

JOSHUA

Moses' Aide;
Servant of God



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Reading: Joshua 1.

Continuity and Discontinuity from Moses

The Book of Joshua is clearly a continuation of the end of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses, and Joshua immediately starts with “*after the death of Moses the servant of God*” (**Jos 1:1**), clearly indicating that the writer was keen to pick up where he left off. And this would again happen in the Book of Judges, which would start with “*after the death of Joshua*” (**Jud 1:1**). We are given a sequence of stories, separated by one specific person: Joshua. And the stories within clearly intended to show that Joshua would be the successor of Moses, in his duty to lead the whole community of Israel (as **Num 27:12-22** would attest). And there would be two similar signs which God performed which caused the whole community of Israel to submit to them; and that was the sign of the parting of water (in the case of Moses, the parting of the Red Sea, which result we see in **Ex 14:31** and in the case of Joshua the parting of the Jordan River which led to the people also submitting to him in **Jos 4:14**). All of these, and the many more preparations Moses had given Joshua (as will be detailed in this chapter), were the signs that Joshua succeeded Moses.

However, despite the glaring continuity from the story of Moses that most people would be able to identify, there was also a discontinuity; and many people miss this. Joshua never held the level of authority that Moses had, for despite the fact that God commanded Moses to appoint Joshua a leader over the whole community (**Num 27:15-17**), He nonetheless only commanded Moses to give Joshua *some* of his authority, not all (**27:20**); and Eleazar the priest, Aaron’s successor, would now stand alongside Joshua to obtain decisions for him (**27:21**). In fact, the discontinuity is so clearly concluded in **Deut 34:10**, which explained that there would be no subsequent prophet to whom God would speak face to face, as He did to Moses. What does this mean? That Moses was the number 1 ranked leader and Joshua was but an inferior second? No, I don’t believe that to have been the case. The main reason for the discontinuity, I believe, was because the nature by which Moses led Israel, and the nature by which Joshua would lead Israel was separated by one glaringly obvious characteristic. The Torah was called the Law of Moses for obvious reason. God gave the Torah to Moses. And Joshua would lead in an age when the Torah had already been given; and therefore there was a certain discontinuity. He was to be a leader who was called not to receive another set of Torah, but one who must lead according to that Torah; as detailed in **Jos 1:7-9**. The history of salvation had progressed; and therefore Joshua had to lead differently.

History’s Opportune Moment – God’s Providential Kairos

Joshua’s leading the people to Canaan came at an opportune time. The superpowers of the day had dwindled. The Hittites were weak, and Egypt’s influence had somewhat faded. And the Assyrians would not be strong enough until centuries later. Would this be the key that contributed to Joshua’s success where Moses had failed? No.

As Christians, we should know that our God is the God who works in and through history. And despite how natural it would seem, the king’s heart is in the Lord’s hand (**Prov 21:1**) and He alone works all things for the good of the elect (**Rom 8:28**). For was it not true that the Israelite’s wandering in the desert was a result of their disobedience, and that one generation’s passing (excluding Joshua and Caleb) was the punishment from God (**Num 14:26-35**)? And so, when the time had fully come, God called Joshua to lead the people to the Land.

But despite the weakening of the Superpower nations of the time, there was no way to describe the task at hand to be an easy feat. Joshua's first assignment would be Jericho. And Jericho was one of the oldest civilization of the ANE, which during the late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC) was already very rich in its material cultureⁱ, and way more superior than Israel, who consisted of homeless ex-slaves in the midst of a wandering. It was a well-fortified city with an army to match.

The task at hand was enormous, but the God of history was with them.

Not an Emergency Leader

Joshua was not an emergency leader that Moses had to suddenly appoint because God said he would not get into the Promised Land. Moses had been preparing him; and furthermore, when looked at from the perspective of God's eternal plan, we need to know that Joshua was not a Plan B.

Joshua was Moses' aide ever since his youth (**Num 11:28**), and from that time onward to the day of Moses' death, Joshua faithfully served as his aide. However, unbeknownst to most, God through Moses was preparing a successor, a new leader. And therefore, to understand the events in the Book of Joshua, we should firstly look back to how the previous Books described him; how God prepared him to be what he is in the beginning of the Book of Joshua.

- **Preparation as a Military Leader.** The very first mention of Joshua was in **Exodus 17** when Moses commanded Joshua to lead a battle against the Amalekites. It was here that Joshua learned that his battle depended not on his skills, or the weapons he possessed. The tides of the battle depended on the hands of Moses – whether it was uplifted or lowered. Of course, this had nothing to do with Moses' hands, but rather because the action was done in faith and obedience to God. The lesson was simple: The battle belongs to the Lord, whether past, present or future. The methodologies might be different. In Numbers 10, they are commanded to blow the trumpets so they will be remembered by God. In Joshua 6, the seemingly strange instruction was to march around the city. Whatever the methodologies, they were not of primary importance. God uses different methodologies so that the people wouldn't misunderstand that to be some sort of magic formula. No, the victories were granted because they had faith and were obedient to the instructions given by God. As David would summarize it, *"it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's"* (**1 Sam 17:47**).

This lesson is of the utmost importance for Joshua, because of the role he would later on take. As I have mentioned above, Canaan is said to be the oldest civilization in the Ancient Near East (ANE henceforth) world. They survived because of their advanced culture, which included military might. They were way more sophisticated than the Israelites were. Wanderers of the desert are called on to fight an advanced culture. Now, one verse struck as God's intentional plan to use this event as a lesson for Joshua. In **Ex 17:14**, God commanded Moses to make sure that Joshua would hear of what God was doing to the Amalekites through Moses and Joshua. God was specifically preparing Joshua to be the military leader that he would eventually become.

- **Preparation as a Spiritual Leader.** Joshua was the one whom God allowed to come with Moses to Mount Sinai when Moses was to receive the Ten Commandments (see **Ex 24:13**). Although Joshua might not have gone all the way up, he was there for the whole length of the time and witnessed the event from up close. He would also stay behind at the Tent of Meeting after Moses is done (**Ex 33:7-11**), which meant that he had a lot of exposure to the worship regulations that God had given. Being a spiritual leader is of the utmost importance for the Israel which is now under a direct Theocracy. Later on in the

story, at the very beginning of his ordination as leader of all Israel, the very first thing that God reminded Joshua was to obey and to keep all the words of the Law of Moses (**Jos 1:7-9**).

- **Preparation as a Moral Leader.** Joshua was amongst the 12 who were sent as spies to the Promised Land. However, one thing that is of interest to note was that this was the only place where the Bible calls Joshua by his original name, Hoshea (**Num 13:8, 16**). Joshua was the name given to him by Moses. But at the event of the spying, he was Hoshea. I think that this was appropriate because Joshua who all throughout acts as Moses' aide is at this moment acting as a representative of his tribe. It had nothing to do with being Moses' aide, and therefore his original name, the name by which his own people knew him when he was young, was used.

But either way, this event was the fruit of Joshua's faith. Therein, he proved that he understood it that the battle belonged to the Lord, and it did not matter as much that the enemies he was facing could snap his neck with but the smallest gesture. And in **Num 14:5-9**, Joshua proved that he was the spiritual leader the people needed (although at the time, not the leader they wanted), as both he and Caleb tried to encourage the entire Israelite assembly not to rebel against the LORD. *Hoshe'a*, which name meant "salvation," was herein acknowledging that he was not the source of salvation, but rather God. And therefore, his name would be rightly changed to *Yehoshu'a*, which meant "the LORD is salvation." A biblical leader would never lead the people to come after him; but rather after God. Joshua's leading exhibited this nobility.

Not the Perfect Leader

We have seen how noble Joshua's character was as a would-be leader. However, the fact that he had been merely the aide of the towering figure of Moses may mean that his confidence was not as great. And admittedly, this was an enormous mantle to inherit, and even after all the preparation he was put through, Joshua needed to be constantly reminded. That is why, even after Moses had known that he would not enter the Promised Land, God continually commanded Moses to encourage Joshua for the express reason that he was chosen as leader (read **Deut 1:38; 3:28, 37**).

And later on, even during his installment as leader, both God and the people would continue to encourage him with this repeated exhortation, "only be strong and very courageous" (**Jos 1:6, 7, 9, 18**).

Joshua was not the natural leader who felt comfortable to lead the mass. Nevertheless, he was called by God. And we can witness from the Scriptures how God often calls the weak and the foolish for this reason: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him" (**1 Cor 1:27-29**).

Yeshu'a ha Massiach, the True Joshua

But let me continue the verse of 1 Cor 1. "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord'" (**1 Cor 1:30-31**).

Why are we called not to boast? Because we tend to boast in our own strength and abilities. But as the story of Moses and Joshua tells us, they were not perfect leaders who were spotless and blameless. Their abilities and successes were only there so that we would look at the One who enabled them. Their failure and

weaknesses were there to remind us that there was another leader who would come, in the form of a perfect spotless Lamb. And where Joshua was called to lead the people in accordance to the Law of Moses, to not depart from it to the left or to the right, the next Joshua would come to accomplish the whole Law.

And just as Moses led the people out of the slavery of Egypt and Joshua led them into the Promised Land, this eventual leader, similarly named *Yeshu'a* (short for *Yehoshu'a*), would lead His people out of the slavery of sin, and into an eternal rest with God. He is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior; the One that Moses and Joshua was waiting for; and the One we should look to.

Soli Deo Gloria!