

The Book of Joshua

Lesson 1: Be Strong and Courageous: Joshua Commissioned -- Joshua 1:1-

18

Moses is dead. Three words, and the whole world of Israel tilts on its axis. For forty years one man had stood between the people and the wilderness, between the people and Pharaoh, between the people and God Himself. He had parted a sea, carried a nation's complaints, and climbed a mountain into the fire of God's presence. And now he is gone, buried by the Lord in a valley no one can find. Picture the camp on the morning after the mourning ended. Two million people, a river in front of them, walled cities beyond it, and the one leader they had ever known lying in an unmarked grave behind them. If you have ever stood at the edge of something huge with the ground shifting under your feet, you know exactly how that camp felt.

Into that silence God speaks, and notice what He does not say. He does not say, "I am sorry for your loss." He does not pause to let the grief settle. He says, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise." The word that matters most is the little word "now." God's purposes do not die when His servants die. The God who called Moses is the same God who is calling Joshua, and the promise He made to Abraham four hundred years earlier has not aged a day. Leaders pass. The Lord remains. And the work He began He intends to finish.

Then God tells Joshua the secret of the whole campaign, and it is not military strategy. Four times in this short chapter the command comes: be strong and of good courage. But the courage God commands is not the gritted-teeth kind that pretends not to be afraid. It is courage anchored to a promise, repeated until it sinks in: "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Joshua is not told to be brave because he is capable. He is told to be brave because God is faithful. There is a world of difference between those two things, and learning that difference is most of what this first lesson is about.

And here is where the chapter reaches across three thousand years and lays a hand on your shoulder. You may not be leading a nation across the Jordan, but you know what it is to face a threshold you did not choose, with the old certainties behind you and the unknown in front. A diagnosis. A move. A marriage that needs rebuilding. A calling you have been avoiding because it scares you. To every person standing at the edge of an uncrossable river, God says what He said to Joshua: I am with you. Be strong. Be courageous. Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Group Discussion: Read the opening verses of the chapter together, where God commissions Joshua. What strikes you most about how God responds to the death of Moses and the fear of the people, and what does that reveal about the way God carries His purposes forward even when His servants are gone?

Personal Reflection: Think honestly about a threshold you are standing at right now, a change or a calling that frightens you. Where is your courage actually coming from, your own confidence in yourself, or your confidence in the God who promises to go with you?

Read Joshua 1:1–18

Study Questions

1. God begins by reminding Joshua that the land is a gift He had already promised: “every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses” (Joshua 1:3). How does grounding the conquest in a promise made centuries earlier to Abraham shape the way we should understand what is about to happen, and what does it reveal about God’s faithfulness across generations?
2. Four times God commands Joshua to “be strong and of good courage,” yet each time He ties that courage to His own presence rather than to Joshua’s ability. Where in your life have you been trying to manufacture courage out of your own confidence, and what would change if your courage were anchored instead in God’s promise to be with you?
3. God tells Joshua that the key to success is meditating on the Book of the Law day and night and being careful to obey it (Joshua 1:7–8). Why does God connect courage and success so directly to a steady diet of His Word and obedience to it, and what does this teach us about where real strength comes from?
4. Joshua 1:8 promises that the one who meditates on God’s Word and obeys it will “make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.” How do you guard this promise against the modern distortion that following God guarantees comfort, wealth, or an easy life, and what does true prosperity look like for a follower of Christ?

5. Three times God says “I will be with thee” or “I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee” (Joshua 1:5). How does the abiding presence of God serve as the foundation of everything God asks of Joshua, and how is this same promise fulfilled even more fully for the Christian in Christ (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5)?
6. God commands Joshua to obey the law and to “turn not from it to the right hand or to the left” (Joshua 1:7). In what specific area of your life are you most tempted to turn to the right hand or to the left, to soften or sidestep what God has clearly said, and what would full obedience look like there this week?
7. The land of Canaan was the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to Abraham, yet the New Testament teaches that this earthly rest was a shadow of a greater rest that remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:1–11). How should we understand the land promise so that we neither empty it of meaning nor turn it into the expectation of a future earthly, political kingdom?
8. The leaders of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh pledge their full support to Joshua and the rest of the tribes, promising to help their brothers until they too find rest (Joshua 1:16–18). Where is God calling you to set aside your own comfort or settledness to help carry the burden of your brothers and sisters in the Lord’s church?
9. When the people answer Joshua, they say, “only the Lord thy God be with thee, as he was with Moses,” and they call for anyone who rebels against his commandment to be put to death (Joshua 1:17–18). What does this reveal about the seriousness of submitting to God-appointed leadership and unity among God’s people, and how does the New Testament call the church to honor faithful leadership while keeping Christ as the true head (Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 1:22–23)?

10. Looking back across this whole chapter, from the death of Moses to the people's pledge to follow, where is Jesus calling you to step across your own Jordan in trust rather than fear? Name one specific way the courage God commanded Joshua is the very thing Christ is forming in you right now.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Deuteronomy 31:1-8, where Moses first charges Joshua and the people to be strong and courageous because the Lord goes before them; Hebrews 4:1-11, which shows the rest in Canaan as a shadow of the greater rest that remains for the people of God in Christ; Matthew 28:18-20, where the risen Christ sends His people out with the same promise of His abiding presence; Psalm 1:1-3, which echoes the blessing on the one who meditates on God's law day and night; Joshua 21:43-45, where God declares that not one word of His good promises failed.

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