

LESSONS FROM JOSHUA'S FAREWELL MESSAGE

Joshua 23 - 24

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Farewell messages usually mark the departure of someone with a ceremony. These messages do provide courage, warnings and strength to the recipients. Dying parents have given farewell messages; people leaving their loved ones for a long-term journey have given farewell messages; retiring persons have also given farewell messages, etc.

Moses, a great prophet, sent by God to do signs and wonders and lead Israel out of the land of Egypt, gave a farewell message to Israel before his death (**Deuteronomy 31-33**).

Moses was chosen by God for the work of deliverance and organization of Israel. He was a great leader and it was recorded that since his death, *there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face* (**Deuteronomy 34:10**). Though, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land because of an act of disobedience (**Numbers 20:8-12**) but He left Israel encamped east of the Jordan. Israel still needs to get to the promised land. Great battles await them. *How many nations will they conquer before they get to the promised land? How will they conquer them? Who will lead them after Moses?*

New occasions call for new men. God chose Joshua for the work of conquest and settlement. He led Israel in all of the great battles that delivered the Promised Land to the children of Israel. Like Moses, Joshua also gave farewell messages to the Israelites, before he died.

Before we consider his farewell messages and the in-built lessons, let's do a character study of Joshua.

JOSHUA, SON OF NUN

Joshua is a warrior.



The first time we read of him is in **Exodus 17** in the battle against the Amalekites. Moses called upon Joshua to choose men for the battle. While Moses was on the top of hill, holding up his hands the battle, Joshua was the leader of the troops in the battle below him.

Joshua is one of the 12 spies sent in to explore the promised land of Canaan (**Numbers 13**). In **Numbers 13:8**, Joshua is referred to as "Hoshea son of Nun" but in **verse 16**, Moses called him – Joshua.

He is one of only two of the twelve spies who trusts the Lord to lead them victoriously into the land. But, Joshua has

an incredible burden. He must lead the Israelites after Moses, the great hero of the Israelite story, and a man with a special status before God.

JOSHUA – LEADING FROM WHERE HE WAS

Joshua did not wait to be nominated, appointed, or chosen as a leader, before he began to develop the character, show the wisdom, conduct himself, humbly as a proper example that will make him an effective leader. Joshua was already leading from where he was.

Most of us (*husband and wives, children, youths and aged ones, singles and married etc.*) see nothing wrong in not developing ourselves – character, values, wisdom and right example-ship because we feel we have not been appointed, nominated or chosen for a leadership position.

And when an opportunity for leadership positions comes, we are either scared or do emergency preparation which end up in failures.

This is one reason, the church struggles with growth and maturity. We are not leading from where we are. We are not developing in knowledge (***II Timothy 2:15***). We sometimes act as children, tearing the church apart, destroying the reputation of Jesus Christ even in the society (***Ephesians 4:14-16; 31-32; I Corinthians 3:1-3; James 4:1***)

Joshua understood that leadership comes with burden, anxiety and responsibility.

- one has to conduct oneself as someone who can always set a right example.
- one has to be competent, in order to be effective.
- one needs character – in terms of values, in conduct and attitude.
- One needs the wisdom of God to use power of leadership appropriately because power exposes one.
- A leadership position, not properly prepared for, will magnify character weaknesses. Having power will reveal who we really are. If we have not dealt with pre-

existing character flaws before stepping into a leadership position, we will carry them with us into it.

Some leaders have failed not because of spiritual or technical incompetence but because their leadership position exposed their flaws, which compromised their leadership.

While no-one is perfect, if we want to be a successful leader the bar is set higher for us and our character and conduct must be able to stand up to the scrutiny that comes with being in a leadership position.

There is a saying taken from a line from the play King Henry the Fourth, Part Two, by William Shakespeare - "*Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.*"



*Uneasy lies the head
that wears a crown.*

Henry IV, Part II

Leadership turned over to Joshua. He knew the burden of leadership and has been developing those features that would make him an effective leader.

Moses spoke to God regarding the position of a man to lead the congregation of Israel (***Numbers 27:16-17***). God told Moses to chose Joshua because His Spirit is with him (***Numbers 27:18***).

Joshua was full of spirit of wisdom; he is always willing to abide by God's words; he never attempted to outsmart God or insult His intelligence. As instructed Moses chose Joshua and laid hands on him (***Deuteronomy 34:9***).

God helped Joshua in every step listed below, to ensure He conquered and possessed nations:

- A. Spying out Jericho (***Joshua 2***).

- B. Crossing Jordan on dry land and setting up stones for a memorial (**Joshua 3, 4**).
- C. Preparing for battle (**Joshua 5**).
- D. Taking Jericho (**Joshua 6**).
- E. Problems taking Ai (*the key to Central Canaan*); blessings and curses are read (**Joshua 7, 8**).
- F. Crafty Gibeon; battles with the kings of the south – *the sun stood still in the midst of heaven for a whole day; God heeded the voice of a man* (**Joshua 9, 10**).
- G. The defeat of the kings of the north (**Joshua 11**).
- H. A summary of the battles (**Joshua 12**).

God did not only help Joshua to conquer and possess nations; HE helped him to ensure the land was fairly divided as inheritance for the tribes of Israel (**Joshua 13 -22**).

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL MESSAGES AND THE IN-BUILT LESSONS

Joshua, a warrior and a great commander, as always, remains loyal to the last to Jehovah and the covenant.

Before he died, He calls a solemn assembly of the tribes at historic Shechem. Shechem is the heart of the land of Canaan.



In Shechem, Joshua reviews the history of Israel and warns them of the dangers of apostasy. Joshua charged them

to re-dedicate their commitment to God and renew their unwavering services to God.

He erected a stone memorial of this renewal of the national covenant, dismisses the assembly and was gathered to his fathers.

ACKNOWLEDGE GOD AS THE ONLY PROVIDER OF YOUR VICTORY AND SUCCESSES (Joshua 23:2-3).

"I am old, advanced in age. You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you.

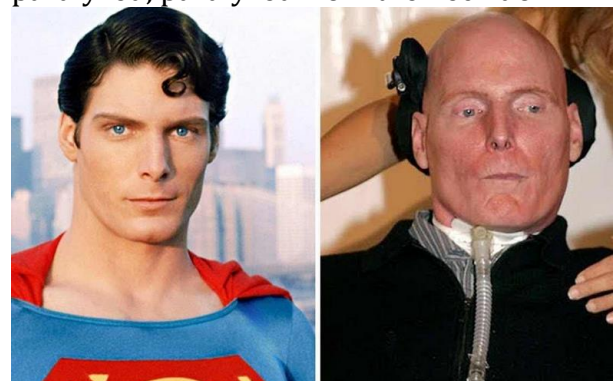
Appropriately, Joshua reminded them that it had not been the Israelites who had won all of those battles; it was the work of God. " *God is He who has fought for you!*"

The Israelites needed to be reminded always about the glory of God which must not be shared with any other person.

They are fond of forgetting the source of their wealth, health and victories.

How easy it is for us to forget the real source of our wellness, blessings, successes, victories and prosperity. We do this most times, when we use our wellness, blessings, successes, victories and prosperity, to show less or no commitment to our relationship with HIM.

Christopher Reeve, who starred as "Superman" in the movies, was involved in a life-threatening accident, a devastating May 1995 riding injury which left him paralyzed, paralyzed from the neck down.



Before his death in 2004, he discovered that in real life he was not as invincible as the character he portrayed. In one of the interviews granted, Mr. Reeve commented that since being paralyzed, he has discovered a new enthusiasm for life.

His condition provided him a sharper vision of life's priorities.

REMEMBER THE EVERLASTING INTEGRITY OF GOD (Joshua 23:14-16).

“Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. Therefore, it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given you. When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you.”

As Joshua stood before the elders, community heads, judges and officers of Israel, he reminded Israel of their glorious past, and challenged them regarding their future. One of the things Joshua emphasized was the integrity of Jehovah; one can depend upon the Lord's word to be faithful.

Jesus confirmed that *heaven and earth will pass away, but HIS words will by no means pass away (Matthew 24:35)*. Isaiah declared that *every word which comes from the mouth of God must accomplish what He please and prosper in the thing for which He sent it (Isaiah 55:11)*.

The word of God is an everlasting bond. What God says He will do, that He certainly does. He cannot lie. He is always faithful to His words and promises both to bless and punish.

What a comforting thing it is to be assured that God's promises of deliverance, healing, peace, protection, providence and everlasting life - will prove trustworthy!

What a terrible and fearful thing it is to be assured that when we practice sin and refuse to repent, that all God's anger will come upon us, the snares of the devil will

overtake us and we will face everlasting condemnation in hell fire.

Hebrews 10:31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

We had better take the Lord's word seriously—both the promises and the warnings. We cannot outsmart God, we cannot deceive God, we cannot mock God – whatever we sow, we will reap (A SURE STATEMENT) – **Galatians 6:7**.

USE YOUR GOD-GIVEN FREEWILL TO SERVE GOD ALONE (Joshua 24:15-27).

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (verse 15).

Joshua inspires the people with a rousing challenge to their commitment to serve God ALONE. He recounts God's amazing acts on Israel's behalf in Egypt, the wilderness and the Promised Land. He was worried, some of them were still carrying idols and false gods with them. They wanted to serve two masters at the same time – impossible.

Joshua wanted them to make an actual but resolute decision. He wanted the decision to be put in writing as a witness against them – they had to sign and witness their commitment.

Humanity has been endowed with **free will**; we have been granted freedom of choice.

And it is upon the basis of free will that our divine Creator urges us, as free moral agents, to choose to serve Him and live moral lives.

God, in His infinite love, wanted for man to enjoy free will, and to choose to do His will. He wanted for man to love Him, not because His will was the only option available to him, but because it was the right option and the only option that would guarantee him eternal joy.

Joshua showed a great example to the people by confirming his resolute declaration of his continued loyalty and obedience to God alone.

Joshua has built his family to understand the principle of using one's free-will to obey only God and statement indicates that his family must have followed his great example.

He was bold enough to make declaration of loyalty on behalf of his family – how many of us can declare on behalf of our families? How many of us have this resolute decision to be and to remain faithful to God?

Joshua's declaration sets a good example for selfless leadership in the life of a nation.

How many selfless leaderships can we find in the church today?

CONCLUSION

Joshua, through his relationship with God, provides a challenge for us to lead from where we are; develop qualities that will make us to competent and effective leaders in the church.

Joshua's lifestyle is an excellent model for leaders seeking to build commitment toward a difficult course of action.

Joshua through his farewell messages, provides an inspiration for us to always remember that God alone is the source of all our victories and successes; remember all that God has done for us, build our faith in Him – for both the present and the future; remember that His integrity is found in both to bless and punish and ultimately for us to use our free-will to commit to serve God alone.

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