

HOME STUDY



Fall Quarter

September | October | November 2023

Large-Print Edition

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FALL QUARTER

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Lessons on Success and Failure

DON RUFF

In the world of business and finance, there are entrepreneurs who claim that they have found the secret to success. They hold seminars and write books about the secrets that made them rich and successful, and they claim they “can make you rich too!”

In the Christian realm, worldly fame and fortune are not the goals God intends for His people (but God blesses as He sees fit for His glory). What does success look like to God? In the lessons from the Old Testament this quarter, success, in whatever form it took, was experienced by those who loved, followed, obeyed, served, and worshipped the Lord with a faithful and humble heart. Failure came to those who disobeyed and disregarded God. Their disobedience was accompanied by hearts full of pride and selfishness.

The first unit of this quarter is titled “Obedience and Success.” Lesson 1 focuses on Joshua’s obeying God’s call to be strong and courageous for the large task of leading Israel to take God’s Promised Land for His people.

An unlikely success story is covered in lesson 2. Rahab a God she had just come to know led her to His grace. He would honor her by being a blessing for all mankind when He chose her to be in the genealogical line of our Saviour.

The fall of Jericho is the topic of lesson 3. Joshua and the people of Israel succeeded only by being obedient to

a military plan that only God could pull off.

The Scripture text for lesson 4 introduces us to Ehud, God’s warrior judge. Acting in God’s will, he took down an evil despot. He obeyed the calling to be Israel’s judge and deliverer.

In lesson 5, Gideon succeeded with God because he trusted and obeyed Him. God would once again use a military tactic that no human could achieve.

The second unit, “Disobedience and Failure,” leaves no question about how to fail with God—disobedience. But it is not just disobedience in and of itself. Anyone who disobeys God, purposefully or not, is not focusing on God but on himself. Pride and selfishness control us when we disobey. We want to do whatever we to want do, and that can lead to sin, consequences, and failure.

Lesson 6 covers the tragic failure of Achan, who disobeyed and stole from God. Sin often affects more than just the one sinning. The consequences of Achan’s actions were harsh but just. God is holy, and His purposes are for the good of all His children.

Because we are imperfect, we never learn our lesson when it comes to failing God. Lesson 7 covers that subject, analyzing how the people of Israel would fail God by worshipping imaginary gods and then getting punished. That was followed by their repentance and deliverance, but then they would

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sin again. That cycle repeated itself many times throughout Israel's history.

God was Israel's Lord and King, but they broke God's heart by rejecting Him and demanding a human king. Lesson 8 covers the ascendance of Saul to be the first human king of Israel. What else could be expected of a flawed king but to fail God, which affected the well-being of Israel?

The topics of the third unit, called "Lessons and Warnings," deal with lessons learned through failure and the warnings to serve God and Him only. In lesson 9, Joshua was at the end of his life, and he made one final speech, an exhortation to serve only God. He warned the people that failure to serve only God would result in terrible consequences.

God was very patient with Israel, and the Scripture passage for lesson 10 further supports that fact. Sometimes Israel wisely repented of forsaking God with their idol worship. Graciously and mercifully, God rebuked them for their failures and then forgave them when they sought forgiveness.

The topic of lesson 11 is the well-known failure of David with Bath-sheba. Adultery is too common of a failure before God, and David added murder to his failure. God punished David to lovingly bring him to repentance.

You have probably heard the warning "Be careful what you ask for." That is one theme of lesson 12. God had to respond to some people who hoped for the day of the Lord. They were only fooling themselves because that would only bring them trouble. God pointed out their failures and reminded them that He was very displeased with them. Their only hope was to listen and obey Him.

On several occasions, God listed for Israel all the ways in which they had failed to remind them about how terrible they had been to Him. He had shown them love from the beginning, and they



forgot and rejected Him on so many occasions.

In lesson 13, the text contains another list of Israel's failures. God was not nagging. He was reminding a stubborn group of people, who probably at times saw no fault in themselves, that they had broken the covenant they had with their Father God. After the failure, they lived in exile.

The Psalm text for lesson 13 gives us insight into the people's thinking after having failed God and being punished. It seems obvious from Psalm 137 that they were living with regret.

There are great lessons of success this quarter. Those successes are examples to us. They should cheer us and give us goals for which to strive. God will help us to achieve the success with Him for which we long.

It is true that some of the lessons can seem a bit depressing to us. After all, failing is not enjoyable. Punishment is not enjoyable (Heb. 12:11). However, keep in mind that we have a loving Father, who would rather we have salvation and abundant life now and forever. His Word contains all we need to learn obedience and apply it to our lives as the Lord sanctifies us. The Lord is always willing to give us good things (Jas. 1:17). In return, He deserves our loyalty and love.

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JOSH. 1:1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

2 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.

3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them.

11:16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the

mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same;

17 *Even* from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all *other* they took in battle.

21 And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.

22 There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

NOTES

Be Strong and Courageous

Lesson Text: Joshua 1:1-6; 11:16-19, 21-23

Related Scriptures: Numbers 27:15-23;
Deuteronomy 11:22-25; 31:7-15, 22-23; 34:5-9; Joshua 22:1-9

TIME: 1405 B.C.

PLACES: Shittim; Canaan

GOLDEN TEXT—“Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses” (Joshua 11:23).

Lesson Exposition

The accounts in Joshua are triumphant and tragic. They show how God’s people, Israel, enjoyed many benefits from their covenant with God. Yet they also reveal how Israel entered into the period of the Judges, a time of repeated failure and missed blessing.

The Bible records the triumphs as well as the failures. Both ways of looking at the history of Israel are important. There was great promise, but there was also great tragedy, the needless but inevitable failures that come with every human endeavor. God gave the people of Israel the power to conquer Canaan, but He left them accountable for the way they responded to His promises.

As it is with Israel, so it is with churches. God’s power and blessing are bestowed. There are triumphs and tragedies. The triumphs are possible because God’s power is available. The tragedies happen because of stubbornness, willfulness, pride, greed, and so on.

Joshua focuses more on the triumph

side of the history of Israel. Judges focuses more on the tragic side. Yet even in Joshua we see that the triumphs were diminished by failures. Before we read about the victories, it is good to remember some other truths from Joshua. Although God’s power enabled Israel to fully conquer and occupy the Promised Land, they did not complete the task. Canaanites moved back into conquered towns. The very thing God warned Israel not to let happen did. This led Joshua, after a long campaign of conquests, to ask the people, “How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?” (Josh. 18:3).

In the first lesson this quarter in Joshua, the focus is on the triumphant side. We look at Israel’s history, and we know there will be failure. Yet it is important to first consider that the failure need not have happened. Similarly, we look at the situation in present day churches and know failures will happen; yet we need to know that there is no lack of divine power to bring success.