

We Will Serve The Lord!

Joshua, the Son of Nun

Martin G. Collins

Given 14-Jul-12; Sermon #1111

Joshua was deeply devoted to God, the God of Israel, and a loyal servant of Moses. He took charge of Israel after the death of Moses, and he gave instructions to carry the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan River, which parted as the Red Sea. He led Israel around the city of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down, and he led Israel's conquest of the Promised Land.

There has been no day like the day that God heeded Joshua's command for the sun to stand still for one whole day. In light of all this it is interesting, even somewhat puzzling, that Joshua is not even named by the apostle Paul as one of the great heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

There are two hundred and one Bible references to Joshua, which leaves us with many valuable lessons. There are very few more dramatic examples of faith in the entire Bible. So why did the apostle Paul leave Joshua's name out of the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11?

Could it have been because the long list of Joshua's accomplishments overshadowed the man himself? Or the things that God did through him were so great that the events actually eclipsed Joshua's deeds?

The story of the life of Joshua, son of Nun, is naturally divided into two parts in which he held entirely different positions with regard to the people of Israel and discharged different duties. In the early period, he was the servant and administrator of Moses, loyal to his leader, and one of his most trusted and valiant captains.

After the death of Moses, Joshua succeeds to the leadership of the Israelites, and directs their colonizing the Promised Land. The service of the earlier years of his life was a preparation and exercise for the office and responsibility entrusted to him for the later period.

The first time we hear of Joshua in the Bible is during the second month of the exodus, under Moses. Under Moses, God led Israel out of Egypt by way of the Red Sea. After dividing the Red Sea for Israel, God killed the pursuing Egyptians in the returning water.

The Israelites journeyed into the rugged mountains of the southern Sinai and camped in

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

a place called Rephidim, which in Hebrew means "rest" or "stays." At Rephidim, Israel entered her first battle against hostile forces, the Amalekites.

You know the story. When Moses held his staff high in the air, the Israelites were victorious, and when his hands fell to his side, the Amalekites were victorious. Finally at the end of the day, Moses sat on a rock with his hand held up by Aaron and Hur. The final result was that Israel was victorious.

What about Joshua? What about his part? What did he do? Moses had appointed Joshua the commanding officer in the field. Notice the orders in Exodus 17:9-10.

Exodus 17:9-10 And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some 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 said to him, and fought with Amalek, and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

No doubt a lifelong lesson was learned on that battlefield. Joshua knew victory did not come from his great military strategy or prowess. It was obvious to everyone he had none. Joshua had no strategy and prowess. He knew victory came from God. He experienced the intervention of God firsthand, and we are introduced to Joshua as he learns to trust in the powerful God of Israel.

As you know, God gave the Ten Commandments to Israel at Mt. Sinai. Moses went up to the summit where he received the tablets of stone and the remainder of the law and statutes and judgments. Remember when Moses was on the Mountain, Joshua played an important role and continued to prove himself qualified for the job that he would fulfill.

Exodus 24:12 Then the Lord said to Moses, come up to Me on the mountain and be there, and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.

So Moses left the camp of Israel for nearly two months, but he did not go alone.

Exodus 24:13 So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God,

Aaron and Hur were left in charge of the camp, and Moses and Joshua went up to the

mountain and set up a base camp, and they waited there six days. Picking up the story in verse 16:

Exodus 24:16-18 Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

On the seventh day God called Moses to the summit of what the Arabs now call Jabel Musa, Mountain of Moses. Moses was there forty days, nearly six weeks. Joshua remained at the base camp for all that time, faithfully waiting.

Meanwhile, Israel, lacking faith in God, insisted on making an idol of gold, a calf after the manner of the Egyptian and other pagan nations. They entered into drunken revelry, immorality, and Moses and Joshua did not know what was happening at the Israelite encampment.

After receiving the law on the tablets of stone, Moses started down the mountain, and as the base camp came, he rejoined Joshua, who had been faithfully waiting. They hurriedly continued down the mountain together to show all Israel the tablets of stone carved with the very finger of God. So they were excited about it, both Moses and Joshua.

As they neared the encampment, they heard faint noises in the distance. Voices reverberated louder and louder off the stony canyon walls. In Exodus 32:17, we will pick up the story.

Exodus 32:17 And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp."

So, they broke into a run, and they discovered the truth.

Exodus 32:18 But he said, "It is not the voice of those who shout in victory, nor is it the voice of those who cry out in defeat, but the voice of those who sing that I hear.

Finally, they reached a bluff where they could overlook the camp of Israel. There, glistening in the bright sunlight in the center of the encampment was the golden calf. Thousands of Israelites were singing and dancing. Many were almost naked and most were drunk. They whirled around and around, fell and worshiped before the golden calf.

Exodus 32:19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Moses and Joshua rushed to the mound where the calf was set up. Moses ordered a fire built, and immediately melted the calf.

Exodus 32:20-21 Then he took the calf which they made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it. And Moses said to Aaron, what did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?

Aaron was weakened and permitted the idolatrous drunken orgy, which still to this day all of us have a hard time really understanding, but we have to remember that Aaron came out of a very pagan society. He was still learning God's way and still trying to carry it out. He was still very, very wrong, to say the least.

Moses removed the tabernacle of worship from the center of the camp to an outer extremity. The tabernacle was God's dwelling place. It is the people that had defiled the place, so Moses had to move the Tabernacle from the defiled place so the Tabernacle would not remain defiled.

If the people wanted to repent and worship God, they would have to make an effort to get to it—the Tabernacle. Even Aaron the high priest had defiled himself. Who was trustworthy and faithful to be placed in charge of the safety of the Tabernacle? Joshua.

Exodus 33:11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend, and he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the Tabernacle.

Joshua must have already been quite an amazing, faithful man at that point, for a young man to have been given that responsibility. Joshua was not perfect; he had lessons to

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

learn as we all do. One such lesson came a little later when God instructed Moses to convene the elders of Israel at the Tabernacle. We find the story in the book of Numbers.

God chose this occasion to perform a special miracle: He took the spirit that lead Moses and gave it to the elders of Israel. God gave them miraculous thought and words, and they began to prophesy, but this was a special gift to the elders who assisted Moses. Joshua as a younger servant, apparently did not receive the gift, at this time.

A runner came from camp and two other elders who had not come to the Tabernacle also were giving prophetic declarations, even though they were not there when those other elders were receiving that special gift from God. Joshua spoke out.

Numbers 11:28 So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my Lord, forbid them"

It seems Joshua had an important lesson to learn at this point. Moses, perceiving Joshua may have been a little hurt, even jealous, since he had not been given the gift of prophecy, reprimanded Joshua for that.

Numbers 11:29 Then Moses said him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them."

The other members of the seventy elders had been with Moses when the gift of prophecy was bestowed on them. They received the Spirit and exercised their office visibly. Eldad and Medad, prophesying in the camp, seemed to Joshua to be acting independently to establish a separate center of authority. Moses discerned a wrong motivation in Joshua's attitude.

The word zealous in verse 29, in the New King James, is actually a bad translation. Most other translations have it correct; it is from a Hebrew word meaning jealous or envious. That is what Moses said to him. Moses in effect was saying to Joshua, "Are you envious for my sake?" By Joshua's fruit, later, we see that he must have gotten the point and repented of that.

Let us take a look at Joshua the spy. Although much of the beginning of this sermon is in chronological order, the whole sermon is not. Let us take a moment to look at Joshua

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

as a spy. Israel had been gone from Egypt for nearly six months when Moses sent a group to spy out the land of Canaan. He wanted a report on the condition of the land, weather, and crops. He also wanted to know who lived in the land, how strong they were, and how their cities were fortified.

Twelve men were selected, one from each of the tribes of Israel. The representative from Ephraim was Joshua. It was at this time that Moses changed his servant's name from Oshea or Hosea, meaning "help," to Joshua, meaning "God's help" or "God's salvation," "God's deliverance." It describes the character of Joshua's military career. So, his name was changed from Hosea to Joshua, by Moses, through the inspiration of God.

It would be God who would help Joshua as their leader. The changed name indicated the desire of Moses to lift the thought of the people toward God and to lead them beyond reliance on physical leaders. Their hope was to be clearly based on God's help and salvation, not Joshua's. It must have been that Moses could see at that time that Joshua would very likely be the leader that would follow him, or at least he saw the potential in him.

In the selection of spies, Caleb represented Judah, and each of the other twelve tribes selected a man. This account is found in Numbers 13.

God said He would lead Israel to a land flowing with milk and honey, and the spies probably arrived in Canaan in September, since the grapes were ripe for harvesting, also the pomegranate and figs and other autumn produce were in abundance.

The fertile pasture land could support all their cattle, sheep, and goats. It was almost too good to be true, and they gathered some of the fruit, a cluster of grapes, that was so succulent and large that Joshua and Caleb had to put one cluster on a pole to carry it back to the Israelites.

After spying out the land for forty days, the spies returned, and Caleb with Joshua reported in.

Numbers 13:30-33 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it [the other ten spies had a different view of things]." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants), and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”

Almost all of the Israelites wanted to return to Egypt. They feared entering the Promised Land. Joshua, Caleb, Moses, Aaron and a few others were shocked at the attitude of the people. They had learned the lesson of faith, and they knew God would be with them. They were His people, but all Israel refused to go. Some even wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb.

After that, God had to teach all of Israel a lesson. They refused to go into the Promised Land that God prepared for them, so God made them spend forty years in the wild, untamed wilderness of Sinai, one year for each day the spies were in the Promised Land.

So for forty years they wandered in the wilderness, all those who had been twenty years of age or older at the time of the Exodus grew old and died in the wilderness. They were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, all because those spies, besides Joshua and Caleb, gave a bad report and the people who believed them lacked faith.

Next in the chronology, we find out whether Joshua had God's Holy Spirit or not. Joshua was endowed by God with the essential spiritual qualifications for the office. Moses, however, was to lay his hands upon him, both in order to confer formal and public appointment and also to confirm and strengthen the spiritual gifts already bestowed.

Numbers 27:18-20 And the Lord said to Moses, Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.

God Himself stated that Joshua had the Spirit of God. He said there... “in whom is the Spirit,” because Joshua was imbued with God's Spirit. He was capable of righteously leading the people. The history of humanity has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that a person who is not guided and influenced by God's Spirit is miserably unqualified to lead people in the work of God.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Deuteronomy 34:9 Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him, so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Remember what God said to Joshua, in Joshua 1:5-6 which we will go into more, later on.

Joshua 1:5-6 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you, be strong and of good courage.

Now let us look at Joshua as leader and soldier. Joshua continues to be faithful to God throughout the forty years' wandering. Trained at Moses' side, he really was the only one of the older generation who was qualified to lead Israel. Caleb would have been the only other possible consideration.

Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when Israel reached the Jordan River. In Deuteronomy 31, we find the story of how God selected Joshua to replace Moses. Here are the two main references.

Deuteronomy 31:14 Then the Lord said to Moses, Behold, the days approach when you must die, call Joshua and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him. So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting.

Under God's direction, Moses, before his death, confessed to Joshua in a public and solemn manner with authority over the people as his successor.

Deuteronomy 31:23 Then He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and of good courage, for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

Joshua was eighty five years old when he took command of Israel. He had a lot of experience in a lot of areas. By this time, he was thoroughly trained for the job. He had proved for forty years that he would faithfully lead the people in the way of God.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

It was, at last, time to enter the Promised Land. Joshua provided dignified and unselfish statesmanship once the division of the land was completed. He carried through the setting up of the Tabernacle, the appointing of the city of refuge, the arrangement of the Levitical order and service, with the same precision and thoroughness that characterized his other work as Israel's premier military leader.

I tried to pull out lessons to be learned from Joshua. He was a great and amazing man. We can learn very much from him, especially today when we see things so quickly deteriorating around us. The book of Joshua covers about twenty five years in one of the most important periods of Israel's history, their conquest and final settlements of the land, which God had promised to Abraham and his descendants many centuries earlier.

It is not hard to understand how Joshua came to the position of leadership of Israel. On the command of Joshua, the priests who bore the Ark of the Covenant walked out into the Jordan River. Just as the waters of the Red Sea parted forty years before, the waters of Jordan parted so Israel could cross into the Promised Land. God performed through Joshua a similar miracle as through Moses. By this the people could confidently know God had selected Joshua to lead them.

Joshua was preeminent as a military leader. He knew how to plan campaigns, discipline his forces, use his spies, but above all, pray to and trust in God. That is really what the whole book of Joshua was about—the whole story of Joshua, the whole life of Joshua.

Many a general has closely studied Joshua's conquest of Canaan and followed his strategy. He never stooped to pilfering or plundering. Joshua was first of all a good soldier of the Lord, and he obeyed the commander of the Lord's army.

Joshua assumed the command and he was visited by the Eternal, who encouraged and assured him with the words, "Be strong and of good courage, and the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." How encouraging that would be if we were to hear those words from God. We would think we could go on forever and never have a lack of faith. (That would be after we picked ourselves up off the ground, from terror.)

Joshua 1:1-9 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

[today, Mediterranean Sea] toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

How encouraging that is, and it should be encouraging to every one of us. This is a simple statement of fact from God on how He treats His people, and that includes us. "Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid, or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Later in chapter 5, all the male Israelites were circumcised, and this had not been done in forty years of wandering. Israel kept the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan. The next day, Passover day, they were able to start eating the produce of the land. God was merciful and waited till the following day to actually stop the manna from coming (that was the actual order of events). Then the commander of the Lord's army spoke to Joshua.

Joshua 5:13-15 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

We know that this commander of the Lord's army is Jesus Christ, because Joshua

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

worshiped Him, which would not have been allowed had He been a mere angel. The words He spoke were the same words He spoke earlier.

Joshua had a great respect and reverence for the God of Israel, and his reaction was typical of human beings who come in close proximity to the glory of God. You remember how Isaiah reacted when he saw some of the glory of God.

Isaiah 6:5 Woe is me, for I am undone. Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Isaiah felt like he was coming apart at the seams (so to speak).

The purpose of the book of Joshua demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promise by leading Israel into the land of Canaan, as He had previously lead them out of Egypt. Why did these things happen to the Israelites? According to I Corinthians 10:11, events of the Exodus, the wilderness wandering and the conquest of Canaan, are highly typical. These things happened to them as an example or literally as types. In view of that, Joshua is a type of Christ, who is our conquering commander.

Notice why Joshua has been regarded as a type of Christ. First, the name Joshua and Jesus mean and represents the same thing: "God is salvation." Second, Joshua brings the people of Israel into possession of the Promised Land, as Jesus Christ brings members of God's church into the possession of God's Kingdom. Third, as Joshua built upon Moses' teachings, so also Jesus' gospel builds upon the law.

As a servant of Moses, Joshua was prepared for the responsibility of leadership. This was the result of his unwavering loyalty and devotion to God first and Moses second. Let us take a look at some of the miracles in Joshua's life. I already mentioned a few of them, but the Israelites eventually marched westward to Jericho, the first settlement Israel was to possess.

Jericho was a heavily fortified city. The inhabitants were not overly concerned with the motley crew of Israelite tents on the plain. For six days the troops of Israel marched around the city walls, and nothing happened. The people of Jericho must have laughed at what they thought were half-crazed soldiers who had been driven mad by the wilderness.

On the seventh day the band of Israelites soldiers marched round and round the city

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

seven times. At Joshua's command the priests sounded the trumpets and the people let out a shout. At that instant, the walls of Jericho came crashing down. The shocked inhabitants were easily routed by the Israelites.

Even though Joshua was not named in Hebrews 11, his example of faith is as Hebrews 11:30 tells us.

Hebrews 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.

Joshua was obviously commander and at that time the leader of faith, as a human being. But all Israel had to show faith as well at that point in order for that to happen. All those soldiers marching around.

From Jericho, Israel marched on. The king of Jerusalem, hearing Israel was coming his way and that the Israelites made a treaty with the nearby Gibeonites, decided to attack the Gibeonites with allies of four surrounding city states. The Jebusites stormed Gibeon where the Israelites were.

Upon hearing of the attack, Joshua marched the Israelite army all night to surprise the enemy at Gideon. In disarray, the Jebusites fled out of Beth Horon into the valley of Aijalon. Here, two more great miracles of the Bible take place.

First, God, who promised to go before the armies of Israel, caused great hailstones to fall from heaven. More enemy troops were killed by the stones than by the battle itself. Second, yet another well-known Bible miracle took place: Upon the command of Joshua, the sun and moon stood still in the valley of Aijalon.

Joshua 10:11-14 And it happened, as they fled before Israel and were on the descent of Beth Horon, that the Lord cast down large hailstones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the children of Israel killed with the sword. Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, sun, stand still over Gibeon, and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon. So the sun stood still, and moon stopped, till the people had revenge upon their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there has been no day like that, before it or after it, that the Lord heeded

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel.

So this is the story of Joshua's long day, as it so commonly called, the participation of God, the divine warrior in Israel's battle against the southern coalition, by raining down hailstones and by the dramatic standing of the sun, in response to Joshua's prayer, is celebrated through inserting a poem in the midst of the battle account. It was that important.

In a series of continuing victories, Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, conquered the southern portion of the land, from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza. They moved northward to Mount Hermon. Six nations and thirty one kings were conquered during the next six years.

The land was then divided for the tribes of Israel. Having subdued the Canaanites, Joshua divided the land among the tribes; Timnath Serah in Mount Ephraim, being assigned to himself, as his own inheritance.

The last section of the book of Joshua, chapters 22-24, concerns the proper worship of God. The altar forms the basis of the dispute between the tribes west of the Jordan and those who built the altar in their land east of the river.

No altar was to be used for sacrifices outside of the Promised Land, and east of the Jordan River was outside, although the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh settled there. Their act of building an altar brought Israel to the brink of civil war, until these two and a half tribes were able to reassure their relatives west of the Jordan River that the altar was not to be used for sacrifices. Instead, it was a symbol to remind them and their descendants of their share in the God of Israel. As a result of this important clarification, the tribes of Israel were able to be at peace with one another.

At this point, I would like to say something about farewell addresses. There is something touching and stirring about the last words of a great man. You can think of some yourself in history, particularly if they are a charge to their successors—telling their successors that "this is what I want you to do," and it is their last words. It is very encouraging and is very stirring.

We certainly find these moving charges in scripture. In the last verses of Genesis, Joseph is dying and has gathered his brothers around him. He wants to remind them of God's past blessings and promise future intervention on their behalf.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Genesis 50:24-25 And Joseph said to his brethren, I am dying but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here.

The Israelites did exactly that. Also we think of Moses farewell recorded in the last chapter of Deuteronomy. They contain the so called song of Moses and Moses' final blessing on the tribes. The New Testament contains Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders at a stop over on his final trip to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:25-31 And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to your selves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

So we see there Paul's farewell address, so to speak, to the churches, just like Moses and Joseph did in ancient times.

Joshua ends his life in a similar way. A long period of time had passed since the events of Joshua chapter 22. At the end of the conquest, Joshua was probably about ninety years old. Forty years in Egypt, according to Josephus, forty years in the wilderness, and seven years in the conquest. At the time of his death recorded in Joshua 24:29, he was one hundred and ten years old.

There is a twenty or twenty three year interval between Joshua chapter 22 and 23. Joshua, knowing that he was soon to pass from the scene, wanted to give a final charge to his successors. Actually he gave two of them; the last chapter of the book, Joshua 24, contains a charge to the people as a whole assembly at Shechem. Chapter 23 contains a charge to the nation's chief men, elders, leaders, judges, and officials.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Caleb was there as well as Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest; so were many of the soldiers who had fought with Joshua through the various campaigns. Most of these men were mere boys used back then and now they were grown and had families. Many had probably risen to positions of the leadership in the nation.

Now let us consider Joshua's farewell address. In many respects this episode mirrors the opening episode in the book of Joshua that we read earlier. The book began with the passing of the mantle of leadership to Joshua, after the death of Moses. Joshua was very elderly and would soon die. So the next generation of leaders is charged and in terms reminiscent of Joshua's own charge in chapter 1.

Joshua 23:1-8 Now it came to pass, a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age. And Joshua called for all Israel for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them. I am old, advanced in age. You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you. [Joshua always emphasized that and that is again the emphasis of the book of Joshua.] See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward. And the Lord your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight so you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God has promised you. Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left. And lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you, you shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause any one to swear by them, You shall not serve them nor bow down to them. But you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.

So, here in chapter 23, Joshua mentions a number of very important things. The first of them is obviously a reminder of what God had previously done for the people. Joshua's reminder has three parts: Military victories, the partitioning of the land at God direction, and the completion of the settlement, some of which was still future but which Joshua regarded as certain.

Although Joshua naturally reminded the people of God's past acts on Israel behalf, it is never-the-less unnatural in that we do not naturally think this way ourselves. On the contrary, we tend to separate ourselves from God's actions. When we are in a trial or

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

when we are faced with danger. We should look to Joshua and see how faithful he was in all that he had to go through in all his leadership of Israel.

We separate ourselves from what God has done by making faith a matter of subjective feelings, as if what matters is how we feel about our religious beliefs, rather than knowing and acting on what God has done.

Everyone in their life has seen what God has done; we can even look at creation and know the attributes of God, as Paul says. We do not generally admit this, of course, and we believe that God has done great acts of redemption for us in the past, but often it becomes a lesson for us, than how we feel now, and we begin to act on our feelings rather than upon what we know of God and His ways.

Joshua did not want the people of Israel to do that. In time they would be attracted to the world and its ways, to the religious practices and immoralities of the surrounding pagan culture. At a time like that, these ways would seem good to Israel, and the pleasures of sin would feel desirable. They were not to defect from the proper worship of God for that reason, because they knew certain things about God and his way of life. He had acted for them powerfully in their deliverance from Egypt; and in the conquest had thereby shown Himself to be the true God. The people were to base their feelings on this knowledge, rather than the other way around.

Second, we separate ourselves from God's acts in history by thinking of faith as a leap over evidence. The Bible knows nothing of this leap of faith; it says, "Look at what God has done for you in history, remember His acts, reason about these things and build upon them."

The Bible does not abandon evidence; it builds faith on logic and understanding on faith.

Hebrew 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Evidence is proof, confirmation, substantiation; it is not a feeling. Feeling may be involved in it, but that feeling has to be based on faith in true things.

Joshua also charged the leaders of Israel, as he passed the torch of leadership to them, with their present obligations; it was not enough to know that God had acted for them in

the past, it was also necessary for them to order their lives in certain ways because of that action that they had seen.

There are two essential requirements of leadership: obedience to God and love for God. Without those, leadership is faulty. Obedience is a natural emphasis for a soldier such as Joshua to make, particularly since it had been the charge given to him by God at the very start of the campaigns. But it is more than that; it is a duty incumbent upon all God's people, all God's soldiers.

The words Joshua uses in this charge are an important echo of what he had been told to do earlier and are a deliberate reference to them. At the beginning God had appeared to Joshua to assure him that he would be with him as he had been with Moses. Exactly the same, no more, no less.

Joshua was to be careful to obey all that Moses had spoken. Remember what God said,

Joshua 1:6-8 Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This book of the law, shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall mediate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua had done this; he had obeyed God, fulfilling the law of Moses exactly; and now he was determined to pass on a similar charge to God's people. Notice Joshua's words once again in Joshua 23. We will reread those words; they are essentially important to our lives and our success, as Christians, as members of God's church and members of the family of God.

Joshua 23:6-8 Therefore, be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you, you shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them, You shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.

In modern terms, what he is saying is: stay out of the world, get out and stay out of the world. Do not socialize with it, do not imbibe in its vices, stay out of it. That is good advice and also the only way that anyone will have good success. It is a direct comparison and association with what God told Joshua.

Two things should be noted here in Joshua 1 and 23. First, there is a connection between the demand to obey God's commands and the previously stated fact that God has done great things on the people's behalf. This is the same connection we find at the beginning of the Ten Commandments.

It is because God had brought the people out of Egypt, out of the world, out of sin (as Egypt represents), out of the land of slavery (sin is certainly slavery), that they were to have no other gods before them. Anything we put before God, whether it be physical (our homes, our children, our cars, whatever), is breaking that commandment. God comes first, and there is no debate on it. There is a connection between God's having given Israel the land and the obedience required.

Second, there is a continuing appeal to the written law of God given through Moses. This is an essentially important standard; it is not merely that the people of Israel were advised to live upright, morale, consistent, and productive lives. That is what people try to do today, apart from God's written standard in scripture, but it does not work. Joshua did not give some vague appeal to an undefined morale code.

He presented them with all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. Not just the Ten Commandments, but the entire books that Moses wrote. The first five books are the books of the law, not just Deuteronomy. They were promised God's favor and blessing if they could continue to live by that standard.

It is the same today; in fact it is the same standard—that standard has been amplified over the centuries during which the Bible was written. We should be thanking God for His standard of righteousness often, every day.

In the very next chapter, in Joshua 24, we find that Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God. In other words, at this point the book of Joshua was added to the canon as an authoritative revelation from God for His people. The standard is the same in all the books of the Bible and is our standard today; in this respect Joshua's charge is contemporary.

It is for you and me; we cannot eliminate any of it. Except we know that Christ died for

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

our sins, and there is no longer any need for the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.

It is not only obedience to God's law that is required of God's people; in addition to the demand to obey God at all things, there is the added obligation to love God, who has blessed them abundantly.

Joshua 23:11 Therefore take diligent heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord you God.

What did Joshua mean by loving God? We have the answer in the way Joshua refers to love in the previous chapter. When giving his charge to the two and a half tribes that were departing to their lands on the far side of the Jordan River, he said:

Joshua 22:5 But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

That is how we love God. That is a reference to Deuteronomy 6:5—the verse Jesus called the greatest of all the commandments. It is a definition of what love for God means. Love means walking in God's ways, obeying God's commands, holding fast to God, and serving God with all one's heart and soul.

Obeying God—the first point and loving God—the second point, go together. They are inseparable. Do not say you love God if you are not obeying His commands in the Bible. To say that is hypocrisy, If you love God, you will keep His commandments, and it goes with the principle that if you attempt to obey those commands and sincerely walk in God's ways, you will find yourselves coming to love God more and more, and that is guaranteed. We have many examples of this in scripture.

The third point of Joshua's charge deals with a brand new problem. The intermarrying of Israelites with the people of the land.

Joshua 23:12-13 Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations, these that remain among you, and make marriages with them and go into them, and they to you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

The intermarrying of Israelites with other peoples had not been much of a problem up till now in the conquest of the Promised Land because they were driving all of the people out of the land that were there.

Joshua was a perceptive observer of human nature, so he wisely anticipated the enormous problems Israel would have in this area if they disobeyed. Which they did later and which we are seeing in this nation as well; this whole culture has been watered down by this very thing.

The problem is not with racial or ethnic intermarriage, a mixed race had come up out of Egypt, and Moses himself married a Cushite, an Ethiopian; also Rahab was incorporated into Israel. The problem was rather what we would call the marrying of a believer with a non-believer.

The native people of Canaan were idolatrous and extremely corrupt. That is why God ordered Israel to destroy them. Joshua foresaw that Israelites might marry survivors of these perverted Canaanites, and so be drawn away to worship their false gods and practice their degenerate behavior. It did happen; this is the sad history of Israel from this period onward.

All through the period of the Judges and into the time of the Kings, Israel fell away from God through this temptation. Even after the Babylonian captivity and dispersion, in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, this is a primary concern. Nehemiah, in particular, ends on this note of falling away from God.

Do we see Satan's hand in this temptation? Because just as dictators inevitably try to weaken family ties, knowing that if they destroy families they make the winning of people's total allegiance to the state so much easier.

Satan know that if he can destroy the family, he can do damage to the church as well; and he can kill two birds with one stone, so to speak; except that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church—we know that as a guarantee.

Joshua's warnings were not only for Israel, they are warnings for us as today. They are echoed by the Apostle Paul's well known admission in II Corinthians 6:14-15.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

II Corinthians 6:14-15 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?

The last point of Joshua's charge to Israel's new leaders was the need to choose. In other words to make a decision to obey and serve God and not to allow themselves to drift along into eventual disobedience. The challenge to choose is not as pointed here as it becomes in Joshua 24. This is the idea none the less.

Joshua 23:14-16 Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you, and not one word of them has failed. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given. When you have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you.

That right now is an indictment of this nation, as it loses everything God has given. There is no continent, there is no nation on earth with the blessings that this nation has. Even down to the water ways, having already been carved out for us so that we hardly had to dig out any canals at all. China is spending billions, hundreds of billions of dollars putting water ways into their country, so that it can transport material. In this nation God, put it all there for us; we did not have to do that.

This is the theme of the book of Deuteronomy and of the ceremony enacted by Joshua on Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim—obedience to Moses' earlier command. If the people obey, there will be blessings; if they disobey there will be judgment. They must choose, as far as these conditional promises are concerned; the response alone will make the difference. Choose. These last words of Joshua to the elders, leaders, judges and officials, is his four fold repetition of the word good.

Twice here in verses 14 and 16, Joshua speaks of good things the Lord your God promised you. And twice he speaks of the good land He is giving you, they go hand in

hand.

We are to follow and obey God not merely because He is the true God, and we should follow Him; it is not even because God's way is the best way. We are commanded to follow God because God really is good. And because His way really is a good way, and God's word good means superlative, tremendous; if God and His ways are indeed good, then we should follow Him wholeheartedly. Joshua was not called to be a preacher. He was a soldier and an administrator. As he grew near the end of his life, and looked ahead to the temptations that he knew would come to Israel, to depart from the worship of the true God, after his departure, he turned to preaching in an attempt to keep them as faithful to God as possible.

We had three sermons of Joshua in the closing three chapters of this book, each longer than the one before it.

The first was in chapter 22. It was delivered to the two and half tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, who were returning home to their land and beyond the Jordan River.

The second is in chapter 23, and it was spoken to the leaders of Israel—the elders, leaders, judges, and officials.

The third is in chapter 24—it was spoken to the entire company of people at a great convocation at Shechem. It is a significant feature of these sermons that although they were spoken to different groups of people and contained somewhat different material, they all have essentially the same point. The need of the people to be faithful to and fervently obey God.

Joshua 24:14-15 Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord. And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua did not begin his sermon at this point; he began by reminding the people of their past and of what God had done for them in bringing them out of a culture of ancient Babylon, and then later out of Egypt, into the land that He had promised to Abraham at the beginning of their history.

The emphasis of course is on what God did for them and the fact that he had done it; and where there would have been a temptation at the end of these long years of conquests for the people, particularly the soldiers to think back over their victories and boast of them as their achievements.

They might have boasted for their victory over Jericho, Ai, or any of the other many hundreds of engagements, but Joshua does not allow the people the sin of such reminiscing. In fact he does not refer to God, using the third person, as having done these things for them, instead he quotes God, using the first person for God, repeatedly, and effectively throughout.

Joshua 24:3-13 Then I [God] took your father Abraham from the land beyond the river, I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac, I gave Jacob, Esau. I assigned the hill country to Sarah, and the hill country of Seir to Esau, I sent Moses and Aaron, I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out, I brought your fathers out of Egypt, I brought you to the land of the Amorites, I gave them into your hands, I destroyed them from before you when Balak, son of Zipor, King of Moab prepared to fight against Israel, I delivered you out of his hand, the citizen of Jericho fought against you but I gave them into your hand. I sent the hornet ahead of you, you did not do it with your own sword and bow, so I gave you your own sword and bow, I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build, and you lived in them, and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. God did it.

When Joshua challenged the people to choose to serve God and affirmed that this was his established choice as well; the tense he used implied more than a once for all choosing as if you can make a choice and be done with it from then on. The tense involves what grammarians call continues action. That is it involves the past, but it also involves the present and the future. It is as if Joshua had said, "I have chosen to serve the Lord. I am choosing that same path of service now, and I will go on choosing to serve God until the very end."

In summary, what spiritual lessons do we learn from Joshua's life? Here are seven of them.

First, good leaders must first be good servants.

Second, impossible situations provide glorious opportunities to trust God.

Third, the key to strength and courage is God's abiding presence.

Fourth, the outsider (for example, Rahab) may be saved by God's power; and the insider (for example, Akin) may be in danger of falling away.

Fifth, even the most faithful can allow fear to replace faith,

Six, rash decisions made without prayer may be regretted,

Seven, we should stand up for our faith, whether or not anyone else is willing to do so. Our faith can set the example for others especially for those in our own family. Our faith meaning the faith of Jesus Christ in us.

One important message the book of Joshua has is that true and false religions do not mix, not even a little. Joshua's orders were to destroy the Canaanites because of their pagan and immoral worship practices. Israel never did totally subdue and destroy these people as they were commanded.

Traces of their false religion remain to tempt the Israelites. Again and again, throughout their history, the Israelites departed from worship of the one true God. This tendency toward false worship was the main reason for Joshua's moving farewell speech. He warned the people against worshiping these false gods and challenged them to remain faithful to their Deliverer, Yahweh.

The point of Joshua's message was that you cannot worship these false gods and remain faithful to the Lord. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." For nearly a quarter of a century, Joshua continued to lead Israel as they settled into the Promised Land. There probably was no comparable twenty five years in the history of ancient Israel, when God's laws were more applied than during this period.

The character of Joshua is marked by singleness of purpose, directness, and decision. He sets a purpose and goal for himself and unwaveringly follows it. We to have to do the same thing in our spiritual battle against sin, Satan, and the world.

Finally, at the age of one hundred and ten, Joshua was old and growing physically weak; knowing he was about to die, he assembled the elders of Israel where he delivered perhaps his most famous sermon. He concluded with these memorable words, here in Joshua 24:15.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Joshua 24:15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the river, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Remember today, tomorrow, and forever is what Joshua is saying. Joshua was buried in his own city of Timnath Serah. How much impact can one man have in leading a people? Joshua's influence lived long beyond his physical life time.

Joshua 24:31 Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.

So for perhaps another twenty five years, Israel continued to obey the laws of God, but slowly gradually Israel slipped into idolatry and immorality. For four hundred years they were governed by judges, some more zealous than others, but none lead them as Joshua did.

For four hundred more years, they were ruled by kings of Israel and Judah. Their wickedness and sins increased until finally by 585 BC, Israel and Judah had gone into captivity.

After Babylonian captivity, God led a number of Israelites back to the Promised Land under Ezra and Nehemiah. They began to rebuild Jerusalem, the city walls, and the temple. They discovered, to their amazement, that God had instructed through Moses the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days and is followed by the Last Great day. Nehemiah re instituted the festival.

Nehemiah 8:17-18 So the whole congregation of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths. For since the day of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so, And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days. And on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

We Will Serve the Lord! by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

You can see how much impact proper leadership can have on an entire nation. Few leaders have ever had the ability to motivate the way Joshua did. The story of Joshua is one of the most inspiring in the entire Bible.

It should not be viewed as just a story; it is a real life saga of a great man of God, but more importantly what the great and awesome God does for His people if they obey and love Him.