

## Promises, Promises: The Journey Home Passing the Baton

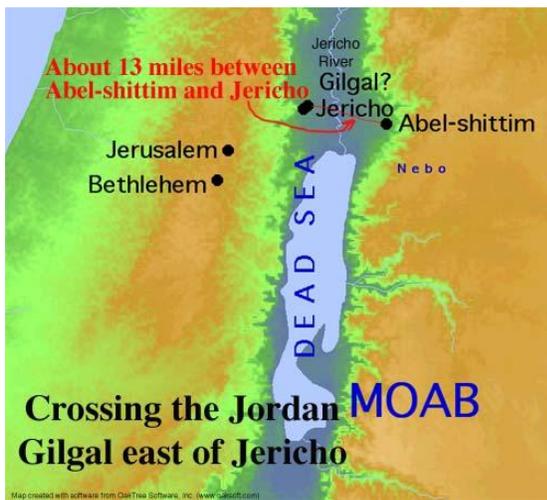
### Introduction

Have you ever faced a situation in your life that seemed so daunting, so overwhelming, so impossible? This is what faces Joshua. He's about to take over the leadership of the nation of Israel. The baton is being passed to him from Moses.

Think about that for a moment. Moses is the only leader Israel has known. He led the people out of Egypt. He took them through the Red Sea and across the wilderness to Mount Sinai. He received the Law from God. He stood as the intercessor between the people and their God all that time.

The Israelites had come up from Sinai to Kadesh where spies were sent into the land. The people, hearing of the formidable enemy they would face, rebelled against God's command to take the land. Consequently, God judged Israel and declared that they would not enter the Promised Land until that entire generation had died away. For 38 years they waited for that to happen.

Then they moved up the east side of the Jordan River opposite Jericho.



God told Moses that he would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land because of an incident where he had disobeyed God and disrespected God's command in front of the people. That disqualified him from going into Canaan.

Near the end of Deuteronomy, we read that God commissions Joshua in the presence of Moses and the people. Turn in your Bible to Deuteronomy.

### **Deuteronomy 31:14, 23**

Who is this man, Joshua, who would be Moses' successor? We know several things about him from the biblical record up to this time. He was:

#### **Joshua:**

- A slave – Joshua was born a slave in Egypt. We're told he was the firstborn of a fellow by the name of Nun. So, Joshua had God-fearing parents who obeyed when instructed to slay an unblemished lamb and sprinkle the blood on the doorposts of their home so that the angel of death would pass over the house, sparing the firstborn within.
- A soldier – Exodus 17 recounts the experience of Israel fighting against the Amalekites before they arrived at Sinai. The person who led the military effort was Joshua.
- A servant – Joshua is described as a “servant of Moses.” Think of him as an aide-de-camp or chief-of-staff to Moses, the leader. It is not until the end of his life that he is described as “the servant of the LORD.”
- A spy – remember that Joshua is one of the 12 spies sent into the land from Kadesh. He together with Caleb would encourage the people, to no avail, that they should go in and possess the land as God had commanded them to do.

An interesting thing here – in Numbers 13, which we considered a couple of weeks ago, Moses gives Joshua his name. His birth name was *Hoshea*, which means “salvation.” Moses now calls him *Yehoshua*, which means “Yahweh saves.” The Greek translation of the Hebrew text is *Iēsous*, the form of the name “Jesus” in the New Testament. David Howard says that “Joshua is the first person in the Bible to be explicitly given a name that incorporates God’s holy, personal name, ‘Yahweh’.”

- A successor – God picks Joshua to lead Israel in the conquest of Canaan. Moses is about to die. Warren Wiersbe notes: “God buries His workers, but His work goes on.” The baton is passed to Joshua. First in a public commissioning

– you can understand how important this was for the peoples’ sake. They were bad enough at following Moses, but what now that Moses would be gone? So it was critical that they see that it was God who had selected Joshua to lead them into the land.

That is the public commissioning; now the private one. And this is where the book of Joshua picks up. The Hebrew text opens with the word “And,” *And after the death of Moses*. The account of Joshua is to be seen as a continuation of or conclusion to the book of Deuteronomy. The focus of Deuteronomy was the exhortation to go in and possess the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. That will now happen under Joshua.

Do you suppose that Joshua might have been a bit apprehensive following Moses’ death? I would think so. Perhaps he is experiencing a bit of uncertainty, or fear, maybe not feeling up to the task.

Joshua is not an untested leader. He led the battle against the Amalakites, spied out the Promised Land, and was beside Moses throughout the entire years of wilderness wandering. Yet, standing on the edge of the Conquest, commander-in-chief of 600,000 men of war, leader of two million people, he must have experienced some emotion and questions: “Am I really the one to lead? Can I do the job? Am I up to the challenge? Do I want to face what Moses faced with these people? Where will God be in this whole conquest thing?”

God speaks to Joshua’s need. These are words of challenge; they are words of encouragement; they are words of exhortation. And in them, God lays before Joshua reminders of his promise, his presence, his power, and his precepts. Let’s look at these four things in the context of God’s conversation with Joshua and then let’s consider how those same four things are to part of the equation for you and for the work God has for you to do.

## **I. The Promise of God – Joshua 1:2-4**

The major theme of this book is Land. This was God’s gift to Israel. This notion of land occurs more than fifty times in the book of Joshua. Moses told the people that if they obeyed God and followed his statutes they would go in and possess the land and enjoy the land that was promised to them. Turn back to Deuteronomy, chapter 30.

### **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**

God again now says to Joshua: “This land is yours; it is the promise I have made to the people of Israel.” There’s an interesting word usage in verses two and three that we shouldn’t miss.

Verse 2: “... the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel.”

Verse 3: “Every place...I have given to you....”

Two significant truths related to God’s giving of the land. There was a present, ongoing sense that God was giving them the land. God was in the process of giving them the land as they entered and began to take possession of the land. But in another sense, God wants Joshua to know that God had already given them the land. They were the rightful owners already. Now they should enjoy the possession that was theirs.

## **II. The Presence of God – Joshua 1:5b, 9b**

This is so important to Joshua. Remember, it’s going to be different from here on out. No longer will the presence of God be the pillar of fire and the cloud. It will mainly be the Ark of the Covenant. I can imagine that the thought had occurred to Joshua – “God was surely with Moses, but can I count on that?”

## **III. The Power of God – Joshua 1:5-7a, 9**

What is God trying to accomplish with these words? The task will be great; it’s ambitious. The enemy is real. God is preparing his man for tenacity, perseverance, persistence, etc. The culmination of 430 years of history – from bondage in Egypt to the bank of the Jordan – is at hand; it is NOW! God did not promise to remove the opposition. Occupying the land would only come through conquest.

In verse 5, a more literal rendering of the Hebrew is: “I will not fail you or forsake you.” The word for “to fail” in verse five means “to let sink, to grow slack, to fall.” It was a word used often to denote losing a grip with one’s hand. God says, “I won’t let go. I’ll not release my grip.”

God frequently reiterated this promise to his people. Look at his word through the prophet Isaiah:

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right

hand.... For I, the LORD your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.” – *Isaiah 41:10, 13*

God encourages Joshua with four very important truths that are to strengthen him as he takes over the task of leading the people of Israel: his promise, his presence, his power, and now, finally, his precepts.

#### **IV. The Precepts of God – Joshua 1:7-8**

What are the actions expected of Joshua in regards to God’s law?

First, he is to “obey.” “Don’t deviate from its instructions. Then you will act wisely.” It will be very easy in the years ahead for Joshua to forget God’s Word that he gave through Moses, whether it be because of neglect or preoccupation or distraction – whatever. God exhorts Joshua to be diligent to obey his Word.

Second, he is to “meditate.” He is to be rehearsing in his mind and his voice constantly the words of God. He is to follow the pattern set before him in the Law.

And if he does that, God promises that he would prosper and have good success. This is one of those passages that is lifted out and used to teach that if you will do this, God will prosper you financially – you’ll be rich and prosperous, and you will be a success in position and status and wealth.

Is that really true? You can hear that on the TV every day tuning into many of the television preachers. Dr. David Howard counters this misuse of Scripture when he writes that these two words or concepts “are almost never used in the Old Testament to speak of financial success. Rather they speak of succeeding in life’s proper endeavors. This happens when people’s lives are focused entirely on God and obedience to him.”

Three times God says to Joshua: “Be strong and courageous.” When you think about what faces Joshua and what lies ahead for Israel, could there have been any sweeter words, any more comforting and encouraging words than these: “Be strong and courageous.”

You may need to hear these words for yourself this morning. I don’t know what challenges you are facing in your life or what tasks lay before you. But they may well be giving you pause today; you might be experiencing that fear of uncertainty,

of whether or not you can do what you know you should do, whether or not you are up to the task. Fear strikes all of us from time to time.

One summer night during a severe thunderstorm, a mother was tucking her young son into bed. She was about to turn the light off when, in a small trembling voice, he asked, “Mommy, will you stay with me here all night?” The mother smiled as she gave him a reassuring hug, and said, “I can’t dear. I have to sleep in Daddy’s room.”

A long silence followed as she moved toward the door. At last it was broken by a shaky voice saying, “The big sissy!”

The same four truths that were to comfort, encourage, motivate and sustain Joshua apply to you and me this morning.

## **I. The Promise of God**

God was reminding Joshua of the promise he had given about the land and the task before him. Warren Wiersbe writes:

God didn’t give Joshua explanations as to how He would accomplish these things, because God’s people live on promises not explanations. When you trust God’s promises and step out by faith, you can be sure that the Lord will give you the directions you need when you need them.

God may not provide you with explanations for the situations you face, for the tasks he has for you to do, but he does give you his promise. What kind of promises might that be? How about these for starters:

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. – *I Corinthians 15:58*

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. – *I Thessalonians 5:23-24*

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him who calls us to his own glory and excellence, by

which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brother affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. – *II Peter 1:3-8*

For the Israelites, the promise of God was the land. It was theirs; but they had to enter into this land and possess and enjoy the land. For them, this was to enter into God's rest.

The New Testament picks up this picture and exhorts believers to be sure to enter into God's rest. Some have equated the Promised Land for Israel with heaven for New Testament believers. But that's not the correct corollary. The "rest" for the believer is the salvation that God provides through Christ. Just like God told Joshua: "I am giving"..."I have given," he says the same for our salvation: "I am giving"..."I have given."

This is one of those "now, but not yet" situations. God has given us salvation; it is completed, assured, your present possession. And yet there is the ongoing realization or experience of being saved, though the final, guaranteed outcome is a completed salvation.

## **II. The Presence of God**

How is God's presence manifested today? It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, something foreign to the Israelites and Old Testament saints. What an advantage we have as New Testament saints! – the permanent indwelling presence of God through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told his disciples in the Upper Room as they celebrated the Passover shortly before his betrayal:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. – *John 14:16-17*

I read a story this week of a woman who agreed to drive her son's car from Michigan to California as part of his move there. It was Christmas-time, so the plan was that she would drive the car out, her husband would fly there for the holiday, and then the two of them would fly home from California together. The day before she was to leave, she fell and broke her left wrist. Despite the cumbersome cast from wrist to elbow, she decided to go anyway and carefully planned the long trip.

About the fourth day out, she felt so tired that she pulled off the road for a short nap, then drove to a restaurant for coffee and a few phone calls to friends who lived nearby. As she stepped outside the restaurant, a man approached her and asked if she was driving a Ford Explorer with Michigan plates and whether she had pulled off the road somewhere earlier. The woman was understandable apprehensive with this questioning by a stranger, but he assured her that he meant no harm. Once she answered his questions, he asked her to wait while he made a phone call and then promised to explain.

When he returned, he told her that truck drivers had been following her since Indiana. One of them noticed this little white-haired lady, with a cast on her left arm, driving a stick shift across the country. They had taken it upon themselves to watch over her. Unbeknownst to her, they carefully tracked her to the motels she stayed each evening. Each morning another trucker would pick up her trail and shadow her progress.

If a trucker had to exit, he would radio another rig-driver to take his place. When she pulled off for that nap, they had lost track of her and were about to alert the State Police. They were still seriously searching for her when one of them spotted her car at the restaurant. The woman had no idea that somebody cared enough about her to initiate such a protection plan. Until that moment, she had been totally unaware that, across all the miles, someone was looking after her day and night.

That's God's presence in your life, whether you are aware of it or not. God has promised to be with you through every circumstance of life, good or bad and for every task, easy or hard.

### **III. The Power of God**

In Ephesians one, Paul prays that believers would know:

...what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. – *Ephesians 1:19-21*

The apostle concludes a prayer recorded in chapter three with these words:

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. – *Ephesians 3:20-21*

In what areas or for what purposes do you need the power of God to give you courage? What have you faced or are facing that requires power beyond your own resources to meet the challenges and opportunities?

- power of perspective
- power to persist and persevere
- courage to make tough decisions
- courage to make the right choices
- power to face temptation and not yield
- power to forgive those who have hurt you
- power to change
- courage to accept God's will worked out in your life even if unpleasant or painful

Finally...

#### **IV. The Precepts of God**

God says that His Word will equip you with the skill to live a wise and fruitful life. Turn in your Bible to Psalm 119 (page 650) and look at the encouragement and exhortations regarding the precepts of God.

**Psalm 119:1-5, 9-11, 66, 80, 97-104, 130, 133**

God's Word instructs; it encourages; it exhorts; it commands; it corrects; it protects. Do you need courage? The Scriptures will provide courage and

boldness. Paul wrote to Timothy, his child in the faith with words that resonate with what Joshua was told:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. – *II Timothy 3:16-17*

Joshua had a mission to fulfill, a task to perform. So do you. God created you for good works (Ephesians 2:10) – a life of service to him and for others. But you dare not think you can do it alone or despair thinking you must do it alone.

This is what God said to Joshua; this is what God says to you today:

Remember my Promises  
Count on my Presence  
Rely on my Power  
Follow my Precepts