

HOW SHALL WE STUDY OUR OLD TESTAMENTS? - Part Three

Sunday, March 22nd, 2026 - 5:30 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

In our last two studies we began looking at the *preparation* of Joshua for his leadership role over Israel. He will replace Moses soon. What does God build into Joshua's life for this crucial task? Most of us think of God's calling as the engagement in specific tasks aligning with His will. But God's *preparation* for His calling begins much earlier. This is why *all* life's events are so important - *more* important than we usually see in the middle of them. Each event is used by the Lord to *prepare* us for what He has farther down the road, in events we can't even see yet. Much of the important work of God's call on your life begins *before* you actually launch into your assigned task. So far we've examined three passages:

- 1) **Exodus chapter 17** - Joshua leads the ground attack against the Amalekites. Moses' hands are lifted in prayer high up on the mountain, *seemingly removed* from the immediate battle. Before he takes Moses' place, Joshua gets a basic reminder on how prayer relates to daily battles with mighty enemies. Battles aren't won by soldiers or swords or human ingenuity. ***Power comes from God Himself.***

Also, when Moses fails in the posture of prayer Joshua sees his soldiers fall. **Death settles into the camp.** The same principle holds true today in **homes**, in **marriages**, in **churches**, in **missionary enterprise**, and in **nations and governments**. What Joshua **sees** happening in the visible realm as Moses' hands come down and the Israeli soldiers fall is only a picture of what **always** happens in **invisible** ways when God's people fail in their prayer assignment.

- 2) **Exodus chapter 24** - Joshua goes up the mountain with Moses to meet God. In a very rare revelation Joshua sees a **visible manifestation of the glory of God for himself**. He sees what is normally **invisible** and manifested only **indirectly** in our world. Most of his days won't shine with God's **visible** presence like that. Most will be far more mundane in outward appearance. They will be filled with seemingly **ordinary** events. But Joshua must **never forget what lies beneath the surface of life**. A passion for God's glory must be held firmly in Joshua's mind even when it's out of visible sight. And that's never easy to do consistently over the long haul.

God reveals His glory **visibly** to Joshua to help him orient his life properly when things seem **totally earthly and natural** by all outward appearances. God never wants Joshua to forget there's more to it all than soldiers and budgets and committee meetings.

- 3) **Exodus chapter 32** - In this great text Moses and Joshua come down the mountain only to be horrified by the idolatry in the camp of the Israelites. And Joshua sees a side of Moses he hadn't seen very often. Joshua sees Moses' **reaction** to this sin. It's a far worse situation than any war ever could be.

Then Joshua sees Moses command the golden idol to be crushed up, mixed with water, and drunk by all the people. Joshua learns there are **consequences** to sin. It can't be ignored. As he hears the people gag and cough **he learns we always choke on sin's effects**. Sin can't be taken lightly. It never just goes away.

And he learns something else. He sees first hand how quickly the hearts of even God's people are drawn into worshipping things that are not God. We are constantly drawn into the **immediate realm of the gratification of our own desires**. This is another reason God brought Joshua along with Moses to behold His visible glory. **We** are not the center of the universe.

Today we'll wrap up this theme of Joshua's preparation looking at **two other passages**. If you're keeping track, these are points **four** and **five**, continuing in the numbering:

- 4) **YOU CAN'T BUILT YOUR OWN EGO AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD AT THE SAME TIME**

Numbers 11:24-29 - "So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. [25] Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it. [26] Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. [27] And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." [28] And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." [29] But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

It's an interesting story. ***Seventy elders*** are appointed to serve under Moses. As they are brought to the Tabernacle, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon them and they prophecy. There comes this marvellous display of the intervention of the Lord in all of the religious pomp and ceremony.

Then Joshua catches word that two men, ***Eldad and Medad***, have remained **outside the Tabernacle**, yet are **still prophesying**. This breach of protocol has Joshua concerned because God is pouring out His Spirit upon those who didn't appear to go through the proper channels. Joshua's heart is expressed in **verse 28** - **"And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them."**

Moses' response in **verse 29** is magnificent - **"But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"** "Joshua, learn right now that my ***ego*** isn't a factor here. ***God's glory*** is my only concern." Perhaps Moses was reminding Joshua to remember the vision of God's glory up on the mountain. ***That*** is all that matters in life.

I think there are at least ***two*** wonderful lessons reaching into young Joshua's heart:

- a) ***Ego kills spiritual leadership and spiritual life*** - Indirectly, Moses tells Joshua not to be too concerned about ***personal position and esteem***. “Don’t fuel your ministry with ***yourself***, Joshua. You will constantly have to choose between ***building your reputation*** and ***building My kingdom*** because whenever you truly work to build the one you must tear down the other. You can’t strive to build ***both*** at the same time.”

It's interesting that Joshua learns that lesson from the lips of ***Moses***. And Moses is uniquely qualified to teach this lesson. Here's why - **Numbers 12:3** - ***"Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth."***

Now God is getting ready to have Joshua take Moses' place. God knows that Joshua is gifted in many ways. Joshua knows how to ***lead soldiers into battle***. That will prove to be very important through the coming years. He knows how to ***organize and plan military strategies***, how to ***inspire and motivate a nation in great accomplishments***.

And for most of us that would be enough. But not for God. Joshua now begins to learn some deeper lessons on the way God prepares us for His planned future. And what he starts to see is **giftedness** isn't enough. It's very important. Gifts come from the Lord. There is nothing innately spiritual about **not** striving to do something well.

But that's only the **obvious** part of the truth. The **less** obvious part is **giftedness** usually doesn't blossom into **fruitfulness** without **humility**. Without accompanying meekness gifts and talents will only generate **activity** and momentary **excitement**. They will never foster lasting **fruitfulness**.

How privileged we are to behold Joshua getting schooled in **"meekness 101."** **Meekness** - when you're no longer asked to **lead** the program, but that doesn't matter. You'll **support it** as whole-heartedly as you did when you were the leader. **Meekness** - when the idea you had was rejected, and replaced with another which you didn't come up with. But once the decision is made, nobody who talks with you will ever know that you are anything but 100% supportive of the direction the group voted on.

Meekness - when that person didn't teach or lead in a way *I* thought was appropriate, but **other** people seemed to really enjoy it and get something out of it. So I'll just pray for God's blessing and fruitfulness on that ministry.

Then Joshua learns something else:

- b) **Joshua learns how easy it is to allow his own agenda to get in the way of the work of God's Spirit.** Most of us would never want to grieve the work of the Holy Spirit, but Joshua **almost** did. And he almost quenched the Spirit of God the same couple of ways **we** usually quench the Spirit of God:
- i) We take note of **how** the Holy Spirit did something for us in the past and we refuse to ever allow Him to accomplish those results again, using anything but the **same methods.**
 - ii) Or, we try to work up those same results again **by doing the same things that seemed to produce those results the first time.** In other words, we **map out in advance** what the Holy Spirit must do again and thereby reduce the need to **seek His face in fresh dependency** for our present situation. Things become orchestrated and predictable.

Joshua learns God can't be **packaged**. If Moses is going to be replaced with Joshua then Joshua needs to learn to be constantly ***listening to God for himself***. God wants Joshua (and a whole generation of humble seekers) to learn to hear and to do and to be what He's calling them to be **before** it all gets catalogued in the latest best seller at the Christian bookstore.

I have been trying to apply this to my own life. There is so much in the book of Joshua about simply ***listening*** to God. You can fast forward to a story we'll study in detail in this series. The Israelites defeat their enemies at ***Ai***. ***Achan***, contrary to instruction, takes some of the spoils of battle. He hides the stolen gold under his family's tent. Eventually Joshua had Achan and all his family stoned to death. It's a brutal, terrible story.

And yet other times, under the very **same** circumstances, God tells the people to take all the spoils of battle for their own use. On some occasions the people were busy **three days** just piling up the goods of their enemies.

Now **why** this difference? What is God up to? The key point of understanding is the issue **isn't** the gold or lack of it. The issue is the **training process**. God is teaching His people they must **listen for fresh instructions after each battle**. They must learn to **pay attention all the time**. They must learn never to fall into **empty routines** and **carelessness** in the way they follow God.

These lessons for Joshua need to be scooped up and poured into all our lives. How many ministries have we seen puff up and swell into oblivion because they honestly began to believe **God could never get the job done without them?** And how many times does the still small voice of God get missed in today's church simply because He didn't quite fit into what we were **already doing?**

5) **MEEKNESS MUST BE COMBINED WITH RESOLUTE CONVICTIONS ABOUT TRUSTING IN THE PROVISION OF GOD**

Forgive me for reading such a long text, but I wanted us to rethink this entire story. It's full of wonderful lessons:

Numbers 13:27-14:10, 14:26-30 - "And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. [28] However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. [29] The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan. [30] But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it." [31] Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." [32] So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, "The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. [33] And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them."

[14:1] “Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. [2] And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! [3] Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” [4] And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” [5] Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the people of Israel. [6] And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes [7] and said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. [8] If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. [9] Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” [10] Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel.”

[14:26]....[26] “And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, [27] "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumblings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. [28] Say to them, 'As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: [29] your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, [30] not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.”

This is the familiar story about the ***searching out of the promised land by the 12 spies***. Ten came back with a negative report. Only ***Joshua*** and ***Caleb*** believed God would enable them to take the land. And theirs was not a ***popular*** opinion. The crowd wanted to have them ***stoned*** (14:10)!

And here's the real point of the whole story. Even under that kind of pressure - the threat of loss of life itself - Joshua and Caleb ***refused to be budged from their commitment to the faithfulness of God***. With all the things Joshua had to learn, there is one trait that seems to have marked him from the beginning. He was ***steadfast***.

The majority who spied out the land trusted God until they saw the size of the enemy. Joshua and Caleb trusted God **regardless** of the size of the enemy. God always delights in those who regard **Him** more than they regard the **size** of the **enemy** or the **opinion** of the **majority**. Remember it all your life. God **always** ignores both the size of the enemy and the opinion of the majority. He **never, ever** has to think of either of those things. That's what **makes** Him God.

God always seems to find unusual delight in such steadfast souls. Jesus praised this same quality in ***John the Baptist*** - **Luke 7:24-27** - **“When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? [25] What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. [26] What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. [27] This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'”**

Jesus seems to say, ***“What would you expect of one who is chosen to prepare a way for Me? Do you think he or she can be wishy-washy - like a tall reed bending whichever way the wind happens to be blowing? Those kinds of people can't prepare anything in My kingdom!”***

Here's how Joshua had this lesson driven home. It's really an amazing story. From the time of deliverance from Egypt to Mount Sinai was about **two months**. They were at Mount Sinai for about **one year**. From the spying **out** of the promised land to **possessing** it took about **forty years**. And when the children of Israel finally **did** enter the land of promise only **two** of the original generation of people crossed the boarder - **Joshua and Caleb**.

Behold the difference between **aimlessly wandering around your whole Christian life** and **taking hold of the promised future God has for those who trust in Him**. **Aim your life at something**. Count on the blessing and provision of God. Never overestimate the power of those who oppose God. Always **bank** on God's promise. Nothing pleases Him more.