



Joshua: Leader for the People

September 6, 2009

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:

JOSHUA 1

PRINTED TEXT:

JOSHUA 1:1–11, 16, 17

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

—Joshua 1:9

Opening Song

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting

Opening Prayer

JOSHUA 1:1-11, 16, 17 (NIV)

1¹ After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:² "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.³ I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.⁴ Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west.⁵ No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.⁶ "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.⁷ Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.⁸ Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.⁹ Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people:¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies 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.' "

¹⁶ Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.¹⁷ Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses.

INTRODUCTION**A. LEGENDARY LEADERS**

Think of any sports celebrity of a generation or so ago. After you do that, try to recall the immediate successor to that person. In many cases, there was a series of people who tried to fill the void. Often a successor ends up “living in the shadow” of a famous predecessor. This has happened regarding famous kings or political leaders as well. How many people can name the immediate successors to Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, or Lincoln?

What a challenge it is to follow in the footsteps of such leaders! Think also of outstanding ministers who serve several decades in one place. They may become famous for their preaching and their people skills. But what happens after they retire, leave, or die? Often the forward momentum slows, and a downward spiral begins. This can happen even if the famous minister handpicks the successor.

Today’s lesson is about Joshua, the man who was chosen to follow a legend and then to establish his own. Moses was used of God to lead an enslaved people away from a very powerful nation. He forged this people into a new nation under God and provided it with laws. Moses is recognized as the author of the first five books of the Bible, and he wrote at least one psalm (Psalm 90). His name occurs more than 750 times in the Old Testament and more than 80 times in the New. By contrast, Joshua’s name appears less than one-third as often in the Old Testament, and there are only 2 references to him in the New (Acts 7:45; Hebrews 4:8). How do you follow a legend?

B. LESSON BACKGROUND

As today’s lesson opens, the Israelites were near the end of their 40-year journey from Egypt. The promised land was immediately before them, on the other side of the Jordan River. They probably had arrived in the plains of Moab during the previous summer (Numbers 22:1; 36:13).

Much happened during that encampment. The king of Moab had sent for Balaam to come from his Mesopotamian home to curse Israel. Balaam consented to come on the second appeal. Those who went to secure him thus made the 1,400-mile round-trip twice, and that took time (Numbers 22–24). Also, a second military census was conducted, revealing that the number of soldiers over age 20 had dropped slightly since the first census 39 years before at Sinai (601,730 compared with 603,550; see Numbers 1:46; 26:51). A military campaign against the Midianites is recorded in Numbers 31.

Moses had been the recognized leader for over 40 years. He was challenged on occasion, for the rebels did not comprehend that to resist Moses was to go against God. Moses was God’s instrument to provide governance, food, etc. But Moses is dead as today’s lesson opens (Deuteronomy 34).

In every social unit, a basic question is *Who is in charge?* God did not leave the Israelites in doubt. He was the one who determined that Joshua would be Moses’ successor (Numbers 27:18–23). Joshua had been Moses’ adjutant or valet for 40 years. Joshua also seems to have been the leader in the battles the nation conducted during the wilderness wanderings (Exodus 17). Moses recognized early on that Joshua had leadership qualities. To make sure that Joshua knew the source of his capabilities, Moses changed his name from Hoshea (“salvation”) to Joshua (“the Lord is salvation”; see Numbers 13:16).

I. CONFIRMATION FOR JOSHUA (JOSHUA 1:1–9)

A. LEADER DESIGNATED (VV. 1, 2)

1. After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:

This time *Moses* is not the intermediary, since the Lord addresses *Joshua* directly. This is the first of several times in the book when Joshua has this privilege. This is a definite source of confirmation to Joshua after the death of Moses. Few people in the Old Testament are described as being a *servant of the Lord*, and it is a special title for Moses. It is used 14 times in the book of Joshua for Moses. In the last chapter of the book, Joshua himself receives this designation (24:29).

Joshua is said to be *Moses' aide* in Exodus 24:13, etc., but he is much more than that. The first reference to him is in Exodus 17:8–13, where he led in the memorable battle against the Amalekites before the people reached Sinai. Joshua was 1 of 2 spies whose minority report 39 years earlier urged the nation to have faith in God and to begin the conquest of Canaan (Numbers 13, 14). It is interesting that the names of the 2 “good” spies are still remembered, but the names of the other 10 are only a part of a listing.

2. “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.

The impact of the phrase *the Jordan River* should not be overlooked. At this time of the year, the Jordan is a wild, wide, rushing torrent. It is now the end of the rainy season, and melting snows from northern mountains add to the flow. *To cross* the Jordan successfully when it is in flood stage will validate the leadership of Joshua in the minds of the people. Comparisons are often made between the crossing of the Red Sea under *Moses* and crossing the Jordan in Joshua's day.

When Abram reached Shechem shortly after entering Canaan, God first promised to *give* his descendants that *land* (Genesis 12:7; see also 50:24). Centuries have passed, and the time for the fulfillment has come (a total of 615 years, with 430 of them in Egypt; see Exodus 12:40, 41). God's ways often require patience.

B. LAND DESCRIBED (VV. 3, 4)

3. “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

The first dimension given to the land is very distinctive: it is anywhere that Joshua travels as he conquers the seven nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1). Similar language is used by *Moses* in the exhortation that he gives in Deuteronomy 11:24.

4. “Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west.

Geographical designations are also used to describe the scope of the land. It extends from *the desert* region (recently traversed) to the far north—to *Lebanon* and the *Euphrates* River. The northern territory, *all the Hittite country*, includes the land occupied by the descendants of a grandson of Noah through Ham (Genesis 9:18; 10:15).

In the days of David and Solomon, the area dominated by Israel did indeed reach these dimensions (about 975 BC). The combined kingdoms of Jeroboam II (king of the northern nation of Israel) and Uzziah (king of the southern nation of Judah) reached approximately the same extent again later (about 750 BC).

The men with Joshua, however, will display a weakness as they develop the “good enough” syndrome. They will not obey Joshua completely. Instead, they will conquer only “enough” land for their perceived needs. This will bring disastrous consequences.

C. GUARANTEES (v. 5)

5. “No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

It is a solid “blessed assurance” to know that the enemy is not *able to stand* in your way. Joshua had a recent experience of this type in a battle against the Midianites (Numbers 31:7). In the end, not one Israelite soldier was missing (31:49). This background, considered with the promise in the verse before us, may help explain Joshua’s great shock after the first battle against Ai, when Israel loses 36 men (Joshua 7:5, 6). The loss turns out to be the result of a sin problem among the people.

The final phrases of the verse express the recurring theme of God’s presence. The same thoughts are expressed in Hebrews 13:5. In that context, we are warned about the love of money and encouraged to be content with what we have. To fail to be content leads to covetousness, which ends up being the problem in Joshua 7:20, 21.

D. GUIDELINES (vv. 6–9)

6–9. “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

The quality of having courage or being *courageous* is mentioned several times in various admonitions to Joshua. Moses expressed this twice in his own exhortations to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23). The Lord uses the word three times in Joshua 1:6, 7, 9. It is difficult to think that Joshua would need to be encouraged. Perhaps Moses’ presence previously gave him confidence, but now Joshua, without Moses, may be hesitant about the outcomes of future conflicts. The cautiousness associated with age may also be a factor.

The final time for Joshua to receive an admonition of encouragement is given in the last verse of the chapter, and it is by

members of his army. It has been said that courage consists in equality to the problem before you. It is meeting difficulties with firmness and, in some cases, by casting aside fear.

In this chapter Joshua is given two primary assignments: to conquer Canaan (which happens in Joshua 6–12) and to consign *the land* among the tribes of Israel (which happens in Joshua 14–19). Eleazar, who became the high priest when Moses’ brother Aaron died, will assist Joshua in the task.

7. “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

The elements of being *strong and very courageous* are repeated, and a new factor is mentioned: *the law* that Moses left behind for the people of Israel. It is a law that is written down, for the next verse states that it is a “Book of the Law.” This law is not simply to be admired or put in a cabinet. It is to be obeyed with exactness.

8. “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

The promise of success is conditioned on obeying the law. The word *meditate* in this context has a distinctive meaning that is different from our usual understanding of it. The word may also be translated “speak” or “utter a sound.” In this light, it depicts the ancient way of reading, which is done orally. To read silently as our teachers instructed us is fairly new historically. Reading aloud engages more of the senses, and it can provide a greater comprehension.

This oral reading is not to be the end of the matter. The goal is to obey completely the things that are *written*. Such obedience will lead to Joshua’s being able to succeed

and be *prosperous* as he fulfills what he is commissioned to do. In this case the prosperity may be partly the material wealth that can come from conquest, but it is more than that. It is the spiritual rewards that are in view.

9. “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

The communication from *the Lord* is coming to an end. These words provide a summary of what has already been said and a final challenge. Joshua and the people are ready to begin the tasks of crossing the Jordan and conquering Canaan.

A final assurance is given that *the Lord* will be *with* Joshua. Joshua has been aware of the Lord’s presence for 40 years, for the fiery pillar or cloud has accompanied the Israelites ever since they left Egypt (Exodus 13:21). The verbal reaffirmation, however, provides further support for what Joshua is about to do.

II. COMMANDS BY JOSHUA (JOSHUA 1:10, 11)

A. DELEGATED TO THE OFFICERS (v. 10)

10. So Joshua ordered the officers of the people:

Joshua has a system of some kind by which he can delegate to others what is necessary to accomplish the objectives. The Hebrew word translated *officers* is the same word used for the Israelite foremen in Egypt (Exodus 5:6, 10). The people Joshua has in mind are mentioned in Joshua 3:2 as following his instructions.

B. DETAILS FOR THE PEOPLE (v. 11)

11. “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies 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.’ ”

The space of the Israelite encampment probably covers several thousand acres. But the nation is organized so that the words of Joshua can be communicated quickly. It has been 40 years since they left Egypt, but in just *three days* they will reach their destination just beyond *the Jordan*. The Jordan River is in flood stage (Joshua 3:15), and the announcement of the pending crossing undoubtedly creates excitement and wonder. In addition to the daily manna, perhaps another great miracle will occur.

First, however, there are preparations to be made. The length of the journey for those on the easternmost side of the encampment will be several miles. This means that the ones closer to the Jordan (that is, those on the westernmost side of the encampment) must travel a good distance beyond the river in order to make room for those who are behind them. Even though a 12-mile wide strip will be available (Joshua 3:16), the distance to be traveled will not allow time for the people to stop and prepare meals.

III. COMMITMENTS TO JOSHUA (JOSHUA 1:16, 17)

A. ENCOURAGEMENT (v. 16)

16. Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.”

Verses 12–15 (not in today’s text) relate Joshua’s important reminder to the two and one-half tribes that had been permitted to settle on the east side of the Jordan: they must help the other tribes in the conquest that is before them. In reply, those tribes promise that they *will do* what Joshua commands and they *will go* anywhere Joshua sends them.

The statements in verses 16, 17 are interpreted in two ways. The majority view is that they are made by the soldiers of the two and one-half tribes, for that is the immediate context. A minority opinion is that the word *they* refers to representatives of all the tribes, for this gives greater

assurance to Joshua. The important aspect is that Joshua has confirmation that his leadership is accepted.

B. EXAMPLE (v. 17)

17. “Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses.”

These words are those of a new generation. This is not the complaining, disobedient, rebellious, fearful generation that left Egypt. The people are aware that

603,548 men of the original military census of 603,550 have died along the way. Only Caleb and Joshua are still alive from that earlier group of men.

This younger group knows from experience that it is better to obey God. Their words may be only a generalization, or they may be saying that as they obeyed *Moses* during the recent months of their journey, so they will *obey* Joshua.

CONCLUSION

The leadership transition from Moses to Joshua is notable in the way it was accomplished. The encouragement Joshua received by all the parties involved can make us wonder if Joshua was reluctant to assume the role that was thrust upon him. The encouragement prompted him to move ahead.

HARMONIOUS LEADERSHIP

It was a fateful day in November 1963 when U.S. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Kennedy and his vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson, had been bitter enemies during the primaries, yet they reached an accommodation that allowed them to run on the same ticket in the 1960 general election.

An assassin's bullet stopped JFK's life before much of his *New Frontier* program of reform could be turned into law. Yet despite their previous (and, some say, continuing) animosity, Johnson's experience in Congress enabled him to enact much of Kennedy's legislative agenda when LBJ succeeded JFK as president.

Unlike Kennedy and Johnson, Moses and Joshua had long worked in harmony. We do not see the kind of struggle for power that typifies so much of modern political and organizational leadership. This was because both Moses and Joshua were in harmony with regard to God's plan for Israel. They provide a good example for all who follow them in leadership among God's people even today. Commitment to divine principles is superior to combat over human proposals. Any congregation will be blessed when its leaders work together in harmonious obedience to God.

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH THE PAST?

A brand-new Plymouth automobile was buried in Tulsa in 1957 as part of the state of Oklahoma's 50th anniversary celebration. The “Tulsarama” committee of 1957 apparently wanted the citizens of the year 2007 to remember what things were like in 1957, hence the car buried in a time capsule.

The concrete vault in which the car was placed was designed to withstand an atomic blast, but that was not enough to protect it from the forces of nature. When the car was dug up on June 15,

2007, its rusted hulk was sitting in four feet of water, the upholstery had disintegrated, and the engine would not start as had been hoped. This outcome did indeed teach the citizens of 2007 something about the year 1957, but not the lesson the original Tulsarama committee had hoped for!

History is a tricky thing. On the one hand, we don't want to ignore the valuable lessons that history can teach. But on the other hand, we don't want to revere history to the point of "living in the past." The Israelites were to anticipate a future that revealed the Lord's blessings. Israelite confidence was to be grounded firmly in the fact that God had been with Moses every step of the way.

But Moses was gone. And no matter how good or bad the past might have been, the Israelites had to live in the present with an eye to the future. The same principle is true for us, whether we are talking about our nation, our church, or our personal lives. Israel's history subsequent to the passing of Moses has much to teach us about the successes and failures in this regard.

LET'S TALK IT OVER

1. In what ways are we guilty of employing the "good enough" syndrome in our walk with the Lord? What would our lives look like if we were to reach our full, God-given potential instead?

2. What are some situations in which even the most capable leaders may lack courage? How can we encourage even those who seem to "have it all together"?

3. Is meditating on God's Word a guarantee of material prosperity? Stated in an opposite way, is a lack of material prosperity proof that a person is not meditating enough on God's Word? Why, or why not?

4. Obedience to military leaders is essential to winning battles. Is the same true in the church? Why, or why not?

5. What are some other ways a church can prepare for a smooth transition of leadership to the next generation? Why is it important to do so?

LET'S TALK IT OVER

1. In what ways are we guilty of employing the “good enough” syndrome in our walk with the Lord? What would our lives look like if we were to reach our full, God-given potential instead?

Reaching our full potential does not necessarily mean attaining spectacular achievements. Someone once said, “If God has called you to be a garbage collector, it is a step down to become President of the United States.” Scripture tells us whatever we do should be done with all our heart, as if we are doing it for God, not man (Colossians 3:23).

We will have a greater impact on society if we consistently demonstrate the highest quality and rigor in our work and studies. More importantly, we should seek to excel in love, which Jesus indicated would show that we belong to Him (John 13:35).

2. What are some situations in which even the most capable leaders may lack courage? How can we encourage even those who seem to “have it all together”?

Many people’s number-one fear is public speaking. Even the most experienced evangelists still feel “butterflies” when stepping into the pulpit. Surprisingly, confidence may erode rather than increase with age. More education makes us aware of how much we still don’t know. Increased spiritual maturity makes us sensitive to how far we are from God’s perfection.

Joshua had been in training for over 40 years, but the affirmation of those he was leading was still important to him. Prayers, notes, and kind words can encourage leaders at all levels. But perhaps what brings any leader the most joy is to see the people faithfully following.

3. Is meditating on God’s Word a guarantee of material prosperity? Stated in an opposite way, is a lack of material prosperity proof that a person is not meditating enough on God’s Word? Why, or why not?

God promised the Israelites safety and material prosperity in return for obedience. When Israel broke the covenant, the blessings were revoked and exile resulted. By contrast, the New Testament nowhere promises material prosperity, but warns that following Christ means taking up a cross of hardship and persecution (Matthew 16:24).

The promise of prosperity to us is weighted toward the spiritual (Mark 10:29, 30). The benefits of highest value are the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, our adoption as sons and daughters of the king, and an eternal inheritance. These promises are greater than the old promises, just as the new covenant is greater than the old one.

4. Obedience to military leaders is essential to winning battles. Is the same true in the church? Why, or why not?

Even in democratic societies, authoritarian leadership is sometimes necessary. During a crisis we expect doctors, law enforcement officials, and others in positions of authority to give orders that are to be obeyed without debate simply because there is no time for a debate. In rare instances, church leaders may need to take decisive and timely action to manage a financial, moral, or doctrinal crisis that poses an immediate threat to the integrity of the congregation.

Extended debate in those areas may have to wait for more “normal” (noncrisis) times. It is important for leaders to treat church members with the gentleness and deference due their own parents and siblings (1 Timothy 5:1, 2), even as all recognize that the church is not a democracy. The congregation in turn should pray for its leaders (Ephesians 6:18–20) and act in such a way that their service will be a joy, not a burden (Hebrews 13:17).

5. What are some other ways a church can prepare for a smooth transition of leadership to the next generation? Why is it important to do so?

Following the good advice of his father-in-law (Exodus 18:13–26), Moses was willing to delegate to others. This created opportunities for the younger generation to gain leadership experience. As Joshua’s good report after the reconnaissance of the promised land illustrates, a spiritual leader stands out not only in interpersonal skills or administrative competence, but also by virtue of a deep faith. When church leadership changes, a congregation must be willing to follow the new leadership. It is through the new leadership that God will provide fresh vision and direction that will build on, but not be limited to, the achievements of the past.

PRAYER

Dear God in Heaven, grant me the wisdom and words to accomplish the tasks that are mine for the cause of Christ and his church. May I do my part to encourage the ones who have leadership roles. In the name of Jesus. Amen.