



# THE COVENANT CONTINUES

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Joshua 1

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

[The LORD said,] “I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:9)

Daily Bible Readings			
<b>M</b>	Aug. 31	Rom. 8:31–39	More Than Victorious
<b>T</b>	Sept. 1	Gen. 13:14–18	See What God Has Promised
<b>W</b>	Sept. 2	Deut. 34:1–12	The Promised Land Revealed
<b>Th</b>	Sept. 3	Heb. 4:1–10	God’s Promised Rest
<b>F</b>	Sept. 4	Heb. 10:14–18	God’s New Covenant
<b>Sa</b>	Sept. 5	Ps. 27	Whom Shall I Fear?

## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

As the book of Joshua opens, ancient Israel is at a defining moment. For forty years they were led by Moses, “the servant of the Lord” (Josh. 1:1). He was the one who persistently confronted Pharaoh with the demand to let God’s people go. Through him, God had worked wonders like parting the Red Sea and drawing water out of a rock. Moses delivered the Ten Commandments from Sinai. He spoke with God face to face and interpreted God’s law. He led the Israelites into battle and organized their life together. Now Moses was dead, just as they prepared to enter the land God had promised. They faced unknown yet intimidating foes.

Nevertheless, God was not going to leave God’s people adrift. God had promised ninety-year-old Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation that would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. God never wavered in commitment to fulfill that covenant. Even through four hundred years of enslavement in Egypt, God never forgot. As central as Moses was to fulfilling that covenant, God had a succession plan. Before Moses died, he chose young Joshua to be his assistant. Joshua was no Moses. The closing words of Deuteronomy tell us that a leader like Moses never again arose in Israel. But God spoke to Joshua and affirmed him as

the new leader of Israel. God had promised that ancient Israel would possess the land that God promised to their ancestors. Now God would work through Joshua to fulfill that promise. God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. Wherever he went, God would be with him.

*Faithful God, your promises are secure. Give us faith to trust in your eternal word and live each day confident that you do not leave us adrift. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Joshua 1:1-11

**1:1** After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant, saying, <sup>2</sup>"My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. <sup>3</sup>Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. <sup>4</sup>From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. <sup>5</sup>No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. <sup>6</sup>Be strong and courageous, for you shall lead this people to possess the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. <sup>7</sup>Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. <sup>8</sup>This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. <sup>9</sup>I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

<sup>10</sup>Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, <sup>11</sup>"Pass through the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for in three days you are to cross over this Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.'"

*Note:* Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

## GOD'S CONTINUING FAITHFULNESS

Every story has a perspective. Telling stories is a way that we find meaning in what we experience. Recounting our past is a way we discern a trajectory in our individual lives, our families, and our communities. The Bible tells the story of God's relationship with God's people from various perspectives. To understand what the writer is saying about God and God's people, we have to know something about the writer's perspective.

The book of Joshua picks up with the Israelites after the death of Moses. Joshua is not the author of the book. Scholars think that it was likely written during the reign of King Josiah in the seventh century BCE. During repairs on the Jerusalem temple, workers discovered copies of the law of Moses that had been lost. This discovery led to a retelling of the story of ancient Israel that focused on the covenant God made with Moses while Israel was wandering in the wilderness. The book of Deuteronomy lays out the particulars of that covenant. Joshua and Judges narrate how the ancient Israelites entered land and how they lived once they settled. The people for whom Joshua was written already knew the facts of Joshua's leading the people into the land, but the book tells the story from a perspective that emphasizes that their victories were a result of God's faithfulness to the covenant even when the people strayed from God.

The author of Joshua is concerned to understand that period of Israel's history in the context of God's covenant instructions with a view to inspiring the present and future faithfulness of the audience. They could take comfort in knowing that even when the people did not obey God and the laws of Deuteronomy, God remained faithful. It is likely that Deuteronomy and Joshua were edited and updated after Judah was carried into exile in Babylon. Living in a foreign land, their nation in ruins and their temple destroyed, God's people took comfort in hearing how God had remained faithful to their ancestors. They found direction and purpose in reclaiming for themselves the covenant that sustained Joshua.

Although the circumstances of ancient Israel and the challenges facing Joshua differ from our situation, God who is at the center of the story is the same.



**How has the story of God's relationship with God's people as told in Scripture sustained you through the changes of your life?**

## COURAGE THAT COMES FROM GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

For those of us who have read to the end of the book of Joshua and know what happened, it is hard to appreciate the anxiety that the Israelites must have felt when Moses died. For forty years, God had worked through Moses to lead the people through challenges that seemed impossible. Now, when they needed strong leadership more than ever, Moses was gone.

You could not blame them if they despaired that God's covenant with them had come to naught. It's a similar situation in which their ancestors had found themselves. Abraham and Sarah were well past their child-bearing years before the son whom God had promised was born. Israel had been enslaved in Egypt four hundred years before God led them to the land that was promised to their forebears. During Israel's journey through the wilderness, there were many times when it looked as if God had left them. They were certain they were done for when they were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. They had resigned themselves to dying of thirst before God sent water out of the rock.

As crucial as Moses was to the survival and welfare of the people, the relationship between God and God's people was not dependent on one person. No person lives forever, but God's promises are eternal, so God provides leaders to guide God's people.

God made it clear that Joshua was the successor to Moses. Moses's name is mentioned six times in the opening eleven verses of the book. The great things that Joshua did were part of the continuing story of God's faithfulness. Yet God was not telling Joshua just to sit back and be passive. Healthy relationships are dynamic. Each party brings something to the relationship, and we respond to each other. In response to God's faithfulness, Joshua's charge was to be strong and courageous. He was to trust in God's strength and not be afraid.

All the people had a role in fulfilling God's promise. As they prepared to cross the Jordan, some of the tribes of Israel had already settled on the eastern side of the river. Joshua reminded them that they had an obligation to fight for the other tribes, just as their compatriots had fought for them. Their safety and prosperity came with a responsibility.

When we trust in God's faithfulness, we find courage to live as God's faithful people.



**When has knowing that God is faithful given you courage?**

## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

The opening chapter of Joshua makes the selection of a leader seem simple. God spoke to Joshua and told him that he was Moses's successor. This did not mean he had it easy. Dissidents had rebelled against Moses in the wilderness, and the Israelites did not always obey Joshua's instructions, but these leaders courageously adhered to God's law and trusted that God would be faithful.

Nowadays, God rarely calls up leaders in the same way God summoned Moses and Joshua. The call to leadership in the church involves three parties. First there is God, who endows certain people with the gifts that the church needs for a particular time and stirs a sense of call in the person. Second is the individual who is called and responds to the movement of the Spirit. Third is the community of faith that sees the fruit of the Spirit in an individual and acknowledges that they are equipped for leadership. Different churches bestow leadership in different ways. In some traditions, leadership is conveyed through bishops. In others, the congregation elects its leaders. The ritual of laying on of hands is often used to signify that leaders in the church are continuing the ongoing story of God's faithfulness to God's people.

The charge that God gave Joshua is the same one that God gives to leaders in the church today. God told Joshua to meditate on God's law, day and night, and to be careful to act in accordance with it. Jesus affirmed that he is the fulfillment of God's law (Matt. 5:17–18). Therefore, the most important thing that church leaders do is attend to their own relationship with Jesus and continue to grow in faith. Whatever demands leaders face, their first responsibility is to devote themselves to prayer and Bible study.

God also commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. Those qualities are sometimes confused with being obstinate and reckless. Leaders who are grounded in prayer and Scripture can be flexible. They recognize that God often leads us to do things in new and different ways. At the same time, they see threats and challenges in the proper perspective, the perspective of God's faithfulness. They know that if the institution of the church they lead changes and even fades away, God's Word is eternal and always new.



**How does your faith community discern those whom God calls to leadership?**

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. The book of Joshua is named for the main character in the historical events that unfold in the book. Joshua is not the author of the book. Joshua picks up where Moses left off, leading Israel to the Promised Land.
2. Joshua's leadership is described throughout the book by many comparisons to Moses.
3. Deuteronomy lays out God's instructions for inhabiting the Promised Land, which is part of the covenant established while Israel was still in the wilderness under Moses's leadership. Joshua and Judges narrate how the Israelites enter and inhabit the land.
4. The book of Joshua is an interpretation of past events, and the author is concerned to understand that period of Israel's history in the context of God's covenantal instructions with a view to inspiring the present and future faithfulness of his audience.