



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for September 6, 2009
Released on Wednesday, September 2, 2009**

“Joshua: A Leader for the People”

Background Scripture: Joshua 1

Printed Text: Joshua 1:1–11, 16, 17

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1–6

Joshua 1:1–11, 16, 17

1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying,

2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them.

7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,

11 Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.

.....

16 And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do, and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go.

17 According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto thee: only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show that God wanted Joshua to do in order to possess the land.

Principles: to affirm that in order to inherit God's blessings, one must follow His laws.

Application: Make a list of ways to support church leaders.

Introduction

Moses had been a great leader in Israel. Of him Deuteronomy 34:10 declares, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." The Lord knew that Joshua would need much encouragement as he took on the great responsibility of leadership in Moses' place.

Perhaps the most important thing Joshua needed to remember was the source of his strength. The world's way of becoming a leader is to marshal one's inner resources and assert one's own dignity and power. This is not the way to lead God's people. The lessons this quarter, which deal with life in God's covenant community, point the way to a manner of living that will perhaps amaze and then draw a weary world with its attractiveness. The leader in such a community knows the world does not revolve around him. Rather, his strength is found in God, and he exists to see His cause advanced and His name glorified.

Lesson Background

As today's lesson opens, the Israelites were near the end of their 40-year journey from Egypt. The promised land was immediately before them, on the other side of the Jordan River. They probably had arrived in the plains of Moab during the previous summer (Numbers 22:1; 36:13).

Much happened during that encampment. The king of Moab had sent for Balaam to come from his Mesopotamian home to curse Israel. Balaam consented to come on the second appeal. Those who went to secure him thus made the 1,400-mile round-trip twice, and that took time (Numbers 22–24). Also, a second military census was conducted, revealing that the number of soldiers over age 20 had dropped slightly since the first census 39 years before at Sinai (601,730 compared with 603,550; see Numbers 1:46; 26:51). A military campaign against the Midianites is recorded in Numbers 31.

Moses had been the recognized leader for over 40 years. His leadership was challenged on occasion, for the rebels did not comprehend that to resist Moses was to go against God. Moses was God's instrument to provide governance, food, etc. But Moses is dead as today's lesson opens (Deuteronomy 34).

In every social unit, a basic question is *Who is in charge?* God did not leave the Israelites in doubt. He was the one who determined that Joshua would be Moses' successor (Numbers 27:18–23). Joshua had been Moses' adjutant or valet for 40 years. Joshua also seems to have been the leader in the battles the nation conducted during the wilderness wanderings (Exodus 17). Moses recognized early on that Joshua had leadership qualities. To make sure that Joshua knew the source of his capabilities, Moses changed his name from *Oshea* ("salvation") to *Joshua* ("the Lord is salvation"; see Numbers 13:16).

GOD'S ENCOURAGEMENT—Joshua 1:1-5

1. What event caused Joshua to become the new leader of Israel (Joshua 1:1,2)?

As the book of Joshua opens, Moses has just died. The description of Moses here sets the tone for the whole book. Moses was simply "the servant of the Lord." This is a

humble way of de-scribing a leader, but in fact no higher praise could be given. The sense we get is that Moses was indeed a paragon among servants. His life had been devoted to God's will. The mantle of leadership was now to pass to Joshua.

God began His communication with Joshua by noting the fact that Moses was dead. The natural result was that Joshua would carry on the work. Alexander Maclaren commented, "No man is indispensable. God's work goes on uninterrupted. The instruments are changed, but the Master-hand is the same, and lays one tool aside and takes another out of the tool-chest as he will" (*Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Doran).

The people were on the eastern side of the Jordan River (v. 2). At this time of the year, the Jordan is a wild, wide, rushing torrent. It is now the end of the rainy season, and melting snows from northern mountains add to the flow. To cross the Jordan successfully when it is in flood stage will validate the leadership of Joshua in the minds of the people. Comparisons are often made between the crossing of the Red Sea under *Moses* and crossing the Jordan in Joshua's day.

The momentousness of the occasion is evident in the mention of all this people, but the confident hope that should be theirs was called for with the reminder that the land was going to be given to them. This was the promise of God Himself. The mention of the children of Israel would call to mind the covenant blessings promised to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

2. What encouragement did God give to Joshua (v. 3)?

God knows when we need encouragement. He here elaborated on the promise of success He had given. The Lord was promising a complete victory. Anywhere that Joshua travels as he conquers the seven nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:1). Similar language is used by *Moses* in the exhortation that he gives in Deuteronomy 11:24.

Wherever Joshua went, he would ultimately experience success. Whatever feelings of inadequacy he might have when remembering *Moses*, he would enjoy the same level of prosperity.

3. What were the boundaries of the Promised Land (vs. 4,5)?

God described the borders of the land He would be giving the Israelites. The language emphasizes its impressive sweep and extent. The Lord first described the land from south to north, beginning with the wilderness—the desert or uncultivated land.

The Israelites had come through such land as they approached the Promised Land from Egypt and Sinai. It extends from *the wilderness* region to the far north—to *Lebanon* and the *Euphrates* River. The northern territory, *the land of the Hittites* (originally from what is today Turkey), includes the land occupied by the descendants of a grandson of Noah through Ham (Genesis 9:18; 10:15).

The western border of the Promised Land would be the Mediterranean Sea. With its size, it was almost like the end of the known world. Having described these boundaries, the Lord reiterated that Joshua would have great success in obtaining the land. No one would be able to stop him for as long as he lived.

4. What are some situations in which even the most capable leaders may lack courage? How can we encourage even those who seem to "have it all together"?

Many people's number-one fear is public speaking. Even the most experienced evangelists still feel "butterflies" when stepping into the pulpit. Surprisingly, confidence may erode rather than increase with age. More education makes us aware of how much we still don't know. Increased spiritual maturity makes us sensitive to how far we are from God's perfection.

Joshua had been in training for over 40 years, but the affirmation of those he was leading was still important to him. Prayers, notes, and kind words can encourage leaders at all levels. But perhaps what brings any leader the most joy is to see the people faithfully following.

GOD'S EXHORTATION—Joshua 1:6-9

5. What would be the result of heeding God's law (vs. 6,7)?

The emphasis on this command indicates that courage and strength do not come easily. We are reminded of the need to apply our hearts and minds to remembering God's promises. In this case, Joshua's confidence was to be rooted in the fact that God was indeed going to give the Promised Land to Israel, dividing it among the various tribes (Joshua 1:6). The Lord was declaring that Joshua was the means of leadership in carrying out God's plans.

The promise of God was great. In order to enjoy its fulfillment, it was incumbent upon Joshua to remain focused on God's will. This seems to be the import of the word "only" (v. 7).

The courage Joshua needed would manifest itself in adherence to God's law. Holding to the law of Moses was evidence that one had faith in God and His dealings with Israel. And it was important not to pick and choose which parts of God's law one would follow. This would be to stand in judgment over God. Joshua was to follow *all* of the commands of God.

The result of complete obedience would be prosperity. We tend to look upon the law as a negative list of regulations that box us in and frustrate us. The truth is that our Maker knows what is best for us. Following His ways leads to life as it was meant to be lived. Since the moral law is a reflection of God's character, His people need to embrace it. As the psalmist exclaimed, "O how love I thy law!" (Psalm 119:97).

6. What was Joshua to do so that God's law would be followed completely (vs. 8,9)?

As the leader of the people, Joshua was always to be speaking of God's Word ("shall not depart out of thy mouth") and always thinking about it as well. Meditating on God's Word means more than just reading it and then grasping its meaning. It involves a prayerful contemplation, a seeking after the knowledge of God and His will. We are to pursue not mere head knowledge through the Word but a closer relationship with the Lord.

As in the book of James in the New Testament, the Lord was telling Joshua that he must be not just a hearer of the word but a doer also (cf. 1:22). We are not truly loving the Lord as we ought to if we take in God's Word but do not let it make any difference in the way we live. If we genuinely follow God's ways, we will experience blessing and spiritual success.

Just in case Joshua had somehow not understood God's message, the Lord again exhorted him to be courageous. He stressed again that this was not an optional matter. He had commanded it. Strength and courage flow from faith in God's provision. They are not something we can conjure up in our own power. God was telling Joshua to trust Him.

Fear is a difficult emotion to control. When God commands that we not be afraid, there is clearly need of supernatural help to obey. The reason the command not to fear is so important is that to be controlled by fear is, in effect, a vote of no confidence in God's promises.

The Lord again told Joshua that He would be with him, adding for emphasis that His presence would be guaranteed no matter where he went. This assurance was to be the foundation of Joshua's fearlessness. When by faith we remember how great God is, knowing He is always with us is powerful comfort.

JOSHUA'S OBEDIENCE—Joshua 1:10-11

7. What did Joshua command the people to do (vs. 10, 11)?

Joshua acted upon what God told him to do. He gathered the leaders of the people and gave them instructions necessary to carrying out what God had commanded. He told the leaders to instruct the people to get food together to prepare for a crossing of the Jordan River.

It has been 40 years since they left Egypt, but in just *three days* they will reach their destination just beyond *Jordan*. The Jordan is in flood stage (Joshua 3:15), and the announcement of the pending crossing undoubtedly creates excitement and wonder.

Joshua must have realized that the people of Israel would have the same fears that he had. This is why he repeated what the Lord had told him concerning how He had given the land to them. The people needed to have faith in God's promises in the same way Joshua did.

Verses 12–15 (not in today's text) relate Joshua's important reminder to the two and one-half tribes that had been permitted to settle on the east side of the Jordan: they must help the other tribes in the conquest that is before them. In reply, those tribes promise that they *will do* what Joshua commands and they *will go* anywhere Joshua sends them.

THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE—Joshua 1:16-17

8. How did the people respond to Joshua's commands (v. 16)?

The people's submission to Joshua was unconditional. They would follow all that Joshua told them. They would not pick and choose what instructions they would agree to. And no matter where Joshua told them to go, they would be willing to do it.

The Israelites did not always obey as they should have, and they often serve as a negative example to us. But here their spirit of obedience sets a standard that we should seek to follow. Too often, our thought is that we will obey God's will—unless He asks us to talk to that certain unbeliever or to do that one thing we find too frightening. A true obedience is a complete obedience because its foundation is trust in God. It is a failure of faith when we set conditions on obedience.

9. What was the people's prayer for Joshua (v. 17)?

Knowing the great regard that the people had for Moses, it would be natural if Joshua wondered whether they would be willing to transfer their allegiance to him. The Israelites were quick to reassure him on this point. They said they would follow him in everything, the same way they had followed Moses. Of course, they had hardly been perfect in their obedience to Moses, and he had been exasperated with them at times. But at least their intentions were good, and they were not resentful of their new leader.

The people realized that no matter who their leader was, the important thing was that God's blessing be upon them. As Richard Hess pointed out, the last part of Joshua 1:17 is not setting conditions on their loyalty; "rather, it is a confession and prayer that the Lord may abide with Joshua just as he did with Moses" (*Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, InterVarsity). The people of the covenant community were ready to follow God's appointed leader.

Conclusion

Passing the Mantle Successfully

The leadership transition from Moses to Joshua is notable in the way it was accomplished. The encouragement Joshua received by all the parties involved makes

us wonder if Joshua was reluctant to assume the role that was thrust upon him. The encouragement prompted him to move ahead.

Churches sometimes experience difficulty with leadership changes. The older generation may be unwilling to relinquish control. The younger generation perceives that property and programs are slowly deteriorating, and they want to make changes. Spiritual maturity on the part of everyone involved is needed to bring about a productive, peaceful resolution.

The work of the church is so important that emotions must be controlled. Studies of biblical principles of leadership must be undertaken. Prayers on bended knees are essential for those who desire what is really best.

Practical Points

- 1.** If our faith is truly in God, no human leader is irreplaceable (Joshua 1:1-2).
- 2.** God's promises are sure; we need only to act upon them by faith (vs. 3-4).
- 3.** We can face any situation courageously if we know the Lord is with us (vs. 5-6).
- 4.** Obedience to God is the key to true success, and obedience is assured by meditating on God's Word (vs. 7-9).
- 5.** Faith always leads to action, and it inspires faith in others (vs. 10-11).
- 6.** Honoring God means that we honor His servants (vs. 16-17).

Prayer

Dear God in Heaven, grant me the wisdom and words to accomplish the tasks that are mine for the cause of Christ and His church. May I do my part to encourage the ones who have leadership roles. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Encouragement can produce results.

Anticipating the Next Lesson:

In the next lesson we will study the circumstances under which Gideon became "A Deliverer for the People." Study Judges 6:1-3, 7-14.

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