

Scripture Selection

Joshua 1:1–11, 16–17

A Verse to Remember

“I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

—*Joshua 1:9*

M Pray for Leaders, *1 Tim. 2:1–6*
 T Training as a Leader, *Ex. 24:12–18*
 W Misplaced Zeal, *Num. 11:24–29*
 T Following without Reserve, *Num. 32:6–13*
 F Commissioned to Lead, *Num. 27:15–23*
 S Ready to Lead, *Deut. 34:1–9*

Joshua: A Leader for the People

1:1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, ²“My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. ³Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. ⁴From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. ⁵No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. ⁶Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. ⁷Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. ⁹I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people,
¹¹“Pass through the camp, and command the people:
‘Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross
over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that
the LORD your God gives you to possess.’ ” . . .

16 They answered Joshua: “All that you have com-
manded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will
go. ¹⁷Just 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!



STEPPING INTO THE WORD

As the book of Joshua begins, the Exodus from Egypt and the years of wandering in the wilderness—defining events for Israel—are behind the former slaves. Now they look ahead. The challenges are no less real: moving in and settling a land where their presence would be resented and contested. What’s more, their new leader, Joshua, follows in the footsteps of Moses, one of the greatest of leaders. Will Joshua be up to the challenge? How will the people respond to his leadership?

JOSHUA’S PREPARATION

Joshua did not come out of nowhere to a position of leadership. He had been appointed by Moses to lead the Israelites into battle against the Amalekites (*Ex. 17:8–13*). Later, he accompanied Moses to the tent of meeting (*Ex. 33:11*). Joshua was one of twelve men sent to spy out the Promised Land. He and Caleb were the only two to recommend proceeding to occupy the land, trusting the Lord’s provision (*Num. 14:6–9*). Then, as Moses looked from afar at the land he would not be allowed to enter, he asked the Lord to appoint a successor “so that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep without a shepherd” (*Num. 27:17*). God instructed Moses to take Joshua, “a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him,” in the presence of the people (*Num. 27:18*; see *Deut. 31:7–8*). This commissioning was confirmed by God’s own action (*Deut. 31:14, 23*).

Joshua came to his position of leadership with impres-
sive experience and credentials. Above all, he came as one
chosen by God. That may seem safe and expected in

ancient biblical texts; but how do we respond today when we hear a leader claim God's mandate? We may well be suspicious of such a leader. Yet we as Christians have in Jesus a leader who clarified and defined how God works and what God desires. His leadership is a reliable measuring stick for all who make such claims.

❓ Are experience and credentials always enough to guarantee good leadership? What do we make of texts like *Isa. 11:6*, "a little child shall lead them"? Taking Jesus' teachings and example as a model, what would be some of the qualities of a leader who claimed to be called by God?

JOSHUA'S MANDATE

For all his qualifications, Joshua does not set out on his own. God is the main character throughout the book of Joshua. God has given the land to Israel; this is repeated some half dozen times in *Josh. 1*. As a gift, it is not something the recalcitrant Israelites have earned. Nor is the conquest of the land to be the result of Joshua's skill and ability.

Joshua's orders (1:2-9) begin and end with the assurance that the Lord will be with him and will not forsake him. Trusting that promise, then, Joshua is to be strong and courageous, a phrase repeated four times in this chapter. It is important to keep this call to be strong and courageous in perspective. Strength and courage are not isolated qualities. They are grounded in the promise of God's presence and faithfulness.

As important as they are, however, God requires more from Joshua than just courage and strength. Through it all, Joshua is called "to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you" (1:7). Like the blessed one of *Ps. 1*, Joshua is to meditate on this law day and night. Obedience to God's law is the expected response of those who have received the gift of God's grace and the promise of God's faithfulness.

So far, this suits our Protestant sensibilities. As we read on, however, there is a jarring note. If Joshua and the people are obedient to the law, then, God promises “you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful” (*Josh. 1:8*). What’s more, those who disobey are to be put to death! (v. 18) Doesn’t such a view fly in the face of our own experience? Surely many of us have known good and faithful people who have suffered greatly, not to mention scoundrels who appear all too successful. More important, the Bible challenges such a view of things: Job; the suffering servant passages in Isaiah; and in *Ps. 73*, where the psalmist is disturbed by the prosperity of the wicked.

Before we too quickly disregard the view expressed in *Josh. 1*, however, it may be helpful to recall the context from which it emerges. The book of Joshua, along with Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, came into their present form many centuries after the events they narrate. The theological perspective of these books comes from Deuteronomy and looks back at the history of Israel in light of the exile in Babylon. One thing seemed absolutely clear in hindsight: In spite of all God’s goodness, Israel persisted in disobedience, and the seemingly inevitable result was catastrophe. From such a perspective, obedience to the law did indeed seem like a life-or-death matter.

Yet even here in Joshua, God’s grace comes first. Scripture consistently witnesses to the conviction that, even in the face of human failure and disobedience, God’s grace will not be defeated. We see this in *Isa. 43*, where, in spite of deserved suffering and exile, the Lord assures Israel, “I have called you by name, you are mine.” We see it in Hosea, where, in the face of gross unfaithfulness, God declares, “How can I give you up . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender” (*Hos. 11:8*). And we see it preeminently in the self-giving of Jesus Christ.

Joshua’s leadership is grounded from start to finish in God’s grace, which will not forsake Israel. This grace calls forth from him the strength and courage that will see Israel through the challenges that lie before them.

? There continue to be many today who proclaim a so-called “prosperity gospel.” How would you respond to those who contend that faith automatically brings material blessings?

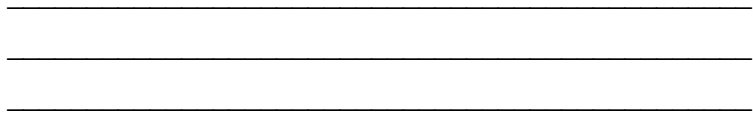
THE PEOPLE’S RESPONSE

What does *Josh. 1* suggest about how the people of God are called to respond to their leader? *Verses 12–15* give us a helpful clue. Here Joshua addresses that portion of the people—the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh—who have been promised land on the east side of the Jordan, land they already occupy. Joshua reaffirms the gift of this land to them, but at the same times calls them to do their part in the conquest that lies ahead: sending their warriors to help their kindred (v. 14). The community is bound together in its responsibility to one another.

These Transjordanian tribes respond enthusiastically. They will go and do as their new leader has commanded (v. 16). Moreover, they offer Joshua the same obedience they had given to Moses and pray that God may be with Joshua, just as God was with Moses. There is, however, a certain irony in their vow. Time and time again, the Israelites had been disobedient to Moses. And later in Joshua (*ch. 22*), these same tribes will stir jealousy and discontent by seemingly staking a claim to land belonging to other tribes. Surely humility is called for in our own bold vows of loyalty and obedience.

Before it is over, Joshua will indeed have successfully met the challenges of leadership. He will act boldly and decisively, in obedience to God; and the people, who are ready to move beyond the past to a new day, will embrace him.

? Do you tend to think of faith in strictly personal or individualistic terms? What are some ways that our faithfulness to God may be demonstrated within the community of faith?



HYMN TEXT FOR REFLECTION

God of grace and God of glory,
On Thy people pour Thy power.
Crown Thine ancient church's story,
Bring her bud to glorious flower. . . .

Lo! the hosts of evil 'round us,
Scorn Thy Christ, assail His ways.
From the fears that long have bound us,
Free our hearts to faith and praise. . . .

Cure Thy children's warring madness,
Bend our pride to Thy control.
Shame our wanton selfish gladness,
Rich in things and poor in soul. . . .

.....
Save us from weak resignation,
To the evils we deplore.
Let the search for Thy salvation,
Be our glory evermore. . . .¹

—Harry E. Fosdick, 1930

PRAYER

God of mercy, whether as leaders or followers, keep us continually aware of your grace. Trusting your goodness, help us to follow where you lead with strength and courage, tempered by humility, after the example of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A LOOK AHEAD

Compare the outlook and mood of *Josh. 1* with that of *Judg. 2:11–23*. What has changed? What implications does this change in outlook hold for Israel's conquest of the land?

Background Scripture for Next Time

Judg. 6—8

1. <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/g/o/godgrace.htm>.