

IF GOD BE FOR US

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Jeremiah 10:23 says, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” We have many examples in scripture of what happens when people try to live their lives their own way without following God. Eve was deceived by Satan in the Garden (Gen 3). Cain designed his own way to worship God and then murdered his righteous brother. Except for Noah and his family, all mankind was destroyed in the Flood because “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Israel “walked in the statutes of the heathen” and rejected God’s ways (2 Kgs 17:7-23). In contrast to this litany of failures, we have numerous examples of the triumphs by those who trusted in the Lord and followed Him. A review of some of these examples should encourage us to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1).

Lessons learned by Joshua

In John 15:5, Christ says, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: *for without me ye can do nothing.*” Sadly, there are times when even God’s children have acted on their own and met failure as a result of their lack of faith in that instance.

Joshua was a great prophet and judge in Israel, and is included in the “great cloud of witnesses” whose example of faith we are to follow (Heb 11:30). Yet even he got too confident after the victory over Jericho and dispatched only a few of his soldiers to fight against the small city of Ai (Jer 7:2-4). They did not ask the Lord ahead of time about whether to go and fight or for His plan for the battle. They were dismayed when they were defeated (Josh 7:4-9).

How could the same army that defeated mighty Jericho lose a battle with tiny Ai? Their success did not depend upon the number or skill of their soldiers, the might of their weapons, or the brilliance of their battle plans. God informed Joshua that the reason they lost to Ai was because He was not with them in that battle, since Achan had taken of the accursed things of Jericho (Josh 7:10-13). They had defeated Jericho due to their faith in God (Heb 11:30). Israel utterly destroyed Ai in a second battle, when God was with them again, and after they had first asked for His guidance in the battle and then obeyed what He said (Josh 8). Even after this, Joshua still had some growing to do. He and the elders of Israel neglected to seek the Lord’s guidance when dealing with the Gibeonites who were attempting to deceive them into making a league with them. God had commanded Israel to utterly destroy all the Canaanites (which included the inhabitants of Gibeon), and to “make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them” (Deut 7:2).

Unfortunately, Joshua believed their trickery and “made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live.” (Josh 9:15). Of course, God knew who those people really were and would certainly have revealed it to His prophet Joshua (see Amos 3:7). What was the problem then? They “*asked not*

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(continued)

counsel at the mouth of the Lord" (Josh 9:14). After the hard lessons of Ai and Gibeon, we never read again about Joshua having any problems from not seeking God like he should!

More than conquerors

In the New Testament, Christ's disciples failed to cast a devil out of a child and wondered why Jesus was able to succeed where they had failed (Matt 17:14-19). Jesus told them they had failed because of their unbelief, as they had not first prayed to God (Matt 17:20-21). No doubt we can all think of episodes in our own lives when we did not pray to God like we should, or study His word like we should, and did not have a good outcome. We need to learn what Joshua and the apostles did. We also have good examples like Jonathan and David. Jonathan was able to defeat a garrison of the Philistines with only his armorbearer with him. Jonathan trusted in the Lord and said that "*there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few*" (1 Sam 14:6). God rewarded his faith by giving him the victory.

David fought Goliath armed only with his staff, his sling, and five stones. Before killing the giant, David said to him, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: *for the battle is the Lord's*, and he will give you into our hands" (1 Sam 17:45-47). Everybody knows what happened next. Romans 8:31 asks, "What shall we then say to these things? *If God be for us, who can be against us?*" Verses 35-39 say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things *we are more than conquerors through him that loved us*. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul expressed the confidence he had in his Lord in Philippians 4:13: "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" The same God who was with Joshua, Jonathan, David, Paul, and all of His other faithful servants is ready to be our strength also. He remains "*able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*" (Eph 3:20).