

# Joshua, Victorious By Faith!

Joshua 1:9

**“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”** (Joshua 1:9)

What tremendous words of encouragement these were when they were first spoken to Joshua more than three thousand years ago as Israel was preparing to embark on its conquest of Canaan! What powerful words of encouragement they can be today as believers endeavour to combat evil and extend God's Kingdom!

Some years ago Premier Khrushchev was speaking before the Supreme Soviet. He was being severely critical of the late Premier Joseph Stalin. While he was speaking someone from the audience sent up a hastily scribbled note. It read in part, “What were you doing when Stalin committed all these atrocities?”

Khrushchev shouted back, “Who sent up that note?” Not a person stirred. “I'll give him one minute to stand up!” thundered Khrushchev. The seconds ticked off until the minute had expired. Still no one moved.

“All right then, I'll tell you what I was doing. I was doing exactly what the author of this note is doing right now. Nothing! I was afraid to be counted!”

Fear can do that to the best of us. It can demoralize and discourage, paralyze and petrify, and ultimately lead to despair. It can keep us from witnessing for Christ; from taking our stand against the evils of our time; from boldly extending God's Kingdom in a secular world.

That is the way it is today, and the way it was in Joshua's time. The Book of Joshua gives the history of Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan. There is a very basic and tremendous truth taught in Joshua; *the just shall live by faith in God.*

The truth is that we must live by faith in God because we are finite. Only God is infinite. Only God understands all realities. His knowledge is complete while ours is fragmentary. He sees the big picture while we glimpse only various pieces of the puzzle. Nowhere is this more pertinent than in the conquest of Caanan.

Many believers recoil from the idea that earlier Israel had been commanded by God to destroy the Canaanites and take their land (Deut. 7:2; 10-10-20). It seems out of harmony with the alternate Biblical picture of God as a God of holiness and love. Has God not said, “Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not covet?” Why, then, was Joshua commanded to wipe out the nations who inhabited Canaan? From our limited perspective it just doesn't make any sense. It seems to cast God in a bad light. It can cause us to doubt God's goodness.

But we need to ask ourselves, “How can God be a God of holiness and love and not be a God of wrath against evil?” Evil is at the root of all the world's problems. Evil needs to be judged and dealt with. The Caananites were notorious for their gross evil practices that were an abomination to the Lord.

Then, we need to remember that God had already given the land of Palestine, or Canaan as it was then called, to Abraham centuries earlier. In Genesis 15:18 the Lord had said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, Euphrates."

Now, four centuries have passed. Israel has been liberated from bondage in Egypt by Moses, and Joshua is preparing to lead her into Canaan, the land of Promise. What we need to understand is that Israel did not go into Canaan to murder, plunder, and steal the land of godly, righteous people.

The Israelites were returning as God's chosen people, as instruments to inflict judgment upon sin and sinners. God often uses man to punish man, nation to punish nation, and such punishment was long overdue the Canaanites.

In Genesis 15:13-16, here is what God had said to Abraham with respect to God's program for him and the future nation of Israel:

**"Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves [Egypt], and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."**

It is evident from this that God in His patience was going to give the residents of Canaan an opportunity to change their evil ways. In His grace He gave them more than 400 years, but they did not repent. By the time of the Exodus from Egypt the cup of iniquity of the Amorites, which included the other nations also in Canaan, was becoming full to the brim. Canaan was filled with every kind of depravity and abomination, including sexual perversity, idol worship, and ritual human sacrifice.

Israel did not come into the land under the impulse of the lust of conquest. They came as executioners of God's divine wrath against people so vile that the only course open to God was to judge them. It would have proved disastrous for Israel to enter the land and then intermingle with the Canaanites. If Israel became like the Canaanites it would eventually bring destruction on God's own people.

This is the scene at the beginning of chapter one. Israel is poised to enter the land, but there is fear and perhaps even despair. Moses, their great leader and worker of miracles, is dead. But God has a message for Israel: heroes pass away, but the power that made them still remains – the power of the Almighty! As God addresses Joshua and commissions him as Moses' replacement, the message is that God's presence and power will continue to be Israel's assurance of victory. Listen to what the Lord says:

**"I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses ... No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you ... Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."**

But there is a requirement stipulated in vv. 7-8:

**"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."**

It is required of believers that we be strong and courageous if we are ever to be of any use in extending God's Kingdom. Fear is the parent of many human woes: fear of conflict, fear of shame, fear of failure.

Fear exaggerates difficulties, shrinks from challenges, neglects responsibility, postpones duty, and finally ends up in the bitterness of despair. It keeps believers from speaking out for Christ on the moral issues of the day; it keeps us from resisting what is wrong and boldly asserting what is right; it retards the spread of God's Kingdom with its values, blessings, and life principles. How often did Jesus say, "Fear not!" How often does his Word call us from fear to victory!

What is the secret of overcoming our fears? It is to focus on God's presence and His many promises found in His Word. God's Word is to be the pattern for our thoughts and actions as we face life's difficulties and our enemies. If we are to have courage, it can exist only on the basis of faith as we remember God and the promises He has given in His Word.

The Lord clearly tells Joshua that the key to success in the Christian life is found only when we saturate our minds with the Word of God, being careful to do everything written in it.

Courage depends upon faith, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God. So says Paul the Apostle in his letter to the Romans (10:17). Faith depends upon the promises. And the fulfillment of the promises depends upon the faithfulness of the Promiser – God Himself! That is where we have great difficulty today. We have such difficulty trusting God, believing His Word, and obeying it. We find it so easy to turn away from the Word to the left or the right.

Why is this the case? Maybe it is because of our inability to see the big picture, the full picture as God sees it. Maybe it's because we are unaware of the many dangers that lurk in a fallen world. Perhaps it's because we feel hemmed in and restricted by God's Word and His commands.

While on vacation this summer we spent much time with our grandchildren. Elijah, who is three, is a study in perpetual motion. He never seems to stop. He wants to go everywhere and he would rather run than walk. He's fascinated with cars and trucks, but he is oblivious to the danger of darting out onto the road. More than once I had to take hold of him and turn him away from the road.

One day I was walking with Elijah on the pier at Steveston. I could only think of the water on three sides and what could happen if he were to fall in. But he was totally unaware of the danger. Once again I had to direct him with a firm hand.

I've thought about how Elijah must have perceived those experiences near the roadway and on the pier. To him it must have seemed that I was hemming him in, restricting his freedom, spoiling his plans. But from my perspective I was only protecting him from dangers of which he was unaware. That's what God does for us by way of His commands.

What we so desperately need to understand is that in the commands of the Lord there is freedom and victory:

- The writer of Psalm 119 says, "I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free" (v. 32).
- "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts" (v. 45).
- "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (v. 105).
- "Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me" (v. 133).

The Apostle John wrote, “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:3-4).

Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32).

Who can we believe? Who can we trust? The answer is that we can believe God, of whom the Bible says, “He cannot lie.” We can put our faith in God who cannot be unfaithful. We can take our stand under His banner who cannot be defeated. This is what Joshua did, and he became Israel's second greatest leader, Joshua the conqueror, second only to Moses the liberator! We Joshua did we can also do.

We are not called to take up the weapons of conventional war. Our weapons are different from those of the world; we wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Our weapons are truth and righteousness, justice and moral purity. We are called to go forth into a world not unlike Canaan with the message of Christ. And our God says to us: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”