

LEADING THE WAY THROUGH
JOSHUA

MICHAEL YOUSSEF



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*To all faithful preachers, teachers, and Christian leaders
who seek to faithfully expound the Word of God
from pulpits or in Sunday school classes or in home Bible study groups.*

Acknowledgments

I offer all my thanksgiving to the Father in heaven whose Holy Spirit has laid on my heart the writing of this series for the glory of Jesus. I am also immensely grateful to the Lord for sending me an able and gifted editor and compiler of my material in Jim Denney.

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My earnest prayer is that, as I leave this legacy to the next generation, God would raise up great men and women to faithfully serve their generation by accurately interpreting the Word of God.

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Introduction

Trembling Heroes

Sergeant James Allen Ward was just twenty-two when he was called upon to do the impossible. During World War II, Sergeant Ward flew with the Seventy-Fifth New Zealand Squadron of the Royal Air Force. Based in England, he was a copilot aboard a Vickers Wellington twin-engine bomber.

On July 7, 1941, Sergeant Ward and his fellow crewmen flew a nighttime bombing mission over Münster, Germany. After the successful raid, the bomber was thirteen thousand feet over Holland when it was attacked by a German night fighter. The enemy plane approached within yards of the bomber's tail, cannons and machine guns blazing.

The bomber's rear gun turret was shredded by gunfire. The wounded tailgunner sprayed the enemy plane with machine gun fire. The Messerschmitt fell away and spiraled earthward, but its bullets had severed a fuel line, setting the starboard wing ablaze.

In the cockpit, the pilot told copilot Ward, “You’ve got to put that fire out!”

It was an order to do the impossible. How was Ward supposed to put out a fire on the starboard wing? If he didn’t figure it out, the fire would spread and the crew would be forced to bail out over Nazi-occupied Holland. Ward didn’t want to end up in a Nazi prison camp.

The pilot slowed the plane to just over a hundred miles an hour. Ward cut a hole in the side of the plane and tried to suppress the flames with a fire extinguisher—to no avail. When Sergeant Ward reported the failure, the pilot replied, “Prepare the crew to bail out.”

“There’s got to be something we can do,” Ward said.

“You could go out on the wing and smother the fire,” the pilot replied.

The idea was absurd. Ward wasn’t a wing-walking stuntman! But then he thought about that Nazi prison camp and—

“I’ll do it,” he said.

He took a rope from the inflatable life raft and tied it around his waist, securing the other end to the airframe. Then he popped open a small Plexiglas dome on the top of the plane and squeezed through. A fellow crewman passed him a parachute, which he strapped on while clinging to the top of the plane. Then the crewmen handed him a folded canvas.

The skin of the bomber was amazingly thin, made of Irish linen stretched over the airframe and stiffened with lacquer. Sergeant Ward used his fists and boots to punch holes in the airplane skin to form handholds and footholds. As the crewmen paid out the rope, Ward climbed down to the wing.

He punched more holes in the wing and inched toward the burning engine. The winds buffeted him and the heat of the flames broiled his skin. He pushed the bolt of canvas in front of him and

stuffed it into a flaming hole in the engine housing. Burning fuel sprayed around the edges of the canvas. Ward wondered if the canvas would ignite.

The flames went out!

Moments later, the canvas blew out of the hole and fell away into the darkness. Fuel continued to bleed from the severed fuel line, but the fire was out and the plane was saved. Ward made his way, handhold by handhold, across the wing, up the side of the plane, and back through the narrow hole in the top of the plane.

Nearly six hours after taking off, the plane approached the landing field. The pilot discovered that the flaps, used to maintain lift and slow the plane during landings, would not lower, so he had to bring the plane in too fast. As the plane touched the runway, the pilot found his brakes were gone as well.

The bomber rumbled off the end of the airstrip and plowed through a hedge. The impact destroyed the airplane—but the crew emerged alive.

A month later, Prime Minister Winston Churchill awarded James Allen Ward the Victoria Cross, the nation's highest honor for courage. As Sergeant Ward stood in the prime minister's office, Churchill asked him questions about his heroic achievement—but the airman couldn't speak. His knees knocked, his hands shook, and no words came out.

Churchill was amused. This brave young airman could crawl onto a burning airplane wing but couldn't speak to the prime minister. "Young man," he said, "you must feel very humble and awkward in my presence."

Ward nodded and managed to stammer, "Yes, sir!"

"Then you can imagine how humble I feel in your presence."

Sergeant Ward was a hero—even to the British head of state—because he accepted an impossible assignment, and he got it done.

Courage for impossible challenges

You and I may never be called upon to crawl across the flaming wing of an airplane, but we are called to face the crises and challenges of our times for the sake of our Lord. We are called to dare and to risk—even if we fail in the attempt. As someone once said, “God does not require you to win, but he does require you to fight.”

There are times in our lives when God challenges us to take on a task that seems every bit as impossible as the challenge Sergeant Ward faced. When the time comes to dare great things for God, we have a choice to make: Do we trust God to strengthen us, to put a steel rod of courage in our spines, and to see us through this challenge? Or do we shrink back in fear and unbelief, rejecting God’s call upon our lives?

That’s the choice Joshua confronted in the opening verses of the book that bears his name. We first find Joshua mentioned in Exodus and Numbers, where he is mentored by Moses and sent out as one of twelve spies to explore the land of Canaan in preparation for conquest. By the time we arrive in Joshua 1, he has succeeded Moses as the leader of the people of Israel. Joshua, the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim, was handpicked by God himself to take on the mantle of leadership. As commander of the army of Israel, Joshua led his people in their conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land.

The events described in the book of Joshua appear to be mentioned in several nonbiblical historical documents, including the cuneiform texts of the Akkadian Empire (Mesopotamia) and the Amarna Letters, a collection of ancient clay tablets discovered at Amarna in Upper Egypt. These records include appeals by Canaanite kings for military assistance from Egypt because of an invasion by the Habiru or Apiru people. Many scholars believe *Habiru* is a corrupted form of the word *Hebrew*. The Habiru are described as a fierce nomadic tribe of people who invaded the land of Canaan

somewhere between 1800 and 1100 BC. The conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua is generally dated at about 1400 BC.

The book of Joshua recounts the miraculous conquest of the heavily fortified city of Jericho, followed by both failure and success at Ai, the dramatic (and supernaturally aided) battles at Gibeon and the Waters of Mermon, and more. By the end of the book, Joshua—who was born a slave in the land of Egypt—has completed the “impossible” mission God had set before him. In the closing verses of the book, Joshua dies at the age of 110 and is laid to rest.

It’s a thrilling chronicle of events, and the story of Joshua has much to teach us about how to live victoriously in the twenty-first century. Again and again, God calls Joshua and the nation of Israel to take on seemingly impossible challenges. The faithful choices Joshua makes are instructive for our lives. The principles that guided him are the same principles that will guide us to victory in the Christian life. Here is counsel and comfort for those times when we look to God and ask, “Lord, are you sure you’re asking the right person? Are you sure you want me to do this? Do you realize you’re asking me to do the impossible?”

Next to the Lord Jesus himself, there is no greater example of the spiritual traits of obedience, faith, and courage than this Old Testament hero, Joshua. As we study his inspiring example, we will learn to make the same faithful, courageous choices he made.

And we, too, will learn how to achieve the impossible.