

Joshua 8:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

Analysis

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua did not read before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

Joshua's comprehensive reading—"not a word... which Joshua did not read"—demonstrates the complete sufficiency and authority of Scripture. The Hebrew phrase lo-hayah davar (לֹא-הָיָה דָבָר, "there was not a word") uses strong negative construction, emphasizing absolute completeness. Joshua neither adds to nor subtracts from God's revealed word, fulfilling the command of Deuteronomy 4:2 and anticipating Revelation 22:18-19. This models the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura*—Scripture alone as the church's final authority.

The inclusive audience—"women, and the little ones, and the strangers"—underscores that God's word is for the entire covenant community, not merely male leadership. Women and children are not passive participants but active covenant members responsible for knowing and obeying God's law. This contrasts sharply with ancient Near Eastern cultures where religious knowledge was typically restricted to male priests and aristocracy. Israel's egalitarian access to divine revelation reflects the biblical truth that all persons are created in God's image and accountable to His word.

The phrase "strangers that were conversant among them" (hager haholech beqirbam, הָגֵר הַהֲלֹךְ בְּקִרְבָּם literally means "the sojourner walking in their midst," indicating not casual visitors but those who had committed to living among Israel and submitting to covenant obligations. This prefigures the New Testament church where Gentile believers are "fellow citizens with the saints" (Ephesians 2:19), fully incorporated into the household of faith through Christ.

Historical Context

The practice of comprehensive public reading of the law follows Moses' instruction in Deuteronomy 31:10-13, which commanded reading the entire law every seven years during the Feast of Tabernacles. Joshua's reading at Shechem, though not the septennial reading, establishes the pattern of regular Scripture exposition for covenant renewal. This practice continued throughout Israel's history—Jehoshaphat sent teachers to read the law throughout Judah (2 Chronicles 17:7-9), and Ezra read the law publicly after the exile (Nehemiah 8:1-8).

Ancient literacy rates were relatively low (perhaps 5-10% in Bronze Age societies), making public reading essential for general knowledge of the law. The communal hearing created collective memory and accountability. The reading was likely antiphonal, with Levites pronouncing curses and blessings as the people responded "Amen" (Deuteronomy 27:14-26), engaging the congregation actively rather than as passive auditors.

The inclusion of women, children, and foreigners in the assembly reflects Israel's unique character as a covenant community where age, gender, and ethnicity did not determine access to God's word. This stands in stark contrast to ancient mystery religions (restricted to initiates), Greek philosophy (largely aristocratic males), and ancient Near Eastern priestly systems (hereditary castes). God's revelation was democratized—available to all who would hear and obey.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's complete reading of the law challenge modern selective reading that emphasizes comforting promises while avoiding difficult commands?
2. What does the inclusion of women, children, and foreigners teach about who should have access to biblical teaching in the church today?
3. In what practical ways can we recover the centrality of comprehensive Scripture reading in our worship and family life?

Interlinear Text

מֹשֶׁה צִוָּה לֹא דִבֶּר מִכֶּל אֲשֶׁר בְּנֵי יִהוָּשָׁע
commanded of all that Moses
H3808 H1961 H1697 H3605 H834 H6680 H4872

לֹא אָשָׁר קְרַב אֶל יְהוָשָׁע כָּל גָּד לִפְנֵי כָּל
not before all the congregation
H834 H3808 H7121 H3091 H5048 H3605 H6951

וּבְנָשָׁים וּבְנָעָרִים יִשְׁרָאֵל
and the strangers
of Israel with the women and the little ones and the strangers
H3478 H802 H2945 H1616

בְּקָרְבָּם כְּהֹל גָּד
among that were conversant
H1980 H7130

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 31:12 (Word): Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:

Nehemiah 8:2 (Word): And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

Jeremiah 26:2 (Word): Thus saith the LORD; Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word:

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