

The History of Moses & Joshua — A Life of Discipleship

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SCRIPTURE VERSES:

Exodus 17:9-13

In this context, Moses commanded Joshua to choose men and go and fight against Amalek. Finally, the Lord gave the victory to Joshua as he overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (Ex 17:13). In this first instance, Moses confided in Joshua and entrusted the leadership of the army under Joshua.

Exodus 17:14-16

Here, God told Moses to write down the victory against Amalek in a book as a memorial. The duty that God gave to Moses was to recite this to Joshua repeatedly. Thus, one element of discipleship demonstrated by the relationship between Moses and Joshua is that Moses, the mentor, reiterated the works and ways of the Lord to his disciple, Joshua.

Exodus 24:13-18

Moses and Joshua went up on Mt Sinai. They traveled together but only Moses went up to the top to meet with God. The consuming fire appeared on the top of the mountain as God met with Moses in the sight of the elders of Israel. Joshua saw God meet with Moses. Joshua traveled with Moses, communed with him, talked with him, and even approached God with him, at least, to a degree.

Exodus 32:15-20

As Moses and Joshua descended from Mt Sinai back to the Israelites in their camp after Moses received the Law, the people of Israel were committing horrible idolatry by dancing before a golden calf. But the sound of shouting prompted Joshua to say that it sounded like war was in the camp. Then when Moses heard the singing and saw the calf, he threw the tablets down to the ground that had been written by the finger of God. Joshua, who was walking with Moses, saw this entire episode transpire.

Exodus 33:11

This text reveals that God spoke with Moses face to face as a man would speak with his friend. And then when Moses would return to the Israelite camp, Joshua the son of Nun, would serve him and minister to him in the camp. There is a fascinating profile of Joshua contained in this simple verse:

1. Joshua was Moses' servant — lit. 'minister', 'aid', 'helper'
2. Joshua was a young man — lit. 'a youth'
3. Joshua was the son of Nun
4. Joshua stayed close to Moses; he would not depart from the camp where Moses was.

Numbers 11:28*

While Israel was in the wilderness and in the context of the Israelite complaining, Eldad and Medad began to prophesy in the camp of Israel. And Joshua, presumably concerned with the purity of the camp and the purity of God's truth, asked Moses to stop them. But Moses then rebuked Joshua and told him not to be jealous. In fact, Moses could only wish that all would be true and reliable prophets of God.

But in this text, we find a fascinating truth about Joshua and his relationship to Moses. The text reads that Joshua was a servant — minister — of Moses from his youth. This suggests an ongoing, persistent, durative relationship where Joshua served, cared for, ministered to, and aided Moses in any way possible.

Numbers 13:16

In this context, Moses sends twelve men to Canaan to spy out the land. Israel is still in the wilderness and they are still grumbling and disobeying God. But God mercifully calls Moses to commission twelve men (one from each tribe) to pass through the Promised Land and then to return and give a report. From the tribe of Ephraim, Moses sent Hoshea, the son of Nun. But Moses called Hoshea, Joshua. From this passage we conclude that Joshua had such a trusted place in Moses' heart and mind that Moses could entrust the duty of spying out the land of Canaan in part to Joshua and the other eleven spies.

Numbers 14:6-10

After the twelve spies return to Moses in the wilderness after the forty days of spying out the land, ten of the spies provide a terribly daunting and horribly pessimistic report of the vastness of the peoples, the impenetrable cities, and they leave the Israelites facing imminent and certain doom. But Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies, returned with a good report and affirmed the covenant of God; that is, the land is an exceedingly rich land. They even tell the nation not to rebel and not to fear the people of the land for they will be prey to Israel. What confidence, trust, and unwavering resolve to God and his promises — even in spite of insurmountable opposition from the other ten spies and the entire nation with a hopeless fate. Moses' aid, Joshua, returned with a positive report. It was a report that affirmed the eternal covenants that God had made with His people and had reiterated to His people numerous times.

Numbers 27:18-23*

This context is where the new generation that has been born in the wilderness will enter the Promised Land whereas the old generation that came out of Egypt will all die for their grumbling and lack of trust in the Lord. God commands Moses to take Joshua and commission him. The following characteristics summarize Joshua in these verses:

1. Joshua is a leader (17a) (**fearless man**)
2. Joshua is a shepherd (17b) (**protecting man**)
3. Joshua is a spiritual man (18) (**a Godly man**)
4. Joshua is a commissioned man (19) (**a recognized & appointed man**)
5. Joshua is an authority (20) (**a humble man/no 'inherent' authority**)

EXPLANATION:

To think that Joshua spent forty years with Moses as his assistant, his aid, his minister, his confidant before taking leadership over Israel is quite an amazingly profound characteristic. Joshua was hidden behind the scenes so often. In fact, he is noticeably referred to frequently as the servant/minister of Moses! He is in the background, he is a servant, and he is the helper of Moses, the appointed leader of Israel! What humility Joshua demonstrated! What a servant's heart and a lack of self-promotion!

Joshua learned from Moses. Joshua saw Moses. Joshua heard the teachings of Moses. Joshua saw the miracles that God did through Moses and at Moses' request. Joshua undoubtedly witnessed the sins of Moses — striking the rock, the anger and frustration of the people of Israel and presumably many other times of hardship.

And over this forty plus year discipling relationship, Joshua learned leadership. He learned how to serve as an authoritative man presiding over the people of God with utterly no self-derived authority but rather as a sent messenger from God. Joshua learned what it was to care for the people, to pray for the people, to intercede for the people, to offer sacrifices for the people. Joshua saw God provide for the needs of the people (food and water). Joshua saw Moses fall on his face in prayer before God. Joshua saw Moses fall on his face before the people begging them not to stone Moses! What an amazing school of leadership Joshua must have had as the servant of Moses!

Then for Joshua to witness Moses as he disobeyed God by striking a rock twice rather than simply speaking to it which thus destroyed all hope of Moses actually leading Israel into the Promised Land must have been shocking! How holy God is. How infinitely pure and righteous God must be! How terrible sin is! How much God utterly despises the vileness of sin — all sin.

Joshua knew how to lead as he had seen Moses do it for decades. Joshua knew the fickleness of Israel as he had witnessed their complaining, rebellion, grumbling, and subsequent consequences. Joshua knew about worship. He knew about the importance of *how* to approach God properly, appropriately, reverently, and according to the way that God has specifically prescribed.

And now, in God's timing, at the most unexpected moment possible, Moses died and Joshua is called to lead. No one in all the nation of Israel would have expected Moses, their fearless leader, to die as their toes reside at the Jordan River imminently to cross the River and enter the Promised Land! Who would have thought their courageous leader who spoke with God face to face would die? An amazing truth is engraved on Joshua's mind at this point: God's workers die but God's work never dies. And Joshua is now the delegated man, the God-picked man, to now shepherd, lead, guide, and fight for the people of Israel.

A lengthy discipling relationship between Moses and Joshua proved itself invaluable as at a later point in Joshua's life as, being an older man, he could say: "as for me and my house, we *will* serve the LORD" (Josh 24:15). What he saw from Moses, his mentor, Joshua implemented in his own heart, mind, words, and life. He led with courage. He led with the Word. And he followed God.