

Joshua 1:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Analysis

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

This verse forms the climax of God's commissioning speech to Joshua, appearing after two previous commands to be strong and courageous (vv. 6-7). The rhetorical question "Have not I commanded thee?" emphasizes divine authority—this is not a suggestion but a command from Israel's true King. The Hebrew construction suggests incredulity: "Haven't I already commanded you? Why would you still hesitate?"

The dual command "be strong and of a good courage" combines physical strength (chazaq) and inner fortitude (amats). These are not psychological self-help mantras but theological imperatives grounded in God's character and presence. The negative commands "be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed" prohibit both sudden fear (yare) and gradual demoralization (chatat). God addresses comprehensive human weakness—both the shock of immediate danger and the wearing down of prolonged difficulty.

The foundation for courage appears in the closing promise: "for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." The Hebrew Yahweh eloheka (LORD thy God) emphasizes covenant relationship—not a distant deity but Joshua's personal

God bound by promise to Israel. Divine presence (immak, "with thee") provides the ground for human courage. Geography doesn't limit this presence—"whithersoever thou goest" extends God's companionship to every location of obedience.

Historical Context

Joshua received this command at a pivotal moment: standing on the plains of Moab with Moses dead and two million Israelites looking to him for leadership. The Jordan River lay ahead at flood stage (Joshua 3:15), and beyond it stood fortified Canaanite cities with superior military technology—iron chariots and massive walls. The generation that witnessed the Exodus was dead; Joshua led a new generation born in wilderness wandering, untested in battle.

Ancient Near Eastern conquest followed established patterns: superior forces attacking inferior ones, gradual territorial expansion, reliance on military technology. Israel's situation inverted these patterns—a ragtag nation of former slaves facing entrenched civilizations. Without divine presence, the conquest was suicide. Archaeological evidence confirms heavily fortified Canaanite cities during this period (1400-1200 BCE), making Israel's victories humanly inexplicable.

This command became paradigmatic for God's people facing impossible assignments. The phrase "be strong and of good courage" appears throughout Scripture at critical moments: David facing Goliath (1 Samuel 17:32), Hezekiah confronting Assyria (2 Chronicles 32:7), exiles returning to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 10:4). New Testament writers appropriate this promise for believers (Hebrews 13:5-6), demonstrating its transhistorical significance.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. Why does God command courage rather than promising to remove the reasons for fear, and what does this teach about facing difficulty as believers?
2. How does the rhetorical question 'Have not I commanded thee?' address the problem of repeated doubts after receiving clear divine direction?
3. In what specific life situations are you most prone to fear or discouragement, and how does God's promise of presence address those fears?
4. What is the relationship between God's presence ('the LORD thy God is with thee') and human responsibility ('be strong...be not afraid')?
5. How does Jesus' final promise 'lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28:20) echo and fulfill this promise to Joshua?

Interlinear Text

בְּלֹא	צִוְּתִי	בְּ	יְהִי	אָמֵן	אֶל
H3808	Have not I commanded	thee	Be strong	and of a good courage	H408
	H6680		H2388	H553	
בְּ	תִּאֵלֶּךָ	בְּ	תִּתְּבָאֵר	בְּ	הִי
be not afraid	H408	neither be thou dismayed	H2865	H3588	for the LORD
H6206				H5973	H3068
תְּלַבֵּן	אָשָׁר	בְּכֶל	אֱלֹהִים		
thy God	H3605	H834	H1980		
H430					

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 28:15 (Parallel theme): And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

Deuteronomy 20:1 (References God): When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not

afraid of them: for the LORD thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

Psalms 46:7 (References God): The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Isaiah 43:1 (References Lord): But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

Isaiah 43:5 (Parallel theme): Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west;

Judges 6:14 (References Lord): And the LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?

2 Samuel 13:28 (Parallel theme): Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant.

Acts 4:19 (References God): But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

Deuteronomy 31:28 (Parallel theme): Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.