



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
SEPTEMBER 09 2023

line in the sand

Scripture Story: Joshua 23; 24.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 49.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Talk about an elder statesman—according to biblical evidence, when Israel conquered Canaan Joshua was the oldest Israelite around. And what a life he’d lived! He had probably baked in the hot Egyptian sun slaving on Pharaoh’s projects; watched in awe as the 10 plagues brought a nation to its knees; celebrated salvation on the seashore; fought Amalekites in the desert; accompanied Moses partway up Mount Sinai; spied on the Promised Land; and four decades later led the Israelites to victory after victory in Canaan. When Joshua talked, people listened. In his farewell message Joshua reminded his people how God had led them, then cut to the chase: Serve God and prosper, or ignore Him and . . . disaster.

Joshua led the people in renewing their covenant with God, yet drew a clear line in the sand for them. Commitment is serious stuff, he insisted. God is a jealous God. He’ll settle for nothing less than all we have in us—our thoughts, our actions, our motives, our minds. He’s responsible for everything good that’s happened to us, and now He wants us to return the favor.

It was a high calling, but never forget that even this was rooted in grace. As God reminded the Israelites, “I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you. . . . You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant” (Joshua 24:12, 13, NIV).

In this lesson your students will explore such issues as:

- The dual deceptions of assuming God will overlook sin, and the idea that people can somehow be “good enough” to be saved.
- The importance of serving God out of love rather than “what’s in it for me” or fear of judgment.
- The surety that God will do as He’s promised.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- *Know* that God is faithful when we follow Him.
- *Feel* the call to serve God wholeheartedly, knowing that God is always eager to accept them no matter what.
- *Respond* by considering the choice Joshua offered.

III. EXPLORE

Spiritual Gifts and Ministries, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 17

“God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are

cornerstoneconnections

called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built up in faith and love. (Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Discuss the meaning of "courage" as Joshua used it. Ask your students to give examples of some of the most courageous actions they've ever seen.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

It was the perfect scam.

Casinos run by American Indian tribes wanted influential people to lobby on their behalf. Enter Jack Abramoff, the man with all the right connections. When legislators tried to shut them down, Abramoff was there, happy to help them stay in business—for the right price, of course. When a casino wanted the government to shut down a competing casino, Abramoff was there too, lending a hand. In fact, he was sometimes even helping out the competing casino at the exact same time. That way, no matter which side won, he was making money, and lots of it.

In 1999 the State of Alabama considered starting its own lottery. For the Choctaw tribe in neighboring Mississippi, that meant competition for their casinos, so they called on Abramoff. Abramoff called his old friend Ralph Reed, who had become famous as the first director of the political group Christian Coalition. Abramoff paid Reed \$1.3 million to encourage Alabamian Christians to oppose the state lottery.

With radio ads starring Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, church bulletin inserts,

phone banks spreading the word, and pastors rallying their congregations, Alabamian Christians felt involved in a great moral cause. What they didn't know was that the money they were using to oppose the spread of gambling came from a casino.

The sad saga reminds us that, as Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24, NIV). Abramoff has pleaded guilty to conspiracy, fraud, and tax evasion, and the careers of his friends have been forever tarnished.

Like the story of Achan, Joshua's farewell message reminds us that we can't serve both God and the world—we must make a choice. While God's grace is always available, we'll live with the consequences and hamper God's blessings if we try to live a double life, with one foot in God's camp and another in the world's.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

"Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came a-tumblin' down." Impressive stuff—but no less impressive than his legacy of a nation that gave its heart to God for two generations. Joshua laid it on the line: There are no two ways about it—are you going to follow God or do your own thing?

"Make your choice," Joshua said. "You can follow the useless gods your ancestors worshipped, who did nothing for them, or you can follow God. I'm following God, and my family is too," Joshua said. "How about you?"

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

By its very nature, love can't be compelled. When Joshua echoed Moses' call to follow God (see Deuteronomy 30), he wanted the Israelites to serve God willingly, as a natural response to God's love for them.

Following God requires dedication and commitment. How did God recommend the Israelites maintain their focus on Him? Have a student read Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. Explain that even today people who strictly follow Judaism keep a small parchment,

inscribed with the words from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21, attached to each of their doorposts. The scroll and the container it comes in is known as a mezuzah. Ask your students for their ideas about how we can apply this principle to our spiritual lives today.

Ask your students to give one-word reactions to the word “law.” Why does the law so often have such a negative connotation? How has the devil distorted people’s ideas of following God wholeheartedly? Have a student read Luke 18:18-23. How would a typical modern person relate to that story?

The Israelites loved God’s law. Divide your students into groups, each reading a different section of the lengthy Psalm 119. Have each group find reasons why Psalm 119’s author rejoiced in the law, and share their answers with the larger group. (Unless your group is particularly large, you probably won’t want to cover the entire psalm.) Answers might include that the law gives life, brings freedom, strengthens the spirit, keeps people from being selfish, etc.

Even so, people today have many distorted views of God’s laws. If possible, share your own testimony or have a guest tell how their view of God’s law changed as the Holy Spirit led them, and how God has blessed since they came to better understand Him. Challenge your students to live with a heavenly focus, as Jesus charged in the story of the rich young ruler.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light

on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Worshipping Canaanite gods such as Baal or Asherah was a tricky, iffy business, but it definitely kept you busy. Problem was, the gods were just so hard to figure out. Canaanites believed their gods needed to be reminded regularly to take good care of them, to keep sending rain and sunshine in healthy amounts, to make their babies healthy, to keep their crops from being wiped out by a turn of the weather. Fertility was everything to the Canaanites, so their religious rituals always reminded the gods where food and babies came from.

You could never be sure what pleased the pagan gods, but God laid it out clearly for the Israelites. The Creator God didn’t need to be coaxed out of His celestial cave to help His people. Here at last was a God you could *trust*, could take at His word. God took the guesswork out of godhood by covenanting with people: *You do this, and I’ll take care of you. I’ll watch out for you—in fact, I’ll lavish you with blessings you’ll have to see to believe.* It was a religion based not on rituals, but on relationship.

The apostle John contrasted it this way: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7, NIV).

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book Patriarchs and Prophets. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Temperamental Thinking

Think and apply—those are two of your most important goals for your students in each week’s class. You want them to think through the topic and grasp its relevance to and implication for their lives. You want them to apply what’s been discussed to their everyday lives.

Every class is made up of different temperaments. Some students have something to say about everything, and need to be encouraged to give other students a chance to speak. Other students need to be gently brought out of their comfort zones before they’ll speak up. Even so, every student has the capacity to surprise you. As you guide your students through a topic, always keep in mind how the issues can shape their everyday lives. Human nature—and God’s love—haven’t changed in 3,000 years. For a lesson like this week’s, which centers on taking a stand, help your students see that following God isn’t just a list of dos and don’ts; it’s an attitude, understanding, and relationship that shape how they face everything in life.

RABBI 101

others. What we do or say may seem to us of little moment, when, could our eyes be opened, we should see that upon it depended the most important results for good or for evil” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 483).

Challenge your students with the fact that living for God won’t begin at some distant date—it begins today. Challenge them to look for opportunities to make a difference in everything they do. As Carl Wilkins, a Seventh-day Adventist who saved lives during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, tells audiences today, each day every one of us has a chance to make a difference. “We have the opportunity. We have the ability. Even in small things, like picking up a piece of trash in the parking lot. . . . Do you do it? And you struggle back and forth in your mind. But if we don’t do the small things, we won’t do the large ones. . . . That’s when the most horrible things in the world happen. When good people do nothing.”

Make a difference.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Joshua called his people to choose—or lose out. There was still much territory left to conquer, and complacency would only lead to calamity. The people would either move forward in faith, or drift into disaster.

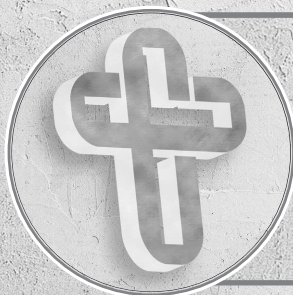
Today a world awaits us that knows too little of God’s love, and needs us to demonstrate it. People wander lost without a clear understanding of God’s mercy, patience, forgiveness, and eagerness to transform us. Jesus offers new life to all who call on Him. Jesus calls us to live in joyful expectation of His soon return, and Matthew 25:34-36 tells us some of how we should spend our time as Christians in a broken world. It’s a no-compromise life of courage in the face of adversity, care and compassion for those shattered by sin, commitment to Christ’s principles of love and faithfulness, and creative expressions of God’s character.

III. CLOSING

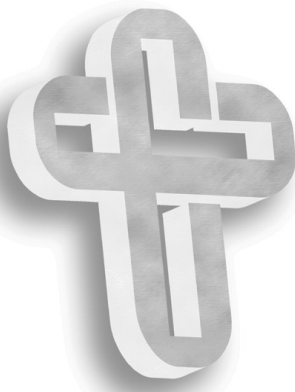
Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

If we just live life looking for something “big” to happen, we’ll miss out. Life is made up of a lot of little seemingly small choices. Ellen White wrote: “We little know the bearing of our acts upon the experience of



Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 49.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 09 2023

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Joshua 23; 24.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 49.

line in the sand



Photo by Jacqui Janetzko

flashlight

"The aged leader urged the people to consider . . . and to decide if they really desired to live as did the degraded idolatrous nations around them. If it seemed evil to them to serve Jehovah, the source of power, the fountain of blessing, let them that day choose whom they would serve. . . . The gods of the Amorites had not been able to protect their worshippers. Because of their abominable and debasing sins, that wicked nation had been destroyed, and the good land which they once possessed had been given to God's people. What folly for Israel to choose the deities for whose worship the Amorites had been destroyed! 'As for me and my house,' said Joshua, 'we will serve Jehovah.' . . . His appeals called forth the unhesitating response, 'God forbid that we should forsake Jehovah, to serve other gods' " (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 523).

keytext

"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

(Joshua 24:15, NIV)

what do you think?

Consider the following multiple-choice questions. Which answers do you agree with?

Courage is:

- a. The willingness to put everything on the line for what you believe.
- b. An attitude that isn't blocked by obstacles and pushes forward with faith.
- c. The ability to focus on what's truly important.

What tempted the Israelites to turn from God in Joshua's time?

- a. The Canaanite religions.
- b. Following God was just too complicated.
- c. They got too comfortable in their new land.
- d. They started thinking they could handle things themselves.

did you know?

Joshua gathered the Israelites at Shechem, one of the cities of refuge, for his final message to them. Shechem was where Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and Joshua 24:32 (NIV) tells us that Joseph's bones, brought from Egypt, were buried at Shechem "in the tract of land that

Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver." Meeting in Shechem reminded the Israelites that they had come full circle—from settling in Egypt, to enslavement by jealous rulers, to providential escape, to finally settling again in the land God had promised half a millennium before. Joseph's life story was the Israelites' 500-year history in miniature—from favored son to enslavement to exalted authority. Joshua reminded them that if they were as faithful to God as Joseph had been, things would only get better.

INTO THE STORY

"After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel . . . and said to them: 'I am very old. You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The LORD your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

" 'Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside

to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

" 'The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. . . . So be very careful to love the LORD your God. . . .

" 'Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the LORD your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.' "

" 'Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.' "

(Joshua 23:1-9, 11, 14-16; 24:14, 15, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

True or false: God would rather you be a hypocritical Christian than an overt atheist.

God always gives people a choice as to how they'll respond. Why do people find following God so difficult?

Is it easier or harder to follow God now than it was in Joshua's time—in today's big business, media-saturated, technologically advanced world with a longer Bible to read and Christianity pretty well-respected in society? Was it easier or harder in Joshua's day, with living memories of amazing miracles, a specific covenant of blessing and curses to follow, and a clearer contrast between pagan depravity and true devotion?

As you look over your life, has God been faithful to you? Have you been faithful to God? How might the two be related?

Joshua urged the Israelites to be careful of intermingling with the Canaanites. Jesus charged Christians to spread out and make disciples of all nations. What's different about Jesus' mission for us? What part of Joshua's advice should we take to heart?

Underline the three phrases, promises, or commands that speak the most urgently to you from the *Into the Story* passage.

punch lines

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, NIV).

“Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways. For the LORD detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence. The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed” (Proverbs 3:31-34, NIV).

“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:26, NIV).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:35-37, NIV).

further insight

“By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.”

—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 48.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Joshua 23:6-8.

This week's *What Do You Think?* explores the meaning of courage. Joshua equates courage with moral strength of character. How does living a Christ-centered life require courage? What modern idols does the world face today, and how can Christians courageously take a stand against them?

Sunday

Read Ephesians 2:8.

Read this week's *Into the Story and Out of the Story*. The questions explore issues of our relationship with God, God's faithfulness to us, and our relationship and witness to others.

People often get tripped up by two different and equally false ideas about God—that God will excuse their sin without their repentance and that we can somehow achieve salvation through our own efforts. God calls us to rely completely on Him. Ellen White wrote: "While they trusted in their own strength and righteousness, it was impossible for them to secure the pardon of their sins; they could not meet the claims of God's perfect law, and it was in vain that they pledged themselves to serve God. It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin, and receive strength to obey God's law. They must cease to rely upon their own efforts for salvation, they must trust wholly in the merits of the promised Saviour, if they would be accepted of God" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 524).

That's grace. Why do you think some people have such a hard time accepting grace, whether it means letting go of sin or their own misguided efforts to be "good enough"?

Monday

Read Joshua 24:15.

If you grew up attending church, you've probably heard it any number of times—a

call to serve God wholeheartedly. The text reminds us as well that God always gives us a choice. Joshua painted a word picture of the Israelites' experience so that everyone would have a clear understanding of the situation, without excuse, but the choice remained.

When the Israelites vowed to follow God, Joshua charged them to get rid of their idols. What changes could you, your family, and church make to follow God more fully?

Tuesday

Read Proverbs 13:22; 28:8; and Ecclesiastes 2:26.

This week's *Flashlight* quote tells about the Amorites coming under judgment for their sins of selfishness and their possessions, their "blessings," being given to others.

What do these verses tell us about our priorities in life? How can we avoid the Canaanites' fate?

Wednesday

Read the Punch Lines from this week's lesson. The world has a way of getting us down—either through tempting us with quick fixes and shortcuts to happiness, or by shouting that God can't be trusted and we might as well give up. This week's *Punch Lines* remind us that we can trust God to help us handle all life's obstacles. Read them and consider the following questions:

How can we balance our rejection of what the world stands for with showing grace and acceptance to those still caught in its web?

How has God led in your life and in your family's history? Has He been faithful? What does it mean for God to be faithful?

Why do people envy the wicked? Despite what some prominent preachers say, Chris-

tianity offers no guarantee of prosperity in this earthly life. Do God's blessings make up for any lack of prosperity? In what ways can prosperity be a curse? (Use the Notes pages in the back of your study guide.)

Thursday

Read Joshua 1:7-18.

Old habits die hard. Despite all they'd seen of God's love and power, people in Joshua's time were still worshipping other gods on the side.

Joshua created a new landmark in Shechem to remind people of their commitment to God. What landmarks of faith can you look back on and/or create to remind you of God's power and promises? Write a song, draw a picture, or build something that will, like the stone Joshua placed at Shechem, remind you of how God has led in your life.

Friday

Read Romans 12:2.

Joshua left behind a legacy of faithfulness and commitment that inspired people to follow God for themselves. Who do you look up to as a truly inspiring "godly person"? What sets them apart and makes their example so inspiring? How have they impacted you and your choices?

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 49.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.