

What can we learn from Joshua's strength and courage?

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"Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go" ([Joshua 1:7](#)).

When you look back over your past, do you see a single conglomeration of events, or do you notice a few clear, definable points of decision that make up the framework of your existence? Most likely, you immediately think of one or two key moments involving critical decisions that shaped your life into what it is now. When we consider the life of Joshua, whom God appointed to lead Israel into the Promised Land, two definite landmark moments are instantly prominent. To understand this man, we must first understand these two life-changing events.

COURAGEOUS

Joshua first steps into clear view in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Numbers. Up to that point, we see only occasional references to Joshua as Moses' servant. Here, however, we see that he is included in the list of Moses' most trusted men. He was so trusted, in fact, that he was among an envoy of 12 spies sent into the Promised Land to judge the condition of the territory.

Walking in shadows, Joshua and his comrades witnessed the magnificence of the land. His heart was filled to bursting at the thought of calling this place home. But his excitement turned to anguish as he heard ten of the spies all except his friend Caleb give a disappointing and horrifying report to Moses and the people. The other spies, it seemed, were more focused on the stature and number of the opposing army than on the condition of the land.

Joshua could not believe his ears. He and Caleb responded to the others' report by crying out and tearing their clothes a sure sign of their angst and sorrow. (**[Numbers 14:6-8](#)**) They did their best to reassure the people of the beauty of the land and to correct the false report of the enemy's apparent might. However, the population was more inclined to believe the fears of the ten and therefore discounted Joshua's testimony.

He then made his most impassioned plea, **"Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey" ([Numbers 14:9](#))**. Simply put, he was calling the people to take courage and be assured that their almighty God could overcome any enemy. But the crowd's response was the picture of cowardice rather than opposing the pessimistic spies, the assembly turned against Joshua and Caleb and even threatened their lives. They thought it was easier to silence the call to courage than to heed it.

Faced with this rebellion, God was inclined to smite the entire congregation and start over with Moses and a few select men. **(Numbers 14:12)** However, after Moses' intercession, the Lord allowed the nation to live, although He would not permit them to enter the Promised Land. Instead, they were made to walk aimlessly in the desert for forty years one year for every day the wicked spies surveyed the land.

Of that entire generation, only Joshua and Caleb would be allowed to enter the land after the years of wandering. For his faithfulness and courage in the face of fear, Joshua would not only live to see the land again, but he would also be used to bring the new generation into it.

STRONG

Forty years later, we see the second watershed moment in Joshua's life. The population of Israel at that time included only the children of the original exiles, plus Moses, Caleb, and Joshua. As the nation's wandering drew to a close, Moses received difficult news from the Lord: he would not be the one to lead the people into the land. Instead, the role of leadership was to be passed to Joshua, the faithful soldier, servant, and spy. **(Numbers 27:12-23)**

Remembering the response of the nation the last time he stood at the city boundaries, Joshua was no doubt unsettled. It was there, in fact, that the entire population had been determined to kill him four decades earlier. Yet, here he stood again, tasked with leading his former attackers' children into their new home. This was certainly a challenge for the aging commander, now most likely in his eighties.

Looking into the heart of His chosen instrument, the Lord spoke words of encouragement to Joshua. And, as if to bookend the entire ordeal, God told him to do that which Joshua himself had told the people years before: be strong, be brave, and trust God. **(Joshua 1:7)** No doubt smiling a bit at the echo from the past, Joshua stood firm, took command, and led his people into an amazing victory.

LEADER AND SERVANT

We are often guilty of downplaying the role of Joshua in our Old Testament readings. Many, in fact, picture him as a young man nipping at the heels of his mentor, Moses. However, Joshua was far from a mere apprentice. Even a cursory glance at his extraordinary life reveals a pillar of strength, courage, conviction, dedication, and righteousness that is rarely seen elsewhere.

Joshua knew what it meant to be a slave. Born under harsh Egyptian rule, he and his entire nation bore the yoke of slavery and intolerable cruelty. Facing the lash of his master's whip every day, how could Joshua have imagined one day leading his people into the richest land conceivable?

Joshua also knew what it meant to be a soldier. These days, believers are often confused over perceived contradictions between the roles of "Christian" and "soldier." For Joshua, however, there was no contradiction. He was a follower of God, and he was a

military genius. He followed orders, commanded troops, outlined strategy, planned attacks, and led his people where they needed to go. And he did every bit of this under the guidance of his Supreme Commander, Almighty God.

Furthermore, Joshua knew what it meant to be a servant. Obviously gifted and set apart for special work, he never overstepped his own humility. From early childhood, he served his master Moses, all the while watching the wisdom and powerful faith demonstrated by his mentor. **(Numbers 11:28)** By allowing himself to be teachable, Joshua was used by God in incredible, unexpected ways.

Joshua was simultaneously leader and servant, spy and statesman. He was filled with God's Spirit **(Deuteronomy 34:9)** and guided by His Word. **(Joshua 1:8)** He was a warrior, yet a pastor. He was, for a time, God's chosen instrument to do great things. And the recipe for his success is found in two little words, which come straight from God: strength and courage.

Following the commands of our Leader is not often easy, but it is always worth the struggle. By empowering Joshua with strength and courage, God plucked him from the pit of slavery and sent him to knock down the door of enemy lands. God's strength and courage are just as strong today. Where might He be sending you? For what purpose might the Lord call you to gird up your own strength and courage? Once you receive your marching orders, start walking and be amazed at what God will accomplish in and through you.