

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOSHUA'S RECEPTION OF THE LAYING ON OF HANDS IN NUMBERS 27:12-23

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Because Christian rites of ordination regularly involve the imposition of hands, scholars generally recognize the importance of understanding this practice. Instituted early in the church's development and thus in close proximity with its Jewish origins, the imposition of hands has been thought by scholars to stem most likely from OT roots.¹ Jewish exegetes and Pentateuchal critical scholars have often adopted the view that ordination was performed for the first time when Moses ordained Joshua with the laying on of hands and that Joshua's installation by Moses became the prototype of rabbinic ordination.² It has also been proposed that Christian ordination originally structured itself on the model of rabbinic ordination, even though it is also understood that it took on meaning of its own.³ Thus in both Jewish and Christian traditions, Joshua's installation has powerfully influenced ordination practice which includes the laying on of hands.⁴

¹ Jean Thierry Maertens, "Un rite de pouvoir: l'imposition des mains," *Studies in Religion* 7 (1978): 29. Eduard Lohse suggests that these OT roots are authenticated by the linguistic relationships evident between Hebrew and Greek expressions for the imposition of hands in *Die Ordination im Spätjudentum und im Neuen Testament* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1951), 18.

² Lohse, *Die Ordination*, 29. See also J. Newman, *Semikhah: A Study of Its Origin, History and Function in Rabbinic Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), 2; Paul Galtier, "Imposition des mains," *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique* (1927), 7:1304; H. Revel, "Ordination," *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (1939), 8:318; Everett Ferguson, "Ordination in the Ancient Church, Part 1," *Restoration Quarterly* 4 (1960): 128; M. H. Shepherd Jr., "Hands, Laying on of," *IDB* (1962), 2:251-252; Allen Howard Podet, "Elements in the Development of Rabbinical Ordination in the Codes" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College, 1964), 50-51.

³ Johannes Behro, *Die Handauflegung im Urchristentum* (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1911; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), 142; Joseph Coppens, *L'imposition des mains et les rites connexes dans le Nouveau Testament et dans l'Eglise ancienne* (Paris: Gabalda, 1925), 162-163; Frank Gavin, *The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1928; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1969), 103; Lohse, *Die Ordination*, 101; and R. Alan Culpepper, "The Biblical Basis for Ordination," *Review and Expositor* 78 (1981): 472.

⁴ Arnoid Ehrhardt, "Jewish and Christian Ordination," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 5 (1954): 138. Ehrhardt sees the OT influence on Christian ordination to be direct, rather than channeled through rabbinic ordination.

While many scholars agree that Joshua's installation has prototypical influence on Christian ordination practice, very few agree as to the significance of Moses' laying hands on Joshua.⁵ Did Moses transfer anything to Joshua through the hand-laying gesture, and if so, what did he transfer? Did the gesture merely designate Joshua as the one to be ordained or, on the other hand, merely identify Moses with Joshua? Perhaps laying on of hands indicated Joshua as in some way a substitute or a representative of YHWH or Moses. Finally, were two hands laid on Joshua or one, and what is the significance of the number of hands used?

In order to answer these questions, one must exegetically study the two Pentateuchal pericopes which describe the event, Num 27:12-23 and Deut 34:9. It is the purpose of this article to present an exegetical study of laying on of hands as presented in Num 27:12-23. The contribution or Deut 34:9 and final conclusions addressing the procedural techniques, symbolic meanings, and tangible effects of the hand-laying gesture will be presented in a subsequent article.

Num 27:12-23 plays an important role in the overall theme of the book of Numbers. Israel had arrived on the plains of Moab and was preparing to enter the Promised Land. The census of Num 26 established a new generation, who was given permission to enter that land. The necessity of new leadership to lead this new generation into the land must be addressed, and Num 27:12-23 addresses this necessity.

An analysis of the pericope's structure provides the starting point for an interpretation of the significance of the hand-laying gesture. Numbers 27:12-23 contains four sections indicated by and related to each other through external, internal, and sequential parallelism. In the external parallelism, the last two sections repeat a pattern established by the first two sections, designated as A, B, A', B'. Each of the A sections presents statements made by YHWH, and each of the B sections present Moses' responses. In the internal parallelism, each of the four sections is further divided into four subsections, which generally follow the pattern established by the four subsections of section A, designated as a, b, c, d, in section B, as a₁, b₁, c₁, d₁; in section A', as a₂, b₂, c₂, d₂, and in Section B', as a₃, b₃, c₃, a₄. Each of the "a" subsections introduces the speaker of that section, each "b" subsection gives a request or response to subsection "a," each of the "c" subsections addresses leadership issues, and each of the "d" subsections addresses congregational issues. In the sequential parallelism, each section responds to issues of the previous

⁵ For a thorough review of the various scholarly interpretations, see my dissertation, "The Laying on of Hands on Joshua: An Exegetical Study of Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 34:9" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1997), 15-21.

section; in other words, B responds to issues raised in A, A' responds to issues raised in B, and B' responds to issues raised in A' and may be designated as A-B-A'-B'. The pericope parallels can be illustrated as follows:

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| A YHWH Announced Moses' -- | A' YHWH Instructed Moses to |
| Death, vv. 12-14 | Install Joshua, vv. 18-21 |
| a Introductory Identifier, -- | a ₂ Introductory Identifier, v. 18a |
| v. 12a | |
| b Request, v. 12b | -- b ₂ Request, v. 18b |
| c Leader Issues, v. 13 | -- c ₂ Leader Issues, vv. 18c-20a |
| d Congregation Issues, -- | d ₂ Congregation Issues, |
| v. 14 | vv. 20b-21 |
| | |
| B Moses Requested YHWH to -- | B' Moses Followed YHWH's |
| Appoint a Leader, vv. 15-17 | Instructions to Install Joshua, |
| | vv.22-23 |
| a ₁ Introductory Identifier, -- | a ₃ Introductory Identifier, v. 22a |
| v.15 | |
| b ₁ Request, v. 16 | -- b ₃ Response to Request, v. 22b |
| c ₁ Leader Issues, v. 17a,b | -- c ₃ Leader Issues, vv. 22c-22a |
| d ₁ Congregation Issues, | |
| v.17c | |
| | a ₄ Concluding Identifier, v. 23b |

The translation of the pericope:

- A a and YHWH said to Moses,
- b Go up into this mountain of Abarim
and see the land which I have given to the sons of Israel.
 - c After you have seen it, you will be gathered to your people,
even you, just as was gathered Aaron your brother,
 - d because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness
of Zin, in the rebellion of the congregation, to sanctify
me at the waters before their eyes. These are the Waters
of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.

- B a₁ And Moses spoke to God, saying:
 b₁ Let YHWH appoint, the God of the spirits of all flesh, a man over the congregation,
 c₁ who will go out before them and who will come in before them, who will lead them out and who will bring them in,
 d₁ so that the congregation of YHWH will not be as sheep who have no shepherd.
- A' a₂ And YHWH said to Moses,
 b₂ Take (to yourself) Joshua, son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit,
 c₂ and lay your hand on him, and stand him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him before their eyes, and you shall confer some of your honor on him so that will listen all the congregation of the sons of Israel.
 d₂ He shall stand before Eleazar the priest and he shall ask for him by the judgment of the Urim before YHWH.
 According to His word they shall go out and according to His word they shall come in, he and all the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation.
- B' a₃ And Moses did just as YHWH commanded him.
 b₃ and he took Joshua
 c₃ and stood him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation and he laid his hands on him and he commissioned him
 a₄ just as YHWH spoke by the hand of Moses.

This study focuses on the third section of the pericope, A', vv. 18-21. Sections A and B provide background material to A'. Section A' gives the information pertinent to interpreting laying on of hands; B' concludes by repeating step by step Moses' accomplishment of YHWH's instructions in A'.

Interpreting the significance of the laying on of hands begins by noting the flow in the subsections of A'. The flow begins in subsection a₂ (v. 18a) by identifying the speaker, YHWH. The flow continues in subsection b₂ with YHWH's request, "take to yourself" Joshua. This imperative then initiates a series of four actions in subsection c₂ that relate to leadership issues: lay, stand, command, and give. The four actions are tied together by four second masculine singular waw perfect verbs indicating how Israel's next leader is to be installed. It is interesting to note that the waw perfect construction expresses a series of actions

contingent or dependent upon the preceding action and at the same time establishes a hierarchy: first, "lay"; second, "stand"; third, "command"; and fourth, "give." Subsection c₂ concludes with a "so that" clause, indicating that the actions of the waw perfect verbs have the purpose of giving status to Joshua--the children of Israel are to listen to him. Finally, in subsection d₂ the flow moves to congregational issues. First, Joshua was to stand before the high priest when he needs to know the will of YHWH for leading the congregation. Second, once Joshua received YHWH's word, he and the congregation were free to go out and to come back. Study will now be given to each of these four subsections.

*Introductory Identifier--"And YHWH
Said to Moses" (Subsection a)*

The Hebrew verb for "said" (אָמַר) appears about 5,300 times in the OT, never with the purpose of describing the technique of speaking, "but to call attention to what is being said."⁶ Frequently, אָמַר is used by God to introduce revelation, in which he expresses himself and his will: "One would suppose that this usage emphasizes that God's revelation is a spoken, transmissible, propositional, definite matter."⁷ The expression "thus says YHWH" added authority and importance to any instruction.⁸ When YHWH spoke, Moses listened and Moses responded.

The instructions of Num 27:18-20 are initiated by YHWH's word. These are no ordinary instructions, but have the weight of the divine behind them. The words which describe Joshua's installation, and which include laying on of hands, are attributed to God himself; they are not words invented by Moses. The pericope concludes in v. 23 by emphasizing that all was accomplished according as YHWH spoke (אָמַר), by the hand of Moses.

*The Imperative--"Take Joshua, a Man in
Whom There is Spirit" (Subsection b)*

This simple command provides a wealth of information. First, it is parallel to the commands (v. 12) to "go up" the mountain and "see" the Promised Land, which had the result of placing Moses in a position where

⁶ Siegfried Wagner, "אָמַר" "amar," *TDOT* (1974), 1:328.

⁷ Charles L. Feinberg, "אָמַר" ('amar) say, speak, say to oneself (think), intend, command, promise," *TWOT* (1980), 1:55.

⁸ This phrase was used in talking to Pharaoh (Exod 9:13; 10:3), when announcing YHWH's will for Israel to leave Egypt (Exod 11:4), and when Moses dealt with the rebellion of the golden calf (Exod 32:27).

YHWH could give a third command, "take" Joshua. Second, it is also parallel to Moses' request in v. 16 to "appoint" a leader. YHWH responded that Moses "take" Joshua, thus communicating to Moses that he too had a role to play in establishing Israel's next leader. Third, the imperative "take" initiated a process of subsequent actions, indicated by the series of waw perfect verbs in subsection c₂. Finally, Joshua, son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, was the one identified as the one to be taken.

The word for "spirit" in "a man in whom there is spirit" has no article, making it difficult to develop a simple interpretation of what spirit Joshua possessed. "Spirit" should be linked to its parallel subsection usage in Section B (v. 16), which identifies YHWH as the "God of the spirits of all flesh." YHWH is thus identified as the sovereign Creator. He is the one who gives breath or spirit; therefore, he is the one who knows what the spirit of a man really is. Identifying Joshua as a "man in whom there is spirit" indicates that YHWH knows who Joshua is and can guarantee Moses that Joshua possesses the requisite spiritual qualifications and skills for leadership.⁹

Is this spirit Joshua possesses a reference to God's spirit, or to the fact that Joshua was a spirited man? The answer is yes to both questions. First, Leon Wood argues that the lack of an article attached to the word "spirit" does not necessarily preclude a reference to the Spirit of God. He uses for support 1 Chr 12:18, where the word "spirit" lacks an article yet obviously refers to YHWH's Spirit. Wood further argues that Moses was endowed with YHWH's Spirit, as evidenced by the story of the seventy elders with whom he shared some of his spirit (Num 11:16-28) and by Isaiah's reference to the "Holy Spirit within Moses" (Isa 63:11). If Moses was endowed with the Spirit, "one should only expect that his successor would have to be."¹⁰

⁹ Most scholars accept the interpretation of spirit (רוח) as an endowment for leadership; for example: Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers Bemidbar*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 5750/1990), 235; Walter Riggans, *Numbers*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 202; "Numbers," *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 147; A. Clarke, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments: The Old Testament* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1938), 1:707-708; Julius H. Greenstone, *Numbers, with Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1948), 297; R. B. Allen, "Numbers" *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:946; Martin Noth, *Numbers, A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, trans. James Martin (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 214-215; F. B. Huey, *Numbers*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 93-94; J. L. Mays, *The Book of Leviticus, the Book of Numbers*, LBC (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), 133; F. C. Cook and T. E. Espin, *The Fourth Book of Moses Called Numbers*, The Holy Bible

According to the Authorized Version, 2 vols. (London: Murray, 1877), 759; A. Noordtzi, *Numbers*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. E. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 256-257; O. J. Baab, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949), 39-42.

¹⁰ Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

Second, "spirit" (רוּחַ) can indicate internal elements of an individual. One particular element referred to is that of ability. YHWH endowed Bezaleel with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge so that he could construct the Tabernacle. In Joshua's case, spirit would refer to his endowed leadership skill. YHWH had already chosen, authenticated, and endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, knowledge, and insight to qualify him for the work. Additionally, the word "spirit" can depict a person's dominant disposition of mind or attitude.¹¹ In particular, "spirit" is used as a synonym for "courage."¹² Designating Joshua as a "man in whom there is spirit" may in part refer not only to the spy scenario, but also to Joshua's long service to Moses as well as to the entire congregation.¹³ To describe Joshua as "a man in whom there is spirit" is to describe him as a man full of life.¹⁴ As such, YHWH declared that Joshua has the spirit of life and courage necessary to provide the kind of strong leadership necessary to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

To summarize, YHWH, the God of the spirits of all flesh, identified Joshua, a man in whom there is spirit. Joshua is thus indicated as one with an indomitable and courageous spirit. But more, as the giver of spirit, YHWH also identifies Joshua as one to whom he had given a special Spirit, a Spirit that has changed him and endowed him for leadership.

1976), 49-50. Allen (2:946) states that "spirit" can also refer to the Holy Spirit, noting that though the word רוּחַ (spirit) in Num 27:18 is indefinite by spelling, it "may be regarded as inherently definite when used as a reference to deity"; see also Clarke, 1:707-708; Greenstone, 297.

¹¹ Spirit describing a dominant disposition can describe the following emotions: crushed in spirit, broken, forsaken, humble, smitten, troubled, faithful, high, cool, long-enduring, anger, stubbornness, seat of, and excellence. Norman Henry Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 146-150; William Ross Shoemaker, "The Use of רוּחַ in the Old Testament, and of **pneuma** in the New Testament," *JBL* 23 (1904): 13-34; J. B. Payne, "רוּחַ (*ruah*) wind, breath, mind, spirit," *TWOT* (1980), 2:836-837.

¹² Joshua had displayed his courage early in his victory over the Amalekites. Caleb had a different spirit than the ten faithless spies, meaning he had not angered YHWH by his obstinacy and rebelliousness like the others, but had instead maintained wholehearted commitment to YHWH, which resulted in an indomitable and positive attitude toward invading Canaan. Though Joshua's spirit is not specifically mentioned in the discussion of Caleb's spirit, the narrative indicates that he shared in that spirit of courageously following YHWH wholeheartedly. Joshua built upon Caleb's spirit by making the case for invasion even more specific and serious.

¹³ For example, Exod 17:8-16; 24:13-14; 32:15-20; 33:7-11; Num 11:26-30; 13:1-14:38. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT, 551-552.

¹⁴ W. Vogels argues that though this translation is possible due to Ps 31:6, Joshua has more than life; he has the spirit of YHWH ("The Spirit of Joshua and the Laying on of Hands by Moses," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966], 3-7).

*Leadership Issues--"Lay, " "Stand," "Command," "Give,"
Congregation "Listen to" (Subsection c₂)*

To review, the flow in each of the four major sections of Num 27:12-23 first identifies the section's main character, then through an imperative either makes a request or gives a response to the previous request, and then introduces matters concerning leadership. In section A, YHWH clarified that Moses as Israel's current leader would soon die. In section B, Moses indicated the desire for a leader who had the internal fortitude necessary to lead the congregation of Israel out and back in. In section A', YHWH responded by instructing how Moses was to install Joshua as the next leader. The imperative level (subsection b₂) of section A' established a command (take) that was intended to initiate a series of four actions by which Moses was to install Joshua as a leader whom the congregation would obey. The four actions were to lay hands on Joshua, stand (present) him before Eleazar and the congregation, commission (charge) him, and give him some of Moses' honor.

"*Lay your hand on him.*" The first action to be initiated by the imperative "take" was that Moses was to lay his hand on Joshua. In order to adequately develop the significance of the hand gesture, one must first study all the other accompanying elements. It should be noted, however, that laying on of hands is the first of the actions indicated by the imperative "take," even though it was not intended that this hand gesture be the first action Moses performed in the installation. YHWH's initial instructions to Moses indicated that Joshua's installation take place in a public setting, thus creating a situation in which public presentation must precede any other action. The installation, as recorded in Num 27:22-23, confirms this conclusion, for Moses first "stood" or presented Joshua to the children of Israel, then "laid" hands on him. By placing hand-laying first, even though it could not be performed first, YHWH appears to be stating that all the other actions depend on it. Structural analysis thus provides a preliminary conclusion. Joshua's public presentation, commissioning, and reception of some of Moses' honor were to each somehow find their meaning or expression in the laying on of Moses' hands. Joshua's installation is rooted in Moses' hand-laying action.

"*Stand him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation.*" The second action to follow "taking" was that of presentation. Four observations can be made about the imperative to stand Joshua before priest and congregation. First, the concept of "standing before" in the OT can have the connotation of presentation.¹⁵ Joshua's formal presentation

¹⁵ R. B. Allen, "אָמַד/('amad) stand, remain, endure, etc," *TWOT* (1980), 2:673. Jacob is presented to Pharaoh (Gen 47:7), the cleansed leper is presented to YHWH at the door of the Tabernacle (Lev 14:11), two goats are presented before YHWH (Lev 16:7), the scapegoat is

had the dual purpose of giving him to the congregation and doing so in a judicial setting which established that Joshua was legally Israel's next leader. Second, the physical gesture of standing communicated Joshua's acceptance of his responsibilities as well as the congregation's and YHWH's acceptance of Joshua.¹⁶ Third, the verb "stand before" indicated a cultic¹⁷ and covenantal¹⁸ event. Fourth, the concept of standing before the priest and "congregation" give indication that Joshua's installation ceremony took place at the tent of meeting, the normal meeting place of the congregation. Joshua's leadership is thus connected to the Sanctuary and to all that it represented in maintaining contact and covenant with YHWH. His leadership must ever espouse these important principles.

"Commission him in their presence." The third action to follow "taking" was that of giving a commission. Moses was to "commission him (Joshua) before their eyes" (Num 27:19).¹⁹ The verb is a piel perfect, second masculine singular of קָוַע , meaning either "to command" or "to give a charge." Numbers 27:19-22 uses both meanings, first in Moses' commissioning of Joshua (vv. 19,23), and second in Moses' obedience of

presented live before YHWH (Lev 16:10), a person is to be presented to the priest (Lev 27:8), an animal is presented to the priest (Lev 27:11), Levites are presented to Aaron for service (Num 3:6; 8:13), a suspected adulteress is presented by the priest or her husband before YHWH for judgment (Num 5:16, 18, 30). See Ashley, 552-553, where he lists ten of the eleven occurrences.

¹⁶ After seventy men died as a result of looking at the ark of the covenant, the men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand before YHWH" (1 Sam 6:20); YHWH asks, "What shepherd will stand before me?" (Jer 49:19; 50:44) implying that the shepherds are not acceptable to himself; YHWH also asks those who have performed all manner of evil how they think they can "stand before" him, meaning, they are to believe they are accepted (Jer7:10); and Esther stood before Xerxes after he indicated acceptance of her presence (Esth 5:1-2).

¹⁷ The OT sanctuary provided the Israelites with a refuge in which to contact YHWH, and its services gave institutional form to maintaining the covenant between YHWH and his people. To state that the phrase "stand before" carries cultic overtones is to say that it represents a ritual involved in Israel's worship of and maintaining contact with YHWH. The phrase "stand before" carried a cultic connection in at least two areas: (1) "stand before" could indicate ministry before or service to one of higher authority or to a group, or (2) stand before" could indicate a representational element in which one representing a group "stands before" another and intercedes in behalf of the group. In terms of leadership, if there was no blessing from the high priest, there would be no leader. Including Eleazar the priest in the formalities underscored the fact that Joshua's leadership of the Israelites was to be one of cooperation with the high priest. Joshua's rule was not to be profane; contact with YHWH was to hold first place in his governance.

¹⁸ Joshua's installation ceremony was public, held before the entire congregation (קָוַע --a term with strong covenantal connections). It is the congregation with whom YHWH has made a covenant; it is the congregation who requires a leader sensitive to this covenant.

¹⁹ KJV, "give a charge"; RSV and NIV, "commission"; NKJV, "inaugurate."

YHWH's command (v. 22). Why would both meanings be used in so few verses? YHWH's control and input comprise one of the more important messages of this pericope. Moses' commissioning (נָתַן) of Joshua directly results from YHWH's command (נָתַן) to Moses. Moses may be the voice of the commission, but Joshua's commission originates with YHWH.

YHWH instructed Moses to give a solemn charge to Joshua "before their eyes," the eyes of Eleazar and the congregation. Previously in this pericope YHWH had used the same expression to remind Moses that he could not enter the Promised Land because he had not sanctified YHWH at the waters "before their eyes" (Num 27:14). Moses' public sin necessitated a change in Israel's leadership. With this reminder, Joshua's commission emphasized a call to consistently responsible leadership to be maintained in the view of all. The commissioning ceremony as a public event took place at the door of the tabernacle.

What are the contents of Joshua's commission? Three passages provide elements of the installation formula: Deut 3:21-28; 31:1-8, 14,23; and Josh 1:1-9. These passages indicate a four-part commission. First, Moses shared words of encouragement calculated to make Joshua firm and resolute. Based on past experience with YHWH, Joshua was encouraged to be strong and courageous, to not fear, or be alarmed, or be filled with terror. Second, Joshua was commissioned to a task, not a position. He was reminded that his task was to be twofold, that of going over the Jordan and into the Promised Land as well as that of appropriately dividing the land among the tribes. Third, Moses extended YHWH's promise of divine assistance, sufficiency, and companionship. Joshua was not to attend to his task alone. YHWH promised to fight for him, go before him, be with him, and never abandon or forsake him. Moses may have verbalized the commission, but YHWH personally effected it. Fourth, Moses exhorted Joshua to read, preserve, and carefully keep the law. He was not ever to depart from it, but to meditate on it day and night.

"Confer some of your honor on him." The fourth action to follow "taking" was that of conferring (נָתַן) some of Moses' honor (כְּבוֹד) on Joshua.²⁰ One catches "a glimpse of the esteem in which Moses was held" upon the realization that the word "honor," which describes an attribute of YHWH and of kings, also describes an attribute of Moses; "his was the

²⁰ Milton C. Fisher, "נָתַן (*natan*) give," *TWOT* (1980), 2:608-609. Because of its extensive use (around two thousand times) in the OT, נָתַן has a great variety of meanings given in translation. This variety can be reduced to three broad areas: (1) give, (2) put or set, and (3) make or constitute. Translations include: set, commit, put, lay, fasten, hang, make, appoint, suffer, bestow, deliver, send, pay, turn, thrust, strike, cast, permit, place, store, attach, and spend. Its usage in Num 27:20 appears to be mainly connected with the more formal meaning of "appoint," thus the translation of "confer."

authority of a king."²¹ Like kings, Moses too had both external and internal honor (דָּהָר). But like kings, Moses' דָּהָר came from YHWH, a gift YHWH instructed him to share with Joshua. However, YHWH did not intend for Moses to pass all of his honor to Joshua, for his instructions added a partitive לְ (of) to דָּהָר (דָּהָרֶיךָ). Moses was to give Joshua only a part of his honor.²² Moses was to remain unique, like the sun, and Joshua, never the equal of Moses, was to reflect only some of Moses' honor as the moon reflects the sun's light.²³ No matter how important Joshua was to become, he was never to rise to the level of his mentor.²⁴

Sharing some of Moses' honor with Joshua contributed an important element to Joshua's leadership. In a similar fashion as sharing some of his spirit with seventy elders (Num 11:16-27), Moses shared with Joshua a portion of his civil and spiritual authority as well as his honor, charisma, and prestige. Endowed to Joshua by YHWH, the gift of Moses' honor was confirmed by YHWH's appearance in a cloud (Deut 31:15). Israel's treatment of Joshua following Moses' death confirmed that Joshua received this gift.

Result of Moses' actions. The four waw perfect verbs of vv. 18-20, which follow the imperative "take," culminate in the לְמַעַן (so that, in order that) clause of v. 20. Moses is to lay his hand on Joshua, cause him to stand before Eleazar and the congregation, give him a charge, and give him some of Moses' authority, "so that" the whole congregation would listen (שָׁמַע) to Joshua. This reaction of the congregation was not a matter concerning the congregation, but a matter of leadership. The appropriate response to all the actions of Moses in establishing Joshua as leader was that of obedience.

²¹ Riggins, 203; see also Porter, *Moses*, 1-28. Porter argues that the working out of the Moses "tradition primarily took place in Jerusalem under the kings, who adopted Moses to be the link between their new monarchy and the older national traditions which preceded it" (22). He states that Moses "is unmistakably pictured in terms drawn from the language of Hebrew royal ideology" and "that Moses is the antitype of the Davidic monarch" (11). Porter's pamphlet discusses at some length the "role of Moses as king and arbiter of his people's destiny." He, however, carries his point too far when he claims that דָּהָר, "when applied to the human being is used exclusively of king" (18), for it also applied to Job and Daniel.

²² The OT commonly employs the partitive לְ; for example: Gen 4:3-4; Exod 16:27; see also Ashley, 547; Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 324.

²³ Rashi, as quoted by Elie Munk, *La voix de la Torah: Commentaire du Pentateuque*, vols. 4-5 (Paris: Fondation S. et O. Levy, 1975), 293; Morris Rosenbaum and A. M. Silberman, trans. *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary Translated into English and Annotated* (London: Shapiro, Valentine, 1946), *Numbers*, 134.

²⁴ Allen proposes an additional interpretation, that the phrase, "some of your honor," suggests a gradual shift in leadership, "not unlike a coregency of son and father as king" (*Numbers*, 2:946).

While the verb **שמע** (listen) basically means to perceive a sound, it more importantly in this context connotes a listening that pays careful attention to what is said.²⁵ A call to **שמע** (listen) is a call to understand and respond to what is heard.²⁶ Calling for attention and understanding has obedience as a consequence, as classically illustrated in 1 Sam 15:22, "to obey (**שמע**) is better than sacrifice."²⁷ After the death of Moses, at the time Joshua actually assumed command, the whole congregation pledged that as they had obeyed (**שמע**) Moses, so they would now obey (**שמע**) Joshua and that all who rebelled against Joshua and did not obey (**שמעוּ - וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ**) his words would be put to death.²⁸

*Matters Concerning the Congregation--Direction
From Eleazar (subsection d₂)*

To review, the flow in each of the four major sections of Num 27:12-23 first identifies the section's main character, then through an imperative either makes a request or gives a response to the previous request, and then introduces matters concerning leadership, and concludes by introducing matters concerning the congregation. The "congregation" remains a high priority throughout the pericope, as evidenced by its seven appearances and three appearances of the phrase "children of Israel." YHWH reminded Moses in Section A (v. 14) of the congregation's sin at Kadesh. Moses, touched by that reminder, pleaded in Section B (v. 17c) for a leader so that the congregation would not be left as sheep without a shepherd, and YHWH responded in Section A' (v. 21). Just how was Joshua to lead the congregation on a day-by-day basis?

Joshua's Action. Not all the privileges Moses enjoyed passed to Joshua, for he was not to depend on receiving Moses' honor of face-to-face conversation with YHWH. Joshua must "stand before" Eleazar (Num 27:21) when he needed YHWH's directions. Evidently the unity of Moses' office was to be shared between Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest.²⁹ In the crossing of the Jordan and the conquest of Jericho, priests

²⁵ See Gen 3:17; 1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 81:11[12]. Hermann J. Austel, "**שמע**: (shama') hear, listen to, obey," *TWOT* (1980), 2:938-939; G. A. Lee, "Hear; Hearken; Listen; Obey," *ISBE* (1982), 2:649.

²⁶ Understand (Gen 11:7; 42:23; Isa 33:19), response: of fear (Gen 4:23), of faith (Deut 6:4), of assent (Job 34:16; 37:14).

²⁷ See also Gen 16:2; 34:24; 42:22; Exod 24:7; Deut 1:43; 11:13; 1 Kgs 2:42; Neh 9:16; Isa 1:19; 42:24; Jer 35:18. The verb is used with the same sense of obedience in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT, 147.

²⁸ Jos.h.1:17-18.

²⁹ Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, vol. 5, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 307. Did the OT ever record that Joshua used the high priest to obtain information from YHWH? On the one

played an obvious role in carrying the Ark of the Covenant as well as in the blowing of trumpets.³⁰ Both Joshua and Eleazar were tasked with dividing the land equitably among the tribes.³¹ Joshua's one-time experience of installation into office did not remove from him the necessity of maintaining constant contact with YHWH. He was to present himself to Eleazar the priest, who in turn presented himself to YHWH through the Urim, in order to receive guidance for running the affairs of the congregation.

Result of Joshua's Action. After having "stood before" Eleazar and receiving YHWH's Judgment through the Urim, Joshua as well as the whole congregation was to "go out" and to "come in" (Num 27:21). Hebrew frequently uses antonyms to express totality. The expression for "going out" and "coming in" comprehensively covers all leadership duties and responsibilities, which include a managing and conducting of one's own affairs as well as the affairs of state.³² Additionally, when used separately, the Hebrew verbs translated as "go out" (אצא) and to "come in" (אבא) were powerful covenantal reminders for the new leader. Used frequently of the great exodus event, the hifil (causative) of אצא (go out) reminded one of the great "going out" event, the exodus from Egypt, which symbolized the mighty redemption of God's people, an event

hand, Scriptures never record a time when Joshua asked for divine guidance through the high priest. Instead, Scripture points out that YHWH spoke directly to him (Josh 7:7-15; 10:12-14), encouraged Joshua that as he was with Moses he would be with Joshua (Josh 1:5; 3:7), personally appeared to Joshua in order to give direct instruction about entry into the Promised Land (Josh 1:1-9; 3:7-8; 4:1-3, 15-16; 5:2) as well as its conquest (Josh 6:2-5; 8:1-2; 8:18; 11:6; 13:1-7; cf. 5:14-15) and the establishment of the cities of refuge (Josh 20:1-6). However, on the other hand, Num 27:21 gives clear indication that YHWH expected Joshua to work through Eleazar, an expectation supported by two points made in the book of Joshua. First, Joshua, through Eleazar, should have taken the initiative to contact YHWH before making a covenant with the Gibeonites (Josh 9:14). Second, whenever Joshua is mentioned with Eleazar, Eleazar's name appears first, implying a dependency upon him (Josh 14:1; 19:51; 21:1). See also Milgrom, *Numbers*, 236.

³⁰ Josh 3:2, 6, 14, 15, 17; 4:11, 15; 6:4, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16.

³¹ Num 34:17; Josh 14:1; 17:4; 19:51; 21:1.

³² Deut 28:6; 1 Kgs 3:7; Ps 121:8; Zech 8:10. George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOTSupp 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 149-150, Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 147; Horst Dietrich Preuss, "אצא yasa'," *TDOT* (1990), 6:226-227, A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers*, NCB (New York: Henry Frowde, n. d.), 346; George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, ICC (New York: Scribner, 1903), 400-401. Gray points out that "to go out and come in" is an idiomatic method of expressing activity in general by reference to its commencement and conclusion and is a *usus loquendi* similar in character to the frequent periphrases for all which consist of two terms for opposed classes; i.e., *the fettered and the free, the dry and the thirsty, the binder and the bound*.

Moses wished his people to often remember.³³ On the other hand, אִבָּ (come in) spoke to the coming and bringing into the land of promise. Giving of the land as well as coming into possession of the land was YHWH's method of establishing the covenant.³⁴

Interpreting "Laying on of Hands."

The instruction to Moses to "lay his hand" on Joshua has its origin with the Almighty, "and YHWH said to Moses" (Num 27:18). YHWH's words to Moses commenced with an imperative to "take" Joshua, a man in whom there is spirit. Laying on of hands, as one of the subsequent actions initiated by "taking," provided a means for Moses to become personally involved in the process of choosing Joshua as well as providing a means for Moses to physically manifest faith in YHWH. A review of Joshua's life history reveals a man who had a careful and close walk with his God. It was no common individual who received laying on of hands. YHWH, the God of the spirits of all flesh, confirmed that this one to receive the laying on of hands was a man in whom there was spirit. Not only was Joshua a man with an indomitable and courageous spirit, but YHWH had given him a special gift of the Spirit that changed him and endowed him for leadership. Hand-laying is thus associated with a spirited man as well as with a man filled with the Spirit of YHWH.

How does an interpretation of the phrase "standing before" apply to "laying on of hands"? First, the hand gesture followed formal presentation to Eleazar and the congregation (vv. 22-23). Joshua's formal presentation had the dual purpose of giving him to the congregation and doing so in a legal setting, thus giving judicial precedence to hand-laying. Second, hand-laying was associated with the physical gesture of standing that communicated Joshua's acceptance of his responsibilities as well as the congregation's and YHWH's acceptance of Joshua. Third, cultic usage of the term "stand before," reinforced by its association with Eleazar and the congregation, indicated hand-laying was part of a cultic and covenantal event. Finally, the term "stand before" also gives indication as to where Joshua's installation ceremony took place. Presentation to priests and meetings of the congregation generally took place at the tent of meeting. Thus, Joshua's hand-laying ceremony apparently took place at the courtyard gate of the tabernacle.

How does the phrase "commission him in their presence" apply to an

³³ Deut 6:12; 26:8. Paul R. Gilchrist, "אָצֵף" (yasa') go out, come out, go forth," *TWOT* (1980), 1:393-394.

³⁴ Horst Dietrich Preuss, "אִבָּ," *TDOT* (1975), 2:27-30; Elmer Martens, "אִבָּ (bo') go in, enter," *TWOT* (1980), 1:393-394.

interpretation of laying on of hands? Hand-laying is associated with a four-part commission, a commission which encouraged Joshua, described his task, extended YHWH's promise of divine assistance to accomplish the task, and exhorted him to keep the law. Hand-laying is thus associated with a commission verbally spoken by a human, but effected by YHWH.

In the implementation of YHWH's orders, Moses stood Joshua before Eleazar and the congregation, laid hands on him, and gave him a charge, but made no mention of giving him honor or authority. Why is this so? An answer to this question leads directly to laying on of hands. Note first that the four actions associated with "taking" by waw perfect verbs form the following chiasm:

A And you shall lay your hand on him.

B And you shall stand him before Eleazar the priest and before the congregation.

B' And you shall commission him before their eyes.

A' And you shall confer some of your honor on him.

Lines A and A' are linked by the Hebrew word וַיָּשֶׁבֶעַי (on him) while lines B and B' are linked by the Hebrew word אֵתוֹ (him). The divine command of v. 20 instructed Moses to place some of his honor "on him" (וַיָּשֶׁבֶעַי), meaning on Joshua. Use of וַיָּשֶׁבֶעַי (on him) corresponds by parallelism directly to the וַיָּשֶׁבֶעַי (on him) of the hand-laying instruction of v. 18, in which Moses was to lay his hand "on him" (וַיָּשֶׁבֶעַי). "Moses thus establishes a physical conduit for the transfer of his כְּבוֹדוֹ ," which is linked by waw consecutive verbs to standing Joshua before Eleazar and the congregation as well as to giving him a charge.³⁵ The physical act of laying hands, combined with public presentation and giving a charge, became the actions which effectively passed some of Moses' honor to Joshua.

An analysis of waw perfect verbs provides two further observations about laying on of hands: (1) its priority with respect to the other actions and (2) its relationship to the other actions in the installation ceremony. As noted above, normally waw perfect verbs are thought to continue the idea communicated by the verbal form of the imperative and express its purpose or a consequent situation. Placing a waw on a perfect gives the verb an imperfect sense, which expresses a logical succession of actions contingent or dependent on that which precedes it. The sense of the imperative of v. 18, "take," continues with each of the following verbs connected to it by the waw. At the same time a hierarchy is established: first, lay; second, stand; third, command or charge; and fourth, give. Each command becomes contingent on the previous. Hence, the primary action of this series of

³⁵ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 235.

commands becomes laying, or the laying of Moses' hand on Joshua.

One other syntactic role of the waw conjunctive/consecutive arises from what Waltke and O'Conner refer to as the "copulative waw" and Williams as the "waw of accompaniment." In other words, the waw introduces a clause describing concomitant circumstances which coordinate with each other.³⁶ In this case, hand-laying would take place concurrently with presentation, commissioning, and giving some of Moses' honor. However, even though all activities may take place concurrently, the activity listed first, or laying on of hands, retains primary significance in the hierarchy of all the activities. Though primary, to be effective, laying on of hands must also be accompanied by public presentation, giving of a charge, and sharing of honor.

One discovers the further importance attached to laying on of hands by comparing the order of activities in YHWH's command to Moses (vv. 18b-20a) with Moses' implementation of the command (vv. 22b-23a). The importance of hand-laying is emphasized by the fact that it was mentioned first in YHWH's command even though Moses did not physically lay his hands on Joshua before making Joshua's public presentation. By placing hand-laying first in the initial instructions to Moses, YHWH declares its primacy over all the other actions and its importance in the installation of Joshua.

The pericope's conclusion (Section B') provides a second chiasm emphasizing the importance of laying on of hands.

A And he stood him (וַיַּעֲמֵהוּ) before Eleazar the priest and before the congregation.

B And he laid his hands on him.

A' And he commissioned him (וַיִּצְוֵהוּ).

Lines A and A' are linked in Hebrew by third masculine singular suffixes attached to the verbs. In the instructions of section A', the pronoun "him" had been indicated by the Hebrew word *ink*, but in the implementation of the instructions, the pronoun is indicated by a suffix. However, the description of the implementation for laying on of hands retains the same Hebrew word for "on him" (עָלָיו) that had been used in the instruction of section A'. Laying on of hands falls into the center, again an indication of its importance.

³⁶ Williams, 83. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor introduce a history of the controversy wrapped around understanding the conjunction waw. The variety of terms used to describe the conjugation gives evidence of the struggle to understand it. Hebraists are not in agreement and have advanced various theories in a fashion something like the proverbial five blind men examining an elephant. Each of them has described a portion of the beast accurately, but they differed in their conclusions because they tried to describe the whole by generalizing from a part (*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 456-457).

Numbers 27:12-23 concludes by, drawing attention to Moses' hand in a different fashion. Joshua's installation took place "just as YHWH spoke by the hand of Moses" (Num 27:23). Two important concepts are placed in juxtaposition with each other, the "word" of YHWH with the "hand"

of Moses.³⁷ Throughout Israel's experience, the "word" of God played a significant role.³⁸ Walter Roehrs observes that the "word of God denotes the acts of God's revelation as embodying and charged with all the characteristics of God. In and by the word, God acts, conveys, and communicates Himself."³⁹ Because דְבַר יְיָ (word) "posits the reality which it signifies," דְבַר יְיָ has been used in contexts where in English we use "thing."⁴⁰ When applied to the divine arena, the "word" of YHWH comes as a dynamic "something" with its own distinct reality that is an expansion of YHWH himself, filled with his personal power. And when YHWH's word comes, it possesses creative power and effects what it signifies, for when YHWH posits the word-thing, nothing can prevent its emergence."⁴¹ The OT also treats the "word of YHWH" as an object or bearer of power which always accomplishes its mission and thus creates history and shapes the future.⁴² Because YHWH's "word" has been treated as an object with such power, the OT invites YHWH's people to "see" his word.⁴³

By placing Moses' "hand" in juxtaposition with YHWH's "word," Num 27:23 makes a significant statement about Moses' hand. His hand became a visible representation of YHWH's communication and of YHWH's power. Moses' hand enabled Israel to see the "word" of YHWH. While it should be noted that thirty-one times the OT states that YHWH acted "by the hand of Moses," it should also be noted that the expression receives limited usage. It appears to be no accident that the expression was used in this pericope. Moses'

³⁷ For the importance of the "word" (דְבַר יְיָ) of YHWH, see W.H. Schmidt, *TDOT* (1978): 3:111-125; Earl S. Kalland, "דְבַר יְיָ (dabar) to speak, declare, converse, command, promise, warn, threaten, Sing, etc.," *TWOT* (1980), 1:178-181; John L. McKenzie, "The Word of God in the Old Testament," *TS* 21 (1960): 183-206; and Walter R. Roehrs, "The Theology of the Word of God in the Old Testament," *CTM* 32 (1961): 257-273.

³⁸ Especially during the exodus from Egypt when the word of YHWH moved Israel at each step from Horeb to Canaan, i.e., Deut 1:6; 2:2, 18, 31; 3:1; 3:27-28.

³⁹ Roehrs, 264.

⁴⁰ Lev 5:2; Num 31:23. John L. McKenzie, "The Word of God in the Old Testament," *Theological Studies* 21, (1960):188, 190.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 196. By the word of YHWH were the heavens made (Pss 19:2-5; 33:6, 9; 147:15-18; 148:8).

⁴² When YHWH's "word" goes out, it will not return empty but will accomplish its mission (Isa 45:23; 55:10-11).

⁴³ See, for example, Jer 2:31.

act of laying his hands on Joshua became a visible enactment of the "word" of YHWH with all of its attendant concepts of power and ability to create and effect what it signifies. Thus it becomes clear why, in the list of actions Moses is to accomplish in the installation of Joshua, the laying on of hands carried primary significance.

Joshua's reception of hand-laying along with the critical elements of public presentation, commissioning, and some of Moses' honor was calculated to have a certain effect. Joshua was to receive something further--that is, obedience of the whole community. However, receiving such recognition did not put Joshua on the same plane as Moses, nor did it remove from Joshua the need of continually seeking YHWH's will. Though hand-laying carried high importance, it did not place Joshua in such a position that he could depend on direct access to YHWH for all of his leadership decisions. Joshua was to seek YHWH's will by standing before the high priest, Eleazar, who in turn was to seek that will through use of the Urim. But once Joshua ascertained YHWH's will, the congregation was to follow his directions.

Numbers 27:12-23 clarifies the importance of hand-laying in Joshua's installation. The gesture is primary in the procedure and results in the congregation's obedience. Did the gesture in any way change Joshua? A careful study of Deut 34:9 will provide an answer.

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