

I open my tent flap every morning and gaze at the same thing. People for as far as I can see. In every direction, people. And sheep. And goats. Dust floating up into the sky. Smells, too. Overwhelming smells of those people. And sheep. And goats. And noise. So thick you can almost touch it.

Except in one direction. Toward the Tabernacle. There you see a giant tent with a cloud over it. A fiery cloud at night.

And it's been this way for more than forty years.

Moses is dead. The Lord tells me so, and he tells me that I am now in charge of all of these people, and sheep, and goats. I watched Moses in charge of them for more than forty years, and, frankly, I'm not too excited about taking his place. But I don't have time to feel sorry for myself.

The Lord tells me to get the people ready to cross over into Canaan. As far as we are willing, go and conquer...that is the land we will inherit. From the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River, from Jordan to the desert. A territory so vast that the sea of people in front of me will be swallowed up in the spaciousness. All we have to do is follow God and do what he says.

As the military commander over a huge army, I wait for God to give me the battle plan. Will we split up and go in divisions or tribes? Or, will we go as one huge force and overwhelm the country one part at a time? Will we lay siege to the towns with huge walls or will God knock those walls down? I wait patiently for the plan, and here is the battle plan I get directly from God.

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to follow my laws closely. Don't quit thinking or talking about the Book of the Law, but meditate on it day and night. Be careful to follow it *exactly*. Don't be afraid or terrified, for I am with you.”

That's it. That's the entire battle plan I am given! So be it. I will be strong and courageous, and follow God like my mentor did. My mentor of more than forty years, Moses.

My name is Joshua, son of Nunn. I obey God completely and immediately, as will my namesake. You know my namesake by a slight name variation...Yeshua, or Jesus.

I have the officers of the camp order the people to get ready to cross the River Jordan in three days. We will cross the river and not come back. Except for the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh who will return to these conquered lands on the East side of the Jordan River once they lead us into battle.

I send two men into Canaan to spy out the territory, especially Jericho. The walled city is my first target. Sending two spies is a nod of recognition to Caleb. He and I were the two out of the twelve spies that wanted to conquer Canaan to start with. My spies return with specific information from Rahab. I agree to spare her and her family from destruction.

The Lord instructs me to tell the people what will happen. The priests will carry the Ark of the Covenant ahead of us. As soon as they touch the river, it will stop flowing, and will pile up as if held back by a giant dam. The priests will stand in the dry riverbed with the Ark as the people cross over on dry land. The people must be careful to stay back about 1,000 yards from the Ark, until it reaches the river. After the people have passed over the dry riverbed, one man from each tribe is to take a stone from the middle of the dry riverbed from where the priests stand with the Ark. These twelve stones are to be used to build a memorial.

The kings of the Amorites and Canaanites hear of God's drying up the Jordan. Their hearts melt in fear, trembling to even face us. All the better if they choose to abandon the land and we don't have to kill them.

The walled city of Jericho stands in front of us. I wait for my battle plan from God, and he delivers an unusual one: make a bunch of flint knives. Fairly poor weapons, I think, but this is not what God has in mind.

While we wandered in the wilderness for forty years, none of the male children born throughout that time were circumcised. The flint knives are used to circumcise all of those men and boys. After we heal from that brutal surgery, we celebrate the Passover for the first time in the Promised Land. The very next day after Passover, the manna we've been eating for 40 years stops coming down from Heaven. We eat the produce of the land.

Now, I expect to receive a special battle plan for Jericho, and I certainly get one...a very unusual one. Have an armed guard lead seven priests with trumpets, followed by the Ark of the Covenant, then a rearguard, and all of the fighting men. Have them march around the city once a day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day. Keep the men quiet for the six days, while seven priests blow trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, after the seventh time around, have the priests blow a long blast and have all the men shout.

It is a perfect battle plan. We follow it exactly, and the walls fall down. We rush in and kill every living thing, just as God instructed...except for Rahab and her family who aided my spies. Our people are very careful not to take any plunder, but dedicate all the gold, silver, iron, and bronze to the Lord's treasury. At least that is what I think they do.

Based on our complete victory, I next send some of my fighting men to take the nearby city of Ai. They are routed and thirty-six of our men are killed. The hearts of my people become fearful. I approach God about our failure, and he tells me that one of the Israelites stole some of the precious metals from Jericho that had been dedicated to the Lord's treasury.

The next day we determine that one of us, Achan, has stolen some gold, silver and a beautiful robe. All of the people and I take Achan and his sons and daughters...and we stone them. We burn all of their possessions. When we are purified of Achan's sin, the Lord relents. Once again, we are bluntly reminded that we are to follow God's directions precisely.

We attack Ai again, and this time, the Lord allows us complete victory. We kill twelve thousand men and women, and burn the city. The Lord allows us to keep their livestock and possessions.

Then I build an altar on Mount Ebal, as Moses had commanded on the plains of Moab. I read the entire Book of the Law to all of the people, not leaving out a single word or person. Not just the Ten Commandments, but all of the numerous commandments given through Moses.

This is easy, I think. Follow the Lord completely and all will go well. Certainly, the we all can do that. Well, that simple plan doesn't last long.

A group of people who have travelled a long distance show up. Their clothes are tattered, their food, stale, and the goods they bring are old and worn out. They have come from so far, and they beg me to please make a treaty with them. And I do. Unfortunately, I did not inquire of the Lord first to determine if I should or not, because I knew we were not allowed to make treaties with the Canaanites. A few days later, we prepare to attack a nearby city of Gibeon only to find, it's the people who lived "far away."

It was all a trick. The dusty clothes, spoiled food, all lies. The Gibeonites were so scared of us, that they set up this elaborate hoax. And I fell right into it.

Rather than compound my error by destroying them, I let them live and make them our woodcutters and water carriers.

We ravage the Canaanite countryside. We take city after city, killing all the inhabitants without mercy. We take much of the land that was promised to Moses. God tells me that I am getting old, but there are still big tracts of land to be conquered. He agrees to drive out some of the people himself.

We allocate the land among the tribes, except for the tribe of Levi. That tribe of priests receives their income from the sacrifices at the Tabernacle, but they do receive the ability to use some towns and pasturelands for their livestock. We also designate some cities of refuge for people who accidentally kill someone.

When it's all said and done, the Lord gives us all of the Promised Lands that we were willing to conquer, and allocates among the tribes as he wishes. Not one of the Lord's promises is unmet...all is fulfilled. With that success, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh return to their lands on the east side of the Jordan.

I call all of the leaders of Israel together. I tell them that I am getting old, and I remind them of all the promises kept by the Lord.

I remind them to follow the Law of Moses and to keep away from idols. One sure way to do this is to stay apart from any survivors and never intermarry with people outside of the Israelites. If they do intermarry, I tell them these spouses will become snares and traps, and whips on their backs, and thorns for their eyes until they perish from the land they have just taken.

I assemble all of the people and remind them of everything the Lord has done for them. I cannot shake the feeling that the people will not be faithful very long. Moses often felt the same way. I tell them to throw away the gods their ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt. I tell them to choose between those gods and the Lord. "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Over and over, the people agree to worship only the Lord and no other gods. Their words will be their own judge if they fail.

But I won't be there to see it. I die at the age of one hundred and ten. Unlike Moses, I am able to be buried in the land of my inheritance in the Promised Land.

During my life and during the lives of the elders who outlive me, the Israelites are obedient to the Lord.

Our ancestor, Joseph, who was second in command to Pharaoh had instructed his relatives to take his bones back to Canaan.¹ When Moses led the Exodus, he retrieved the bones of Joseph. We carried those remains for more than forty years. It was a dusty, noisy, smelly journey for Joseph's bones. But finally, we buried them at Shechem in the land Jacob had bought from the Sons of Hamor. Jacob's land now held Joseph's bones and all of his descendants.

Forty years, their journey. We are finally ready to be God's people, and only his people.

¹ Genesis 50:24-25