

Be Strong and Courageous: Joshua 1:1-9

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Last Sunday we went through the first 5 books of the Bible in 7 words. I want to set the stage for what we're going to learn in Joshua. Here are those 7 words / headings again . . . very briefly.

Eden: God gave His people (Adam and Eve) a beautiful land (the Garden of Eden).

Exile: Due to their rebellion, Adam and Eve were kicked out of that good land.

Abraham: God made a great promise to this undeserving man (Genesis 12:1-3). God would give Abraham and his descendants a very good land to inhabit.

Egypt: Abraham's great-great-grandson, Joseph, ended up in Egypt. This was due to the wickedness of Joseph's jealous brothers, but also part of God's sovereign plan to save His people (Genesis 50:20). After Joseph died, another king came to power in Egypt who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8). The Israelites ended up as slaves.

Exodus: This was God's miraculous deliverance of His people from Egypt.

Wilderness: Due to their rebellion, the Israelites were made to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land.

Eternity: God's promise to give His people a restful home, a land of abundance, should direct our gaze toward heaven.

Now we come to the beginning of the book of Joshua. Now we come to a climactic event in the history of Israel, a moment that has been long anticipated by the descendants of Abraham. They are now on the brink of the Promised Land, and it's time for them to take possession of this land flowing with milk and honey.

What we have in the first several verses of Joshua is a commissioning. The Lord, Himself, speaks to Joshua, commissioning him as the new leader of Israel. The repeated exhortation to Joshua is this: "Be strong and courageous." It shows up 3 times in the space of these 9 verses.

Joshua is stepping into some big shoes . . . or sandals. The Lord is calling Joshua to a very significant leadership role at a very pivotal time for his people. And Joshua is going to need to really step up. He's going to need strength. He's going to need courage, to carry out the things God is calling him to do.

We're going to talk about Moses and Joshua this morning. We'll start by thinking about Moses' legacy and then talk about Joshua's leadership.

Moses' Legacy

The first verse of our text is easy to read over without much thought. But it's incredibly significant. "After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, "Moses my servant is dead . . ."

I heard a great message several years ago by a pastor named Crawford Loritts. Some of you are probably familiar with him and have heard him before. I was at a pastor's conference, and he spoke from this passage in Joshua 1 about a call to courage.¹ I've listened to that message a handful of times since then (I listened to it again this past week), and it's been a great encouragement to me. As he's introducing this passage, as he's about to expound this statement that Moses is dead, he says that we have to understand this statement in its emotional context. We need to try to get our hearts around this, not just our minds. We need to try to feel the sense of loss that must have pervaded that generation of Israelites at that moment. Joshua was there ready to take the reins, but nobody could replace Moses.

To understand this in its emotional context, let's set the stage geographically and chronologically. We need to remember what Israel had been through (and where they had been) over the 40 years prior to this, under Moses' leadership.

Moses was sent by God as a deliverer. The Israelites were being harshly oppressed in Egypt, and the people cried out to God for help. Moses, himself, was rescued in a miraculous way. His mom hid him so that he would not be killed, for Pharaoh had ordered that all the Hebrew boys be killed at birth. What a horrific thing! Moses' mom put him in a basket and placed him in the river, and he ended up in the hands of Pharaoh's daughter who took pity on him. Moses lived, and even had the privileges and prestige of being part of Pharaoh's household.

¹ <http://www.desiringgod.org/conference-messages/the-call-to-courage>

Many years later, after Moses had grown up, he fled from Egypt because he had taken the life of an Egyptian task master. Moses saw this Egyptian beating a Hebrew, so Moses struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. He didn't think anybody saw him do it. But when he found out that others new about it, he fled.

He settled in the land of Midian, which is where the Lord appeared to him in the burning bush. Moses was a reluctant leader. He didn't feel qualified or capable. But the Lord said, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12).

And, indeed, the Lord was with Moses as he headed back to Egypt to bring the people out of that land through many signs and wonders.

The Israelites departed from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, then headed toward southward on the Sinai peninsula to Mount Sinai, where Moses received the 10 Commandments. That's in the book of Exodus. In the book of Numbers we read of the Israelites departing from Sinai and heading north on the other side of the Sinai peninsula to Kadesh Barnea. And that's where the Lord told them to take the land, but they refused. The spies were sent into the land, but only Caleb and Joshua believed the Lord. The rest of the spies were faithless and afraid, and the people rebelled. I read some of that last Sunday from Numbers 14.

What I didn't read was what happened right after that. The rebellious spies died by plague before the Lord (Numbers 14:37). That, apparently, got the people's attention because the next morning they changed their minds and were determined to go up and take the land. But Moses told them, Don't go up now . . . the Lord is not with you. You'll just get struck down by your enemies (Numbers 14:42). Well, they went anyway. And sure enough, they were soundly defeated.

And then they spent 40 years wandering through the wilderness. It wasn't because it took 40 years to get to the Promised Land. They were right there. But it was going to take 40 years for the rebellious generation to die off.

It was on the plains of Moab that Moses delivered those final sermons which are contained in the book of Deuteronomy. In the last chapter of Deuteronomy we read of Moses' death. He went up to Mt. Nebo where the Lord showed him all the land.

This is what Deuteronomy 34 says about Moses' death.

“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and he [that is, the Lord] buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.” (Deuteronomy 34:5–8, ESV)

This helps us to feel the emotional context of Joshua 1. Moses is dead. The leader who had brought the people out of Egypt, who had endured a stubborn and rebellious people for 40 years of wandering in the wilderness . . . he was no longer there to lead the people. Talk about a power vacuum! Moses had been the man for decades.

But here’s something we need to realize. When a godly leaders dies, God’s plans never die with them. This is a point Crawford Loritts made. He made a great point that when a leader like Moses dies (or we might think of Charles Spurgeon or Martyn Lloyd-Jones or James Montgomery Boice, or whatever hero of the faith comes to your mind), God is not up in heaven wringing His hands saying, “What are we going to do now? How can the mission move forward without so-and-so?” No, God’s just saying, “Next!” Who’s in the pipeline? Who’s going to lead next? The mission moves on, and it’s time for the next leader or group of leaders to step up.

Listen: When a prominent leader dies, God’s plans never die with them. A leader may die. A leader may fall into sin. But God’s plans live on, and are to be carried on by the next generation of leaders.

And that’s a word I hope you younger people will take to heart. We can’t look to our leaders as though they are immortal. We learn from our leaders, we follow them as they follow Christ, but we must also recognize that our learning is for leadership. We are being prepared for some kind of leadership, and that needs to be on our radar.

So let me say to those of you who are young: What might God be preparing you for? What kind of leadership role might you have someday, or even now? How can you have a godly influence on those around you this week? Maybe someday you’ll be a mom or a dad, and you’ll be a hugely influential leader in the lives of your kids. Maybe you’ll disciple and mentor others and in that way have spiritual children. Maybe someday you’ll be a leader in

the church or in a mission organization or a local ministry. Maybe you'll be a leader in the community, or in government or business.

Don't minimize the opportunities you may have to lead—in the future and even now. As Paul says to young Timothy: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” (1 Timothy 4:12)

Even as godly leaders die, there are newer, younger leaders rising up. This is a beautiful thing in God's design. And it's a reminder, on the one hand, not to idolize any Christian leader. No matter how godly and mature they are, God's plans for His people will not be diminished in the least when that individual dies.

And on the other hand, it's also a good reminder to be open-minded to newer, younger leaders. That's the weighty transition happening at the beginning of Joshua.

A leader has died whose significance is difficult to overstate. A new leader, a younger leader, is now stepping into that role.

Joshua's Leadership

I've talked about Moses quite a bit so far. Let's talk about Joshua now.

1) Hoshea → Joshua

First of all, his name. In Numbers 13 he is referred to as Hoshea, which means salvation or deliverance. But then Moses calls him Joshua, which means “Yahweh saves,” “Yahweh delivers,” “The Lord is salvation.” This man's name tells a story. This man's name preaches a sermon. And in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this name is written as Iesous—the name that is used in the New Testament for Jesus. Sometimes there's a whole lot of meaning in a name. That's certainly the case for Joshua.

It's unmistakable, in his life and even in his name, that Joshua is a type of Christ. That means his life foreshadows the life of Christ. In certain ways, he is a preview of what is to come later. That doesn't mean Joshua was perfect. Every human being, other than Jesus, is deeply flawed and sinful. But there are things in Joshua's life that point us very clearly to Christ.

His name means, The Lord saves. And his life was all about leading God's people into the Promised Land and calling them to faithful obedience. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, does the same.

He is leading us, His people, toward the Promised Land—heaven. And He exhorts us to follow Him, to live faithful, obedient lives.

The Lord truly does save. You might be thinking to yourself, What exactly do I need to be saved from? The Israelites needed to be rescued out of Egypt . . . that's pretty clear. But I'm not in slavery. I'm not being held against my will in a place that's not my home. What do I need to be saved from?

Sin is what every one of us needs to be saved from. In a sense, we're all born in Egypt. We start off in bondage to sin. And sin is a very mean task master. Sin is a very seductive and deceptive slave master. We need the Lord to lead us out of that bondage, to cover us with the blood of the Lamb (as the Passover illustrates for us), and we need a Joshua—we need Jesus, to lead us into the Promised Land.

It could be this morning that you are so blind to your own sin that you can't even see the shackles around your wrists. You don't even realize what a slave you are to your own lusts and fears. I pray that God will give you eyes to see those chains, and then give you a voice to cry out for deliverance. I pray that this morning you believe with all your heart that, indeed, the Lord saves!

That's Joshua's name.

2) His Preparation

It's not as though Joshua shows up out of nowhere in the first chapter of this book. He's been a major figure in the story already. By this time, he has quite a bit of experience.

We meet Joshua for the first time in Exodus 17 where Moses tells Joshua to choose men to go out and fight Amalek. So we see him as a military leader already at that point in the narrative.

Joshua was there, in Exodus 24, when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to meet with the Lord. Joshua was there, in Exodus 32, when Moses came down the mountain and they found the Israelites with the golden calf.

And then in Exodus 33 we read an interesting little comment about Joshua. The Lord would speak with Moses in the tent of meeting, which was set up outside the camp.

“Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his

assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.” (Exodus 33:11, ESV)

We see Joshua here, even as a young man, desiring to be in the presence of the Lord.

And then, of course, Joshua was one of the spies to go into Canaan in Numbers 13. There were 12 spies sent, and only Caleb and Joshua came back with a good report.

While Moses was still alive he commissioned Joshua to be the next leader. And that leads to the third thing I want us notice about Joshua.

3) Filled with the Spirit

In Numbers 27 the Lord instructs Moses to ordain Joshua, to commission him as the one who would later have Moses’ authority.

Listen to how the Lord describes Joshua.

“So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.” (Numbers 27:18, ESV)

And then at the very end of Deuteronomy, just after we’re told of Moses’ death, it says:

“And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.” (Deuteronomy 34:9, ESV)

Joshua was a man filled with the Spirit, and filled with the wisdom that comes from the Spirit.

4) A Man of Faith

Next, I want to highlight Joshua’s deep faith in the Lord. Remember what Joshua and Caleb said to the people after spying out Canaan.

And remember what the other 10 spies said. They said, We’re like grasshoppers compared to those guys. There’s no way we can defeat them. But what did Joshua and Caleb say?

“The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and

honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.” (Numbers 14:7–9, ESV)

We have to understand, that was not an easy thing for them to say. First, they had seen what the other guys saw. They knew that there were big, mean, strong soldiers in the land. And secondly, Joshua and Caleb also saw the rebellious, grumbling Israelites right in front of them who didn’t want to hear this message. In fact, as soon as Joshua and Caleb were done talking, the people tried to kill them by throwing stones at them.

That’s courage. That’s a demonstration of courage that is built upon faith. Joshua believed in the promise of God. And therefore he was going to stand up to defend God’s Word, even in the face of strong enemies who wanted to kill him, even in the face of a rebellious people who wanted to kill him, he stood strong.

Some people might say, “With friends and relatives like that, who needs enemies.” Well, he had both. His own people wanted to kill him. And the people of Canaan wanted to kill him, too, if he was going to try to take their land. All these factors highlight the depth of Joshua’s faith. He believed what he could not see. The battle had not yet been won. But in Joshua’s mind, he considered the battle as good as won because He believed that firmly in the word of God.

5) A Man of Obedience

And that leads to the 5th and final thing I want to say about Joshua this morning—he was a man of obedience. And I especially want us to see the link between his faith and his obedience. Why was Joshua willing and eager to go take the Land? Because he believed that what God said is true. He believed that God would keep His promises.

I love the quote from the famous missionary William Carey, who said, “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.” That was Joshua’s mindset. He believed that God was going to keep His promises. He believed that God was going to do great things for His people. So Joshua was ready to go. He was strong and courageous because he had his feet firmly planted on the solid promises of God.

Here’s another way that Joshua points us to Jesus. Who obeyed perfectly? Jesus did. Because He believed perfectly. Jesus had an unwavering, absolute trust in His Father. And

therefore He did everything, everything His Father asked Him to do, including going to the excruciating torture of death on a cross. Only a sinless, spotless sacrifice could atone for our sin. Jesus is the only One who has done that.

And for those who are trusting Him, who truly trust Him (not just empty words), we're not only saved from the punishment of sin. We're also being changed so that we're less and less controlled by sin, that old slave master. We're liberated to obey. I hope that the faith leading to obedience that we see in Joshua's life (and perfectly in Jesus' life) will be increasingly evident in our lives.

Take a promise like Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Dwell on that, believe that. Meditate on the pleasures of communing with God. And use that to fight lustful thoughts and to motivate you in your obedience to God's commands regarding sexual purity.

Take a promise like Matthew 28:20 where Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." That's very similar to what the Lord tells Joshua in Joshua 1:5, "I will not leave you or forsake you." Use those statements to fight fear and apathy. As we soak in God's Word and believe His great promises to us, it will increase our desire to obey.

Another thing we can say as we're talking about Joshua's obedience is to connect this with what I said earlier about the Spirit. Joshua was a man filled with the Spirit, and so we recognize the Spirit's work in producing fruit in our lives.

There's an interesting relationship here that we come back to again and again. There's the Spirit's empowerment that is absolutely necessary for every act of obedience. It's also necessary for us to act, to obey. I think it's appropriate to acknowledge some mystery in this. We have to be careful not to make it sound simplistic or mechanical. We have to affirm that we cannot obey in our own strength. We need the Spirit to work in us to give us a desire to obey. And we must also affirm the necessity of active, willful obedience. We have to choose to obey.

Notice what the Lord says to Joshua in verses 2-3 of our passage.

"Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses." (Joshua 1:2-3, ESV)

God has promised and is promising to do something very great. He is giving this land to Joshua and the Israelites. But not apart from Joshua and the Israelites moving their feet. Do you see that in the text? Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you. In other words: I have given it to you, so go and get it.

God's empowerment and provision is impossible to miss in this passage. But Joshua's active role and responsibility is also emphasized. Look at verses 6-7, and then also in verse 8b (emphasize pronouns).

God is going to do this amazing thing! Yes! And He's going to accomplish this great work through His servant Joshua.

What great things is God doing among us? How is He working through us to accomplish great things for His glory and the good of His people? That's an exciting and motivating thought. God is doing great things! So let's go be part of it. After all, He's going to work through us to accomplish these very things.

In closing I want to leave you with 2 other verses that complement what the Lord tells Joshua here in Joshua 1. Joshua was a man of faith who desired to obey the Lord. And the Lord here exhorts him to obedience. Look at verses 7-8. What does that wording remind you of?

Do you remember last month I preached a sermon, *Delighting in the Word of God*, from Psalm 1?

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:1-2, ESV)

That's what the Lord is telling Joshua. Meditate on it day and night.

Another verse that comes to mind is Ezra 7:10, which would be a great life verse.

"For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." (Ezra 7:10, ESV)

Notice the 3 things Ezra had set his heart to do: study the Law of the Lord, do the Law of the Lord (obey it), and teach the Lord's statutes to others. Again, that's what the Lord is calling Joshua to do. Meditate on the words I gave to Moses, live by them, and lead this nation accordingly.

I challenge you, I challenge myself, to live with that kind of focus and passion. Be an individual who trusts in God's promises and steps out to do the things that may seem crazy to others, but are right in line with God's Word. Be strong and courageous, knowing that the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.