

God's Sure Promises

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Date: 07 August 2016

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[0 : 00] Well, please do turn to Joshua in your Bibles there, and we'll be reading Joshua chapter 1, which you will find on page 178 in the Church Bibles.

Now, Joshua marks a bit of a change, a bit of a turning point in the life of the people of Israel. We read at the end of Deuteronomy that Moses dies and hands over a responsibility of leading the people to Joshua, and the book of Joshua charts the people's conquest of the land that was promised long ago, and it marks them carving up the land into different inheritances for each of the tribes. So it's an action-packed book, and there is much for us to learn. I'm going to read the end of Deuteronomy, and then we'll look on into Joshua chapter 1. So just the last couple of verses of Deuteronomy. 34 verse 9, And Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his lands, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. Joshua chapter 1. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you, and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.

From the wilderness and this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to the law all that Moses, my servant, commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

[3 : 29] For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan, to go into it, to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess. And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, remember the words that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you, saying, the Lord your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan.

But all the men of valor among you shall pass over, armed, before your brothers, and shall help them, until the Lord gives rest to your brothers, as he has to you. And they also take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession, and shall possess it, the land that the Lord, the land that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise. And they answered Joshua, all that you have commanded us we will do, and whatever you send us we will go. Just as we obeyed Moses in all things, so we will obey you. Only may the Lord your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command them shall be put to death.

Only be strong and courageous. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Well, please do grab your Bibles and turn to Joshua chapter 1.

[6 : 10] So we begin this evening a new series in the book of Joshua. Joshua. And it's an extremely encouraging book as it speaks of God's great faithfulness to his people, his promise keeping.

There's also a challenging book as it calls his people to covenant fidelity to their king. It's a book written about Israel's victorious conquest of the promised land, about their tribal inheritances in that land, and about covenant loyalty in Joshua's day.

And as we'll see, it's more than just a slice of history from a long time ago in a place far, far away. It has much to teach the church today as we look ahead to the land that God has promised for his people.

Now, the book begins on a bit of a downer. A surprising start, isn't it? I'm not sure this will be my opening line, but here it is.

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord. Moses has died. Moses was dead.

[7 : 54] Moses has died. Now, what a moment of crisis that would have been for the nation of Israel. It is not a promising start.

It's a bit like the start, well, it's not really, but it's sort of like the start of the Disney Pixar film Up. I'm not sure if you've seen that. But in the first few minutes of that film, you see almost the entire life of the main character flash before your eyes.

You see him growing up, getting married, getting old with his wife, his wife dying. And by the time the narrative slows down, you're two minutes into the film. You're left with a widower who's just marking time.

It's not the most promising start for a film, but it gets better. And likewise, here at the start of Joshua, it is not a promising start.

Moses gets about 11 mentions in the first four verses. He's the towering figure that looms large. But here, at the start of Joshua, with the death of Moses begins a new chapter in the life of God's people.

[9 : 06] It's as if the pause button, which has been switched on for the last 40 years, has suddenly switched off. God's people have been treading water in the desert for 40 years.

A journey to the promised land that should have taken a matter of weeks took them 40 years. But now, as we read Joshua, things happen quickly.

An army is mobilized. The people enter the land. They win battles. They claim their inheritance. And this opening chapter, chapter one of Joshua, sets the scene.

It introduces the central character and the key themes that will crop up all through the book. And in this first chapter, I want us to see three straightforward things.

A lesson about God's word, about God's leader, and then about God's people. So firstly, verses one to four, God's word.

[10 : 07] His promise of the land is a sure thing. Look again at verses one to four as I read them. After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, Moses, my servant, is dead.

Now therefore, arise. Go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel, every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I have given to you, just as was promised to Moses.

From the wilderness and this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.

Now central to what God says here to Joshua is the age-old promise of the land.

It is the land, verse three, that was promised to Moses. In fact, that promise long preceded Moses. The promise has its roots in the very foundations of the Bible.

[11 : 15] Well, in Genesis chapter 2, we read of God placing his people, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, a place where they enjoyed God's blessing and where they enjoyed perfect rest.

But as we know, by the end of Genesis chapter 3, they've been excluded from the Garden, excluded from the land, excluded from God's rest. And then in Genesis 12, God made that glorious promise to Abraham that he would again bring his people into a land that would be theirs, a place where there would no rest, where they could live, a place they could call their own.

And all through Genesis, you read of this promise of a land. Genesis 12, Genesis 13, 15, 17, 24.

Just flick back to chapter 15 for a moment, and we'll see there just one example of these promises of a land made to the people.

Genesis 15 and verse 17. When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

[12 : 40] On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, to your offspring I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadamonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

God had promised the land, and yet that promise was not yet fulfilled. Even here at the start of Joshua, hundreds of years have passed.

The people have been in slavery for 400 years in Egypt. They've been wandering around in the desert, on the brink of the land for 40 years. God's people were not yet in the land that had been promised to Abraham.

But God's promise is a sure thing. What God has said, he will do. And Joshua is the book where we see the fulfillment of that promise.

Joshua is the book where the people do at last enter God's promised rest. Turn to the end of the book of Joshua, chapter 21.

[13 : 54] This marks a key turning point in the book.

Up until this point, it's very much been the Lord's faithfulness demonstrated to his people as they've been taking the land, victorious in conquest. And here, at the end of chapter 21, verse 43, we see the Lord's faithfulness to his promise.

Verse 43, Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their fathers.

Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the Lord had given them all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed.

All came to pass. God kept his promises. Joshua evidences that the promise of God, in particular his promise of a land for his people, a land of rest, that promise is a sure thing.

[15 : 21] But there is a greater, fuller rest to come. In the New Testament, Hebrews chapter 4, we read that there is a promised land, a land of rest, that awaits every Christian believer.

As we know, as we read on in the Bible, God's people didn't, in the end, take full possession of the land that was promised to them. They didn't fully take their inheritance. There is a promise to come. And in chapter 4 of Hebrews, we read this, For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. And every Christian believer looks forward to that eternal rest in the promised land, the new creation. We are not home yet.

This land that we live in now is not as good as it gets. I'm sure we don't have too much trouble believing that. But we are not to seek our ultimate rest, our ultimate security.

[16 : 35] Here, there is a land to come. And God has promised to you, to all of us, a land of eternal rest. And his promise will not fail.

It will be completed. Listen to the words of the Lord Jesus as he points forward to that great day. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit in his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For God's people, there is a promised land to come. That is a sure thing. It is certain.

[17 : 44] God's promises do not fail. His words do not fall. And God's promises to Israel, they were fulfilled despite major obstacles.

Just think about the realities on the ground for those two or three million Israelites camped east of the Jordan in the wilderness. Just imagine the realities that face them.

And God's words were fulfilled to them despite three things. God's word was fulfilled despite the passing of a great leader. God's word was fulfilled despite a people who had been faithless. God's word was fulfilled despite powerful opponents. God's word was fulfilled. God's word was fulfilled. So firstly, God's promises are certain despite the passing of a great leader. God's promises are certain despite the passing of a great leader. Moses, the one who had led them out of Egypt, the one who had met with God on the mountain, who carried on tablets of stone the very words of God, Moses was dead.

[18 : 59] And the people will no doubt have felt great sorrow. And he looms large at the start of the chapter, doesn't he? Eleven mentions in the first four verses.

And yet, God's promises were not contingent on any one human leader. Moses dies, but God's promises live on.

God's fidelity to his promises did not evaporate upon Moses' death. God's kingdom does not depend on human personality, but on his promises.

Now that should encourage us, perhaps challenge us. God's promises live on despite the passing of a great leader. A leader to whom you look up to and respect.

Who perhaps on a human level, brought you into the kingdom. God's promises live on despite their passing. Perhaps they move to a new ministry.

[20 : 06] Perhaps they retire. Perhaps they die. God's promises are certain despite the passing of a great leader.

Don't make an idol out of one of God's servants. It is only his promises that abide. That was the first great obstacle they faced.

Secondly, God's promises are certain despite the faithlessness of a people. This generation that we read about here in Joshua, the generation that would take the inheritance promise, they lived in the shadow of a previous faithless generation.

The generation that four decades before this moment stood on the brink of the promised land and refused to go in. They refused to obey. They refused to trust God's promises.

And rather than have faith, they were fearful. And so they wandered aimlessly in the desert and died there. But despite that faithless generation, God's promise was certain and unfulfilling.

[21 : 18] And so for us, God's promise is a sure thing despite prior faithlessness. And we live in a generation where the church at large seems in free fall, doesn't it?

Many abandoning the promises of God, seeking rather to defer to whatever cultural winds are blowing. Don't be disheartened. The question is, will you, will you, Tron Church, cling to the promises of God and keep clinging?

They're a sure thing. Are you tempted to be fearful? Tempted to fear what you see rather than trust the promises of God?

Well, learn the lesson of that faithless generation who feared what they saw rather than trust what God had said. God's promises are certain.

They are trustworthy. Have faith in what he has said. Do not fear. And the third great problem they faced.

[22 : 31] God's promises are certain despite powerful opponents. Now, Joshua's army, the people of Israel, they faced two major problems as they looked into the land that God had promised.

The first one was the River Jordan. And the second was Jericho and all the inhabitants of the land. Now, the River Jordan. I'm told by a reliable source that one of the most difficult military operations you can perform in the field is a river crossing.

It is logistically tricky. And it requires meticulous planning, exact execution. Now, consider the situation here.

Joshua had an army of about 600,000 men plus families, plus livestock, plus provisions, plus animals, all that. then consider the river Jordan.

That was a considerable obstacle, wasn't it? But the Lord, well, he had form here, didn't he? Just as he had seen his people safely through the Red Sea, so he would take them through the Jordan.

[23 : 49] A seemingly impossible task from a human perspective was not insurmountable for the God who would keep his promises for his people.

But that wasn't the only problem. Think back four decades and the 12 spies who went into the land to search it out.

Ten of them came back with frightening reports of the inhabitants of the land. And as Joshua prepared his people, his army, for the conquest that was to come, no doubt they were fearful. They would have heard stories passed down about those original ten spies who spoke about the fearful opposition. But just the very fact they were going into battle, that in itself was a fearful thing. They were fighting God's enemies. But God's promises, they were a sure thing. God's promises are a sure thing, no matter the ferocity of the enemy, no matter the size of the enemy.

[24 : 59] So we too can take heart. Don't our enemies seem overwhelming? The evil one has a well-organized force, doesn't he?

But God's promises stand firm. We can hold your nerve because we look back to the decisive victory that our great leader won on the cross and his resurrection.

We look back to that. Victory is assured. God's promises are a sure thing. We are far more ground for confidence than they did.

We can look back to what God has already done on the cross. Take heart. God's promises are a sure thing. And that is hard for us to grasp, isn't it?

I'm sure that you're used to promises being broken, whether spoken by politicians, our parents, our friends, those nearest to us.

[26 : 00] some promises kept, but many broken. Not so with God. What God has said he will do.

And his promise to you, each one here this evening who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, his promise to you is that he will bring you to his promised rest, his promised land, the new creation.

And nothing will stand in the way of that promise being fulfilled. Nothing can touch it. Nothing can shake it. Nothing will stop God fulfilling the promises that he has made to you.

But how was God's, how was his promise to give them the land, how was that going to materialize?

How was that going to happen? Well, we've seen God's word.

And secondly, verses five to nine, we see God's leader. God gives the land through his strong and courageous leader. And the focus here at the start of this book is the man Joshua.

[27 : 14] His name means savior. It's the same word in the Greek for Christ, for Jesus, sorry. His name has the same root as Joshua.

And it's through Joshua, God's chosen leader, that God's people will inherit the land that has been promised to them long ago. And notice verse six there.

Be strong and courageous for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give to them. Now the you in verses five to nine, throughout that section, it's a singular you.

It's you, Joshua. It's all to do with Joshua, you. Just as God was with Moses, so he would be with Joshua.

And God gives Joshua great words of assurance, promises to be with him. Verse five, I will never leave or forsake you. Verse nine, do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

[28 : 23] Great words of comfort to Joshua, but also great words of command. If Joshua was to lead the people into the land, much was expected of him. Verse six, be strong and courageous for you shall cause this people to inherit the land.

And surely that made Joshua gulp. Verse seven, be strong and very courageous being careful to do all that the Lord commanded Moses.

Verse eight, the book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

That's a big ask. Much was expected of Joshua. If Israel was to take possession of the land, then it would only happen as Joshua, their great leader, remained faithful to the Lord.

The great promises God made were to be met by obedience to every word of the law. And Joshua was faithful. At the end of the book, Joshua is on his deathbed and he exhorts the people to serve the Lord faithfully.

[29 : 43] And then he says, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua was a faithful leader, strong and courageous to the end.

It was through him that God would give his people what was promised to them. But as we know, the people never did take full possession of all that was promised to them.

Joshua wasn't the perfect leader. He died. And those who followed him did not claim the inheritance that God had promised. Joshua, a good leader, he pointed forward to another Joshua, another

savior, a greater, perfect savior who would win for his people the full promised land.

God has appointed for his people a leader. A leader who has begun and is and will complete the conquest over our enemies and will bring us into the land that is promised.

A land that will never spoil, never fade. A land of perfect rest and peace. our great leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, he's our perfect savior.

[31 : 12] Only he has been perfectly strong and courageous. Only he has perfectly done all that Moses commanded. God has promised you a land of rest and God gives you that land through his great leader, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And so our final point is the great implication that flows from these fundamental truths.

We've seen God's word, his sure promise.

We've seen his leader. But what about God's people? What will God's people do? We see verses 10 to 18 that his people align themselves behind God's leader.

Joshua in verse 10 turns to the people. And Joshua commanded the officers of the people pass through the midst of the camp and command the people prepare yourselves, prepare your provisions for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in and to take possession of the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess.

He's getting his people battle ready, ready to cross over and into the land to go to battle. Will the people follow? Will they align themselves behind God's leader?

[32 : 34] And the answer, verse 16, is yes. And they answer Joshua, all that you have commanded us we will do and wherever you send us we will go.

look on a bit. Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your word, whatever you command him shall be put to death. Anyone that steps out of line from following Joshua, they're going to face the ultimate penalty.

The people commit themselves unequivocally to their leader. Whatever Joshua commands, whatever he tells them, they will do it. They recognize his authority and they align themselves behind them.

They know that the only way they're going to enter the land is under the leadership of Joshua. And so they align themselves completely behind him.

And so for you today, if you want to be sure of entering the eternal, glorious, perfect inheritance, the promised land, the new creation, perfect rest, then you must align yourself completely, wholeheartedly to God's leader.

[33 : 54] You must follow completely and fully the Lord Jesus Christ. All that he commands, wherever he sends you, you are to follow him. That is the only way you will enter the land that has been promised to you.

And that means no half-hearted, tentative commitments, no dipping the toe in the water, it's fully aligning yourself.

No sitting on the fringes hoping others will pick up the slack. All are to be on board, fully committed to following the leader. Christians, we are in full battle mode.

we are in the midst of spiritual warfare. Full commitment is required. Will you align yourself with God's leader?

Before we finish, I want us to notice a slight oddity in the text. Perhaps oddity isn't the right word, but something that's a bit surprising and unexpected detail. Look again at verses 12 to 14.

[35 : 01] Particular instructions are given to some of the tribes to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Now what's going on here? Well you can read the background to this in Numbers chapter 32. The Reubenites and the Gadites asked Moses if they could take their inheritance east of the Jordan. Now the problem was the land of Canaan lay on the other side, on the west side of the Jordan. That was what God had promised as their inheritance and these tribes wanted to take land east of the Jordan.

Now they agreed with Moses that those tribes could take that land east of the Jordan if they assisted the rest of the tribes in gaining their inheritance west of the Jordan.

They would have to send men able to fight and battle to go and help in the conquest. Only if they did that could they take the land east of the Jordan. And here in Joshua 1 those promises that the Reubenites and the Gadites had made are being cashed in.

[36 : 14] Now this was a moment that could have sparked the beginning of the end. Those tribes east of the Jordan could have been mightily tempted to seek the quiet life and settle down enjoy their inheritance wave goodbye to the other tribes as they cross over the Jordan.

Good luck. But they align themselves with the whole people of God. They willingly send their men of fighting age to join the conquest.

They align themselves together as a unity behind their leader. They could easily have chosen not to settle for what they already had.

And so we too must align ourselves as a unity behind our leader. We are not a collection of individuals who happen to follow Jesus. We are a body.

We are being built together. We are the church and we are a unity. unity. And so all of us as we align ourselves to God we align ourselves to each other.

[37 : 25] Unity is more important than personal comfort and preference. It would have been far easier for those eastern tribes to have pulled up the drawbridge enjoyed their inheritance but that would have been catastrophic for the other tribes.

tempting I'm sure for us as a church to enjoy our own earthly inheritance our own foretaste of that great inheritance to come.

We are in the midst of significant change as a church new locations being established in different places in the city one already on the go for a few months one about to start and it is easy for those attending one location to begin to sideline the needs of others perhaps to forget about the concerns of the whole church body here.

Let's not be tempted to do that. Remember that we are in battle mode we must unite and remain united together and united behind our great leader the Lord Jesus Christ serving together serving each other serving our savior savior.

There can be no space for parochial interests trumping greater priorities in the service of Christ and his church. God has made great promises to his people promises of a perfect rest but the obstacles seem huge don't they?

[39 : 04] they often frighten us but we can trust him what God says he does his word to you to all of us is a sure thing he has given us a greater leader than Joshua one who will see us safe into the land will you align yourself behind him there is no other way if you have aligned yourself behind him stay there fully committed serving our great leader for he will see us safe into the land he's promised let me pray Lord we do thank you so much that your word is a sure thing that what you have said will come to pass all your great promises will be fulfilled and we thank you that in the

Lord Jesus Christ we have such great assurance the ultimate victory already won our future promised rest secured so help us Lord to align ourselves behind you and behind our great saviour for we ask it in Jesus name Amen