

Changing of the Guard

Second in Command: Life of Joshua – Part I

Joshua 1:1-6

Introduction

We will begin today, an Old Testament series as we continue our study through the Bible. I invite your attention to the book of Joshua.

Now, unfortunately, there are characters in the Bible that we have relegated to one or two events. For example:

- If I were to say the name of Daniel to you, what would be the first thing to come to your mind? You would probably say, “Daniel and the lion’s den.”
- If I were to throw out the name of Noah to you, what would you think of first? You would most likely answer, “Noah and the ark.”
- If I were to give you the name of Joshua and ask what comes to your mind first, you would most likely scratch your head for a minute because he is not quite as familiar. Eventually, however, you would probably say, “Oh yea, that’s right, Joshua and the battle of Jericho.” That is the one thing we remember about him.

Well, I trust, as we study together in God’s Word, we are going to find so many things that it is going to be hard to contain them within our discussions. In fact, I am teaching from the book of Joshua for the first time and, not knowing exactly where to jump in or how long it is going to take, we will probably cover the first six verses today.

The Preparation of Joshua

His birthplace and name (Numbers 13:8)

We will start with the birthplace of Joshua, as historical background. That is not found in the book of Joshua, by the way.

Joshua was born in the land of Egypt under the rule of Pharaoh. His name, according to Numbers, chapter 13, verse 8, was Hoshea, which meant, “salvation”. At some point, Moses changed his name to Yhowshuwa, or in the contracted form, Yashua. In English, we call him Joshua, which means, “Yahovah, or Jehovah, is salvation”.

His childhood experiences (I Chronicles 7)

Now, if you think of what it must have been like to grow up in Egypt, obviously his childhood experiences were anything but pleasant. Joshua grew up in incredibly oppressive times. He saw his father very little. In fact, what he saw of him would have been a bloody man coming home at night after serving under a taskmaster that could care less for the Jew. We could wonder how biblical his home was and if that were a handicap. Undoubtedly, his home was rather unusual.

However, Joshua was on hand to see the return of a man named Moses. He heard Moses go to Pharaoh and declare, in great courage and faith, “Let My people go.”

Joshua waited with anticipation, along with all of the others, wondering what Pharaoh would do. Pharaoh, of course, repeatedly said, “No.”

I Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 27, informs us that Joshua was the firstborn in his family. His father’s name was Nun.

Knowing that Joshua was the firstborn gives special meaning to that Passover; that day when Moses came and said, “God wants you to take a lamb, slay it, and with the blood of that lamb, anoint the doorposts so that the firstborn will live and not die.”

Joshua sees his father, by faith, anoint the doorpost with the blood of the lamb. Then, Joshua is safe.

So, from early on, we can tell that his life was marked with hardship and difficulty, and yet, the expressions of God’s faith and of faithful men, as well. Joshua, evidently, chose to accept the way of his Hebrew parents and follow the leading of God’s man, Moses. In fact, in Numbers, chapter 11, verse 28, we read that he was,

. . . the attendant of Moses from his youth . . .

His growth as Moses’ assistant (Exodus 17 & 24)

Other things would mark this man, before the time of the book of Joshua. Let me give you several things that would develop Joshua as Moses’ assistant.

The first would be the war with Amalek, as recorded in Exodus, chapter 17, verses 8 to 16. Moses ordered Joshua to lead the counter attack against the Amalekites. It was a battle that the Israelites should never have won. The odds were stacked against them. However, Joshua saw the supernatural power of God revealed as they defeated this enemy. It must have marked him well.

Another illustration of God’s faithfulness would be as Joshua went with Moses on the mountain, in Exodus, chapter 24. Moses said these words to the elders, in verse 14,

. . . “Wait here for us [Moses and Joshua] until we return to you. . . .”

The story goes on to tell that when they returned from the mountain from that experience of close communion with God, even though Joshua was around the corner somewhere and was not able to be part of the intimacy that Moses had shared with Jehovah,

. . . his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

In other words, Joshua was so overwhelmed with Moses that he just wanted to stay with him, after having been so close to God.

What camaraderie Joshua must have shared with Moses. There was a close relationship as he would serve Moses for nearly eighty years before assuming the leadership post.

You may know the joy of sharing faith and vision with someone else. You may know the feeling of camaraderie that you have with someone who is sharing the same burden and heart with you.

I know, for myself, it has been a thrill to see what God has done. But I think it would be far less thrilling had it not been for the privilege of sharing it with my wife. There have been times that I have come home and my expression was so typical, “You’ll never believe this!” We could not believe what God had done, and what He is doing.

There were times, especially in the early days, my wife and I would come home, sit down, look at each other, and break into laughter. We could not believe! That was a camaraderie that made even the events of faith more precious.

For you, it may be a professor that you have had or a close friend that shares your heart – that was Joshua and Moses. They were in it together. They were partners in faith.

His service as a spy (Numbers 13-14)

One thing that marked Joshua, as well, was his service as a spy. This is recorded in Numbers, chapters 13 through 14. Please turn to Numbers, chapter 14, and look at verses 7 through 10 with me. This is Joshua’s response to a people that will not go into the land because of fear. This is the point at which he begins to emerge as a man of faith himself.

and they [Joshua and Caleb] spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us – a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they shall be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear

them.” But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. . . .

Now Joshua’s response in faith in this incident, is very, very important. It tells us many things. Let me give you several.

First, it tells us that he was not intimidated by God’s enemies and he relied on God for success in conquering the land.

It tells us, as well, that Joshua was not the kind of man who was swayed by the majority vote. Ten spies gave a bad report; two spies gave a good report. Joshua was in the minority. It did not matter, however, he stuck to it.

Joshua was also not afraid to warn the people against sinning. Look at the first part of verse 9 again.

Only do not rebel against the Lord . . .

He was a man of conviction.

Additionally, Joshua did not resign his post because the people would not listen to him. He did not, at that point, say, “Moses, I’ve done my best. I’ve put my life on the line. No thanks. This is where I get off the train.”

So, I think the next step in the progression of the preparation of Joshua is obvious.

His appointment by God (Deuteronomy 31:14-16)

After these steps in Joshua’s preparation, he is appointed by God. Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 31.

Now, what I like about Joshua, so far in the study that I have done, is that Joshua was not a terribly exciting guy. He was not a guy that people would automatically assume would become the leader of two million people. Joshua was a plodder. He was a down to earth kind of man who was concerned and convinced that all he really needed to do was obey God. There was nothing really flashy about this guy, he just simply obeyed.

Three lessons in leadership

What was qualifying Joshua to lead? Joshua was qualified because he was learning several lessons in leadership. We are going to discover these in this passage. Let me give you several.

Leadership is based upon God’s decision

The first thing that he learned was that his promotion to leadership was God’s decision. Joshua would lead the people, not because he put his name in the hat; not because he got the most votes, but because God chose him to lead.

Look at Deuteronomy, chapter 31, verses 14 and 15,

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him.” So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.

“Joshua, why are you going to lead this people?”

“Because God chose for me to lead.”

This realization does a couple of things.

- First, it discourages fleshly efforts; it discourages, among God’s people, ambition. In fact, the Latin word “ambition,” could be defined as, “canvassing for promotion”.

This happens all the time on the job where you work. It is almost guaranteed that someone in the office will, every time the boss comes around, sit up straight, work a little harder, and smile like it is a wonderful day. You, and everyone else, knows that the guy or gal is canvassing for a promotion. As soon as the boss leaves, the truth comes out, right?

It happens in the church as well. People reveal their piety to others so that people can go, “Ooh, ah.” In reality, however, they are canvassing for votes. Are we impressed? The trouble is, we often are.

- Realizing a promotion to leadership is God’s choice does something else, as well. It not only discourages fleshly efforts, but it encourages failing hearts.

There is not a leader alive who has not asked God, “Am I really supposed to be teaching this class? Am I really supposed to be directing this ministry? Am I really supposed to be the one out front?”

Do you know what the answer is? Not that you are the most qualified or the most talented or the most gifted, the answer that you hear from God, from this passage, is, “You are there because I chose you to be.”

I think this also encourages the person who may not be a leader. You may think, “Aren’t leaders more special to God?”

No, they are not.

You may also think, “Don’t leaders have a direct line to God – more than those who follow?”

No, they do not.

“Don’t leaders have God’s real attention.”

No.

Do you know why you are leading? Because God chose for you to lead. Do you know why you are not in a position of leadership? Because God chose for you not to lead.

Leadership involves hardship

The second lesson in leadership that Joshua learned is that leadership involves hardship.

Now, before we get to verse 16, I just want to tell you that this is a very exciting event in Joshua’s life. He is about to be commissioned into the ministry of leading these people.

One of the most exciting things that happened in our church was when we commissioned two men who were called into the ministry. I remember, in my own life, the day I was ordained. Twenty pastors and professors surrounded me and everyone was positive and it was a great day. Everything is exciting and you are on “cloud nine” at that time!

Now look at verse 16 of Deuteronomy, chapter 31. This is the commissioning service for Joshua; Joshua is standing there listening.

The Lord said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and . . .”

“ . . . follow Joshua . . .”

Oh, excuse me, “. . . this people will arise and . . .”, do what?

“ . . . play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.”

Now, imagine you are Joshua. Would you think, “Hey, this is great news! Wow! I’m so happy to be leading this people that, as soon as Moses dies, they’re going to rebel. Thanks, Lord.”?

We are not wired to take jobs like this. Let us be realistic for a second. Imagine you have just taken a coaching job. As soon as you take it, though, a voice from heaven says, “You won’t win one game.”

We do not think, “Wow! That’s the kind of coaching job I want to have!”

We all want to be on the winning team.

Yesterday, I had an experience of great joy as I watched my two five-years-old boys scamper back and forth on the soccer field. I was screaming at the top of my lungs. No one knows I am a preacher, and I want to keep it that way! The soccer league, for this age, has a rule of not keeping score. No one keeps score. These are five-year-olds and you want them to play to win, and believe me, I do! Oh, excuse me! The truth is out! I mean, I want them to have fun and enjoy themselves! All along the sideline, however, you hear the parents say, “What’s the score? What’s the score? What’s the score?” I am not part of that, but we have won two and tied one, just for your information!

You need to understand that, as Joshua enters this, the people of Israel will never capture the land that God has promised them. Never. Joshua will learn then, very quickly, that leadership involves hardship.

Leadership hinges on accountability to scripture

The third lesson Joshua would learn is that leadership hinges on accountability to scripture.

Turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 34, to an insightful verse, verse 9.

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom . . .

This does not say that Joshua was filled with the Holy Spirit; it says that he was filled with the spirit of wisdom. Wisdom, in the Bible, never relates to intellectual capacity; it never refers to I.Q. Wisdom, in the Bible, always relates to the person who understands the scriptures and who obeys the scriptures. Joshua was committed to knowing and obeying God’s Word. In fact, ladies and gentlemen, every person is capable of being a wise person.

Moses was a great leader. His overwhelming epitaph is in the last chapter of Deuteronomy and the first chapter of Joshua. Three times in nine verses, there is the phrase,

. . . *Moses My servant* . . .

Deuteronomy, chapter 34, tells us that there was no greater leader in the land and there will never be anyone as great, until the One greater than Moses comes – a reference to Christ.

Moses was a great man, but what does God say? He says, “Moses My servant . . . Moses My servant . . .”. He is saying that Moses knows the Word of God and obeys the Word of God.

Joshua had the same spirit of obedience. In fact, you probably know the very familiar phrase in Joshua, chapter 24. A little plaque hangs in many of your living rooms or dining rooms that says,

. . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Who said that? Joshua. This was not the statement of a new follower of God – Joshua said this when he was ninety-five years of age. He did not say it thinking, “Life is rosy; it’s going to be wonderful; no bumps”; he said that after he had been through life.

We need people in their forties, fifties, sixties, and older, now that they know what the battle is all about, now that they understand pressure like never before, to say,

. . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

The Announcement to Joshua

So, the announcement of leadership comes to Joshua then. Now turn to Joshua, chapter 1.

Look at verses 1 and 2a.

Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying, “Moses My servant is dead . . .”

To learn a little about that day, turn back to the last chapter of Deuteronomy. Look at verses 5 and 6 of chapter 34.

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, . . . but no man knows his burial place to this day.

Notice verse 6 says, “He buried him . . .” – with a capital “H”. No one was present but God. God performed the funeral; God buried the body, and no one knows where it is.

Now the Lord delivers the message to young Joshua, “Joshua, Moses is dead.”

A leader is not irreplaceable; not indispensable

We should add one additional lesson to the list of lessons on leadership at this point. A leader is not irreplaceable; not indispensable.

We will find out, in the book of Joshua, that God is not handicapped because Moses died. In fact, the Bible tells us that he died according to the word of the Lord. The last chapter of Deuteronomy tells us, in verse 7, that,

. . . his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated.

He was ready and raring to go, but he died. Why? Because God said, “The end of your life is here.”

God’s plans are not tied down, necessarily, to people. He uses us in His sovereign grace, but when he takes someone off the scene or to heaven, His plans never change; they do not even hiccup.

One of the great lessons of leadership, if you are in leadership, is that you are not indispensable. God can have someone else take your place.

Why was Joshua afraid?

So, God is not shaken, but from the rest of God’s word to Joshua, in chapter 1, it is obvious that Joshua is shaken up. In fact, four times, in chapter 1, God says,

. . . be strong and courageous . . .

God does not say that because Joshua is filled with courage, He says that because Joshua is lacking courage. He is saying, “Be strong, Joshua, don’t tremble; be courageous.”

The last phrase of chapter 1 is,

. . . be strong and courageous.

Why is this? Evidently because Joshua is filled with fear. He is terrified of leading two million people.

Why do you think Joshua would be afraid? I kind of propped my feet up on my desk and began to think, “Why was Joshua so terrified?”

I have some suggestions.

The death of a national leader can create a crises

- First, let me suggest that the death of a national leader can and usually does create a crises.

Perhaps some of you, who were living at the time, heard the news, “FDR is dead.” I am sure everyone wondered if Vice President Harry S. Truman could fill the shoes of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Eighteen years later, the announcement came over the news, “John F. Kennedy has been assassinated.” Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in. The death of a national leader creates a tremendous amount of crises in the hearts of people who follow.

Moses was a servant of God and an experienced leader, but was now dead. The leadership goes to Joshua. How much experience did he have? Almost none. There was the concern, from a human point of view, about this transition, “Can he do it?”

The death of a popular leader can produce a conflict in the people

- Let me suggest, secondly, that the death of a popular leader can produce a conflict in the people.

Now we know that Israel mourned the death of Moses for thirty days (Deuteronomy 34:8). This was a long period of time and they were not professional mourners. The nation was grieving over a beloved leader.

Moses might have been shocked to discover that they mourned for him for thirty days, but they did. They loved him. He was a great leader.

Think about this for a moment. Who was the President of the United States after Abraham Lincoln? Who was the British Prime Minister after Winston Churchill? These men just seem to be overshadowing epics of history.

Joshua, undoubtedly, is intimidated by the fact that a great leader has left his sandals to be filled, so to speak, by Joshua. He is somehow supposed to fill those sandals!? Look at the first chapter of the book of Joshua – even though it is supposed to introduce Joshua, Moses is mentioned eleven times.

I am sure there was a conflict in Joshua’s mind because he has the memory of a situation from forty years earlier. He remembers coming back from spying in the promised land with a report and telling the people, “We can take the land. God is good. If He is pleased with us, we can conquer.”

What did the people do? They picked up stones to stone him. So, he is thinking, “Now, wait a second! Forty years ago, they didn’t follow me. I could not influence them then, why will I be able to so now?”

I can just imagine the old critic saying, “Joshua, lead?! Ha, Ha, Joshua?!”

Have you ever balked at ministry or leadership? “If only I had her voice . . . If only I had his connections . . . If only I had her gifts . . . If only I had her personality . . . If only . . . If only . . . If only . . .”

What an “if only” game Joshua could have played as he was commissioned by God and given this ministry.

Take a look at Joshua, chapter 1, verse 2, again. God says,

Moses My servant is dead . . .

“. . . Whatever will we do now?” No. Perhaps,

Moses My servant is dead . . .

“. . . Joshua, you try as best you can to be like him.”

No. Notice that, in this chapter, God *never* tells Joshua to measure up to Moses. God never does tell Joshua, “Act like Moses. Fill his shoes.”

God, in fact, as we will discuss in our next session, tells Joshua to measure up to the Word.

The death of an effective leader can destroy continuity

- Let me suggest one more reason that Joshua might have felt afraid. The death of an effective leader can destroy continuity.

One of the main points of God’s communication to Joshua, in chapter 1, is, “Joshua, leaders may die, but I do not. Joshua, leaders will change, but I won’t.”

There is a continuity in God’s plan. His purposes and His plans cannot be obstructed. God will have His sovereign way. In other words, “Moses and people will change, but My purposes will *never* change.”

There is a continuity because of God’s character and because He never changes.

I like the statement one man made, when he said, “God doesn’t make plans, He has always had plans.”

Look at the way in which God establishes the promise of continuity, in verses 2 through 5 of chapter 1.

Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory. No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

“Joshua, will you fail?”

“Yes. But God won’t.”

Continue to verses 6 and 7a.

Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous . . .

Skip to verse 9.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

Look at the last phrase of verse 18.

. . . only be strong and courageous.

Application

Now, that is wonderful for Joshua, but what about us? In Hebrews, chapter 13, verses 5b and 6, Jesus Christ says to His beloved,

. . . “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” so that we confidently say, “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?”

Has God put some of your plans to death? Has God smashed your security; your crutch?

For nearly eighty years, Joshua had depended upon Moses. For eighty years, Joshua had heard God speak through Moses. For eighty years, Joshua had followed Moses and received direction from Moses. Now, Moses is dead.

Chapter 1 lets us know that there stands Joshua – not a man of great courage, but a man trembling and feeling all alone. God says to Joshua, “Moses is gone, but I am not.”

Perhaps He wants you to hear the same message this morning,

. . . I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you

Therefore, on the basis of that, be strong and very courageous.

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