

Joshua 1 – “Strong and Courageous”

The book of Joshua is the first of the twelve historical books we have in the Bible, taking us from Joshua right through to Esther, and this period of history deals with them coming into the Promised Land, a time of judges, kings, and captivity. This book becomes a good transition from that of the Pentateuch, which is all about the beginning of a special nation, their Exodus out of Egypt, the giving of their law to keep them separated unto God, and their journey to their own land. Joshua now picks up the narrative as they are ready to move into their new territory, the land of Canaan.

It's a book that's filled with some practical lessons for us. The Old Testament is rich with typology; pictures that illuminate a spiritual truth for us today.

- You could say that most New Testament principles have an Old Testament picture.

The book of Joshua is ripe with these pictures. It's an exciting time in Israel's history; they're ready to enter into the Promised Land. Now some have confused this with being symbolic of heaven. Past hymns have referred to this time when we pass over the Jordan into heaven: *“I looked over Jordan, and what did I see Comin' for to carry me home? A band of angels, comin' after me, Comin' for to carry me home.”* – Swing Low Sweet Chariot.

But this is not the picture here. Israel would still have battles to fight and wars to win. I don't remember this being the scene in heaven. This Promised Land speaks of the life that God has for you – the abundant life, life to the full, a life dominated by the Spirit. And these things are written for our admonition today.

- **1 Corinthians 10:1–11**, *“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ² all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³ all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. ⁵ But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. ⁷ And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” ⁸ Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; ⁹ nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰ nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were*

destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

- The word example comes from the Greek word *typos*, from which we get our word type. And the typology in the O.T. is so rich when you begin to see the N.T. reality.

The Old Testament is indeed a fun study and Joshua brings some great lessons and questions for us. Are we living in the place that God has for us?

This chapter has 3 divisions in it:

1. God's Charge to Joshua – 1:1-9
2. Joshua's Charge to Israel – 1:10-15
3. Israel's Response to Joshua – 1:16-18

1. God's Charge to Joshua – 1:1-9

1:1-3 - *After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: ² "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. ³ Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.*

All of these things that we're looking at now happened after the death of Moses. That's important because Moses represents the law. Moses is heralded in Jewish sentiment as the great law giver. He's their guy! But instead of elevating him, they should be feeling like he's put them under quite a constraint. Now of course we know this was of God, we're not blaming Moses here, but we understand that the law was heavy.

Those that are trying to live according to the law live lives of heaviness and condemnation. It's a legalistic life and it robs you of joy. You can never live up to the demands of the law. So why the Law then?

- We know the law was given to reveal sin and ultimately lead us to the only One that could deal with our sin – Jesus Christ.
- **Galatians 3:19–25**, *"What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. ²⁰ Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. ²¹ Is the*

law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. ²² But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

- **Psalm 19:7**, "*The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul...*"

Now this is where the picture comes into focus and is so perfect. Moses the law giver could only lead the nation of Israel so far. For all that Moses did, and by no means are we dissing on Moses today, but he was only able to take them up to the Promised Land but not enter in.

The law can only bring you so far, but it cannot bring you into the true blessed life that Jesus has for us. Joshua would be the one to bring them in to the fullness of what God had for them.

- In the same way, the law is to lead us to Christ! Jesus came to fulfill the law. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13).
- This is all so fitting as Jesus is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Joshua. Joshua means "Jehovah is salvation". His name used to be Hoshea, which means "salvation". But Moses changed it to Joshua. You see, we can't save ourselves, we need someone greater than us. That's Jesus! He's the One that saves us and brings us into the abundant life, life in the Spirit; a life that cannot be produced by the law but by Jesus alone!

Now as Joshua is a picture of Jesus and the work of Jesus, it's interesting that his birth also seemed to be a miraculous birth – He was ***the son of Nun*** 😊.

Notice the land is given to them by the Lord. It's His land. Nobody has the right to that land except who the Lord says. And He has promised this land to Israel as an unconditional promise. That's why we call it the Promised Land.

Notice we read in vs. 3 – ***every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you***... This is a place that the Lord has already given them. It's in the past tense. It's not something He has yet to provide for. He doesn't need to come up with a way to make it happen. It's theirs! But they need to rise up and possess it. They need to walk in and lay claim to what God has already given them.

- I wonder how many Christians have lived a life where they have wonderful promises given to them in the Lord but have failed to possess them. Perhaps they've struggled over the assurance of salvation and felt like their stumbles and mistakes has disqualified them. Maybe they've lived a defeated life and failed to realize we are more than conquerors in and through Christ. We have great and glorious promises in the Lord which are given to the believer, but we need to possess them by faith as Joshua and all of Israel is being instructed to do.

What did they first need to do? ***Go over this Jordan...*** Moses led them through the Red Sea crossing. That spoke of this nation's new birth. It's a picture of our new life in Christ and our baptism in water proclaiming our new life in Him. Whereas this crossing of the Jordan speaks of the 2nd baptism – the Holy Spirit. If we're going to walk in the abundant life that Jesus has for us, we need to be filled in the Spirit.

And these promises I believe extend far beyond what we are willing to even imagine. **Ephesians 3:20**, *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,"* Look at what the Lord was giving to Israel...

1:4-5 - *From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. ⁵ No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.*

The borders of this Promised Land were very expansive. And yet the nation of Israel never completely reached the full potential of what God had given them [show map].

Genesis 15:18, *"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—"*

Just as God promised Moses that He would be with him, God now promised Joshua that He would be with him. What wonderful words to hear: ***I will not leave you nor forsake you.***

When God calls you into service you can be assured of the promise of His presence. We've seen it time and time again in God's Word. For Moses God comforted Him by saying, "I will certainly be with you" (Exodus 3:12). To Gideon God said, "Surely I will be with you" (Judges 6:16). With Jeremiah God reassured Him saying, "For I am with you to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:8).

But these aren't just promises for Old Testament stalwarts, they're promises for us!

Hebrews 13:5b–6, "...For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Do we live with boldness in these promises? Do we allow this truth to ring in our minds but fail to be put into practise?

Jesus assured us in **Matthew 28:20**, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen."

We have the promise of His presence, He is Immanuel, God with us! What more could we need or want?

Joshua is told that nobody will be able to stand before him. This is the equivalent of **Romans 8:31**, "...If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Now we know that there is lots of things and people that do come against us. This statement to Joshua does not deny the reality of opposition. There's going to be battles to fight, people to overcome, but God is saying that He will be with him and nobody will overtake him. With God on our side, there is nothing to fear. And yet it seems that Joshua is dealing with a little anxiety still.

1:6-7 - Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.

Joshua is told 3 times in the first 9 verses to be strong and of good courage. Who do you need to say that to? To someone who is not feeling strong or courageous! And you can't fault Joshua for this. He's been with Moses. He's seen what it's like to lead this people. I'm not sure if Joshua was worried about the enemies on the other side of the Jordan as much as he was worried about the Israelites on his side of the Jordan.

- Moses had to go through people complaining, accusing him, disobeying. The Israelites haven't really been a picnic. But Joshua is being called to

lead them on to a new land and to face the challenges before them. And this is something that Joshua can accomplish not because of his own ability, but because God is with Him.

- We're not called to be bold and strong in ourselves. We're called to be strong and courageous in the Lord. We have a mighty God with us!

Ephesians 6:10, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."*

Joshua is further told to observe all that is written in the law. This was their Word of God at this time. Even if Joshua didn't *'feel'* the presence of the Lord, believe what the Word of God has already said.

- So often we're led by our feelings rather than truth. Too many times our feelings deceive us and lead us into fear. But when we stand upon the Word of God and in faith believe what He's already said, we can be strong and of good courage.
- Moses had already given this word to Joshua in **Deuteronomy 31:7–8**, *"Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. ⁸ And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed."*
- The Word has been given and now Joshua needs to simply believe it and obey it. And it's in simply following the Word of God that we truly prosper! If Joshua just observes and obeys what God has already said, then whatever he does and wherever he goes, he will prosper.

The Word of God is that lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). It's given to us to be our guide and to ensure we walk in the things of God. This is what brings about blessing!

Along with this, Joshua is told:

1:8 - *This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe 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 key to success was not just in the Lord being with Joshua, but it was in Joshua being with the Lord. And one way to be abiding in Him is to be in the

Word of God. This ensures our success and prosperity. This ensures we are walking in close union with Him, and we can't help but to produce fruit as we do.

Joshua is to be continually meditating in this Word (***meditate in it day and night***). Biblical meditation compared to what we hear today about meditation are two very different things. Meditation as it's often practised today has its roots in Eastern Religion and the New Age. It's more about emptying your mind. But Biblical meditation is about filling your mind, it's filling your mind with what is good and true – God's Word.

When we're continually thinking on God's Word we're going to be active in it, observing it, following it, and as God says, this will be the key to ***good success***.

It reminds me of what we read in **Psalm 1:1–3**, *“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; ² But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.”*

- Are you delighting in the Word of God. Does the Word hold that sort of value in your life where it's your sustenance, stability, and strength? Joshua would come to know that it's through following God's Word that He would prosper and remain close to God.
- This is what true success looks like. The world has a skewed definition of what success is. Don't get caught up in trying to keep up with how the world defines success. Follow God's Word, stay close to Him, do what He's called you to do. That's success!

1:9 - *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.*”

God is merciful in our fears and worries. But we certainly don't need to remain there. God is not giving an option to Joshua, He is saying ***be*** strong! This is an imperative. And He can be strong because of God's presence with Him.

“The Swiss theologian Karl Barth often quoted Karle Wilson Baker, who defined *courage* as “Fear That has said its prayers” (“Courage” in Monroe, *Poetry*).

We do not need to fake courage and valor. We can confess our fear and find strength to move to faith because we know God will never leave us or abandon us.”¹

- **Isaiah 26:3–4**, *"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You. ⁴ Trust in the Lord forever, For in Yah, the Lord, is everlasting strength."*

2. Joshua's Charge to Israel – 1:10-15

1:10-11 - ***Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, ¹¹ "Pass through the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you to possess.'**"*

The charge to Joshua seems to have settled in as he steps up now and says, ***you will cross over this Jordan***. Joshua's not being hesitant on this. He's not saying, *Let's give it our best college try here guys! I don't know how this is all going to pan out, but let's see what happens.*

Nope, he's being strong and courageous, and he's setting the tone as a leader who is putting His faith in a big God. You ***will*** cross over...

- And for those of you who have been to Israel and have seen the Jordan river, you may be thinking of this scenario and thinking, crossing the Jordan is no big deal. We've got ditches bigger than that in our neck of the woods. And you may be right. But in this day, before water levels have been depleted, the Jordan was a significant river. Crossing it would have been a challenge. That's why we'll read of the miraculous parting of the waters when they cross over (3:16).

Once again, the Lord has given them this land, but they need to go in and possess it. Sadly, some chose to not be 'all in' with the things of God...

1:12-15 - ***And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh Joshua spoke, saying, ¹³ "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, 'The Lord your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.'** ¹⁴ **Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave you on this side of the***

¹ Smith, R., Jr. (2023). *Exalting Jesus in Joshua* (D. Platt, D. L. Akin, & T. Merida, Eds.; p. 22). Holman Reference.

Jordan. But you shall pass before your brethren armed, all your mighty men of valor, and help them, ¹⁵ until the Lord has given your brethren rest, as He gave you, and they also have taken possession of the land which the Lord your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and enjoy it, which Moses the Lord's servant gave you on this side of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

Numbers 32 gives us the account of these two and a half tribes that decided to stay on the east side of the Jordan and not enter into the Promised Land. It's a sad scenario because they're right at the border, ready to inherit all of God's goodness, but they decide they're going to be better off where they're at. God had so much for them, as He does for us too, but these tribes became content and satisfied in the place they were and they missed out on the great rewards of walking in the fullness of what God has for them.

- Too often Christians today are living an incomplete life because they have stopped moving forward. They're not progressing any longer in their pursuit of God. They are borderline believers.
- God will not take you further than you want to go. We need to press on passionately pursuing God with all that we are, lest we end up defeated and displaced like these tribes were (eg. they were the first to be attacked when the Assyrians invaded).
- The Apostle Paul even had to guard himself from this sort of complacency. **Philippians 3:12–14**, *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

*Although their territory was included in the larger boundaries promised to Israel (1:3–4), the narrative at times seems to place the two and one-half tribes outside the Promised Land (cf. 22:19). ²

In case Joshua is still having worries and maybe doubting the Word of the Lord, God in His grace has other people stand up to voice their approval of Joshua and thus confirm the Word of the Lord.

² Barker, K. L., & Kohlenberger, J. R., III. (1994). *Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition: Old Testament)* (p. 292). Zondervan Publishing House.

3. Israel's Response to Joshua – 1:16-18

1:16-18 - ***So they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. ¹⁷ Just as we heeded Moses in all things, so we will heed you. Only the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moses. ¹⁸ Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage."***

These people confirm that they are ready and willing to go at Joshua's command. Now they certainly have some selected memory because they did not heed Moses ***in all things***, and they won't with Joshua either.

But at least they're seeing the necessity to have a leader that is following God and being sure His presence goes with them. Again, we can be strong and courageous when we know the reality of that.

We've seen Joshua in a few different roles already in Scripture:

1. The Soldier

Exodus 17:8–10, *"Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. ⁹ And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand."¹⁰ So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek..."*

2. The Servant

Exodus 24:13, *"So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God."*

3. The Spy

Numbers 13:1–8, *"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them."³ So Moses sent them from the Wilderness of Paran according to the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel. ⁴ Now these were their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; ⁵ from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; ⁶ from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; ⁷ from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; ⁸ from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun;"*

Now we see Joshua in a new role:

4. The Successor (Joshua 1:17)

When we are faithful in a few things, God will use us in greater ways.

Matthew 25:23, *"His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'"*

It is a joy to serve the Lord and be used of Him. And though we might at times feel insufficient, God is with us, so be strong and courageous. Walk in the fullness of what God has for you!