

A Pastor's Perspective: On Joshua 1:6–9

“God uses the confidence and bravery of ordinary people to carry out his expectations”

The writer of Joshua opens with a riveting scene. Israel is poised along the Jordan River with the land of promise before them and God commanding Joshua to lead the people across the water (vv. 1–2). The boundaries of the land are identified (vv. 3–4). God asserts a promise: he is with Joshua, and will never leave him (v. 5). Then the opening verses close with God's expectation of his people: “Be strong and brave!” (vv. 6–9, NET).

God's exhortation to “be strong and brave” (קַיָּוֶה and בָּרָאָוּ), repeated three times in verses 6–9, stresses a familiar point. Moses had already told the people to “be strong and brave” during the commission of Joshua as Israel's new leader (Deut. 31:6, 23). The first occurrence of “be strong and brave” in Joshua (v. 6) underscores God's expectation: “They are in no way to be passive, but they are to prepare themselves, take heart, and have backbone to fight” (John D. Currid, *Strong and Courageous: Joshua Simply Explained* 2011, 25). In this historical setting, God's people are to act on their conviction that God has promised them land and will be with them in laying claim to it. God expects his people to accept their role in this two-fold relationship (cf. Rom. 4:21). They are to step out and act on their faith with confidence and boldness.

In the second occurrence (vv. 7–8), God's people are to obey God's word. Strength and bravery are necessary for obedience. The expression not to turn to the “right or to the left” is an all-inclusive idiom that speaks of God's expectation for (1) complete obedience (“act carefully”), (2) oral reading (“leave your lips”), and (3) “memorization” (NET, מִנְהָגָה) of God's word. For the original readers, God's word would have been limited to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Joshua's final occurrence of “be strong and brave” (v. 9) appears with two antithetical statements: “do not tremble” and “do not to be dismayed” Fearlessness should define them. Similar statements also appear in Deuteronomy (1:21, 29; 7:21; 20:3; 31:6, 8). The reason (כִּי) to be fearless is simply because Yahweh will be with his people as they step out and conquer the land he has promised them.

As it was expected for the original readers, so too is it for God's people today. We are to be convinced of our faith, to live it confidently and bravely. Mel Gibson's movie, *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), tells a story about Desmond Doss. He was a conscientious objector during World War II who had a conviction about carrying, shooting, and killing another person because of God's command “do not kill.” What is to be admired about Doss was the recognition that his objection to killing was a *personal conviction* (cf. James 4:17). He never imposed his belief about “killing” onto others, and yet he exhibited confidence and boldness to live out his faith (cf. Rom. 14:13–23). His story is an example of an ordinary person God used not only for Doss's personal growth, but also for the glory of God. The point is simply this: *God uses ordinary people like you and me to carry out his expectations as we live out our faith with confidence before others.*

Herbert W. Bateman IV
President of the Cyber-Center for Biblical Studies