

“Commissioned” for *Explore the Bible* series (Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention [1 of 13]), 2016

Context Passage: Joshua 1:1-18

Core Passage: Joshua 1:1-9

FIRST THOUGHTS

Prior to joining the faculty at Union University a colleague, along with his wife and family, spent almost thirty years with the International Mission Board (then Foreign Mission Board) in Peru and other countries. The Latin culture proved to be their greatest challenge. During many of those years Peru was one of the poorest countries in the world. In the city of Piura, their initial assignment, almost half of the Peruvians lived in houses of cane poles and straw, erected on a desert floor. Most had no electricity or running water. Sanitation issues prevailed. With no air conditioning, the temperature often neared one hundred degrees in the summer.

My colleague can now smile about some of the things they experienced. In the early hours of a particular morning, a pastor arrived at their home. A deacon’s mother had passed away. The pastor needed transportation and knew no one else who owned a vehicle. With the deceased woman in an upright position in the rear seat, my colleague transported her three hours to her native city.

On one occasion, he arrived home, in the heat of the day, to find his wife butchering meat. Even with screens on their windows, flies swarmed (my colleague said, “I am convinced to this day that our city had enough flies to export to the rest of the world”). In the sweltering kitchen, with tears streaming down her face, she told her husband if she had plane tickets she would go home. But they had no plane tickets. They stayed, faithful to their commission. My colleague said his call and commission anchored him in his ministry in foreign lands.

Can you describe a time in your life when God’s commission anchored you?

As my colleague, Joshua must have experienced discouraging times in his life. There must have been times when Joshua simply wanted to give up. But Joshua didn’t quit. God’s commission upon Joshua included the promise of His presence. God expected Joshua to be obedient to that commission.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Joshua chapter 1 serves as a transition between this book and the previous book of Deuteronomy. Notice Deuteronomy concludes with the death and burial of Moses (34:5-6). Modern readers can see this transition easily by observing that the book of Joshua begins with “After the death of Moses the Lord’s servant, the Lord spoke to Joshua. . .”

Due to the fact that “No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Dt. 34:10), undoubtedly, the Hebrews experienced some anxiety regarding Moses’ successor. Who would now lead them? Could this person possibly be as effective as Moses? The Lord prepared Joshua for such a task. We read that “Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him” (Dt. 34:9a). Joshua, Moses’ “aide” (Joshua 1:1) according to the New International Version, had

been a constant companion to Moses. Joshua had the opportunity to observe Moses' leadership style, decision-making approach as well as his spiritual strengths and weaknesses. From an early period, the Lord readied Joshua for this particular time and need.

Because of God's commissioning, Joshua proved to be a gifted leader. He molded twelve, loosely connected tribes, into a respected, even feared, military. He led the Hebrews to victory after victory at Jericho, Ai and Hazor, against superior numbers and fortified cities. We understand Joshua's military prowess because his ambush at Ai has to be one of the earliest examples of the use of such a tactic in military history (chapter 8).

After conquering the land (recorded in chapters 1-12), Joshua successfully divided it among the tribes (recorded in chapters 13-19) and lead them as they began to transition to an agricultural base, non-nomadic lifestyle. What greater acclaim might be attributed to any leader other than the fact that "Israel worshiped Yahweh throughout Joshua's lifetime . . ." (Joshua 24:31)?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A NEW LEADER (Joshua 1:1-5)

VERSE 1

The death of Moses, the Lord's servant, must have been a devastating event for the Hebrews. This man, who knew the Lord in such an unusual manner ("face to face," Dt. 34:10), led the Hebrews out of Egypt and out of a bondage for which they suffered for four hundred and thirty years (Ex. 12:40). The Lord gave the Hebrews the Law through Moses as well as instructions for the erection of the Tabernacle and the worship that was to take place in it. This man led the Hebrews through one of their most trying experiences, the forty-year wilderness wandering. He led them to the plains of Moab (East of the Jordan River), on the cusp of entering into the Promised Land. Doubtless with great joy, the Hebrews anticipated crossing the Jordan River and, finally, entering the land that the Lord had promised their forefathers (Dt. 34:4). The death of Moses must have suppressed much of this joy.

Joshua 1:1 describes Moses as "the Lord's servant." While this Hebrew word can be translated as "servant" it can also be rendered as "slave." Similarly, Paul referred to himself as a "slave" of Christ Jesus (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10, Phil. 1:1; check the Holman Christian Standard Bible). Translating the Hebrew word as "slave" demonstrates Moses' (and Paul's) humble submission unto the Lord.

While the author of the book of Joshua described Moses as the "Lord's servant [slave]" he described Joshua as one "... who had served Moses." This participle in the original text is a different word from the noun previously translated as "servant." This word communicates the idea of a chief assistant. Joshua did not serve Moses as a slave but as an assistant.

VERSES 2-3

Notice the stark reality: "Moses My servant is dead." With this announcement, God summoned His children to focus their attention away from the past. He alerted them to the

present and pointed them to the future: “Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan . . .”

So sure could the Hebrews be of success that the Lord communicated His plan as though the victory had already been accomplished: “I have given you every place where the sole of your feet treads . . .” The Hebrews had to fight for the land, but God had promised the land to Moses, leaving no doubt as to their victory.

VERSES 4-5

The boundaries of the land must have been difficult for many of the Hebrews to fathom. Less than fifty years previous, the ancestors of these same Hebrews dwelled, as slaves, in Egypt (Goshen). Now they were free. Their ancestors eked out a meager living in a foreign land. Now they would have their own land and, by comparison to Goshen, a large land.

The Lord insisted that “No one will be able to stand against you . . .” Of what assurance did the Hebrews have for such an unparalleled triumph? The Sovereign Lord promised, “I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you.” The commissioning of Joshua as Israel’s new leader served as proof of God’s presence. God’s presence guaranteed the Hebrews of complete victory over their enemies now in possession of the Promised Land. As the Lord had been with Moses, He would be with Joshua.

The Hebrew name “Joshua” means “Yahweh delivered.” The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of the name “Joshua” and means “Yahweh is salvation, the anointed one” or the “Messiah.” Joshua “delivered” the Promised Land unto the Hebrews, but modern readers recognize that God actually gave the land to His children. As God gave the Promised Land to the Hebrews, He gave His Son to all humankind. Jesus, by His death, offers salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

Read Matthew 28:20 (especially “I am with you always, to the end of the age”). How does this passage help you in your daily living?

Read Psalm 1:3 (especially “Whatever he does prospers”). What does it mean that God promises Christian’s success?

A NEW TASK (Joshua 1:6)

VERSE 6

The Lord promised Joshua complete victory. God told Joshua that he would one-day divide the land as an inheritance to the Hebrews. But Joshua knew before any division of the land could occur the land had to be conquered. Joshua knew a formidable task awaited them. Some within the group, as previously, may have insisted on their inability to take the land. Perhaps someone again reiterated that they could not “go up against the people” because, by contrast to the inhabitants of the Promised Land, they were but “grasshoppers” (Num. 13:31-33). Any person, including Joshua, might have succumbed to fear and cowered from the task ahead. The Lord called Joshua to be strong and courageous.

The initial Hebrew verb, translated as “strong” in the Holman Christian Standard Bible, can also be translated “grow firm” or “strengthen” and communicates the idea of

physical strength. Joshua needed to be physically strong for the grueling events of the immediate future.

The second verb, translated as “courageous” in the Holman Christian Standard Bible, can also be translated as “bold,” “assured” and “secured for oneself” and communicates the idea of confidence. Joshua would soon face the fortified city of Jericho. The Lord instructed Joshua to wage war, not with sword and shield, but with ram’s horns (The Holman Christian Standard Bible translates as “trumpets” in 6:13)! Joshua would need confidence. Where did Joshua find the boldness to undertake this task in such an unexpected, even irrational, manner? By the fact that the Lord had commissioned him.

Both of these verbs are commands in the original Hebrew. The Lord did not ask Joshua to be strong and courageous. The Lord demanded Joshua to be strong and courageous.

The Gospel of John records the fact that, after the crucifixion, the disciples, minus Thomas, “In the evening of that first day of the week . . . gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews” (20:19). We do not need to be too harsh toward the disciples. They, after all, had witnessed Jesus die a cruel death. They knew Jesus had been buried. They feared the same people who had murdered Jesus might now desire to kill His disciples.

One can imagine Peter, whose name means “rock,” trembling with the rest of the disciples. At that moment, Peter didn’t look or act like a “rock.” Yet this same Peter, in strength and confidence, later preached at the day of Pentecost. We read that “. . . Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and proclaimed . . .” the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14ff). Peter preached that lawless people nailed Jesus to a cross and killed Him (Acts 2:23). One can almost hear Peter’s voice increase in volume as he proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24). What a tremendous preacher Peter had become. We ask: what happened to Peter? What happened to Peter from the time he recoiled with the other disciples behind locked doors to the time he boldly preached the Gospel at Pentecost? In a few words: Jesus commissioned Peter (and the other disciples as well)! We read that Jesus told Peter and the fearful disciples, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21).

Jesus commissions every believer. Jesus gives every believer instructions to “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matt. 28:19). God will save any person who, in repentance and belief, calls upon His name. But Jesus expects every believer to be a witness for Him. In order to be effective witnesses for Christ, believers need both strength and courage.

What are some controversial issues today that demand Christian strength and courage in order to confront them? How might believers confront these issues in an effective manner?

What is the difference in the Hebrew meanings of the words “strength” and “courage”? How do these meanings help believers understand what Jesus demands of us?

A NEW TRUST (Joshua 1:7-9)

VERSES 7

God demanded that Joshua be strong and courageous in his task of conquering the Promised Land. Using the same two verbs of verse 6, as Israel's new leader, the Lord also charged Joshua to be strong and courageous in following His law.

The phrase "carefully observe" in the Holman Christian Standard Bible translates two verbs in the original Hebrew. The first verb can be rendered as "keep" or "watch." The second verb has the idea of to "do." God instructed Joshua to keep and do His "whole instruction." Many believers will recognize the word "Torah," here translation as "instruction." The word "Torah" can refer to a commandment, a word, a decree, a custom, or a prohibition. In Judaism the word "Torah" refers to the first five books of the Old Testament. The word can be translated literally as "instruction" and "guidance." The "Torah" constitutes instruction given by the Lord to the Hebrews regarding life. With the "whole instruction," the Lord did not give Joshua the option of choosing to keep and do some of His Laws while choosing to neglect or disobey other Laws. Perhaps Christians need to be reminded that the Lord expects us to be obedient to His entire written revelation (both Old and New Testaments).

VERSES 8-9

Joshua's reciting the book of instruction day and night would result naturally in his awareness of its content. The inhabitants of Qumran took this command and others like it literally (check Psalm 1:2; 119:97). The community that gave the world the Dead Sea Scrolls studied the Law, in shifts, night and day. The entire community waked around two o'clock in the morning to recite, study Scripture and pray.

The importance of carefully observing "This book of instruction . . ." cannot be overstated. With "For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do" Yahweh told Joshua that his success depended on it. The success of believers hinges upon our obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus.

Finally, the Lord told Joshua not to be afraid or discouraged. Joshua's fear and discouragement could be managed by recognizing the fact that God promised to be with him wherever he went and whatever he did. Jesus makes the same promise to His children.

How easily could Joshua have placed trust in his military or his military understanding? The Lord called on Joshua to have a new trust. The Lord called on Joshua to trust Him.

What is the danger of believers obeying only a portion of God's Word?

Why is it important for Christians to meditate on God's Word day and night?

IN MY CONTEXT

Believers can trust God to keep all of His promises. God kept one of His promises when He sent Jesus to die for our sins (see Isa. 53). When facing challenges, Christians should draw strength and courage from God's presence. Believers do not have the option of obeying only a part of God's Word. Jesus expects His followers to obey His Word, all of it, in every area of life.