

The Lord of Transitions

Deuteronomy 31:14-23

Many scholars date the Exodus from Egypt at about 1280 BC. For some 40 years the people of Israel became accustomed to Moses, a skilled leader, organizer and writer, a man who could communicate well with God and with fellow humans, a true “servant of the Lord” (Dt. 34:5). He was the right man for the right job. And yet the Lord knew it was time for a change.

The Lord closes chapters

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Now the day of your death is near’” (31:14). Most people prefer a different message! A rush of energy runs through our veins when we speak of new projects, new adventures, new ministries. But the same God who opens chapters is also the God who closes them. There is as much dignity in starting a ministry as in stepping away from it or closing it. To ‘stay on’ when we should ‘step down’ is not a virtue. Are you still in the right place?

The Lord calls replacements

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘...Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting’” (31:14). Moses was not sent out to seek volunteers, neither did he ask the people ‘who do you want’. The Lord calls. Joshua was called. Others recognize such calling. If a replacement cannot be found, resist the temptation to manipulate another person to ‘fill the gap’. If a brother or sister is not called, the ministry will become an obligation, a joyless burden. If it is time for you to stop and the Lord does not call a replacement, it may well be time to close – temporarily or finally. Are you prepared to let God close a chapter?

The Lord commissions

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of

Meeting, where I will commission him’” (31:14). It was important that Joshua should know that it was now the right time for him to lead. It was important that he receive the new task from the Lord Himself, and not only from Moses. Being conscious that we are called and commissioned by the Lord Himself, keeps us going when others stop clapping, when others criticize, or when the work becomes repetitive.

The Lord knows the future

“When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant... I know what they are disposed to do” (31:20-21). The Lord well knew the difficult task that lay ahead for Joshua. Every service for the Lord has its hard moments. Are you going through a difficult or a discouraging patch? If the Lord said ‘start’, keep on going until He says ‘stop’.

The Lord encourages leaders

“The LORD gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: ‘Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you’” (31:23). To succeed in his new job, Joshua should daily remember to: (a) **Be strong**: Ministry has its difficulties, risks and painful moments. (b) **Be focused**: His job was to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. As in all ministries, it is easy to get absorbed in attractive, interesting and urgent ‘good’ distractions. (c) **Be dependent**: Joshua should never forget God’s promise: ‘I myself will be with you’. Neither should we!

Being faithful to the Lord will sooner or later involve change. I find it encouraging to remember that God, the owner of the work, is also the Lord of the transition.

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