

FOR
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AGES 15-17

SENIOR HIGH BIBLE TEACHER

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Senior High Bible Teacher

FALL QUARTER

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The Weeks Ahead

Everyone wants to avoid failure and be a success. Christians, however, measure success and failure differently than the world does. We should measure success by whether we are pleasing God by our lives and serving well in His kingdom. This quarter's lessons provide guidance about success and failure from a godly perspective.

Our first unit, from the books of Joshua and Judges, gives us examples of success in God's service. We begin in lesson 1 with the Lord's encouragement to Joshua as Israel stands ready to begin the conquest of the Promised Land. We learn from this that obedience to the Lord is central to success and also that ultimately it is He that brings the good results, not us.

The remaining lessons of the first unit introduce us to an unlikely cast of characters who would find success in service. These include a spiritually awakened harlot (lesson 2), an army that brings down a city wall with a shout (lesson 3), a left-handed man with an audacious plan (lesson 4), and a once-fearful man whom the Lord found hiding in a winepress (lesson 5). In all these lessons we see how faith in God is the foundation of obedience.

Just as faith and obedience lead to spiritual success, so disobedience leads to failure and chastening. Unit 2 gives us instructive examples of how things can go wrong.

In lesson 6 we will study the negative example of Achan, whose failure to obey the command of God concerning the captured riches of Jericho led to a painful defeat for Israel. Then, in lessons 7 and 8 we will see how the

nation fell into a recurrent pattern of sin during the time of the judges and ultimately demanded a king modeled on the world's ways rather than gratefully submit to the Lord's loving kingship. This last lesson, from I Samuel, takes us outside of the books of Joshua and Judges for the first time this quarter.

Entitled "Lessons and Warnings," the third and final unit of this quarter, taken from various Old Testament passages, further demonstrates the importance of faith and obedience in the lives of God's people. In lesson 9 we go back to Joshua and hear his final exhortations to his people, urging them to remain faithful to God.

Lesson 10 shines as a light in the dark history of the period of the judges. It details a prayer of repentance that gives evidence of spiritual life. In lesson 11, though, we are confronted with David's sin with Bathsheba. Even the godliest of men are vulnerable to sin and need to heed the Bible's warnings.

The quarter's last two lessons include the prophet Amos's warning against the spiritual pride and blindness of Israel (lesson 12) and then the account of the culmination of Israel's sin as Jerusalem is sacked and God's people head into exile in Babylon. The quarter closes with a psalm of lament over the bitterness of this exile.

Many of this quarter's lessons are sobering, but we must never lose sight of God's love. Even amid dark times, His grace rekindles faith and obedience in His people. Let us look to Him for the strength to trust and obey Him.

—Stephen H. Barnhart.

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Understanding True Success

STEPHEN H. BARNHART

If there is one thing that people want more than anything else, it is success. Go into any bookstore or survey the bestseller lists, and you will be sure to find a bunch of publications about how to succeed in various pursuits. This preoccupation is understandable in a way. Who wants to be a failure?

How should followers of Christ approach the idea of success? The first thing we need to realize is that success is going to look very different to a believer than it does to a man of the world. The world tends to connect success to self-exaltation. The Christian should view success through the lens of a growing relationship with the Lord and a life of active service in His kingdom.

One consideration that stands out as we approach this subject is that the Bible does not use the word “success” very much. In fact, the KJV uses it only once! That one time is Joshua 1:8, a verse in the same chapter that is part of our first lesson this quarter. So Joshua 1 is a good place to form our understanding of genuine success from a believer’s perspective.

Before we zoom in on the Lord’s words to Joshua, though, let us examine some other uses of the word “success” in Scripture. Other translations use the word a few more times, often in connection with the fulfillment of some particular mission. When Abraham’s servant is seeking a bride for Isaac, he prays for “success” (what the KJV calls “good speed” in Genesis 24:12).

As Nehemiah is about to take the risk of asking the Persian king for

permission to go and help rebuild Jerusalem, he quickly prays that the Lord would grant him “success” in his petition (the KJV renders it “prosper . . . thy servant” [Neh. 1:11]).

These examples show the close connection the Bible makes between success and the accomplishment of God’s will. Abraham’s servant and Nehemiah were seeking “success” from God, its only true source. And they were seeking this as they fulfilled important roles in the advancement of God’s great plan of redemption.

Abraham’s servant and Nehemiah both knew that they had no chance of success apart from God’s intervention. And this brings us back to the case of Joshua. Here was a man who certainly realized the same truth. Moses had just died, and Joshua was now the one tasked with leading a vast multitude in the conquest of the Promised Land. He was a good soldier, but he no doubt was feeling the immense nature of the task before him. He could not help but feel some degree of inadequacy.

Joshua 1:8 says, “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” This is not the counsel you are likely to find in secular books about success! But here is found the true path for experiencing it.

The Lord knew that Joshua would need encouragement as he took on

the mantle of leadership. He anchored His encouragement in the promise of assured success in the battles to come (vss. 2-5). Israel would succeed in the conquest of the land. Likewise, believers today can rest in the sure promises attendant upon their salvation in Christ. They will experience the success of God's sovereign purposes.

Three times in Joshua 1:1-9, the Lord tells Joshua to have courage (vss. 6, 7, 9). Courage is an outgrowth of faith. We cannot overstate how fundamental faith is in the life of a follower of God. After all, we are called "believers," are we not? If we are going to succeed in our service to God, we will have to possess the courage that comes from faith in His promises.

Another key element in success is obedience to God's Word. This is another theme that the Lord emphasizes more than once in His message to Joshua. He will have success as he follows what God tells him to do (vss. 7-8).

Faith, courage, and obedience. Those are the ingredients for genuine success. And of course, underlying all of this is the grace and sovereign providence of God. Just looking at the people God used in the lessons for this quarter, we can see how merciful and kind God is. He delights in using unlikely heroes, so that all the glory for the triumph of truth and righteousness will go to where it rightly belongs—to God Himself.

We pause here a moment to reflect on this truth that God's glory is the ultimate aim of all He does. This might be puzzling to us at first. But exalting God's glory is different from exalting our own.

As John Piper has said, "God's self-exaltation is different from *human* self-exaltation in that, by exalting himself, he is not distracting us from what is ultimately satisfying, but displaying it and inviting us into the enjoyment

of it. . . . God is the one being in the universe from whom self-exaltation is a form of love. For he is the only being whose worth and beauty can satisfy the human soul fully and forever" (*Providence, Crossway*).

How does this relate to the idea of success? Unlike the way the world looks at it, the believer experiences success as he brings glory to God. And that is why God uses such unlikely people as His heroes. He uses a reforming prostitute like Rahab, or a trickster like Ehud, or an initially cowering man like Gideon, insisting that he cut his army down to almost nothing so that the Lord alone will receive the glory for victory over the Midianites.

By God's grace and in His providence, He used people like Rahab, Ehud, and Gideon. And it is only by His grace that He uses any of us to achieve the success of His kingdom. Any other kind of "success" matters very little in the light of eternity.

We can learn a bit more about success by examining its flip side—failure. This quarter's lessons give us some vivid pictures of spiritual failure. Even a man after God's own heart like King David experienced a major time of failure when he sinned with Bathsheba and sinned further trying to cover it up.

The nation of Israel repeatedly failed to obey God's will and repeatedly placed their love and trust in people and things rather than in God. The nation ultimately would experience exile as a result.

Despite the failures of God's people, however, God's grace ultimately prevails. How grateful we should be for that! Perhaps the ultimate lesson we need to learn about success is that any lasting success we experience is in reality the work of God in and through us. The only proper response is gratitude for His lovingkindness and a readiness to proclaim His glory forever.

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 swore 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).

Studying the Text

A period of doubt and uncertainty—even confusion—clouds every change in leadership. The organization is at a crossroads. People in the organization have questions. They knew what things were like under the old leader. But what will the new leader be like?

This period of uncertainty happens when the country elects a new president. It happens when a new boss takes over. It happens when two companies merge. It also happens when two people who both have children get married and create a blended family.

Joshua was a new man in a new job. But amid all the change, there was one constant—the call to obedience.

NEW MAN, SAME MISSION— Josh. 1:1-6

Joshua’s appointment (Josh. 1:1-2). God takes His workers, but His work goes on. “Moses my servant is dead” (vs. 2). This must have been shocking and disturbing to the people of Israel. Moses was the only leader they had ever known. He had led them out of slavery in Egypt. He had given

them the law at Mount Sinai. He had supervised the construction of the tabernacle. He had led them through the wilderness for forty years. Now this great leader was dead, and God chose someone to take his place.

Joshua was the man chosen by God to replace Moses. Joshua did not volunteer or push himself forward. He was not elected by the people; he was chosen by God. This put the divine stamp of approval on his leadership.

Who was Joshua? What do we know about this man God chose to replace Moses?

Joshua was one of two faithful spies (he and Caleb) who had gone into the Promised Land to see what had to be done to conquer it. The other spies had said that the enemy was too strong and that Israel could not win. However, Joshua and Caleb had said that if the people trusted the Lord, He would give them the victory (cf. Num. 13:1—14:45).

Joshua was a soldier. Before becoming the commander in chief, he was the commander of Israel’s army.

Joshua’s full name was “Jehoshua,” which means “Jehovah (or Yahweh)