



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 11
JOSHUA**

MARCH 12-18, 2007

DAY	<i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i>	ABBREVIATED STUDY
Monday	Joshua 9-12, Psalm 51	Numbers 14:1-12, Psalm 51
Tuesday	Joshua 13-17, Psalm 52	Joshua 1:1-9, Psalm 52
Wednesday	Joshua 18-19, Psalm 53	Joshua 6, Psalm 53
Thursday	Joshua 20-21, Psalm 54	Joshua 7-8, Psalm 54
Friday	Judges 1-3, Psalm 55	Joshua 23, Psalm 55

READ

Numbers 14:1-12

Psalm 51

REFLECT

This week we look at the figure of Joshua, who was given the responsibility of leading the people of Israel after Moses' death, into the Promised Land. Today we will glance back at the way he is described while working with Moses, and then we will move into the book of Joshua, which gives the account of his conquest of Canaan.

Joshua emerges as a successful military man very soon after Israel crosses through the Red Sea, in the battle with the Amelkites (Ex 17:8-13). It foreshadows his role as general in the process of claiming the land of promise from the inhabitants. But he is also at Moses' side in matters dealing with the Lord's presence and holiness. He is called Moses' "assistant" (different from "servant;" a description repeated in Joshua 1:1). The fact that he accompanies Moses up the mountain when Moses receives the 10 Commandments (Ex 24:13) means that Joshua is not connected with the idolatry of the golden calf. He also apparently has a regular place at the tent of meeting (Ex 33:11). His personal loyalty to Moses is seen in his protest, ill-advised as it turned out, that Eldad and Medad seemed to be exercising authority beyond what Moses had delegated (Num 11:28).

But it is as Moses sends of spies into Israel, preparatory to the conquest of the land, that the Lord begins to reveal His plans for him. Joshua is one of the spies, and sides with Caleb against the 10 others, who are succeeding at frightening Israel into abandoning the conquest (Ex 14:1-10). The scene is powerful, and charged with emotion. For Joshua, the stakes are huge: it is a matter of believing that the Lord is God, or denying all His promises. The people, preferring to believe the

warnings of the 10, start to move to stone Joshua. This was a legislative right of theirs, a legal act rather than mob mentality: the danger was real. Only the actual appearance of the glory of the Lord interrupts them, and saves Joshua. The Lord affirms Joshua's faith, condemning Israel to 40 more years of wandering, and declares that only Joshua and Caleb of the men currently alive will enter the Promised Land (4:30).

What we see in these accounts is the preparation of a young man for leadership. There is varied experience, opportunity to learn and to prove certain skills, and the testing of loyalty and vision. But the great qualification that emerges from these stories is clear: Joshua is a man who has placed his full allegiance in the Lord God of Israel, and he is willing to serve this God whatever the cost. A later king of Israel will win the description, "a man after God's own heart." But it also describes Joshua, and constitutes the great reason for his call into leadership.

Today's Psalm, written by David, remains a classical and powerful expression of the heart that follows after God, both for forgiveness and for blessing.

RESPOND

As Christians we know the value of full devotion to the Lord. How often does it become a burning issue for us? Surely this is one of the benefits of times of trial and even anguish: we learn again what it means to be single-minded in our worship. But our opportunities for leadership and service in the church also present such chances for renewed vision.

PRAY

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and sustain me with a willing spirit. Psalm 51: 10-12

- D.D.

READ

Joshua 1:1-9

Psalm 52

REFLECT

The book of Joshua begins with a clear moment of transition. Moses had died, and it is time for Joshua to assume the leadership. Today's passage tells of the charge that the Lord gives Joshua at this crucial moment, and it serves both to look back at the heritage he stands in, and forward to the challenge before him.

Joshua is referred to as "the assistant of Moses" in verse 1. This is the reminder of the close connection that Joshua has had with Moses, but it also serves to suggest a difference between them. The Lord goes on to remember Moses as "My servant" in verse 2, a different term from the one that describes Joshua (though many translations use the same word for both, obscuring the distinction). There will be similarities as well as differences in the ministry of Joshua.

The continuities clearly draw from the fact that Joshua is completing a vision given to Moses, and actually helping to attain a promise given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: the nation of Israel would some day have the security and prosperity of its own land. Moreover, the language of this opening passage recalls the words Moses used in sending Israel across the Jordan (Deut 33:1-8).

The passage includes within it three major commands, which some have found to represent an outline of the rest of the book of Joshua. Joshua is commanded to conquer the land (vv. 2-5), to help the people possess the land (v. 6), and to do so in obedience to the law of God (vv. 7-9). So we see that the conquest is described in chapters 1-12; that chapters 13-19 narrate the settlement of the tribes in the land; and chapters 20-24 reiterate the importance of obedience.

The promise of the land comes in nuanced language that can strike us as paradoxical: "Wherever the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you" (v. 3). Is Joshua supposed to take the land by force, and then understand that God has actually given it to him? We touch here on a perennial mystery: even though God is sovereign and could accomplish anything He wanted to on His own, He has chosen to accomplish His will and work among us. He wishes to be in partnership with His people. He wishes to work with us, and in the process to teach us about Himself, and at the same time to have the joy of our recognition and spontaneous appreciation. How this partnership works in detail we will soon see, with the battles of Jericho and Ai: Joshua can accomplish no seizure of the land – no "treading the sole of his foot" anywhere – without the Lord's active involvement.

We see it also in the threefold repetition to be "strong and courageous." It is not just a matter of bucking oneself up, of tricking oneself into a positive outlook. Rather, as v. 9 makes clear, it happens as we allow ourselves to understand the big picture, that the Lord is real and active in our behalf, and calling us to wonderful tasks and blessings.

RESPOND

Our faith is a faith that finds its proper expression in action. By the same token our faith is a faith that grows as we put it in action. God's kingdom of love is extended as we express His love advisedly and intentionally. What act of faith lies before you today?

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you that you call us to cross over to Your love, that You are with us as we settle within Your kingdom, that You are in our efforts to walk in obedience and praise.

- D.D.

READ

Joshua 6

Psalm 53

REFLECT

The story of the destruction of Jericho is familiar to us all, though perhaps more familiar from the popular song than from this chapter. On the heels of the first celebration of the Passover in the Promised Land, in fact during the seven days of unleavened bread, a man who claims to be the captain of the armies of the Lord calls Joshua to attack Jericho. The instructions describe a siege of a sort that has never before or since been recorded in the literature of the world: soldiers would proceed in what was essentially a priestly ritual of marching in celebration around the city, for each of seven days, culminating on the seventh day with seven marches and a shout. Joshua saw to it that these details were followed exactly, and the result was that the walls physically fell to the ground, and the city was taken.

The drama of this story, which includes the total destruction of the city and all its inhabitants (with the one exception), is not repeated in subsequent tales of the conquest, but makes good sense at this point in the narrative. First and foremost, it demonstrates what is meant by the promise given to Joshua that the Lord would be with him in the conquest. Surely that battle belonged to the Lord.

Second, the details of the battle give ample room for Israel to heed the Lord's requirement for perfect obedience during the conquest of the Land. To look at just one detail, the command for the mass of soldiers to keep absolute silence until the last moment, and then to shout, might seem almost arbitrary. (What if they had shouted all along, then suddenly fell silent?) But it certainly demonstrates the powerful effect of

corporate obedience. Not only Jericho, but Israel too, felt the power of that unity.

Third, the success at Jericho meant that half the battle was won for the rest of the land, as the astonishing story got around (6:27). Again, this would have been important both for a psychological advantage over the Canaanites, but also for the confidence of Israel in Joshua's leadership.

The completeness of the destruction of all the inhabitants of Jericho makes hard reading for us. Was such bloodshed necessary? It is best perhaps not to try to soften the edges of the biblical narrative; we might run the risk of deleting an important message – in this case, about the absolute holiness of God. But on the other hand the text itself makes much of the exception of Rahab and her household, stringing the mention of her three times throughout the account of the destruction of the city. Whatever else we hear, we must understand the importance of this grace extended to this harlot whose only qualification was openness to the Lord's people. She was to become an ancestor of David, and of Jesus (Matt 1:5). Our Psalm for today expressed this same grace of God for the one who is coming to understand where salvation is really to be found.

RESPOND

This chapter can remind us how through a fresh engagement with a familiar text we often discover so much that is a surprise. What are some details of this chapter that surprised you? Why do you find those details to be interesting or poignant?

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you for power of Your story, and the undoubted effectiveness of Your love. We lean upon You today, and look for the opportunities to share Your love.

- D.D.

READ

Joshua 7-8

Psalm 54

REFLECT

The battle for Ai is the account of the second battle in the Promised Land. If the account of the battle of Jericho spoke of the power and glory of the Lord, this passage has much to say about the ongoing problems that Israel discovers in following her God.

The story is tied to chapter 6, since it stems from the failure of one man in Israel, Achan of Judah, to observe the “ban” under which all of Jericho lay. Instead of obeying God’s command, he found and squirreled away a huge amount of silver and gold hoping to keep it for himself. When Joshua fails to conquer Ai as expected, and he returns to the Lord in weeping and prayer, the Lord tells him that there has been disobedience in the Israelite camp, and that until it is addressed, there can be no more victories. The incident is a case-in-point of the very clear requirement, given in Joshua 1:7, that all must be done in obedience.

There is a second problem, however, with the way Joshua carried out his attack. Even apart from the question of Achan’s sin, the planning of the attack as it is given in 7:2-4 seems to lack the kind of dependence on God that was key at Jericho (not to mention the Red Sea). Instead, Joshua takes the advice of his spies, who turn out to have been undiscerning and overconfident. We have no word that he consulted the Lord or prayed at all. The campaign comes across as all too human both in its mounting and in its failure. This point, however, is not directly raised by the Lord in His rebuke to Joshua (7:10-15). The Lord focuses on the sin of the theft, although He acknowledges a more general attitude of sin (7:10). Perhaps it is right to see here that even a private sin can have

the effect of an infection, disturbing the clarity of the whole community in a subtle way.

Still, full opportunity is given Joshua to relearn the lesson that if the Lord is willing to dispense exact advice, that’s probably the advice to take. And the Lord’s plan for taking Ai is wonderfully canny, showing the psychological astuteness of this One who made heaven and earth. As the saying goes, once again “the Lord has a better idea.” And as Joshua accepts this advice and follows it to the letter, victory is Israel’s once more.

In that context, our Psalm for today reads almost as if it were written by a chastened Joshua: “Save me, O God, and vindicate me by Thy power.” “Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the sustainer of my soul.” This is a lesson that Israel would have to learn in every generation, and avoid the double temptation that beset her since the days of Moses: grumbling, and disobedience. The disappointment that this incident blots the entrance of Israel into the Land only underlines how problematic sin can be, and how entrenched. Ultimately only the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus would address it with finality, and only in the outpouring of the Spirit would peace and joy begin to well from within.

RESPOND

Secret or entrenched resistance to God’s grace is a problem for each of us, at some time or other. The solution can only be to recognize that it is God’s own love, and not His condemnation, that would want to move us beyond the impasse. His grace becomes our freedom, and freedom becomes our testimony.

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you for the beauty of the path that lies before us, as we seek to hear Your word and follow it.

- D.D.

READ

Joshua 23

Psalm 55

REFLECT

At the end of his life, at the end of his service as the military leader of the conquest, Joshua gives a final exhortation to Israel. Much has been accomplished since the days of Jericho and Ai. Many enemies have been defeated, and the twelve tribes have each been given huge tracts of land in which to make their ancestral homes. The identity and stability of the nation have been affirmed in a way that was only a glimmer in the eyes of Moses.

But with the new situation, a fresh problem has emerged. The enemy has not been completely eliminated, and alongside each tribe there are the remnants of other nations that must be expelled. The problem with the proximity of other peoples is in the tendency of Israel to accommodate culturally and religiously to those living nearby. Economic and social interaction quickly results in intermarriage, and the gods of other peoples are then placed alongside Yahweh in the hearths and the hearts of Israel. Proximity leads to accommodation, and accommodation to idolatry. And the covenant is broken.

In this circumstance, Joshua exhorts the tribes to continue to fight the necessary fight for national security, but also to maintain the obedience to God that is so much at the center of Israel's identity. He sees the alternatives as mutually exclusive: either they will "cling" to the nations, or they will "cling" to the Lord (23:8, 12). The future of Israel is to be found in both of these activities: in nurturing real knowledge of God in the people, and in resisting the influx of alien values and gods. The sadness, as we read this, is that we know (if we have ever read any of the subsequent parts of the Old Testament) that none of this will ever

come easy. Finally God will call the Babylonians to come and carry Israel into exile, as He still tries to get across the message that "I am the Lord and there is no other."

We may feel grateful that we find ourselves in a more relaxed position. If so, we need to wake up. I think that all of the warnings that Joshua delivered to Israel remain powerfully pertinent to us. There is a change, though, in our situation as Christians. We need to remain as vigilant about the influx of godlessness, but we now also have to be ready to present the truth about our God within the very culture that provides the temptations. The task has become more complicated. Jesus' phrase, that we are "in the world but not of the world," expresses the tension that we face. We have come to realize the reality of the kingdom of God, but we have lives to live in this world, rich as it is with both pleasures and tragedies. For me I suppose it comes down to a day to day discernment of where the love of God and knowledge of Him leads in a given occasion. We certainly can be grateful to have good companions in this project, and a good church home, and astonishing resources in the presence and love of our faithful Lord Jesus Christ.

RESPOND

What element of our culture do you find most helpful to you as a Christian? What element seems most wearing to your spirituality? If the Lord were to comment to you on each of these elements, what would He say?

PRAY

Dear Lord, Thank you for the deep peace we have in knowledge of you, and in the joy of obedience. Thank you too for the chances to share the truth of Your love with those whose perspectives are so foreign to that love, and we remember them in prayer.

- Dave Dorman