

September 6, 2009/Joshua 1 (ESV¹)

all of the people who had been adults at the time of the Exodus from Egypt (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) have died off ... lastly, Moses himself has died (before being allowed to enter the promised land, because of his impatience with God's plan in the matter of providing for the Israelites in the wilderness) ... before he died, at God's direction, he passed the mantle of leadership of the Israelites on to Joshua ...

read **Numbers 27:12-23** and **Deut 31:1-8**

what do we know about Joshua previous to this? ... Joshua and Caleb were the two spies who 38 years before had urged the Israelites to go into the land and take it from the Canaanites ... he functioned as Moses' right hand man during the Exodus and wilderness wanderings, e.g. going with Moses up onto Mt. Sinai to receive God's law ... he had been the Israelites' battle commander when the desert tribe of Amalekites had attacked them ...

Jos 1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant,

while Moses was alive, God had spoken to Joshua and the other Israelites through Moses ... now God speaks directly to Joshua ...

we should probably remark that Joshua's original name was "Hoshea", which means "salvation" ... Moses changed it to "Joshua" which means "Yahweh saves" ... it is the same Hebrew name translated "Jesus" in the New Testament ... not only is Joshua the namesake of Jesus, but Joshua is often seen as a OT prefiguring or type of Jesus ... Joshua is called "the son of Nun" throughout Joshua ... it's only at the very end that he is first called "the servant of the LORD" like Moses ...

Jos 1:2 "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 my servant is dead ... Joshua knows this already, God's not announcing this to Joshua ... what He is saying is "in light of the fact that Moses my servant is dead ... you, Joshua, as my appointed leader ... you and all these people, get ready and go over ..."

the circumstance that the Israelites are facing is a river at flood stage, this is the spring of the year ... God is going to lead them into the land in a miraculous way ... the next 3 chapters are well worth reading today after you get, home ... but that's another story ...

into the land that I am giving to them ... this is not a new promise ... this is the same promise given to Abraham 600 year before and renewed to Moses 40+ years before ... it's the promise that not only were the people delivered from bondage, but that there is to be an inheritance and rest ... now God is going to fulfill that promise in the lives of these people, the sons and daughters of the ones Moses led out of Egypt ... notice that although it is God who has promised and it is ultimately God who is going to make good on the promise, the Israelites are hardly going to have this handed to them on a platter with no effort ... what is coming is strenuous and dangerous effort ... that's the way it was with them, and that's the way it is with

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us ... we have God's promise, it is He that guarantees it, but with it comes serious obedience and effort on our part ...

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

God reminds Joshua that the promise is the one that had been given to Moses ... again, this is not a new thing ... Joshua is to see himself as part of a great heritage of Faith, he is simply carrying on where Moses left off ... in 21st century arrogance, it's popular to have some kind of idea that we know some things that our forefathers, the Luther's, the Calvin's, the Wesley's, etc. didn't really know ... that's not only silly on the face of it, but it puts us at odds with the attitude of the people of Scripture ...

Jos 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.

this is a big chunk of land ... much larger than present day Israel ... it includes a big piece of present day Syria ... historians think that probably under Kings David and Solomon the full extent of this promise was briefly realized ... how is all this possible? ... is it because Joshua is a better military man than anybody else around? ... is it because the Israelites have a better equipped army than anyone else? ... hardly! ... the key is next ...

Jos 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 key is not Joshua, nor the people, nor any thing about them ... the key is God's presence ... the same presence that was with Moses will be with Joshua ... that same presence is promised to every New Testament believer ... this promise extends to us ... **Heb 13:5-6 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"** ... the security is not in the words, but in the person behind the words ...

Jos 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.

be STRONG AND COURAGEOUS ... these are words of a kind that seems to have almost passed out of usage in our time ... we think in small terms, carefully guarding our comfort, acting as if what we perceive to be our "needs" are the foremost issue ... THIS is an injunction to act for God and to do it fortitude and boldness ... BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS ... these are Bible words, not the small words of our time ...

think again about what is to be done here ... 40 years ago, this was just a rag-tag bunch of runaway Egyptian slaves who had been under terrible persecution for at least 80 years ... they had gotten to this land and decided that they couldn't do what was required, and as a result had to wander the desert for 40 years ... now they are ready to cross a river at flood stage and attack the heavily fortified city of Jericho as a first step in driving out the current inhabitants of the land ... this is serious business that they are about to embark on ...

Jos 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.

look at the mindset Joshua is to have ... the boldness and courage are linked to careful, purposeful following of God's revelation ... this is something other than just whipping oneself into some macho military frenzy ... this is not psyching the team up for the big game ... this is acting in accord with who God is and what He has said to do ... that gives Joshua and the Israelites cause to act courageously ... it is a big, grand purpose to serve the one true and living God ... the prospect of carefully following His revealed will ought to inspire us, it ought to cause us to be STRONG AND VERY CORAGEOUS ... the end of it ought to be the glory of God ... it is also a matter to be approached carefully ... there is to be no charting one's own course ... we are not to turn to the right or the left from God's revelation ...

Boice's commentary on Joshua makes the point eloquently that Joshua is not portrayed to us as clever or especially talented or flamboyant ... what he was, was consistent ... he took God at His word and carefully obeyed ... he day after day put one foot in front of another doing what God had called him to do ...

Jos 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.

notice that Joshua has lived through the time that Moses was writing down Genesis through Deuteronomy ... he had personally known and served Moses and knew he wasn't a perfect being ... but he also knew what God had given him to write down was the very Word of God ... Joshua is told plainly here that his entire life is to be lived in the context of God's Law ... there is to be no kind of compartmentalization of his life into the everyday and the spiritual here... his every waking thought and action are to be carried out in light of God's law, given to and through Moses ...

Jos 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."

do we think maybe that God is making a point here? ... this is the third time in these few verses that Joshua has been told to be strong and courageous ... perhaps he is to be strong and courageous ... in fact, it is not an option ... it is a command! ... this is the proper mind of the people of God ... we are to know the promise of God, live lives that are saturated with His Word and the context of His Holy Law, careful to obey, and then *be absolutely fearless and uncowed by the world* ...

notice that it is implicit in the command that there will be opportunities for Joshua to be other than strong and courageous ... there may be legitimate reason to be terrified ... there may be legitimate reason to be discouraged ... there absolutely is no promise here that the whole enterprise of leading the Israelites into the promised land is going to go easily ... things didn't go easily for Moses before Joshua, and there is no promise that they will go easily for Joshua ... but ... what is the promise that Joshua can count on? ... it is that same promise that we can count on ... God will be with us ... and it is that promise that gives us the necessary backbone to face whatever awaits us today ... to act in accord with God's revealed will in any circumstance ...

Jos 1:10 And Joshua commanded the officers of the people,

Jos 1:11 "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'"

officers of the people ... one thing that has happened while the people have been wandering around in the desert is that they've gotten some order and organization ... perhaps these people are related to the judges that Moses appointed in Genesis 18 ... probably it is even organization beyond that ... **Deu 1:15 So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers, throughout your tribes.** ... so they are not the disorganized, ragtag bunch that refused to go into the land 38 years ago ... now God tells Joshua to get the people ready to move out, and there is a chain of command to carry it off ...

it is God who has promised them the land and will ultimately be responsible for seeing that it is theirs, but they must go in and face the difficulties courageously, relying on his presence ... and in that enterprise there has to be organization and structure ... that organization is not an enemy of God's purposes, it is a something that God is able to use in accomplishing them ... notice also that the people are not to go off half-cocked ... they are to get ready to move out in three days, with the proper supplies ... it is NOT true that in order to really follow God, you've got to be both disorganized and ill-prepared ... to the contrary this is a command to an organized people to prepare themselves to move out in the will of God ... but, again, lest we forget the heart of the situation ... it is the I AM who is giving the land ... in fulfillment of His promise ...

now Joshua speaks specifically to the tribes that will have no inheritance on the west of the Jordan, having already gotten their land on the east ... he does so, reminding them of their responsibility to the other tribes laid out by Moses ...

Jos 1:12 And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said,

Jos 1:13 "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.'

Jos 1:14 Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them,

Jos 1:15 until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise."

this people is at present unified in the will of God ... they are ready to obey and do their duty ...

Jos 1:16 And they answered Joshua, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.

Jos 1:17 Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, as he was with Moses!

one might find this promise somewhat ironic ... I'm not sure Joshua should have found much comfort in a promise to be as cooperative with him as they had been with Moses ... but giving every benefit of the doubt to these folks, they do at least acknowledge the legitimate God-given authority of Joshua ... and they confess that the whole enterprise depends critically upon God's leading of Joshua, God's presence with Joshua ...

Jos 1:18 Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and courageous."

unfortunately, it won't be long before this has to be put into practice ... Achan is going to disobey Joshua's commands in the sacking of Jericho and there is going to be military disaster at Ai ... as far as Joshua is concerned, the people need from him what God has charged him ... be strong and courageous ...