

Joshua Takes the Promised Land

March 24, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Joshua 1:1-9

Session Outline

1. New Leader (Joshua 1:1-3)
2. Assured Victory (Joshua 1:4-5)
3. Strong and Courageous (Joshua 1:6-9)

Theological Theme

When God calls people to step out in faith, He strengthens and equips them.

Call to Action

In your obedience to Jesus, what is one area you are struggling with faith and need to “be strong and courageous” (Joshua 1:9)?



Leader Guide

Joshua Takes the Promised Land

Introduction

Scientists estimate that the human brain has enough memory storage to equal around 2.5 million gigabytes if it were a computer. That is a huge number. For comparison, the biggest hard drives to date are only around 10,000 gigabytes. A supercomputer doesn't come close to the capacity of a human brain.¹ Yet many of us feel that our brains can't handle much more.

Many of us are content to “work smarter, not harder” when it comes to brain power. When was the last time you committed something to memory? We tend to just Google or ask Siri, instead of seeking the answer out on our own. Although many adults can still rattle off phone numbers from when they were young and didn't have cell phones, most people don't memorize phone numbers anymore because they are stored in our phones. Today, we are studying why it matters that we know, obey, and meditate on Scripture. When we store God's Word in our heads and hearts, it strengthens us and guides our decisions.

- ❓ What is the most random thing you have memorized?
- ❓ How many Scripture verses do you have memorized?
- ❓ Why or how is it helpful to commit Scripture to memory? What does this give you that you can't gain from even continual access to Scripture?

Session Summary

As the new leader of the nation of Israel, Joshua's first task was to lead the people across the Jordan River and into the promised land. This was the same task Moses had been given but failed at forty years earlier. Now Moses was gone, and Joshua was in charge.

God knew Joshua would need to be strong and courageous to be successful. God gave Joshua specific commands and encouragement as the people finally stepped into the land that had been promised them years before. To lead with bold courage, the Word of God must be our focus. Joshua was told to know, obey, and meditate on God's instruction. This was to guide every decision Joshua made and be at the forefront of his thoughts, words, and deeds. Any time God calls a person to a new thing, this same formula applies and is the difference between trusting in the power and presence of God or trusting in self.

1. New Leader (Joshua 1:1-3)

The book of Joshua records history, but it also reveals the truth about God to us. In the first chapter, the children of Israel faced another defining moment. They had wandered in the wilderness until all the adults except Joshua and Caleb died. Moses also died. He was not allowed to lead the people into the promised land due to his own unfaithfulness.

All this happened, then the Lord spoke to Joshua. Joshua had been an assistant to Moses for years and because of the faith he displayed when the spies first went in to scout the land, he and Caleb were allowed into Canaan. Joshua was now the leader of the nation of Israel, and his first big task was to lead the people to the promised land.

- What might Joshua have been tempted to feel in this moment if His focus was not on God and His promises? How does this apply in our lives?

Think about all the ways being assistant to Moses prepared Joshua for the day the Lord called him to step up and lead the people. He had learned much about leadership from his firsthand experiences with Moses. God knows what we need before we need it, and Joshua needed to know the right and wrong things in leading this huge number of people. He had been faithful to serve Moses for years and that faithfulness in small daily things had prepared Joshua for this day. Great men and women are prepared by ongoing faithfulness in small things until they are entrusted with larger tasks.


- How does faithfulness in small things prepare you for bigger tasks from the Lord? What is an example of this from your life?

Moses's Successor

The Lord commissioned Joshua as Moses's successor (see Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9) to lead Israel into the promised land. God instructed Joshua to be obedient to the law of Moses and to be courageous so that he might succeed.

The Lord spoke to Joshua and called him to lead the people into Canaan. God reiterated the promise He made to Moses about inhabiting the land. There was no question it was time to cross the Jordan and go into Canaan, and Joshua was entrusted as the representative leader. Joshua's role pointed forward to Jesus, who went before us and allows us to possess all God has for us.

God gave the people the land but also made clear their responsibility in possessing it. He said every place the soles of their feet trod would be given to them. The whole land had been given to them, but they could only possess what they acted to gain. The people would face opposition but because God had given them the land, He would also empower them to press ahead for what He had promised. It was going to take effort, but it would be worth every bit.


 Application: What are some things God freely gives His people today that still require responsibility on our part?

2. Assured Victory (Joshua 1:4-5)

The exact boundary of the territory was described by the Lord as reinforcement of His promise. God meant what He said to Moses years earlier about a real land with real borders as the destiny of His people. It was now up to Joshua to lead them into this new place and guide them through the efforts that would be necessary for them to occupy Canaan.

In the stated specifics about the land, one portion was described by naming the people residing there at the time. This was a subtle reminder that although the land had been promised to the children of Israel, they would face opposition for it. The difference between the battles for this land and others is that the victory was already assured by the Lord.

Note that victory was not assured because of who Joshua was or anything the people had done. Victory was certain because God declared it. This victory would be a result of the greatness of God and was guaranteed because of who He is. The Lord told Joshua that no man would be able to stand against him because of the Lord's presence. Think about how that must have empowered Joshua to lead. Knowing that the victory is not dependent on our efforts but requires our obedience affects the way we face battles.

 Think about watching a movie where you know the ending or a recorded sporting event where you know the outcome is favorable for your team. How does this change your perspective as you experience the highs and lows of the journey along the way?

God promised Joshua He would be with him just as He had been with Moses all those years. This would also have encouraged and strengthened Joshua. He had been right beside Moses for years and had witnessed the presence of God along the way. He knew the difference it made to have the Lord with you.

- ❓ How aware are you of God's presence with you each day? How does this impact the way you live?

There are no words that could have a bigger impact of this new leader than the assurance God would be with Joshua and not forsake him in any way. God has promised His presence to every person who has placed his or her faith in Christ. Just as God was with Joshua and the Israelites as they prepared to take the promised land, He is also with those who follow Him and obey Him today. When God calls you, He will empower you and be with you through the presence of His Holy Spirit. You can be sure of that.

- ❓ Application: Where is God calling you to step out in faith? How does the promise of His presence change your perspective on this situation?

3. Strong and Courageous (Joshua 1:6-9)

These verses give a good picture of successful leadership under God's guidance. The Lord called Joshua to be bold in Him. As a leader, it was necessary that Joshua recognize where he would find the strength he needed to fulfill God's call. He could only find the bold courage that was vital for this task in God. Even a great leader like Joshua needed encouragement to rely on the Lord and not on himself.

But God didn't only tell Joshua this as a general encouragement. Joshua was told to do specific things to rely on and be strengthened by the Lord. The instruction given to Joshua is also pivotal in our lives.

First, God told Joshua to know and obey the law. God's Word is where the answers are. Joshua was reminded that to lead well with bold courage, he would need to stay focused on Scripture. He needed to read it and study it. In the busyness of leading, he was not to neglect the law but to honor and obey it. The law was given to guide Him in the way of God. Any leader who makes knowing and obeying God's Word his or her priority will lead well.

- ❓ Why would the coming challenges tempt Joshua to rely on his own strength or that of the people? How would a focus on God's Word guard against this?

In addition to knowing and obeying the Law, God told Joshua to meditate on it. Christian meditation is not about emptying our minds as is the goal of many Eastern meditation practices. Instead, Christian meditation is to fill our minds with the truth of God. Joshua was to keep the law in his mind and on his tongue. Meditating on the Word keeps it at the forefront of your mind, words, and deeds as you allow it to shape every part of your life.



When have you sought to meditate on God's Word? How did this affect you?

As Joshua followed the commands of the Lord, he was promised God would be with him and never forsake him. God declared His presence would be with Joshua and the people wherever they went. The Israelites knew the impact of having God's presence with them, just as Joshua did. They had spent years wandering the wilderness and following the signs of the presence of God. God gave Joshua exactly what he needed to follow through with his calling. We can be sure the same is true for us today. When God calls you out of your comfort zone and into a new thing, focus on God's Word and His truth and you will be strengthened with boldness and courage from Him.



Application: What is an area of your life where you need to be strong and courageous? How will you focus on God's Word to seek His wisdom and equipping?

Conclusion

Joshua faced the challenging task of leading the people into the promised land. It was his first assignment following the death of Moses. After years at Moses's side, Joshua was prepared by God for this specific and important task. When God calls us out of our comfort zones into a new thing, He will equip and strengthen us for the task just as He did Joshua.

God never left Joshua to his own efforts or expected him to handle things on his own. God knew what Joshua needed and gave him specific instruction that would enable and equip him for what he had been called to do. To lead well, Joshua was reminded of the importance of knowing and living by the Word of God. God gave us Scripture as a guide for our lives and, just like Joshua, we are to live our lives knowing and obeying the Word of God.

- ❓ How will you be intentional about prioritizing the Word of God daily?
- ❓ How have you let fear keep you from stepping out obediently in faith? What needs to change?
- ❓ What issue are you facing currently that you need to follow Scripture's guidance on? How can we support one another in this as a group?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for calling you and equipping you to do His will. Ask for the bold courage needed to live your life in faithful obedience to Him.

Memory Verse

"Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." - Joshua 1:9

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Joshua* by Robert Smith Jr.
- *Be Strong* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Joshua* by David Jackman

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Joshua

Purpose

Just as Joshua's leadership begins with the death of Moses, so the book of Joshua follows and completes the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy serves as a means by which the new generation of Israelites renewed their covenant with God. The book of Joshua provides the means by which God fulfilled his part of the covenant. God gave them victories, but each victory required a step of faith. God's provision for the people as their leader and guide bore witness to later generations of the divinely willed leadership for Israel, and his gracious gift of the land showed how the people's faithful fulfillment of the covenant could result in abundant blessing.

Author

The author of the book of Joshua is not identified in the Bible and otherwise remains anonymous. If Joshua himself did not originally compose the book that bears his name, then it may be presumed that someone who knew him and his exploits recorded the work. There are numerous references throughout Joshua that suggest a final formation of the book after his lifetime. These include the death of Joshua and descriptions of memorials or names that are said to remain "still ... today" (4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26; 8:28–29; 10:27; 13:13; 14:14; 15:63; 16:10; 22:17; 23:8).

Setting

The accounts in the book of Joshua occur in the period immediately after Moses's death. This was a new generation, not the one that had left Egypt. The story of Joshua is thus set when the nation of Israel first appeared in the land west of the Jordan River—the land that would bear their name. First Kings 6:1 states that the exodus occurred 480 years before Solomon's fourth year as king (966 BC). In Jdg 11:26, Jephthah said that Israel had been living in regions of Palestine for three hundred years. Jephthah lived around 1100 BC, thus dating the end of the wilderness journey and the beginning of the conquest around 1400 BC.

Special Features

The book of Joshua is named for the most famous member of the Israelites in the generation after the death of Moses. The book describes the history of the generation that crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land of Canaan. Their battles and faithfulness have a place among the greatest stories of faith in the Old Testament. Joshua led the people to defeat the adversaries who opposed God's people. He then oversaw the division of the land into the tribal allotments. Finally, Joshua renewed the covenant between the people and God.

Extended Commentary

Joshua 1:1-9

1:1 The death of Moses created a leadership vacuum. Moses's epithet, Lord's servant, was first applied at his death (Dt 34:5) as this epithet would first be applied to Joshua at his death (Jos 24:29). Used rarely in the earlier part of the Bible as an evaluation of a person's life, it became more common and was enhanced by Jesus (Jn 15:15), although Paul retained the title (Rm 1:1). Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant, identifies Joshua as the one who had been with Moses since Ex 17. "Assistant" (cp. Ex 24:13) translates a different term than "servant."

1:2 God commanded Joshua to prepare the people to cross over the Jordan. The key words cross over (Hb 'avar) ties this section together. The fact that all the people were involved emphasizes the importance of unity among the people of God. God emphasized that the land was something he was giving the Israelites; it was God's grace, not the efforts of the Israelites, that provided the land.

1:3 Repeating the emphasis on the land as God's gift, it now included every place where the sole of your foot treads. Although the "promised land" is normally understood as something that God promised Abram, Isaac, and Jacob (Gn 12:1-3), here God attached the promise to Moses. Deuteronomy 34:4 refers to this promise made to Moses (Ex 3). The extension of Moses's promise to Joshua further establishes him as successor.

1:4 This wilderness is not the land of wandering. The term is used in 8:15, 20 and 12:8 to describe the area east of Ai and the "desert" region of Judah in the south. It thus designates the southern part of the promised land. Lebanon ("white") refers to the mountains north of Israel in the modern land of that name. The land of the Hittites seems not to refer to the Hittite Empire of modern Turkey but the Egyptian and later Assyrian usage of this term to describe the region controlled by the Hittites in the western part of modern Syria. These lands and boundaries identify Canaan as it was known both to the Bible (Gn 10:19; Nm 13:17, 21-22; 34:3-12) and to Egyptian writers of the second millennium BC.

1:5 The reference to as long as you live looks to the end of Joshua's life, concluding this "Table of Contents" in vv. 2-5. The promise I will not leave you anticipates the plea of Gibeon in 10:6, "Don't give up on your servants," using the same expression. Likewise the verb abandon occurs again in Joshua, in Israel's promise of loyalty to God (24:16, 20). This verse forms a hinge, concluding the previous sections of promises and introducing the next section of responsibilities. God's promise of his presence occurs again in 1:9 and thus provides an envelope to 1:6-9. All the responsibilities of these verses depend on God's presence that guarantees the mission's success, just as Christ's presence enables his disciples to achieve their mission (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15, 20; Ac 1:8).

1:6 God's command, Be strong and courageous, already spoken by Moses to Israel (Dt 31:6), appears three times here (Jos 1:7, 9). The expression is used before great undertakings like David's charge to Solomon to build the temple (1Ch 28:20), King Hezekiah's encouragement to his subjects to withstand the enemy's siege (2Ch 32:7), and Joshua's own charge to Israel to fight (Jos 10:25).

1:7 The word success (Hb sakal; cp. succeed in v. 8) is found frequently in the Wisdom literature to describe one's mastery of the world and insight into its challenges ("prudent" in Pr 1:3). The whole instruction (Hb torah) describes God's revelation in the form of the previous books of the law of Moses.

1:8 Two more references to the instruction affirm the key importance of God's revelation. Study and learning of it are to form so much a part of one's life that the words are fully obeyed as in Dt 6:6–9. The stylistic frame of God's promised presence in Jos 1:5, 9 indicates that Joshua's success will come because God is with him, enabling him to read and observe God's Word (Eph 2:8–10).

1:9 This is the third command to be strong and courageous. Moses also commanded the people twice not to be afraid or discouraged (Dt 1:21; 31:8).²

References

1. Kamal Al-Malah, "The Human Brain: Search for Natural Intelligence," *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review* 8, no. 6 (November 3, 2021): 232–35, <https://doi.org/10.15739/ijepr.21.026>.
2. *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).