



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 4: God Leads His People

Lesson 1: The Promised Land—Joshua 1-4; 24

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

After Moses' ministry was complete, God turned his attention to Joshua to follow in the footsteps of his former mentor and take the Israelites into the Promised Land. This was a moment prophesied about more than a generation earlier in Deuteronomy 7:1—a statement of fact by God that the Israelites would enter the land, He would give them victory, and they would possess it as a holy nation.

The only problem was the extent of the land to be possessed was massive and occupied by at least seven foreign people-groups. Each nation defined a part of the region as their own, and they weren't eager to give up their space. The Lord's commands to the Israelites to enter these 300,000 square miles included an inherent challenge that they would have to claim it; this was something that Moses' generation struggled with and was disciplined for. It's why the Israelites sent spies into Jericho, and why even Rahab the prostitute knew to submit herself to the Lord.

With this context, it's no surprise why there are two running themes in the initial chapters of Joshua and in his final declaration to the people as an old man: "be strong and courageous" and "serve the Lord." Though God had promised a victory almost a half-century before this moment, He would let this generation claim it even though their parents and grandparents had doubted His words. Instead of the Lord displaying His greatness through a supernatural attack on the pagan nations, He would work through His relationship with this ragtag army of ordinary people to accomplish an unheard of victory nationally and providentially.

Perhaps this is why the miracle God displayed was for the Israelites and not for their enemies. By parting the waters for Joshua's generation as He did for Moses' generation, He reaffirmed His blessing and covenant with the people. Likewise, the Lord stated through this event that Joshua was as valid a leader as Moses was. A key difference was that for this second manifestation of the miracle the Israelites needed to get their feet wet first before anything happened.

The book of Joshua as a whole expands on this theme, as it shows a completion of the redemption from national slavery that began in Exodus. One day Jesus would further this covenant by giving His life up so humanity's slavery to sin would be taken care of, and would even be baptized at the beginning of His ministry in these very waters. The final culmination of this is still ahead when Christ shall return to permanently and personally walk us into the ultimate Promised Land of heaven.

OUR STORY

Christians seem to like miracles, especially when they take place as concrete events we can tell others about. When God does something extraordinary and powerful, all the faith we've put into Him seems validated. There are even some movements within Christianity that tend to focus entirely on dramatic supernatural experiences to feel closer to God and make Him known.

The challenge is that God seldom does the same miracle twice, as if He wants to ensure we focus on Him more than what He does. Even when a miracle does repeat, as was the case for Joshua in parting the sea, the Lord personalizes it to make sure everyone understands its purpose. If we can't predict His miracles, perhaps we're left with nothing but the relationship.

Ironically, that's the greatest miracle of all. If God doesn't answer your prayers as you demand, He is always available for you to lean on. It can be His way of saying, "I won't give you everything you ask for, but I will personally show you everything you need." Just as Joshua challenged his generation, so do you have to make a choice if you will serve the Lord for what He can do for you or for who He is.

OTHERS' STORY

Some of the brightest people in history have tried to figure out a pattern regarding how God works. At best, most have concluded, "The Lord works in mysterious ways." This may make a great bumper sticker and ironically even be somewhat accurate, but it doesn't really satisfy the deeper questions or longings inside of skeptics and believers alike.

Joshua's generation provides a great example for our generation in finding a balance. When God was clear on something, they were clear on doing it; however, when He left space for freedom, they took steps of their own to honor Him in all things. As a result, the Israelites did more than conquer the land—they brought a living relationship with God into territories where paganism reigned.

When we offer others a real-time viewing of our relationship with the Lord, we give them the footing to find their own connection with Him. Whether or not we can be clear on all the answers for every question people have about God, we can offer them stories of how we've exercised our freedom to follow Him and what it did in our lives. Sometimes this type of "out-loud remembering" reminds us of how legitimate and real our faith is. When we do this in community, such as through a church service or outreach ministry, others can even find a place to belong before they believe.

Again, that doesn't mean you can ignore or trivialize someone's demand for proof by sharing a spiritual story. There will be some who will doubt everything you have to say about God, causing you to even question even your deepest beliefs. Keep in mind that when it comes to ministering to skeptics your proof isn't always in what you can put into a test tube but in Who fills your testimony. Even if you can answer every argument others throw at you, their hearts will remain unconvinced unless they can genuinely sense the Holy Spirit genuinely alive in you.

THE WORLD'S STORY

The foreign nations didn't move out when the Lord's people came marching in, and that remains a pattern we see in the world today. Whether you focus on the holy wars fought in the Middle East or recognize a general decline in American morality, the conclusion is the same: we are in a battle against the forces of evil. Ephesians 6:12 clarifies that our struggle is not against people or cultures, but "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

Just because we experience resistance and often a sense of loss doesn't mean there can't still be breakthroughs. God's offer of salvation to those who would accept it remains constant. With God all things are possible, so even in a lost world there is no lost cause.

Joshua 24:2 may hold a key insight, for it reminds us that Abraham's father Terah settled halfway in between the land God told him to claim and the one he left. Very little is written about him as compared to Abraham, who made the full journey to where God wanted him to go and is constantly regarded as the father of many nations. We can't settle halfway between the world God says is possible and the one we've left—otherwise we will create a culture that has the appearance of godliness but that denies His power. We must always see the future “new heaven” and “new earth” Revelation 21 describes in order to plant seeds for that Promised Land even now in this world.