

# Haftarat V'Zot HaBrachah וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה

Torah: Deuteronomy 33:1–34:12

Haftarah: Joshua 1:1–18

## Be Strong and Courageous: Lead the People into the Land

### General Overview

In the Torah, God specified that Joshua ben Nun would succeed Moshe after his death as the one who would lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land. This haftarah reading records the fulfilment of that promise. After Moshe had died, therefore, God encouraged Joshua to take the leadership of the nation in following the Torah. By the end of this portion, Joshua, having been encouraged, exercises his first duties as the new leader of Israel by soliciting the help of the nation's leadership to rally around him.

### Connection to the Parasha

In the final parasha of the Torah, we read the account of Moshe's death. Just before he died, Moshe laid his hands on Joshua and formally commissioned him to take over the leadership of the nation after his death. This haftarah picks up where the Torah leaves off. Moshe died and now Joshua is the confirmed leader of Israel.

Both the Torah and the book of Joshua depict the man Joshua as a godly, wise, and strong leader, fully capable of leading the people of God — just as his mentor and predecessor Moshe did.

The reading of the first chapter of Joshua, which opens the section of Scripture known as “The Prophets,” is to remind us that though Moses is dead, his work and message are eternal, and remain the undying task of all future generations in Israel to fulfil.<sup>1</sup>

### Exposition

Everything about this haftarah is uplifting and encouraging; it is a truly fitting way to end the cycle of haftarot. Even within the text of this passage, we read four times that Joshua was encouraged to be strong and courageous. In fact, those four exhortations, each coming with their own reasons, becomes the basis of our approach to this passage.

- I. Be Strong and Courageous: Lead the People into the Land.
- II. Be Strong and Courageous: Live According to the Torah.
- III. Be Strong and Courageous: Learn to Trust God.
- IV. Be Strong and Courageous: Legislate Faithfully.

In this excerpt from Haftarat V'Zot HaBrachah, we will focus on the section, Lead the People into the Land.

## I. Be Strong and Courageous: Lead the People into the Land.

The first five verses of this book form an introduction to the entire book. In fact a case can be made that they are indeed, *the* introduction. For example, Joshua 1:2 describes the crossing of the Jordan River. Verse 3 speaks of the conquest of the Land. Verse 4 implies the distribution of the conquered land, and

the emphasis on all the days of Joshua's life in verse 5 is found in the end of Joshua's life in the final two chapters of the book.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most important things to notice in this introduction is the continued use of the second person personal pronoun, "you." God outlined the dimensions of the conquest and the specified territory that Israel was to possess, but He spoke in terms of a personal message to Joshua. It was not to Moshe that these words were spoken, but to Joshua. Then, in Joshua 1:5, the Holy One speaks again to Joshua, informing him that, "no man will [be able to] stand before you all the days of your life." As if this was not enough encouragement, the Lord again exhorts Joshua by saying, "just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5b).

With all of this encouragement, why, then, did God have to say to Joshua "Be strong and courageous?" If God told him that the Land would be his, that no one would be able to stand up to him, and that God's presence would be with him just like it was with Moshe, then what need would there have been for the command, "Be strong and courageous?" In thinking deeply about Joshua's situation, we assert that the need for such encouragement becomes self-evident.

First, note that the word translated "be strong" is in Hebrew, *hazak* (חזק). This word denotes fortitude, and even physical power. It is a fairly commonly used word, even in Modern Hebrew. But the next word, translated, "be courageous" (*ametz*, אמצ) is a more unusual word. As already indicated, it can mean "courageous." But it can also mean "to be alert," as well as to have courage or boldness.<sup>3</sup> This phrase is used elsewhere in the Scriptures in similar types of contexts.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the term could be used in a variety of circumstances but always within a context of God's presence and support.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Joshua was to be firm and strong, i.e. well-assured, courageous, not alarmed.<sup>6</sup>

There are several reasons why Joshua may have needed extra encouragement and support from the God of his forefathers. This first occurrence in the book of Joshua comes in a context where God is telling Joshua to lead the people in taking the Land. We are sure that there was much more to this task than what may meet our eyes today.

First, "perhaps Joshua was intimidated by the greatness of his predecessor Moses and the awesomeness of his own responsibility.<sup>7</sup> Moshe was like a father and a grandfather to the people of Israel. Although they were told that Joshua would take his place, in reality, Joshua knew that strong emotions would be involved in that succession. Their bodies may have been with Joshua, but their hearts may very well have still been with Moshe. It would have taken Joshua a lot of strength and courage to assert his position as the leader of the grieving nation.

Second, conquering the Land was no picnic. True, God gave all of the assurances that He could to the people and to Joshua. But, nevertheless, Joshua had to lead Israel's sons into battle for a long period of time. Although the Israelites experienced glimpses of the battlefield in their various skirmishes in the wilderness, it was an awesome task to lead a nation into outright war. This enormous task manifested itself in many different ways.

### **1. Organization**

The army had to be mustered, trained, outfitted, and supplied. Joshua, as the commander-in-chief, was the one who was primarily responsible for this gargantuan job.

### **2. Logistics**

The nation, while at war, still had to have food and water, not to mention the logistical needs of the army. Joshua was the one everyone would look to when they were hungry or thirsty — just as they did to Moshe when he led them. We are sure Joshua remembered the angry emotional reactions, the anger, and the rejection that Moshe must have felt when the people did not like his decisions. The thought of having to face similar responses from potentially disgruntled people must have been very frightening to Joshua, who was right there with Moshe and witnessed what he went through.

### **3. Strategy**

Although the Lord gave the basic plan for the war, it was up to Israel's officers, especially General Joshua to develop specific battle plans, and to see to their execution.

### **4. Morale**

Joshua, as the spiritual and military leader, was responsible for the overall morale and godly conduct of the people.

### **5. Encouragement**

Finally, Joshua had to actually lead the soldiers into battle, as well as to convince their mothers and fathers to let them fight. That took awesome leadership. In addition, there may perhaps have been those within the nation who were not convinced that the nation should be involved in such wars, the "peace-niks," so to speak. Joshua had to do his best not to let them discourage the others.

In this light, is it any wonder, then, that the Holy One saw fit to remind Joshua to be strong and have courage several times when he led the people into the Promised Land?

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, 918.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hess, *Joshua* (TOTC), 68.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* ("BDB"), 54–55.

<sup>4</sup> See Deuteronomy 31:6, 7, 23; 1 Chronicles 28:20; 2 Chronicles 32:7, and Joshua 10:25.

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<sup>5</sup> Hess, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Donald H. Madvig, "Joshua," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ("EBC"), vol. 3, 256.