

Joshua 23:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age:

Analysis

And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age. This verse introduces Joshua's farewell address, one of three major speeches that structure the book's conclusion (chapters 23-24). The comprehensive assembly—"all Israel, and for their elders (zeqenim, זִקְנִים), and for their heads (rashim, רָאשִׁים), and for their judges (shophetim, שֹׁפְטִים), and for their officers (shoterim, שְׁטָרִים)"—demonstrates the importance of this final charge. Every level of leadership gathered to hear their aging commander's testament.

Joshua's self-description, "I am old and stricken in age" (zaqanti ba'ti ba-yamim, זָקַנְתִּי בָאֵתִי בַיָּמִים), literally means "I am old, I have come into the days." The phrase "come into the days" appears in Genesis 24:1 of Abraham and 1 Kings 1:1 of David, indicating advanced age approaching death. Joshua's frank acknowledgment of mortality models godly leadership—no pretense of perpetual strength, but honest recognition of human limits and succession planning.

The gathering of multiple leadership categories (zeqenim - tribal elders, rashim - clan heads, shophetim - legal authorities, shoterim - administrative officials) reveals Israel's complex governance structure. Leadership wasn't concentrated in one person but distributed across family, tribal, legal, and administrative lines. Joshua's farewell addressed this entire leadership apparatus, ensuring continuity after his death.

Historical Context

Joshua was likely over 100 years old at this point (he was Moses' minister during the Exodus when approximately 40-50 years old, lived through 40 years of wandering, then led conquest and settlement for perhaps 20-30 years; he died at 110, Joshua 24:29). Ancient Near Eastern leaders typically gave farewell addresses to ensure smooth succession and preserve their wisdom—examples include Jacob (Genesis 49), Moses (Deuteronomy 31-33), David (1 Kings 2), and Paul (Acts 20:17-38; 2 Timothy).

The assembly likely occurred at Shechem (Joshua 24:1) or another central sanctuary where all Israel could gather. Such gatherings required significant logistical coordination—housing, feeding, and organizing representatives from all twelve tribes scattered across Canaan. The fact that Israel could assemble peacefully indicates the relative stability achieved through Joshua's leadership and God's faithfulness in establishing them in the land.

The leadership structure described here—elders, heads, judges, officers—reflects the system Moses established in the wilderness (Exodus 18:13-26; Deuteronomy 1:9-18) and that would govern Israel until the monarchy. This distributed leadership prevented tyranny and ensured local administration while maintaining national unity through shared covenant and worship.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's honest acknowledgment of aging and mortality model godly leadership transition for church leaders today?
2. What can we learn from Joshua's careful gathering of all leadership levels about the importance of comprehensive succession planning?

3. How should Christian leaders balance awareness of their limitations with confidence in God's continued faithfulness to His people after their service ends?

Interlinear Text

וְקָרָא	וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ	לְכָל	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְזִקְנָיו	וּלְרָאשָׁיו
called	And Joshua	H3605	for all Israel	and for their elders	and for their heads
H7121	H3091		H3478	H2205	H7218
וּלְשֹׁפְטָיו	וּלְשֹׁטְרָיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	אֵלָיו	
and for their judges	and for their officers	and said			
H8199	H7860	H559	H413	H589	
וְזָקְנֵי	בְּאֵתִי	בְּמֵימִי:			
unto them I am old	and stricken	in age			
H2204	H935	H3117			

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 24:1 (Judgment): And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

1 Chronicles 28:1 (References Israel): And David assembled all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men, unto Jerusalem.

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.