

JOSHUA 1

Joshua 1:1-9

1:1-2 *¹After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, ²"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.*

Moses, the servant of the Lord, was dead. The Lord took him to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, and showed him all the land that the Lord had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses died there on that mountain. The text says that Moses died there *according to the word of the LORD (Deuteronomy 34:5)*. Israel's deliverer and lawgiver no longer led Israel.

A man by the name of Joshua took his place, a man who was *full of the spirit of wisdom (Deuteronomy 34:9)*. Joshua had been standing by Moses's side for forty years. He led the fledgling Israelite army in their defense from the attacks of the Amalekites (*Exodus 17:8-13*). He ascended Mount Sinai with Moses, acting as his assigned assistant (*Exodus 24:13*). He took

care of the tent where Moses met with the Lord (*Exodus 33:11*). Now the Lord Yahweh spoke to Joshua in the same way that He had spoken with Moses. God informed Joshua that Moses was dead. He then gave Joshua instructions to get the entire Israelite encampment into motion. They were to cross the Jordan River and enter the land that the Lord was giving to them, to Israel His chosen people, according to His promise to Abraham (*Genesis 13:14–18*).

Although not specifically said, the text infers that Joshua was now God's appointed leader of His people. There is a sense in which God was placing His hand on Joshua and identifying him as Israel's leader. Moses anointed Aaron as Israel's high priest. Here, however, there is no human interaction. God spoke directly to Joshua just as He had spoken to Moses from the burning bush.

1:3 *Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.*

After giving Joshua his "marching orders," the Lord encouraged Joshua. It was an enormous task to be the leader of this newly formed nation. It would be normal for any man to doubt his abilities to lead them successfully. To counteract these doubts, the Lord promised Joshua that He would be with him every step he took. The Lord would give Joshua every place where he walked throughout the land. God had made this promise to Abraham (*Genesis 13:17*). Now He was affirming the same promise to Joshua.

1:4 *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.*

The Lord then described the boundaries of the territory that He was giving to His people. The region was expansive. It

started where Joshua now stood on the east side of the Jordan River. It extended as far north as the Euphrates River and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. This was what the Lord told Abraham (*Genesis 15:18*) and repeated to Moses (*Exodus 23:31–33*). In 2019, Israel’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, read chapter fifteen of Genesis to prove that the land belonged to the Jews. This was recorded and accepted in the minutes of the United Nations.¹ By reading this account, Israel’s representative was using the Bible as the contract by which God gave this region to the reborn nation of Israel.

On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— (Genesis 15:18)

³¹⁴And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. ³²⁴You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. ³³They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.” (Exodus 23:31–33 NKJV)



1:5 *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.*

The Lord expanded His promise to Joshua. No one would be able to overpower Joshua for the rest of his life. This included those within Israel who may from time to time challenge his leadership. It also spoke of Israel's (Joshua's) enemies. Even before Israel arrived on the banks of the Jordan, the Lord told them about the fight with the inhabitants of Canaan the nation would encounter when they entered Canaanite territory. God promised that He would go before them and drive the Canaanites out of their homeland (*Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23, 28; 33:2; 34:11*). No matter whether friend or foe, Joshua would always prevail. As the Lord had been with Moses since the time of the burning bush, so would He be with Joshua.

This theme of God's divine presence is significant throughout the sojourn of Israel's patriarchs. As the patriarchs embarked on numerous journeys under the Lord's direction, God's divine presence accompanied them. The presence of Israel's God was so obvious that foreign kings acknowledged what they witnessed in Abraham's journeys (*Genesis 21:22*). The same was true for Isaac (*Genesis 26:28*). The Lord encouraged Jacob with the same promise (*Genesis 28:15*). Moses received the same promise even though he was reluctant to do what the Lord wanted him to do (*Exodus 3:12*). Now Joshua received the same promise the Lord had made to others.

However, there is a distinction to be made between the promises made to Moses and Joshua. When the Lord promised His divine presence to the patriarchs, it was always within the framework of their personal direction. When God promised His divine presence to Moses, it was within the framework of the journeys of His people Israel through the wilderness until they arrived at the Promised Land. The promise to Joshua was

no longer in the framework of journey, but in the framework of conquest. Joshua's leadership was going to be dramatically different than Moses's. Joshua was going to have to function both as a military leader and an administrator.

1:6 *Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.*

After telling Joshua that no one would be able to oppose him, the Lord continued to encourage Joshua. It would be understandable that Joshua needed encouragement. Moses had perished on Mount Nebo, and his mantle of leadership of the nation now fell on Joshua. The Lord had given Joshua his marching orders. He was to lead Israel across the Jordan to possess the land that the Lord promised to Abraham. It was a daunting task, riddled with more questions than answers. There would be numerous battles. Death would become a constant companion to the families of the warriors.

The words *strong* and *courageous* mean much the same thing in the Hebrew language. However, the word *courage* carries with it the idea of resoluteness. What God was asking Joshua to do required both strength and a resolve to do what the Lord was telling him to do.² However, the text emphasizing the Lord's encouragement precedes the task that Joshua was to do. He never put the burden of leadership on Joshua without first assuring Joshua of His presence, guiding and directing him every step of the way.

1:7 *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.*

The Lord told Joshua that physical, moral, and spiritual strength had to be coupled with a firm resolve. The task was

monumental in scope, but would only meet with success if he obeyed the Law that Moses had given to Israel. It was not just Moses's Law, it was God's Law given to Moses, and through Moses to Israel. Joshua was to be obedient to this Law. As Joshua walked at Moses's side, he had learned the significance of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. He was never to be deterred from the pathway that the Lord laid out for His people. It was his duty, his privilege to serve the Lord in this capacity. However, obedience to what the Lord conveyed to Israel by Moses was never to be challenged.

1:8 *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.*

The Lord emphasized the importance of his obedience. Nevertheless, Joshua was to do more than obey. He was to saturate his thinking with the Law of the Lord. He was to meditate on it day and night. It was to be the lens through which he gleaned the wisdom to lead the people in their conquest of the land. The Law was to color every thought and decision he made as the leader of the nation. The Lord guaranteed their success if the people obeyed.

The principle of absorbing the word of God is a common thread through all of Scripture. One must learn what the Lord says, think about what the Lord says, and then do what the Lord says. Both the Old and New Testaments emphasize the importance of this practice. *"I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways"* (Psalm 119:15 NKJV). *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:22 NKJV). *"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (1 John 2:4 NKJV). Joshua learned this as he labored at Moses's side.

“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” (Deuteronomy 11:18)

1:9 *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.”*

Joshua had been Moses’s companion and student from the time God’s people were rescued from slavery to their Egyptian taskmasters. He had witnessed the complaints of the people against Moses. He knew that Israel was prone to disobey. As Israel’s new leader, Joshua realized that these things would probably continue. Therefore, the Lord couched His encouragement to Joshua in the form of a command. The Lord gave Joshua a clearly worded command to be *strong and courageous*. There would be many occasions for him to be frightened as he faced the enemy. There would be times when he would be dismayed by the behavior of God’s people. However, the Lord’s command was His gift to Joshua. Under the Lord’s clear teaching of the Law, Joshua would remain strong and resolute. As He did with Moses, God promised Joshua that His divine presence would go with him. God would be with Joshua both in battle and in the administration of the developing nation of Israel.

Notes/Applications

The book of Joshua begins with God’s encouragement to Joshua. It is a testimony of God’s faithfulness to those who are called by His Name. The language of these verses is embedded with expressions of God’s care, provision, and protection.

More than five hundred years earlier God pledged His care, provision, and protection to Abraham; to Abraham’s son Isaac; and to Abraham’s grandson Jacob. Abraham’s great-grandson

Joseph also carried out his duties as the administrator of the land of Egypt under God's pledge of support during seven years of devastating famine. When it was time for Moses to step forward and assume the leadership of Israel, God again promised that He would go with Moses, protect him from Pharaoh's anger, and give him wisdom when he led more than two million Israelites out of slavery into a forty-year wilderness journey.

Now the new nation of Israel stood on the borders of Canaan. The land stretched to the west before them. Now God pledged His support to Joshua in language very similar to His earlier promises to Israel's patriarchs. God told Joshua that His presence would go with him wherever he set his foot. "*The LORD your God is with you wherever you go*" (Joshua 1:9).

Two things are obvious when one gains an overview of God's actions in the early days of Israel. First, God never changes. His promise to one is His promise to all. Over a span of five hundred years the promise of God never changed. Second, God's presence became the hallmark by which these men fulfilled God's plan to bring His blessing to the nations. Nothing was more important to these saints than the knowledge that God Himself walked with them. Their pathways were often barricaded by obstacles that seemed insurmountable. Yet, God's presence was always with them—encouraging them, challenging them, supporting them. By the presence of God, they conquered their fears, their waywardness, and even their sin.

Is this not the prayer and hope of all those who long for God to walk with them throughout their earthly journeys? So many Christians appear to struggle hopelessly through the problems they face, but God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What He promised the patriarchs, Moses, and Joshua is still the pledge of the eternal God to those who long for His presence in their lives.

Is this not the purpose of God's gift of His Son to a lost, chaotic world? His judgment on sinners is sure, swift, and severe. But He longs for people to look to Him as their Savior. He longs to shower His blessing on those who call upon Him. He longs to forgive them through the sacrifice of His Son. He longs to bring them home where they will live forever in His glorious presence. Listen to the words of Jesus:

I am with you to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)
I will come to you and make our home in you. (John 14:23)
I will send the Comforter to you. (John 14:26 KJV)
I will send the Spirit of truth to you. (John 14:17)
Peace I leave with you. Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

These are the promises of God given to us today, just as He gave them to Joshua so many centuries ago. He has not changed. He still promises us His presence. These are the promises of the eternal God. His word is sure. His promises are certain. As the Apostle Paul writes:

³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35–39)

However, never forget that our relationship with the eternal God is not a one-way street. The Lord God of Israel demanded Joshua's loyalty and obedience.

⁷Only 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. (Joshua 1:7)

God says the same to us today. However, the obedience that He demands of His followers today is not couched in the words of a legal contract. Rather, the obedience of those who follow Jesus today is couched in the framework of a warm, vigorous, relationship of love with the Savior Who has redeemed them by His blood. God loved the world and gave His Son to people who would believe in Him and find their salvation. In return, Jesus tells His followers:

¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15–17)