

## **LOOSE THY SHOE**

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*Lesson: Joshua 5:10-15*

Children: Joshua was a very brave and courageous man. He was the man who was going to lead the Israelites into the land of Canaan, the land which the Lord said overflowed with milk and honey, the land which the Lord had promised would be their home if they would obey His commandments. But the people who already lived in the land did not want the Israelites to have a home there. They hated the Israelites, and were afraid of them, because of the wonderful miracles that the Lord had done for them. And so, before the Israelites could live in that Promised Land, they would have to fight the Canaanites in many hard battles. And Joshua was to be their leader.

You might think that Joshua would be afraid, knowing he would have to fight so many battles against enemies that were larger and stronger than his people. But Joshua was a brave man. He was not afraid, for he knew that the Lord would show him what to do and would help him win, if only he obeyed the Lord's commandments. He also had great courage; for he loved and worshiped the Lord and was ready to go anywhere and do anything the Lord wanted him to do, no matter how hard it might seem.

So Joshua obeyed the Lord's command to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. Jericho was the first city against which he would have to fight. And when Joshua came near to Jericho, he looked up and saw a man whom he had never seen before. This was no ordinary man: he stood with a sword in his hand, as though he were ready to fight. Most people would be afraid of such a man. But not Joshua! He walked right up to the man and said, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?"—which means, "Are you on our side, or are you an enemy?"

And the man answered, "No, but as captain of the host (or army) of the Lord am I now come." As soon as Joshua heard this, he knew that he was talking with an angel. Yet more than an angel; for who is the one captain, the one only prince of the armies of the Lord? Of course, it is the Lord Himself. This angel was the Lord, who had come to Joshua. And so Joshua fell down to the ground, with his face, on the earth, and worshiped the Lord. And he asked, "What saith my Lord, unto His servant?" He was eager to listen, and to do whatever the Lord told him. Then the captain of the Lord's host said to him, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." And Joshua did as the Lord had said.

Now, wasn't that a beautiful thing that the Lord told Joshua to do? Joshua was to fight the Lord's fight against the enemies of Israel. But he was to fight for what was good and right. He was not to bring anything unclean or unholy into the Lord's battles. And because shoes pick up from the ground much that is dirty, so Joshua was told to take off his shoe, as a sign that he would fight a good, clean fight.

Don't you wish you could be like Joshua? Don't you wish you could be strong and brave, and have the courage to fight against your enemies? But you can be like Joshua. For who are your enemies? They are those who try to keep you from living in the land which the Lord has promised will be your home, if you obey His commandments. And where is this home? It is in heaven. The land that the Lord wants to give you is heaven, where the angels live in beautiful homes and are as happy as they possibly can be.

But your enemies don't want you to live in heaven, just as Joshua's enemies didn't want the Israelites to live in the land of Canaan. Your enemies don't want you to love the Lord or to do what is true, good and clean. They want you to break the Lord's commandments, to lie, steal, cheat, be jealous and hate other people, so that you cannot live in heaven. And it isn't only evil spirits who try to get you to like what is wrong. Often your friends in this world may ask you to do or say things that in your heart you know are wrong because the Lord has said they are wrong, and you want very much to do these things.

Then what are you going to do? You're going to have to stop and think, aren't you? You will have to think it over very carefully. Are you going to give in and do the thing you feel like doing? That would be the easy way out. But that was not Joshua's way. Or are you going to have the courage to do what is right, even if it seems very hard to do it?

"But," you may ask, "how can I have this courage?" For as you grow older you will have to fight against doing wrong, and not just once but many, many times. You will have many battles against evil, just as did the Israelites. And how will you be brave enough to do what is right?

You will be brave if you do as Joshua did. When he saw the captain of the Lord's host, he bowed down and worshiped Him. For he knew that really it was the Lord who would win the fight for him. And if you will trust in the Lord, if you will be ready to listen to the Lord's Word and do whatever the Lord says, if you will try to stop doing and thinking things that are wrong and dirty, then the Lord will be with you and will fight for you. So the Lord will give you courage, will make you strong, and you will be ready to fight bravely for the Lord and His church. Then you will be like Joshua, who fell on his face to the earth and worshiped the Lord. And the captain of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." And, Joshua did so. *Amen.*