

We Will Go Everywhere You Send Us

(Joshua 1:10-18)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Joshua

I. Introduction

- a. In the prior message, we began our study of the **Book of Joshua**.
 - i. We explained that in this series, we plan to focus on **chapters 1-10 and 23-24**. In contrast, we plan to move much more quickly through the middle chapters that are more about taking territories for the different tribes of Israel.
 - ii. We will highlight important connections with the New Testament, practical lessons for us and foreshadowings of Christ and things to come.
- b. In the prior lesson, we reviewed
 - i. An overview of the history of the promise that God made to Abraham in **Genesis 15** that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, and the steps taken thus far to fulfill that promise.
 - ii. An overview of the life of Joshua, noting:
 - 1. He was born in Egypt, originally named 'Hoshea', the son of Nun (or Nave), of the tribe of Ephraim.
 - 2. He crossed the Red Sea with the rest of his people, as a relatively young man, at the age of at least 20 years.
 - 3. He was Moses' assistant.
 - 4. He was one of only two faithful men, of the 12 who were sent out to spy out the land of Canaan in **Numbers 13-14**.
 - 5. Of that first generation, of all the men who were over the age of 20, only Joshua and Caleb would live to enter the Promised Land. All the others would die in the Wilderness
 - 6. In **Numbers 13:16**, it explains that Moses gave Hoshea the name 'Joshua'. In Greek (in both the LXX and in the Greek New Testament), the new name he was given is 'Jesus', the exact same name that the angel Gabriel would later tell Mary to name her son.

- a. We can see some unusual parallels between Joshua (the *Old Testament 'Jesus'*) and *Jesus, the Son of God*.
 - i. The *same name* was assigned to both men.
 - ii. Both finished the mission begun by Moses.
 - iii. Both were good shepherds, to make sure that the Lord's people would not be "like sheep having no shepherd." (**Numbers 27:17** and **Matthew 9:36**)
 - iv. Despite all the challenges that they face, we see no sin committed by either one (in contrast with Noah, Job, Abraham, David and many other heroes of faith who were considered righteous).
 - v. Let us be on the lookout for more parallels and foreshadowings!
- iii. In **Joshua 1:1-9**, we saw that the Lord called Joshua to be "strong and courageous," since the Lord would be with him wherever he went.
 - 1. Joshua was told to meditate on the Book of the Law day and night, so that he would do everything it said.
 - 2. In doing that, he would be blessed in whatever he did
- c. My original plan was to move quickly through the rest of **Joshua chapter 1** and then dive into **chapter 2**, which is an especially rich story with many important lessons for us.
 - i. However, in preparing this lesson I stumbled on some things in **Joshua 1:10-18** that I previously had not fully appreciated.
 - ii. So today's message is, to me, an "unexpected lesson," about some unexpected heroes of faith.

II. Back Story to the Special Instructions Given to Reuben, Gad and the Half-Tribe of Manasseh.

- a. Background on the 12 Tribes of Israel.
 - i. Jacob (also given the name 'Israel') had 12 sons by his four wives.
 - ii. In **Genesis 48**, Joseph brings his two sons (Manasseh and Ephraim) to his father Jacob, who is sick and approaching death. Jacob blesses his two grandsons and considers them as his own children.

- iii. All the tribes except for the Levites were to inherit their own designated territory. The Levites were given the tabernacle service, the priesthood, and the tithes. The Lord said that since He was their inheritance, they would have no territorial land inheritance. (**Numbers 18:20**, repeated in **Deuteronomy 10:9** and **18:1**).
- iv. Therefore, there were 12 tribes in total that would inherit land.
 - 1. Keep in mind that included the two from Joseph, minus one for the Levites (who would not inherit their own land).
- b. Let us review the back story on the special arrangement made with the 2-1/2 tribes who will settle east of the Jordan River.
 - i. This is given in overview in **Deuteronomy 2-3**. However, there is a more colorful and interesting account in **Numbers**.
 - ii. In **Numbers 21**, near the end of the 40 years in the Wilderness, while they are still on the east side of the Jordan River, Moses and the Israelites are attacked by two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. The Lord delivers those kings and their armies into Israel's hand.
 - 1. The Israelites completely defeat both kings, wipe out their people, and take over their possessions, cities and lands.
 - 2. Thus, they inherit the land of two kingdoms east of the Jordan River.
 - iii. In **Numbers 32**, while Moses is still alive, the men of Reuben and Gad approach Moses with an unusual request. They like the land that had been occupied by the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, before the people crossed the Jordan River. Let us read about their question and the strong response by Moses
 - 1. Read **Numbers 32:4-5**.
 - a. The sons of Reuben and Gad want to remain where they are. So they say to Moses, "Do not make us cross over the Jordan (with the rest of the Israelites)."
 - 2. Moses denies their request, with a sharp, multi-pronged rebuke.
 - a. Read **Numbers 32:6-15**.
 - i. Note that in this passage Moses, described in this same book as "very meek, more than all men on the meekest man on the face of the earth" (**Numbers 12:3**) delivers *a rebuke for the ages*.

- ii. He starts by asking a rhetorical question: “Your brothers go to war, *and shall you sit here?*” (**Numbers 32:6**, LXX, OSB)
 - 1. Moses seems to be accusing them of being lazy, cowards or selfish, not caring to share in the struggles ahead for their brother Israelites.
- iii. Moses then reminds them of what happened the last time some Israelites asked to be excused from crossing into Canaan. That was about 40 years earlier, when their fathers rebelled after the twelve spies were sent out.
 - 1. Moses says the Lord was *very angry* then, to the point where He sentenced the people over 20 (except Joshua and Caleb) to wander in the Wilderness for 40 years, and be “utterly destroyed”, dying in the Wilderness.
 - 2. Moses warns them that the Lord will be *EVEN ANGRIER* toward them than He was toward their fathers, if they abandon the Lord (as their fathers did, acting lawlessly and refusing to cross the Jordan).
- 3. The “sons of Reuben and Gad” think about what Moses said, and offer him a ‘*Then How About...*’ type of counter-offer.
 - a. Read **Numbers 32:16-19**.
 - i. Their *revised* proposal is:
 - 1. First, the men will build fortified cities for their families and pens for their livestock.
 - 2. Then the men of these tribes will leave their families and livestock behind (in the lands formerly occupied by Sihon and Og) and will join their brothers in crossing over the Jordan and battling the people of Canaan.
 - 3. The men of Reuben and Gad will cross over fully armed, and will be “the advance guard”, going before their brothers.

4. They will not return home (on the east side of the Jordan) until all the other tribes have received their inheritance.
4. Moses approves their plan, but warns them they must be faithful to deliver what they promised.
 - a. Read **Numbers 32:20-33**.
 - i. Moses repeats and approves the proposal. He makes it clear that they cannot return to their people until the mission has been accomplished.
 - ii. The men of Reuben and Gad agree to do what Moses said.
 - iii. Moses then explains this agreement to Joshua, the high priest Eleazar, and all the rulers of Israel.
 1. Moses warns the men of Reuben and Gad. If their men *DO NOT* cross over the Jordan with the rest of Israel, the leaders of Israel will *forcibly take the wives, children, and cattle* of the rebellious Reubenites and Gadites across the river!
 - a. (Note that this detail is provided in the LXX, from which we are reading, but is not in the Masoretic Text.)
 - iv. The men of Reuben and Gad agree to do everything Moses said. Half of the tribe of Manasseh (one of the sons of Joseph) is included along with the other two tribes.
 1. Therefore, the tribe of Manasseh will be split, with half ('east Manasseh') inheriting land east of the Jordan, and the other half ('west Manasseh') inheriting land in Canaan.

III. Joshua Addresses the 2-1/2 Tribes

- a. Moses has died, Joshua is in charge, and the Israelites are about to cross the Jordan River (three days from then) and enter Canaan near Jericho.

- b. The action part of the book of **Joshua** starts and ends (like bookends) with a discussion about the 2-1/2 tribes.
 - i. It starts with them being reminded of their commitment by Joshua (**Joshua 1**).
 - ii. It concludes after all the land of Canaan has been conquered, divided, and given to the 9-1/2 tribes, after which the other 2-1/2 are allowed to return home (**Joshua 22**). That is right before Joshua's farewell address and the account of his death and burial.
- c. Read **Joshua 1:10-18**.
 - i. Joshua reminds the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the eastern half of the tribe of Manasseh of what Moses had commanded them earlier (in **Numbers 32**).
 - 1. Their men will cross over before their brothers, armed for battle.
 - 2. They shall leave their families and livestock behind.
 - 3. They will be able to return to their inheritance, on the eastern side of the Jordan, only after they have subdued the land to be inherited by all the other tribes, in Canaan.
 - ii. The 2-1/2 tribes respond that they will do everything Joshua told them, just as they heeded what Moses said. Regarding any man from among them who *does not* follow Joshua's instructions, they reply: "Let him die."
 - 1. They also call Joshua to "be strong and courageous."
- d. The **Book of Joshua** is essentially 'bookended' by the account of the men of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh. The book starts with the instructions given to those men before they cross the Jordan River. Then the book ends with the successful completion of the mission and the return of the 2-1/2 tribes to their homelands on the eastern side of the Jordan River.
 - i. In the aftermath: We will see in **Joshua 22** that the men of these 2-1/2 tribes were faithful to their commitment, all the way to the end.
 - 1. They went before their brothers, fought on their behalf, and returned home only after all the land was subdued and divided among the other 9-1/2 tribes.
- e. **Lessons for Us?**

- i. These unlikely heroes end up providing us a great example of *faithfulness*. These were people who kept a challenging commitment *all the way to the end*.
 - 1. Motivated both by love (shared sacrifice with their brothers) and fear (reflected in the “Let him die” statement, and the threat Moses gave of taking their wives, children and cattle across with them).
 - 2. This faithfulness was tested by time and trials. It involved a great sacrifice to benefit others (rather than themselves).
 - 3. We need this kind of faithfulness to be saved on the last day. Keeping our commitment to the end.
 - a. God is a faithful God, who always keeps His word. Also, Jesus was faithful to the One who sent Him. Jesus calls those of us who follow Him to be faithful to the end, as well.
 - i. “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” (**Matthew 24:12–13**, NKJV)
 - ii. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (**John 15:5–10**, NKJV)
- ii. While some might be inclined to use passages like this to justify Christians *participating in wars*, let us keep in mind:
 - 1. The people said they would follow “whatever Joshua (in the Greek of the LXX *Jesus*) said”, and be faithful to the end. The

'Jesus' who leads us, the Son of God and head of the church, has given us *different* directions to follow! (See **Matthew 5:38-48**.)

- a. Also, consider how Paul said that our struggle is *not* against flesh and blood. Rather, we are engaged in a *spiritual war* against the hosts of evil in the heavenly realm, which must be fought with *spiritual weapons*. (See **Ephesians 6:10-20**.)
- iii. We cannot just be thinking about the comfort of ourselves or our families. We need to make sacrifices *for the good of others* as well.
 1. I think of Moses' disturbing rhetorical question: "Your brothers go to war, and shall you sit here?" (**Numbers 32:6**)
 2. Are you just (figuratively) "sitting here" while others are doing the hard work of the kingdom?
 - a. Think of what Paul told the Corinthians regarding financial support, in view of the sacrifices that the Macedonians were making. The Macedonians were held up as a great example. Despite their poverty, Paul says they "first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us" (**2 Corinthians 8:5**).
 - b. Paul said, "I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened", but that there should be an equality (of everyone involved in similar level of sacrifice to meet the needs) (**2 Corinthians 8:13-15**)
 3. **Personal Example from My Own Life:** Rowing competitively in the Masters Division of the Head of the Charles in an 8-oared racing shell, on the Charles River. Every oarsman in the boat is counted on to 'pull his weight'.
 4. Sacrificing to meet the needs of others, not just taking care of ourselves and our own families. There are many different ways that people make personal sacrifices to meet the needs of others in the kingdom of God, including the following.
 - a. Giving financially to help those in need.
 - b. Serving others directly.
 - c. Discipling others, speaking the truth directly to one another, sharpening one another; having "skin in the game".

- d. Reaching out to the lost, spending time to build relationships and to share the gospel with them.
 - e. In general, having the heart of a servant and laying down your life for others (without neglecting your immediate family in the process).
- 5. From the famous hymn, "*Am I a Soldier of the Cross*" (No. 490 in the *Hymns of the Church* songbook we use), two questions for us to reflect on:
 - a. First verse:
 - i. "Am I a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb? And shall I fear to own His cause, or blush to speak His name?"
 - b. Second verse:
 - i. "*Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease? While others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?*"
 - 1. This is a poetic way to say the same thing Moses said, when he challenged the men of Reuben and Gad, with the rhetorical question:
 - a. "Your brothers go to war, *and shall you sit here?*" (**Numbers 32:6**)
- 6. In **Ephesians 4**, Paul admonished members of the Ephesian church to strive for maturity, speaking the truth in love to one another, that all parts of the body of Christ would grow up into Him who is the head of the body, Christ:
 - a. "...according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (**Ephesians 4:16**, NKJV)
- iv. With Paul's admonition in mind, may we heed the call that Moses and Joshua gave to the 2-1/2 tribes, and follow the example of the heroes of the past. May we also do our part in the collective battle before us, to the very best of our ability, being faithful to our mission to the very end.