these passionate believers is Moses’ protégé Joshua who likewise pursued righteousness as a young adult:

“He [Moses] would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle” (Exod. 33:11).

This “young man” engaged in his own passionate pursuit by studying under Moses and clinging to the tabernacle where God’s glory dwelt. Because of his readiness for discipline with a heart after God, he was noticed early and commissioned for leadership. His first test of command came in a fight with the Amalekites in the wilderness. With help from Moses’ uplifted arms, Joshua prevailed. When the dust settled, the Lord made an astounding declaration:





"Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua..."
(Exod. 17:14).

The Lord God of the Universe had this young leader on His heart! Like a good senior officer who loves his soldiers, God was looking out for His servant Joshua. God knew Joshua's name, and his potential, from the very start of his career.

Ponder that thought: God knew Joshua's name, and it was not just any name. In the English vernacular we miss the significance of the name that God knew. The Hebrew is *Yehoshua*, or *Yoshua* meaning, "YHVH [the unutterable name of God] is Salvation." That name should sound familiar to those aware of the Hebraic roots of Christianity. Indeed, Jesus of Nazareth was another *Yoshua* (commonly pronounced *Yeshua*). In Christian understanding, the latter "Joshua-Jesus" (Schein) became the embodiment of the name meaning "YHVH is Salvation." Interpreting backwards from the life and ministry of the Nazarene, Christian theology sees Joshua as a forerunner and type of Jesus/Yeshua.

A DIFFERENT ROSTER

Joshua was not named among the faithful warriors of Hebrews 11, but he was not missing from a much earlier roster of Moses' most reliable. The great general had hand-selected young officers from each of them, forming them into a reconnaissance patrol with a mission to scout out the land of Canaan:

"So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel. Now these were their names...from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun..." (Num. 13:3-8).

Hoshea the son of Nun? What happened to Joshua? Yes, he made the roster, but by his birth name meaning "Salvation." After his early military success and

demonstrated faithfulness to the promises of God, Hoshea received, at the hand of Moses, a promotion from merely “Salvation” to “YHVH is Salvation.” The young man with the elevated name and rank went forth to conquer the Promised Land.

Christians wait in hope for Joshua’s namesake to complete the ultimate conquest of that same covenanted land. We believe Jesus/Yeshua came once to anchor His spiritual kingdom in the sacred soil that Joshua had earlier secured and that He will come again as a mighty warrior to defeat the last of Israel’s enemies.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

We have asked why Joshua did not make the Hebrews 11 honor roll and have explored several possible answers. We can thank the rabbis who have taught us to ponder not only what is in the text, but also what is left out. The search for answers is its own discovery as the searcher draws close to the heart of God who is sovereign over all that is...and is not.

While I have no definitive answer to the question of the missing Joshua, I do offer a closing thought born of investigation and wonder from a biblical Christian perspective: The Holy Spirit who inspired Joshua for battle is the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Hebrews author for writing. The Spirit intentionally left Joshua out of the line-up, perhaps being careful to exalt only one Joshua in the book of Hebrews: Jesus (*Yeshua*-Joshua). Given the humble strength of character of the faithful warrior Joshua Ben Nun, I doubt he would have minded another Joshua getting the glory.

Dr. Bill Adams is a 1981 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point who served over a decade on active duty as a US Army Field Artillery officer, retiring in 2001 with the rank of Major, US Army Reserve.

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Scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (*Yeshua*)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or O.T.) – *Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or N.T.)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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