

Divine Communication in the Book of Joshua

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The book of Joshua is divided into two sections. The first 12 chapters tell of the possession of the land and the second 12 chapters tell of the division of the land. In the first section, a particular pattern is repeated. Six times the text states that the Lord told Joshua, Joshua instructed the people, and the people did as they were instructed.

- Prepare to cross the Jordan River (1:1-9, 10-15, 16-18)
- Stand still in the Jordan (3:7-8, 9-13, 14-17)
- Take twelve stones from the Jordan (4:1-3, 4-7, 8)
- Come up from the Jordan (4:15-16, 17, 18-19)
- Destroy Jericho (6:2-5, 6-7, 8-21)
- Set an ambush for Ai (8:1-2, 3-8, 9-17)

Five additional times God instructed Joshua, and Joshua obeyed the Lord's voice.

- Circumcise Israel (5:2, 3)
- Remove evil from the camp (7:10-15, 16-26)
- Stretch out your javelin (8:18, 18)
- Do not fear the five-king coalition (10:8, 9)
- Hamstring the horses of the five-king coalition (11:6, 7-9)

In one particular example, this pattern is noticeably absent. The Gibeonites were under a death sentence as inhabitants of Canaan. However, they deceived Joshua into thinking that they were from a distant country, making a covenant for safety. This time, God did not give instructions on the matter, and Joshua and the Israelites "did not ask for the counsel of the Lord" (9:14).

Notice the following lessons we learn from the pattern of communication in Joshua.

1) **God gave instructions for the people.** If God has expectations for his people, he will instruct them. God promised Israel the Land of Canaan, and He guided them in the process of taking the land. Today, God has also revealed His expectations to us in an understandable way (Eph. 3:3-5; Heb. 1:1-2).

2) **Joshua spoke the word of the Lord.** When God spoke to Joshua, He expected him to relay His word to the people of Israel. Joshua did not have the prerogative to change God's message. Today, we have a responsibility to spread God's word, and we must speak with a book, chapter and verse, instead of our own opinion (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 4:11).

3) **Joshua and the Israelites obeyed the word of the Lord.** As God's leader, Joshua was not only responsible for relaying God's word he also had to obey it. The people of Israel looked to Joshua to speak *and* live the word of God. When others see us, they will take notice if we practice what we preach (1 Tim. 4:11-12, 16). The people of Israel should also be commended. When God told them what to do, they simply obeyed. They did not question the Lord and they did not delay. We must imitate their example of obedience (Rom. 6:16-18; 15:4).

4) **Without the word of the Lord we can be deceived.** Joshua and the people could have avoided deception if they had inquired of the Lord. There is stability in the truth of God's word, but when we fail to go it, we can be deceived by error (Eph. 4:14-15).

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