

Joshua 1:10-18, Joshua and the People

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Overview

Zoom in:

Ch. 1-5: Preparation for Battle.

Ch. 1: Joshua commissioned. Three steps:

1:1-9, The Lord charges Joshua.

1:10-15, Joshua charges the people.

1:16-18, The people accept Joshua's leadership.

Lesson

One of the most fundamental principles of the Bible is that each person is individually responsible to God. In some cases and for specific purposes, God may establish the rule of one person over another: parent over child, husband over wife, magistrate over people, elders over assembly. But this rule is not to be assumed unilaterally or imposed by force.

10-15 shows us Joshua as a ruler.

1-9 shows that he must answer to God for how he rules.

16-18 shows that his rule can only be effective if the people submit under it.

10-15, Joshua Charges the People

Two distinct charges:

1. To the people in general, preparing them for a new order of life, no longer as wanderers, but as a conquering army.
2. To Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who have already received their inheritance on the east side of Jordan.

10-11, General: Prepare to Cross

Note the paradox of these two instructions:

11a, Prepare you victuals

1. "Victuals" = travel rations, food that can be prepared at the beginning of a journey and then last throughout it; cf. Ex 12:39; Jos 9:11.
2. "You" = "for yourselves."
3. For 40 years the Lord provided them with manna every morning. In fact, the manna was still coming; it does not cease until 5:12, after they have crossed the Jordan and celebrated the Passover. We don't know what they prepared, but it must have been a

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new experience, one that might have led them to think that God was taking less care of them now than heretofore.

11b, Ye shall ... go in to possess the land

In fact, far from ceasing his bounty toward them, he is really opening heaven's doors further than ever. They are finally on the verge of enjoying what he has been promising their people ever since Gen 15:7, possession of the land as a feudal grant from their divine Lord. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never had this. Neither did Moses or Aaron. But it shall be theirs.

Application

They must shift from manna to travel rations because now they have more responsibilities, and can no longer devote the time to picking up the manna every morning. The blessings are greater, but so are the responsibilities. 2 Cor. 9:6 on sowing and reaping.

12-15, RGM/2: Don't Forget your Pledge

Most of the nation would take encouragement from the fact that they were finally going to possess the land that had been promised their fathers. But two and a half tribes had already received their inheritance, on the east bank of Jordan, and now Joshua reminds them of the terms of their earlier grant.

13, The Historical Context

Read Num 32:1-33 for the full story of Moses' command, which was based on a direct request from RGM/2

14, The Command

1. Leave your wives, children, and cattle behind. A great act of faith, leaving them without protection.
2. Lead the people into battle. Note the modifiers:
 - "armed"—lit. "by fives," marching in battle array.
 - "before your brethren"—they are to go first, leading the way.
3. Help them obtain their possession as they helped you obtain yours. NB: the Lord gives rest, but the people must fight to take possession.
4. Then return to your own land and possess it.

Application

Phil. 2:4; 1 Cor. 10:24, 33; 1 Cor. 12. We are all members of one body, and need to support one another day by day, sometimes enjoying the support of others, at other times lending them our support, esteeming their happiness our own.

16-18, The People's Response

Two promises, each with a condition introduced by "Only." Note:

1. The promises are complementary. The first is positive, obligating the people to do something. The second is negative, describing the penalty if they do not do it.
2. The conditions are also complementary; between the two of them they cover 1:9, itself the summary of the Lord's charge to Joshua.

The Promise

16-17a, Positive.—Complete obedience to Joshua's instructions. They acknowledge that he now has taken Moses' position, and they accept him in that role.

18a, Negative.—They agree on the death penalty for anyone opposing Joshua's authority, an agreement that will be exercised in chapter 7 in the case of Achan.

Application.—Social order requires a clear understanding of who has what authority. It does not require that there be a total top-down ordering of authority, but where there is authority, it must be accepted and abided. Better not to have a leader than to pretend to have one and seek to evade his authority.

The Condition, 17b, 18b

The people quote 1:9 back to Joshua, inverting the order of the clauses. They can only submit to him if

- the Lord is truly with him; and
- he draws effectively on that presence for courage and strength.

Note that their first condition, "The Lord be with thee," effectively constitutes a prayer, while the second constitutes a word of encouragement.

Application.—The direction of this encouragement is unparalleled in the rest of the OT. Elsewhere it is the leader who encourages the people. But in this context gives us a critical lesson. Those who are led must uphold those who lead if they would be led effectively. The people of Israel here show us how to uphold those the Lord has given us for direction:

- pray for the Lord's presence with them;
- encourage them in their task.