



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

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SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: Joshua 1, Isaiah 7, 1 Thessalonians 1-2

“Be strong and of a good courage”

We know virtually nothing about the early life of Joshua. As one of those who left Egypt, we can be certain that he would have suffered in that land of sin and death and would, most certainly, have rejoiced as God's people were led out by Moses. He experienced the 'national baptism' in the Red Sea (**1 Corinthians 10:1-2**), and commenced the journey to the land which had been promised to the fathers so many years before. Then, finally, after forty years of waiting (**Numbers 14:33-34**) the time came at last. The children of Israel were to take their inheritance. Canaan was before them and Joshua was the one who had been chosen by Almighty God to lead his people in.

The death of Moses and the selection of Joshua

We can easily imagine the sadness felt by the people of Israel as the life of Moses drew to a close. He had been an amazing man. The meekest of all (**Numbers 12:3**), yet with a strength, faith and willingness to serve which surpassed almost all others. And, although many in the camp would have loved and revered Moses, the relationship which he enjoyed with Joshua was different. They had been through so much together. Joshua is termed Moses' "minister" in **Exodus 24:13** (AV). When the nation made the molten calf, Joshua was with Moses in the mount (**Exodus 32:17**). It may have come as no surprise, therefore, when Joshua was chosen. Moses was called to lay his hands upon his faithful servant (**Numbers 27:18**). Here was the one selected by the Father to continue the work. What an unspeakable privilege this was!

“Be strong”

So, with Moses taken from the people (**Deuteronomy 34:5-7**), the time came for them to follow their new leader into the land. **Joshua 1** describes the commencement of this awesome process. Truly this was a pivotal moment in the Father's dealings with his people. Many years before, Abraham had been promised that his descendants would suffer in a Gentile country, then come out and inherit the land on which he stood (**Genesis 15:13-16**). Finally, the time had come for these things to be fulfilled.

In the first chapter of Joshua we have words of guidance and encouragement which Joshua received from the LORD. We read that: “*Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you.*” (**Joshua 1:3**). From the wilderness where they stood, up to the mighty Euphrates river and even into Lebanon and the country of the Hittites, this was the massive portion of land before them. If only they would go forward, in faith. No enemy would be too strong. No army would be too mighty. And yet the Father was still calling for a response from His people. Much as He would bless them, keep them, provide for them and lead them, He would not make them serve Him. Nor would He simply wipe out the Gentile nations, leaving Israel free to march straight into an empty land. They had to go forward in faith. They had to be brave. So, on four occasions in this key chapter we read the same phrase: “*...be strong and of a good courage (very courageous).*” (**vs 6, 7, 9, 18**).

A challenge from the start of the journey

This phrase: “*...be strong and of a good courage*”, would have had particular significance for Joshua. Moses had said the same thing to him, just prior to his death (**Deuteronomy 31:7, 23**). He had also called for Joshua, along with Caleb and another ten chief men from the nation, to spy out the land many years before: “*... see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be*

strong or weak, few or many ...” (Numbers 13:18). Sadly, we know that ten of the spies came back with an *“evil report”* (Numbers 13:32). Yes, the land was beautiful and fruitful. And yes, it was everything they had been told it would be. But the people there were *“strong”* (v28).

From the words of these faithless spies we see exactly what they thought. The enemy was too mighty for Israel to overcome, even with the blessing of their God. Only Joshua and Caleb were truly strong and courageous. Only they could see that no giant or high city wall would pose a problem for the LORD. He had defeated Egypt by a *“strong hand”* (Exodus 13:9). Why should the nations of the land prove too powerful for Him? The waters of the Red Sea had stood up like walls on either side of the people as they walked through the midst of it (Exodus 14:29). So why be bothered about a city like Jericho whose walls may have been just a few hundred feet high?

As we know, these words were not hearkened to. The ten spies swayed the nation as a whole and Joshua and Caleb’s pleas were rejected. In fact, so abhorrent were their words that the people spoke of stoning them (Numbers 14:10). Had it not been for the glory of the LORD appearing in the camp they would almost certainly have died there and then. What’s more astonishing is that Caleb’s ancestors were Gentiles (see Numbers 32:12). What irony there is in these things.

A need for mental strength in the wilderness

As we read on in the Numbers record, we see that the ten spies and the rest of the people who had accepted their words, were not permitted to enter the land. Only Joshua and Caleb would do so (Numbers 14:38). Joshua was sustained with an abnormal degree of divine strength and vitality (Joshua 14:10-11) as was Moses (Deuteronomy 34:7), so that, when the time came, both he and Caleb would be able to enter the land and overcome their enemies. Just imagine how hard those following years must have been for these two great men. Despite being sustained bodily, they were still being called to manifest an immense degree of mental strength and resilience, an acceptance of the will of their God. For thirty-eight long years they had to travel through the wilderness, awaiting the time when all those of the first generation would be no more (Deuteronomy 2:14). They did so, manifesting mental strength the like of which the other spies had never known.

The challenge for you and me

Joshua was blessed with strength, but he still had to choose to use it. We too, have ‘strengths’ and ‘talents’, which we are called to utilize in the service of our God and His son. We can be like Joshua who used his abilities faithfully, or like the man who buried his talent in the ground (Matthew 25:25). We can be afraid of the things and people of this age and allow that fear to conquer us, or we can go forward in faith, knowing that God is mighty and nothing is impossible for Him (Luke 1:37).

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus, bearing the same name as Joshua, would have known these things very well. He too faced great and mighty foes. He had to deal with enemies who afflicted him *“...from (his) youth”* (Psalm 129:1-2). When Jesus began his ministry the leaders of the nation were always there, criticizing, accusing and threatening. In time he was brought to stand before two of the most powerful of men: Pilate and Herod, and yet still he remained faithful. He would not argue his case so that he might be freed (Matthew 27:14). Nor would he do some mighty work to amaze those before whom he stood (Luke 23:8). Though he was: *“...made strong”* by his Father (Psalm 80:15, 17), like those before him, he chose to use that strength aright. Ultimately, that greatest and most powerful enemy, sin, was conquered: *“For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God.”* (2 Corinthians 13:4). We now take bread and drink wine in memory of that time. He died that we might live with him. He died that the kingdom might be his. And in that great day, by grace, we will *“renew (our) strength”* forever (Isaiah 40:31). Oh, may that time come very soon!