

HOW SHALL WE STUDY OUR OLD TESTAMENTS? - Part one

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Let's start with looking at Joshua. Joshua plays such a *pivotal role* in Israel's history. After all of their wanderings and struggles, he's the one who would actually bring them into their promised land. Israel enjoyed its greatest *military success* under his leadership. He is really the key link between the Pentateuch and the rest of the scriptures.

Why did God choose Joshua for this job? What made him so usable to the Lord? It's more than just an academic question. What is God looking for *today* in the lives of people who will really make a difference for Him *tomorrow*? It takes more than just *luck* to make life work on God's terms. What is the key for people who really want to *accomplish things for God* - who want to do more than just *get by and mark time in the Christian life*?

This is really what these books sandwiched in the middle of the Old Testament are all about. There are great leaders and there are terrible flops. So what goes into the making of a *Godly* leader? Teachers, parents, children's workers, business people, or those who just want to be exemplary in their Christian walk - who transform others just by the path they cut in life - what does the Bible *teach* about being of *influence for God*?

Joshua didn't just materialize in the first chapter of the book bearing his name. If you take the time to look, you'll see an extensive **shaping process** - a **schooling** - of this great leader. Before we launch into an extended study of the entire book of Joshua, I want to take several weeks examining the **calling** and **shaping** of Joshua, the would-be leader. And it all starts long before Joshua chapter one. Here are some important background texts:

1) **LESSON NUMBER ONE - POWER COMES FROM THE LORD**

Exodus 17:8-16 - "Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. [9] So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." [10] So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. [11] Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. [12] But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. [13] And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword."

[14] "Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." [15] And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, [16] saying, "A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

The externals of this story are easy to summarize. Israel is at war with the Amalekites. Joshua is the new, young field commander of the troops. This is the very first mention of Joshua in the Scriptures. And he's thrust into the middle of a pretty crucial situation.

The Amalekites will be seen to be constant enemies of Israel. But they aren't just being arbitrarily picked on by God. The Bible makes it clear that the Amalekites are rebelling against more than just the Israelites.

The text says they are set against the **God** of the Israelites - **Exodus 17:15-16** **"And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The Lord is my banner, [16] saying, "A hand upon the throne of the Lord! [that's the Amalekites] The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."**

The Amalekites had set their hands on the throne - the **rule** - the **authority** - of God Himself. Through their own false religion and pride and violence they were trying to usurp God's rightful place of rule. And they were zealous and passionate in their arrogance.

And now we begin to see something important about Joshua. He's young and he's inexperienced, but he's **observant**. This is a great trait in Joshua. None of what is going on is **wasted** on Joshua. He learns to **really notice** what is just **behind** the outward events. He learns about **God**. Here's what he learns right away:

a) ***God will not be rebelled against without consequence.***

These Amalekites are numerous and mighty. They've been settled into the pattern of ignoring God for a long time, seemingly without any external consequence. But their time is coming. It is absolutely certain, even though they can't imagine it's coming.

This is the important lesson poking Joshua in the face. There is absolutely no earthly reason for the Amalekites to lose this battle with Israel. No reason except one. You can't set your face against God persistently without ruining yourself. God will have Joshua down in the battle field for a reason. Enemies will fall by his own hand. No one will see as **close up** as Joshua the cost of rebellion against the hand of God. Joshua learns at square one that the only wise response to God is an obedient, humble, submissive one.

But there's an even more basic lesson Joshua learns at this point of our story:

- b) ***Israel's true source of power isn't in army or sword. Power comes from the Lord.*** This is what verse 11 is all about - **“Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed.”**

This is not a tale of **magic** or **superstition**. Joshua and the people were to learn early where their strength came from. Look at the way God set the whole scene up. It was all designed so nobody would remember the lesson better than Joshua.

Moses may get tired arms, but that's really his only loss. But when Moses' hands come down, Joshua starts to see his soldiers fall and the blood flow. The pain of **powerlessness** hit home with the lowering of Moses' intercessory prayer hands. And the vivid consequences hit Joshua first hand. I'm sure he never forgot that costly, visible lesson.

Now hear me on this point. Nothing I say in this teaching is as important. What Joshua **sees** of the bleeding, broken rubble of human lives from the dying of prayer is only what **always** happens when people don't pray, **made visible**.

In that sense this passage holds an **eternal** principle. There really is a message here for **us**. This passage is God's way of teaching Joshua something we **all** need reminding of. If you want to see what happens when we forget to pray, or grow **weary** in prayer like Moses and are inclined to give up, or just get so busy with the struggles and battles of life, or the running of our church programs that they forget to wait before the Lord, remember young Joshua.

And it's not enough for God to just **tell** Joshua this. Truth **told** only reaches us on a certain level. Truth **heard** is good. Truth **demonstrated** is more unforgettable. In Joshua's battle God very firmly put this lesson in **visible** terms. At least **this** time Joshua is allowed to **see** that all the soldiers, chariots, swords and spears won't win the battle.

Picture it! As the rod of Moses comes down and the Israeli bodies start to fall, Joshua looks up to the mountain and very quickly puts two and two together. **God** is their source of power and victory, and nothing else will work right without that priority being fed by earnest prayer.

It really begs some searching questions. What happens when church prayer rooms and altars empty just because the unsaved in our community don't find those concepts user friendly? I know some people don't like Sunday night prayer groups, but is that the **biggest** issue? What if we **never** have prayer groups just because we want **everyone** to be comfortable? What starts to **fall** and **die**?

What begins to rot and decompose under the surface of our lives and church ***long before*** the collapse appears on the outside? What happens in a home when parents don't pray with their kids? When personal devotions get scarce? When people get so busy fighting the time crunch of a hectic life they just don't have ***time*** for God?

And when you ask those questions, ***remember this passage from Exodus chapter 17.***

2) **JOSHUA LEARNS TO LIVE ALL OF LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

Exodus 24:9-18 - "Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, [10] and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. [11] And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. [12] The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction."

[13] “So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. [14] And he said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.” [15] Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. [16] The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. [17] Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. [18] Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.”

I *didn't* say Joshua learned God was always present, or “*omnipresent*.” It wasn't *theology* Joshua learned on the mountain with Moses. For the first time, Joshua got to go with Moses into the very Presence of God on the mountain. He *sees* what *Moses* sees (13). He sees the reality and glory of a God who is usually *invisible*.

Why is that so important? Because in the future, Joshua won't **always** see God like this. Just like, in the future, he won't **always** see prayer warriors with their hands raised while the battle rages. Many of his days will be like yours and mine - pretty ordinary days filled with all sorts of people problems and squabbles (**you** try keeping about a million displaced people happy and cheerful!), administrative details, perhaps tax forms, Visa bills, leaky pipes - you name it.

Most days God will seem **removed** from the events Joshua **sees**. But if he's going to lead the people he must always remember not to get bogged down in the **secular** or the **administrative**. He must never let his problems block out the great unseen God who is truly there - just as much in the **ordinary** as in the **cloud of glory**.

This is the constant battle of **faith**. The writer of **Hebrews** calls faith the "**conviction of things not seen**"(11:1). Faith operates under the **conviction** that there is always **more going on** than we see. There is more going on than our limited perceptions can handle. There is always **more at stake** than we see on the surface of things. There is always more to live for - more going for us - more to consider and pray about - more to shun and set aside.

So, just this time, God tells Moses to bring Joshua with him up the mountain. **Just this time**, so he'll **remember it always**, God is going to **show** Joshua His glory so he'll never doubt it again. Without this foundation under everything he does Joshua won't take God as seriously as he should.

He'll **believe** in God. But God's after much more than that in the person He is preparing for His use. He wants Joshua to be constantly and instantly **influenced** by His presence. God wants Joshua to be **unearth-bound**. He's always delighted in people who **remember** Him when everyone else **forgets**. Those are the people who shape history and please God.

There's a third lesson in the preparation of Joshua: We'll look at that next Sunday night.