

THE FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND: THE STRONG CHARGES AND ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE AND JOSHUA DEUTERONOMY 31:01–08

Introduction

There are occasions when a person needs to be stirred to arise and carry out his duties. At times, the person needs strong encouragement. At other times, the same person needs a strong warning. He needs to be warned of the consequences of his behaviour in order to stir him into action.

The Israelites needed both the charge of encouragement and a strong warning. Moses, the dear servant of God, was aged — now 120 years old. He was soon to pass from the scene. These are the last days of his life upon earth. He will have only a few more meetings to share with the people; therefore, he has to prepare them for his departure.

The Israelites must be encouraged in their faith, encouraged to hang on to the hope of the promised land, to the wonderful inheritance to be given them by God. Moreover, there are some practical matters that the people must handle before Moses leaves them. The mantle of leadership is to be passed on to Joshua, so a commissioning service must be held. Also, the *Book of the Law* needs to be entrusted into the hands of the nation's leadership. A special worship service also needs to be established for the reading and learning of the law. So much to be done in so little time.

How could the dear aged servant of God do all this with just a few days remaining upon earth? How could he both encourage and warn the people — do all he could to strengthen their faith — and handle all the practical matters in so brief a time? How was the dear aged servant of God going to close out his ministry in the most effective way possible? What was he going to say to the people? What were to be his last words?

Keep in mind that Moses, this dear aged servant of God, was one of the greatest men of human history, not only in the minds of men, but also in the estimation of God. Moses was one of the two men who appeared with God's own Son, the LORD Jesus Christ, on the mount of transfiguration. With this passage begins some of the final words of Moses to the people of God: a message for people of all generations. Note that he gives five strong charges of encouragement and a strong warning to the people of God: *The Final Preparations for Entering the Promised Land: Five Strong Charges of Encouragement and Warning*, Deuteronomy 31:1-29.

- I. The charge and strong encouragement given to the people (vv. 1 -6).
- II. The charge and encouragement given to Joshua: the commissioning service to appoint him as the new leader (vv. 7-8).
- III. The charge given to the leaders and priests, the ministers of God: to read and teach the law (vv. 9-13).
- IV. The charge of God to Moses and Joshua — given by God Himself (vv. 14-23).
- V. The final charge by God's servant to the Levites (ministers) (vv. 24-29).

I. *Deuteronomy 31:01–06 The Charge and Strong Encouragement Given to the People*

A strong charge and encouragement was given to the people by the aged servant of God. Moses had summoned all the people together, and now he was about to address them, knowing that his days upon earth were rapidly drawing to a close. This is a touching scene, for it is the picture of an aged leader spending his last days upon earth with the dear people he loved so much. For 40 years he had led the Israelites, living with them day in and day out and struggling with them through all the trials and temptations of life. He had personally experienced the mighty hand of God using him to deliver the people out of Egyptian slavery. He had walked hand in hand with the people for forty years, suffering through the wilderness wanderings. He had experienced both victory and defeat with the people, and he knew that they were basically a stubborn and stiff-necked people toward God. Nevertheless, this aged servant loved his dear people, the Israelites. What would he say to them in one of his final hours with them? What was upon his heart? His heart was obviously tender toward them; yet knowing they were hard and stiff-necked, what could he say in these final days that would arouse them to follow God wholeheartedly? Note the Scripture and outline:

1. Moses declared that his death was rapidly approaching (v. 2). He was soon to go home to be with the LORD. This he knew, for he was 120 years old. But there was another fact that the people needed to know: he was forbidden by God to enter the promised land. Why? Because years before he had disobeyed God and shown arrogance before the people at the waters of Meribah. The Israelites had apparently been forced to camp at Meribah, a place where there was little or no water. As a result, they began to grumble and complain, even to the point of threatening the life of Moses. But in mercy, God stepped forth and instructed Moses to gather the people before a particular rock. There Moses was to speak to the rock before the very eyes of the people, and water would come gushing out of the rock. However, in anger and hostility toward the people, Moses began to speak to the people and not to the rock, accusing the people of being rebels. Displaying a shameful arrogance, he failed to give God the full credit and honour for producing the water: he claimed that it was both he and God who had provided the miracle for the people. This was a disobedience and arrogance that God could not accept, for the evil was committed in a public meeting right before the

people. As a result, God had to chastise His dear servant. He was barred from ever entering the promised land. (See note, Num 20:7-13.)

Moses was heartbroken. No doubt, every time he thought about or had to mention his chastisement, it cut him to the core. But now, it was time to get the point across to his dear people, for they were soon to cross the Jordan. When they entered the promised land, he would not be with them. This fact must be settled in their minds and hearts.

2. Moses knew that the people must be encouraged. God Himself would be with them. They could rest assured of His presence and guidance (vv. 3-5). In fact, the LORD would actually cross over ahead of them and do three wonderful things for them:
 - a. God would lead the Israelites and destroy the enemies of the promised land. The people could rest assured that they would secure the land promised by God (v. 3).
 - b. God would raise up a new leader, Joshua, to take the place of Moses (v. 3). God would not leave the people stranded, without leadership. He would give them a very capable leader, a man who had already proven himself:

=> as a military leader (Exo 17:9-16)

=> as a spy (Num13:1-16)

=> as a leader of strong faith, decision, obedience and courage, standing up for the truth — even against all odds (Num 14:6-9)

=> through training and service in leadership, being personally trained by Moses (Num 11:28; Josh 1:1)

Joshua had been prepared for leadership as much as a person could be. The people could rest assured in his guidance, for they had witnessed the proof of his leadership for years.

- c. God would give total and complete victory over all the enemies of His people (v. 4). Moses declares that the LORD will give the very same kind of victory He had given over the Amorites, over King Sihon and Og (v. 4).

The people had every right to stand encouraged. They had the wonderful promise of God's presence and guidance, the promise of a new leader, and the glorious promise of complete victory over all enemies who stood before them. This was the strong encouragement the aged servant of God, facing the final days of his ministry, gave to his dear people.

3. Now, he gave them a very straightforward charge: be strong and courageous (v. 6)! As you march into the promised land, do not fear nor be terrified by the enemies who oppose you. The LORD your God will be with you. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Note that the people's strength and courage would not come from the power of their armed forces nor from their own abilities and strategies to conquer the enemy. On the contrary, their strength and courage would come from God Himself. This is a strong

charge for the people to be focused upon God, not upon the enemy; to be focused upon trusting God for victory instead of the arm of the flesh. They were to believe and have confidence in God, in His presence and power.

Thought 1. As we march to the promised land of heaven, the one thing we want is a full and victorious life. We want to experience all the abundance of life, walking triumphantly through all the trials and temptations that confront us. Simply stated, we want fullness of life and victory over all the enemies that attempt to defeat us, enemies such as...

- accidents
- disease
- broken relationships
- abuse
- mistreatment
- anger
- lawlessness
- violence
- immorality
- drug addiction
- death
- war
- unemployment
- financial
- difficulty

The enemies that confront and attempt to defeat us are innumerable. But victory over all enemies can be attained. The power to conquer each one is at our disposal. We can be victorious throughout life and experience the fullness of life. This is the promise of God. The same charge and encouragement given to the Israelites is applicable to us. Note what Scripture says:

- (1) We must be strong and courageous. We must not fear nor be terrified by the enemies who confront us throughout life.

1 Cor 16:13 *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.*

Eph 6:10-13 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

Phil 1:28 *Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved — and that by God.*

2 Tim 2:1 *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

1 Pet 5:8-10 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

1 Kng 2:2 *“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, act like a man.”*

2 Chr 15:7. *But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.*

Josh 1:6 *Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.*

Josh 10:25 *Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.”*

Josh 23:6-10 *“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.”*

(2) We can be strong and courageous because of God’s presence and guidance. As we face the enemies of this world, God will be with us and never forsake us.

Mat 28:20 *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

John 16:13 *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”*

Gen 28:15 *“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”*

Exo 33:14 *The LORD replied, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

Deut 20:1 *When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you.*

Psa 23:2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.*

Psa 25:9 *He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*

Psa 48:14 *For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.*

Psa 73:24 *You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*

Isa 30:21 *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”*

Isa 43:2 *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

II. Deuteronomy 31:07–08 The Charge and Encouragement Given to Joshua: The Commissioning Service to Appoint Him as the New Leader

There was the strong charge and encouragement given to Joshua. This was the commissioning service to appoint Joshua as the new leader of the Israelites. A public commissioning service was needed so the people would know that the mantle of

leadership was now being passed to Joshua. By witnessing the commissioning service and seeing the confidence of Moses in Joshua, the people would be encouraged. They would begin to look to Joshua for leadership.

1. The commissioning charge was strong and clear: be strong and courageous (v. 7). Both strength and courage were needed, for Joshua would bear two heavy responsibilities:

=> the responsibility of leading the Israelites into the promised land

=> the responsibility of dividing the land among the tribes

But Joshua was given not only responsibility, he was given a most wonderful privilege. He was the person chosen to lead God's people in the fulfilment of the ancient promise made to the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What was the wonderful privilege, the ancient promise? The inheritance of the promised land. The ancient promise was now to be fulfilled in the lives of God's dear people. They were soon to cross over the Jordan and enter the promised land, receiving their long awaited inheritance. And Joshua was the appointed leader to guide them into the land.

2. The commissioning service also included a strong encouragement (v. 8). Standing before the people with his hands resting upon the head of Joshua, Moses gave the most wonderful encouragement to Joshua. He was being divinely appointed, and he could rest assured that he would be divinely led. In commissioning Joshua, Moses declared that the LORD's presence and guidance would always rest upon Joshua. The LORD would go before him and be with him, never leaving nor forsaking him. He must, therefore, not be afraid nor ever be discouraged. This was the strong expectation of God.

Thought 1. The genuine believer has the most wonderful promise from God: that of His presence and guidance. God promises never to leave nor forsake us. Because of this wonderful promise, God expects one thing from us: that we not fear nor be discouraged. If God be with us, who can be against us (Rom 8:31)? God's presence assures fullness of life and a victorious life. The presence and guidance of God should eliminate all fear from our hearts and lives. God is with us and He guides us. Consequently, the charge is to us as well as to Joshua: we must not fear nor be discouraged.

Mat 10:30-31 *“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

Rom 8:31-32, 35, 37-39 *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither*

height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Phil 1:28 *Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved — and that by God.*

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

1 John 4:4 *You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*

Deut 31:6 *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*

Josh 1:6 *Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.*

Josh 10:25 *Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.”*

Josh 23:6-8 *“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.*

2 Sam 10:12 *“Be strong, and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight.”*

1 Chr 19:13 *Be strong, and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight.”*

1 Chr 22:13 *Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the LORD gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.*

1 Chr 28:20 *David also said to Solomon his son, “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished.”*

Isa 41:10 *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

Isa 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” ■*