

God Always Keeps His Promises (Joshua)

Big Idea: Against all odds, and despite all obstacles, God keeps his promises and gives his people rest.

Joshua Bell emerged from the Metro and positioned himself against a wall beside a trash basket. By most measures, he was nondescript – a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt, and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. From a small case, he removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he shrewdly threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money and began to play.

For the next 45 minutes, in the D.C. Metro, Bell played Mozart and Schubert as over 1,000 people streamed by, most hardly taking notice.

If they had paid attention, they might have recognized the young man for the world-renowned violinist he is. They also might have noted the violin he played– a rare Stradivarius worth over \$3 million. It was all part of a project arranged by The Washington Post—"an experiment in context, perception, and priorities—as well as an unblinking assessment of public taste. In a banal setting, at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?"

Bell managed to collect a sum of \$32 while performing in the subway station. The number of people who donated after pausing briefly was 27. This was in stark contrast to Bell's previous concert where he played to a packed house at Boston Symphony Hall. Only three days ago, tickets for ordinary seats at the concert were sold out for \$100 each.

They missed what was right in front of them.

I feel like the same is true about the book that we're going to look at today, the book of Joshua. Other than a few popular passages, this book is usually ignored. Some parts are considered downright boring. But it's got a message that we can't afford to ignore.

An Overview of Joshua

We're going through the entire Bible this year. Last week, we hit a major milestone. We finished the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. It's the foundation for everything that follows in the Bible. If you don't understand these books, it's like walking into the movie theatre 15 minutes after the movie has started. "This would result in a nagging feeling that we were missing something, even as we watched to the end," writes [Ian Vaillancourt](#). "It is impossible to fully enjoy a movie if we have missed the essential first part of the story."

It's absolutely crucial that we understand it.

Let me see if I can summarize the message of the Pentateuch in a nutshell.

- God created the world and made it good.
- We ruined it through sin.
- But God made a covenant with a very flawed people so he could rescue the world. He did everything he could for them: he chose them, he made promises to them, he grew their numbers, he rescued them from slavery, gave them his law, and even lived among them despite their sin.

What we've seen so far is incredible. It helps us understand God, the world, and ourselves. Understanding these first five books means that we get to arrive on time and "soak in the essential first act in the Bible's grand story of redemption."

Today, we turn a corner. We're looking at Joshua, which marks a transition from the Torah or Pentateuch to the historic books, also called the Former Prophets. These books include Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings.

Let me give you a bird's eye view of Joshua:

- In chapters 1 to 5, Israel enters the Promised Land under new leadership. Key term: go over.
- In chapters 5 to 12, they conquer the land in two military campaigns. Key word: take.
- In chapters 13 to 21, they divide the land. Key word: divide.
- In chapters 22 to 24, they recommit to serving God. Key word: worship.

That's the book. They go over, take the land, divide the land, and worship. You can summarize the entire book in two sentences: Israel takes the land. Israel divides the land.

You can see why some people struggle with this book. If you're reading the Bible and you come across a book about Israel taking the land and dividing the land, you may wonder what this book has to do with you. The answer is: a lot. But first you have to get there by answering an important question: how does this book fit within the story that the Bible is telling us?

What Joshua Teaches Us

To understand Joshua, you have to understand the bigger story. The context for the story of Joshua is found all the way back in God's promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1, right at the start of God's rescue plan to save the world. "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" Abram did exactly what God told him. And then in verse 7 we read, "Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'"

In Genesis 15:8, we read, "To your offspring I give this land."

And then in Genesis 17:7-8, God said:

I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

You can draw a straight line from these promises to the entire book of Joshua. The story of the Bible is God choosing his people despite the fact that they didn't deserve to be chosen, showing them grace, and keeping his promises to them, even when they mess up over and over again.

Why is taking the land and dividing the land so important to us? Because the land represented a promise that God made to his people a long time, some 600 years earlier. When Israel took the land and divided the land, it communicated an important message: **against all odds, and despite all obstacles, God keeps his promises and gives his people rest.**

And that's a message that we need to hear today.

Highlights

Let me lift three highlights from the book of Joshua that matter for us today.

First: God does the heavy lifting.

It would be easy to think that Joshua is about Joshua. It's not. It's also not primarily about the Israelites. They're supporting characters. It's about God. The emphasis in Joshua is not Israel's military strategy or strength. It's on God's provision of the land.

There's no clearer example than the first city they faced: the city of Jericho. It was one of the oldest cities in the world, and the first obstacle they faced as they crossed the Jordan River. What was the plan to conquer the land? Here's God's plan:

See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days ... On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him.
(Joshua 6:2-5)

Israel takes a passive role. God delivers his people; Israel needs to simply trust and wait. The plan makes no sense according to the wisdom of the world, but it's how God

operates. Right from the start, he teaches Israel that he will give them the land. Israel doesn't work; it simply receives.

Near the end of Joshua, God says to the people:

And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.' (Joshua 24:11-13)

That is such an important lesson for us today as well. How do God's people get to enjoy God's promised blessings? We don't earn them. We don't work for them. We simply receive them as a gracious gift from God.

That's still how God works. How do you get all the blessings God has promised to us in Jesus? You don't work for them. You don't earn them. You simply receive them. In every other area of life, we have to work ourselves to the bone to get ahead. Want to graduate with honors? Prove yourself. Want to get a job? Put your best foot forward and show them what you've got. Want to be an entrepreneur? Hustle. Want to be blessed by God? Stop wearying yourself. Simply come to Jesus with empty hands and receive. He will graciously give you what you need.

Hear these words from Isaiah:

*Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;*

*and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
(Isaiah 55:1-2)*

Friends, come to Jesus today. Stop working and simply receive. You don't need to earn. Simply come to Jesus who has done everything for you and invites you to simply receive forgiveness and life and hope.

Second: God doesn't care for you in general. God cares about the details of your lives.

I mentioned that Joshua 13-21 is about dividing the land. Joshua 13-21 is about all the details. Read these chapters and you've got a massive list of tribes and the cities and boundaries of each tribe.

When we read these chapters, we yawn. These chapters can seem so boring to us. But I'm really struck by what [one podcast](#) on the book of Joshua says:

When you get to Joshua 11-21, you'll be tempted to speed-read. It's just a long list of places and names you've never heard of.

But the original readers? They would have read it slowly, with tears in their eyes.

Why? Because it includes them. It names their tribes, their cities. It shows God's particular care for them. What could be better?

Does God care about the details of your life? So much. Nothing has escaped his attention. If God is willing to get down to the details in the book of Joshua, he's willing to deal with the details of your life too. He doesn't care about you in general. God cares about the details of your life.

God does the heavy lifting. God cares about the details. One more highlight.

Three: Despite all the obstacles, God will keep his promises and give you rest.

Think of everything that had happened from the promises God made to Abram and the taking and dividing of the land. Think of all the twists and turns, all the obstacles:

- Abraham and Sarah's infertility, which meant that the plan to make a great nation from Abraham was doomed from the start
- Incredible family dysfunction, which God somehow used to put Joseph exactly where he needed to be to preserve the family when they were on the brink of starvation
- Israel's captivity to the most powerful nation on earth, which looked like an insurmountable obstacle
- The sinfulness of God's people, which tripped them up over and over again

- The fact that the Promised Land was already occupied by a collection of city-states

So many obstacles. And yet none of them stand in the way of God keeping his promises to Abram. God always keeps his promises no matter how many obstacles come along.

Hear Joshua 21:43-45 and be encouraged:

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 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.

Hear this over your life as well, with all its twists and turns, with all the obstacles: not one word of all the good promises that the LORD has made will fail; all will come to pass.

Why is Joshua so important? Because God always keeps his promises. He will do the heavy lifting; he will mind the details. You can be assured against all odds, and despite all obstacles, God keeps his promises and gives his people rest.

What's going on in your life today? You can trust God. He will give you everything he's promised and more.

Father, thank you for keeping your promise to Abram. Thank you for staying faithful despite all the obstacles and all the twists and turns. Thank you for caring for the details. Thank you for keeping your promises and giving your people rest. Thank you that all your promises are yes and amen in Jesus.

Because you always keep your promises, may we trust you with all that we have. In Jesus' name. Amen.