

# BaptistWay Bible Series for Sept. 4: In the midst of change, God is there

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### In the midst of change, God is there

- Joshua 1

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Transition is a part of life. It is inevitable. Sometimes change is something to be desired and yet to be feared. As children mature, we no longer must treat them like infants, feeding them, changing diapers, etc. But as our children grow up, we age, too. And we are not what we used to be.

To most of us, many aspects of modern technology make parts of life much easier. Cellular phones, text messaging, Internet and e-mail all can make us much more accessible. But many people still find themselves incredibly lonely and isolated. And how well do neighbors today know each other as opposed to 30 or 40 years ago? Things just are not what they used to be.

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The same refrain often can be heard in our churches. Churches are faced with cultural shifts, generational changes, multiplication of diverse worship styles and many other trends and fads. And leadership within churches comes and goes. For example, how often can we hear in a church with a new pastor (or other new staff or leadership), “Things are not what they used to be”?

When confronted with the many changes life can throw at us—as individuals and as churches —there is something for us to learn from reading Joshua 1. Things for Israel just were not what they used to be. Moses was dead. Joshua had been designated successor to Moses, but he was different from Moses. Israel knew it. There was much room for the people to cry out for “the good old days.” But the way things were was not always so good.

Even when Moses was alive, Israel seemed to always be wishing for the good old days. In Exodus 14:11, when Israel stood before Yam Suph (often translated “Red Sea” but actually meaning “Sea of Reeds”) and Pharaoh and his Egyptian army were rapidly approaching, they cried to Moses, “Was it because there were there no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?”

In Exodus 16:3, just over two months after having been miraculously delivered from Egypt by God, they were hungry and cried to Moses and Aaron: “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat

around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Similar incidents occurred as recorded in Exodus 17:3 and in Numbers 13-14.

Moses had been given a huge task by God. He led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. But consistently the people had complained. Many times they had shown a lack of faith.

Now, it was Joshua’s task to lead God’s people. And this task was enormous, also. Joshua 1:1-4 records God’s telling Joshua of the expanse of territory Israel was to conquer. They were just one generation removed from slavery. They had not been an army. They had little military history or experience. But God gave Joshua a promise. “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Joshua 1:5).

Things for Israel were not what they used to be. They were no longer slaves. They had to be an army. They were no longer strangers living in someone else’s land. Now, they were to take the land God had given them for their own.

So, perhaps the first lesson for us is that neither “things” nor we were as good as nostalgia can trick us into remembering. Things may not be the way they used to be, but new situations present new opportunities. Despite the many challenges they present, both the present and the future can be good and exciting. With God, we can claim as Browning wrote, “The best is yet to be.”

Though they had a new leader, one thing remained the same: God still was with them. Though Joshua was different from Moses, the same God had called them both. The same God had promised them both his presence and strength.

That is one of the many wonderful things about our loving God. Whenever God calls and commissions people to a task, God promises to be with them.

That was true with Moses and Joshua. And it is true with us. God has called us to salvation and to service. The Great Commission Jesus gave us in Matthew 28:18-20 ends with the wonderful promise, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

That promise, like the God who made it, will never change. Cultures always have changed. Generations and leadership come and go. Things will never be the way they used to be—not in our personal lives and not in our churches. We could face these with a fatalism that easily surrenders and yearns for the good old days that never really were. But God has a more fulfilling and meaningful way for us to live. In the midst of this life of continuous change, we can live with hope, faith, courage, excitement and anticipation—because God is with us.

### **Discussion question**

- What are some of the changes in your life, your church or your culture that most frighten you?
- How can God’s presence with you help you find opportunities for growth in those changes?

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