

# WEEK 2: AN OLD PROMISE, A NEW LEADER

Joshua 1:1–18



## The Place of the Passage

The first chapter of Joshua establishes the setting and agenda for the book. This chapter has been compared to the pistol shot at the beginning of a race, with all the action in the rest of the book starting from the people, commands, and promises introduced in this chapter. Of course, this chapter doesn't begin in isolation from the rest of the Bible's story. As we've considered, the book of Joshua is like the opening scene in a movie sequel. Here the characters and themes from the Pentateuch are carried forward. At the end of the Pentateuch, Moses died. This is where Joshua 1 begins.

## The Big Picture

With Moses departed, the Lord commissions Joshua to lead his people into the land with courage and obedience to Moses' law—a daunting but achievable task, given the certainty of God's promises and presence.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through Joshua 1:1-18, then engage this section of Scripture with the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 394-395; available online at [esv.org](http://esv.org).)

1. God's Marching Orders for Joshua (1:1-9)

The first nine verses introduce a number of characters. Read these verses and write down the name of each character or group represented, along with what we learn about them. For background on Moses, read Deuteronomy 34.

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Because of his sin against God (Numbers 20), Moses was not allowed to lead his people into the land. Now that Moses has died, God leads his people through Joshua. In a sentence, what is God commanding Joshua to do? What verse expresses the key to Joshua's success?

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Joshua receives an order, and we have every reason to hear it as a difficult charge. How many times does God command Joshua, "Be strong and courageous"? What was there to fear? (See Numbers 13 for context.)

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Joshua had good reasons to be afraid, but God gave him better reasons to be courageous. List the reasons God gave Joshua to be "strong and courageous." What is the main reason?

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Having spent some time in the passage, we can't escape the presence of Moses. There are important points of continuity between God's dealing with his people under Joshua and under Moses. What assurances does this afford Joshua?

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2. Joshua's Marching Orders for the Nation (1:10-18)

The people of Israel would have been waiting their whole lives, quite literally, for this moment. What emotions do you think they experienced when Joshua's men gave the orders to begin preparations?

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This chapter is specifically structured to communicate a certain logic about how God leads his people. How does God speak to and lead his people?

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Throughout the book we'll encounter many easy-to-forget people. In 1:12, however, we meet a set of three tribes: "the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh." Understanding their backstory will help us understand parts of this book. Read Numbers 32 and write down the reason these people have made a home east of the Jordan.

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In Joshua's speech he uses an important word to interpret God's gift of land. What word does he use, and what do you suppose this means?

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In light of the Bible's story to this point, what is surprising about the people's response in Joshua 1:16-18? For a comparison, read Numbers 14:36-38 for a summary of how the previous generation responded to the same task.

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The chapter ends with another command to Joshua to "be strong and courageous" (Josh. 1:18), this time from the lips of the people. Courage is possible because of God's promise: "I will not leave you or forsake you" (1:5). How does Hebrews 13:5-6 apply this promise to Christians?

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Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.

**Gospel Glimpses**

**"I WILL BE WITH YOU."** It is remarkable that God would say something like this to a human being. It is true that God is present everywhere, but God promises to be with Joshua in a personal way. In the opening chapters of Scripture, God spoke with Adam and Eve and walked among them (Genesis 1-2). But Joshua lives on the other side of Genesis 3, where man is outside God's presence and under his wrath. This is why God's promise to be with Joshua—a promise made also to Abraham, to Moses, and later to David—is a sign of great hope for humanity. If God promised never to forsake Joshua, perhaps there is hope for us as well. And there is. In Christ, God dwelt among his people (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; John 1:14), and today the Lord is with us in an even more direct way through the Spirit (Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

**"JUST AS I PROMISED."** God owes us justice for our sin. Yet the Bible is a story that unfolds along a string of promises from God to us for our eternal good. In fact, God's promises are the connective tissue holding the whole story of the Bible together. In Genesis 3:15, God promised that a son of Eve would crush the head of the Serpent, who is Satan. In Joshua 1, his promise to be with Joshua is a promise of victory in the land of Canaan, a promise in continuity with his promise to Moses. In the course of this story we will see how God's promises work together in this book to prepare us to see how every Old Testament promise finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). God's faithfulness in this story strengthens our faith in his promises to us through Jesus.

**Whole-Bible Connections**

**OBEDIENCE AND THE BOOK.** Joshua 1:8 is a key verse for grasping the story of Joshua and its significance in the story of the Bible. The word "law" might call to mind the idea of civil law, or perhaps the commandments in Scripture. In Joshua, however, the "Book of the Law" refers to the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These books include commands, but much more. They instruct Israel in knowing and relating to God. Central to this is her relationship to God's leader. When the Lord instructed Moses concerning the kind of king Israel should seek, he gave a straightforward job description: "... he shall write for himself in a book a copy

of this law. . . . and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law, . . . that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children” (Deut. 17:18–20). For Joshua, careful obedience to God’s law would be his path to success, and disobedience his undoing. Indeed, Christ will delight in God’s law (compare Ps. 1:2), keeping it perfectly on our behalf.

**A LEADER LIKE MOSES.** Moses was a towering figure in the life of Israel. In Deuteronomy 34:9–11, Moses’ unique status is highlighted: “There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses.” Moses was the mediator of God’s covenant with his people, and thus the people’s fate was tied to his (Ex. 33:7–16). In the first chapter of Joshua he is mentioned 11 times, and Joshua’s success is guaranteed with the promise that God would be with him “just as” he was with Moses (Josh. 1:3, 5, 17). Even more, it is by following the law that Joshua will have success (vv. 7–8) and will attain the land first promised to Moses (v. 3). Joshua will function as a new Moses, but he is not Moses’ final successor. Jesus Christ is the greater Moses, a prophet superlative to Moses who reveals God fully, leads his people perfectly, and brings a better covenant (see Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:1–6; 8:6).

**A PLACE OF REST.** One of the Bible’s most important images for salvation emerges in this chapter almost unnoticed: rest. Quoting Moses, Joshua says to the people, “The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land” (Josh. 1:13; see also Deut. 12:10). On the seventh day of creation, “God rested from all his work,” entering into the full enjoyment of his creation (Gen. 2:2–3). For this reason the seventh day of the week was set apart as holy and as a pattern for mankind (Ex. 31:12–18). God promised rest in the land to Moses, and Moses promised the same to God’s people: enjoyment of God in the place of his presence (Ex. 33:14; Deut. 3:20; 12:9; 25:19). With this as background, Jesus invites sinners to salvation with these words: “Come to me . . . and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Coming to Jesus is the only way to find true rest, since Jesus’ saving work is the only means of favor with God (Heb. 4:10).

### Theological Soundings

**GOD HAS A NAME.** It is hard to say we know someone if we don’t know his or her name. For this reason, God has given us a name by which to call him. The name Yahweh, translated “LORD,” is God’s personal name. It is the name he used when he introduced himself to Moses from a burning bush, and it is how he intended to be remembered by his people: “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD’ . . . is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations” (Ex. 3:15). God is committed to being known. This is why he

called and covenanted with Abraham and his sons, and this is why he reveals himself to us with a name. As the Bible unfolds, God will be called a rock, a fortress, and many other descriptive names. But Yahweh, meaning “I am,” is his proper and personal name. In covenant love he comes to Joshua, and this is how he comes to us.

**GOD SPEAKS.** The God of the Bible is a speaking God, which explains how we have a Bible. While God spoke through his leader, Joshua, time and again, this was largely to expound what Moses had *written*. In this way, Joshua’s generation was the first to truly live *by the book*. The church<sup>1</sup> lives under a book as well, but according to the author of Hebrews, our position is much better: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). Jesus sent his Spirit to inspire our New Testament Scriptures through his apostles<sup>2</sup> and prophets so that today the “word of Christ” dwells in us by means of his written Word (Col. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19; see also 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12). This Word, says Peter, is more reliable than his own firsthand experience of Jesus’ glorious transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:17–19).

### Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 1:1–18 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.

#### 1. Gospel Glimpses

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#### 2. Whole-Bible Connections

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### 3. Theological Soundings

### 4. Joshua 1:1–18

#### As You Finish This Unit . . .

For Joshua, courageous obedience would mean safety and success against his enemies. For Jesus, who sweat drops of blood on the night of his arrest, obedience would mean suffering in the place of his enemies under God's wrath. Praise God in prayer for the perfect obedience and suffering of Christ!

#### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **Church** – From a Greek word meaning “assembly.” The body of believers in Jesus Christ, referring either to all believers everywhere or to a local gathering of believers.

<sup>2</sup> **Apostle** – Means “one who is sent” and refers to one who is an official representative of another. In the NT, refers specifically to those whom Jesus chose to represent him.

## WEEK 3: SENDING IN THE SPIES, FINDING A SURPRISE

Joshua 2:1–24

#### The Place of the Passage

Israel has been here before. Forty years earlier, at the edge of the land, Moses sent in 12 spies to bring a report. The result was a disaster, not because of the intimidating reality beyond the Jordan but because of the faithless timidity of the spies who insisted Israel not go in. God had proven himself trustworthy, but his people would not trust him, and so that generation died in the wilderness. Now, 40 years later, Joshua secretly sends two spies. He trusts God, but perhaps he is not so trusting of men. Joshua does not send his spies to decide whether to enter the land but to decide *how* to enter. Their report is optimistic in ways he could not have imagined.

#### The Big Picture

Joshua sends two spies into Canaan, who return with a favorable report and a surprising story, confirming God's sovereignty<sup>1</sup> and hinting at his global purposes.