

Joshua 1:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Analysis

The command begins with a prohibition: "**This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth**" (lo-yamush sefer hatorah hazeh mipicha, לֹא-יָמוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה, מִפִּיִּךָ). The verb yamush (יָמוּשׁ, "depart") means to move away, withdraw, or cease. God commands that Torah remain constantly on Joshua's lips—not merely stored in memory but actively spoken, recited, and taught. "Out of thy mouth" emphasizes verbal engagement with Scripture, not merely intellectual knowledge. This oral dimension was crucial in predominantly oral cultures where Scripture was memorized, recited, and passed down through spoken repetition.

The positive command follows: "**but thou shalt meditate therein day and night**" (vehagita bo yomam valaylah, וְהָגִיתָ בּוֹ יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה). The Hebrew hagah (הָגָה, "meditate") originally meant to mutter, murmur, or speak in low tones—suggesting audible repetition and pondering of Scripture. This wasn't passive reading but active, repetitive engagement that internalized God's word. "Day and night" indicates constant, continuous meditation—Scripture should occupy one's thinking throughout all activities, not merely during formal study times. This anticipates Psalm 1:2, which describes the blessed person as one who meditates on God's law "day and night."

The purpose clause explains why: **"that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein"** (lemaan tishmor la'asot kekhoh-hakatub bo, לְמַעַן (תִּשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל־הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ). Meditation leads to obedience. The verb shamar (שָׁמַר, "observe") means to guard, keep, or watch carefully, while asah (עָשָׂה, "do") means to act or accomplish. Knowledge of Scripture must result in careful, comprehensive obedience to "all that is written." The promise concludes: **"for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success"** (ki-az tatzliach et-derakecha ve'az taskil, וְאִזְ תִּצְלִיחַ אֶת־דְּרָכְךָ וְאִזְ תִּשְׁכִּיל). The word tatzliach (תִּצְלִיחַ, "prosper") means to succeed or advance, while taskil (תִּשְׁכִּיל, "have good success") means to act wisely or prudently. Success in Joshua's mission depends not primarily on military strategy or political skill but on meditation and obedience to God's word.

Historical Context

This command came at Joshua's commissioning after Moses' death, as Israel prepared to cross the Jordan and conquer Canaan. "This book of the law" likely refers to the Torah (Pentateuch), particularly Deuteronomy, which Moses had recently completed and placed beside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Ancient Near Eastern kings often received written law codes to guide governance (Code of Hammurabi, Hittite law codes), but Israel's uniqueness was that their law came directly from Yahweh and governed all of life, not merely civil matters.

The emphasis on meditation "day and night" reflects ancient Israelite educational practice. Children were taught Scripture orally, memorizing extensive portions through repetition (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Professional scribes and priests preserved written texts, but most people engaged Scripture through hearing, memorization, and recitation. This oral engagement created deep internalization—Scripture shaped thinking patterns, influenced decision-making, and provided interpretive frameworks for understanding life. The practice continues in Jewish tradition through daily recitation of Shema and study of Torah.

The connection between meditation, obedience, and success established a principle that runs throughout Scripture. Psalm 1 describes the blessed person who meditates on God's law day and night, becoming like a fruitful tree. Jesus

taught that building on His words results in stability and security (Matthew 7:24-27). James warns against being hearers-only rather than doers (James 1:22-25). Paul commands Timothy to give attention to reading, doctrine, and meditation, so his progress may be evident (1 Timothy 4:13-15). True prosperity in biblical terms isn't primarily material wealth but successful accomplishment of God's purposes through obedient application of His revealed will.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How much of your thinking throughout the day is shaped by Scripture versus by cultural narratives, personal anxieties, or worldly ambitions?
2. What would change in your daily schedule and priorities if you took seriously the command to meditate on God's word "day and night"?
3. In what specific areas are you treating Scripture as information to know rather than instruction to obey, and what would comprehensive obedience look like?
4. How does understanding biblical prosperity as successful accomplishment of God's purposes challenge contemporary prosperity gospel teaching that equates blessing with material wealth?
5. What practical disciplines could help you move from passive Bible reading to active meditation that internalizes Scripture and produces obedience?

John 14:21 (Word): He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

Deuteronomy 29:9 (Word): Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.

Luke 11:28 (Word): But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Matthew 7:24 (Parallel theme): Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

Psalms 119:11 (Word): Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalms 119:97 (Word): O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.