

Character Lessons From Scripture

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Week One

The Courage of Joshua

The Book of Joshua begins with the death of Moses and the Lord calling Joshua to lead Israel into Canaan. We might begin our study of Joshua here, but this would afford little insight into Joshua's formation as a servant of God. In truth, Joshua's story began generations before his birth when a dying Jacob laid his right hand upon the head of Joseph's second born son, Ephraim, and blessed him.

Joshua's belonging to the tribe of Ephraim is important information to know if we are to understand the role of inheritance in God's plan for Joshua's life and how Joshua embraced that plan through faith and obedience. Joseph took his sons to see Jacob when he was told his father was ill. During this visit Jacob said, "Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are (Genesis 48:5).

Following his declaration of adoption, Joseph presented the two boys to Jacob with his eldest son, Manasseh placed towards Jacob's right hand and the youngest, Ephraim toward his left. Jacob crossed his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim's head. Believing Jacob was confused Joseph tried to move his father's right hand to the head of his first-born son, but his father kept his hand upon Ephraim, stating, "his younger brother shall be greater" (Genesis 48:19).

1 Chronicles 7:20-27 lists the genealogy of Ephraim ending with Joshua the son of Nun. We are never told whether Joshua was aware of the special blessing he carried with him. God's call on Joshua's life and Joshua's response of faithful and steadfast obedience to the Lord and to the Lord's servant Moses were surely a fulfillment of all that Jacob spoke over Joshua's forbear in Egypt.

We first hear of Joshua's courage in Exodus 17:9 when Amalek fought with Israel at Rephidim. This battle took place at a time when scripture says the Israelites were quarreling with Moses and asking "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7b). In contrast, Joshua was walking faithfully with Moses and submitting to Moses' authority as to the Lord. When Moses called on Joshua to go down to do battle with Amalek, "Joshua did as Moses told him" (17:10).

During his battle with the Amalekites, Joshua saw sure evidence of the importance of working cooperatively with God to ensure victory and blessing. This battle was the one during which success came when Moses had his hands elevated over the battlefield. When Moses lowered his hands, the enemy would prevail. While Aaron and Hur assisted Moses, Joshua fought Israel's battle in the field (Exodus 17:10-13).

In Exodus 17:14 we hear first mention of what will become a theme in Joshua's life, especially in his role as a leader. The Lord instructed Moses to write 'a reminder in a book' of the Israelite's victory over Amalek, and he instructed Moses to 'recite it in the hearing of Joshua.' Joshua's courage was built up over the course of the forty years he served as Moses' assistant. He witnessed the Lord's faithfulness again and again as he served at Moses' side.

Joshua also learned the importance of reminders in anchoring the hearts of a people prone to wandering away from God's good plan for them. Joshua served Israel both as a champion and a shepherd, foreshadowing characteristics we later find in King David and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Before sending Israel's tribal leaders out to 'spy out the land of Canaan' (Numbers 13:2a) 'Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua. This effectively changed the meaning of Joshua's name from (Hoshea) 'Save!' or 'Oh save!' to (Joshua) 'Yahweh is salvation.' (See separate attachment for further study).

Joshua's courage was evident both in his bravery when facing Israel's enemies and in his resolute posture of clinging to God's promises during times of 'civil unrest' among his own people. Joshua confronted those who complained against God and Moses with a direct statement challenging their faithlessness and lack of trust in God (Numbers 13 & 14).

Near the end of Moses' life, the Lord instructed Moses to bring Joshua before the priest Eleazar that he might be commissioned as a leader of Israel in the sight of the whole congregation (27:16-23). The Lord instructed Moses to give Joshua a measure of his own authority that day, so that the Israelites might obey Joshua no longer as an assistant to Moses, but as a leader of God's people chosen by God as Moses himself had been chosen.