

Joshua Generation, Part 4

Israel in Joshua is in the same place that we stand today – on the threshold of a new experience, on the way to a new level of living. They are a new generation, holding an old promise that has never yet been possessed!

Joshua 1:2-3 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

DARAK (“tread”) – “Take up your weapons and fight!” – command still used with Israeli army today – “every place that you FIGHT FOR, I will give you”

THEY ARE ABOUT TO TRANSITION INTO A BRAND NEW EXPERIENCE!

Joshua 3:3-5 And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for **ye have not passed this way heretofore**. And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.

TRANSITIONS are difficult, but transitions are necessary if we are to be all that God has called us to be. The people of Israel have been landless for nearly five hundred years, and now God says – “Take the land.” It is YOUR Promised Land. And it is at this point in their history that God begins to transition His people from a nomadic culture and a slavery complex to a nation of conquering warriors. Wandering and bondage have been in their DNA for five centuries – that is all they have ever known.

But you can't act like wanderers and think like slaves and function like conquerors at the same time!

God is not transitioning them (or us!) to a place where there are no more battles, but to a place where the battles are more STRATEGIC – and therefore the results are more SIGNIFICANT, influential and eternal.

There was a long list of enemies that could have prevented Israel from entering into their Promised Land – Amalekites, Ammonites, Amorites, Canaanites, Edomites, Gebalites, Geshurites, Gibeonites, Girgashites, Girzites, Hittites, Hivites, Horites, Jebusites, Kenites, Moabites, Perizzites.

That's why God told Israel to **DRIVE THEM ALL OUT!**

Numbers 33:51-53 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall **drive out all the inhabitants of the land** from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: And ye shall **dispossess the inhabitants of the land**, and dwell therein: for **I have given you the land to possess it**.

God is saying “I will shake the devil loose” IF YOU WILL FIGHT FOR IT!

THE LESSON OF JERICHO is that God's people don't simply fight FOR victory (silver trumpet) but FROM victory (ram's horn), because the Lord has already won the battle! We are VICTORS, not VICTIMS!

THE LESSON OF THE JORDAN is that private altars of dedication (in the MIDST of the river) must be built FIRST, where only God can see (under the water) – and then there will be public altars of celebration (on the SHORE).

THE LESSON OF AI is that secret sin (Achan) is STUPID and SELFISH, but it is also ultimately SHORT-SIGHTED – the only person you hurt by refusing to get involved in what God is doing is YOURSELF.

There is a lesson for us in every battle fought in the book of Joshua! The next experience the Israelites have is a meeting with the **GIBEONITES**, who have heard of the conquests of Israel and want to make a treaty. God had told Israel to drive out the local inhabitants, but not all the countries around the Promised Land. So when the men of **GIBEON** tell Joshua they have made a journey from a “very far country” he makes a peace pact with them. The only problem is that they are LYING – they live just a few miles away!

Joshua 9:14-16 And the men took of their victuals, and **asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD**. And Joshua **made peace** with them, and **made a league** with them, to **let them live**: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them. And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbours, and that **they dwelt among them**.

There are consequences to decisions made without asking God!

Have you ever made a decision that you wish you could erase? Is there anything in your life you wish you could forget? Is there anything you've done that you hope no one ever finds out about? We should have known better. In fact, in some cases we did know better, but for some reason we thought we would be the one to beat the odds and be the exception to the rule. We believed that we could control the outcome of our decision. Some of the bad decisions you made led to chapters of your life you wish you could go back and unlive. Some of our bad decisions are just embarrassing, but others scar us forever.

You've already met someone on the verge of making the same dumb decision you made and you've warned them. What do they do? They continue full speed into that oncoming train! Could YOU possibly have been that naïve, stubborn and foolish? YES! The problem is that, while nobody plans to mess up their life, few of us plan NOT to! We don't put the necessary safeguards in place – and that robs us of our our future.

Today I want to leave you with a **QUESTION** Joshua should have asked.

- I cannot answer it for you.
- It applies to every decision you will ever make for the rest of your life.
- It would be very difficult for me to answer, but will be fairly easy for you to answer – in fact, in most cases you will know the answer immediately.
- While it is easy to answer, it can be a bit threatening to ask.
- It pierces the fog of self-deception and exposes our motives.
- It sheds light on issues the Bible doesn't specifically address.
- Most important, if you had asked this one question and acted on your conclusion, you could have avoided your greatest regret in your life.

This question can FOOLPROOF your life if you will ask it! So why don't we ask it? Because we are so good at deceiving ourselves when we want something. Some of us are very talented at making a bad decision sound like a great decision, a poor financial choice sound like an investment opportunity, or a poor relationship decision sound like a ministry opportunity!

- This won't hurt anybody.
- I'll only do it once.
- I haven't had any for a week.
- I'll be careful.
- I can handle it.
- I can quit whenever I want to.
- Everybody needs to live a little.

Some of your greatest regrets started with choices that you convinced yourself were good ones. But you were actually robbing yourself of your FUTURE, the way Joshua was actually robbing Israel of land they could have possessed by permitting the Gibeonites to live within their borders!

We are usually fully aware of the game we are playing! The fact that we have to give ourselves a reason, make up an excuse, defend our decision, or go through a series of mental gymnastics to rationalize it ought to tip us off immediately! You don't sit around looking for reasons to do the right thing (i.e. eating vegetables, saving money, exercising) – it's the bad decisions that require creative reasoning! That's why this question is uncomfortable:

- It exposes the irrationality of our excuses.
- It reveals the true intent of our heart.
- It penetrates the walls of rationalization we are hiding behind.
- It dismantles the arguments we use to keep truth at arm's length.

You will really like this question if you really want to do what's right. But it will be a nuisance if, instead of trying to make a right decision, what you are actually doing is trying to "make a decision right." Pay very close attention to your emotional response to this question today – it will either illuminate or irritate. If your reaction is defensive, that alone will tell you a great deal about the decision you are making.

The first three chapters of Ephesians expound the benefits of being in Christ, then chapter four turns a corner:

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

Paul says, "Don't live the way you used to live, because you are not the person you used to be!" And he launches into one of the most practical sections in the Bible, even suggesting that we become imitators of God in our everyday lives. It's a little bit overwhelming! Paul's standards are certainly worth striving for, but just about everything he says runs directly against the "cultural current." And if no one else is making me do it, I don't know if I'm that good, consistent or disciplined to do all of this!

Paul knows our frustration, so in his list of "WHAT TO DO" he includes instructions on "HOW TO DO IT." He unveils an approach to life that will set us up for success if we will just honestly answer one question.

Ephesians 5:15-17 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

- Walk circumspectly – don't be careless or casual in following Christ, watch your step because it is so easy to stumble, be intentional
- Not as fools but as wise – this is the yardstick we are to use to assess every decision we make, and it leads us to the one question that enables us to consistently apply the commands of the Bible:
- **WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?**

Usually when we are making our choices we run our options and opportunities through this filter – IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT? The assumption is that if there is nothing wrong, illegal, unethical or immoral about it, then it qualifies as an option for us. If there is no "THOU SHALT NOT," we assume that God is saying "THOU SHALT IF THOU PLEASE."

Unfortunately, this kind of thinking sets us up for the real question behind too many of our choices: "How close can I get to the line between right and wrong without actually doing something wrong?" How close can I get to sin without actually sinning? If it's not technically "wrong" then it must be "right."

But it doesn't stop there! We soon end up asking: "How far over the line between right and wrong can I go without experiencing consequences?" And eventually we will be asking "How did I ever get myself into this mess!?" Every bad decision you have ever heard about could have been avoided if only someone asked, **WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO?**

God is our Father, and so He wants what is best for each of us. He has given us a standard that goes beyond cultural norms. He has given us a question that enables us to live an ABUNDANT life!

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

The question God gave us in His word is not "Is there anything wrong with it?" but "What is the wise thing to do?" You can avoid the mistakes of the past and live "regret-free" in the future by making it your habit to ask this question. Stop using "How close can I get to sin without sinning?" as your standard! God never intended for us to live life at the level of what's permissible, legal, acceptable or not prosecutable! He wants us to analyze every opportunity through the lens of WISDOM.

Ephesians 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesus did not have a morally neutral climate – and neither do we! If we walk carelessly or casually, we will be swept right back into the mess we have been redeemed from – and we won't even realize it! Every day, we interface with a culture that encourages us in the most provocative ways to do everything in our power to try and satisfy appetites that can never be fully and finally satisfied. You don't have to go looking for trouble – trouble is on every street corner, magazine, billboard, television and computer!

Joshua 9:14 And the men **took of their victuals, and asked not counsel** at the mouth of the LORD.

If you don't pay attention, you will end up paying a price for your carelessness – like Joshua did! If you aren't intentional about living for God, you may unintentionally end up ensnared by sin. If you don't filter your choices through God's question, you will find yourself facing consequences that could have been avoided.

Ephesians 5:17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

How can a human being really "understand" God's will? By facing up to what we already know in our hearts that God would have us do! Probably one of the biggest temptations for Joshua was that making a treaty with Gibeon meant one less battle. But God had said FIGHT! God never said being a Christian was EASY, He said it was BEST. So ... **GO AFTER IT!**