

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, לא־ימוש ספר התורה זה מפיך). The verb yamush (ימוש, "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, וְהִגִּית בּוֹ יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה). The Hebrew hagah (הגה, "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 kekhol-hakatub bo, לְמַעַן תִּשְׁמַר לְעֵשָׂוֹת כָּל-הַכְּתּוֹב בָּו). Meditation leads to obedience. The verb shamar (שְׁמַר, "observe") means to guard, keep, or watch carefully, while asah (עֲשָׂה, "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, כי-אָז תָּצַלְיָח אֶת-דֶּרֶךְךָ וְאָז תִּשְׁפְּלִי, "prosper" and "have good success"). The word tatzliach (תָּצַלְיָח, "prosper") means to succeed or advance, while taskil (תשְׁפְּלִי, "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?

Interlinear Text

לֹא יִמְשַׁלֵּח מִפִּיךְ
H3808 shall not depart H4185 H5612 H8451 H2088 H6310

וְתַהֲרֵת יְמִינְךָ בְּזַהֲרֵת
but thou shalt meditate H1897 H0 H3119 H3915 H4616

תְּשַׁמֵּר כָּל־לְעָשׂוֹת
that thou mayest observe H8104 to do H6213 H3605 according to all that is written H3789 H0

וְאֵלֶיךָ בְּאַתְּ פָּצַל יְמִינְךָ
H3588 H227 prosperous H6743 H853 thy way H1870 H227

תְּשִׁפְּלָה:
and then thou shalt have good success H7919

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 119:15 (Parallel theme): I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.

Psalms 19:14 (Word): Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

Colossians 3:16 (Word): Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Proverbs 3:1 (Word): My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

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.

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