

Sunday, March 11, 2018—Joshua 1-3

The opening paragraph of Joshua is filled with significance. Moses has died. The one God called to lead Israel out of Egypt and to the Promised Land is no longer able to lead, and the people are not yet where God has called them to be. The good news is that Yahweh remains in charge, and that He continues to speak. He tells Joshua to have courage and that He will be with them. He has given them the land, and no one will be able to stand against them. Because of who He is, they can have courage.

Courageous faith acts boldly and wisely. Knowing they would have victory did not mean Joshua simply marched into Canaan. He sent spies to help establish a strategy. They found Rahab, who herself had to have courageous faith and strategic action. In saving the spies, she saved herself and became part of the family line of Jesus. One never knows how God will reward courageous faith, but the reward will always be rich.

Because courageous faith takes people to places they've never been before (3:4), God is faithful to go before them like He did with Israel. The priests took the Ark of the Covenant and stopped the flow of the Jordan so the people could pass over. God amazes and rewards those with faith.

Know what God has promised He will do. Pray for daily courage to empower faithfulness and obedience for His glory and your good

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Saturday, March 10, 2018—Deuteronomy 32-34

"I like the music because of the beat. I don't really listen to the words." Those statements and many like them have come from the mouths of countless teenagers as they explained or defended their choice of music. What so many truly know, however, is that sound—whether musical notes or the words that accompany them—is powerfully effective.

God above all knows the value of music and encouraged His people to play and sing, making a joyful noise. He left none of the music behind for the generations who would follow the biblical authors, but He provides the words of hundreds of songs to testify to His character and promises and to move His people to worship and obedience.

In Deuteronomy 31:19, God told Moses to write down a song which would do this very thing. He recited it to the people in Deuteronomy 32, telling the story of God's greatness and faithfulness and foreseeing the unfaithfulness of His people. Their idolatry would lead to disaster, and then God would ask them where the gods were which they trusted so intensely. Despite their unworthiness, He would show compassion and healing.

Moving from a song to a blessing, Moses used more words to bless the nation before his death. "How happy you are, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved the LORD? He is the shield that protects you, the sword you boast in. Your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread on their backs" (33:29).

Praise God for giving words which inspire, convict, and teach.

Friday, March 9, 2018—Deuteronomy 29-31

"God ain't never had a grandchild. Only a child will do!" These lyrics from a Southern Gospel song highlight the fact that God always calls people into a personal relationship with Him. One can never say he is redeemed and free because a family member has a relationship. One cannot rely on the liberty of another. Only a personal covenant with God counts.

As the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, God made a covenant with the people in addition to the one He established 40 years earlier with the previous generation (29:1). He was making clear His desire to bless them in their obedience and His promise to curse them if they chose to worship idols. There were many things God Himself alone could know, but He had revealed enough for His people to know Him and to flourish in His land for generations (29:29).

This was not some complicated theological exercise to which He was calling His people. They did not need secret knowledge or super-human skill. He was commanding them to love Him and walk in obedience in His ways (30:16). If their hearts turned away (and they would), He would curse them but give them the opportunity to repent and return.

Moses charged Joshua to lead the people, and he commanded him to have courage (31:7). The early church likewise prayed for boldness (see Acts 4) as they faced an uncertain future with a powerful, promise-fulfilling God. Ask God to give you courage to obey Him in your personal walk.

Thursday, March 8, 2018—Deuteronomy 26-28

Some see giving as an obligation or a nuisance. The offering time during worship may sometimes seem like “halftime,” a simple transition between the singing and the preaching. When God was preparing His people for the Promised Land, He wanted them to see giving as a time of worship, reflection, celebration, and blessing.

Coming to the priest with a basket containing the first tenth of the produce, the Israelites were to recount their story—we began as one man, became a great nation, faced great misery, experienced God’s redemption, and now have great abundance. Then, they were to acknowledge the portion they brought and ask God’s blessing over it. Far from the drudgery or regret many experience today when they give, this was full of joy.

God made it clear to the people. If they put these words into practice, they would be blessed, but if they failed to do them or defiantly violated them, they would experience His curse (27:25-28:2). Their decision would affect them personally but also affect their families, their produce, and their herds. God was sovereign over all and wanted everything about their lives to point to His greatness and glory. If they devoted all they had to Him, He would bless all they had. His description of the blessing is adequate but brief, but His description of the curse is lengthy and discouraging. If they disobeyed, they would face the devastating loss of everything God had given to bring identity, comfort, and purpose.

Praise God for the promise of blessing. Obey and enjoy.

Wednesday, March 7, 2018—Deuteronomy 23-25

What God does for His people is unlike what any other deity does. He offers grace and mercy and abides with His people. He does not depend on them to make themselves worthy but provides, through His own effort, the pathway to communion with Him. Those who trust and follow Him can never lose sight of the precious nature of this relationship.

This unique connection required God to address some unusual, even uncomfortable topics. He talked about those who were allowed and those who were forbidden to enter His holy assembly and discussed anatomy, genealogy, and illegitimacy. He wasn’t trying to discriminate or make people feel bad about themselves and decisions over which they had no control. He was highlighting the magnificence of His presence. “For the LORD your God walks throughout your camp to protect you and deliver your enemies to you; so your encampments must be holy. He must not see anything indecent among you or he will turn away from you” (23:14).

His holiness required the holiness of His people. His truthfulness demanded the truthfulness of those who were His. Making a vow was not to be done hastily and something the people could avoid altogether without being guilty of sin. (23:22). Their word was a reflection of their character.

How they dealt with foreigners, widows, children, and orphans was a reflection of their understanding of God’s grace. “Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you” (24:18). Ask God continually to remind you of His holiness and grace.

Tuesday, March 6, 2018—Deuteronomy 20-22

The instruction from God to Israel included direction for engaging in war. They were first to offer peace between the two peoples, with the inhabitants becoming slaves of the Israelites. The other options were to abandon the land or fight to the death. Co-existence wasn’t an option.

God was using Israel to purge evil from the land. The tribes and nations that lived in Canaan were evil, and they were now facing the consequences of their choices. Sin is devastating, and God was using His people to illustrate that. Israel, in turn, was to avoid the evil that plagued the people they were displacing.

“You must purge from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, for you will be doing what is right in the LORD’s sight” (21:9). God would not allow this to continue in His chosen place.

In purging the land of evil, God’s people were not to act carelessly. The death penalty, for foreigner or Jew, was to be an example and a deterrent but was to be handled correctly so as not to defile the land further (21:23). God was present with His people, and He demanded holiness. Their outer violence against sin was to match an inner hatred for it.

In chapter 22, Moses discusses seemingly disconnected ideas—sexual purity, marital faithfulness, planting seeds, plowing with animals, and clothing of mixed material. God was saying in all things His people were to appear whole and true. Their outer lives were to match their inner holiness.

Pray for a lifestyle that fights against sin and models His holiness.

Monday, March 5, 2018—Deuteronomy 17-19

God called His people to holiness, but He knew this was not a transformation into perfection. The sacrificial laws attested to the fact that Israel would commit sin, so He gave a way for repentance and restoration. Some sin, however, was unforgiveable. Those who were found guilty of idol worship, for instance, were to be put to death. God could not express it forcefully enough, “You must purge evil from the land.”

Though He did not want them to have a king, He knew their weaknesses would lead them to ask for one. God said this king was to abide by certain rules: He was not to acquire many horses (because that would require a return to Egypt and place his trust in military might rather than Yahweh’s character), he was not to acquire many wives, and he was not to acquire much wealth. God wanted the king’s heart to be solely His, and the three idols of money, sex, and power were incredibly persuasive.

The king was also to write his own copy of the Law in the presence of the priests. There was clear separation of power and function between the priests and the king, yet the king was bound by the Law just as the priests were. The moral authority of Yahweh reigned over all. The third key leader, the prophet, also found himself under the authority of the Law, and if he strayed from those boundaries, he was condemned.

Ask God to use the Word to purge evil from your life.