

Preview of Joshua

The Book of Joshua is the first of the twelve historical books, linking the Pentateuch with the historical section. Consequently, an interesting parallel exists between Joshua and the Acts of the Apostles. Joshua is to the Books of Moses what Acts is to the Gospels—a record of the action and events that followed divine revelation.

This book is confined to the period of Israel's history when Joshua was their leader, a time span of approximately twenty-five years. It begins at the death of Moses, where Deuteronomy closes, and ends with Joshua's death. During this time, Israel became established in Canaan. Under Joshua's leadership, there were very few, if any, lapses into sin as a nation—a marked contrast to the Book of Judges, where Israel committed nearly all the sins that God warned them against in Deuteronomy.

The Book of Joshua contains the proceedings of the conquest and settlement of Canaan. However, only some details of this period are recorded. For example, chapter 12 lists the conquered kings of Canaan, but the book details the capture of only a few.

Joshua is a book of warfare. God was using Israel to bring judgment on the Canaanites for their wickedness. At the same time, He was fulfilling the promise made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier that his descendants would possess the land. Therefore, the message of the book is two-fold. On the one hand we see God punishing sin; on the other hand we see the faithful inheriting God's promises.

The book is filled with many typical truths relating to present-day Christian experience. Crossing Jordan typifies the believer's death with Christ through which he enters into newness of life (Romans 6:3-6). The battles fought in conquering the land represent the Christian's warfare in his pursuit of holiness. Victories won assure us that we can triumph over sin through God's enabling grace. Finally, if we faithfully obey our Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, and drive out every besetting sin, we will possess God's promised peace and rest.

Lesson 5 - 27 November 2011

Joshua's Commission

Lesson Scope: Joshua 1

Lesson Focus

Change and uncertainty faced the Israelites. Moses, their capable leader for forty years, was dead. Joshua had been his faithful assistant for many years, but would he be able to lead the whole nation?

Just ahead of them lay the Jordan River, now raging at flood stage. How could two million people get to the other side?

On the other side lay Canaan, a land of walled cities and giants, the same land that had frightened the ten spies into reporting, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Numbers 13:31). How could a band of wilderness wanderers conquer a settled people?

In all their uncertainties, God's people of all times can depend on His faithfulness. His message to Joshua applies to all His people: "Be strong and of a good courage.... for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

To have courage, we need the right kind of fear. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). As the saying goes, "Fear God, and you have nothing else to fear."

We see here the tremendous power and perfection of God. In every Bible example of failure, the problem was with men, not with God. Our fear reflects a lack of faith in "him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

God charges men with the responsibility to drive out the enemy. This is a solemn and demanding work, but God has said, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."

Lesson Aim: To identify the basis for courage.

Theme Verse: [Isaiah 12:2](#). Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.

Lesson Text:

The Commission

Joshua 1:1-6 ¹ Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, ² Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, *even* to the children of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. ⁴ From the wilderness and this Lebanon *even* unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. ⁵ There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. ⁶ Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them.

The Conditions

Joshua 1:7-15 ⁷ Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. ⁹ Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest. ¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ¹¹ Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it. ¹² And to the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh, spake Joshua, saying, ¹³ Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land. ¹⁴ Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle, shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side Jordan; but ye shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valour, and help them; ¹⁵ Until the LORD have given your brethren rest, as *he hath given* you, and they also have possessed the land which the LORD

your God giveth them: then ye shall return unto the land of your possession, and enjoy it, which Moses the LORD'S servant gave you on this side Jordan toward the sunrising.

The Commitment

*Joshua 1:16-17*¹⁶ And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandedst us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.¹⁷ According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the LORD thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

Questions for Study

The Commission

1. What promises did God give Joshua?
2. What are some promises God has given to help us fulfill His will today?

The Conditions

3. List the four elements of prosperity and success in Joshua 1:7-8.
4. What is the cause of fear and dismay?
5. How does good leadership promote courage?

The Commitment

6. How did Joshua's words inspire confidence in the people?
7. How does commitment to a group develop courage?
8. How can we strengthen and encourage our leaders?

Analyzing the Passage

The name of Moses is mentioned eleven times in our lesson text. Five of those times he is referred to in some variant of "the servant of the LORD." Joshua had a good mentor and role model, but now the burden of leadership rested on himself.

Joshua would be the favored leader who would finally oversee the fulfillment of God's promise first given to Abram in Genesis 12:7: "Unto thy seed will I give this land." He repeated the promise to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and later to Jacob (Genesis 28:13). Now, approximately four hundred seventy years after the promise was first made to Abram, God told Joshua, "Unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them."

Joshua reminded the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh that, even though they had received their inheritances east of the Jordan, they had promised to cross over and help conquer the west side

(Numbers 32:27). In fact, they were to serve as shock troops and "pass before your brethren armed." Their inspiring response in verses 16-18 shows that they were ready to keep their promise. Indeed, they fought for seven years before returning to their inheritance (Joshua 22:1-4).

Principles and Applications

The Commission

1. God's work does not stop when men of God die (Joshua 5:1-2). Men are mortal, but God is eternal. His work is far greater than any man. God told Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise." When an earthly leader dies, God faithfully raises up another to take his place. "O God, our Help in ages past, / Our Hope for years to come!"

2. The promises of God are a source of courage for the child of God (Joshua 1:3). "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (James 1:12). "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). These are just a few of dozens of promises that inspire courage in God's children and help them to lay hold on eternal life. We have no excuse for failure. We too can gain the victory in "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon."

3. God's presence gives us courage to press on (Joshua 1:5-6). The almighty God, who has never lost a battle, dwells in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. As children in the dark feel safe with a parent, we are comforted by the presence of our heavenly Father. Share your fears and concerns with your Father; He is walking beside you. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

The Conditions

4. Obedience to God is the condition for strength and courage (Joshua 1: 7-8). God has provided overwhelming spiritual power for our use. But it is reserved for those who use the key of obedience to open the storehouse.

Even though parents love their children, their relationship will be tested if the children disobey. In the same way, disobedience affects our relationship with God. Someone who lives in known sin and says, "I'm closer to God than I've ever been," is deceived.

5. God's presence helps His people overcome fear and dismay (Joshua 1:9). When challenges loom before us, we naturally shrink back in fear. But if we turn and look at our God with the eye of faith, we find the courage to

face the issue.

Debilitating dismay is caused by unbelief. God provided the "shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked," but He has not provided armor for a fleeing Christian's back. If, like Peter, we focus on the waves instead of on our Lord, we will sink into fear and despair.

6. A unified effort to accomplish God's work builds courage (Joshua 1:12-15). Earthly kingdoms train their soldiers to work together as a team. This commitment to a group encourages bravery and builds confidence.

The knowledge that our brethren care about us and are depending on us helps us face the hottest battles. If the devil can divide us, he can conquer us one by one. United we stand; divided we fall.

7. The prospect of possessions, rest, and enjoyment gives courage to press on (Joshua 1:15). The heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 suffered much because they desired a better country. Jesus, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame."

Today our narrow path is illuminated by the light shining down from heaven. The perfect joy that is set before us inspires us to fight bravely for the prize. Is your courage fading? Turn to Revelation and read the promises to "him that overcometh."

The Commitment

8. A willingness to be told what to do inspires courage in leaders and in the group (Joshua 1:16-17). From childhood, we long for control. We want to do things our way and even tell others what to do. But God calls us to yield ourselves in brokenness to Him. Our surrender to God as Head leads to submission to the church, His body. Only then do we discover the tremendous help and encouragement available from God's people. "All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

9. Courageous leaders stimulate courage in the people (Joshua 1:18). As leaders, Joshua and his officers set an example of courage as they called the people to prepare to cross the swollen Jordan, not knowing exactly how the Lord would accomplish this. Had they doubted, Israel would have refused to follow.

Today's church and family leaders also need to lead by example. If we shrink back, our followers will flee before the enemy. To tell our followers, "Do as I say, but not as I do" invites defeat. "Somebody follows you, /

Watching the things you do; / Walk in the light, and be pure in His sight, / Somebody follows you."

Important Teachings

1. God's work does not stop when men of God die (Joshua: 1-2).
2. The promises of God are a source of courage for the child of God (Joshua 1:3)
3. God's presence gives us courage to press on (Joshua 1:5-6).
4. Obedience to God is the condition for strength and courage (Joshua 1:7-8).
5. God's presence helps His people overcome fear and dismay (Joshua 1:9).
6. A unified effort to accomplish God's work builds courage (Joshua 1:12-15).
7. The prospect of possessions, rest, and enjoyment gives courage to press on (Joshua 1:15).
8. A willingness to be told what to do inspires courage in leaders and in the group (Joshua 1:16-17).
9. Courageous leaders stimulate courage in the people (Joshua 1:18).

Answers to Questions

1. What promises did God give Joshua?
God promised total victory with words like every and all in verses 3 and 4. God also promised His divine presence and assistance (verse 5). Finally, in verse 6 He promised that Joshua would be the one to fulfill a centuries-old promise to the patriarchs.
2. What are some promises God has given to help us fulfill His will today?
"Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life" (James 1:12). "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." God has provided many more promises to comfort and encourage us.
3. List the four elements of prosperity and success in Joshua 1:7-8.
The four elements of success listed in these verses all relate to God's Law. "Turn not from it" suggests diligent pursuit of truth. Verse 8 gives instruction to talk about God's law, meditate on it continually, and obey all that is written therein.
4. What is the cause of fear and dismay?

Although some anxiety may be only human, debilitating fear and dismay are caused by unbelief. A focus on the problem instead of on God's power and goodness invites defeat. "Worry is practical atheism."

5. How does good leadership promote courage?

Godly leaders are men "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Their lives of obvious faith inspire courage in their followers. Their clear direction on issues helps their people know where to stand. Their warmth and love builds relationships that help members through difficult times.

6. How did Joshua's words inspire confidence in the people?

Joshua gave the people definite and specific direction. He was clearly functioning within the bounds of God's plan for Israel. His leadership built upon the work that faithful Moses had begun. The people could tell that God was directing Joshua.

7. How does commitment to a group develop courage?

When I see my brother standing firm, I am inspired to stand firm also. When I am tempted to sin, the knowledge that my brethren are counting on me helps to strengthen my resolve to resist temptation. The unity of a common cause exerts a positive peer pressure on me.

8. How can we strengthen and encourage our leaders?

The primary way to support our leaders is to be good followers—to obey and cooperate with them. We can express appreciation for their preaching and faithfulness, look for practical ways to lighten their loads, and remind them that "thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Summarizing the Lesson

Spiritual courage comes from spiritual vision. Like Elisha's servant, we need to have our eyes opened to see God's chariots of fire around us. Behind our fiery trials, our eye of faith must see God's loving hand preparing us for heaven. God's ultimate victory is guaranteed. Will we have enough faith to battle the enemy until Jesus' return?

Research Guide

1. Research the Jordan Valley in Unger's Bible Dictionary.
2. Research examples of courage in the Martyrs Mirror. Note the connection between courage and the martyrs' complete dependence on God.
3. Read Hebrews 11 and note the motivations for the courage of the heroes of faith.