

The Lord Your God Goes Before You

God's Work in the Book of Joshua

"Be Strong and Courageous"

1:1-18

Focus Attention:

How well do you handle change?

- I love change. It invigorates me and adds zest to living.
- I don't like change, but I deal with it because it is inevitable.
- I fight change and try to prevent more from happening than has to.
- Change? What's that?

There seems to be only one thing we can depend on in the 21st Century, and that is that nothing can be depended on because things always change. This also seems all too common in our walk with God, doesn't it? About the time I think I have it "all figured out," my mind is opened to something new in God's word, or someone is asking me to look at things a little differently, or Satan is putting a new challenge in my way.

The people of Israel have reached the doorstep to Canaan, the land God had promised to give to them. It has been a long, hard journey getting here, but things are about to change. It is time for a new direction with new leadership. What they had known for the last 40 years is about to be a thing of the past.

Focus on the Word:

A. The importance of moving forward. (vv 1-6)

1. "After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord..."
 - a. "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt... For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut 34:10-12).
 - b. It is a time of transition for the people of Israel. A great and godly leader has died. The people spend thirty days weeping and mourning over the loss (Deut 34:8). Now what?
2. A time to move forward
 - a. It would have been very easy for the Israelites to stay put, or to even look back and celebrate the glory days of Moses. God had other plans for them, and the direction is forward.

- b. Joshua's marching orders
 - i. Cross the Jordan River (v 2).
 - ii. Defeat the enemy (vv 3-5a).
 - iii. Take possession of the promised land (v 6).
 - c. God is ready to bless them with an "inheritance."
 - i. An inheritance from one's father is a well-established custom throughout historical time periods and cultural backdrops. An inheritance is the gift of a loving father to his children to be passed along the family line.
 - ii. In giving an inheritance to His children, Israel, God was pledging to care and provide for His people, and a promise of security and peace in their new land.
 - iii. The inheritance was ready to be given, but it was up to the people to take possession of it (v 11). To do that, they had many battles to fight, filled with the power and protection of God.
 - d. In reality, the direction God has given Joshua is a direction He desired for Israel 40 years earlier, but they refused to follow His lead. Now God looks to Joshua and instructs him to press on.
- ☞ The imagery of an "inheritance" is used in the NT to describe what we have received in Christ.
- "In Colossians 1:9-14 the imagery of being 'rescued from the dominion of darkness,' 'brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves,' and gaining a 'share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light' echoes the experience of Israel in its exodus and inheritance of the land." <Dictionary of Biblical Imagery>
 - Our inheritance is also one that is graciously given, and it requires that we take possession. We do so by faith (1 Pet 1:3-5). Along the way we, too, have many battles to fight (Eph 6:10-12). It is an inheritance that requires forward movement.
3. A time to look up
- a. God is very succinct in His instructions to Joshua. There is no explanation of "how" Joshua is to proceed. No strategy sessions to map out a clear battle plan. No question of timelines or exit strategies.
 - b. Joshua and the people were not to rely on strategy or strength, but on God's promises.
 - i. Seven times in these verses, God says, "I give" ... "I promised" ... "I will."
 - ii. God emphasizes that the future for Joshua and for Israel lies not in their ability to perform, but in God's ability to provide. God works to accomplish His purposes, and Israel will be the beneficiary of that work.
 - iii. God had said similar thing through Moses just a few weeks earlier.
 - (a) "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous ... but it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore." (Deut 7:7-8ff).

(b) “You may say to yourselves, ‘These people are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?’...” (Deut 7:17ff).

(c) “Do not say to yourself, ‘The Lord has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness...’” (Deut 9:4ff).

☞ As we take possession of the inheritance given through Jesus Christ, we also have the promise of God’s purposes accomplished in our lives – not because of our effort but because of God’s presence (*Phil 2:12-13; Matt 18:20; Eph 2:8-10; Heb 13:6). Perhaps we should focus less on setting strategies or plans for receiving an inheritance from God, and instead trust and rely on His promises to be victorious over each battle as it comes.

B. The way for moving forward (vv 6-9)

1. God instructs Joshua that it is time to move on from the place the people are camped. Now He tells Joshua what he must do to take possession of the inheritance awaiting them.
 2. “Be strong and courageous.”
 - a. These words appear three times in this section (vv 6, 7, 9).
 - i. He further explains what it means to be courageous: “Do not be terrified.”
 - ii. And what it means to be strong: “Do not be discouraged.”
 - b. These are not merely words of encouragement or words to boost Joshua’s self-esteem as he sets out to lead the people in conquest of the inheritance. “Have I not *commanded* you?” (v 9).
 - c. The command is there because Joshua’s leadership is to be a matter of trust: “For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (v 9). Being strong and courageous in the battle for the inheritance is a demonstration of faith.
 - d. What does Joshua have to fear?
 - i. The legacy of Moses. Can he measure up to the high standard set by Moses as God’s leader?
 - ii. The strength of the Canaanite culture at the time.

“Canaanite culture was thriving during this period of the late Bronze Age, as illustrated by thousands of artifacts... The military superpowers who had been players in the action (Hittites, Babylonians, Egyptians) no longer had a significant presence. Instead, the Israelites would have to confront a number of independent city-states or groupings of states.” <Archaeological Study Bible>
- ☞ The command to be “strong and courageous” is one we need to hear and obey. Whether it is fear of meeting some perceived standard of spirituality of someone who has gone before us, or meeting the challenges our culture lays before us and our families, we need to demonstrate genuine faith in God’s power as we take possession. (See Rom 8:28-39; Eph 1:17-19; 2 Tim 1:6-9a.)

3. How is Joshua to find strength and courage? “Obey all the law...” (v 7).
 - a. The legacy of Moses was something God wanted Joshua to continue. The great lawgiver had been the instrument God had used to spell out His holy character and purposes for Israel. Joshua was to continue in that heritage as God’s new leader and representative over Israel.
 - b. The law of God in this passage seems to refer to the Pentateuch – the five books we now know as Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – that Moses had compiled and given to the people of God. These were now to be Joshua’s guide.
 - i. “Do not turn from it.” The Law was to guide Joshua’s steps – every decision, every attitude, and every action.
 - ii. “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth.” “It was the practice of the Jews to read Scripture aloud and talk about it to themselves and to one another (Deut 6:6-9). This explains why God warned Joshua that the Book of the Law was not to depart out of his *mouth*... ‘If you don’t talk to your Bible, your Bible isn’t likely to talk to you!’” <Weirsbe, pp 27-28>
 - iii. “Meditate on it day and night.” David said, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps 119:11). Joshua was to allow the Law to sink deeply within his heart so that it would always be with him in every situation he was about to face.
4. The result: “That you may be successful wherever you go.” (vv 7, and again in 8)
 - a. What was the success and prosperity God had in mind here? Fame and wealth as the leader of a new, up-and-coming powerful nation?
 - b. Success is found in taking possession of the inheritance. It is in have God’s promises become a reality in one’s life. By following the Law, Joshua would succeed at having God’s purposes fulfilled in him.

☞ Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). He further explained, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Abundant life is the inheritance Jesus holds out for us – the success and prosperity promised. What from the instructions given to Joshua about following the Law helps us understand better how we find the strength and courage to take possession of our inheritance?

C. Moving forward as a people of God (vv 10-17)

Taking possession of God’s promises was never intended to be done individualistically. It is done in a nation of covenant people ... a body of believers ... a family focused on Christ ... a group of friends with like-minded purpose.

1. The importance of godly leadership
 - a. Joshua turns around and instructs the people with the words he has been given from God.
 - b. Joshua’s words are simple: Get ready and take possession. Again, no explanation of strategy or plan. Instead he calls the people to action by following God in faith.

- c. He also calls the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who had already claimed their portion of the land east of the Jordan, to remember their responsibilities to the rest of the tribes of Israel.
 - d. Joshua did not consult with his officers, nor did he seek the counsel of trusted advisors. This was not a time to get a consensus of opinion or take a poll. Joshua had a word from God. He did not need anyone else's permission or approval.
- ☞ There are times when it is wise the leadership of God's people to seek wisdom and advise from those in the family of God – when methods or preferences are a part of the discussion. But if the people of God are to reach the inheritance found in Jesus Christ, there are also times leadership must stand firmly on the word of God and refuse the temptation of seeking some sort of “security through consensus.” The battles God's people fight today will succeed or fail based on how closely we follow God's rules for engagement.
2. The importance of a godly response to leadership.
- a. Full obedience: “Whatever you have commanded us we will do.”
 - b. Forward focus: “Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you.”
 - c. Faithful intercession: “May the Lord your God be with you.”
 - d. Unfailing support: “Whoever rebels against your word ... will be put to death.”
 - e. Godly reminders: “Only be strong and courageous!”
- ☞ Those in leadership are not the only ones who have a responsibility in the battles for the inheritance. Others must follow their leadership fully (Heb 13:17), and hold them accountable to following God's word. What part do you play in the battle?

Focus on Tomorrow

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Ephesians 6:10-12

Which command do you need to hear this week?

- ☞ Be strong and courageous.
- ☞ Obey all the law.

Are you lingering east of the Jordan, dwelling on some perceived “glory days” of the past, or have you crossed into the inheritance of Jesus Christ, and are you fighting the battles of the abundant life? What steps will you take this week to trust God with His power and purposes for your life?

Resources:

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery
 Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*
 Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Strong*
 Zondervan's *Archaeological Study Bible*