

## CHAPTER THREE: SCOPE OF VICTORY

### 3.1 – THE DECISION

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

Joshua 1:1-2

By now, hopefully you have a fresh understanding of what is happening in the human brain when there is a habit or addictive cycle that needs to be broken. Along with that understanding is the pivotal concept that breaking free when our brains get held captive is less about strength and willpower than it is about rewiring the neural connections in our brain over time. These two thoughts tied together may cause us to feel more empowered to break free than we ever have been before. In the struggle for change, the new perspective about the need to shift our motivation from a temporal source like our spouse or kids to an eternal source might give us the fuel we need to kick things off on the right foot. The examination of some of our excuses might have already started to break down the walls between our current state and real, lasting change. Still, if your mind is not yet free the heaviest battles have not even begun. You might feel as though you are no longer in your proverbial Egypt, but like you are also not yet in Canaan. So, this chapter will examine some aspects

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from the life of Joshua as he prepared for and then fought in the promised land.

Joshua was not born free; he was born into slavery. We can surmise that he spent at least the first three decades of his life in the land of Egypt as a Hebrew slave and then left as part of the mass Exodus that occurred sometime in his mid-thirties. Along the way he saw the Nile River turn to blood, frogs infest every corner of the kingdom, and experienced the first Passover. I can imagine him listening to the older Jewish men grumble about how a fiery Moses was promising that God would deliver them from slavery but, in fact, was making things worse for everyone. He was among the masses that walked through the parted waters of the Red Sea. He fed on manna for forty years, where he had a front row seat to everything that God did.

This is all speculation, of course, because we do not actually know much about the early life of Joshua before he led the Israelites through their conquest of Canaan. Here's what we do know: We know he was the military commander who led the Israelite warriors in battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17), and that he was with Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel when God gave the covenant and ten commandments to Moses (Exodus 24). Joshua was full of wisdom (Deuteronomy 34), and he lingered in the presence of God even after Moses left His presence (Exodus 33). This all paints the picture of a man who was being prepared for the fight of his life. We could say the same for you and I, too.

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Beginning sometime in his thirties or forties, Joshua worked directly with Moses as his assistant. He was likely his personal bodyguard as well, water-carrier when he climbed up Mount Sinai, and scribe. In short, Joshua followed the man everywhere he went. He learned from him, studied how he handled conflict, and watched his rhythms when spending time with God. He was there when Moses struck the rock in anger (Exodus 17), watched in awe when he returned from the peak of Mount Sinai glowing brightly (Exodus 34), and he likely comforted Moses when God refused to allow him entry into Canaan (Deuteronomy 32). The books that precede the recorded history within the pages of Joshua – the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy – are filled with the account of Israel living under Moses' leadership - and Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, was privy to all of it. The book of Joshua then begins where Deuteronomy ends – with the death of Moses.

Just before his death, Moses gave a final farewell speech and then simply - left camp to die. Somewhere in the land of Moab it is thought that God himself buried Moses, which left Joshua to lead the people of Israel on his own. He was no longer able to follow the orders of another but had to implement his own habits, plans, and strategies. Joshua had the support of the tribal elders, sure, and Moses had spent a considerable amount of time building him up as their next leader, but he was still left to face the challenges in which the Israelites had not yet been victorious – the success of which he alone had the responsibility over.

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Can you relate to Joshua's position? The Israelites were camped near the Jordan River at a place known as Acacia Grove when the transition of leadership occurred. I can imagine Joshua walking down by the river to clear his head and looking across at Canaan. Knowing that what laid ahead were fierce battles and a brutal military campaign in which many Israelite warriors would likely die, Joshua could have easily chosen to remain on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Joshua was standing on the precipice of an unfulfilled promise, the fulfillment of which would require an unmeasured amount of sacrifice and uncertainty. That, or a guaranteed semi-freedom along the near side of the river. Joshua did what we all must choose to do – he chose to cross the river.

If we continue to read the first chapter of Joshua, we see that God speaks directly to Joshua's fear, anxiety, and uncertainty about the battles to come. He reminds and commands Joshua to be strong and courageous three times, and then he sends Israel's elders with identical words at the end of the very same chapter. I know that God never says things that are unnecessary, and so I can sense the trepidation in Joshua as he stepped into the role of leading the Israelites. This is a man, if you'll remember, who was born a slave. Unlike Moses, he never lived in a palace and did not come from a royal bloodline. He had not yet tasted true freedom. At this point in his life, he did not know what it felt like to have his own land to occupy, cultivate, build upon, and defend.

Regardless, we see him embrace the courage that God and the men around him instill in him and he decides

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to cross the river.

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

Joshua 1:10-11

I believe we all must face a Jordan river moment in our lives. This is a moment in time when we realize that we have spent our entire lives either in the chains of our own bad habits and addictions or moving away from them. Living in the ‘in-between,’ we are left to decide whether to trust God and risk fighting for our freedom or to remain on the near side of the river, never experiencing what it feels like to be truly free. Perhaps reading this book is prompting a Jordan river moment for you. Perhaps you’ve been camped at the Acacia Grove for a long while now but you’ve never crossed the river and fought for the permanent change that you know God is calling you towards. Regardless of where we all are in our journeys to freedom, we must all make the conscious decision to either remain where we are or to cross the river and engage in battle.

At the end of Joshua’s life, after the initial military campaigns were over and the lands had been divided, he

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called together the Israelites and gave a farewell speech much like Moses did. As he reflected back on his life and on the incomplete challenges that lay ahead for the twelve tribes, he said one of the more famous lines in all of scripture. Let's allow his words to settle into our minds as we make our decision regarding how to approach our own Jordan river:

But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua 24:15

Isn't it time you stopped camping out on the edge of true freedom and cross the river to lay claim to the land which the Lord has promised you?