


## WHO WAS JOSHUA?

If Joshua was Zerubbabel's High Priest, how could he also have fought the battles of the Lord?" This was a question I was asked recently. The answer, of course, is quite simple: there were two different Joshuas; well, actually there are at least half a dozen Joshuas in the Bible, but only two who are mentioned in our ritual: Joshua, the son of Nun, and Joshua, the son of Josedech, and they are separated by about a thousand years. 

Joshua, the son of Nun, is well documented. He was Born in captivity in Egypt, witnessed the ten plagues, and shared in the hurried departure of the Exodus. Moses soon realised this young man's potential and appointed Joshua captain of his army in the fight against the Amalekites. Joshua was the only man to accompany Moses on the ascent of Mount Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given, and on the death of the great law-giver, Joshua became his natural successor.

On entering the promised land, the Israelites met severe opposition from the Canaanites. There followed the "Battles of the Lord" in which Joshua and his army were involved; perhaps the most famous of these was the siege and capture of the city of Jericho following the terrifying parade of the Ark of the Covenant with trumpets, graphically described in the Book of Joshua.

Another memorable occasion was the defeat of the Amorites at the battle of Makkedah when Joshua apparently received meteorological and astronomical assistance: not only was there a torrential hailstorm which reportedly killed more of the enemy than the Israelite's did, but also Joshua "spoke to the Lord in that day" whereupon "the sun stood still in the midst of heaven" until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies (Joshua, Chapter 2).

The position in which Joshua prayed at this battle is not mentioned in the Bible, but there was another time, described in Exodus 17, when the Israelites were fighting against the Amalekites at Rephidim; Moses was still alive in those days and he sat on a hill-top while Joshua and the army fought in the valley below. The Bible tells us that when Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed; so Aaron and Hur stood, one on each side, and "stayed up his hands ... unto the going down of the sun". These two stories have sometimes got mixed up, and the raising of the hand has been attributed to Joshua instead of Moses; but perhaps the thing that really matters is the importance and the power of fervent prayer and perseverance.

The final act of Joshua's life was to gather the people together at Shechem to renew the covenant with the one true God: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve ... As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people said, We will serve the Lord for he is our God" (Joshua, 24). So Joshua died at the age of one hundred and ten, and was buried on Mount Ephraim.

Joshua, the son' of Nun, was followed by the Judges, then by Saul, David, Solomon, and all the kings of Israel and Judah ending with Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar then destroyed Solomon's temple, sacked Jerusalem, and took the surviving population into exile in Babylon. Cyrus, the king of Persia, conquered Babylon and thus "inherited" the exiled Hebrews, but being a more enlightened monarch than Nebuchadnezzar, he allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple.

Zerubbabel was the leader of the returning exiles, and he was supported by Haggai the prophet and by Joshua, the son of Josedech. This Joshua was the first High Priest of the third series, and the ancestor of fourteen future High Priests. Just as the son of Nun had been born in the captivity of Egypt, so the son of Josedech had been born in the captivity of Babylon, and so for him also, Israel was the "promised land" to which he now came. His first care on reaching Jerusalem was to restore the daily worship on Mount Moriah, including the sacrifices prescribed by Moses and Aaron so long ago.

Meanwhile, the Temple was gradually rebuilt, though the work was hindered by interference from neighbouring tribes, and by an unfortunate amount of apathy amongst the Israelites who had to be stung into action by the preaching of Haggai.

The dedication of the new Temple was carried out with full ceremony and with the sacrifice - according to the Book of Ezra - of some seven hundred and twelve animals! Nothing more is heard of Joshua after this, and it is presumed, that he died in Jerusalem early in the reign of Darius.

'One interesting point: it is only Ezra who calls our hero "Joshua"; Haggai and Zechariah both call him JESHUA which is another rendering of the same Hebrew letters, - and it would avoid confusion if we had copied them; but, in fact, the name, in Hebrew, is actually Jehoshua, so they are both equally right - or equally wrong. Finally, Jehoshua, in the Greek language, becomes Jesus. But that's another story.

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