

## JOSHUA'S RECEPTION OF THE LAYING ON OF HANDS, PART 2: DEUTERONOMY 34:7 AND CONCLUSION

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Two passages address laying on of hands in the installation of Joshua: Num 27:12-23 and Deut 34:9. In a previous article,<sup>1</sup> I exegeted Num 27:12-23 with the specific purpose of analyzing the significance of laying hands on Joshua. In this article, I will exegete Deut 34:9 with the same hand-laying emphasis and then conclude by analyzing the procedural techniques, symbolic meanings, and tangible effects of laying on of hands in the installation of Joshua in these two passages.

Deuteronomy is generally divided into four major sections: Moses' first (chaps. 1-4), second (chaps. 5-26), and third (chaps. 27-30) addresses, and final arrangements (chaps. 31-34). As a key element in the final chapter of the book, Deut 34:9 also plays a significant function in the final section of the book (chaps. 31-34) as it clarifies the roles of YHWH and Moses in selecting the new leader of the covenant community as well as Israel's expected response to the new leader.

Deuteronomy 34:9 must be understood in light of the larger picture portrayed in Deut 31 through 34. Other than YHWH, Moses and Joshua play the major character roles of the final four chapters. While the dominant theme running throughout these chapters is that of the death of Moses, the installation of Joshua plays an important secondary theme. Deuteronomy 31-34 can be divided into three sections, each containing a chiasmic structure. The Hebrew word for speak (דבר) demarcates the beginning point of each section, while the Hebrew word for finish (כלה) concludes the first section, and the Hebrew word for complete/finish (חמם) concludes the second section. Deuteronomy 31 through 34 can be outlined as:

### I. Moses spoke (דבר) these words to all Israel (31:1-29)

- A. I am 120, cannot go out/in, for YHWH says I cannot cross (עבר) over the Jordan
  - 1. YHWH and Joshua will cross over (עבר) before you
  - 2. Do what YHWH commands and be strong/courageous; YHWH will not fail you

<sup>1</sup>Keith Mattingly, "The Significance of Joshua's Reception of the Laying on of Hands in Numbers 27:12-23," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 191-208.

## B. Moses summoned and spoke to Joshua (31:7-9)

1. Be strong/courageous; you will go in (תָּבוֹא) to the land with this people
2. YHWH will be with you/not fail you, nor forsake you

## C. Moses wrote this Torah, gave to Levites/elders, charged to read it (31:9-13)

## D. YHWH spoke to Moses (31:14-21)

1. You are going to die—so summon Joshua, come to tabernacle
2. You will soon sleep with your fathers, I will be forsaken, so write this song and teach it to Israel

## C' Moses wrote this song and taught it to Israel (31:22)

## B' YHWH commanded Joshua and said to him: (31:23)

1. Be strong/courageous you will bring (תָּקִים) Israel in
2. I will be with you

## A' Moses finished (כָּלָה) writing the words of this Torah into a book

When the words concluded (חָמַם), Moses commanded the Levites, saying: (31:24-29)

1. Place this book of the Torah at the side of the ark of the covenant of YHWH  
For I know your rebelliousness while I am alive, surely more so after I die
2. Gather the elders and I (YHWH) shall speak words into their ears  
For I know that after my death you will surely rebel

## II. Moses' Song (31:30-32:47)

## A. Moses spoke (דִּבֶּר) the words of this song to Israel until their conclusion (חָמַם) (31:30)

## B. The Song (32:1-43)

## A' Moses spoke all the words of this song to the people, he and Joshua

Moses concluded (כָּלָה) speaking all these words (32:44-47)

## III. Moses' Death (32:48-34:12)

## A. YHWH spoke (דִּבֶּר) to Moses that very day, saying (the command to die) (32:48-52)

1. Ascend the mountain and see the land of Canaan
2. And die on the mountain
  - a. because (עַל אֲשֶׁר) of your rebellion against me among the children of Israel
  - b. and because (עַל אֲשֶׁר) of your not sanctifying me among the children of Israel

## B. The blessings of Moses (33:1-29)

## A' The death of Moses (the response to YHWH's command) (34:1-12)

- 1' Moses ascended the mountain and saw the land YHWH promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- 2' Moses died a great man
  - a. Servant of YHWH

- b. According to the word (עָלָה) of YHWH who buried him in an unknown place
- c. Moses was 120 years old, eyes not dimmed, vigor not diminished
- d. Israel mourned for Moses 30 days until the mourning period ended (סָמַח)
- e. Joshua blessed by Moses' greatness
  - i. Received spirit of wisdom as a result of Moses' laying hands on him
  - ii. Israel listened to Joshua and did according as YHWH commanded Moses
- f. Never a prophet like Moses whom YHWH had known face to face
  - i. Evidenced by all the signs and wonders performed in Egypt
  - ii. Evidenced by his strong hand and awesome power performed before all Israel

Sections I and III emphasize Moses's old age and imminent death and describe Joshua's installation as Moses' successor. Section I describes two elements of the installation as described in Num 27:12-23, namely, that of presentation and commission.<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 31:7 describes Joshua's presentation by stating that Moses "summoned" Joshua and "spoke" to him "before the eyes of" all Israel. Deuteronomy 31:14 adds a second element of the presentation by stating that Moses was to present himself and Joshua at the Tent of Meeting before YHWH, where both Moses (Deut 31:7-8) and YHWH (Deut 31:23) gave Joshua words of commission. Section III describes the third element of Joshua's installation as described in Num 27:12-23, namely, that of the laying on of hands. Section II gives importance to Joshua by giving him credit, along with Moses, for having spoken the words of the song normally attributed only to Moses (Deut 32:44).

Section III is divided into three subsections, A, B, A'. While A and A' both address matters of Moses' death, their themes are dramatically different. Subsection A addresses the more negative elements of Moses' death, namely, the cause and consequence of his death. Subsection A' addresses Moses' death from a positive standpoint. Moses is referred to as the "servant of YHWH." No human buried Moses; YHWH personally buried him. Though he was 120 years old, subsection A' points out that his eyes had not dimmed nor his vigor diminished. Evidently, he did not die of old age. He was so important to the Israelite nation that they mourned for him thirty days. He had such an impact on Joshua that by laying his hands on him, Joshua received both the spirit of wisdom and the obedience of Israel. Finally, this subsection points out that never has there arisen a prophet like Moses whom YHWH knew face to face, as evidenced by all the signs and wonders he performed in Egypt and the

<sup>2</sup>See Mattingly for a thorough discussion of the parallels between the two passages ("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], 256-263).

strong hand with which he performed awesome power before Israel.

Deuteronomy 34:9 falls into the second section of chapter 34, which addresses the greatness of Moses. The unique elements of v. 9 are twofold: it introduces a person other than Moses and addresses the future beyond Moses' death by describing Joshua's installation as Israel's next leader through the laying on of Moses' hands. Deuteronomy 34:9 consists of two distinct sections, each with two subsections, as illustrated in the following outline:

A. Joshua, son of Nun

a. Full of the spirit (רוּחַ) of wisdom, חָכְמָה

b. Because (כִּי) Moses laid hands on him

B. And the sons of Israel

a'. Obeyed (וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ) him

b'. Did (וַיַּעֲשׂוּ) as YHWH commanded Moses

This short verse contains a variety of parallelism. An external parallelism based upon result exists between sections A and B. Section A establishes the result of laying on of hands on Joshua: he received the spirit of wisdom. Section B establishes the result of the hand-laying gesture for the children of Israel: they obeyed YHWH by obeying Joshua. Simultaneously, a sequential parallelism is developed: section A establishes a fact to which section B responds. Israel's obedience of section B is a response to the hand-laying of section A.

Subsections a, a' and b, b' provide an internal parallelism within the verse. Subsections a and a' are more abstract, presenting spiritual principles. Subsection a establishes that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom, and subsection a' establishes that Israel "listened" to or "obeyed" Joshua. Subsections b and b' portray actions that relate to their previously mentioned principles. Subsection b establishes that the spirit of wisdom was the result of an action—that of laying on of hands. Subsection b' establishes that Israel actually "did" something.

Two elements influence an understanding of laying on of hands in the experience of Joshua as related by Deut 34:9. First, Deut 34:9 describes the results of the hand-laying gesture on Joshua personally—he was filled with the spirit of wisdom. Second, Deut 34:9 also describes the results of the gesture on Joshua as it related to the Israelites in general—they obeyed him by doing as YHWH had commanded.

### *Results on Joshua*

#### Filled

Joshua was filled (מָלָא) with the spirit of wisdom. The basic meaning of מָלָא is "to fill," "be full," or "to make full."<sup>3</sup> The form מָלָא (fill) as it exists

<sup>3</sup>Richard Gary Fairman, "An Exegesis of 'Filling' Texts Which Refer to the Doctrine

in Deut 34:9 can be translated in one of three ways: as a verb, qal perfect 3d masculine singular (was filled) or a qal participle; as an attributive adjective (full or complete, modifying spirit of wisdom); or as a masculine noun (fullness, that which fills).<sup>4</sup> As a verb, מִלֵּא can be translated as either "to fill" or "to be full (of)"<sup>5</sup> and can be used in the sense of "to fill up, complete."<sup>6</sup> An object can be filled by either that which is concrete or that which is immaterial. Immaterial items that can be used in the filling process include praise, blessing, glory, indignation, righteousness, laughter, or anguish.<sup>7</sup>

The first two options of the above three choices apply to Deut 34:9—either מִלֵּא is a verb, as translated above, or an attributive adjective modifying "spirit of wisdom," translated as "Joshua, son of Nun, received the spirit of wisdom in its fullness."<sup>8</sup> Two arguments support translating מִלֵּא in our verse as a verb. First, the structure of the verse indicates clearly the choice of verb. The verse is divided into two sections in which each section contains two verbs: the first contains two perfect verbs, and the second contains two imperfect verbs (plus the clause stating: "as YHWH

of Filling" (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1986), 23-32. Fairman reviews the major lexicons and provides an excellent study of the meaning of מִלֵּא; cf. my dissertation for a review of the OT expression "filling the hands" ("The Laying on of Hands on Joshua: An Exegetical Study of Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 34:9," 121-123).

<sup>4</sup>Walter Kaiser, "מִלֵּא," *TWOT* (1980), 1:505-506; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 347; L. A. Snijders, *TDOT* (1996), 8:297-308; Heinz-Joseph Fabry, "מִלֵּא māle," *TWAT* (1986), 4:876-886; idem, "מִלֵּא māle," *TDOT* (1996), 8:307-308.

<sup>5</sup>William Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 195.

<sup>6</sup>Snijders, 298, states: "Complete the week of this one [bride] (Gen 29:27), while in Babylon, Israel's time of service was fulfilled when its measure of suffering was complete (Isa 40:2), when the days of the Nazarite separation are filled (completed, Num 6:5, 13)."

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. Praise (Hab 3:3), blessing (Deut 33:23), glory (Num 14:21), indignation (Jer 15:17), righteousness (Isa 33:5), laughter (Job 8:21; Ps 126:2), and anguish (Isa 21:3).

<sup>8</sup>Wilhelm Julius Schröder incorrectly interprets this clause ("Deuteronomy," in *A Commentary on the Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical*, vol. 3, trans. A. Gosman [New York: Scribner's, 1858], 238). Fairman, 126, agrees with Schröder and argues that the "adjective is to be preferred because the verb is transitive, and this occurrence lacks a direct object." However, Fairman, 26, points out that מִלֵּא can be either transitive or intransitive. Thomas Lambdin cautions that adjectives are often associated with stative verbs which are frequently identical in stem form to the 3ms of the perfect and thus easily confused (*Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [New York: Scribner's, 1971], 94). However, Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor treat מִלֵּא in Deut 34:9 not as an adjective, but as a stative, qal perfect verb, and translate, "Joshua . . . was filled with the spirit of wisdom" (*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 366).

had commanded Moses"). Should מלא not be a verb, the verse would be imbalanced. Second, the particle כי (because) forces the choice of a verb.

The book of Numbers, on one occasion, used the verb "fill" when referring to Joshua. Israel's older generation could not enter the Promised Land because they followed the advice of the ten faithless spies who did not "fully" or "completely follow" (מלא אחרי) YHWH. However, Caleb and Joshua were allowed to enter because they "completely followed" (מלא אחרי) YHWH.<sup>9</sup> Rendered literally, the Hebrew idiom reads that they "completely filled themselves after YHWH," giving the idea of total obedience and dedication.<sup>10</sup>

The act of filling, as indicated in Deut 34:9, is an act of placing something into Joshua, an act of completion. YHWH completely filled his servant who had faithfully and fully previously given his all.

### Spirit of Wisdom

To understand the "spirit of wisdom" that filled Joshua, one must review the four other OT texts<sup>11</sup> that use the phrase as well as review the concept of wisdom as used in Deuteronomy. In a seminal study on "filling" texts, Richard Fairman noted three additional texts to the above-mentioned four which provide an important contribution to an understanding of that which filled Joshua.<sup>12</sup> A review of these texts reveals the following three points. First, YHWH is the one who fills. YHWH alone truly knows and understands wisdom, and it is he who dispenses it to his people.<sup>13</sup> His spirit is seen to be the means by which his people are filled with wisdom; hence the expression, "spirit of wisdom." Second, the people of YHWH were "wise of heart." Wisdom, placed in the heart by YHWH, draws one's attention to the law,

<sup>9</sup>Num 32:12. Jacob Milgrom translates the phrase as, "they remained loyal to the Lord" (*Numbers Bemidbar*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990], 269). Philip J. Budd translates it as, "they followed Yahweh wholeheartedly" (*Numbers*, vol. 5, WBC [Waco: Word, 1984], 335).

<sup>10</sup>Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 104. The phrase, מלא אחרי יהוה is used four times in the Pentateuch: twice for Caleb (Num 14:24; Deut 1:36), once for Caleb and Joshua (Num 32:12), and once for the nation of Israel, which did not follow YHWH (Num 32:11).

<sup>11</sup>Three texts address the workers who built the tabernacle (Exod 28:3; 31:3; 35:31), and one addresses the shoot to arise from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:2).

<sup>12</sup>Fairman, 103-145, refers to seven texts. Of the seven, four have already been mentioned because they refer specifically to the "spirit of wisdom" (Exod 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Deut 34:9). The three additional texts include Exod 35:35 (Bezalel and Oholiab filled with the heart of wisdom), 1 Kgs 7:14 (Hiram filled with wisdom), and Mic 3:8 (Micah filled with power of the spirit of YHWH).

<sup>13</sup>See also 1 Kgs 5:9, 26; Job 11:6; 28:23; Pss 51:8; 90:12; Prov 2:6.

one's ears to be open to knowledge, and one's words to be well chosen.<sup>14</sup> One "wise of heart" possesses a broad intelligence that comprehends the surrounding world and provides a dimension of experience informed by acknowledgment of YHWH's righteousness and divinity. It was these kinds of persons, both male and female, who were filled with the spirit of wisdom to fashion the priestly vestments and construct the tabernacle.<sup>15</sup> Third, YHWH's gift of wisdom gave the practical ability to accomplish a task or the skill to lead, distinguish right from wrong, and render true justice.

An overview of the usage of wisdom in Deuteronomy yields four important observations.<sup>16</sup> First, wisdom played a role in the establishment of leadership. The book of Deuteronomy introduces its concern for leadership in 1:9-18, where YHWH instructed Moses to choose wise, discerning, and reputable men to aid in the governance of Israel. Second, wisdom in Deut 1:16-17 manifested itself in clear leadership responsibilities, such as listening without bias and judging without partiality or fear. Third, the book associates wisdom with obedience, particularly of YHWH's statutes and judgments (Deut 4:5-8). In keeping YHWH's law, Israel will show its wisdom and understanding to other nations (Deut 4:6). The nation's wisdom lies in an intelligence and discernment that is the fruit of obedience to the law. Fourth, the book of Deuteronomy also associates wisdom with the ability to recognize where a particular course of action will lead. Moses called his people (Deut 32:29) to be wise and understanding so that they could interpret events that YHWH would bring into their experience.

What did Joshua receive when he received the "spirit of wisdom"? Most importantly, the origin of the spirit that Joshua possessed came from outside himself—YHWH filled him. However, YHWH filled those who were already wise-hearted. Joshua had established a special ability in the congregation. As would occur in the future with Solomon, Joshua received a special gift of wisdom, giving him the various skills necessary to lead.<sup>17</sup> He needed wisdom to righteously judge all Israelites and aliens

<sup>14</sup>Placed by YHWH (Exod 35:35; Prov 2:6; 1 Kgs 10:24; 2 Chr 9:23); focused on law (Prov 2:2; 10:8); ears open to knowledge (Prov 18:15); and words well chosen (Prov 15:28; 16:21, 23; Job 33:3; Isa 32:4).

<sup>15</sup>Of the "wise of heart" texts mentioned above, Exod 35:25, 26 refers to women who wove the tapestry for the tabernacle.

<sup>16</sup>S. Dean McBride Jr., "Polity of the Covenant People: The Book of Deuteronomy," *Int* 41 (1987): 229-244. McBride suggests that the book of Deuteronomy concerns itself with the leadership of Israel in two of the above four ways: provision for setting up leadership and instructions about responsibilities of leadership. He suggests that Torah in the book of Deuteronomy is best understood as polity, by which Israel's life should be ordered and ruled.

<sup>17</sup>The phrase "spirit of judgment" (Isa 28:6) refers to the power being given to one who sits in judgment by which he is enabled to exercise his judicial functions. Similarly, the spirit

without partiality and fear. Because the book of Deuteronomy associates wisdom with obedience to YHWH's law, it can be assumed that the spirit of wisdom associated with Joshua also included a relationship to the law. As a leader, Joshua needed the ability to understand, interpret, and apply the law in the life of YHWH's people. Also he received special wisdom that enabled him to choose wisely where to lead YHWH's people. Wisdom is that quality given by YHWH which enabled Joshua to make good judgments, to understand the essence and purpose of things, and to find the right means for achieving the YHWH-given goals.

### Because Moses Laid His Hands

Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom because (כִּי) Moses had laid his hands on him. Reception of the spirit of wisdom evidently depended upon hand-laying, which on the surface appears to contradict Num 27:18, where hand-laying was dependent on a previous possession of spirit. An attempt at reconciliation of this contradiction must take into consideration the particle כִּי.

Although the particle כִּי is one of the most frequently used words in the OT with a wide and varied range of meanings,<sup>18</sup> clear evidence supports interpreting it as causal in Deut 34:9. The evidence that supports this conclusion is at least fourfold: translations generally understand כִּי as

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of wisdom is a gift which enables the governing of people; cf. Norman Henry Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), 149. Joshua received practical wisdom and common-sense administration skills. See also Samuel Rolles Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, ICC (New York: Scribners, 1902), 424; Joseph Reider, *Deuteronomy with Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1937), 345.

<sup>18</sup>כִּי has been used in the OT in at least ten different ways: causal (because), temporal (when, now), conditional (if), adversative (after a negative), concessive (though), asseverative (to assert strongly, a use originating in oaths), resultative (that), interrogative (who, introduces a question), nominalizing (introducing noun clauses), and recitative (introducing direct speech) (J. Muilenburg, "The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle *kî* in the Old Testament," *HUCA* 32 [1961]: 135-160). כִּי occurs about 4,350 times; see also Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2d ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 72-73; W. Vogels, "The Spirit in Joshua and the Laying on of Hands by Moses," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 38 (1982): 3-7; T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), 136-159; John N. Oswalt, "כִּי (*kî*) as though, as, because that, but, certainly, except, for, surely, since, that, then, when, etc." *TWOT* (1980), 1:437-438; Pinchas Doron, "Motive Clauses in the Laws of Deuteronomy: Their Forms, Functions, and Contents," *HAR* 2 (1978): 62-65; A. Schoors, "The Particle *kî*," in *Remembering All the Way... A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Oudtestamentische Werkgezelschap in Nederland*, ed. A. S. van der Woude, Oudtestamentische Studien, no. 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 240-273; and Mitchell Dahood, "Interrogative *kî* in Psalm 90:11; Isaiah 36:19 and Hosea 13:9," *Biblica* 60 (1979): 573-574.

causal,<sup>19</sup> Masoretic accents indicate that the  $\text{ב}$  clause was to be included as an explanation of the previous clause, the structure of the verse supports placement of the Masoretic accents,<sup>20</sup> and most instances of  $\text{ב}$  following a main clause should be rendered as "because."<sup>21</sup> The particle indicates that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom *because* Moses laid hands on him.

It should be no surprise that Moses' hands were perceived as having the capability of such accomplishment. The three verses following Deut 34:9 conclude the book by reminding the reader of the greatness of Moses with language that draws attention to the entire exodus experience. Moses' greatness included talking face to face with YHWH, performance of signs and wonders which YHWH sent him to do in Egypt, possession of a mighty hand (תִּיר הַחֲזָקָה), and performance of awesome deeds in the sight of Israel. It should be noted, however, that the Pentateuch's intent is not to present Moses' hands as having magical power. YHWH is always presented as the real power.<sup>22</sup> Moses laid his hands upon Joshua when he set him apart for leadership, but it was YHWH who gave the gift through the hands of Moses.<sup>23</sup> Although it is the blessing of YHWH that made the difference in establishing Joshua as Israel's next leader, YHWH yet chose to pass that blessing through the hands of Moses.

What did the gesture accomplish for Joshua? Realizing that Deut 34:9 concludes a ceremony begun in Deut 31, the laying on of hands designated a rite of installation, an investiture of a new function, a method of induction into a position of authority.<sup>24</sup> Earl Kalland and

<sup>19</sup>NAB has "since"; JB, NASB, RSV, NEB, KJV, NKJV have "for"; NRSV, NIV have "because."

<sup>20</sup>The verse is composed of four well-balanced sections: Joshua, the son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom; because Moses had laid hands on him, so the Israelites listened to (obeyed) him, and did as YHWH commanded Moses. Also the verb in the first two sections is in the perfect, and the verb in the last two sections is in the imperfect.

<sup>21</sup>Schoors, 264-273. Muilenburg, 145, points out that the causal  $\text{ב}$  is particularly noteworthy for the role it plays in the many kinds of motivations of various literary forms; cf. Gen 3:5, 14; 1 Kgs 13:21; 21:29; 2 Sam 12:10; Isa 7:5; 15:1.

<sup>22</sup>YHWH told Moses that Pharaoh would not let him go unless a "mighty hand" compelled him. So, YHWH stated that he would stretch out his "hand" and strike the Egyptians with his wonders (Exod 3:19-20).

<sup>23</sup>In Deut 31:7, 8, Moses informed Joshua that YHWH would be the one who took Joshua into the Promised Land; in Deut 31:23, YHWH affirmed this promise directly to Joshua. In the Num 27:12-23 pericope, Moses asked YHWH to appoint a man and then did all that YHWH commanded him.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph Coppens, *L'imposition des mains et les rites connexes dans le Nouveau Testament et dans l'Eglise ancienne* (Paris: Gabalda, 1925), 163; Henry P. Smith, "The Laying-on of Hands," *The American Journal of Theology* 17 (1913): 59-60.

Matthew Henry refer to the installation of Joshua as an "ordination."<sup>25</sup>

Scholars have proposed at least two suggestions as to what was transferred by Moses' hand gesture during Joshua's installation ceremony. On the one hand, the "spirit of wisdom" is a reference to that part of Moses' honor which YHWH told him in Num 27:20 to pass on to Joshua. By the laying on of hands, Joshua became a participant of the authority and spirit of wisdom of Moses.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the "spirit of wisdom" refers to a special gift given by YHWH's Spirit. On at least one other OT occasion, reception of the Spirit of YHWH was connected to a physical act. David received a mighty outpouring of the Spirit on the day Samuel anointed him with a horn of oil.<sup>27</sup> This outpouring did not preclude the fact that David already had a measure of the Spirit. Rather from that day forward, David received extra evidence of YHWH's Spirit. In the case of Joshua, a man who already had spirit (Num 27:18) received an extra measure of the spirit of wisdom mediated by the physical contact of Moses' hands.<sup>28</sup> In the laying on of Moses' hands, Joshua received something more. That something more was what Moses had possessed during his leadership of Israel and which Israel was soon to lose due to Moses' imminent death—a gift to lead the whole nation into YHWH's desired action. Joshua had no need of this gift prior to Moses' death and his installation as the leader of the nation.

### *Result on Israel*

As a result of the hand-laying experience in which the spirit of wisdom was mediated to Joshua, "all the sons of Israel obeyed" him. All that

<sup>25</sup>Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," vol. 3, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 324-325; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 888.

<sup>26</sup>Paul Galtier, "Imposition des mains," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1927), 7:1304; W. D. Stacey, "Concerning the Ministry—Three Addresses to Ordinands," *ExpTim* 75 (1963-64): 265. Stacey states: "It seems certain that the transmission of personal virtue and vitality (of Moses) is implied." Smith, 59-60, emphasizes that the Spirit is not bound to any one physical act on the part of man. Hand-laying did not mediate the Spirit. Rather, it transferred a portion of Moses' honor or majesty.

<sup>27</sup>1 Sam 16:13.

<sup>28</sup>Allen Howard Podet, "Elements in the Development of Rabbinical Ordination in the Codes" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, 1964), 42-46; Coppens, 163; A.R.S. Kennedy, *Deuteronomy and Joshua*, vol. 4, *The New Century Bible* (New York: Henry Frowde, n. d.), 246-247; Henry Wheeler Robinson, *Deuteronomy and Joshua*, NCB (New York: Oxford University Press, 1907), 246-247; Bernard M. Zlotowitz, "Semichah and Its Relation to Ishut," in *Rabbinic Authority: Papers Presented before the 91st Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, ed. Elliot Stevens (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1982), 90/2:67-68; John D. W. Watts, "Deuteronomy," *BBC* (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), 296.

YHWH had asked Moses to do to Joshua in Num 27:12-23 had as its intended result—the obedience of Israel directed toward Joshua. Deuteronomy 34:9 reports that Israel followed through with YHWH's instructions and submitted to Joshua. The children of Israel also did as YHWH had commanded Moses.

In listening to Joshua, Israel was listening to Moses, who had listened to YHWH. Thus in "listening" to and "obeying" Joshua, as well as "doing" all that YHWH had commanded through Moses, Israel was taking some of its first steps in covenant fulfillment. Reception of Moses' hand-laying gesture confirmed Joshua's role as leader of the covenant community. Only as Israel obeyed him could it maintain the integrity of its covenantal relationship with YHWH.

### *Comparing Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 34:9*

The book of Numbers indicates that Joshua was appointed from among the numbered who were to enter the Promised Land. It addresses Moses' specific concerns for the leadership of Israel, concerns of shepherding and leading the people out and back in. The book describes elements other than the laying on of hands that were part of the installation ceremony. Such elements included public presentation to the congregation and the high priest, the giving of a charge, and the giving of some of Moses' honor. Deuteronomy 31, which introduces the last major section that Deut 34 concludes, also describes two of the elements accompanying the laying on of hands mentioned in Numbers, namely, presentation and commission. The book of Numbers also specifies that in order for Joshua to discover YHWH's will for his leadership, he must ask Eleazar the high priest, who in turn was to seek YHWH's will through the Urim. The book of Deuteronomy states that Joshua received the "spirit of wisdom" through hand laying and adds a touch of closure by stating that Israel really did obey Joshua.

The two areas of apparent disagreement between the two passages can be harmonized. In the first disagreement, the book of Numbers appears to contradict itself by reporting that YHWH instructed Moses to lay his hand (singular) on Joshua, but in following YHWH's instruction Moses laid his hands (plural). A review of Moses' usage of hand or hands indicated that there was no significant difference in the symbolism of one or both hands. Most likely, in that hands (plural) are mentioned in both Deuteronomy and Numbers, the actual ceremony involved Moses' using both hands.<sup>29</sup> The second disagreement concerns the relationship between

<sup>29</sup>The command is more concerned with method than with numbers. It appears that the instruction is to use a particular part of the anatomy in the ordination service, namely, the hand. A review of hand usage in the OT confirms that Hebrew thought placed no significant

hand laying and the "spirit." The book of Numbers states that Joshua was to receive hand laying because he is a man in whom there is spirit, and the book of Deuteronomy states that he received the spirit of wisdom because of the hand gesture. The two passages really address two different issues: Numbers clarifies why Joshua is eligible for the position of leadership, while Deuteronomy clarifies what happened as a result of the hand-laying experience. Joshua's previous reception of the Spirit did not preclude the need of a new, outward sign. YHWH passed a special, new gift to Joshua as a result of Moses' laying hands on him, which was necessitated by the fact that Joshua received new responsibilities. The book of Deuteronomy clarifies that Joshua received an additional endowment of the "spirit."

Both passages emphasize YHWH's control—he is in command of the event. In Num 27:16, Moses requested that YHWH, "the God of the spirits of all flesh," direct in choosing Israel's next leader. Eight specific references to YHWH throughout the passage further indicate his control. The pericope concludes by pointing out, with two distinct statements in the short space of two verses, that Moses did as YHWH had commanded. Deuteronomy 34:9 follows in the same vein, also emphasizing that Israel did as YHWH had commanded Moses. Both passages emphasize the significant role of spirit.

Both passages emphasize that as a result of the hand-laying gesture all of Israel obeyed Joshua. Both passages treat the laying on of hands as of primary importance to the installation of Joshua. Both passages structurally indicate the importance of the laying on of hands: Numbers by placing the gesture first to emphasize its importance as both a title to the list and a conclusion, Deuteronomy by placing it last in the Deut 31 through 34 pericope as a summary statement to give meaning to the entire installation procedure. Hand laying provided a means for Moses to become physically involved in choosing Joshua, to physically manifest his faith in YHWH, to pass some of his honor to Joshua, and for YHWH to give the spirit of wisdom. Both passages treat the gesture as an important, visible expression of the word of YHWH with all of its attendant concepts of power and ability to effect what the gesture signified. YHWH blessed Joshua through the hands of Moses.

### *The Significance of the Laying On of Hands*

Joshua's reception of the laying on of hands played a critical, necessary, and significant role in his installation to the office of Israel's leader. At

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difference upon the usage of one or two hands. Vogels, 4-5, states that "the ritual of the laying on by one or two hands appears elsewhere and the difference of number does not seem to indicate a difference of meaning." He then refers to D. Daube, E. Ferguson, J. K. Parratt, and C. Chavasse for support.

least three types of transfer took place as a result of this procedure: Joshua received a portion of Moses' honor, an extra measure of God's Spirit in the form of the spirit of wisdom, and the obedience as well as loyalty of the Israelite congregation. Laying on of hands was the primary element which summarized and gave meaning to all the other actions that took place at the installation service. In other words, the laying on of hands gave meaning to the public presentation and became a physical conduit for passing two elements to Joshua: YHWH's commission and Moses' honor. The laying on of hands was a legal action which gave visible representation to YHWH's word. While Moses laid his own hands on Joshua, YHWH did the transferring.

It should not be surprising that hand laying played such a significant role because of the importance hand symbolism played in the ancient Near Eastern and biblical worlds. Inasmuch as hands symbolized power and possession throughout these worlds, YHWH was easily perceived as passing his power to Joshua through Moses' hands, and at the same time he was perceived as claiming Joshua as his possession through the instrument of Moses' hands. On other occasions, YHWH spoke "by the hand" of Moses. On the occasion of Joshua's installation, YHWH transferred his Spirit to Joshua "through the hand" of Moses.

Usage of the hand-laying gesture in Joshua's installation service indicated an ordination to a special work of ministry for his people. Joshua was to lead his people out and bring them back in by becoming their shepherd. Hand laying indicated that he was indeed YHWH's personal choice to be Israel's shepherd. As hand laying indicated an act of consecration in which the Levites were set apart from the rest of the congregation in order to be completely dedicated to cultic service, so the same hand-laying gesture indicated a consecration in which Joshua was set apart from all others in order to be dedicated completely to the ministry of leadership. While ordination to priesthood was indicated by "filling the hands," Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom at his ordination by the "laying on of hands."

The ceremony in which Joshua received the laying on of hands followed a simple procedure. Moses called all of Israel to meet at the door to the tabernacle. In full view of all, Moses formally presented Joshua. Presentation played an important role in the procedure. He then laid his hands upon the head of Joshua, which was followed by giving Joshua a commission that included words of encouragement, a description of Joshua's task, promise of divine assistance, and exhortations to preserve and keep the law. Joshua was then presented to the high priest as a reminder that he was to always work in conjunction with him, especially to discover YHWH's will for Joshua's leadership. The ceremony concluded with YHWH's appearing in the pillar

of cloud, wherein he confirmed the process by giving his own personal commission to Joshua that included words of encouragement, task description, and a promise to stay close to Joshua.

Laying hands on Joshua carried several symbolic meanings: identification, substitution, affirmation, confirmation, setting aside, conferral of office, and transfer. Hand-laying identified Joshua as YHWH's choice to become Israel's leader. The gesture also identified Moses with Joshua and Joshua with Moses, thus making Joshua the clear substitute of Moses by receiving his endorsement through personal touch. Thus by placing hands on Joshua, Moses affirmed him and indicated confidence in him as well as confirmed and ratified the spiritual gifts of leadership YHWH had already given him. Laying on of hands signified an official investiture wherein Joshua was dedicated to the office of leadership and indicated conferral of formal and public appointment to that office. It was the visible symbol of transferring the lifelong office and powers of leadership to Joshua. Because of the laying on of hands, the Spirit of YHWH was transferred to Joshua, enabling him to better function in his capacity as leader.

Did the laying on of hands establish a succession of leadership? Yes and no. Yes, Joshua succeeded Moses as a result of the laying-on-of-hands ceremony. However, Moses in no way established a dynasty or circumstances that could in any way be interpreted as "apostolic succession."<sup>30</sup> Moses' authority was rooted in his relationship with YHWH and not in his relationship or connection with any human being. Joshua's authority was rooted in YHWH's commands to Moses as well as to himself. Joshua's authority was founded in his connection to YHWH rather than in his connection to Moses. One does not read that Joshua in turn laid hands on anyone; but instead after his death, YHWH raised up judges to lead Israel.<sup>31</sup> What made the difference was YHWH's choice, whether it be of Joshua or later of the judges. However, it should be noted that YHWH chose to establish Joshua through the physical contact of Moses' hands with Joshua's head.

<sup>30</sup>Pirke Avoth states: "Moses received the Torah at Sinai and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly." Such a statement implies some sort of succession. However, the intent of the statement appears not to be concerned with leadership succession, but rather with outlining a historic chain of men who transmitted Jewish tradition. See, e.g., Irving M. Bunim, *Ethics from Sinai: An Eclectic, Wide-ranging Commentary on Pirke Avoth* (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1964), 1:28; R. Travers Herford, *The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 20; Jacob Neusner, *Torah from Our Sages: Pirke Avot* (Chappaqua, NY: Rossel, 1984), 25; Isaac Unterman, *Pirke Aboth: Sayings of the Fathers* (New York: Twayne, 1964), 24-30.

<sup>31</sup>Judg 2:16.

Whereas the laying on of hands was rooted in a command from the Almighty, the gesture had at least two tangible results: Joshua's reception of the spirit of wisdom in leadership skills, and the congregation's receptivity of and obedience to his leadership. YHWH's gift of wisdom received through the laying on of hands had such a noticeable, tangible effect on Joshua that the writer of Deut 34:9 felt compelled to make note of it. The whole congregation observed Moses physically touch his successor. Moses did not just speak words; he also gave physical manifestation to graphically illustrate his point. Moses, by touching Joshua, marked him as the one to receive the above-mentioned symbolic meanings of hand-laying. The gesture of touch became the conduit by which YHWH chose to pass some of Moses' honor to Joshua.

The laying on of hands is thus central to the essence and purpose of ritual investiture as described in Num 27:12-23 and Deut 34:9. This essence and purpose permeate the procedural details, the symbolic meaning, and the tangible results of the hand gesture. While the other elements of the installation ritual were important, the laying on of hands was indeed the strong identifying mark that bound them all together.