



DEFINING SUCCESS

Joshua 1

Joshua had an enormous task ahead of him in conquering the promised land, but he also had a great God with him, and that is the key to true success and prosperity. Joshua would prove to be a military genius, but more importantly, he would prove to be a man of God.

We now begin our journey through the book of Joshua. Joshua is the first of twelve books in the Old Testament that recount Israel's history, and it tells us how God directed and protected the Israelites, getting them out of the wilderness and into the promised land.

Even though the Israelites were given the land of Canaan as the covenant promise from God, they still had to go in and conquer it. The idolatrous nations that lived there hated Yahweh and the people of God, and they were not just going to roll over and say, "Come on in." And that's why the book of Joshua can be divided into three major military campaigns.

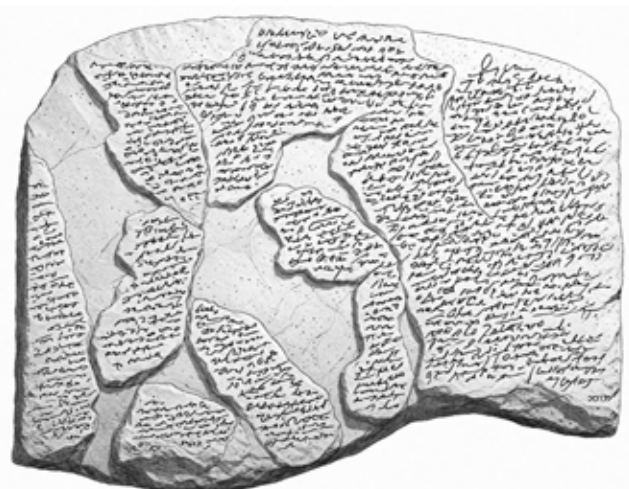
You might actually have something Joshua said, framed and hanging in your house like we do in our home: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Well, Joshua said that in chapter 24 when he was right around a hundred years old; that was the motto of his life.

Beloved, when you get out of bed in the morning, if this is already settled in your heart—that you and your house will serve the Lord—well then, every other decision facing you has already been settled. God is in charge of your day because God is in charge of you.

Now as chapter 1 opens, Joshua is commissioned by God to take the nation Israel into the promised land. God says to him in verse 2:

"Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel."

And in verse 5 the Lord offers this assurance:



Treaty between Hittites and Egyptians concluded after the battle of Kadesh



“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.”

Now four times in chapter 1 you can underline God’s words to Joshua, “Be strong and courageous.” And they are repeated probably because Joshua is intimidated by this assignment. He’s not just a young spy returning with a positive report like he did forty years earlier; now he’s the commanding general, and he’s probably wondering if the people will even follow him.

Well fortunately, here in verse 17, the people respond by saying, “Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you.” Now I don’t find that reassuring at all, because they did not obey Moses in all things! They complained and disobeyed Moses like a roomful of three-year-olds.

That is why the promise from God back in verse 5 is so meaningful: “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” It’s as if God says to Joshua, “Look, the people you’re leading will fail you, but I will never leave you.”

That same promise has been given to you today, beloved; the Lord says in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

*Hebrews 13:5,
“I will never leave
you nor forsake you.”*

Now Joshua is facing seven enemy nations in the promised land. These nations are collectively referred to as Canaanites. Tucked inside that term *Canaanites* you have all the “ites”—the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Moabites, and all the other mos-

quito bites. They will try to suck the blood out of Israel from morning until night.

I am often asked why God tells Israel to destroy these Canaanite nations. Is God being cruel to these people? To answer this, you have to go back to Genesis chapter 9, where Noah pronounces a curse on Canaan, who will go on to become the father of the Canaanites. This curse was prophetic because God knew what the Canaanites would become—seven immoral, brutal, child-sacrificing, demon-worshipping, warrior nations.

When Israel went in to claim their inheritance, they were also acting as the instrument of God’s judgment. People say to me today, “The God of the Old Testament was cruel, but the God of the New Testament is kind.” Well, they haven’t read the New Testament evidently. It ends with a final judgment of every person who has ever lived and refused to follow God. After that judgment, Revelation chapter 20 informs us, they are cast into an eternal hell. Listen, what you are seeing here in the book of Joshua is God’s judgment on sin, and it’s a strong warning of that future, final judgment on all who defy God and His Word.

If you had just been told you are about to go into a land where these seven wicked nations are waiting, wouldn’t you want to know what your chances were? Well, God gives Joshua some reassurance here in verses 7 and 8, where God promises him that he will have “success” and be “prosperous.”

Success and *prosperity* are defined in the Word of God very differently from how we usually define them. If someone is successful today, that means he’s got more room in his garage than most people have in their homes, along with some impressive title at work.

But when the Bible defines success, it has nothing to do with your paycheck—it has everything to do with your priorities. Let me tell you, I’ve met a lot of poor Christians in different parts of the world, but in the eyes of God, they were successful and prosperous.

Joshua is told here to make three decisions that will bring him true success. And making these three decisions will do the same for us today.



First, Joshua has to decide to *obey God's Word*. God says to Joshua in verse 7:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

Joshua probably had watched Moses writing out these first five books of the Old Testament—the Torah. Torah is the Hebrew word for “teaching.” These books are also called the Pentateuch. Penta means “five” in the Greek language, and teuchos means “book”; so, the Pentateuch is the first five books of the Old Testament.

Keep in mind that when God tells Joshua to obey “this book,” this is all Joshua has—the Pentateuch. He can't have devotions from the book of Psalms or Isaiah or Romans or the Gospel of John. But the Book he has—the Bible he has, if you please—is enough to give him a successful life.

The second decision Joshua has to make is to *communicate God's Word*. We read in verse 8: “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth.” This means it must always be on his lips. You see, it was the responsibility of Israel's leaders to read these five books to the nation every seven years. Imagine sitting through that sermon! Joshua was to continue this practice.

Beloved, do you want to be successful in life? Well, how long does it take before your family, friends, classmates, or coworkers hear something from your mouth that communicates the truth of God's Word?

The third decision that leads to biblical success is to *meditate on God's Word*. In verse 8, God tells Joshua

to “meditate on it day and night.” The Hebrew word here for “meditate” means “to murmur,” or “to ponder.” Like a cow out there in the pasture chewing its cud, we need to be mentally chewing on the Word of God throughout the day.

That is true success—obeying God's Word, communicating God's Word, and meditating on God's Word throughout the day. Let's decide to do that today.

How is your faith encouraged knowing God is always present with every true believer? How is your thought life and your choices impacted by this same truth about God's presence? Read Psalm 139 to shore up your confidence and convictions in this area of your life.

Consider this: how has the world shaped your concept of success? How does Colossians 3:1-6 affect your pursuit of anything rooted in the world's way of thinking? Choose several biblical characters and study their lives in God's word to further remind you of who defines and where the foundation of success can be found.

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