

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

Joshua 1:1-7

Moses, God's great leader of the Israelites, having brought them out of the land of bondage and through the terrible wilderness, was about to leave them. Ready to enter the Promised Land, they had to part with their great leader, Moses, who was not permitted to enter on account of his previous disobedience to God. The people had become attached to Moses and had learned to trust his judgment and to follow his leadership, even though they frequently murmured against him.

Moses' death marked a crisis in the career of the Israelites. He was taken from them just when they seemed to need him most, which caused a peculiar sadness among the people. God buries His servants when their tasks are completed, but His work must go on. And it must be remembered that His work does not depend entirely on any one worker, no matter how great he may be. Nobody is indispensable. When one of God's workmen is called home, He always has someone to fill the vacancy. He always has someone in training to meet every emergency as it arises. At every critical period in history, God raised up someone whom He could use in the accomplishment of His purposes. Without a single exception, when even the mightiest of men fell, the work had to go on, so new leadership was secured. People must not sit still and mourn over their beloved dead, but they must arise and carry on the work which they left.

We do not know much about the early life of Joshua. His name is worthy and a significant one, meaning "Jehovah is salvation." The relationship between Moses and Joshua was beautiful and significant. At the first Joshua is seen as the servant of Moses, loyal to his leader, a most trustworthy and valiant captain. One of his conspicuous characteristics was his unswerving loyalty to Moses, God's appointed leader.

Years of training in the ranks of God's forces prepared Joshua for the position of successor to Moses. Association with Moses for forty years afforded Joshua sufficient practical experience to qualify him for the leadership of Israel. When he assumed leadership, he had proved himself to be a man of faith, a man of steadfastness, and a man of spiritual integrity. He had great faith in God and displayed remarkable devotion to Him. He was a man of decision. There was never any wavering, hesitating or delaying when the way of duty had been made clear to him. He is one of the few Old Testament characters against whose name there is no reproach.

I. Joshua's Call. Joshua 1:1.

For a month the people had been mourning over the death of Moses, so the time had arrived for them to cease their mourning and to proceed into Canaan. Therefore, God very definitely called Joshua to particular service for Him. God said, "Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan." Separation, service and satisfaction were involved in this call from God. He was told to cross Jordan, to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, and to enjoy the marvelous blessings that were in store for them there.

II. Joshua's Challenge. Joshua 1:2-4.

A principle of vast significance is set forth here. God is very generous, and His gifts are beyond calculation. But His gifts must be received. While God gave all Palestine to the children of Israel, only so much of it as their feet trod upon actually became theirs to enjoy.

In meeting the conditions attached to possessing the land, God was their enabling. As in all of God's dealings, it was all of grace. God promised that He would go with them and drive out all of the enemies, if only they would believe Him enough to take Him at His word and act accordingly. All they needed to do to possess the land was to cross over the Jordan and occupy it. These glorious promises which God gave to Joshua were calculated to strengthen him and to challenge him.

III. Joshua's Companion. Joshua 1:5.

God promised Joshua a blessed companionship. Although Moses had been taken away from him, God was still with him. Therefore, he was assured that he would have the same protection and power that Moses had. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."

In this companionship there was complete victory, for God said, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life." So, Joshua was encouraged greatly by the assurance of God's constant and unfailing presence with him. When God said, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee," He was promising both His presence and His power to Joshua. He was promising him to enable him to do all that would be required of him. With the duty there inevitably comes the power to discharge it, for God will never fail His own.

No man is able to withstand God's servant who is doing God's will, in God's way, at God's time, and for God's glory. "No weapon that is formed against him shall prosper." No power of man or Satan can defeat the person who does the will of God.

IV. Joshua's Courage. Joshua 1:6-7.

God called upon Joshua to be strong and courageous. Surely, Joshua had every good reason to be strong and courageous. God had promised to be with him, to give him victory over his enemies, and to strengthen him for his tasks. He was challenged to be strong and courageous to divide the land, and to observe God's Word, remembering always that "the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Instead of permitting a sense of unfitness, unworthiness, or unwillingness to deter him or to turn him aside, his attitude was that of readiness to do as he had been commanded. His attitude is accurately expressed in the words of Romans 1:14, "As much as in me is, I am ready."

But, observe that the foundation of courage is faith in God's Word, nurtured by meditation on it "day and night." Only those who meditate on God's Word to learn His will can do God's work acceptably. The need for diligent searching of God's Word by His people cannot be overstressed.

Joshua proved that he did have the courage which comes from complete dependence upon God, and throughout his long life his loyalty to God was demonstrated clearly.

Today God is calling for real Christian optimism on the part of His servants. How it must grieve Him the way some professed Christians go around meaning, groaning and complaining that it is practically impossible to do any great work for the Lord in these days. God's children need never fear when He is with them. He will provide the necessary strength for every emergency.