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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Review the context and big picture every week – The goal of a book study is not just to learn each individual lesson, but to build understanding of the Bible, how it fits together, and how to study it.

Try not to use this guide as a script. The purpose of this material isn't to give you exactly what to say. Rather it is to give you the content you need to structure and develop your own lessons. Teach as much as you feel is important for your class. Feel free to go off topic if your own study leads you to approach the passage in a slightly different direction.

Don't feel like you have to cover everything. There is a lot of material in each lesson. Some classes like to cover a lot of ground. Other classes like to camp on one point and drill deep. Start by teaching the Main Point, then teach the Main Bullet Points. Use the extra detail and discussion questions as you see fit. The goal is to generate discussion, specifically regarding life-application. So don't worry if you don't get all the way through a lesson.

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THE DEATH OF MOSES: BE STRONG IN THE LORD

JOSHUA 1

The subject of the book is how the people of Israel entered, conquered, and settled the Promised Land. The book of Joshua divides into three sections:

1. Preparing to Enter the Promise Land (Chapters 1-5)
2. Conquering the Promising Land (Chapters 6-12),
3. Possessing the Promised Land (Chapters 13-24).

The first two sections are really interesting, and the third section is full of long lists of which tribes were given which land. In this respect it is similar to the book of Numbers, which is full of lists at the beginning before it starts telling the story of the Exodus. We will be studying the first two sections over the next couple of months. Part 1 will focus on the preparations of the People of Israel to enter the promise land. Part 2 will look at the stories of the conquest and some issues that are raised by it.

Before we begin the study of the book, it is important for us to be able to know a little about where it is found in the Bible and how it fits into Bible History.

WHERE JOSHUA FITS IN THE BIBLE

Joshua is a book found in the Old Testament. It is classified as one of the History Books. Here is where to find it in the roadmap of the bible:

The Bible is broken into 2 groups: Old and Old Testament

- Old Testament is written primarily in Hebrew and is about God's choice of the people of Israel
- New Testament is written in Greek and is about Jesus and the Church
- Joshua is in the Old Testament

Old Testament is broken down into 4 groups: Law, History, Writings, Prophets.

- One of the biggest obstacles to reading and navigating the Old Testament is not understanding this 4-fold division. So take out your bible, open to the Table of Contents and label the Old Testament books in these groups.
- **Law** – (Also Called the Torah, Pentateuch, and the 5 Books of Moses) Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

- **History** – Joshua through Esther. These books tell the story of the formation, division, collapse, exile, and restoration of the nation of Israel. (See below OT history for more on this.)
- **Writing** – Job through Song of Songs. These books are a collection of wisdom literature (Proverbs), Worship Songs (Psalms), Philosophy (Job, Ecclesiastes), and Love Poetry (Song of Songs)
- **Prophets** – The rest of the OT contains the writings of the prophets. They are divided into two Groups: Major and Minor Prophets. This had nothing to do with the importance of each work. It has mainly to do with length. The Major Prophets wrote longer works.
 - Major Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (We include Lamentations, which was written by Jeremiah, in the list of the Major Prophets, though in the Hebrew Bible it is listed in the writings with Proverbs, Psalms, etc.)
 - Minor Prophets – Hosea through Malachi

WHERE JOSHUA FITS IN THE BIBLE STORY

Joshua is a story of the Conquest, which occurs after the Exodus. It is the beginning of the Books that focusing on the people of Israel entering and taking possession of the Promised Land.

Old Testament History in a Nutshell – In order to understand any book of the OT, you need to have a basic understanding of where it fits in the scope of OT history. By placing it in context, you will be able to have a greater appreciation for what is going on.

- **Patriarchs** – the Story of God calling Abraham and working in the lives of his children. Contained in the Book of Genesis.
- **Slavery/Exodus** – The Story of how God brought Israel out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness and to the Promised Land. Contained in Exodus-Deuteronomy.
- **Conquest** – The story of how the people of Israel entered the Promised land, conquered the other people living there, and established an early system of rule. Contained in Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel.
- **United Kingdom** – In 1 Samuel, Israel demands a king. So, God gives them Saul. the 12 tribes of Israel are only united as one nation for the reigns of 3 kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. Contained in 1 Samuel.
- **Divided Kingdom** – After the excesses of Solomon, the 10 northern tribes of Israel rebelled, broke away, and started their own nation. From this point on, the term Israel refers to the 10 northern tribes; Judah refers to the nation composed of the 2 remaining tribes: Judah and Benjamin.
- **Exile/Return** – Both nations became wicked and were judged by God. Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC and were absorbed into their empire. They reappear at the Samaritans in the New Testament. The nation of Judah lasted until around 600 BC when it was also conquered, this time by the Babylonians, who transported many of them to Babylon (modern day Iraq) where they remained in Exile for about 70 years before being allowed to return and rebuilt the city and the temple.

For more, watch the intro to this sermon on Ruth (starting at about the 4:00 mark): <https://vimeo.com/136524262>

WHO WROTE IT?

The book of Joshua does not list an author. It takes its name from the main character of the book. Jewish tradition considers Joshua to be the author, but there is nothing in the book that requires this. There are clues in the book that Joshua wrote at least some of it, and that it was written down pretty close to the actual events that are recounted. Joshua 24:26 mentions Joshua writing things down. Whether that includes this whole book or just part of it is unknown. Joshua 6:25 mentions that Rahab was still alive at the time Joshua was written down.

WHERE JOSHUA STARTS: THE DEATH OF MOSES (V1)

The book of Joshua picks up right where the book of Deuteronomy ends. Joshua 1:1 says, “Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying...”

Imagine the situation. The man who led you guided the people out of Egypt, who led them through the wilderness, who spoke directly with God dies right before you enter the promise land. Imagine having to fill those shoes. That is where the book of Joshua starts.

This first chapter deals with the transition of power from Moses to Joshua. It contains God’s commands to Joshua about how he should lead these people. 4 times in this first chapter God uses the phrase, “Be Strong and Courageous.” This chapter contains God’s guidance in how to demonstrate the strength and courage He wants us to have. It is important to realize that He doesn’t tell Joshua to workout or take leadership courses or to look deep inside himself and discover the leader within. God speaks to Joshua and reminds him that the secret to Moses’s success wasn’t Moses but God. The point of this chapter is best summed up with a verse taken from the New Testament. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:10, “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” That is what God commands Joshua to do. This chapter shows us how we can do the same.

REMEMBER GOD’S PLAN (V2-4)

The first thing God reminds Joshua is that though the leader might have changed, the plan hasn’t. Verse 2 says “Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.”

The reason why it was called the “Promised Land” was because God had promised it to them. In Exodus 3:10, God told Moses at the burning bush, “So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”

But the promise had preceded Moses. God had promised Abraham in Genesis 15:18 as

Abraham walked through this land, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land.’”

We are able to be strong in the Lord when we remember that that God’s plan hasn’t changed even when His leaders do.

REMEMBER GOD’S PRESENCE (V5-9)

Next, God promises Joshua that He will always be with him. Joshua 1:5 says, “No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.” The reason no one was able to stand against Moses, the reason no one will be able to stand against Joshua isn’t their superior intellect or strength, but rather that God is with them.

God says it again in verse 9, “Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

This is a constant reassurance throughout Scripture that we can draw strength from remembering God’s presence with us. Psalm 23:4 says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.” God’s presence is the source of our strength as Isaiah 41:10 says, “Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

God promises to be with us to help us. What God calls us to accomplish can only be achieved through His strength not our own. As Zechariah 4:6 says, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.” Jesus says something similar in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. “

We are able to be strong in the Lord when we remember God’s empowering presence.

REMEMBER GOD’S PROMISE (V7-8)

The last source of strength that God reminds Joshua of is His commands. Joshua 1:7 says, “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.”

This isn’t God telling Joshua, “Do what I say and in exchange I promise to give you good things.” This is God saying that His commands themselves are the path to life.

Destruction and Death are not an external and arbitrary decree of God imposed on people who mistakenly make a poor choice. Success is not the blessing bestowed transactionally on those who keep all the rules and earned a treat.

Jesus said in John 3:17, "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." God didn't send Jesus to judge to world. He doesn't have to judge sin because sin judges itself. Paul wrote in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." God gives life, not death. It is sin that gives death. Death is the wages that sin pays out. God's commands show us the path to life.

That is what God reminds Joshua. We will be able to be strong in the Lord when we remember God's promise that obedience to His commands leads to life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where does the book of Joshua fit in the Bible and in Bible History?
2. What is the difference between being strong in ourselves and being strong in the Lord?
3. How can we remind ourselves of God's plan and draw strength from it?
4. How can remembering God's presence strengthen us?
5. What is the promise that God wants Joshua and us to remember?

RAHAB AND THE SPIES: AN UNLIKELY FAITH

JOSHUA 2

One of the consistent messages of Scripture is that God uses unlikely people to accomplish His purposes. He takes people that the world think are useless and through them does amazing things. Its not hard to find examples. Think about Abraham, who thought his life was over before God called him, or Moses who shepherding flocks in the desert, or Gideon who was hiding in a wine press, or a band of Galilean fisherman, who “turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).”

Maybe it’s because those who don’t think they are useless are more able to be vessels of God’s power. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:9, God’s “power is perfected in weakness.” For whatever reason, the church has frequently been full of people you wouldn’t think would belong together or be useful to God. But this is on purpose.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Paul describes how this situation played out in the Church at Corinth., “26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God.”

Because of this, surprising faith is found in unlikely places. Luke 7:9 shows us how Jesus reacted to finding great faith in an unlikely place: “Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.” Let that sink in: during Jesus’ earthly ministry, the person with the greatest faith was not a Pharisee or a Priest. He wasn’t even a Jew. It was a Roman soldier.

Today’s lesson is about a similarly strong faith found in a similarly unlikely spot. Joshua 2:1 says, “Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.” Joshua sent spies to get some information about what they were facing. The spies went to the house of a harlot, probably because it was also an inn where they could sleep, but also because it was a place frequented by soldiers, so they would be able to gain valuable military intelligence.

Rahab, the woman who ran this establishment, ends up being the unlikely hero of the story. Hers is another classic story about how God uses unlikely people to do amazing things. He takes a woman who had spent her life running a house of ill-repute and turns her into a great hero of the faith. Rahab is included in the great chapter of the heroes of the faith: Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11:31 says, "By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace. In James 2:25, James uses her, alongside Abraham, as an example of faith in action: "In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?" Perhaps most amazing, Rahab is one of only 4 women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. Matthew 1:5-6 says, "5 Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. 6 Jesse was the father of David the king."

Rahab had amazing faith. Chapter 2 of Joshua is the only place her story is told in detail. This week we are going to look closely at her encounter with the spies and see if we can learn what real faith looks like.

REAL FAITH IS COURAGEOUS (V2-7)

The first attribute of Rahab's faith that is on display is her courage. Real faith is courageous. It involves a choice, often in the face of danger, to put your hope and trust in one thing instead of another. It involves risk. The spies' mission and presence were discovered. Joshua 2:2-3 says,

² It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." ³ And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."

This is where Rahab risks. She does several things. She hides the spies. But more than that, she lies for the spies. Joshua 2:4-5 says,

⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. ⁵ It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."

Much has been made of the fact that Rahab lied and was rewarded for it. Some say that this shows her immature faith. Some say that the lying was a sin, but that she was forgiven. But there are no two ways around it. Everything she did for the spies was a lie in one way or another to the Jericho king. What do we do with this? Does this mean that it is ok to lie?

Something similar happens in Exodus 1:15-22. Pharaoh saw that the Hebrews were increasing, so he commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill every male child that was born. The midwives not only disobeyed the Pharaoh's command, they lied to his face about it.

Exodus 1:20-21 says, : “20 So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. 21 Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them.” God rewarded them for their lying.

What are we to make of this? It’s a complicated situation and we are sinful people who are always looking for ways to excuse our own bad behavior. The best answer is to understand these episodes in the light of what Jesus says in Matthew 7:6, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” I think “the truth” is one of the holy things or pearls that Jesus is referring to. In both these situations, both Rahab and the midwives involved did not tell the truth to people who would have taken the truth and used it to do evil. It’s wrong to lie. It’s not wrong to lie to the Nazis if there are Jews hidden in your house, or to Pharaoh when he asks you to kill babies, or to the king of Jericho who are looking for the spies you have hidden upstairs.

Rahab had great courage. She had to choose between obeying men or God. She chose God even when she knew what the consequences would be.

REAL FAITH IS CONFIDENT (V8-11)

The second attribute of real faith that Rahab demonstrates is confidence. After hiding the spies on her roof, she goes to them and reveals why she did what she did. Joshua 2:9 says, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.” She doesn’t say, “I have a reasonable expectation that you guys will win. Nor does she say, “It seems more likely that you’ll win rather than us.” She says, “I know that the LORD has given you the land.” This declaration is an embodiment of the definition of faith given in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” She is assured and convinced of things that have not happened yet.

What Rahab says in the next verse gives us a window into how she discovered her confident faith. Joshua 2:10 says, “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.”

Rahab didn’t have blind faith. She had faith based on evidence. She learned about the people of Israel and what Israel’s God did for them: how he performed miracles over nature and granted them victory over other nations. All of this leads to make the confession in Joshua 2:11, “the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

The same thing will happen for us. Our faith will grow when we see evidence of God’s activity in the world. When we seek Him and see Him at work, our faith will be strengthened to trust him more. Faith isn’t an on-off switch. It is a muscle that gets stronger the more you use it.

REAL FAITH IS CONTAGIOUS (V23-24)

The rest of chapter 2 tells how Rahab asked for herself and her family to be spared when Jericho was conquered (v12-14), how the spies arranged to find Rahab and her family during the conquest (15-20), and how the spies ultimately escaped and returned to the Israelite camp (21-22). But there is one final attribute of real faith that is revealed in the final few verses of this chapter.

After they returned to the camp, they told related everything that had happened, “Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us.” (Joshua 2:24)

What is interesting is that God had been telling the Israelites that He was going to give them the land for the several hundred years. The message had been repeated more loudly and with more frequency over the last 40 years as they neared the promised land. The story of the wandering in the wilderness is rooted in their disbelief that God would do what He said. When Moses sent the original spies into the land, 10 of the 12 didn’t think it was possible to accomplish the task. Numbers 13:30-33 says,

³⁰ Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it.” ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.” ³² So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. ³³ There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

This time around, the spies come back from the land, and they are finally able to believe what God had wanted them to realize all along. What was the difference? This time around their faith had been strengthened by Rahab’s.

Real faith is contagious. People who know and trust God are able to lead others to know and trust God more. God grew the faith of His chosen people by inspiring great faith in someone who wasn’t a part of his chosen people.

APPLICATION

Many of us read things stories of faith like this and realize that we don’t measure up. We remark, “Oh well, I guess I don’t have real faith.” Many of us find ourselves caught in between faith and lack of it. We cry out like the father in Mark 9:24, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

But the point of recognizing real faith is to realize it is possible for the same to be true of you. The reason we hold up examples of great faith is not so that we can beat ourselves up for failing to measure up. Rather, we do so to encourage ourselves that such faith is possible for us, too.

Each of these points shows us the way forward to grow out faith.

Real Faith is Courageous and takes risk. When we find ourselves in a situation where we have to choose between following the world and following God, choose God and see if your faith doesn't grow.

Real Faith is Confident. If you aren't confident in your faith, ask yourself why and seek answers the questions that are keeping you back. It was evidence that grew Rahab's faith. The same will be true for us as well.

This final point, though, shows us the best way forward in how to grow our faith and be like Rahab:

Real Faith is Contagious. The starting point is not to have a contagious faith, but to find someone with a contagious faith and get close to them. Find examples, role models, heroes of the faith, learn from them, see how they lived, follow their example and see if your faith doesn't burn brighter because of it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had an encounter with an unlikely person who could do amazing things?
2. What does courageous faith look like?
3. How can we grow more confident in faith?
4. Why does sharing our faith actually strengthen it?
5. How would you explain Rahab's lies?

CROSSING THE JORDAN: LEARNING TO BE LED

JOSHUA 3-4

There is an old hymn that goes,

*He leadeth me, O Blessed thought!
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.*

The Bible is full of promises that God will lead His people. One of my favorites is Psalm 32:8, which says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you." But the next verse says something important about our ability to be led. Psalm 32:9 says, "Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you." God promises to lead us with his eye upon us. Evidently, we have a role to play in our ability to be led.

The people of Israel had struggled with this. God led them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. He led them by a pillar of fire and smoke. He promised to go before them and give them the Promised Land. But they refused to be led. In the desert, they doubted the direction God was taking them and his ability to provide. They wanted to go back to Egypt. Now a new generation stands on the cusp of entering into God's promises, and God calls them once again to follow where He leads.

As we look at this passage today, my hope is that we will be reminded that God does lead and that we would learn from the Israelites how to prepare ourselves to be led by God.

WAIT (JOSHUA 3:1-4)

Waiting, as an American singer, songwriter, and philosopher once said, is the hardest part. No one likes to wait. We want more and we want it faster. We want to get to where we are going as fast as possible. We find car travel too slow and want to fly everywhere. We simply can't imagine what it must have been like to spend all day traveling and only cover ten or fifteen miles.

Waiting, however, is exactly what God asks the people of Israel to do. They get to the eastern bank of the Jordan river and are preparing to enter. Joshua 3:1-2 says they "1came to the Jordan and they lodged there before they crossed. 2 At the end of three days the

officers went through the midst of the camp.” They arrive at the end of the Jordan; they can see where they are supposed to be. Maybe some of them skipped stones across. But they sat there on the banks for three days, waiting, before the officers came through the camp to give them instructions.

The instructions they do give are to wait some more. Joshua 3:3 says:

³ they commanded the people, saying, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. ⁴However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before.”

They aren’t told when this will happen, but they are told that it will happen and to wait for it. I wonder what they thought when they heard this word. After already waiting three days, they probably wondered why God was making them wait some more.

We probably do the same. When we wait, we wonder why. Are we in trouble? Did we do something wrong? The truth is we can never know all the reasons why God makes us wait. Sometimes its to help us expand our vision beyond the thing we are focused on. Sometimes, God wants us to acknowledge the fears that rise to the surface when we are forced to wait. Other times, waiting is about learning to trust that God can work outside the artificial boundaries and boxes we put him in. Sometimes waiting is a gift. We need rest and He gives us time and space to get it because He knows we won’t take it for ourself. God sees farther that we do. Perhaps he sees some danger He wishes us to avoid, or some good that He wishes us to meet, and He knows waiting will do the job.

Whatever the reason, the first step to learning to be led is learning to wait on God. Psalm 37:7 says, “Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”

CONSECRATE (JOSHUA 3:5-6)

The next step in learning to be led by God is to consecrate yourself to His service. Joshua 3:5 says, “Then Joshua said to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.’” Sometimes we imagine waiting as simply killing time. We pull out our phones and find ways of passing the time. But there is a more purposeful way to wait. To wait purposefully means to prepare. When we are waiting for Christmas, we don’t just sit around waiting for the day to arrive. We get ready. We do all that we can so that when the day does get here, we are able to fully enjoy it.

Something similar is at work here. Joshua tells them to consecrate themselves, which means to purify or set apart. This means that they were to prepare for the coming events. This wasn’t about making themselves good enough for God to use. This was about focusing on God and reorienting their lives towards God. It doesn’t say what they did.

Perhaps they prayed, fasted, sacrificed, worshiped. Whatever was done, the point of consecration is rededicating yourself to the things of God and opening yourself toward God and what He has for you.

Consecration is a key component of waiting on God. It's a way of publicly demonstrating to ourselves and others that we are on God's side. We are ready to see God act. We are ready to be used by God. Perhaps we miss God or are made to wait because we don't fully recognize this dimension of learning to be led.

ANTICIPATE (JOSHUA 3:7-17)

The reason why waiting and consecrating are so important to being led by God is because the truth is that many people don't believe God is at work in the world. We think we are on our own and it is all up to us. This is evidence by the fact that a large percentage of people think that "God helps those who help themselves" is a verse from the Bible. One of the reason our society is plagued by depression and anxiety is because we believe if we are unable to do something, then it can't be done. We anxiously think we have to do everything, then collapse into depression when we fall short. We don't factor the activity of God into our life. Sometimes God stops us and gets us reoriented so we can learn to expect Him to act. Not that we can compel Him to do what we want when we want it. But rather, that we can count on the fact that God isn't a passive viewer in the world but rather is actively involved. This passage shows us two dimensions to learning to anticipate God's work in our world.

- **Anticipation Involves Receiving God's Word (Joshua 3:7-13)** – Anticipation is about reacting, but before you can react, you have to know that one you are reacting to. That is why the first dimension of anticipation is to receive the word of God. In Joshua 3:9, Joshua tells all of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." He tells them exactly what God is going to do so that when it happens, they won't be shocked or think it was an accident, but rather have their faith strengthened. Though God doesn't often tell His people exactly what He is going to do like in this passage, the Bible is full of promises that we can trust. First, it is full of prophecies that have been fulfilled by Jesus. Such prophecies renew and deepen out promises in the God who sent Jesus. The Bible also reveals the character of God, so that when we can't figure out what God is doing, we can trust His heart. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'" God doesn't say, "Let me tell you my plans." He invites us to trust that He is a God who makes good plans for us.

- **Anticipation Involves Responding to God's Work (Joshua 3:14-17)** – Receiving God's word doesn't mean just hearing it. It means knowing who God is and what He is up to so when you see a chance to get involved, you do. Verses 14-17 recount how the people of Israel saw the priests marching towards the Jordan, which was in a flood stage. They had been told to follow where the priests and the ark went, so they went too. When the priests

dipped their feet in the water, the water receded. Verse 16 says that the water “stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away.” The result was that, as verse 17 says, “the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel crossed on dry ground, until all the nation had finished crossing the Jordan.”

Some have hypothesized that a landslide caused by an earthquake could have stopped the flow of the Jordan River. This has happened twice in more recent history. Once in 1267 AD and once in 1927. The one in 1927 also occurred near the town of Adam (just as in verse 16) and stopped the flow of the Jordan for more almost 24 hours. But even if an earthquake was responsible, it is still a miracle. The natural explanation shows how God did it, but only God can explain the miraculous timing.

One wonders if they would have missed their window to cross if they hadn't received God's word and been ready to respond when God moved. The same is true for us. Sometimes we miss what God is going because we aren't ready. Sometimes we miss it because we haven't decided from the outset to obey no matter what. When God leads, there often isn't time to sit and consider whether you will decide to follow. The only way to be ready is to stay ready and be willing to follow when and where He leads.

COMMEMORATE (JOSHUA 4)

There is an old song that begins “all the way my savior leads me.” That means God is never done leading us. Each time we obey and follow, we are better equipped to follow again next time. Many people make a mistake in how they think about their faith. They think faith is like an on/off switch. They think you either have it or you don't. But most people are somewhere on the same continuum as the father in Mark 9:24 who said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” Our faith is a muscle. It gets stronger the more we use it. Each time we use our faith, we will find our faith growing.

One way we can make sure previous acts of obedience can have their full effect on our future faith is to make sure we remember previous instances of God's faithfulness. That is why Joshua 4 is dedicated to God instructing the people to send one man from each tribe in the middle of the dry riverbed to bring a stone out and place it on the shore where they were going to camp that night. Joshua 4:6-7 says:

⁶ Let this be a sign among you, so that when your children ask later, saying, “What do these stones mean to you?” ⁷ then you shall say to them, “Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.” So, these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever.

Monuments like these serve as memorials to commemorate, to bring to mind, the faithfulness

of God. The purpose of this commemoration is to keep your faith strong so that the next time you find yourself in a difficult situation, you can remember God's previous faithfulness to you and encourage yourself to trust and obey in this moment too.

This is the final step in learning to be led by God. Commemorating God's faithfulness to us as we follow. Often times such commemoration occurs in a season of waiting as we watch and wonder what God is doing next. And so the cycle begins again, and we are invited to follow wherever God leads.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to "Wait on God?" What is the difference between waiting and killing time? How can we "redeem the time" while we wait? What are some fears or frustration you experience while waiting? Have you ever seen God's perfect timing revealed in waiting?
2. What does consecration mean? How does this apply to us? Does this mean we have to be good enough for God?
3. What is mean to anticipate God's actions? What does it mean to receive the word? What does it mean to respond to God's work? How does failing to receive God's word lead to us failing to respond to God's work?
4. How does God tell the Israelites to commemorate this event? Why is commemoration important? What are some things we can do to remind ourselves of God's past faithfulness to us?
5. Even if there is a natural explanation for how the Jordan River dried up, why is it still a miracle?

RENEWING THE COVENANT: HOW TO START OVER

JOSHUA 5:1-12

Supposedly there is a sign on a highway in Alaska that says: “Choose your rut carefully, it goes for the next 100 miles.” The roads are ice in the winter and dirt in the summer. The road gets grooves carved in it that get deeper and deeper with each passing truck. At some point, when you get into it, you are in so deep it can be hard to get out.

Have you ever found yourself stuck in a rut? Our lives can get into ruts that we can find difficult to get out of. When ruts are good, we call them patterns, traditions, or habits. But ruts are the word for when they aren't good. They are patterns, traditions, habits, or routines, that keep us trapped in a place we want to escape; they keep us stuck headed in a direction we want to change.

Sometimes we can be stuck in a rut without realizing it. We might have been born into it or pushed into it through someone else's choices. However we ended up there, getting out can be hard. We struggle and strive only to fall back into patterns we wish we could escape. What is the answer? What is the solution?

The good news is we aren't the first to find ourselves in this kind of situation. The people of Israel were in a similar situation. The wandering in the wilderness had been a huge rut worn into the sand of the Sinai Peninsula by the generation that had left slavery in Egypt. Now a new generation is preparing to enter the promised land. They are learning to reject the ruts of the previous generation and learning to trust God for themselves and to be led by him.

They have already seen him part the Jordan, allowing them to cross into the Promised Land on dry ground. Now they stand on the cusp of taking possession of their inheritance. But before the battles begin, they need to make sure they are fully out of the previous rut. Today's lesson focuses on how Joshua leads the people in renewing their covenant with the Lord. “Renewing the covenant” is just a theological expression for “starting over.” This passage shows how the people of Israel renewed their relationship with God and began again. Hopefully we will see something in the story that will help us when we find ourselves in a rut we want to get out of and wish we could start over with God.

START OVER BY OBEYING (V2-9)

The first step in starting over is to obey. That is where Israel starts. Verse 2 says, “At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make for yourself flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time.” Verses 4-5 give a reason why this had to be done:

⁴This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, died in the wilderness along the way after they came out of Egypt. ⁵For all the people who came out were circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness along the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised.

Circumcision was the sign given by God to the Israelites to remind them of their covenant and unique relationship with Him. The whole generation of people who had left slavery in Egypt had been circumcised, but they had neglected to circumcise their children.

There was nothing magical about the rite. Rather it symbolized the desire of people to be obedient to God. As verse 6 says, the generation coming out of Egypt “did not listen to the voice of the Lord.” They were living in disobedience, and now their children were walking in that rut. Joshua ends their disobedience by renewing this covenant sign.

This shows us that the first step to starting over is to choose to obey God. It is never too late to start obeying again. James 4:7-8 says, “7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

It will be hard to obey when your natural inclinations and habits goes against it. That is why Psalm 4:7 says, “Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the LORD.” Initial obedience often feels like a sacrifice, like something is dying, like something you don’t want to give but choose to. We are called to choose to obey God and trust Him to see if He will fulfill His word to us. Starting over begins with obedience.

START OVER BY WORSHIPING (V10)

Verse 10 says, “While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho.” The Passover was a commemoration of God’s deliverance out of Egypt. It was an annual event that was supposed to be repeated. The reason for the festival was to remind Israel of who God is and how God had delivered them.

Though there are instances where the Passover was celebrated during the wandering, this is the first Passover in the promised land. It is the first Passover before God starts doing a new thing.

This shows us that another dimension of starting over involved worship. Worship is one of those words that we frequently use but rarely define. Sadly, many people unintentionally equate it with singing. The truth is that worship is anything we do that focuses our hearts

and minds on God and demonstrates our reverence and love for Him. The Passover was an act of worship. It reminded the people of what God had done and allowed them a chance to demonstrate their devotion and gratitude to Him.

It is important that on the eve of so great an undertaking the Israelites made a point to worship. Some may say that it was just simply coincidence that they were there at that time on the date of Passover. But the fact that they chose to do it in the midst of all that was going on is proof that they took it seriously and saw its importance.

The same is true for us. When we need to start over, worship is an important dimension of reorienting our lives towards God. It allows us to focus on the truth of who God is. It gives us a chance to pull our minds away from what is distracting us and place it where it needs to be.

The Bible is full of commands to worship, especially in times when we don't feel like doing it. Psalm 34:1 says, "I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." That verse only makes sense when we don't feel like blessing the Lord. It means when I don't feel like it, I will choose to find a reason to bless the Lord and keep his praises in my mouth. Hebrews 13:15 says, "let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Our praise is only a sacrifice if it is hard to make. Otherwise, it is an offering, but doesn't really cost us anything. Praising God when it is hard reminds us that God can be trusted in every situation. That is the reason why worship is so essential when you are looking to start over with God.\

START OVER BY TRUSTING (V11-12)

Sin starts when we stop trusting God and start looking for something else to satisfy us or start trusting something else to fulfill us. Starting over with God involves choosing to trust Him above all else. That is where the people of Israel find themselves. Just when they had entered the promise land, something negative happened. Verses 11-12 say,

¹¹On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year.

Just when they thought things were starting to go right, God stops the manna. Imagine how they felt the first morning they went out to gather manna and it wasn't there. They had seen it and relied on it for so long. I wonder what their initial reaction was. Panic? Frustration? Anxiety? Confusion? Why had God stopped the manna? The clue is in verse 12 "the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land." God was still providing. He had just started doing it in a different way.

I have no doubt that it took a great deal of trust for the people to believe that God was still taking care of them even when the manna ceased. The same is true of us. Sometimes

the things God uses to provide for us end or transition. When that happens, we can fear, worry, or doubt. But it is in precisely these moments when we have to choose to trust God and see not what we are lacking but what God has provided instead.

Such transitions ensure that we are trusting God and not making an idol of the thing He has blessed us with.

CONCLUSION

Obedience, Worship, Trust. It's hard to decide which is the best place to begin when you are looking to renew your relationship with God. It is never too late to start following the commands of God. You will be more willing to do so if you renew your mind and refocus your heart on God through worship. All of this will ensure that you trust God more than yourself or the world. Wherever you start, all three of these things will help you draw near to God and help you do the other things better. Obedience helps you worship, which helps you trust, which helps you obey. So, pick one, do it, and see if you don't feel drawn closer to God and find your life refreshed and renewed in the process.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever found yourself caught in a rut of disobedience with a stale spiritual life? What was the cause? How did you notice? What did you do about it?
2. How did the Israelites start over with God by obeying? How can we do the same?
3. How did the Israelites start over with God by worshiping? What is worship? How can we do the same?
4. How did the Israelites start over with God by trusting? How can we do the same?
5. How do obedience, worship, and trust relate to one another? How do they build and reinforce each other? Have you ever seen in your life how one of these can feed the other two?

COMMANDER OF THE ARMY: WHO IS IN CHARGE?

JOSHUA 5:13-15

Leadership is a hot topic these days. To be honest, though, I guess it has always been. People always want to be in charge. People always look for ways to be in control. There have been, it seems, an explosion of books on leadership helping people maximize their potential, expand their influence, build their brand, or whatever new buzzword happens to be current.

Its sad to realize that these ideas have crept into the church. I am not saying that we shouldn't learn all we can from leadership development professionals. We just have to be careful that we don't end up treating the church like a business and pastors like marketing executives. This is happening as more and more pastors turn to the corporate world rather than the Bible for direction and guidance. As Eugene Peterson once lamented, "The vocation of pastor has been replaced by the strategies of religious entrepreneurs with business plans."

Jesus showed us that Christian Leadership is supposed to look different than the world. He told his disciples in Matthew 20:25-28:

²⁵But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The Christian leader is someone who is first a follower. He serves God first and serves others second. He puts himself third. A powerful demonstration of this happens in today's passage. This first several chapters of Joshua have been about preparing for battle. It starts with the death of Moses and the command to be strong in the Lord. Joshua's faith was confirmed by the spies' report of their meeting with Rahab and the crossing of the Jordan on dry ground. Joshua has consecrated his people and was standing with his feet in the land God promised to give to them. Now Joshua and the Israelites are on the verge of their first engagement. Before that happens, one final event occurs which underscores the true nature of Biblical leadership and completes Joshua's preparations to lead the Israelites into battle.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER (V13)

On the eve of battle, Joshua heads out of the Israelite camp in order to scout the terrain and contemplate his plan. One wonders what was going through his mind. Was he wracking his brain trying to figure out what was required in laying siege to a fortified town like Jericho? Was he doubting himself just a little bit wondering if he could fill the shoes left by Moses? Whatever he was thinking, while Joshua was walking, he met somebody. Verse 13 says, “Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand.” Strange encounter is an understatement. Imagine being on guard duty in no mans land between two armies and you encounter a man in front of you not just armed but with his weapon in his hand.

In a blend of courage and wisdom, Joshua doesn't run, nor does he fight, he simply asked the figure in front of him a question. The rest of verse 13 says, “Joshua went to him and said to him, ‘Are you for us or for our adversaries?’”

A STRANGE DISCLOSURE (V14)

Joshua doesn't run from the battle, nor does he start it prematurely by picking a fight with a stranger. He approaches the man and asks who's side he is on. There seemed to be only two choices. You are on the Israelites side, or you are on Jericho's side.

The man responds with an even stranger disclosure. His answer is “Neither.” I wonder what Joshua's face looked like the moment he heard. I wonder if he was about to express his confusion when the man finished his reply, “rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the LORD.”

He reveals that he didn't come to pick a side, he came to lead the Lord's army. He didn't come to give Joshua help. He came to take over. He declared himself the captain of the Lord's Army, a title that Joshua could have claimed for himself.

How would you have responded to having your leadership challenged in this way? Joshua realizes that he is having a divine encounter and humbles himself. The rest of verse 14 says, “Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, ‘What has my lord to say to his servant?’”

This man came not to help but to take over. Joshua recognizes that it is God's war, not his, and gladly accepts the role of servant.

A STRANGE COMMAND (V15)

The strange encounter gets even stranger when the man responds to Joshua's question: “The captain of the LORD'S host said to Joshua, ‘Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’” (v15)

The man tells Joshua to remove his shoes because he is standing on Holy Ground. That is when Joshua realized he wasn't talking just to man, or to a heavenly being. He was talking with the Angel of the Lord, which means a physical manifestation of representation of God Himself. In short, the Angel of the Lord is the Lord Himself.

This is Joshua's burning bush moment. When God revealed Himself to Moses in the Burning Bush, He said the exact thing. In Exodus 3:5, God tells Moses, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Holy ground is the indication that God is present. Holiness is one of God's primary attributes. The ground is holy because it is where God meets his people. The fact the Joshua obeys is proof that he realized to whom he was talking.

APPLICATION:

This is the briefest of stories, but in it Joshua reveals that he is fully ready to lead the Israelites into battle. He demonstrates the attributes of a leader God can use. He shows us the attributes of a real Biblical leader.

•**A Real Leader Surrenders to God's Position** – Joshua had been placed by God in the position vacated by the death of Moses. But when asked to step aside, he does. He demonstrates that a real biblical leader is first a follower. In fact, a biblical leader is the first follower of God. He shows the rest how to follow God.

Paul demonstrates this in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he says, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." Paul says follow me not because I am special, but because I am following Jesus first.

One of the reasons why God frequently uses unlikely people whom the world doesn't want is because they are the most willing to surrender their position and follow God. They don't have what it takes and look to God to guide them. If we want to lead like Joshua, we have to realize this. We don't get God on our side. We join God's side. We let God lead and follow wherever He goes.

•**A Real Leader Seeks God's Purpose** – It is important to underscore the fact that the first words out of Joshua's mouth when he realizes to whom he is talking is "what do you want me to do?" This reveals that a real leader seeks God's purpose. Many people in similar situations would have probably run some ideas past God or tried to give Him some suggestions. We often say we are willing to surrender to his position, but the fact that we don't seek His purpose proves we are deceiving ourselves. It just shows that we already know what we want and are going to try to use God to get it.

Jesus showed us the problem with this when he said in Matthew 7:22-23, "22 Many will

say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you.’” A lot of people will try to show Jesus their spiritual resume as proof that they belong to Him. They will say “look at all the great stuff we did for you, Jesus.” Jesus responds that he doesn’t know these people. God is inviting us into His kingdom. In order to enter His kingdom, we must leave our own. Often, instead of trying to renounce the throne of our own kingdom, we just try to stamp a cross on it. We still want to be kings. We want to be famous, important, wealthy, successful. We just promise to do it for God. We try to impress Jesus with how many Bible studies we attended, how many small groups we lead, how many mission trips we went on, how many books we wrote. We aren’t doing God’s will. We are doing our own will and using Jesus to justify it. We aren’t building His kingdom. We are building our own but trying to add some Christian flavor to it. A real leader seeks God’s purpose first.

•A Real Leader Submits to God’s Plan – When Joshua hears what God wants him to do first, he doesn’t question, he does it. When we don’t seek God’s purpose, we end up being unable to unwilling to submit to His plan. God is about to give Joshua an atypical battle plan to say the least. Before he is able to be entrusted with that, though, he needs to demonstrate that he can be faithful in the small stuff.

This has always been the case with God. God’s commands are often counterintuitive, going against what we were expecting or desiring. In those moments, we have to learn to trust God and not ourselves. Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust God with your whole heart and don’t trust your own understanding.” Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” When we use “what feels right” as a barometer for decision making, we quickly find problems. It leads to destruction. Submitting to God’s plan starts when we realize we don’t have all the answers. When we acknowledge our own lack of resources, we open ourselves up to God’s power and wisdom. If you think you are wise in your own eyes, you will do things according to your own assessment of things, which will be deficient. A real leader submits to God’s plan.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the world define leadership? How does the Bible define leadership? What are some similarities and differences?
2. What does it mean to surrender to God’s position? How do we try to play God? How do we try to get God on our side instead of joining His side?
3. What does it mean to seek God’s purpose? What is the opposite? How can we seek God’s purpose for our lives?
4. What does it mean to submit to God’s plan? What are our reasons for not doing so?
5. How does this episode serve as an important capstone and final preparation for Joshua before he enters into battle?

NOTES

— ABOUT THE AUTHOR —

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