

Joshua Leads Courageously

Devotional Reading: Daniel 10:18–21

Background Scripture: Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 31:1–8; 34:1–12; Joshua 1

Today's Scripture: Joshua 1:1–11

I. Commission Joshua 1:1–6

¹ 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 Mediterranean Sea in the west. ⁵ No one will be able to stand 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 ancestors to give them.

1. *Moses* dies at age 120, and what follows takes place after that death. The name *Joshua* appears more than two dozen times in the Pentateuch, the designation for the first five books of the Old Testament. He is further identified as being the *son of Nun*, a descendent of Ephraim.

The word translated as the noun *aide* is actually a verb in the Hebrew text. This fact highlights Joshua's service to his elder

and mentor. Joshua had done so since his youth. The designation draws a parallel between Joshua's service to Moses and Moses' position as *the servant of the Lord*, although the Hebrew words translated "aide" and "servant" are different.

2. The word of the Lord to Joshua affirms a change of leadership for the Israelites. *Moses* is *dead*, and now Joshua will become a leader who will speak for the Lord and guide the *people* of Israel into the land. Centuries earlier, God had promised Abram that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7; 15:8–13; 17:8). God reiterated the same promise to his son and grandson as well (26:3; 35:12). Moses received the same promise when the Lord called him to lead the Israelites to "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8). At the time of Moses' death, the people had not yet taken any land west of the Jordan River. However, in a sense, the land had already been granted to them by the Lord, as it had been promised to their ancestors.

This crossing would have been relatively simple at the end of the dry season, as the *Jordan River* would be a quiet stream. However, it is now the end of the spring rainy season. Heavy rains and melting snow have caused the Jordan to be in flood stage. Despite these challenges, God will make the crossing

possible. This miracle will validate Joshua's leadership and demonstrate the people's willingness to obey the Lord and take *the land* for themselves.

3. The Lord reiterates to Joshua the promises that he made to *Moses* regarding the land in Deuteronomy 11:24. The Israelites do not yet possess the land, but to receive such a promise from the Lord is almost the same as holding the title deed to it. Although conflict and battles will occur, the victory ultimately belongs to the Lord and his people.

4. The description of the extent of the territory aligns with previous statements. The description begins in the southernmost region of the land (*the desert*) and extends to the northwest, where the mountains of *Lebanon* are located. To the north-east and east is the *Euphrates* River. This river lies more than 400 straight-line miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The northern area is summarized by the phrase *the Hittite country*. At the time of Joshua, in approximately the fourteenth century BC, the Hittites are a rising power. They controlled regions of what is now modern-day Turkey. The western boundary of the land is the *Mediterranean Sea*.

5. When God issues commands, he often follows them with supporting information that provides assurance. The Israelites will not acquire the land through their own strength. Instead, they will take possession of it solely because the Lord has granted it to them.

This instance is not the first time the Lord has promised his presence to Joshua. By ensuring that no one will *be able to stand* in Joshua's way, the Lord guarantees the fulfillment of his promises and presents himself as a warrior fighting on behalf of his people.

6. A form of the command *be strong and courageous* appears a total of eleven times in the Old Testament.

Dictionaries offer several definitions of *courage*. A summary of them would be that courage is "the quality that enables one to meet danger and difficulties with firmness or valor, despite feelings of fear or inadequacy." Joshua may have feelings of fear or inadequacy as he leads the people. His mentor, Moses, definitely felt inadequate (Exodus 3:11).

Even so, the Lord has chosen Joshua and given him a task to accomplish. The promise God *swore to their ancestors* is recorded in Genesis 12:1–3; 15:18; 26:3; 28:13; 35:12.

II. Command Joshua 1:7–9

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 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; 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 afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."**

7a. The imperative *be strong and very courageous* is important enough to be repeated. This command serves as the "marching order" for Joshua and the Israelites preparing to enter the land of Canaan. To be cowardly instead of courageous would reveal a lack of trust in God.

7b. Joshua will model courage and success by obeying *the law* the Lord gave the Israelites. The practices and promises offered by the pagan people who inhabit the land will be very enticing, as they already have been. But Joshua must be determined not to go with them. His

trust is not to be in a smorgasbord belief system—some of this and a little of that. He cannot swerve in any direction so as to taste what looks appealing.

As Joshua considers this requirement, perhaps he thinks of God's command found in Deuteronomy 28:14. Joshua's courageous leadership depends primarily on his willingness to obey the Lord.

8. Joshua is to *keep* the law on his *lips* so that he can do three important things: reflect on it, obey it, and enjoy the blessings of obedience. Success in conquering the promised land depends on this!

Joshua will know the contents of the law by meditating on it *day and night*. As the newly appointed leader, he will need to make significant decisions throughout each day, but those decisions must be evaluated in light of what God has instructed. All hours of the day or night are good times to contemplate God's ways and his word.

The words translated *prosperous* and *successful* each occur dozens of times in the Old Testament. But this is the only place where those two Hebrew words occur together. To be prosperous is not necessarily referring to financial success. Instead, it addresses the broader concept of "flourishing."

9. The Lord reassures Joshua by posing a rhetorical question that should remove any doubt about the outcome. In this case, the Lord intends for the people's obedience to fulfill what he has planned for centuries: a provision of a particular land to Abraham and his descendants. The Lord would oversee the fulfillment of that promise himself.

This is the third time in this chapter that the Lord encourages Joshua to *be strong and courageous* as he assumes leadership of the people. Moses had given Joshua the same challenge when appointing him as successor (Deuteronomy 31:7,

23). While Joshua previously benefited from the support and wisdom of Moses, that era has now changed. Joshua is on his own—with the promises of God as his blessed assurance.

III. Crossing Joshua 1:10–11

¹⁰ So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: ¹¹ "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your provisions 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.'"

10. Joshua's preparatory commands to *the officers* demonstrate his trust in God and his willingness to begin entering the land. This group may include elders and administrative leaders.

11a. When the verse now before us is combined with the verse just before it, a threefold order of leadership for the Israelites is apparent: (1) The Lord directs Joshua; (2) Joshua gives commands to officers; and (3) the officers ensure that *the people* receive proper direction. In modern military parlance, this is called "the chain of command." This will remind those in the army of Israel—potentially more than 600,000 soldiers (Numbers 26:2, 51)—of who is in charge.

11b. As Joshua receives his marching orders from God, the Israelites are camped on the plains of Moab. That area is east of the *Jordan* River and just north of the Dead Sea. Historical hindsight tells us that their need to take food (*provisions*) is only a temporary, in-between step because of the coming shift from receiving manna to being able to eat from the produce of the land they are to enter. When the people approached the land decades earlier, they had backed down. This time, however, is to be different.

Involvement Learning

Joshua Leads Courageously

Into the Lesson

That took courage!

Do an internet search for a news story describing an event that required a courageous response from an individual or group. What made the individual(s) in the example courageous?

The individuals in these examples all demonstrated courage. In today's study, we'll review a passage of Scripture that illustrates courage and obedience to God.

Into the Word

Read Joshua 1:1–11. What are the key directives of God's call to Joshua?

In what ways is God's call of Joshua similar to God's call of Moses in Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 11:8–32?

In what ways are the calls different?

Summarize the commands given to Joshua in Joshua 1:1–11.

Key Text

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

—Joshua 1:9

Summarize the resources, practices, and attitudes that Joshua needed to obey God successfully.

Summarize the results God promised would come to Joshua through his obedience.

Into Life

Write a definition of the word *courage*.

Choose one of the following contexts and write a way to act courageously in that context.

*Work. Church. Family.
Neighborhood. Politics.*

Thought to Remember

Be courageous as God leads you!