

Lesson 1

A Promise Confirmed

Joshua 1

Have you responded to the call of God on your life? You may think God only calls special people, but I am convinced His call is for each one of us. He is calling you to start living in the Land of Milk and Honey. Many of you have been wandering around in the wilderness for too long. You are trapped in a place that the Lord never intended. You may be nursing resentments, stuck in unhealthy relationships, incapacitated by anxiety and fear. You may not even be aware of how the hurts from the past influence your actions in the present. Or maybe you are just bored with the Christian life and missing out on the freedom that Christ brings. His peace eludes you. Real joy is rare. You have settled and compromised. The abundant life that Jesus offers seems like an illusion.

“Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

The Israelites of Joshua’s day felt stuck in the wilderness too. It was all they knew. But God called, and by His grace, they made it out of the wilderness. We can learn from their story. Under the leadership of Joshua they started really living in the Land of Milk and Honey. As we follow their example, step-by-step, we will be set free to experience the abundant life!

Prepared for Purpose

Read Joshua 1.

I wonder if Joshua's parents knew their son would receive an awesome call from God. Did they look at their precious child, their first son, and know that he would do great things? Did they have any idea that he would lead their nation into the Promised Land – a land they had only heard of in stories of their forefathers? Or had they begun to lose hope? Were they accepting their lives in captivity as the only lives they would ever know?

Joshua was probably born about fifteen years before the Exodus, during the Israelites' captivity in Egypt. He was the firstborn of Nun, who was of the tribe of Joseph. As the firstborn son, the angel of death would have killed Joshua during the first Passover if his father, Nun, had not spread the blood of a lamb over the door to protect him. By obediently acting to save his son, Nun showed himself to be a faithful Israelite, believing God for His promises.

1. What does Ephesians 2:10 say about you as a believer?

2. Read Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28. What do they promise about the way that God is able to use all of our circumstances?

God used every event and relationship in Joshua's life to equip him to lead His chosen people out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. During those formative years, God was teaching Joshua truths about His power and faithfulness – truths Joshua would need emblazoned on his heart before he could effectively lead the Israelites.

3. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:24 promise?

God took His time as He prepared Joshua for his leadership role of deliverer. God does such a thorough job of training His people that we may start to think that we are going to be too old before He gets around to actually using us! Joshua wandered in the wilderness for forty years before God allowed him to lead the Israelites across the Jordan into the Promised Land. While it may seem tedious to us, God's timing and preparation are always perfect.

4. *Can you think of a time when God clearly used certain events and circumstances to prepare you for something that He was calling you to do?*

God may place us in situations or roles that make us feel unqualified and that challenge us to grow. The good news is that if He has called you to a task, He will equip you to accomplish it.

- 5. See Hebrews 13:20-21 under the key in the margin. Who equips us to do the Lord’s will? (These keys highlight principles for living in the Land of Milk and Honey. At the end of the study, these will serve as reminders of the promises and instructions we have for living life in the Promised Land.)



“Jesus our Lord [will] equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever.”

Hebrews 13:21

Joshua was born at just the right time, in just the right place, and he received just the right training he needed to accomplish the Lord’s purpose for him. God may not yet have fully revealed how He will mold and use our circumstances, but we can be sure that He will use them – each and every one – to shape us into His likeness so that we may fulfill His purposes for our lives. These truths are more than just pleasant thoughts or sweet condolences. They are promises in Scripture that God wants us to know and to possess!

- 6. *Spend time thanking God for the callings and circumstances of your life. If there are circumstances that you don’t understand or wish were different, thank Him that He can use even those negative circumstances to shape you into the person He wants you to be.*

Possessing the Promise

Joshua had waited his whole life for this moment. It was finally time to step out of the shadow of Moses and lead Israel into her inheritance – into the Promised Land. The day was a long time coming, but with the voice of the Lord commissioning Him, it was time for Joshua to move into action.

- 7. In Joshua 1:2-4, what did God tell Joshua to do?

The physical territory that is marked out in verse 4 is often referred to as the Promised Land. Actually, some five-hundred years before Joshua, God had promised Abraham that he and his descendants would inhabit this exact land. God would prove Himself faithful, but the Israelites would have to do their part to possess the land.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have “Promised Lands” too. God promises us a wonderful inheritance – the very riches of Christ. This inheritance is not something that we have to wait until we die to enjoy; it is for this life. He promises peace that defies our circumstances, deep and abiding joy and His constant presence and freedom.

8. From John 10:10, what else does Jesus promise?



We can start living in the Land of Milk and Honey now. Just as in the days of Joshua, knowing the promises of God is different from actually possessing these promises. What if your rich uncle died and left you millions of dollars? After his estate is settled, your inheritance is put in a special bank account just for you, but you never write a check on it. You never access the funds. You continue to live in relative poverty even though you have vast wealth. You have the money, but you are not possessing it. You are not enjoying your inheritance.

Jesus promised us abundant life, but experiencing that life requires action on our part. This isn’t something we request in prayer and then sit back and passively receive. Joshua didn’t sit on the bank of the Jordan waiting for God to supernaturally transport him to the Promised Land. We will see that he got up! He fought battles! He possessed the land!



9. Read John 5:2-9. What did Jesus ask the lame man beside the pool of Bethesda? Write the question from John 5:6 under the key in the margin.

It may seem like a rhetorical question, but the truth is that many people are quite comfortable in their infirmities. Some actually derive their identity from their afflictions and do not want to be made whole and well. Some want to stay in their place of bitterness, refusing to forgive the ones who hurt them. Others don’t want to lose the crutch of the identity that their many problems provide. God respects free will and does not violate it. The Lord will not work in our lives to bring us into the Land of Milk and Honey if we want to stay in the wilderness. You can see why it is so important that we first answer "yes" to Jesus' question: "Do you wish to be well?"

Jesus, in John 5:6

10. *Do you want to be made whole and well in your spirit, soul and body? Take a moment to truthfully answer the Lord's question.*

Could you answer that question? Was your heart's answer a resounding, "Yes!?" Or did something inside of you hesitate? If you aren't sure yet, I encourage you to continue to explore the Promised Land. As someone who has survived in the wilderness but is now moving into the Land of Milk and Honey, I can tell you that it is worth it, and I will show you some of the fruit as we continue through this study. Go for it! Continue to seek the Lord. Ask Him, "Will You show me the way out of the wilderness into the Land of Milk and Honey? Will you show me that You are good? Will you give me the faith to trust You?"

- 11. In Joshua 1, there is an admonition that is repeated four times in verses 6, 7, 9 and 18. What is the admonition, and what do you think it implies about possessing the Promised Land?

Crossing into and possessing the Land of Milk and Honey is not for sissies! It takes strength and courage.

- 12. Moses sent twelve spies into the Promised Land at the beginning of the Israelites' wandering. Read their report in Numbers 13:27-33. Why will it require courage on the part of the Israelites to possess the Land of Milk and Honey?

You can be sure that forty years later, as Joshua prepared to cross the Jordan River, that same enemy was still waiting to devour them. It wasn't lost on Joshua that the Lord told him four times in his commissioning to be strong and very courageous. This is not going to be easy.

- 13. What does the Lord promise to Joshua and to us in Joshua 1:5? This promise is reiterated in Romans 8:31-39.

The giants may have been huge, and the enemy may have wanted to devour him, but no man would be able to stand before Joshua because the Lord was with him!

14. How about you? Are you willing to say “yes” to the Lord’s challenge to possess the Promised Land? Take some time to be still before the Lord and to tell Him what is on your heart as we embark on our journey into the Land of Milk and Honey.



“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

Psalm 1:1-2

Meditating on God's Word

In order to possess God’s promises and to live in the Land of Milk and Honey, it is important that we *know* God’s promises.

15. What conditions for success did God set forth for Joshua in chapter 1, verses 7-8?

The word “meditating” in Joshua 1:7-8 is the Hebrew word *hagah*, which means “to speak, imagine, groan, study, mutter, utter, roar, ponder.”¹ When the Bible talks about meditation, it is not referring to the eastern religious concept of emptying our minds. Rather, Biblical meditation is filling our minds with the Word of God. Meditating on and never departing from God's Word is a foundational platform of living in the Land of Milk and Honey.

16. To better understand this concept, let’s observe a few other scriptures where this word is used. Look up and summarize the following verses:

❖ Psalm 63:6:

❖ Psalm 77:12:

❖ Psalm 143:5:

You can see from these verses that the concept of meditation is not racing through your daily Bible study questions, searching for an answer so that you can scratch that task off your list. To meditate on Scripture is to carefully consider and mull over a portion of it. As one who has found Bible study to be of inestimable value, I was surprised to learn from Mark Virkler's *How to Hear God's Voice* that the word "study" is found only three times in the entire King James Version of the Bible, and one of those references is Ecclesiastes 12:12: "much study is a weariness of the flesh."ⁱⁱ

17. How does the Lord say we are to reason according to Isaiah 1:18?

The Lord wants us to reason with Him, not on our own. Jesus was not happy with the Pharisees' approach to the Scriptures. They knew the Scriptures backward and forward, but they missed *Him* – the Messiah: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (Jesus, in John 5:39).

To help us incorporate the habit of meditation into our daily lives, we will do a simple meditative prayer exercise every week of this study. This is a wonderful way to ponder the Scriptures and to "reason together" with the Lord by allowing the Holy Spirit to amplify His word to us.

18. *You can meditate on Scripture using the following meditative prayer exercise. You will read the scripture four times, according to the instructions below:*

❖ *FIRST TIME: Take some time to carefully consider the words, asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you through this verse.*

Scripture: **Deuteronomy 31:6**

❖ *SECOND TIME: Ask the Lord to highlight a word or phrase from the scripture that He wants you to consider.*

Word or Phrase:

Meditative Prayer
Exercise

❖ *THIRD TIME: Ask Him for more amplification and insight. As you pray over this verse and wait on the Lord, He may give you a picture or some sensory perception.*

Insight:

❖ *FOURTH TIME: Take time to listen to Him. He may want to give you direction in some area of your life. Is there some action He is calling you to take or some specific situation to which this word applies? How will you carry this word into your life this week?*

Invitation:

Rest



“Thus says the LORD, ‘Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.’”

Jeremiah 6:16a

19. What does Joshua remind the Israelites in Joshua 1:13?

Joshua was rallying the people to rise up and to fight to claim the land that God had promised to them. He took a moment, though, to remember God's promise of rest. God wants us to live into His promises and to fight for what He wants us to possess, but He also wants us to learn to experience His rest in the midst of our battles.

Over and over in the book of Joshua, the Lord will tell the Israelites that as they enter the Promised Land, He will give them rest. Rest in Hebrew is the word *nuwach*. It means “to dwell, to stay, to give comfort, to cease, to quiet, to remain, to rest.” The original idea is the concept of drawing breath. It is the word that is used to describe the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments.ⁱⁱⁱ In the New Testament, the same word is translated from the Greek word *katapausis*, which means “to put

to rest, resting place, abode.” It includes the concept of abiding, dwelling, remaining.^{iv}

20. What invitation does Jesus give in Matthew 11:28-30?

21. How does John 15:1-11 teach us to abide in Christ and what will the results be when we do this?

22. How do we receive the Spirit of God (as well as any other gift from Him, including rest) according to Galatians 3:2, 5?

Hebrews 3 and 4 discuss the concept of God’s rest at great length. The writer sums up this passage by saying, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4:11, RSV). It seems like a contradiction, but we are told to strive, to labor, and to make every effort to enter His rest!

23. From Hebrews 3:7-11, what were the reasons that the Lord withheld His rest from the wilderness generation?

24. From Hebrews 3:12- 4:11, sum up the ways that we can be disqualified from receiving His rest.

I know that this may seem trivial, but I have a simple example from my life of implementing the concept of rest into our daily lives. It goes without saying that the Christmas season is usually not a season of rest, especially for the mom in the house. In our family, we love to send out cards, share gifts with our family, friends and those less fortunate, entertain and participate in special services at our church. We usually pack our bags and travel to visit family out of town. It can get

stressful. I usually wait to start my preparations after our last Bible study of the year the second week of December, right when traffic in Houston is really crazy! As much as I may try to simplify our holiday traditions, it always strikes me as ironic that the season when we celebrate the birth of Christ is the season that has been the most stressful for me.

The year that an office supply store came out with the “easy button” for their ad campaign, Anne and I decided we were going to claim the easy button for ourselves. We knew that in Matthew 11:30 Jesus promises us that His burden is easy, so we decided to trust His Word. We decided to take a deep breath and invite the Lord into each situation and looking to Him for His wisdom and plan. The Bible says that He ordained our days, so it follows that He knows best how to organize that very day. We made a conscious decision to turn to Him in the mundane crunch of the holidays. And we intentionally opened our spirits to receiving His rest as we went through the season. As we kept turning to the Lord for His strategies and His rest, He showed each of us what needed to get done and just how to do it. Peace and joy really reigned in our lives that season, and neither of us could believe the difference that our intentional “striving for rest” made. Later on, as a commemoration, I traveled way out of my way to get to that office supply store to purchase each of us that red button: “That was easy!”

God’s rest does not mean that there is an absence of activity. It means that even in the midst of activity, there is a sense of abiding in His presence. He offers this to us because He knows we are weary. We need to take Him up on His offer!

25. Consider Psalm 91. Jot down and discuss some of the verses from this Psalm that picture the concept of God’s rest.

Prepare for Life

Even as Joshua was rallying the Israelites to action, He took a moment to remember God's promise of rest. Taking our proper place in the Promised Land will require effort on our part. We will have to rise up and possess the Lord's promises. However, because we are living in the presence of the Lord and in the freedom of His will, He promises that He will give us rest. If your experience of the Christian life has been one of toil and strife, take a deep breath and anticipate the freedom into which God is calling you! God is inviting you to arise, to cross the Jordan and to live in the Land of Milk and Honey – in His presence, in His rest.

26. Look back over the key principles we've discussed this week. What do you desire to get out of this study with the Lord?

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- i Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *hagah* (Strong's 1897)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 13 July 2010. <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=H1897>>
 - ii Patti and Mark Virkler, *How to Hear God's Voice: Seminar Workbook* (Cheektowaga, NY: Communion With God Ministries, 2005), 12.
 - 3 Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *nuwach* (Strong's 5117)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 13 July 2010. <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=H5117>>
 - iv Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *katapausis* (Strong's 2663)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 13 Sep 2010. <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?strongs=G2663>>

Lecture Notes: