

Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

August 30, 2020

I. Introduction

A. Today, we will use parts of Joshua's story to consider three truths about choices and their resulting consequences. The **first** truth is, choice is not an option. In other words, you have no choice about making choices, only which choice to make when presented with a choice. **Second**, all choices have consequences, whether good or bad, and most often we can discern the short and long-term consequences of our choices if we will give it serious thought. **Third**, the wise believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (**Hebrews 11:6**). In other words, the wise believe that at least in relation to God, their choices have consequences, that is, if they seek God and obey God they will be rewarded. In contrast, the fool says there is no God, therefore there are no consequences to ignoring God or living contrary to His will.

B. Prayer

II. Though making choices is not optional, they always lead to consequences

A. From his overall story, we can conclude that Joshua made many intentional, faith building, and spiritually maturing choices which led to a strong, courageous faith in God, a faithful life of godliness, a genuine humility, and ultimately becoming God's choice to replace Moses as Israel's leader.

1. Though the scripture speaks of Joshua as serving Moses, it is probable Joshua chose to stay close to Moses in order to learn what he could about God, God's ways, God's will, obedience to God, and godly living.
2. And as we see from Joshua's life, his choices in this regard brought him as near to the real presence of God as the thickness of the fabric that made up the tent of meeting. And he accompanied Moses up the mountain to meet God and get the commandments.
3. The point here is that our choices make a tangible and measurable difference – which is why we ought to make intentional and wise choices regarding such things as the building of our faith in God, who we listen to or reach out to for discipleship, and how much time and effort we put into drawing as near to God as possible.
4. There is another truth about Joshua and his choices that I want to point out. He did not take today's popular path to Christian service

that so many young Christians take. With a humble determination, he focused on nurturing a courageous faith, trusting and obeying God – even when most of those around him urged him to do otherwise, and on gaining as much as he could from observing, listening to, and obeying Moses. And he did this for 40+ years.

- a. My point is that Joshua focused on growing in faith and godliness, and after a time – in fact a long time – God put him into service as Moses' replacement.
 - b. For me, Joshua is the fulfillment of Paul's words in **2 Timothy 2:20-21**, "Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. [21] Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."
5. With these thoughts in mind, let's look at more of Joshua's story.

B. Story of Joshua making good choices

1. We get a glimpse of Joshua's choices based on his courageous faith in God and his humble submission to Moses in **Exodus 17:8-13** . . . Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim (*REF ih dim*). [9] So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." [10] Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. [11] So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. [12] But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. [13] So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.
2. It is in **Exodus 24** that we learn that Joshua's decision to stay close to Moses led to Joshua being included when God called Moses to ascend the mountain in order to meet with God and obtain the commandments written on tablets of stone. We read this in **Exodus 24:12-13** . . . Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction." [13] So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God.

- a. It is true, there was thunder peeling, lightening flashing, and the earth was quaking, but imagine being that close to the tangible presence of God.
 - b. Of course, being in a setting like that requires making the kind of choices necessary – over a prolonged period of time – just as it did for Joshua.
3. We learn from **Exodus 33:7-11**, that Moses would set up the Tent of Meeting outside the camp, and a good distance from the camp. Whenever Moses went to the Tent of Meeting, Joshua would follow along and sit at the entrance to the tent. When Moses would enter the Tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance to the tent – right where Joshua was sitting. Then the Lord would speak with Moses – face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.
 - a. When Moses finished and went back to camp, Joshua would stay at the door of the tent rather than leaving with Moses.
 - b. Though we can only imagine what that experience was like for Joshua, it was an experience made possible by Joshua's choices. You and I can make similar choices – choices that will be as profound and life-changing as they were for Joshua.
4. In **Numbers 27:15-20**, we learn that Moses asked God who would take his place and God said Joshua – who, God said, was filled with the Holy Spirit.
5. Moving on to **Deuteronomy 31:1-3**, we read that Moses spoke to all Israel and said to them, "I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I am no longer able to come and go, and the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.' [3] It is the LORD your God who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken."
6. [7] Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. [8] The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."
7. And finally, **Deuteronomy 34:9** tells us that Joshua was filled with the **spirit of wisdom**, for Moses had laid his hands on him. Whatever part Moses played in this, I submit to you that God was equipping Joshua with what he needed to lead Israel into the

Promised Land. And I submit to you that God equipped him with what he needed because Joshua faithfully sought God, faithfully lived according to God's word, and humbly waited for God to decide he was ready to do such a job as this.

- C. Joshua did his job as the leader of Israel, and so we read in **Joshua 23:1-13**, that near the end of his life he called a meeting of Israel's elders, family heads, judges, and officers.
1. At this meeting, Joshua recounted all that God did in driving out the prior inhabitants of the Land and how God fought for Israel even as they fought the inhabitants in clearing the Land.
 2. Then Joshua assured them that God would continue to fight on their behalf in driving out the inhabitants who had not yet been driven out – **IF** they would keep all that was written in the book of the law of Moses – and especially in relation to idol worship.
 3. Joshua went on to assure them that if they would cling to God and God's word, they would be victorious over any enemy, but if they turned away from God and His word, they would bring God's judgement and discipline upon themselves.
- D. Finally, we read in **Joshua 24:14-15**, that Joshua said, "Now, therefore, **fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth**; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. [15] If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, **choose for yourselves today whom you will serve**: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; **but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**"
- E. As I said at the beginning, the focus of today's teaching is on the inseparable link between choices and consequences. We began by looking at Joshua's choices – choices to live a God-trusting, God-fearing, God-pleasing, faithful life. And to help himself get there, he chose to stick as close to Moses as possible, to submit to Moses' leadership, and to be courageous in doing God's will – including leading Israel into battle. And I think he did this to learn from Moses what he could.
1. Now it is not that Joshua never made any bad choices, for we know he did (*i.e.*, *covenant with the Gibeonites* – **Joshua 9**). But more importantly, he limited his bad choices and worked at making good choices, which resulted in good outcomes and good consequences.

2. And it is my opinion that God's decision to replace Moses with Joshua was not based on one or two of Joshua's choices, but numerous choices over forty plus years – choices he made without ever knowing he would one day be God's chosen leader.
- F. Therefore, I want to reinforce the three truths I stated at the beginning. The **first** truth is, choice is not an option. In other words, you have no choice about making choices, only which choice to make when presented with a choice. Therefore, what we choose is up to us, including the choice not to make a choice or to leave the choice to someone or something else. But even then, we have chosen the outcome of whatever comes from not making a choice.
1. God made this truth clear in the Garden of Eden when He told Adam that he could eat from all the trees in the Garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Genesis 2:15-17**). In this one command, God put Adam and Eve in the position of having to choose how they would deal with the inward yearning or outward temptation to eat the forbidden fruit.
 2. And God made this truth abundantly clear when He presented Israel with the Blessings and the Curses in **Deut. 27-30**, because both the blessings and the curses would be the outcome of choices.
 3. Here in **Joshua 24:15** this truth is affirmed again when Joshua says, "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD (*that is, if the choice to serve God seems like a bad choice for some reason, then*), **choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.**"
- G. **Second**, all choices have consequences, whether good or bad, and most often we can discern the short and long-term consequences of our choices if we will give it serious thought.
1. Admittedly, discerning the outcome of our choices isn't always easy, especially when the outcome is the result of numerous smaller or seemingly insignificant choices. In cases like this, you have to think hard, pray much, and seek advice – which is why the naive, those who live in denial, and the careless repeatedly make foolish choices until it is too late.
 2. Could they have known? Yes, but it would have required listening to those who are older, more experienced, and wiser. It would have required asking God for wisdom to see what they were not seeing. And it would have required using God's word to evaluate what the probable outcome would be from their choices.

H. The **third** truth is that the wise believe that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (**Hebrews 11:6**). In other words, the wise believe in the existence of God, and that at least in relation to Him their choices have consequences. They believe that if they seek God, they will be rewarded. If they don't, they will experience the consequences of not seeking Him. Therefore, it is the fool who thinks his choices won't have consequences or that he can avoid the consequences in this lifetime and the next.

1. We see this truth in Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lived his life in joyous splendor and pleasure every day, while Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs falling from the rich man's table (**Luke 16:19-31**).
2. But what was the outcome of the rich man's choices? He dulled his conscience, numbed his sense of right and wrong, and ended up in hell, while Lazarus ended up with God. In this regard, the rich man was a fool. And though it was too late for him, he recognized choices have consequences which is why he wanted Lazarus sent back to his brothers to warn them not to make the same bad choices.

I. The reality is, the rich man did not consciously or with forethought choose hell. But he repeatedly made the kind of choices that led to hell.

1. In the same way, no one chooses drug addiction or alcoholism or obesity or debilitating depression or the physical symptoms that come from anxiety or the shallow relationships that come from a general distrust of people or the broken relationships that come from anger, controlling behavior, or other relationship damaging behaviors. However, in all these cases, people chose the things that lead to these destructive consequences.
2. The Israelites didn't specifically and intentionally choose forty years of wandering in the wilderness, but they made a choice that resulted in spending the next forty years that way.
3. I doubt that Samson chose to die blind and being made fun of while bound to two pillars at his enemy's party. But he made choices along the way that led to his life ending that way.
4. Achan did not choose for himself and his whole family to be put to death, but he made a choice that led to this outcome.
5. We have a son who never chose a bad back that he would have to endure the rest of his life, but he made risk taking and careless choices along the way that led to a bad back.

6. Do you give serious consideration to the outcome of your choices – including the smaller ones and the ones that seem insignificant? Are there areas where you don't want to face up to the consequences of your choices on yourself and those around you? Living in denial doesn't change the fact that choices have consequences, but it does mean you'll be forced to face this truth when it is too late to do anything about it.
- J. When Joshua says in **vs 15**, "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve," he is not saying they must make a choice, for they would have already decided God was not worth serving.
1. What Joshua is saying is, "Get honest with yourself about the choices you have made or are making. Stop pretending you are serving God when you have chosen to serve someone or something other than God."
 2. So let me ask again. Are there areas in your life where you ignore or live in denial of the consequences resulting from the choices you have made or are continuing to make? Are you honest about the effect on others of your choices? Do you consider the possibility that what is happening to you today, or to those around you, is the outcome of choices you've made in days gone by? Do you believe God uses consequences to encourage or get our attention, to reward us or discipline us?

III. Conclusion

- A. I want to conclude with **Ecclesiastes 8:11**, "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil."
- B. The rich man lived many years before seeing the outcome of his choices. Don't follow his example and allow the lack of destructive consequences lull you into a stupor whereby you continue to make the same bad choices. Seek God's wisdom. Read God's word. Pray about and ponder your choices in light of God's wisdom and His word.
- C. Be wise and follow Joshua's example in faithfully making good choices, for that is the path to good consequences.