

THE EXAMPLE OF JOSHUA - COMMANDED TO MEDITATE

(JOSHUA 1:8)

- PART 1 - The Verses and the Context
 - PART 2 - The Importance of Context
 - PART 3 - Suggestions for studying this passage
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PART 1 - The Verses and the Context

The word "meditate" occurs in verse 8. We will look at verse 7 as well, for the two verses express similar thoughts.

Verse 7 begins with the command, "**Only be strong and very courageous; ...**" but then it continues by telling Joshua what he must do, to make it possible.

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1  be careful to do according to all THE LAW which Moses My servant
    commanded you;
2      do not turn from it to the right or to the left,
3  SO THAT you may have success wherever you go.

1  THIS BOOK OF THE LAW shall not depart from your mouth,
2a      but you shall meditate on it day and night,
2b      SO THAT you may be careful to do according to all that is
        written in it;
3a  FOR THEN you will make your way prosperous,
3b      and THEN you will have success.
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The similar thoughts are numbered. They include:

1. The *need* for us to focus on God's Word
2. The *method* for doing this
3. The *results* of doing so

Two of the issues mentioned in the context are:

1. God's intention to keep his promises (as he always does) - verses. 2 - 5a
2. God's promise to be with Joshua in all that would happen - verses.5b, 9

No wonder Joshua was told to be strong and courageous (verses 6, 7 and 9)! With all that God had guaranteed him (and as long as he followed God's commands), he had no reason to be anything else! And as long as the people remained faithful to the Lord, Joshua could also tell *them* to be strong and courageous (verse 18b).

PART 2 - The Importance of Context

Many errors can occur when people take verses out of context. In this instance, when we look at the context, we see that God is promising to grant success and prosperity to the people, as they are attempting to do his will. He is reminding Joshua that he blesses those who put him first in everything, and who desire to do what pleases him. Yet, the primary focus isn't on the blessings, but on *God!*

Sadly, there are some who ignore the context and twist these words into a formula or "recipe" for self-gratification. They try to use these verses as a means of "forcing" God to grant them all their wants and wishes, even though they have no interest in putting God first in everything. They interpret this passage something like this: "Do these things, and you will get whatever you want!" But God and his Word are not like a "magic lamp," which, when rubbed the right way, grants you your every demand.

Ignoring context doesn't *always* lead a person into serious error, but it is *never* good. Let us learn from examples such as this, and be careful to not do it ourselves!

PART 3 - Suggestions for Studying this Passage:

Examine these verses, and their context. If you wish, you can read more of the book of Joshua (which shows God actively fulfilling his promise), or the first few chapters of Judges (which shows what happened when the people failed to do their part - to put God first in everything).

What was Joshua told to do/to not do? (at least 2 things are mentioned) Why? What attitude was he to have toward God's Word?

Notice that both *attitudes* and *actions* are involved. ("Attitudes" includes both mind and mouth. The mouth normally reflects one's "heart.") Explain the relationship between

attitudes and actions. Can you support your answer with other verses? (You might want to look in the New Testament, in James, 1 John, or the words of Jesus.)

In these immediate verses, Joshua's focus on God's Word would have what consequences or results on: 1) his actions? 2) his circumstances? Does this suggest a relationship between lifestyle and circumstances? Explain.

What can be learned from the context? What are the results of meditating on the Word? What could be the consequences of *not* meditating on the Word?

How should this example have an effect on your life? (See 1 Corinthians 10 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which remind us that what is written in the Old Testament has value for us, today.)

PART 4 - Think about it:

[As you think about (meditate on) this passage, do any questions come to your mind? If you cannot answer them now, perhaps as you study other verses in this series about meditation, you will find an answer.]

How much of life is included in what God was telling Joshua to do? (Was he to apply God's Word to *part* of his life, to *all* of it, or what?) How could you follow Joshua's example in your own life?

How does your "meditation life" compare with this? Do you meditate "day and night"? In other words, is the Bible one of the things you think about throughout the day? Why or why not? What attitude toward meditation flows out of your heart? What can you do to change your attitude, if it falls below the mark?

Are there certain areas of your life (or certain things that you do) in which meditation is "missing"? Why? Be thinking about this issue, as you study this series about meditation. Make it your goal to do something about any weaknesses you may have in this matter. Remember though, it won't be easy to change a lifetime of wrong habits. You must be willing to fight them (to deny self and to follow God). Change may be slow. But change *can* happen!

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Some additional comments about MEDITATION

- PART 1 - Growing in your meditation of the Word
 - PART 2 - Meditation on the Word overlaps thinking about "the rest of life."
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PART 1 - Growing in your meditation of the Word

You may find that you want to meditate on the Word more often, but doing so just doesn't seem to come naturally. Keep trying and don't give up! Don't let worry and despair overwhelm you, when you don't have instant success. Remember that spiritual growth is a *life-long* process.

Until a person becomes a Christian, he is spiritually dead, with no heart-desire to let the Bible make him more "Christ-like." When he turns to Christ, that desire is born, and as he grows in Christ, that desire grows. You may find yourself weak and struggling in this matter, but if there is any real desire at all, there is hope. As you meditate on the Word (though your efforts may be weak), it will not only increase your comprehension and understanding of the Word, but God will be able to use it to change you! In time, your attitudes and desires (including your desire to meditate on God's Word) will change. This process will continue throughout life, until the day you stand in Christ's presence. (At that time, the whole process will be wonderfully finished!) If God has begun a wonderful work in your life, *he will finish it*.

It is not a matter of forcing oneself to meditate contrary to one's *heart*-felt desires (although forcing oneself to go contrary to one's *fleshly* desires is a normal part of living in Christ). On the contrary, as you grow in Christ, you will *want* to think (meditate) about the things of God, and how they relate to all of life. Thinking about God is the natural outflow of a *changed* heart.

In contrast, a person who is *not* a Christian may realize that he *ought* to focus on God's Word, because of the *conscience* that God gave him (Romans 2:13-15), which reminds him of his obligations. Yet he will tend to *not* do the things he knows he should. If he persists in not doing what he *knows* is right, he will become hardened in heart, until his conscience no longer convicts him. (He may even convince himself that he *is* a "Christian," unaware that his life proves differently.)

[Do you have a changed heart? How has it demonstrated its presence? (It will, if it exists.)]

PART 2 - Meditation on the Word overlaps with thinking about "the rest of life."

Meditation (on God and his works) does not *exclude* other things - the rest of life. Rather, it overlaps or encloses them.

Even the "mundane mindless tasks" of life (which people normally describe as "boring" and "a waste of time and life") provide an excellent opportunity for thinking about God! If the task permits it (without risking safety or quality), you can use your mind to worship, pray, and focus on other things, while you are performing your daily obligations and duties. God may be able to teach you some very beneficial things... even using your job as a "teaching tool"!

A shepherd boy, named David, sat day after day watching farm animals walk around, eat, sleep, and occasionally get into trouble. How boring! Yet what did he do with his mind? Read Psalm 23.

For some activities, it will not be possible to have God and his Word as the *primary* focus of one's thinking. But it can still remain a thought in the background. For instance, if you had a job that required intense concentration, your job would be the primary focus of your thoughts. But God would still be in the background, for you would be wanting to do your job in a manner that pleased your Savior and Lord! One aspect of meditation involves thinking about how to accomplish this.

And *whatever* you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)