

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Joshua

The commander of Israel's army

Lesson 1 – Joshua – Fought the Amalekites

Reading: Exodus 17:8-16

Isn't it interesting that this is the first mention of Joshua? He was leading the Israelite army. It's even stranger when we consider that the people had only just been freed from slavery in Egypt. It appears a little optimistic to call it an army. What training, if any, had Joshua received or experienced?

Maybe it was as Josephus suggests. Whilst the Hebrews were slaves of the Egyptians, they were not all brick makers. Some would have been trained in other crafts, as Bezaleel probably was. Josephus also suggests that Moses led an Egyptian army against the Ethiopians and it is more than likely that Joshua had served in Pharaoh's army. Moses may well have noticed Joshua's ability then and enlisted him as one of Israel's commanders.

The Bible records that Joshua was the son of Nun. However, we are told very little about Nun except that he and Joshua were descendents of Ephraim. Thus Joseph, the Prime Minister of Egypt, was one of Joshua's significant forefathers. Knowing the background helps us understand Moses' choice and God's big picture plan for the Israelites.

God had designed His plan well. Joshua didn't suddenly appear on God's scene as an untried, undisciplined and released slave. No, here was a man descended from the most prominent Hebrew in the Egyptian nation and trained for success. An experienced leader and yet one who recognised both human and divine authority. Someone who would not react spontaneously or without deliberation but strategised each situation he faced.

Joshua knew Moses well and trusted his judgment and plans. No doubt, both of them would have discussed the campaign in some detail before Joshua led his troops into battle. However, Moses' comments must have seemed a little strange to a military commander: *"I will climb to the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."*

Nevertheless, Joshua set out to fight the Amalekites. I'm sure Joshua would remember how effective Moses' rod had been in the past. God used it to demonstrate His power during the challenging negotiations with Pharaoh. God used it again when the people were caught between the charging Egyptian chariots and the impregnable Red Sea. On this occasion, however, it was Joshua in the front line hoping God would grant him success.

On face value, the whole incident seems rather bizarre. It was the Hebrews' first land war. Joshua led the troops into battle while Moses looked on from a high point and at a very safe distance. While Moses raised his rod in his hand, Joshua and his troops prevailed. When Moses' arms were lowered, the Amalekites prevailed. Fortunately, Aaron and Hur had accompanied Moses up the hill and recognised the volatility of the battle. As soon as Moses' arms drooped, Aaron and Hur would raise them up again. Eventually, they had to find a rock for Moses to sit on so that they could sustain the position. What was that all about?

Moses' posture was the normal posture for prayer to God. Eyes open, head back and arms raised towards Heaven. As Moses interceded for Joshua and the people of Israel, God answered in

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victory. As Moses relaxed, got faint or weary, the tide of the battle would turn against Joshua.

Sometimes, after praying for a while, we may become discouraged or tired, especially when the breakthrough seems so far away. We need to remember that God puts people in our lives to stand with us and support us in our times of need. I believe God wants us to appreciate that corporate prayer is necessary for the bigger victories. Jesus Himself encourages us to pray with others as well as on our own.

Joshua would say to us today...

I remember that battle. I remember the ebb and flow. I knew when Moses was prevailing in prayer and when he was tiring. I'm so glad Aaron and Hur understood the importance of corporate prayer. For you to win on earth you must petition the Lord in Heaven.

Prayer

Father, thank You that You answer our prayers. Thank You for giving us friends who can pray for us and with us about the big things in life. Thank You that You provide the breakthrough. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Judges 6:1-10
- 1 Samuel 15:1-23
- 1 Chronicles 4:24-43
- Matthew 18:19-20

Questions

1. What are the 'Amalekites' in your life?
2. How important is corporate prayer to you?
3. What is going on in your life right now that requires others to support you in prayer?

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Lesson 2 – Joshua – Revealed as Moses' assistant

Reading: Exodus 24:1-18

In this passage of Scripture, we read that God invited Moses, Aaron and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, along with seventy of Israel's leaders into His presence. Amazingly, Scripture records that they actually saw God and something of His awesome majesty. They saw God, they ate and drank in His presence and yet did not die.

However, it would appear that they had seen God from a distance because Moses was later invited to go up the mountain – to be closer to God. At this point, Aaron, his sons and the elders had to stay back whereas Moses went on up the mountain. Nevertheless, Moses didn't go alone. He had his aide, Joshua, with him.

What an amazing man Joshua must have been. As we saw last time, he grew up in Egypt and was probably a soldier in Pharaoh's army, if not a commander. Moses appointed Joshua the commander of the Israelite army and he won a major offensive against the Amalekites. Here, however, we find another side to his relationship with Moses. Moses chose him to be his aide.

That role would have been very much like a servant. Joshua's role was to minister to Moses' needs. So Joshua, in effect, became Moses' servant or slave. Joshua would have surrendered all his rights as the commander-in-chief of Israel's army – to become the servant of Moses, with no rights, but with the awesome responsibility of looking after Moses and making sure he had all he needed, wanted or requested.

The fact that they were well acquainted, even friends, would not have diminished the significance of the change in their relationship. And yet, we do not read of any jealousy or regret in Joshua's attitude. Joshua was and remained a man of integrity, humility and meekness. This was just the beginning of a new era in their relationship. If anything, Joshua was to become closer to Moses and, at the same time, closer to God.

We read later in Exodus that whenever Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to converse with God, Joshua was also there. Furthermore, after Moses met with God and returned to reveal to the people what God had said, Joshua remained at the Tent of Meeting. The inference is that Joshua would probably have heard both sides of the conversation – all of what Moses said to God and how God responded. No doubt he would have pondered all in his mind and acquired much Godly wisdom.

So often we want to be out fighting the enemy, when what God wants us to do is to serve others and thereby hear the heartbeat of our Heavenly Father. Why is it we think that unless we are in the spotlight; unless we are active and 'achieving' something, we are guilty of wasting our time. We forget that God is outside of time and sees a much bigger picture than our puny desires.

Joshua shows us the importance of being content wherever God wants us to be, to be the person God wants us to be and to serve the people God has provided for us to minister to. Yes, it may seem unimportant and insignificant, but God often uses these times as the training ground for greater service and, above all else, allows us the privilege of spending more time with Him.

So don't rush to be busy – relax and be refreshed in the presence of God and learn the most significant things of eternity.

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Joshua would say to us today...

One of the greatest privileges in life is to be a servant of a servant of God. I learned from the best. I walked with Moses, fought with Moses, talked with Moses and lived with Moses. I saw how he dealt with the people of Israel and interceded for them whenever they rebelled against God. He had one vision only and that was to serve the living God. He taught me well and prepared me for what was to come and, at the same time, I got to know God a whole lot better.

Prayer

Father, thank You for the examples of servant leadership that we read of in the Bible. Please help me learn to serve others, especially those You have called to lead Your church. Amen.

Additional Readings

1 Kings 19: 19 – 21; 2 Kings 4: 17 – 37; Jeremiah 36: 1 – 21

Questions

1. Why do we find it difficult to serve others?
2. What are the characteristics of a servant of God?
3. Who are you serving and who are you training up to follow you (and Jesus)?

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Lesson 3 – Joshua – Was not involved with the golden calf rebellion

Reading: Exodus 32:1-20

Six weeks is a long time. It's a long time to be without a strong and charismatic leader. It may seem almost an eternity when you are in a desert place and just waiting for the instructions to move on. I think we gloss over the challenge it must have been for the Israelites who were definitely outside their comfort zone, in foreign territory. They must have missed Moses, the one they totally relied on for physical direction and moral leadership.

I think we also fail to empathise with the Hebrews, who last saw Moses in the distance, climbing up the mountain and disappearing into a cloud, knowing that they were forbidden from following because of the threat of death if they did. No doubt, many days had passed when the people demanded some answers from Aaron. We can assume the people were in an unstable and emotional state.

Surely, Aaron should have known better. How could a priest, especially the High Priest, be so weak and ready to compromise so quickly? Had Aaron not been with Moses, all the way through the head-on battle with Pharaoh? Had he not seen Moses lift his staff over the Red Sea, so the people could pass over on dry land, and the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh's army? Aaron would have witnessed Moses heal the water at Marah and produce water from the rock in the Desert of Sin. They all had been eating God's miraculous daily supply of manna and quails, so how could he condone the people's demand for an idol?

What could possibly have got into Aaron's brain to enable him to deny God, the Creator of the world whom he represented on earth? How could Aaron entertain the idea of making an idol when all it represented was a lie? Why, of all metals, would he choose to make it out of gold, and why the symbol of Egypt when they had been slaves in that terrible country? None of it makes sense, does it?

Aaron told the people to bring their gold earrings to him so he could melt them down and make into the shape of a calf. Worse still, he allowed them to cry out to the molten calf as if it was a god. Worst of all, Aaron set the following day apart as a festival to the Lord. What on earth was Aaron thinking? How could he sink so morally low by allowing the people to conduct themselves in the most despicable way?

Joshua was completely fooled. Having enjoyed the presence of God, along with Moses, his thoughts were still on true godly worship. When he heard the people shouting, his immediate thought was that they were fighting a battle.

However, as soon as Moses saw the calf and the dancing, he immediately saw through their duplicity and remonstrated with Aaron. Moses must have been totally bewildered by Aaron's pathetic excuse. Aaron suggested that the people had brought their jewellery to him, he had thrown it into the fire and out the golden calf appeared. How ridiculous was that!

Thank the Lord, we have the evidence of Scripture that Joshua was totally innocent of this debacle. No, Joshua was with Moses on the mount, supporting Moses and in the presence of God. So when God eventually called Joshua to lead the people, we know that he had not been tainted by the golden calf rebellion.

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Joshua would say to us today...

I could not believe it. God had delivered us from Egypt; He had helped us miraculously escape from Pharaoh's army and provided sustenance in the form of water, manna and quails; He had helped defeat our enemies and yet when Moses and I were up on the mountain for six weeks with God, our people abandoned their faith and coerced Aaron into making a golden calf idol. I was not the least surprised when Moses threw the stone tablets to the ground in frustration. Our faith in God has to be all encompassing or we will revert to the ways of the world around us.

Prayer

Father, thank you for keeping Joshua away from the golden calf debacle. As Jesus taught us to pray – please lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one, for Your Name's sake, Amen.

Additional Readings

- Matthew 6:5-13
- Ephesians 6:10-18
- James 4:1-10

Questions

1. Why do you think Aaron gave in to the request for the golden calf?
2. How do we protect ourselves from being deceived by the enemy?
3. How important is it, do you think, that Joshua was not part of the golden calf debacle?

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Lesson 4 – Joshua – Spied out Canaan

Reading: Numbers 13:1–14:11

God told Moses to send men to spy out the land of Canaan. One from “*each ancestral tribe*” (each of the sons of Jacob). However, we discover that the names of two of Jacob’s sons are missing – Levi and Joseph. Joseph was replaced by Ephraim and Manasseh. Levi was missing from the list because God had declared that the Levites would never own land; they belonged to God and He would provide for them.

We also find that the representative of Ephraim was called Hoshea, and we are told that Moses named him, Joshua. (Other renderings include Oshea, Jehoshua and Jesus – all incorporate the English meaning of salvation.)

Moses gave the men some fairly explicit instructions for their mission: from the geographic coverage, the examination of the land and soil, the observation of the people and their cities to the cataloguing of trees and fruit and the requirement to return with samples of the produce.

The exploration took about six weeks. The men returned with their eye-witness account and brought back some grapes, pomegranates and figs. The description of the bunch of grapes defies our imagination. Just a single cluster, which had to be draped over a pole and borne by two men. Interestingly, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism uses this picture as its logo today – two men walking with a pole over their shoulders, draped with a huge bunch of grapes (coloured red on a white background).

The spies returned to Moses and the people of Israel, and reported what they had seen. They initially agreed that the land was flowing with milk and honey, and proudly showed off their prize. However, they discouraged the people when they went on to describe the inhabitants as giants and invincible.

Caleb immediately tried to counter their argument and encouraged the people to set out at once, in obedience to the Lord’s command. But he was overruled, as the other men reinforced their report by adding that the local inhabitants were so large they felt like grasshoppers in comparison, and that they undoubtedly looked like grasshoppers to the Canaanites.

The people accepted the majority view, became despondent and desperate enough to want to choose another leader and return to Egypt. Moses and Aaron humbled themselves before the people. Again, Joshua and Caleb addressed the people and encouraged them to change their minds, and to understand that because God was on their side, He would provide the victory. Joshua and Caleb also challenged them not to rebel but to be obedient. However, the community resolutely rejected their advice. They refused to follow and were about to stone Joshua and Caleb when God’s glory appeared at the Tent of Meeting.

Yes, God vindicated Joshua and Caleb, and yet both men still had to wander in the desert for forty years – until the rest of the people died and a new generation was invited to enter the Promised Land.

We, Christians, have been given spiritual blessings far greater than the Israelites. Yet, so often we don’t enter the Promised Land God has given to us through Jesus Christ. Today, God is challenging us to enter His Promised Land, through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit, and to enjoy eternal life now whilst we are still on earth.

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Joshua would say to us today...

I shall never forget that first visit. The amazing contrast between the desert and the fertile land of Canaan was immense – Caleb and I could hardly believe our eyes. The enormity of the privilege of seeing the land we would eventually call home never left us. As you know, we returned to the rebellion of our people and the disappointment of being unable to go straight into the Promised Land. Nevertheless, the sure hope of our destiny drove us ever onwards to final victory. We all face frustrations and defeat; it's how we respond to those pressures that matters in the end. Trust the promises of God – they never fail.

Prayer

Father, thank You so much for the record of Joshua and Caleb's visit to spy out the Promised Land. Thank You for their example of faith. Please help me to trust You as they did, rather than submit to the obstacles in front of me or the doubts of unbelievers. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Matthew 17:14-22
- 2 Corinthians 1:18-22
- 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Questions

1. How do you think Joshua felt when they returned with the men carrying that huge bunch of grapes?
2. Why do you think the ten spies brought back a bad report?
3. How do you think Joshua felt after the decision was made not to enter the Promised Land?

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Lesson 5 – Joshua – Succeeded Moses as Israel's leader

Reading: Numbers 27:12-23

The time arrived for Moses to pass on the baton. He was an old man – 120 years old. He had virtually accomplished everything that God wanted him to do, and his successor was ready. Yes, the time may have been earlier than God had initially intended, since God told Moses that it was because of his and Aaron's disobedience over the second 'water from the rock' incident that disqualified Moses from leading the people into the Promised Land. However, we know that Moses was still in very good health. He was considered the meekest person to have ever walked the face of the earth and was still God's chosen servant.

Consequently, God, in His mercy, allowed Moses the opportunity to go and see the land from a distance. Moses climbed up Mt Nebo and, from there, saw Israel's inheritance.

We learn from both Moses and David that it is possible for the most ardent followers of God to blow it, be forgiven and yet, at the same time, be required to live with the consequences of their actions. If was true for them, it should hold true for us, too. We need to constantly guard against pride, impetuosity and carnality. We must live in obedience to God and flow with the desires of His Spirit.

Once Moses realised the implications of what God had said, he cried out to God to find a suitable replacement shepherd for the people. I wonder why Moses didn't recognise Joshua as suitable. Joshua was his victorious commanding officer, his aide and confidant, and the one God was obviously training up to succeed him, but it seems Moses had missed the point! How often leaders miss their obvious successor, standing right in front of their eyes. The best person is often the one from within rather than one from outside.

God had to instruct Moses to appoint Joshua. In the presence of Eleazar the priest, Moses lay his hands on Joshua and commissioned him in front of the people, thus demonstrably activating the succession. The 'ceremony' had a three-fold significance: 1) it was physical – demonstrated by declaring the transfer of the leadership, 2) it was emotional, with Moses laying his hands of blessing and approval upon Joshua, and 3) it was spiritual – in that God, through Moses, commissioned Joshua and consequently, *"Joshua... was filled with the spirit of wisdom."*

Even after Joshua was appointed, the people, no doubt, still recognised Moses as their greatest prophet who ever lived. This is because Moses was the one God chose to rescue the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt.

One of the hardest things Christian leaders have to do is handle their succession well. Whether it is in Christian ministry or the Church, many mistakes or failed attempts have been made. It's particularly difficult when the pioneers and visionaries have to try and let go. I'm sure it was not easy for Moses.

However, God is a God of order, not chaos. He can plan ahead and we need to remember that. We are finite and often want all the answers before we will take action. God wants us to walk with Him day by day and to trust Him for and with the future.

Our role, as leaders, is to look out for and discern our successors, help prepare them for the responsibilities of office, then release them into the role and trust the future to God. After all, it's God's Kingdom, not ours.

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Joshua would say to us today...

I had a bit of a shock when Moses told me that God said that he would not enter Canaan and would die very soon. It was even more awesome to learn why. However, I was so grateful to the Lord and Moses for presenting me to the people. I was very touched when Moses lay his hands on me and, along with Eleazar the priest, prayed and commissioned me into leadership.

Prayer

Father, thank You for being the eternal God. Thank You for caring about the future as much as You do the past. Thank You for caring about our families, our churches and our communities, and for looking for the right people to be the next generation of leaders. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Deuteronomy 34:9
- 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- 2 Kings 2:1-14
- Acts 13:1-3
- 2 Timothy 2:1-7

Questions

1. How important is it to prepare our successor?
2. What are you doing to prepare the next generation of Jesus' followers?
3. What are some of the challenges we face following after great leaders?

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Lesson 6 – Joshua – Commissioned by God

Reading: Joshua 1:1-18

The people mourned Moses' passing for a month and didn't move from their camp in Moab. When the time of mourning was over, God approached Joshua and reminded him that he was to lead the people across the River Jordan and into the Promised Land of Canaan.

Just imagine how Joshua must have been feeling. Yes, he and Caleb had spied out the land. However, that was now forty years ago. They were forced to wander around and around in the desert all that time, because of the disobedience of the people and the other spies. Joshua and Caleb had witnessed the death of all those people. I'm sure it would have been a very bitter-sweet experience. Every step would have been one step towards their destiny. However, like a marathon race, it was only in the last few paces that the reality of the prize became more visible and finally attainable.

Even then, the prospect had been clouded by Moses' death. The death 'sentence' was hard enough. Nevertheless, the physical burial of Moses' body brought an end to one of the most amazing periods in Israel's history – the miraculous escape from the tyranny of Egypt and the equally miraculous protection and provision of God throughout their wilderness journey.

Moses, the almost super human leader, was dead. Joshua's mentor and friend – the one Joshua looked up to for counsel, direction and wisdom had now gone. The full weight of the responsibility of being the leader of the people was now bearing down upon his shoulders. I think Joshua would have been quite happy to stay in Moab for a lot longer, don't you?

It was almost as if God had to break into Joshua's grief with a jolt. *"Moses, my servant is dead."* Hello, Joshua. I don't know if you have noticed but Moses is gone. He is no longer here. He is dead and he's not coming back. Your job is to get up and get going.

Even so, the Lord graciously repeated to Joshua the promise He had given to Moses. *"I will give you every place where you set your foot."* What an awe-inspiring promise. God added, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you or forsake you."*

That was not all. God went on to encourage Joshua that not only would He be with Joshua but He guaranteed that Joshua would lead the people into the land. Yes, God also challenged Joshua to hold fast to God's word and the law that He had entrusted to Moses. God promised He would grant Joshua prosperity and success if Joshua observed His law.

Joshua responded at once and gave the people notice of departure. He told them to get everything ready, as they were going to cross the River Jordan in three days' time. That was to become the beginning of the Promised Land Campaign, when they realised their destiny.

Joshua also gathered the leaders of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Mannaseh together. They were the ones who had asked Moses if they could stay in the Trans-Jordan area of the Promised Land. Joshua reminded them that the condition of their settling in that area was dependent upon the men leaving their wives and children behind and crossing the Jordan in order to help their fellow countrymen realise their new inheritance. Only when their brothers had received their inheritance would these men be allowed to return to their families.

I'm sure Joshua was very relieved when the leaders totally agreed with those conditions. Moreover,

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they pledged their unequivocal support to Joshua and encouraged him to be strong and courageous.

When God anoints and appoints, He always delivers.

Joshua would say to us today...

Following a pioneer leader is not easy. However, by the grace of God, the Lord prepared me for the role. When I took over, Moses had died, and the Lord empowered me and honoured me in front of the people. I never demanded that the people follow me – I followed the Lord and He did the rest.

Prayer

Father, thank You for great leaders. Thank You for the ones we read about in the Bible and thank You for the ones we see today. Help us to follow You by following them and honouring them. Amen

Additional Readings

- Exodus 3:1-14
- 1 Kings 3:5-14
- 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Questions

1. What are the challenges people face following a pioneer leader?
2. Why is it so important to wait for God to appoint a leader?
3. What are the benefits we get when appointed by God?

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Lesson 7 – Joshua – Crossed the Jordan

Reading: Joshua 3:1-17

The Exodus from Egypt was miraculous. The crossing of the Red Sea was miraculous. The provision of water in the desert was miraculous and the daily provision of Manna was miraculous. The God of the Hebrews – Moses' God – was a miracle-working God.

However, the question remained: how long would God carry on providing miracles? Moses was dead and a new era was ushered in. The people would have a second opportunity to be obedient to God's command and enter the Promised Land. However, in order to do so, they would have to cross the River Jordan, which was rising to its peak at this time.

Nevertheless, God instructed Joshua to get the people ready to cross the river in three days' time. Joshua told the people to consecrate themselves, to get spiritually prepared for what God had in store for them. They were to follow the priests, their spiritual leaders, because, as Joshua told them, they were going to be led in a direction and a way they had never been led before. It would require a new level of faith and obedience.

Joshua had some specific but strange instructions for the priests. Their job was to carry the Ark of the Covenant in front of the people towards the river. The people were only allowed to follow at a distance of about a thousand metres. Once the priests reached the river bank, although the river was in flood, Joshua commanded them to walk on into the water. God had assured Joshua that the water would dry up as soon as the feet of the priests touched the river.

Joshua had to believe he had heard God right and to trust Him. The priests had to trust Joshua's directions. We can imagine how the priests felt as they neared the flowing river. It must have taken determination and considerable courage to descend from the river bank into the river. And yet, as soon as they did, we are told the river stopped flowing from up stream. In fact, it seemed to flow in the opposite direction and, as with the Red Sea, the water piled up into a heap so the people could cross over on dry land. The priests remained in the middle of the river with the Ark of the Covenant until all the people had crossed over.

This was the first demonstration of God honouring Joshua as He had honoured Moses. He was confirming that He had chosen Joshua as their new leader and that He expected the people to follow Joshua and his instructions – just as God had expected the people to follow and obey Moses in the past.

I'm sure Joshua was very relieved that the priests and all the people had followed his instructions. However, I am even more certain that when the River Jordan stopped flowing, so that the priests didn't drown and the people were able to get across without getting their feet wet, Joshua would have been ready to hug the priests and dance before the Lord! What a fantastic sense of relief and release Joshua must have felt. I suspect he would have also felt extremely humble.

No doubt through this experience, Joshua realised that not only had he understood God's instructions correctly but God had performed another miracle – not only to facilitate their entrance into the Promised Land but also to establish Joshua as God's appointed leader for His people.

Just as God was totally faithful to Moses, God was establishing His faithfulness to Joshua. God's character is totally consistent, and His love and grace are unconditional.

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Joshua would say to us today...

Miracles always follow obedience. There is no substitute for waiting for God's instructions and then carrying them out, even if the directions from God seemed extraordinary on first hearing. A life of obedience is a life of challenge and excitement.

Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us the record of the Hebrews crossing the River Jordan. It is just one more example of Your amazing grace and miraculous power. Thank You that we can know and trust You, just as Joshua did. Please help me to remember that with You nothing is impossible and that, even today, miracles still follow obedience. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Exodus 14:10-28
- Matthew 14:22-33
- John 6:35-40

Questions

1. Why do you think God dried up the Jordan as He had the Red Sea?
2. Why was it necessary for the priests to actually touch the water?
3. What is the next step of obedience you need to take?

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Lesson 8 – Joshua – Met the Commander of the Lord's armies

Reading: Joshua 5:1-15

The Israelites had finally crossed the River Jordan and entered the environs of the Promised Land. Yes, they had managed to cross on dry land because God had performed another miracle and caused the river to cease flowing.

It was similar to their leaving Egypt when God dried up the Red Sea. However, this time there were no enemy soldiers or chariots, Egyptians or otherwise, who were drowned when the water returned to its normal level. Nevertheless, when all the local tribes and kings heard what had happened, they were filled with fear and lost all their courage to fight with the people of Israel.

The Israelites pitched camp at Gilgal and it was there that the Lord instructed Joshua to circumcise all the men. All the fighting men who had left Egypt had been circumcised but they were now dead because of their disobedience in the desert. Those who had been born since leaving Egypt hadn't been circumcised and so this was rectified at Gilgal. God mercifully allowed the people time to heal before they were commanded to move on.

Circumcision was a physical sign that they were God's chosen people. Before the Promised Land Campaign began, it was important that they identified themselves as the people of God. Additionally, God used it as a sign that He had forgiven them and would treat them as if they had just left Egypt in total obedience to God's commands.

Miraculously, the Manna stopped as soon as the people ate the unleavened bread and roasted grain in Gilgal in the Land of Canaan. That miracle food that God had ceaselessly provided for their complete desert journey stopped as soon as they were able to eat the food of the Promised Land – one miracle giving way to another less spectacular. All food comes from God and the produce the people ate from Canaan was food they hadn't planted or tended. It was food God had prepared in advance, in His grace, for His people to eat.

Before the people were told to advance, Joshua decided to reconnoitre the area and, in particular, the land in front of Jericho, in preparation for their attack. However, as he neared the city, Joshua met a Man with a drawn sword in his hand. (Some theologians suggest that the Man was an Old Testament manifestation of Jesus.) Whoever it was: man, angel or Jesus, Joshua wisely asked him whose side he was on. Joshua didn't want to be found fighting a friend, although his question suggests he was ready to fight if the wrong answer was given!

I love the Man's answer. *"Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come."* I also love Joshua's response. As the stoic commander of Israel's army, he didn't reply: "Yeah right, and where is this so-called army of yours? I can't see any of them." Which may well have been true. On the contrary, Joshua wisely responded by reverently sinking to his knees. With his head bowed as low as he could, Joshua asked the Man for advice. Whereupon the Man told Joshua to take off his sandals as the place he was standing on was holy ground. That reminds me of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. Moses had to remove his sandals, as he found he was also standing on holy ground, when he received instructions from God to lead the people out of Egypt.

However, what impresses me the most is the implication of what the Commander of the Lord's Army said. In reality, He was saying, "I'm not here to take sides – I'm here to take over." "It's my

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battle, not yours.” No doubt, Joshua was hoping he would win the battle of Jericho – now he knew without a shadow of doubt.

Joshua would say to us today...

Always make sure you only fight your enemies. Stop, and take a deep breath, before starting a fight or you may find yourself doing battle with a friend.

Prayer

Thank You, Father, for recording for us how Joshua dealt with that awesome meeting. Please help me to be more and more sensitive to the Holy Spirit so that I am able to accurately discern right from wrong and friends from enemies. For Your Name's sake. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Judges 6:11-23
- Acts 9:1-19
- Revelation 19:11-16

Questions

1. How do we stop having quarrels with those we love?
2. How can we avoid conflicts within the church?
3. What are the battles we should be engaged in?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 9 – Joshua – Conquered Jericho

Reading: Joshua 6:1-27

The initial battle of the Promised Land campaign was not only a resounding success, but also a test of humility and obedience. God tested both Joshua and the entire people, including the priests.

I wonder what the priests thought when Joshua issued them with the battle plan for the capture of Jericho. Having suffered the ignominy of having to carry the Ark into the waters of the River Jordan, I wouldn't be surprised if they had thought the idea of walking around the enemy's city, blowing trumpets without actually engaging the enemy in warfare, was a recipe for disaster. Nevertheless, they obeyed all of Joshua's commands.

Joshua received the battle plan directly from God. It probably seemed as bizarre as the directions he received for crossing the River Jordan. However, by this time, Joshua had learned a few things about God – the biggest lesson was to trust Him, regardless of how unconventional His instructions might seem.

Joshua had to command his army to provide an armed guard to march in front of and behind the seven priests holding trumpets and the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. The people were to follow on from behind. The whole company would walk around the city once a day for six days. There was to be no sound, except that made by the seven trumpets. The people had to walk in total silence.

Just imagine being one of the people inside Jericho. They had been expecting an Israeli attack for forty years. They knew spies had recently re-visited the city, made a search and escaped. Worse still, those sent to apprehend the spies had been unsuccessful. The people of Jericho also learned how God had dried up the River Jordan so the Israelites could cross over on dry land.

By now they could see the Israelites in the distance. The leaders of the city had barricaded their people and forbidden them to leave. Fear had seized everyone. No doubt, even Rahab and her family were anxious. Would they be killed as traitors by the people of Jericho? Would the Israeli spies honour their promise? They would find out soon enough, but the wait would have been nail-biting.

On the seventh day, the Israeli army, the priests and the entire Israeli population walked around the city once more. However, the instructions for the seventh day were different. Yes, they would make the normal circumnavigation; however, they would have to repeat it for another five times. At the end of the seventh circuit, the priests were told to blow one long trumpet blast. At the same time, the people were to give a shout, releasing all their pent-up emotion and praise to God.

Immediately, there was a sound of crumbling masonry and the walls of the city fell flat to the ground. The Israelis, led by their armed forces, charged into the city and completely destroyed all the people and every living creature. None escaped.

No, actually a certain prostitute, called Rahab, and her family escaped death. They were the sole survivors. Yes, the spies had told Joshua of the promise they made to Rahab. God honoured Rahab for hiding the spies and her request for salvation. The family was led to safety and lived happily with the Israelites from then on. Matthew records, in the genealogy of Joseph, that Rahab became the mother of Boaz, who married the Moabitess, Ruth.

Joshua uttered a curse over Jericho, discouraging anyone from ever trying to rebuild it. Some have

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tried with disastrous results. Even today, Jericho is largely in ruins, except for the refugee camps. The Promised Land campaign had started with a vengeance.

Joshua would say to us today...

God is not only a God of miracles, He is also a God of surprises. Whether you are an 'ordinary' follower of the Lord or made a commander in His army, be sure you carefully follow His instructions every time because He is a creative God. Moreover, a life of obedience to God is the most exciting and exhilarating existence you can ever know.

Prayer

Father, I never cease to be amazed at Your creativity when helping Your leaders of the past secure a victory. Please help me to remember that You specialise in the extraordinary and miraculous, and to trust You in every circumstance of life, knowing that Your way is perfect. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Judges 7:9-22
- 2 Chronicles 20:14-30
- Hebrews 11: 30-31

Questions

1. How did Joshua win the battle of Jericho?
2. Why did Rahab survive?
3. How do you think the people of Israel felt when the walls of Jericho fell down?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 10 – Joshua – Dealt with deceit and covetousness

Reading: Joshua 7:1-26

I'm sure the people of Israel would have been on a huge high after defeating the people of Jericho; the taste of victory would have been very sweet and exhilarating.

Joshua and the commanders wanted to press their advantage as soon as possible and quickly shifted their focus to Ai. Joshua sent out spies for up-to-date intelligence and they reported back what he expected. There was no need for everyone to be involved in this 'minor' exercise. Just a small detachment of soldiers would suffice. And so it should have been.

Joshua sent three thousand soldiers, expecting the conflict to be over in no time. However, as his men engaged in battle, they encountered unexpected, fierce and determined opposition. So heavy was the fighting that they were completely routed by the men of Ai and sustained about 36 fatalities. The soldiers returned from their beating, defeated and despondent.

When Joshua heard their story and saw the soldiers' desperation and its devastating effect on the people, he tore his clothes and prostrated himself in front of the Ark of the Covenant. Joshua poured out his heartfelt complaints to God. The elders followed his example.

Interestingly, God challenged Joshua to rise up again, as the reason the army lost the battle was not strategy related but rather a result of disobedience within the Israeli camp. God told Joshua that someone had disobeyed His instructions. They had stolen some of the items that should have been placed in the Lord's treasury. God explained that until the issue was dealt with, the people would not be able to secure any more victories. They had to be honest with God or He would no longer go before them in battle.

God instructed Joshua to have the people stand before him in the morning. He would then reveal the culprit to Joshua through a process of elimination. God also warned that the convict should be burned along with all that he owned.

The following morning, Joshua followed the Lord's commands and eventually Achan was discovered. Achan owned up to his disobedience. His tent was searched and the offending items retrieved and displayed for the entire company to see.

Achan, the stolen items, his sons and daughters, all their animals and even his tent were taken into the Valley of Achor and there the people stoned Achan to death. They stoned his entire family and set everything on fire. Once the fire died down, the people covered all the remains with a large pile of rocks, which became a monument to this terrible incident in their history. Once the sentence was fully executed, God allowed their relationship with Him to be restored.

This story is often used as the basis for what we call a witch-hunt. Something goes wrong in our lives or ministry or in our church, and everyone is presumed guilty until proven innocent. It can be a cause of unnecessary pain and guilt.

Yes, we are right to examine ourselves when troubles come. However, we also need to understand that life is full of struggles and not all struggles are caused directly by the 'sin in our life'. Paul reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus once we have been forgiven. God convicts us when we do something wrong so we can confess it, seek His forgiveness and move on. Only the enemy condemns us so we remain guilty and defeated.

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Joshua would say to us today...

It is very unwise to be deceitful with God. God is omniscient and omnipresent; He knows and sees everything. I had to discern the reason for our defeat. Then I had to publicly expose the error, pass the judgement and carry out the sentence in order for our relationship with God to be restored. In leadership, it is advisable to avoid procrastination over moral decisions you have to make. Deal with them, however painful they may be, and then move on.

Prayer

Father, thank You for not treating us as our sins deserve but showering us with Your mercy. Thank You for warning us, however, that You are a righteous Judge and, rather than overlooking sin, You deal with it. Thank You so much for allowing Jesus to bear the punishment for my sin on the Cross. Amen.

Additional Readings

- 2 Samuel 12:1-23
- 2 Kings 5:15-27
- Acts 5:1-21

Questions

1. Why do you think God was so hard on Achan?
2. Why did Achan's sinful action have implications for the whole nation of Israel?
3. How does God deal with sin today?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 11 – Joshua – the miracle of the sun standing still

Reading: Joshua 10:1-15

It doesn't necessarily make you the most popular person on the block just because you follow the Lord's will for your life. Joshua was obedient to what God had told him to do but the enemies of God decided to fight back.

Yes, Joshua won the battle of Jericho through a mighty miracle of God. However, that was closely followed by the humiliating defeat of the army at Ai. Joshua had to discern the reason for the huge set-back and discovered Achan had stolen some of the treasures earmarked for God. Once Joshua had dealt with the disobedience, he was able to lead the people to victory over Ai.

Having finally destroyed Ai, as the Lord commanded, Joshua proceeded to read the Law to all the people. He read both the blessings and the curses, whilst half of the people stood before Mt Gerizim and the other half stood in front of Mt Ebal.

Just when it seemed the people were finally walking in obedience to God's instructions, the kings of the surrounding nations decided to band together to make war against Joshua and the people of Israel. The people of Gibeon, however, decided to try and make a peace treaty with Joshua. Unfortunately, they managed to deceive Joshua. They pretended that they lived a very long way away and had come to make peace. In reality, they were neighbours who didn't want to be eliminated like everyone else. Joshua was fooled by their ruse and consequently entered into covenant with them, against God's command.

Although Joshua was angry once he learned the truth, he felt obliged to honour the Treaty he had made. Instead of killing the people because of their dishonesty, Joshua made them forced labourers, as water carriers and wood-cutters.

Learning that the Gibeonites had entered a peace treaty with Joshua, Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem and four of the other Canaanite kings attacked Gibeon. That was because Gibeon was one of the largest cities and its people were accomplished fighters.

Naturally, the people of Gibeon cried out to Joshua for help. So, once more, Joshua had to lead his army into war. The Lord encouraged Joshua to fight the battle, as He had promised He would hand all of the enemies over to Joshua and his people. Nevertheless, Joshua had to lead his troops in an all-night march to reach the battle-ground. This took the enemy by complete surprise.

God added confusion to the surprise. Joshua and his men routed their enemies everywhere they fled. Furthermore, God rained down huge hailstones on the enemy. In fact, more enemy soldiers died from being hit by hailstones than from being killed by the Israelites' swords.

However, the hailstones were not the only evidence of God working a miracle on that day. Standing in front of his entire army, Joshua prayed to the Lord that the sun would stand still during the battle. History records that, from mid-day, the sun did indeed stand still for about a full day.

Just imagine that. God responded to Joshua's request by a miracle of creation. Today, we would probably say the earth stopped in its orbit for 24 hours. Whichever way we describe it, the fact remains that God performed a miracle in the cosmos. No-one had ever seen anything like it before and God performed it for a Jew. As the Bible records for us – *Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel.*

Lessons From the People of the Bible

As I remember the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, I think God was then fighting for Israel too. God still loves His people and will, when necessary, still fight miraculously for them.

Joshua would say to us today...

A life of obedience to God is not easy. However, it is the most exhilarating, challenging, fulfilling and rewarding life any human being can experience. It is in obedience that you will see God perform amazing miracles. Do try it.

Prayer

Father, I am so glad that you care about the big things I face as well as the small things. Please help me to remember that nothing I face today is too difficult for You to handle. Amen.

Additional Readings

- 2 Kings 20:1-11
- Matthew 27:45-56
- Revelation 22:1-6

Questions

1. What are some of the challenges we face when we are people of integrity?
2. How do you think Joshua felt when he got the emergency call from the Gibeonites?
3. Why do you think God answered Joshua's request for the sun and moon to stand still?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 12 – Joshua – Apportioned the Promised Land and allocated Caleb's inheritance

Reading: Joshua 14:6-15

There are aspects about Joshua's life that point us to Jesus. The name 'Joshua' relates to the word, 'salvation' and we know the name 'Jesus' means, *'he will save his people from their sins'*.

Joshua led the Israelites into possession of the Promised Land. God had promised them land wherever they placed their feet. It was for the people to appropriate the promise. God had secured the land for them; the people just had to take over and dwell in it.

Similarly, Jesus leads us into our Promised Land. He has secured it for us. Paul tells us that all the promises of God are ours through Jesus Christ, our Lord. When Jesus died and rose again from the dead, He opened up the way for us to live in victory.

Some people think that Heaven is the Promised Land and yet, as we study Scripture, it suggests otherwise. Whilst Heaven is the destiny for the disciples of Jesus, us Christians, it is not the same as the Promised Land. Yes, Jesus will take us to Heaven and yet nowhere in Scripture do we read we have to fight battles in Heaven. On the contrary, Heaven is a place where there is peace, where there is no suffering, no sickness or pain. The Promised Land that Joshua led the people of Israel into required them to fight all the way from Jericho to Jerusalem and everywhere they were to settle.

Jesus has secured for us the spiritual Promised Land. We gain all that Adam lost. Every promise we read in Scripture becomes ours, as Christians, because we live 'in Christ'. When God says, *"I will be with you"* to Jacob, He is also saying it to us. When God says, *"Don't be afraid"* to Joshua, it is God's promise to us, too.

However, we have to appropriate the promises of God for ourselves. I can't do it for you and you can't do it for anyone else. It requires a personal appropriation. Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land but each tribe had to appropriate the land for themselves. It seems some of them never made it. Indeed, the ten spies who looked over the land first, together with all their peers, died in the desert without ever entering into the blessings of the Promised Land.

The Holy Spirit enables us to live in the spiritual Promised Land every day – if we let Him. We need to appropriate all the spiritual blessings that are released to us through Christ. Paul tells us that God has *"blessed us in the Heavenly realms with every blessing in Christ"*.

Caleb visited the Promised Land forty-five years earlier but was denied his allocation then because of the people's unbelief. Now at eighty-five, Caleb still found it pertinent to ask Joshua for the inheritance that was due him. I am quite convinced Joshua would have had tears in his eyes as he said to Caleb, *"Of course. Go for it. You've earned it; finally it's yours for the taking."*

Scripture records it was one of the most challenging areas to take over. It was hill country and the inhabitants were some of the strongest. However, we read Caleb secured it and *"then the land had rest from war."*

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Joshua would say to us today...

This was one of the easiest and most rewarding jobs I was ever involved with. Caleb was such a man of faith and integrity. He followed the Lord with every breath in his body. Although the challenge before him was the most difficult of all, He knew His God would deliver. I wished all the leaders were as committed as Caleb was.

Prayer

Father, thank you for recording for us the lives of men and women who were prepared to follow You faithfully all their life, even though they have to face difficult and challenging times. Like them, please help me to be faithful to You to the end. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Deuteronomy 1:34-40
- Joshua 15:13-19
- Ephesians 1:3-14

Questions

1. What gave Caleb the determination to finish well?
2. How do we overcome bitterness and defeat, particularly when they are caused by the actions of others and not a result of our own fault?
3. What issues are you facing, which could hinder you from following the Lord wholeheartedly?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 13 – Joshua – Challenged the descendants of Joseph

Reading: Joshua 17:1-18

Whilst Joshua had allocated the Promised Land to the various tribes, it is nevertheless sad to read that, on more than one occasion, the tribes did not fully dislodge the native inhabitants, as commanded by God.

On the other hand, I love the story of Caleb's family. Caleb secured Hebron and, when faced with a particular challenge, offered the hand of his daughter, Acsah, in marriage to the victor. Caleb's nephew, Othniel, obliged and the two were married. However, Acsah was not satisfied with the land they had received because it was not well watered. Acsah asked her father to give her springs of water, in addition to the land. And what Dad could refuse such a request? Caleb therefore gave Acsah the upper and lower springs. I love it, because it suggests to me that she had learned the right attitude from her father. She was as determined as Caleb, and wanted to enjoy her inheritance to the full.

God did not allocate any territory to the Levites because they were called to be God's ministers and His special possession. The Levites were to be provided for by the other tribes. They were eventually allocated cities with surrounding pasture.

Nevertheless, the Promised Land was divided up into twelve allocations; two and a half were Trans-Jordan, and nine and a half were in Canaan. Because Joseph had two sons born to him in Egypt, Jacob considered them his own and gave each an inheritance equal with their uncles. Consequently, although neither Joseph nor Levi was allocated territory, both Ephraim and Manasseh were.

One of Manasseh's descendants, Zelophehad, had no male children but had five daughters. The daughters went to Eleazar the priest, Joshua and the other leaders and reminded them that God had told Moses to allocate land to them, similar to what their cousins would inherit. So Joshua acceded to their request.

Later, when the tribes of Joseph grew in number, they returned to Joshua to ask for an increase in their territory, even though Scripture records that they had not occupied all their towns because they failed to conquer some of the Canaanites. Joshua told them that since they were blessed by God and had become so numerous, they should go and possess their allocated territory.

The leaders responded by saying that they were unable to do so because their hill country wasn't big enough for them and the 'enemy' residing in the plains had iron chariots. They must have thought that God had become impotent and would not be able to overcome the scientific advancement of the opposition. A similar challenge many Christians seem to struggle with today.

Joshua wisely reminded the tribes that they were not only numerous but very powerful and that they should '*stop complaining*' and get on with occupying the territory they had been promised. With God on their side, they were more than capable of defeating their enemies and claiming their inheritance.

Joshua revealed some very important traits required of a leader. On the one hand, Joshua had sympathy for Zelophehad's daughters and so acted counter-culturally and acceded to their request, convinced that it had been confirmed by God. On the other hand, Joshua showed

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considerable resolve by not giving into Joseph's tribes' request, (even though Joshua himself was an Ephraimite) and reminded them of their position in God and encouraged them to appropriate it.

Joshua would say to us today...

A life of faith is one that is lived in the light of the promises of God. Don't look at the circumstances and give up. On the contrary, look at the challenges and expect a miracle. With God all things are possible, period. He cannot fail and He has won the final victory. Our job is to appropriate His victory for ourselves. When in leadership remember that integrity means not showing favouritism to your own friends and family.

Prayer

Father, thank You so much for the fact that I do not have to win the battle. Rather, You have already won it. Thank You that all the promises in the Bible are now mine, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Please help me live in that victory. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Joshua 18:1-10
- 2 Corinthians 1:18-22
- Hebrews 3:12-4:11

Questions

1. Why did Joseph's descendants fail to occupy their inheritance?
2. What was the significance of the iron chariots to them?
3. What are the iron chariots in your life that are hindering you from enjoying the fullness of a life with Christ?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 14 – Joshua – Set up the Cities of Refuge

Reading: Joshua 20:1-9

God's character is unchanging. The God of the Old Testament is the same God of the New Testament. Those who think that the God of the Old Testament was just a vindictive, harsh and judgmental Potentate have a very limited view of the Truth.

The character of the God of the Bible is consistent from Genesis to Revelation. God was, is and will always be righteous, holy and just. Whilst God cannot allow sin in His presence and has to deal with it, nevertheless, He is not willing that anyone should perish. When Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, God put an angel to guard the way to the tree of Life so they would not have to live in their disobedient state forever.

Abraham thought he would give God a hand in fulfilling the promise God had made about giving him a son through Sarah. As Sarah was advancing in years, Abraham tried to propagate his family through Hagar, Sarah's maid. A child, Ishmael, was born. However, he was not the one God had chosen. Nevertheless, God blessed Ishmael and gave him 12 sons.

Jacob stole Esau's birthright but God made Jacob the next patriarch since Jacob was passionate in his devotion to God. Even though Joseph's brothers treated him with jealousy and hatred, nevertheless, God watched over Joseph and eventually fulfilled the dream God had given him as a young man.

Moses murdered an Egyptian and yet God forgave him and chose him to lead His people out of bondage. Miriam was made leprous but forgiven and allowed back into the camp. Indeed, God waited for her to be restored before moving the people on. In each of these events we find God's grace, love and faithfulness.

When God established the cities of refuge, he did so looking forward. The people of Israel had lived as slaves in Egypt, following which they sojourned in the desert for over forty years. Now that they had entered the Promised Land, it would be a whole new experience for them. They would settle in cities, towns and villages with houses and walls made of stone. There was a very real possibility that someone could be killed by falling masonry, through no fault of their own or as intended by the house owner or occupier.

The law demanded that a murderer be put to death by the avenger of the blood of the victim. However, the people were always required to prove that there was intent to kill. This was verified by the actions of the person accused of the murder. In addition, they had to ascertain a motive behind the actions. In other words, any hatred between the accused and the victim had to be established.

If there was no evidence that the accused intended to harm the victim and the victim died accidentally, God provided a way of salvation for the innocent party. The accused could escape to the City of Refuge, pronounce their innocence and the elders would admit them and protect them from their avengers. The 'refugees' would have to stay in the city until their trial and also until the death of the High Priest serving at the time of the incident. Once the High Priest had died, they could return to their own home once more and live in peace.

Joshua set up the six cities of refuge, three on either side of the Jordan. The refuges were open to both Israeli and foreign fugitives – Kedesh in Galilee; Shechem in Ephraim territory; Hebron in

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Judah on the West side of the Jordan, and Bezer, Ramoth and Golan on the East. These cities represented a place of peace, security, hope and life.

Joshua would say to us today...

We all make mistakes and we all need a City of Refuge. The refuges are a picture of God's plan for us. He wants us to run to Him for safety, security, peace, hope, salvation and life.

Prayer

Father, thank You for establishing the Cities of Refuge. Thank You for putting them within reach of everyone. Thank You that they point forward to Jesus. Thank You that Jesus has become my City of Refuge. Amen

Additional Readings

- Numbers 35:6-28
- Deuteronomy 4:41-43
- Hebrews 12:22-24

Questions

1. Who were the cities of refuge designed for?
2. Who, in the New Testament, can be likened to a City of Refuge? How did that happen and why?
3. Who is your city of refuge and why do you need one?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 15 – Joshua – Says farewell

Reading: Joshua 23:1-16

Joshua had a true pastor's heart. Yes, he was a daring spy. Yes, he was a very successful and seasoned military general, and he was also a great civil leader. Yet through it all, he loved the people.

We often find the deepest and longest lasting relationships through times of adversity. Regrettably, today, we all too often run away from conflict, rather than pursuing resolution.

Joshua had seen and experienced it all – the campaigns of the Egyptian army; the plagues; the Passover meal; the crossing of the Red Sea; the drowning of the Egyptian chariots and men, and the final escape from Egypt.

Joshua had witnessed the rebellion of the people of Israel on so many occasions. He was there on the mountain with Moses when Moses received the Ten Commandments. He witnessed the debacle of the Golden Calf and the miraculous supply of water from the rock, and the provision of the Manna and quails. Yes, God's gracious provision of miracle after miracle.

Joshua would have experienced an adrenaline rush from spying out the Promised Land. It must also have been exciting helping to bring back the gigantic cluster of grapes. Joshua would have been overwhelmed by the rejection of his report encouraging the people to enter the Promised Land at once. He had also witnessed Moses interceding for the people.

Yes, Joshua had to wander aimlessly around the desert, waiting for all the disobedient people to die. He had the privilege of receiving the baton of leadership from Moses and was there to mourn Moses' death. Miriam and Aaron had also died and Joshua was left to lead the people. Yes, his old friend Caleb was still there, a reminder of the good times and the promises of God.

Joshua had successfully led the people to conquer Jericho. He had been humiliated at Ai but went on to apportion the Promised Land to the various tribes. He had seen some tribes win many battles and complete their tasks, and witnessed others too timid and faithless to succeed.

He knew what the people were like. He knew that they were fickle and human. He had seen defeat snatched from the jaws of victory. He would have felt disappointment, anger, frustration and desperation, and yet he loved the people and wanted God's best for them. He would have yearned that they would follow God wholeheartedly, like Caleb. He would have longed for the people to inherit the land that God had given them. Joshua passionately desired that the people would fully grasp the privilege that was theirs, as people of God.

All those emotions increased his love for the people. Yes, I'm sure there were times when he would gladly have walked away and left them to their just rewards. However, he couldn't. He was called by God to lead the people. He was mindful that it was God who had provided him the resolve and grace to carry on until the end.

However, when Joshua sensed that the time of his death was near, he called the people around him, as a grandfather would do on his death-bed. He reminded them of God's faithfulness and affirmed that God would continue to expand their inheritance to meet the needs of their growing population. Joshua challenged the people to continue to follow the Book of the Law given by Moses, and to trust and worship God as their only one true God. He warned them of the results of turning away.

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He concluded his impassioned message by reminding them, *“You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”*

Joshua would say to us today...

The followers of God Jehovah, the Creator of the Heavens and Earth, are supposed to experience life to the full. Life that is challenging, exhilarating and fruitful. God always keeps His promises. You can trust Him, just as I did. Go for the best.

Prayer

Father, thank You so much for being a faithful and loving God. Thank You that we can trust You because You always keep Your promises, even if Your timing is not the same as mine. Please help me to be patient and to trust you regardless. Amen.

Additional Readings

- 1 Kings 8:56-61
- Lamentations 3:21-26
- Psalm 136

Questions

1. Why do we often find it hard to trust God?
2. What promises has God fulfilled for you?
3. What promises are you still waiting for God to fulfil?

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Lesson 16 – Joshua – Issues the people a final challenge

Reading: Joshua 24:1-31

Joshua was so passionate about his people that he did all he could to make sure they would continue to follow the Lord well after his death. It was a tall order. Joshua knew how rebellious, self-centred and fickle they were. He had lived through the highs and lows. The highs had been very high – miraculous provision, miraculous protection and miraculous deliverance, time and time again.

However, the lows had been very low, too – the rebellions, the idolatry, the disobedience, the coveting, the waywardness and the incredible lack of faith. His life was one long roller-coaster that never seemed to stop for him to catch a breath.

Yet he loved the people. He knew God loved His people. He knew being obedient to God brought blessing and that disobedience and faithlessness brought humiliation, defeat and curses. Joshua longed to draw the folk around him and empower them to follow God. Yet, he knew it was beyond his capability nor was it God's will, since God has given to each of us a freewill and will not violate our ability to make our own choices.

They were each responsible for their walk with God. However, they were also responsible for their corporate walk with God. Hadn't Joshua witnessed that first hand? When he and Caleb returned from the Promised Land with a good report and encouraged the people to enter straight away, the people rebelled, and had to wander in the desert for forty years because of their disobedience. However, Caleb and Joshua were not allowed to enter the Promised Land without them. Both had to experience the pointless delay. Walking around for forty years when they knew they could have achieved the goal in eleven days. Yes, the rebellious decision affected them too.

Knowing all that, Joshua summoned the people to assemble before him at Shechem. A City of Refuge in Ephraim Territory. There, Joshua delivered his last message from God. It was a reminder of how the Lord had chosen His people. Joshua began with Abraham's father, Terah, and stated how God had led Abraham to Canaan and promised the land to his descendants; how Isaac and Jacob had continued to believe the promise and how Jacob and his sons had gone into Egypt. It was God who had sent Moses and Aaron to bring the people out to their dwelling place. It was God who had given them a land they had not fought for, cities they had not built, and vineyards and olive groves they had not planted.

At this point, Joshua challenged the people not only to serve God faithfully but also to destroy all the gods of the land they were now living in. He emphasised the challenge by saying, *"choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."*

The people responded that they would also serve the Lord, because He was their God. Nevertheless, Joshua challenged them further to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. He was mindful that they were a rebellious and idolatrous nation and warned that God would not forgive their faithlessness. The people responded that they would definitely serve the Lord.

Joshua called the people to account and challenged them to confess that they were witnesses to their decision. This they accepted willingly. Then Joshua told them to rid themselves of idols and consecrate their hearts to God. Joshua set up a stone under an oak tree as an everlasting witness to this event.

Lessons From the People of the Bible

Joshua would say to us today...

Today God is issuing you the same challenge that I gave the people of Israel just before I died. It is the most important question you will ever face. Get the answer to this correct and everything else will fall into its proper perspective. Get it wrong, and you will end up with a wasted life of pain, anguish and guilt. Whom will you serve?

Prayer

Father, I want to serve you wholeheartedly, like Joshua, and yet so often I find myself letting You down or succumbing to doubts. Please help me to keep my eyes fixed on You and eternity, so that I will make wise decisions that honour You everyday. Amen.

Additional Readings

- 1 Kings 18:16-39
- Matthew 27:11-26
- John 7:37-39

Questions

1. Why did Joshua tell the people that they could not serve the Lord?
2. What does it mean, in your culture, to serve the Lord?
3. Are you preparing the next generation to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?