

# **JOSHUA, THE CONQUEROR OF CANAAN**

**By Dub McClish**

## **Introduction**

The only reason Joshua was not the greatest man of his time is because he was contemporary with Moses. None would question that he and Moses were the two principal characters of their era. We know little of Joshua's ancestry, only that he was of the tribe of Ephraim and that he was the son of Nun (Num. 13:8). However, great men and women are not so merely because of their parentage, kindred, or associates or because they are pronounced great. True greatness is earned and its characteristics are definable and recognizable. This is no less true of Joshua than of any other. When we study the life of Joshua we find him to be great in many areas.

## **Joshua Was Great as a Servant**

In the sight of most men, and most assuredly, in the sight of God one can never be pronounced "great" apart from his willingness to serve others. When the apostles were quarreling over who would be greatest in His kingdom, Jesus told them, "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant" (Mat. 20:27).<sup>1</sup>

Joshua is introduced to us in the sacred record in the role of a servant of Moses. When Amalek came against Israel at Rephidim, Joshua's name abruptly appears in the text: "And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him..." (Exo. 17:9–10a). God gave the victory to Joshua and Israel that day, with the help of Aaron and Hur who held up the hands of Moses during the

battle. After the battle God instructed Moses both to write in a book (scroll) and to tell Joshua that He would eventually obliterate the Amalekites for their unprovoked attack (v. 14; cf. 1 Sam. 15:3, 9; 2 Sam. 27:8–9). Joshua, as his servant, faithfully did what Moses commanded him to do.

We next read of Joshua on the occasion of Moses' trek to the top of Sinai to receive the tables of stone on which God had inscribed His law (Exo. 24:12–13). He was allowed to accompany Moses further than even Aaron and his sons or the seventy elders of Israel (vv. 9, 14). He stayed in the mount with Moses the forty days and nights during which Moses received the fullness of the law. He then accompanied him on his descent to find the people engaged in an idolatrous orgy around a golden calf (32: 15–19). Before the tabernacle was built Moses had a tent called “the tent of meeting” at which people could approach God (33:7). When Moses departed the tent to enter the camp again, Joshua, “...his minister..., a young man” stayed in the tent, perhaps to guard it in Moses' absence (v. 11). The zeal with which he served Moses is seen in his jealousy for Moses' authority when Eldad and Medad were reported to be prophesying (Num. 11:28). In this passage Joshua is again called “the minister of Moses” and “one of his chosen men.”

Joshua was a faithful and loyal servant not only of Moses, but of God. He served God faithfully as one of the spies sent into Canaan, which will be more fully discussed later (Num. 14:6). On another occasion, Moses said of Joshua that he had “wholly followed Jehovah” (Num. 32:12). Joshua prepared himself to be a great leader (which we will notice subsequently) by first being a great follower and servant, both of the godly man, Moses, and of God.

There are several ways in which Joshua is a type of Jesus, the Christ. Joshua led the faithful remnant of fleshly Israel into the promised land of Canaan and Jesus will lead spiritual Israel (His faithful church) into the promised land of Heaven. Even the names, “Joshua” and “Jesus,” are identical in Greek, both meaning “savior.” Another way in which Joshua typifies our Lord is that he was a consummate servant of men and God. The Christ could not have been what He was had He not been such a faithful servant. In the context in which He lectured the apostles because they were striving for positions of greatness in His kingdom, He told them that He “...came not be ministered unto, but to minister...” (Mat. 20:28). If we had to choose one word to capture the essence of the life of the Son of God it would be the word “servant,” a trait that did not escape the inspired Peter and Paul (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30; Phi. 2:7). Jesus taught this principle on other occasions. He once said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mat. 23:11). Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John all described themselves as “servants” of the Christ.

Joshua must have been a humble man because willingness to serve is rooted in humility. Jesus paralleled, yea practically equated, humility with service, even as he did greatness with exaltation in Matthew 23:11. Peter wrote a powerful statement on the connection between humility and service: “Yea, all of you **gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another**: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5, emph. DM). Just as humility is the well-spring of service, so it is indisputable that human pride keeps one from serving others and demands to be served. Although the proud person may be acclaimed by the undiscerning and by those

seeking his favor, true greatness will ever elude him because, “Before honor goeth humility” (Pro.15:33b; 18:12b).

Our nation suffers for lack of the servant spirit in the masses. Men want to be served rather than to serve. There are manifestations of this phenomenon on every hand, among them the following: (1) A totally selfish approach to life that operates on the following principles: “What’s in it for me?” “Why don’t you help me?” “Get out of my way!” “You can’t tell me what to do!” “I don’t care what you think.” “Don’t honk your horn at me or I’ll shoot you.” (2) The once-common protocol of commerce in which the merchant or clerk sought to serve the customer, and to do so courteously, is now a rarity. (3) The welfare approach to life in which the unproductive expect those who are productive to provide for them, even when they are able, but unwilling, to provide for themselves. (4) The denial that God and the Bible influenced the founders of our nation and the attempted expulsion of their authority and influence by Humanists from everything related to the state. Have not pride and ingratitude replaced the simple humility and thankfulness that characterized so many of our parents and grandparents? Is it possible that we have had peace and prosperity too long? If “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18), we wonder how much longer our nation can survive!

As does the nation, so the church suffers terribly for lack of the humble, serving spirit of Joshua. Grievous problems involving false teachers and their false doctrines now plague the people of God. I have long been convinced that such things as pride, arrogance, egotism, selfishness, and the craving for notoriety are at the root of most of them. It is possible for any of us to err in doctrine due to ignorance or other factors—in

fact even the best Bible student may do so. The humble servant of God will grieve over his error when it is discovered and will immediately repent. However, the liberals who are carrying the banner of compromise, change, and innovation are not promoting error through ignorance. Most of them once knew and boldly preached the faith of which they have now made shipwreck and many of them have advanced degrees in some Bible-related field of study. Many of us have patiently tried to help them see their error and to reclaim them, not believing they were advocating such horrendous doctrines till we were forced to, but as with certain evil men and impostors Paul described, they "...wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13).

Have you ever seen anyone more pride-filled or arrogant than the liberals among us? If you have ever tried to express your concern over their false doctrines and practices, I need say no more. If you doubt what I say, try approaching the president of Abilene Christian University about one of his several apostate professors or even some of his own liberal theology. Or, dare to confront Rubel Shelly, Jim Woodroof, Mike Cope, Max Lucado, or others of their ilk. You will find out right away that they are above question; they will be the teachers, not the learners! Theological liberals, as political liberals, are extremely paternalistic toward all others but their own. They and they alone have the knowledge and wisdom to know what is best for us poor, misguided, unrealistic conservative dolts who are still so naive as to believe in the plenary verbal inspiration and to respect the authority of God's Word! The arrogance of the liberals among us fairly gushes from their tongues and pens and their personal presence often reeks with it as they assault the bride of Christ and mock the Word of God. We commend to all such the noble example of the humility of Joshua, which led him to be

such a loyal servant.

Lamentably, the liberals in the church are not the only ones who have hearts filled with pride and selfishness and who know not how to serve. Some of the most doctrinally conservative members of local congregations can also be the most selfish and the least inclined to serve. Those who never visit others sometimes become angry and lash out at their brethren (especially the preacher!) for not visiting them. These folk must have their way in such earth-shattering matters as the color of paint on the walls or carpet on the floors, or someone will be made to pay! This same brother or sister never shows up for a work day at the building, has not taught a Bible class in fifteen years, is spasmodic in worship and class attendance, and would not think of visiting someone else to bring them help or cheer. Such members operate on the following premise: "I'll have my way or make everyone wish they had let me. It's either rule or ruin. After all, I put \$2.00 in the collection plate every time it's passed—that is, when I decide to attend. By the way, why didn't someone meet me at the hospital when I had outpatient surgery on my hangnail in 1961?"

While many churches have necessarily divided over liberalism, many others have divided over things having **nothing to do with doctrine**, but because one or more members refused to be humble servants of either God or their brethren. No behavior could be more unlike that of the great man, Joshua, or of the greater One, Jesus, the Only Begotten of the Father! Remember, the greatness of Joshua overall was based upon his greatness as a humble servant of both man and God.

### **Joshua Was Great as a Man of Faith**

A man or woman may be great in some ways, but none will ever achieve the

greatness that could have been theirs without a great faith in God. By faith we mean not mere intellectual acceptance or oral profession, even though these are necessary corollaries to it. Although faith in God requires that we believe His Word and that we trust Him, genuine faith also goes further —much further. (1) Faith, by Bible definition, is not something for which we merely blindly wish or even hope, but it is firm conviction and conclusion based upon irrefutable evidence (Heb. 11:1). (2) Biblical faith cannot be defined apart from action or putting into practice that which God tells us to do—in a word, **obedience**. The Christ teaches us this: “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). James worded it succinctly: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead” (Jam. 2:26). Careful Bible students have long observed that all of the heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews 11 are described as “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (Jam. 1:22)(e.g., “By faith Abel offered...,” “By faith Enoch was...well-pleasing unto [God],” “By faith Noah...prepared an ark...,” et al. [Heb. 11:4–7] ). As we shall see, Joshua’s faith consisted of all of these Biblical elements of faith.

Joshua had already demonstrated a marked degree of faith by his faithful service to Moses, God’s spokesman, but the first real test of his faith came when he was sent into Canaan as one of the twelve spies (Num. 13:8, 16). The twelve spies were sent to bring back a report of the people, the cities, the productivity, and the various natural features of the land (vv. 17–20). They returned after forty days and with one accord reported that Canaan was a land flowing “with milk and honey,” and that the cities were fortified and the people strong (vv. 27–29).

Caleb, another one of the spies, was the first to exhibit great faith on this pivotal occasion by taking the lead in urging Israel to enter it and possess it immediately (v. 30). However, ten of the spies proved utterly faithless in God's power and discouraged the people from taking the land (vv. 31–33). The people so vigorously followed the majority report and advice that they murmured against Moses, questioned God for bringing them out of Egypt, and began making plans to select a captain to lead them back to Egypt (14:1–4). Joshua (with Caleb) then demonstrated his great faith in God by making an impassioned appeal to the people to have faith in God who would give them the land (vv. 6–9). Joshua's faith was so strong that he risked his life to take a stand for both God and Moses; his sermon provoked the mob to threaten to stone him (v. 10a).

The faith of Joshua was such that God decreed that of all of those who came out of Egypt, only he and Caleb would be allowed to enter Canaan (v. 30; 26:65; 32:11–12). His subsequent steadfast, unquestioning obedience of God (in such events as the conquest of Jericho [Jos. 6:2–20]) demonstrated the reality and genuineness of his faith.

We live in a nation whose people have largely lost whatever measure of faith in God and His Word they once had. It is heart breaking to know that the infidelity and corruption start at the very top. Our president (1) is a big-time fornicator, who, with a straight face can hypocritically preach to a denominational conference on the need for strong families and (2) has built his entire administration on lies and around immoral perverts, but (3) still likes to have the news media take his picture on the steps of church buildings with Bible under arm! Many, if not most of those who we elect to represent us at both state and federal level, are little better. Our supreme court

continues to defend and protect those guilty of infanticide on the grandest scale the world has ever known. Our lower courts (and sometimes our bleeding-heart juries) “punish” even the most heinous crimes with mere wrist slaps or not at all. The most awful sexual abominations are gaining ever-greater acceptance, credibility, and respectability from our legislators and courts.

Unaccountability and its twin, irresponsibility, are the prevailing principle: No one is to blame for anything anymore (except, of course, Bible-believers who have induced guilt and provoked so much anti-social behavior by trying to “impose” our “Victorian” morals on others!) The learned theologians have relegated the Word of God to the literary ash heap as a mere human product that is totally out of touch with our sophisticated age of technology. What little “faith” remains in the masses is in name only. It is sometimes still convenient for a politician to say he is praying for someone or something or to utter a “God bless you,” but for the most part it sounds utterly absurd, hollow, irreverent, and incongruous. Some national leaders in high places are now openly attacking the “religious right,” which is actually an attack upon those who still have some degree of faith in God and His Word. If they were polled anonymously, I opine that the vast majority of those in places of authority and influence in our nation (i.e., politicians, theologians, college and university professors, business tycoons, et al.) would deny their belief in God and the Christ as they are revealed in the Bible and in the Bible as the infallible Word of God . When men do not even **intellectually believe** in God, His Son, and Their Word, it is certain that they are not going to break a leg to **obey** what the Godhead teaches!

The erosion of faith can also be seen to an alarming degree among those in the

kingdom of God. There have always been a few maverick, outer-fringe liberals (e.g., Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett) who reveled in their religious rebellion. However, what was once a trickle of erosion has become a veritable mudslide. It is worse than sad to observe and report that liberalism (a synonym for loss of faith, infidelity) is now the norm in scores, if not hundreds, of our “big name” preachers, many of our large metropolitan congregations, and in most of our universities.

Loss of respect for the authority of the Bible (which is equivalent to loss of faith in God who gave us the Bible) is always the first indication of an eroding faith and an evolving infidelity. Consider some obvious examples:

1. The dozen-plus ingenious attempts to circumvent the clear and clearly universal teaching of Matthew 19:9 are manifest symptoms.
2. The cry for a “new hermeneutic” is a blatant announcement by its proponents, not that they **are losing** their faith, but that **they have lost it**.
3. Rubel Shelly’s averment that the inspired Luke composed his Gospel account from “...Mark, Q, what, I don’t know, scraps, [or] listened to preaching,...”<sup>2</sup> is a loud and clear declaration of infidelity.
4. Carroll Osborn has authored numerous statements which boldly announce the bankruptcy of his faith. His view of the Bible, as well as such subjects as the church and fellowship, are crystal clear in the following samples:

Representative of the hermeneutical methodology of twentieth-century Churches of Christ are [Thomas B.] Warren and [J. D.] Thomas, whose views are essentially those of Hodge and the Fundamentalists.... Fundamentalist methodology dominated thought in the Churches of Christ in much of the twentieth-century. While the Fundamentalist approach stresses the existence of the supernatural and the inspiration of scripture, it

approaches truth more like a giant “grid,” all parts of which must cohere. So, biblical interpretation is not conducted in terms of literary and historical controls, but in “proof-texting” fashion to provide “proofs” for the various elements in the “grid.” As such, presuppositions control the use of biblical data. No interpretation can be correct which does not cohere with the “truth grid.” But citing a passage here and there from any part of the Bible, assuming that one has the mind of God on the matter, leaves much to be desired....

Alternatively, within conservative circles, a significant revision of fundamentalist views has emerged. While retaining belief in the existence of the supernatural and emphasis upon the historicity of the Christian faith, other matters are viewed differently. The authority of the biblical text is maintained, for instance, but “verbal” inspiration has given way to “full” inspiration, the use of the Greek text has supplanted the KJV, and texts are studied in their literary and historical contexts.... Rejecting arrogant exclusivism, Christian fellowship is extended to a broader arena.

...Conservatives, then, maintain belief in the existence of the supernatural and take a high view of scripture, but avoid the propositional truth approach of Fundamentalists. The text, analyzed according to rigorous application of literary and historical controls, is allowed to shape an emerging theology. Truth exists, but conservatives content themselves with the search for truth, laying no unique claim to its possession. Tolerance and constructive interaction with other schools of thought is characteristic of their work.... The conservative approach to scripture does not begin with preconceived constructs, but with the text itself....

The conservative alternative to fundamentalism and liberalism is compelling. Controlled analysis, which interprets the biblical text in its own linguistic, historical, and cultural settings, provides the essential matrix within which non-sectarian Christianity can emerge and flourish, developing responsible theological perspective within an ever-changing culture.<sup>3</sup>

I offer now some observations on the assertions of this brother:

1. Those of us who use Scripture-based and time-tested hermeneutical principles are “fundamentalists.”
2. We got our “fundamentalist” hermeneutics, not from the Bible, but from the

evangelical scholar, Charles Hodge!

3. It is foolish to view all of the Bible as consistent with itself as if it were a “giant truth grid.”
4. He gives us some interesting identifying marks of a genuine “conservative” (which is what he claims to be):
  - a. He denies the concept of “verbal” inspiration and instead believes in “full” inspiration. Whatever “full” inspiration consists of, it obviously does not include the internal harmony and inerrancy of Scripture.
  - b. He rejects the “arrogant exclusivism” of us “fundamentalists” and extends fellowship to a “broader arena” conviction, doctrine, and practice. (I wonder if it is “arrogant exclusivism” to reject those he styles “fundamentalists” who believe in the Bible doctrine of a “narrower arena” of fellowship!) If any are still unsure about the driving principle behind the rejection of the Bible by liberals, he just “spilled the beans”! They have to make a choice. They cannot (1) follow what the Bible teaches on fellowship and the exclusiveness of the Lord’s people (e.g., Mat. 7:21–23; 15:3–14; Rom. 16:17–18; 2 Cor. 6:14–18; Eph. 5:11; 1 John 1:6–7; 2 John 9–11; et al.) **and** (2) have either fellowship with or respect from their liberal sectarian colleagues. Since they cannot have both their liberal buddies and the Bible, they obviously chosen: “Hang the Bible, we’ll take our buddies!”
  - c. He rejects the “propositional truth approach” to Scripture. Does this include the following “propositional truths”: (1) “For that which is conceived in her [Mary, DM] is of the Holy Spirit” (Mat. 1:20b); (2) “He that believeth and is

baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16a); (3) “There is one body,...the church” (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18 [Oops, I brought two separate parts of the Bible together as if it were a “giant truth grid”!]); (4) “Which things also we speak, not in **words** which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth” (1 Cor. 2:13; emp. DM [All liberals must especially despise this “propositional truth” which affirms verbal inspiration!]). The list of “propositional truths” in the Bible is practically endless, yet this man who rails against thus viewing it still masquerades as a believer in the Bible as the Word of God! Incidentally, did not Osburn use the “propositional truth approach” when he wrote, “...Conservatives... avoid the propositional truth approach of the Fundamentalists”? Since his “Conservative” view of “full” inspiration is a “high view of Scripture,” we must assume that he considers the “Fundamentalist” concept of “verbal” inspiration which approaches the Bible as “propositional truth” a “low view of Scripture.”

- d. He believes in an “emerging theology” and merely engages in a “search for truth”—unlike us ignorant and arrogant “fundamentalists” who make a “unique claim to its possession.” I congratulate Osburn (along with Shelly, Love, Lucado, Anderson, and their kind) on the honesty of this statement. Their theology is “emerging” all right. They have already “merged” far away from the Truth out into the maelstrom of modernism/liberalism, but their theology is still evolving and “emerging.” The radical position they spew out today may seem tame when compared with what they posit tomorrow. No one (including the liberals themselves) knows their eventual theological destination because

they are still sliding around in existential and subjective slime. Such is the sorry fate of all who sever the anchor-line to the Word of God—no restraint, no boundaries, no borders, no direction, everything Biblical (including the Virgin Birth, a la Andre Resner) is “up for grabs.”

- e. He thinks his approach to the Bible provides an atmosphere from which “non-sectarian Christianity can emerge and flourish” (do not miss the implication that “non-sectarian Christianity” **has not** emerged and **does not** now flourish). This is an oblique, but still a most certain, way of saying that he considers the Lord’s church to be merely a part of sectarianism.

One thing is certain: This brother has given new meaning to *conservative* and *conservatism*. If he is a “conservative” we can scarcely imagine what he will advocate if he ever becomes a “liberal”! This entire program of infidelity is quite compelling to our brother. (Yes, we can see how it would be to one who has lost his faith by imbibing the heady “theology of unbelief” in the course of earning his two doctorates from universities which are verily crawling with infidel professors.) We have cited these statements and made these observations, not to demean a brother or brethren, but to demonstrate that some of the Lord’s people have lost their faith. If this brother has not made shipwreck of his own faith and of “the faith,” how many fundamentals would he have to surrender to do so? The even greater tragedy is that he is lauded by the administration of Abilene Christian University as their “Carmichael distinguished professor of the New Testament” and is thereby positioned where he can destroy the faith of hundreds of gullible, trusting young people, which he has already had opportunity to do for some years!

The signs of faith-loss in the rank and file Christian are not so radical as the

instances thus far cited, but if they are not halted, they may well become so. It is a lack of faith that causes the following types of behavior:

1. Forsaking the assembly in spite of the clear prohibition to do so (Heb. 10:25; et al.)
2. Refusing to give generously of our money each first day of the week according to our prosperity, in spite of the clear mandate to do so (2 Cor. 9:6; 1 Cor. 16:2; et al.)
3. Engaging in various kinds of sensual and worldly conduct (e.g., wearing immodest apparel in public, gambling, drinking, dancing, filling the mind with filth from books, magazines, TV, and movies, etc.) in spite of the many Scriptural proscriptions of such (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21; et al.)
4. Ignoring the Scriptural mandate to mark false teachers and to withdraw from the immoral and the disorderly (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 5:1–13; 2 The. 3:6, 14; et al.)

Besides these evidences of faithlessness, there is the growing attitude of apathy toward Biblical authority for both doctrine and practice. Human desire, rather than what the Word of God authorizes, has become the father of doctrine and practice for hundreds of churches and thousands of saints. This fact explains why so many continue to use and applaud the change agents and innovators among us. This is why so many continue to publicize, praise, and patronize such wellsprings of apostasy as the Tulsa Workshop and the Nashville Jubilee. The “end justifies the means” approach to evangelism and church growth is a tacit confession that its devotees have lost their faith in the Word as God gave it and the church as Christ designed it. To all such we believe the Lord must be repeating the words he said on several occasions to His disciples, “O

ye/thou of little faith” (Mat. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; et al.).

The Lord’s cause desperately needs men and women now who have the faith of Joshua, just as His cause needed him in the time of the wilderness wanderings and the conquest of Canaan!

### **Joshua Was Great as a Leader**

Another element that contributed to the overall greatness of Joshua was his prowess as a leader. He was not only a good follower, but he was one who others willingly followed. We see this in the first mention made of him in the Bible. He was commissioned by Moses to assemble and lead a company of men against Amalek. This he did, and the fighting men of Israel followed him in putting the Amalekites to flight (Exo. 17:9–13). He asserted his leadership in things commendable when he stood with faithful Caleb and urged Israel to have faith in God’s power and promise and to go up and take Canaan (Num. 14:6–9). God so recognized the leadership abilities of Joshua that he commanded Moses to appoint him publicly to a place of great authority even while Moses lived (Num. 27:15–23).

God further honored Joshua’s great character and his ability as a leader when he ordained that he and Eleazar were the men to whom He had given authority to divide Canaan among the tribes (Num. 34:16–17). Finally, He informed Moses that Joshua was His choice to lead Israel into Canaan (Deu. 1:38; 3:28) and Moses announced this decree of Jehovah in an ordination ceremony before all Israel (31:1–8). God formally charged Joshua with the leadership of His people as Moses neared death (31:14, 23). With Joshua’s faithful service to Moses, his repeated demonstrations of faith, and his ever-emerging leadership qualities witnessed by Israel through forty years, we are not

surprised that they wholeheartedly accepted God's appointment of him over them and willingly followed him: "And the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as Jehovah commanded Moses" (34:9); "And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou hast commanded us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us we will go" (Jos. 1:16); "On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life" (4:14).

It will be to our profit to try to discover what attributes of character made him such a mighty leader. In this discovery we will find the kind of persons we must be if we would be such leaders. We suggest the following:

#### *Humble Service*

Joshua's willingness to serve both men and God humbly and faithfully (discussed above) was an essential part of his leadership ability.

#### *Deep and Abiding Faith*

The depth and consistency of Joshua's faith in God (also discussed above) made him tower as a giant above almost all of the other men of his time. In his faith we see a key to his leadership of men.

#### *Decisiveness*

He was decisive. No man can be a leader of men without the capability of dealing with conditions or crises as they arise and making decisions concerning them. After God had laid the revered Moses to rest, He told Joshua it was time to lead Israel across the Jordan. Joshua did not question, complain, nor hesitate. He immediately deputed his officers to order the people to begin making the necessary preparations (Jos. 1:1–10). He acted decisively, according to God's command, in dealing with Achan and his sin

(7:14–26), as he did in the course of all of the battles of the conquest.

Doubtless, we best remember the great spiritual decision he made concerning himself and his family. Although his godly life argues that he had made the decision many years before, he announced it boldly and clearly in his final speech to Israel:

And if it seem evil unto you to serve Jehovah, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but **as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah** (24:15, emph. DM).

In essence, Joshua told Israel that even if they all decided to serve idols, he had made his decision to serve the true and living God.

Many modern-day saints are as Elijah described the Israelites at the great contest at Mt. Carmel: “How long go ye limping between the two sides? if Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kin. 18:21). So many have not made a firm decision to serve God. They are playing at religion. Consequently, when they are faced with some moral or doctrinal challenge they do whatever is most pleasant and least uncomfortable at the moment or they act so as to please those about them. Paul described such Christians as “...children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14).

The area of decisiveness is one of the greatest weaknesses in elders and elderships in the Lord’s church. They, as do so many of the members under their oversight, sort of roll with the pressures as they drift along the course of least resistance. In many cases they can hardly be made to react, much less positively act, to accomplish anything. The result is churches that are aimlessly floundering with practically no leadership. There is much more to being a Scriptural elder than merely making decisions, but making

decisions that affect the entire church (based upon a deep knowledge of and unqualified respect for the sacred Scripture, though they sometimes are painful and unpopular) is a necessary part of their responsibility.

Joshua not only made a decision about the direction of his house, he made a **wise** decision. Positive, productive leaders are makers of **wise** decisions. There are many people who have no trouble making clear-cut decisions, but they are life-destroying, soul-damning, foolish decisions. Some give their lives to the pursuit of fame, others to money, sensual pleasure, or some other unworthy temporal aim and this decision drives all that they do.

Leaders are not the only ones who need to make wise decisions. It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of giving our children the tools (and the encouragement to use them) at an early age by which they may make wise decisions. The one great decision we should guide them to make early is the one Joshua made—to serve God wholeheartedly. Having made this one wise decision, other decisions are more easily made (e.g., attitude toward the Bible and the church, career choice, mate choice, recreational activities, etc.).

The wise decision Joshua made to serve God was a **fixed** decision from which he never wavered. It was his overall plan of life through which every other decision and deed was filtered. Again, as earlier stated and emphasized, this is evident from our first introduction to him in the sacred text. He did not have to ponder anew each morning whether or not he would serve God that day. This wise and grand decision at an early point in Joshua's life provided the guide beam for his entire life. Real leadership demands this trait. One cannot wake up every morning with a new plan (or no plan) for

life and be a faithful child of God, much less an effective leader.

The need to make unwavering decisions applies to the marriage bond. The decision to marry, once we have acted upon it, is not one about which we can suddenly or arbitrarily change our minds. It must be entered as a life-long decision and commitment, with one exception (Mat. 19:9). We may illustrate the need for this trait this with the subject of Bible class and worship attendance. In thousands of Christian homes such a relatively simple thing as a firm decision to attend Bible classes and worship faithfully has never been made. As a result, this issue has to be decided afresh each week. I, as perhaps you, had the happy privilege of growing up in a home in which the question was never asked concerning Sunday or Wednesday night, "Are we or are we not going to attend?"

There is the ever-present danger of becoming discouraged and weary and abandoning our decision. Surely, Joshua faced this temptation on many occasions in the rigorous work God set before him. His greatness as a leader and as a faithful saint is demonstrated yet more by his perseverance in carrying out his wise and Scriptural decision. The list is long of those who, at one time, perhaps as young men, determined they would devote their lives to living and preaching the Gospel, but who have become practitioners of immorality or preachers of false doctrine. The congregations need elders that will not flag in their early zeal for the Truth and for the souls committed to their care.

It is not just the one who starts well that succeeds, but the one who, in spite of temptation, trial, and persecution, finishes well: "Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience [stedfastness, ASV f.n.] the

race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). Because God has promised us “...the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul exhorted, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:57b–58).

The Lord sought to inspire rugged resoluteness in His newly-appointed apostles, even in the face of persecution: “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” James wrote much the same thing to Christians in general: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12). As Joshua endured to the end, so did Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). God’s message to all of His people is in the words of the Holy Spirit through Paul: “And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

#### *Spiritual Direction for His Family*

Joshua provided spiritual direction for his family, as Joshua 24:15 indicates. Not only did Joshua make the fateful decision to serve God himself, but he announced that he would exert all of his leadership and influence to see that his family did also. In fact, it is most likely that he had done this all of his life. Was he married? Did he have children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, grandchildren? The inspired record does not tell us and some have thus assumed that he never married. It may be that his “house” refers to whatever immediate family remained of the house of Nun, his father (i.e., brothers, sisters, cousins, and whatever families they had). At any rate, the direction he set out for his family was the sure resolve to serve God.

Husbands and fathers are given a place of authority in the home (Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1; et al.). However, I fear that they often ignore the grave responsibilities that accompany that authority. These responsibilities involve loving one’s wife as Christ loved the church and as the husband loves himself (Eph. 5:25. 28–29; Col. 3:19) and giving honor to his wife (1 Pet. 3:7). **The New Testament is also explicit in placing the spiritual direction and leadership of the family upon the man of the house.** While children are commanded to obey both of their parents “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1) (i.e., “as the Lord teaches” or “in harmony with the Lord’s teaching”), it is fathers who are given the primary responsibility toward their children to not provoke them to wrath, “but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord” (v. 4).

The tiny percentage of homes in which this is being done in America is terrifying to contemplate. Millions of children do not even have a father living with them; many do not even know what man fathered them. In homes where both parents are present, few fathers are either aware of this Biblical injunction, or if aware, care not. What little “spiritual” emphasis children now get from either parent is almost altogether erroneous and misleading. The disastrous results are visible all about us as the age of criminals is growing ever younger and as the evidence mounts that many children are growing up with no conscience—not even a primary concept of right and wrong, let alone of spiritual Truth and error.

Even in Christian homes where both parents are present, the father so often shirks his responsibility to be the spiritual leader, pushing both spiritual training and discipline of his children off on their mother. When the father deserts his God-given role and treats spiritual concerns and the church flippantly, he should not be surprised if his children

get the idea that God, the Bible, and the church need not be important to them. “After all,” they may conclude, “maybe religion is just for women and little children.” Joshua shames all such fathers by standing forth as the powerful spiritual leader in his own family. How badly we need tens of thousands of fathers who will follow the admirable example of Joshua in providing strong spiritual direction for his house!

### Conclusion

The epitaph of Joshua is simple, but sublime: “Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of Jehovah, died, being a hundred and ten years old” (Jos. 24:29). “The servant of Jehovah” is the simple description given of Moses when his death was mentioned in Joshua 1:1. It is odd that no special period of mourning was observed for this great man who had labored so long, so hard, and so faithfully, as was done at the death of both Moses and Aaron. Matthew Henry told of the following legend among the Jews concerning this curious mystery:

Joshua’s burying-place is here [Jos. 24:30] said to be **on the north side of the hill Gaash, or the quaking hill**; the Jews say it was so called because it trembled at the burial of Joshua, to upbraid the people of Israel with their stupidity in that they did not lament the death of that great and good man as they ought to have done [emph. in orig].<sup>4</sup>

In Joshua we have a man who does not disappoint us in any respect. He prepared himself for powerful leadership by forty years of humble and faithful service, ever in the shadow of Moses. Let us learn and practice the lessons of his good life.

### Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version.
2. From transcribed tape of lecture delivered by Rubel Shelly at Richland Hills Church of Christ, Fort Worth, TX, Feb. 4, 1990 as quoted by Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991), p. 300.

3. Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom—Essays Favoring Non-Sectarian Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), pp. 62–63, 65, 70. Note: Brother Osburn is “Carmichael Distinguished Professor of New Testament” at Abilene Christian University, which institution has thus far defended his heretical view of Scripture.
4. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.), 2:119.

**[NOTE:** I wrote this MS for the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Denton Lectures, hosted by the Pearl St. Church of Christ, Denton, TX, November 13–17, 1994. It was published in the book, *Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, and I delivered a digest of it orally. I directed the lectureship and published and edited the book of the lectures.]