

Joshua 1: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Joshua chapter 1 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. 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. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

[1 : 1 6] Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, Pass through the midst of the camp, and command the people, Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, Remember the word that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, The Lord your God is providing you a place of rest, and will give you this land.

Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan. But all the men of valour among you shall pass over armed before your brothers, and shall help them, until the Lord gives rest to your brothers, as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them.

Then you shall return to the land of your possession, and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan, toward the sunrise. And they answered Joshua, All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.

Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you, as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death.

[2 : 4 1] Only be strong and courageous. Joshua chapter 1 is a chapter that falls into two halves. God commissions Joshua in verses 1-9, and Joshua takes leadership in verses 10-18.

There are four speeches. The Lord speaks to Joshua in verses 2-9, Joshua to the commanders of the people in verses 10-11, Joshua to the Transjordanian tribes in verses 12-15, then the Transjordanian tribes speak to Joshua in verses 16-18.

The opening verse situates us after the death of Moses, just as Joshua is about to cross over the Jordan. This is a transition between a wilderness and a land leader.

It's not the only time that this will occur around that point near the Jordan. We see a similar thing in 2 Kings chapter 2, as Elijah ascends into heaven, and Elisha takes his place as the leader that goes into the land.

And then again, of course, in the story of Jesus and John the Baptist. There is a repetition of some earlier phrases that we've read. In Deuteronomy chapter 11 verse 24, for instance, Joshua is a different kind of leader from Moses.

[3 : 57] He was Moses' assistant, but he doesn't have the same prophetic force to his leadership. He does not go up to the Lord's presence as Moses did on Sinai. He is not the intermediary that Moses was.

While he represents a continuation of Moses' ministry in some senses, as his assistant, he is much more associated with the people than Moses ever was. Moses always stood over against the people, as the representative of the Lord to them, as the great prophetic leader.

The Lord called Moses as someone who was not closely associated with the people he was being sent to deliver, as someone who had been living in Midian for decades, and in Egypt with the Egyptians before that.

The Lord called and commissioned him alone, and then sent him to lead the people. The Israelites regarded Moses as if he were some sort of demigod. Joshua, however, was a member of the people.

He had been one of the spies sent into Canaan as a representative of his tribe. He was commissioned before them by Moses at the end of Numbers. At the end of this chapter, the Israelites reaffirm and remind him of his commission.

[5 : 01] This would never have happened with Moses in that way. Joshua then represents a new form of leadership for a more mature Israel. Israel has now graduated beyond their need for Moses' intensely top-down leadership.

However, the Lord assures Joshua that he will be with him in much the same way as he was with Moses. There are promises given specifically to Joshua here, that the Lord will be with him, that he will give him every place where he treads, that he will never leave or forsake him, that no one will be able to stand before him, etc.

And these promises are also given to Israel more generally elsewhere. The parallels between the promises and the charges given to Israel and those given to Joshua are more explicitly seen in Deuteronomy chapter 31 verses 1 to 8.

So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel, And he said to them, I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The Lord has said to me, You shall not go over this Jordan.

The Lord your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them. And Joshua will go over at your head, as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land when he destroyed them.

[6 : 16] And the Lord will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you. Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it.

It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Comparing this with Joshua chapter 1, we should observe that much of Joshua chapter 1 is the Lord reiterating to Joshua what Moses had told him earlier, with all Israel as witness.

Then at the end of the chapter, the Transjordanian tribes reaffirm the statement of Moses and the Lord concerning Joshua's leadership, and present him with the same charge that Moses had delivered to Joshua, before his death in their presence.

The charge given to Joshua here is similar to the charge given to Solomon by David in 1 Kings chapter 2 verse 1 to 4. When David's time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, I am about to go the way of all the earth.

[7 : 29] Be strong and show yourself a man, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do, and wherever you turn, that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart, and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.

And then in 1 Chronicles chapter 28 verses 20 to 21, Then David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, is with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished. And behold the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God.

And with you in all the work will be every willing man who has skill for any kind of service. Also the officers and all the people will be holy at your command. There is a transition occurring here that is similar to that that occurs between David and Solomon.

However, with the passing of Moses, the leadership of the Lord of the people, the fact that the Lord is the King of Israel, is going to come into much sharper focus. Joshua is especially charged to pay attention to the law.

[8 : 51] He is to meditate on it day and night. He is not a king, but the requirements given to the king in Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 18 to 20 seem to be in the background of the Lord's instruction to him here.

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Joshua prepares the people to cross over the Jordan in three days' time. Verses 10 to 11 are his first commands. It's a sign of him assuming his role as the leader of the people at their head.

He directly addresses the Transjordanian tribes, Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who had their territory outside of the Promised Land proper, on the far side of the Jordan. They are instructed to go before the rest of Israel into the land, as they had promised to do in Numbers chapter 32.

In this way they will represent the unity of the nation in their taking possession of the land that the Lord has given to them. The Transjordanian tribes give an exemplary response to Joshua. They express their commitment to follow him.

[10:14] They declare that those who resist Joshua's leadership should be put to death. They desire him to be faithful to the Lord's charge to him, and for the Lord to bless him and his leadership, as he blessed Moses.

Joshua's leadership is being characterised here. Joshua is not a prophetic leader, managing a rebellious people through great judgements. He faces a very different situation from Moses.

He is a leader who has a people behind him. The people see themselves in Joshua in a way that they did not seemingly see themselves in Moses. Moses tended to represent the Lord over against the people, whereas Joshua represents the people far more effectively.

This is a people who can own their leadership in a new way. A question to consider. The charge to be strong and courageous given to Joshua is repeated four times in this chapter, three times by the Lord, and then once by the Transjordanian tribes.

Why is this particular charge so accented?