



A MODEL OF OBEDIENCE • GOD DISCIPLINES AND PROTECTS •

JOSHUA 23:1-16 • 04/22/2018

MAIN POINT

God demonstrates His faithfulness to His people by disciplining and protecting them.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever received? How did this piece of advice influence, protect, or shape you?

If you knew exactly when you were going to die, what is the one piece of advice you would want to impart to your family?

When Joshua was nearing the final days of his life, he found himself with one last opportunity to address the people of Israel. Instead of imparting some personal wisdom

or insight he had gained in His years of faithfulness to God, he took this opportunity to remind the Israelites of God’s perfect faithfulness. Joshua sought to spur the Israelites on to greater faithfulness by reminding them that God’s perfect faithfulness is demonstrated in the ways He disciplines and protects His children.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 23:1-6.

The book of Joshua began with an aging Moses passing the mantle of leadership to Joshua, and now as the book draws to a close, we find an aging Joshua charging the leaders of Israel to remain true to God’s covenant.

Why had God specially chosen Israel to be His people? Why did God bless the Israelites and give them victory over their enemies?

In Deuteronomy 7, God made clear to Moses that He did not choose Israel because of anything good or impressive about them. God chose Israel because they were the fewest of all peoples and because He love them. In other words, God chose and blessed the Israelites because He is gracious and good.

Why was Joshua concerned that the people of Israel remember that in all their previous military victories, “the Lord your God was fighting for you” (v. 3. see also vv. 9-10)?

Why is it important that we acknowledge the ways God has provided for us and protected us in the past? How might neglecting to do so affect your walk with Christ?

What did God promise to do with Israel’s remaining enemies that still occupied parts of the Promised Land (vv. 4-5)? What did Joshua command the Israelites to do in light of this knowledge (v. 6)?

Joshua hoped that by acknowledging the many times God had fought for the Israelites in the past, they would be spurred on to finish the mission He had set before them to inherit the Promised Land. If we hope to persevere in faith in the present, we must discipline ourselves to remember God’s faithfulness to provide for and protect us in the past. Acknowledging God’s perfect track record of faithfulness to His people should give us confidence to face any challenge that might come our way.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 23:7-13.

Why was Joshua so concerned that the Israelites not “associate with these nations remaining among you”? What did Israel stand to lose by doing so (v. 7 and vv. 12-13)?

Joshua commanded the Israelites not to associate with the surrounding nations because they were not strong enough in their faith to live among them without compromising their faith. The Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites were pagan people whose worship posed a threat to the Israelites’ exclusive devotion to God (Ex. 23:24-25, 33). Some of these people’s religious practices included lewd sexual acts with cult prostitutes and even child sacrifice. God had charged the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan both as an act of judgment on their idolatry and as a means of preserving and protecting His people. This command does not contradict Jesus’ expectation that we, as His followers, would live as His witnesses among nonbelievers—it was not until the Holy Spirit came upon believers that they would be strong enough to live faithfully for Christ among pagan people.

What things most often distract you from a sincere and exclusive devotion to Christ?

While we may not be tempted to worship pagan gods in the same way the people of Israel were in Joshua’s day, there are many things in our culture, if left unchecked, that can distract us from delighting supremely in Christ. We live in a culture that, like the pagan nations inhabiting the Promised land, is obsessed with obtaining power, success,

and pleasure at all costs. In light of these temptations, we, like the Israelites, need God to strengthen us to continue obeying “all that is written in” His Word (vv. 6-7).

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOSHUA 23:14-16.

What is the relationship between our obedience and God’s promises?

Are God’s promises always contingent upon our obedience? Why or why not?

Read Hebrews 12:8-11. Why is it important to note that God will be faithful to all of His promises? How do God’s faithfulness to all His promises demonstrate His love for us?

Believers are saved by grace through faith and not by works. Through the sacrifice of Christ, believers become children of God whose right standing is not based upon their obedience, but on the Lord’s faithfulness. That, however, does not mean that God will never punish us for our sin during our time here on earth. The Lord never disciplines us out of bitterness. If we are facing the consequences for our sinful actions, it is because God loves us and wants us to share in His holiness (v. 10). The discipline of the Lord may be unpleasant, but is used to produce the fruit of “peace and righteousness” in our lives. God disciplines us because He wants to make us more like Christ.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How has God shown His faithfulness to you and your family? How might remembering the ways God has protected and provided for you help you and your family persevere in faith?

What might need to change in your life if you hope to be wholly and exclusively devoted to Christ? How might we help each other prioritize Christ in our lives?

What would it look like if you faced the consequences of your own sin? How might your response to God's discipline promote spiritual growth and encourage others?

PRAY

Thank God for the many ways He has protected and provided for us. Pray that we would embrace both His blessings and His discipline as good gifts from Him intended to make us more like Christ.

COMMENTARY

JOSHUA 23:1-16

23:1. The note that Joshua was old repeats the words from 13:1, just as the theme of rest from all the enemies carries forward the sense of 21:44. Joshua had completed his life's mission.

23:4. The land currently occupied by the remaining nations had already been parceled out as an inheritance; the Israelites merely had to conquer it with God's help.

23:5. Israel was to remain faithful and watch as God would force them back on your account. This is not unlike what had already occurred. Israel had observed God fighting against their enemies and had merely followed after Him to experience the victory.

23:6. The requirement for Israel to continue to enjoy success was that they obey all that is written in the book of the law of Moses. This is what Joshua was commanded to do in 1:9-11. His obedience and that of Israel had brought victory.

23:7. The way to obey God is to worship Him alone and refuse to be lured into association with other deities or the nations who worship them. This was God's most basic command for Israel (Ex 20:3-6; Dt 5:7-10).

23:10. God wins the victories and enables Israel to succeed.

23:12. This warning against association or intermarriage with other nations is repeated in 24:20.

23:13. Disobedience would result in God withdrawing His strength so that Israel would not fully possess the land. This compromise would lead to a trap for Israel and ultimately, in anticipation of the exile centuries later, to the tribes of Israel disappearing from the promised land.

23:14. The way of all the earth is death, since everything on earth eventually dies (Ecc 9:3; Rm 5:12; Heb 9:27).

23:16. Joshua's warning, If you break the covenant, uses the same verb (Hb 'avar) as the opening chapters of Joshua where it describes the crossing of the Jordan River (1:2). The same God who enabled Israel to benefit from great miracles can also turn against a faithless nation. The breaking of God's covenant by worshiping other gods would cause the loss of the land.