

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 21

Journey Lessons from Joshua

I was in the eighth grade when I undertook the daunting challenge to learn golf. My best friend's dad was an avid golfer, and my friend convinced me that together they could teach me golf. I still recall the first lesson and round of golf together. We were on about the fifth hole when his dad shanked the tee shot straight into the water hazard running along the right side of the hole. The dad calmly walked to his cart and took a second ball from his bag. "What's he doing," I asked my friend. "It's my turn." "He's taking a mulligan," my friend replied. I couldn't believe it! This will be a great game – every time you make a bad shot, you just take a mulligan! Needless to say, it didn't quite work out the way I had hoped.

If you're like me, sometimes you need a mulligan in life. An adult friend calls his "do-overs." Others call them second chances. God calls it grace.

"After the death of Moses..." So starts the book of Joshua. The nation of Israel was gathered literally on the edge of the Promised Land...finally. A journey that should have taken one year had instead taken forty, all because of some terribly wrong choices. But instead of completely abandoning the Israelites, God gave them a second chance of sorts – a do-over, a mulligan. Here was their second chance to enter the land that God had promised them through Abraham and Moses, to see God work in ways that only God could work, and to be a testimony to the world of what a great God He is.

I wonder what thoughts were running through the minds of the people of Israel at that time. "Will God still be with us?" "Will God guide us through this new guy, Joshua?" "How will we conquer the land?"

Today, we undertake some vignettes covering the process of taking possession of the Promised Land. "Why study the nation of Israel, or any events of the Old Testament?" some might ask. In one of several reasons given in the Scriptures, we are told that events were "...written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."¹

Hope for the future, by observing the faithfulness and character of God in the past! It's something we desperately need today as well.

Let's recap where we've come over the last few lessons!

¹ Romans 15:4

A RECAP OF LIFE UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MOSES²

The Israelites had left Egypt in the middle of the night. Rescued by God from the slavery of Egypt, God intended to bring them into a bountiful land – one flowing with “milk and honey.”

Exodus 19 tells us that it took about three months for the people to reach Mount Sinai in the Sinai desert. There, Moses went up on the mountain to receive the “Ten Commandments,” the Old Testament law, instructions for the tabernacle and the priesthood, and instructions for the worship of God through offerings and feasts.³ For almost a year,⁴ Moses and the people stayed in the Sinai wilderness building the tabernacle and instituting the priesthood that God had given.

The next step was re-entry into the land that the patriarch Jacob had left 400 years earlier due to a great famine. Jacob and his family had relocated to Egypt at the urging of his son, Joseph, who was the ruler of Egypt and second only to pharaoh. God had promised

² A chronological organization of the journey from Egypt into the land of Israel requires a synthesis of five books: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua, each written for a different purpose. *Exodus* records the birth of the nation Israel, starting with the birth of Moses, continuing through their departure from Egypt, and ending at Mount Sinai where Moses received the Law. *Leviticus* covers the role of the priesthood (Levites, hence “Leviticus”) as God revealed to Moses on the mountain. *Numbers* has two distinct sections: (1) the final month at Sinai and journey to Kadesh-Barnea to spy out the land, and the subsequent 38 years of wandering in the wilderness; (2) the death of the rebellious generation, and the approximate one year conquest of the Trans-Jordan area by the new generation. *Deuteronomy* consists of three messages Moses gave immediately prior to his death on Mount Nebo across from the Promised Land. These messages covered the past, present, and future of God’s relationship with Israel. *Joshua* picks up after the death of Moses and continues to the crossing of the Jordan and subsequent conquest of the land.

³ On Sinai, God “reveals to Israel His conditions for a proper relationship to Him. He places before them a blessing and a curse. He promises to bless them if they will be faithful to His instructions; he promises to curse them if they fail. His conditions for the relationship are set forth in the three major divisions of the Law: (1) the moral law, which governed the moral behavior of men, primarily found in the Ten Commandments, (2) the civil law, which explained how man is to relate to his fellow man, and (3) the ceremonial law, which spelled out the procedures for the priests and Levites.” See study aides to The Open Bible [Boa, Ken, “*Talk thru the Old Testament: from Walk Thru the Bible,*” (Tyndale House Publishers, 1980) at 11].

⁴ Numbers 1:1

Jacob that He would bring his descendants back to the land,⁵ and that time had finally come!

In preparation for the battles associated with conquering the land, God commanded that the people be organized by tribe, clan, and families. Then, every militarily fit male 20 years of age and older was counted.

Finally, the people set out for Kadesh-Barnea, which is located at the southern border of the land. Even with entry into the Promised Land so close, the people of Israel continued their habit of doubting God and complaining – “Why did we come out of Egypt?”⁶ It is from Kadesh-Barnea that Moses sends 12 men, one from each tribe, to spy out the land, and what they find is amazing! Over a period of 40 days the spies travel about 500 miles, going all the way from the Negeb in the south to Ziphron in the far north. On their return through the Valley of Eshcol, they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes so large that it had to be carried on a pole between two men!

The land was indeed plentiful with abundance. But it was also plentiful with danger – giants in the land, and large and fortified cities. Two men, Joshua and Caleb, stood faithful, believing that God would fulfill His promises. However, the other ten spies persuaded the people to reject God and instead return to Egypt.

God had finally had enough. All of the men of war who had previously been counted at Mount Sinai (except for Joshua and Caleb) were condemned to wander in the “wilderness” until the last of them died. Only a new generation would be allowed to enter the Promised Land! For thirty-eight⁷ more years they would wander, always moving but never getting anywhere.

Shortly before the death of the last of the generation, God told Moses, “You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough.”⁸ So began the final stages of preparing for entry into the land. This time, however, their entry would be from the Trans-Jordan side (lit. “beyond-Jordan,” *i.e.*, the eastern side of the Jordan River) instead of from Kadesh-Barnea in the south. To get there, the people needed to pass through the territories of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, respectively. Edom was a land that had been given to Esau (Jacob’s brother and, hence, their relative), and God instructed them:

⁵ Genesis 46:2-4

⁶ Numbers 11:20

⁷ God determined that they should bear their consequence of their sin for forty years, one year for each day that they spied out the land. It is uncertain how long the Trans-Jordan conquest took, although most scholars estimate it to be 1-2 years. Hence, the 40-year period may also include the first year to reach Mount Sinai if the Trans-Jordan conquest only took one year.

⁸ Deuteronomy 2:3

You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall purchase food from them for money, that you may eat, and you shall also buy water of them for money, that you may drink. For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing. (Deut. 2:4-7)

Similarly, they were to avoid any confrontation with the people of Moab and Ammon because God had given the land to the descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot.

As they prepared to enter the Trans-Jordan area, they were attacked by two different kings of the Amorite people: first at Jahaz, by Sihon, king of Heshbon in the south, and later by Og, a man of gigantic stature⁹ and king of Bashan, at Edrei in the north. But, God gave decisive victories over each of the kings, effectively vanquishing the Amorites on the eastern side of the Jordan.



With the Trans-Jordan area now secure, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and a portion of Manasseh were given the newly captured territory for their inheritance. However, the three tribes first had to agree to leave their families in the new land while their men fought with the other tribes to conquer the land west of the Jordan.

With this agreement finalized, Moses' job as God's leader for the nation was finally finished. In a farewell address to the people,¹⁰ Moses reminds the people of God's faithfulness in the past, His commitment in the present, and His promise for the future. Moses was not allowed to enter the land because of his disobedience 1-2 years earlier when he dishonored God by striking the rock at Meribah to bring forth water. As a

⁹ Og controlled sixty fortified cities in the northern region of the plain east of Jordan (Deut 3:1–10). According to Deut. 3:11, Og's bedstead was made of iron and measured 9 common cubits (4 m. [13 ft.]) long and 4 cubits (1.8 m. [6 ft.]) wide. Some scholars have suggested this was actually a sarcophagus of basalt (cf. NEB). See Meyers, A.C., *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, (Eerdmans, 1987)

¹⁰ This "farewell address" is the subject of the book of Deuteronomy. "The name Deuteronomy results from a mistranslation of Deuteronomy 17:18 in the LXX and the Vulgate. For the Hebrew 'a copy of this law,' the LXX and the Vulgate have terms meaning 'the second law' or 'a repetition of the law.'" See Kalland section in Gaebelien, Frank, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, (Zondervan, 1990), v.3 at 3.

concession, God allowed Moses to see the land from a distance on the other side of the Jordan.

With Moses' death, the mantle of leadership and the challenge to conquer the land, was now passed to Joshua.

FOLLOWING GOD WITH FEET OF CLAY

The nation of Israel was at the border. It was time to move. From some of the clues we see in Scripture, it appears that Joshua had at least some fears about his new position as leader of the nation! How could that be? When we think of Joshua's background, he seemed like the perfect person for the job – Moses' assistant from his youth, a warrior who led troops in battle, a spy who checked out a hostile land, and a servant of God who seemingly never wavered in his faith. From the outside, he looked faultless. But, God knew he still had needs.

Just prior to Joshua's commissioning as the new leader, we find Moses publicly exhorting him to "be strong and courageous," and do not "fear or be dismayed." A short time later the same exhortation was given again – this time by God. Four times in the first chapter of Joshua, God reminds Joshua to be "strong and courageous," and do not "fear or be dismayed." Later in the same chapter, Joshua reminded the 2-1/2 tribes of the Trans-Jordan land (Gad, Reuben, the half tribe of Manasseh) of their commitment to fight with the nation to conquer the land. Can you guess their response? "Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous." Apparently, Joshua was in need of some encouragement!

How do you become strong and courageous? By obeying God, even one step at a time. Joshua moved forward the first step by sending out spies. Then, they moved one more step by stepping into the Jordan; then, another step by taking twelve stones for a memorial; and then, another step by commanding the priests to come out of the Jordan.

He moved one more step by circumcising the men. This 'step' must have tested Joshua and the entire nation, for we remember the story of Simeon and Levi who alone killed all the men of Shechem because they were unable to defend themselves after being circumcised. Yet, every male Hebrew was now in the same position as the Shechemites, and only two miles from their enemies at Jericho! They must have wondered why God didn't require this when they were at least on the other side of the Jordan, if not earlier! Who would defend and protect them while they were recuperating? The answer was obvious – it would have to be God!

Finally, Joshua looked up and saw a “man standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand.”¹¹ Joshua approached the man and asked him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries.” The ‘man’ identified himself as the commander of the army of God! Joshua took his next step and asked what he should do. It was only then that God told Joshua the plan he would use to take the town of Jericho!

Point for Home

There is no perfect person - each one of us comes with strengths and weaknesses because we are humans. That doesn't surprise God, and it shouldn't surprise us.

Are you willing to give grace to others who on the surface appear so perfect – at least until their feet of clay begin to show? Are you willing to recognize that they are only human, just like you, and to support them in prayer and kindness even when they fail or disappoint you?

What about your own weaknesses? Do you try to “muscle through” and do it on your own? Or do you recognize that God wants to use your weakness to remind you of your need to trust in Him. The real answer to our weakness is to trust God by allowing Him to lead us one step at a time. We don't need the whole picture in advance. We just need to follow the next step. God gives us enough light for our path, but we have to take a step forward for the light to keep moving.

GOD IS AT WORK EVEN WHEN WE CAN'T SEE HIM

When the two spies arrived at Jericho, they went to the house of Rahab and lodged there. Rahab hid the men on the roof under stalks of flax, and when the king of Jericho sent soldiers to her home, she told them the two men had come but had left the town just before the gate was closed at dark. With that, the soldiers pursued the phantom spies along the presumed path back to the Jordan.

After the soldiers left Rahab, she returned to the roof to talk with the spies. Although Rahab had obviously spoken with the spies earlier, this is the first conversation between them recorded in Scripture, and it was a significant one! Rahab told the men that she knew that the Lord had given them the land (not just Jericho), and that the fear of Israel had “fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.” This is exactly what God had said would happen many years earlier!¹²

¹¹ Joshua 5:13

¹² Exodus 23:27, Deuteronomy 2:25

Then, Rahab told the spies why the inhabitants melted away: they had heard about God parting the Red Sea 40 years earlier, and what God had done to Sihon and Og in the past year! If we read ahead to chapter 5, we find that Joshua and the people crossed the Jordan after God miraculously dried up the river, and this news, too, reached the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites to the west of the Jordan, causing their “hearts to melt.” Once again in chapter 9, we find that the Gibeonites had heard of what God had done in Egypt, as well as to Sihon and Og, and that made them afraid as well. When the spies returned to the camp, they confidently told Joshua, “Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us.”

Years before the Israelites arrived in Jericho, and unbeknownst to them, stories about their God had already reached the ears of the inhabitants of the Promised Land. God was fighting for them before they even knew it!

Point for Home

Is your way dark or scary? Are you unsure of your future? Then, I have a question for you. Do you belong to God? Are you seeking Him? If so, you have nothing to fear because He has not left you alone in the wilderness. In fact, God has already gone before you to prepare the way. We may find danger ahead, but there will never be any risk because the God of the universe is on our side and He is watching over us. Paul confirms this in Romans 8: “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

GOD HONORS THE HEART OF THOSE WHO TRULY SEEK HIM (REGARDLESS OF OUR PAST LIFE!)

In the story of Jericho, I remain the most amazed by the part played by Rahab – a woman who was a prostitute. I can only imagine the journey that brought her to that profession, and the abuse and disrespect she must have experienced from people. Yet, with the arrival of the spies, she risks everything to help them.

The town was obviously on high alert. The king was aware of the mighty acts of God and was apparently on the lookout for strangers because it wasn’t long after the spies arrived that the king sent his men to Rahab’s home to capture them. Instead, Rahab told the king’s men that the spies had come but that she did not know who they were, and they had left before the town gates were closed. What if the king’s men decided to search the house before leaving? Rahab would surely have been branded a traitor to her people, with the appropriate consequences for her actions. Instead, the king’s men left and followed the supposed direction of the phantom spies.

Rahab’s decision to hide the spies was not rooted in fear, it was rooted in faith. Hebrews 11:31 tells us “By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish...because she had given a

friendly welcome to the spies.” We gain even more insight from the discussion of faith without works in James 2:19-26. There we read:

²⁴You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

The passage deals with FAITH PLUS works, not just works. Rahab’s ‘works’ in receiving the messengers was coupled with her faith!

Rahab’s actions after the conquest of Jericho evidenced her faith in the Lord – she stayed in the land. Not only did she stay, but according to Matthew 1:5, Rahab also become the mother of Boaz,¹³ who was in the direct lineage of David and ultimately Jesus!

Point for Home

What is your baggage? Where do you fall short? There is hope. There is a future. Pursue God with your heart, and follow him with your feet. He is waiting to take you into His care.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU AGREE TO

Things were going well. The Israelites had defeated Jericho and rebounded from the sin of Achan to decisively defeat the town of Ai. Suddenly, a few tired-looking men showed up – their clothes and sacks were worn, their food was dry and crumbly, and they had a good sounding story. “We’re from a land far away, so make a covenant with us.”¹⁴ But something didn’t seem just right. “Perhaps you are deceiving us, so how could we make a covenant with you?”¹⁵

God had warned¹⁶ the nation of Israel about making a covenant with the inhabitants of Canaan, for He knew that it would cause them to begin to adopt the Canaanite ways and turn away from God. The people had even just returned from a time of recommitment to the covenant God had made with them! The leaders knew to be wary, but they let their

¹³ Some debate exists over the timing of this lineage, although few deny the role of the Rahab of Jericho. “According to Matthew 1:5, Boaz’s mother was Rahab, the Canaanite harlot from Jericho. However, Rahab lived in Joshua’s time, about 250-300 years earlier. Probably, then, Rahab was Boaz’s “mother” in the sense that she was his ancestress (*cf.*, “our father Abraham,” Rom. 4:12, which means “our ancestor Abraham”).” See Walvoord, John F and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Victor, 1985) at 428

¹⁴ Joshua 9:6

¹⁵ Joshua 9:7

¹⁶ Exodus 24:32; 34:12,15; Deut 7:2; Numbers 33:52

guard down based on the repeated lies of the visitors, instead of turning to the God of truth for guidance. It all looked and sounded so good.

The Scripture states the problem simply, “So the men took some of their provisions (*at face value*), but did not ask counsel from the Lord.” Instead, Joshua made peace with the deceiving Gibeonites and made a covenant with them. Three days later, Joshua discovered the deception, but it was too late.

Later, five neighboring kings attacked Gibeon because it had made peace with Israel. Joshua refused to abandon their commitment to Gibeon, regardless of how it had been obtained, and came to their rescue. God used the opportunity to bring about the destruction of the armies of the five kings by a series of miraculous interventions: throwing the armies into a panic, killing many of the enemy with hailstones, and causing the sun to stand still to allow Joshua’s army more time to conquer the opposing armies. God can take even a bad decision and use it for good!

Point for Home

Where do you go to find out the truth? Do you search out the answers in Scripture, or through Godly counsel? Do you ask God in prayer to guide and protect you? God will honor our hearts for truth, but we must seek Him and His righteousness to find it.

GOD IS ALWAYS BIG ENOUGH

I’ve always loved the boldness of Caleb. At the age of forty, he represented the tribe of Judah as one of the twelve men chosen to spy out the land. You recall the story – the land was perfect, except for those pesky giants and fortified cities! Ten of the spies couldn’t take their eyes off of the giants of Anak and the strength of the enemy. Caleb and Joshua both trusted in God, but Caleb spoke first: “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.”¹⁷

After 38 years, Caleb, then 78, was still ready for battle when nation of Israel finally began the conquest of the Promised Land. He had wandered in the wilderness for 38 years along with everyone else, not because of his own sin but because others wouldn’t trust God. Still, he never lost faith in who God was or what He was going to do. Now, after seven years of fighting, Joshua was at last ready to divide the conquered lands. But, before he could start, Caleb interrupted to remind him of their spy mission forty years previous, and the resulting promises Moses made to him. Moses had promised as an inheritance to Caleb all of the land on which his foot had trodden because he wholly followed the Lord.

¹⁷ Numbers 13:40

So, what was the land for which Caleb was asking? It was the land of the giants and their fortified cities! At the age of 85, Caleb was still believing and trusting in God and not himself! Listen to his words:

And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. So now give me this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the LORD said.”
(Joshua 14:10-12)

Guess what! God was with Caleb, and Caleb did drive them out!

Point for Home

Surely God smiled with pleasure at the boldness and faith of Caleb. How about your faith? Are you looking only at the things that the eye can see, or are you focusing on the unseen God? How do you handle the tough times, especially the ones where you suffer because of someone else’s mistakes? Our passion for the things of God will determine our perspective on the circumstances around us. We ought to be more like Caleb.

IT’S YOUR CHOICE (AND ONLY YOURS!)

Joshua had led the nation to many great victories. They fought first across the center of the country in a strategy of divide and conquer. Then, they defeated the inhabitants in the south. Next came the final campaign to the northern land. After seven years of battle, it was time for Joshua to divide the land among the tribes. The land wasn’t completely conquered, but it was sufficient for each tribe to continue taking possession of their allotment on their own instead of through a national army.

Ten to twenty years later, Joshua was near the end of his life. He had begun to see the complacency of the people to drive out the remnants of the Canaanites, choosing instead a co-existence that would later lead them astray. Before he died, Joshua wanted to speak one last time to the people, so he called together their leaders for his farewell address.

Joshua told them that everything they had accomplished was because God had fought for them and was with them. He reminded them of God’s faithfulness beginning with Abraham, to Isaac and Jacob and Moses, their deliverance from Egypt, their time in the wilderness, and the ultimate conquest of the land. God had blessed them when they obeyed, and cursed them when they rejected Him, just as He had promised.

Yet, we note with some surprise that the people still possessed some of the gods they had from Egypt and others they had obtained from the people encountered on their journey to the land. The time had come to make a decision. Who would they serve – the Lord who

had delivered and fought for them, or a false god? Personally, Joshua knew whom he would serve – God!

Point for Home

Have you made your choice yet? I don't mean part way, or half-way, or even mostly. Who will you serve with your entire being? God wants all of you. Joshua's challenge is surely as valid today as it was then. "Choose you this day whom you will serve." But like Joshua, no one can make the choice for you. It's all yours.

WANT MORE?

As you read through Judges, identify and consider the overall theme of the book. Then send me your thoughts of how it applies today, and how we, as Christians, should respond.