

Deuteronomy - Joshua



Monday: Deuteronomy 29-32

Tuesday: Deut. 33-Joshua 4

Wednesday: Joshua 5-9

Thursday: Joshua 10-13

Friday: Joshua 14-17

Introduction

For eighty years you have lived in the shadows of one of the greatest leaders to have ever lived. You watched as God worked signs and wonders through His servant Moses. While everyone cowered in fear, Moses was courageous enough to stand before God and speak the truth and beg for God's mercy. Now, that great, wise, experienced, next-to-godlike man is looking you in the eye and saying, "It's your turn. Now you are in charge." How do you feel?

This was the situation Joshua found himself in at the beginning of the book of Joshua. Let's not forget that Joshua was no slouch himself. Out of the 12 spies that were sent to scope out the land, he was one of 2 that believed God could deliver on his promises, in spite of the giants in the land. Joshua had proven himself a loyal and trusted servant of Moses from the very beginning. Yet, it is one thing to be the first-mate and defer all the big decisions to Moses. It is a different thing altogether to be thrust into the "big chair" and to be looked upon by a million plus people as the man who will know what God wants for the people to do.

How would you feel under those circumstances? Spend a moment to reflect on this. Behind you is the nation of Israel, a group that has proven themselves to be less than trustworthy on many occasions. In

front of you lies the Jordan River, beyond which are heavily fortified cities, well trained armies, and very large fighting men. Your mentor is about to expire and now, at a human level, there is no one to turn to for advice?

Joshua stepped up to the plate very well. The book of Joshua is a nice contrast to the book of Numbers. In Numbers, the people experienced great defeat and suffered terribly as the consequence of poor choices and lack of faith. Joshua took the nation in a 180 degree direction and actually followed the Lord's commands. As a result of his strength and courage Joshua led the people to claim the promise that God had made to Abraham and allowed the people to settle into their land and begin growing crops.

Joshua can be divided into two major sections:

Part 1: Conquering Canaan (1-12)

1-5 Preparing for Conquest

6-9 Determining who's in Charge

10-12 Taking the Land

Part 2: Allotting the Land (13-24)

13-22 Giving the Tribes their
Promised proportion

23-24 Joshua's Farewell Speech.

Monday: Choose LIFE

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

How are the commands described in vv. 11-14?

What will it take to live and increase in the land?
(v. 16)

What choice is Moses presenting to the people?

Why does Moses want them to choose life?

Food for thought:

The message of the entire Bible cannot get much clearer than it is proclaimed in this passage. Spreading out before you today are two paths. One path, called obedience, leads to God's eternal Kingdom, to a life of fellowship with the eternal creator; to LIFE itself. The other path of self-reliance and self-indulgence leads to separation from the God of the universe, to isolation from true purpose and fellowship, to Death itself.

Jesus echoes these words in Matthew 7:13-14, *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* He said that a man who enters through the wide gate is like a man who builds his house on sand. When the winds blow and the rain crashes down, that house will be washed away. A man that enters through the narrow gate, on the other hand, will be anchored deep into the rock of truth, the bedrock of all existence, the original author, the uncaused cause, the alpha and the omega, the first and last. A house anchored into that kind of foundation will be able to weather any storm.

One of the greatest phrases in the Bible is in that defining moment when Moses burns his piercing gaze into the eyes and the souls of the Israelites and urges them, as a father who is letting his son go to be on his own would urge, **"NOW CHOOSE LIFE."** Jesus said, in John 10:10, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the fullest."*

The question that perhaps you have asked about this is, "what is the good life?" Notice how Moses goes on to explain it in the same verse... *"so that you and*

your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life..."

Here's an acrostic that may help us remember what real life is all about.

Living **I**n **F**ather's Fellowship **E**ternally

Death is anything that distracts us from knowing God and being fully filled with His presence.

Each day we are faced with this choice. Will you choose life today, or death? Will you choose to die to your selfish desires, your cherished sins, your self-pity, and lay those things at the altar of sacrifice so that you may exchange those nasty clothes for a brilliant garment of God's grace and walk in obedience to His leading? Or, will you wake up and say, "What is on my agenda today; how can I build my dreams?"

I am not talking about waking up and risking the loss of your eternal salvation. I'm talking about waking up and risking the loss of your present salvation. Jesus didn't come simply to give us fire-insurance so that we could pray a prayer and know that we will wake up in Heaven when we die. He came to give us life...right now. He came to give us life abundantly. Even those who have claimed Jesus as their savior, who are eternally secure in their post-mortals destination, can live in death each day. We can wake up and choose to turn aside from the path of surrender, obedience, and love, and walk down our own self-made path. How sad it is that so many Christians are not choosing life each day.

Today, right now, choose life.

Tuesday: Be-Complex

Joshua 1:6-9

What task was Joshua being asked to complete?

How would you have felt in Joshua's position?

What instructions did God give Joshua that would insure his success in accomplishing his task?

Food for thought:

I'm no military strategist, but I have a sneaking suspicion that when generals are preparing for battle there are certain processes and checklists that they employ. They probably send out intelligence agents to study the enemy. They count the troops to determine their strength on land, sea, and air. They study strategies of great generals before them to determine the most effective tactic to defeat the foe. This kind of planning just makes sense.

Let's broaden our perspective on this discussion and see how the same principles apply in many areas of life. When a person is making a career change, she will do her homework, strategize, leverage her resume, outsmart the competition, etc. In something as simple as planning a vacation, we tend to look at the task at hand and map out the best approach to the project.

Joshua was a man who was facing a very daunting task. He was supposed to lead a group of second-generation freed slaves, who have been living a nomadic existence for 40 years, into the land of Canaan to fight against well-trained, well-fortified "giants." The wisest general, as we have already suggested, would have spent this preparation time in strategy sessions. Yet, God pulls a reversal on Joshua. God tells Joshua that, if he wants to be successful, (and who wouldn't) he is to not spend his time on strategizing, but to spend his time on Prayer and Meditation. God did not tell Joshua what he was to do, he told him how to be.

He said...

BE strong

BE courageous

BE obedient

How could Joshua be strong and courageous in these circumstances? His strength and courage came from the knowledge that God had ordained this attack. Joshua was not being called upon to be a great leader. He was being called upon to be a great follower. God was leading this army. God was going ahead of them to drive out the Canaanites. All Israel had to do was to believe, obey, and follow.

The key to Joshua's strength and courage was in his obedience. If Joshua would focus his energy on the Law of God, meditate on it daily, keep it in the forefront of his mind and speech (not letting it depart from his mouth), then He would be in tune with the will, heart, and mind of God and would have the strength and courage to do the things that God asked him to do.

Once again, we run right into the overflow principle. If Joshua would detach himself from the task of leading an army and graft himself into authentic fellowship with God through the disciplines of study, prayer, and meditation, then the fruit (or the overflow) of Joshua's life would be a "success" because it would be orchestrated by God Himself.

Too many times we rush into a venture that we have planned, using our own strength and "wisdom." After noodling it out in our own steam, we then offer it up to God and say, "bless this." Let's shift our focus. Let's join with Joshua in his formula for success. Let's remember that we are called to follow *God's* agenda for *His* Kingdom. Even if we are "leaders" in the church, we are called to simply follow. Let's let our strength and courage be the result of knowing the mind and heart of God so well that He is naturally flowing through our lives.

Wednesday: A Tale of Two Cities

Joshua 5:13-7:26

Let's create a contrast chart between Israel's campaign against Jericho and Israel's campaign against Ai.

Attitudes

What attitude did Joshua have before the commander of the Lord's army (5:14)

What attitude did the people have towards Ai (7:2-3)

Actions

How did the people attack Jericho? (6:2-19)

How did the people attack Ai? (7:4)

Results

What was the outcome of the attack on Jericho? (6:20-22)

What was the outcome of the attack on Ai? (7:4-5)

Why did the attack on Ai fail? (7:10-12)

What was God's reaction to this?

What had to be done to make things right?

Food for thought:

Here's the devotional thought for today, plain and simple: Sin messes things up! So don't do it!

God could not have been any clearer to the people. He told them not to take any of the booty from Jericho. The spoils from this victory were to be the firstfruits of Israel's income from the endeavor God had sent them on. Remember from Exodus that the Israelites were to bring the firstfruits of their harvests to the Lord as an act of sacrifice and faith in God's provision (Exodus 23:16). For 40 years the people had not planted crops or had an income. The city of Jericho was very symbolic as it represented the firstfruits of the promised blessing that God was fulfilling to His people.

And yet, even with the clarity of instruction, Achan could not resist. When he saw the goods, he knew he had to have it. Perhaps he felt that he deserved it because he had been without for his entire life. Perhaps he thought that God and Joshua would never notice, after all, it was just a trinket in comparison to the vast riches they had just acquired. Whatever his thoughts and rationalizations, the fact remains that Achan blew it and the nation suffered.

As modern, individualistic people, we tend to see the sin of Achan and apply it to our own personal lives. It becomes clear to us that if we get greedy and disobey God, then we will suffer the consequences. While that is a valid application point from this story, there is another that is perhaps deeper and broader. The sin of Achan affected the entire nation, even to the point where 36 innocent men died in battle. As Christians we need to reconnect to the reality that we are parts of the body of Christ. We do not live in a

vacuum where our sins affect only us. Just like in the human body, when one cell turns cancerous, it begins to destroy the cells around it.

God knew that sinful attitudes are like a cancer in the collective body of His people. The story of Achan demonstrates that a cancerous cell must be dealt with quickly and decisively for the sake of the health of the body.

The next time you are tempted to give in to your cherished sin again, stop and think about all the other people in your church community. Realize that by committing that sin you are disrupting the flow in your relationship with God. When your flow gets disrupted you will stop overflowing onto others and will become disconnected. This can lead to a cascade failure and destroy a community. If you are in the moment of temptation and feel yourself giving in, reach out to God and reach out to a trusted brother or sister in the church and ask them to give you the strength to turn away and get reconnected to the flow of God. If you have committed a sin that you know is eating at your heart and jeopardizing the collective health of the body, first confess it to God, then confess it to a member of the community. Repent from it. Turn away. The worst thing you can do in that situation is to hide from others because of shame. Bring it into the light, let the fire of God's truth burn it out, and let the balm of God's Spirit heal it up.

Don't just do it for your own sake, do it for the sake of the community. You are not alone.

Thursday: The Sun Stands Still!?!

Joshua 10:7-15

In this battle scene...

...what did Israel do?

...what did Joshua do?

...what did God do?

...what was the result?

Food for thought:

This passage has created some of the most heated debate, and has provided some of the best fuel for the skeptic's attack against the reliability of the Bible. It would benefit us to spend today looking closely at this passage.

Let's look at this passage in three ways. First, we must look at the physical issues of the Sun standing still in light of our current understanding of physics. Second, we need to look at the theological message of the passage. Third, we need to look at the practical issues of what we can learn from this passage:

Physical Issues:

How powerful is God? Can God do anything? Can God make a boulder so big that He can't lift it? These kinds of brain teasers have entertained and perplexed theologians for centuries.

In this passage we must ask if God can physically stop the sun. On this side of Copernicus, we know that stopping the sun isn't even the issue. If the sun stood still in the sky that would mean the earth stopped rotating. Imagine the catastrophic planetary impact that would have.

Could God do it? Sure. Would God do it? We can't know. It seems like a pretty huge bending of physical laws for a battle that took place on a tiny plot of land with a few hundred men.

Is there another possible explanation?

One alternative explanation makes sense. Remember, this was a hot day in July. It must have been exhausting to chase your enemy across the Palestinian countryside, let alone fight them. God sent a hailstorm to defeat the enemy. Have you ever been in a hailstorm? It is dark and nasty. You can't see the

sun. If it stormed all day and the storm wiped out the enemy, then it would have seemed like the sun never shined at all. The Hebrew term translated stood still can also mean hidden.

Perhaps the “longest day” that saved Joshua was actually a prolonged night. It was a storm that both cooled off the army – a break from the summer heat – and rained soldier crunching hailstones on the enemy. For an underdog army, that was a double benefit.

Theological Issues:

Any time we read the Bible we must always place ourselves into the perspective of the people to whom the book was written. In our world, when we say “Sun” we think of a big ball of burning gas, called a star, that is one of trillions in the universe, around which our little spherical rock/planet revolves. When we say “moon” we think of a little spherical rock that revolves around our planet and, through gravitational forces, influences the tides of the sea. We think of these as neutral, objective objects in space that have no intrinsic meaning, they simply exist. Not so in the ancient world. For the ancients, the sun and the moon were gods. The sun was the master of the universe, he controlled life and death. He was overseer of all things. The moon, depending upon the individual culture, was sometimes seen as the wife of the sun, that woman who passed through her monthly cycles and gave birth anew each month. The sun and moon were destiny setters, answerable to no man.

Here, as Joshua, the great leader of Yahweh’s army, was leading a day-break assault against the pagan Canaanites, we see a battle of the gods. In the same way that Moses was a conduit of Yahweh’s power over the Egyptian Gods in the plagues of Egypt, so

too does Moses demonstrate Yahweh's power over the Sun and the Moon. At Joshua's request, the Sun and the Moon are altered and used in favor of Yahweh's army. This display of power must have completely drained all courage from the hearts of the Canaanites. If their gods were at the beck and call of Joshua's Yahweh, then what possible chance did they stand of survival?

Practical Issues:

As we have been tracking with the story of the Exodus and the invasion of Canaan we have drawn the analogy to our own hearts. Once again, we can see how God is at work in our battle against the enemy of the sin that has taken residence within us. From this story we can be reminded of one simple truth: God is greater than any "god" that you fear. You may be held captive today by one form of addiction or another. Perhaps you are addicted to alcohol or to sex. Maybe you are addicted to negativity or pessimism. Perhaps you have been chained to bitterness and resentment for so long that you can't remember what freedom feels like. You have been bowing to this Sun and Moon for too long. Today, as Joshua did, ask God to make the Sun and the Moon serve you. They have no power. God can, and will dethrone them in your life if you will ask Him to do so. He wants to set you free.

Friday: Caleb, the Unsung Hero

Joshua 14:6-15

Who was Caleb?

What great thing did he do?

What did Caleb ask for?

What was Caleb given? Why?

Food for thought:

Have you ever felt overshadowed by someone else? Even though you have given it your all, done the best you could, remained faithful and full of integrity, someone else has gotten the glory? How do you feel about that person? How do you feel about yourself?

Caleb is a man who could have easily fallen into that category. Back at Kadesh-Barnea he and Joshua stood, side by side, in front of Moses and declared that, despite the giants, the “Anakites” that were in the land, they believed God would deliver the land to the Israelites. Joshua and Caleb...together...equal. But, who gets the big commission? Who gets all the ink and all the credit? Joshua.

Where’s Caleb in all this? He could have been jealous of Joshua and started a rebellion. There was definitely ample opportunity to spark a movement of unrest among the perpetually grumbling Israelites. Yet, He didn’t. Notice how he is described in this chapter. He is 85 years old. He has been a faithful warrior for God, one among the many. Now, after the battle is over, he is as strong as ever. What does he want? Glory, fame, power? No. He just wants to fight for God.

What does God give him? Hebron. To us, Hebron is just a name, but it is so much more than that. Hebron was the highest city in the entire land. Hebron was where Abraham had hung out in the past. Hebron is where David would establish his first capital in later years. But, most importantly, Hebron was where the Anakites lived. Remember the Anakites? They were the giants that everyone feared. When it was time to divvy up the land, Caleb was given Hebron. The Anakites were still there.

Just try to imagine this eighty-five year old man, full of vigor and fervor for the Lord, storming into Hebron and once and for all, in a preview of David vs. Goliath, defeating those giants and establishing Hebron for the Lord. What a glorious day and what a fitting end for a humble hero.

The lesson from Caleb is simple. It doesn't matter who is in charge and who is getting the "press" in the human realm. The battle belongs to the Lord. Just remain faithful. Keep your eyes fixed on God, not on the approval of men. Stay faithful and strong, and, in the end, you will slay giants.