



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE**.
Adults

Joshua; Judges; Ruth

Leader Guide (CSB)

Summer 2026



MAKING HISTORY

History never occurs in a vacuum. Any number of forces move individuals toward action. And those actions shape history. It might be tempting to think people know they are making history in the moment, but, in most cases, that's not how it works.

Sure, we can identify times when historical figures knew they were setting a new standard. America's founding fathers probably had a sense of history in 1776. And Neil Armstrong recognized the importance of "one small step for man" as he touched the moon's surface in 1969.

But those moments are the exceptions, not the rule. For the most part, history only becomes history over time. The books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth give us a snapshot of Israel's history and the people who helped make it. Moses, the nation's main history maker since it left Egypt, was gone. Now, the Israelites looked to Joshua to lead them into the promised land.

Later, in their own way, the judges made their mark on history. Meanwhile, an obscure Moabitess named Ruth rewrote the direction of history—for Israel and for every member of the human race. These people were not perfect, but God used them to make a difference because that's what God does.

God has a plan for your life, as well. He wants to use you to change history. But before you can touch the future, you've got to come clean with Him in the present. You do that through a personal relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus. If you've never made the decision to follow Him, you can do it today. Here's all you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITERS



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Rick Prall wrote the group plans for Sessions 1–11 on Joshua and Judges. He serves as the principle product writer at Ramsey Solutions in Franklin, Tennessee, and has more than three decades of experience writing and editing Bible study materials. He and his wife, Helene, live in Lebanon, Tennessee.

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER



“Moses my servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses” (Josh. 1:2-3).

From the very first verses of the book of Joshua, God communicated His plans for His people. They would (finally!) cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land. A generations-old commitment God made to Abraham would at long last be realized. Joshua would be their new leader. The next steps of their journey were important ones. Courage would be needed. Deep faith in God, the One who had painstakingly led them thus far, was a requirement. Stepping out in faith would be a daily exercise.

As we study the Israelites’ entrance into the promised land and the years that follow, let’s not miss the details. God’s plans for His people and His faithfulness to His promises shouldn’t be overlooked. He would use faithful men and women to accomplish what He had in mind. The Israelites’ faith would be tested. Through it all, God’s character would be on full display.

I hope this quarter’s study brings you a deeper understanding of God’s Word, preparing you for any “next steps” God has for you. May His promises give you daily strength to faithfully follow where He leads.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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Explore

Discover



Being a Trellis for a New Group

G. Dwayne McCrary

Growing tomatoes is easy, they said. All you need is some sunlight, soil, and water. No one shared the necessity for spacing, a trellis or stakes, and adding fertilizer. The plants needed more care and support than I anticipated. The challenge was real, but with the support and knowledge of others, our tomatoes survived and eventually flourished.

The same can be true of starting a new group. The process may sound simple, but the challenges are real. Facing a room with only you and one other person can be discouraging. Trying to connect with people who seem to have forgotten how to answer their cell phones can feel personal. Attendees who are present one week and gone for the next two can also contribute to the discouragement of starting a new group. Leaders of established groups can help the leaders of new groups survive and thrive in five ways:

1. MENTOR

Just as I needed the expertise of successful tomato gardeners, leaders of new groups also need expertise. Experienced leaders can walk alongside new leaders and help them fine-tune how they prepare, offer tips for reaching out to potential group participants, and share how they overcame some of the challenges new leaders face. One important thing to remember is that they may also notice our less-than-stellar habits, so we want to make sure we are setting a good example.

2. ADOPT

Supplying a new gardener with items like a tomato cage and preferred plant foods is a way to ensure a new gardener gets a good start. We can provide new groups with the tools they need to succeed. An established group can offer a new group a fresh set of dry-erase markers, nametags, and other items they find helpful. We can even present these items to a new leader a couple of weeks before they start their new group, also inviting them to share about their journey in starting their new group.

3. PRAISE

As a novice tomato gardener, having a pro point out what I'm doing right can make a big difference. Affirmation goes a long way for new group leaders as they seek to reach people who aren't part of a Bible study group. We can encourage them when they do the right things, knowing their faithfulness will be honored in time.

4. CELEBRATE

The excitement of the first tomato is worth sharing and celebrating. So, too, is a new group. We can celebrate the start of a new group. We can applaud the growth of the group and the new people who are participating in Bible study. We can celebrate as new groups reach people our current groups have been unable to reach.



5. PRAY

Regardless of how much experience a tomato grower has, some things are beyond their control—weather, pests, diseases, and so on. The same is true with new and established groups.

“WE CAN PRAY FOR EYES TO SEE THE NEED AND COURAGE TO ADDRESS IT IN THE WAY HE DIRECTS, SEEKING HIS HEART AND DIRECTION, AND ACTING ON HIS ANSWER.”

Some things can only be addressed with prayer. We can lead our established group to pray for the new group, encouraging the leaders with our prayers. In some cases, a new leader just needs to know that someone is praying for them. We can be those people.

The group that gave birth to the new group needs prayer as well. The vacuum left by those who moved to the new group will open the door for new opportunities and growth. We can also lead our groups to ask God to help us determine when we need to help start a new group. God may tell us to support other groups who are starting new groups, or He may reveal that we need to start a new Bible study group. Our responsibility is to ask God rather than decide for Him. We can pray for eyes to see the need and courage to address it in the way He directs, seeking His heart and direction, and acting on His answer.

These five actions—mentoring, adopting, praising, celebrating, and praying—serve as a trellis for a new group and provide the needed support so they can be fruitful.

G. Dwayne McCrary is the manager of the adult ongoing Bible study team at Lifeway.



Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Achan [AY kuhn]—person whose theft of a portion of the spoil from Jericho brought God’s displeasure and military defeat of the Israelite army (Josh. 7).

Adam—a city near the Jordan River, where waters of Jordan heaped up so Israel could cross over to conquer the land (Josh. 3:16).

Anakim [AN uh kim]—a people group living in Hebron before being destroyed by Joshua. Their remnants then lived among the Philistines (Josh. 11:22). These tall people were part of the Nephilim (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33).

Ashtoreth [ASH tuh reths]—Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war that appears to be the sister of the goddess Anath and the spouse of the god Baal (Judg. 2:13; 10:6).

Boaz [BOH az]—wealthy relative of Naomi’s husband who married Ruth and became Obed’s father, David’s grandfather, and an ancestor of Christ (Ruth 4:13-17).

Caleb [KAY luhb]—one of the twelve spies sent by Moses to scout out the territory of Canaan (Num. 13:6). He was one of only two who brought back a positive report (13:30). At the age of 85 he conquered Hebron (Josh. 14).

Hebron [HEE bruhn]—a major city in the hill country of Judah about 19 miles south of Jerusalem. After his separation from Lot, Abraham moved to Hebron. Four centuries later, when Moses sent the twelve spies into Canaan, the tribe

of Anak lived there. After the conquest of Canaan, Hebron was given to Caleb (Josh. 14:9-13).

Jerubbaal [jer uhb-BAY uhl]—personal name meaning “Baal judges”; another name for Gideon (Judg. 6:25-32; 7:1).

Manasseh [muh NASS uh]—one of the twelve tribes of Israel; when the promised land was allotted, half of the tribe of Manasseh settled on the east bank of the Jordan and half on the west (Josh. 14:4).

Rahab [RAY hab]—a prostitute in Jericho who hid the two Hebrew spies sent by Joshua (Josh. 2:1).

Og [AHG]—Amorite king defeated by the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan (Num. 21:33-35; Deut. 1:4; 3:1-13); he was the last survivor of the Rephaim or giants (Deut. 3:11).

Sihon [SIGH hahn]—Amorite king who allied with Og against the Israelites. The tribes of Reuben and Gad settled in the area formerly held by Sihon, just east of the Jordan River (Josh. 2:10).

Zabdi [ZAB digh]—a son of Zerah and the grandfather of Achan (Josh. 7:18).

Zerahite [ZEE ruh hight]—a clan from the tribe of Judah from which came Achan (Josh. 7:17).

BIBLE READING PLAN



JUNE

- 1. Joshua 1:1-18
- 2. Joshua 2:1-14
- 3. Joshua 2:15-24
- 4. Joshua 3:1-17
- 5. Joshua 4:1-13
- 6. Joshua 4:14-24
- 7. Joshua 5:1-15
- 8. Joshua 6:1-14
- 9. Joshua 6:15-27
- 10. Joshua 7:1-15
- 11. Joshua 7:16-26
- 12. Joshua 8:1-13
- 13. Joshua 8:14-29
- 14. Joshua 8:30-35
- 15. Joshua 9:1-15
- 16. Joshua 9:16-27
- 17. Joshua 10:1-15
- 17. Joshua 10:16-27
- 19. Joshua 10:28-43
- 20. Joshua 11:1-15
- 21. Joshua 11:16-23
- 22. Joshua 12:1-24
- 23. Joshua 13:1-33
- 24. Joshua 14:1-15
- 25. Joshua 15:1-19
- 26. Joshua 15:20-63
- 27. Joshua 16:1-10
- 28. Joshua 17:1-18
- 29. Joshua 18:1-28
- 30. Joshua 19:1-51

JULY

- 1. Joshua 20:1-9
- 2. Joshua 21:1-45
- 3. Joshua 22:1-12
- 4. Joshua 22:13-26
- 5. Joshua 22:27-34
- 6. Joshua 23:1-16
- 7. Joshua 24:1-13
- 8. Joshua 24:14-33
- 9. Judges 1:1-20
- 10. Judges 1:21-36
- 11. Judges 2:1-13
- 12. Judges 2:14-23
- 13. Judges 3:1-11
- 14. Judges 3:12-31
- 15. Judges 4:1-10
- 16. Judges 4:11-24
- 17. Judges 5:1-15
- 17. Judges 5:16-31
- 19. Judges 6:1-10
- 20. Judges 6:11-24
- 21. Judges 6:25-32
- 22. Judges 6:33-40
- 23. Judges 7:1-14
- 24. Judges 7:15-25
- 25. Judges 8:1-9
- 26. Judges 8:10-21
- 27. Judges 8:22-35
- 28. Judges 9:1-21
- 29. Judges 9:22-41
- 30. Judges 9:42-57
- 31. Judges 10:1-18

AUGUST

- 1. Judges 11:1-11
- 2. Judges 11:12-28
- 3. Judges 11:29-40
- 4. Judges 12:1-15
- 5. Judges 13:1-16
- 6. Judges 13:17-25
- 7. Judges 14:1-9
- 8. Judges 14:10-20
- 9. Judges 15:1-13
- 10. Judges 15:14-20
- 11. Judges 16:1-11
- 12. Judges 16:12-20
- 13. Judges 16:21-31
- 14. Judges 17:1-13
- 15. Judges 18:1-13
- 16. Judges 18:14-31
- 17. Judges 19:1-15
- 17. Judges 19:16-30
- 19. Judges 20:1-10
- 20. Judges 20:11-28
- 21. Judges 20:29-48
- 22. Judges 21:1-12
- 23. Judges 21:13-25
- 24. Ruth 1:1-15
- 25. Ruth 1:16-22
- 26. Ruth 2:1-9
- 27. Ruth 2:10-23
- 28. Ruth 3:1-9
- 29. Ruth 3:10-18
- 30. Ruth 4:1-12
- 31. Ruth 4:13-22

USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

2. READ THE GROUP TIME PLAN.

Study the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

DURING THE GROUP TIME

4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

AFTER THE GROUP TIME

6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at goExploreTheBible.com

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

JOSHUA

One of the greatest military leaders of the Old Testament, Joshua bears a name meaning “Yahweh delivered” or “Yahweh is salvation.” He succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites after their forty years of wilderness wanderings. Although the book acquired its title from a human personality within its pages, the central character in the account is God. It was the Lord who led His people into the promised land and who drove their enemies out of the land.

Sandwiched between Deuteronomy and Judges, the book of Joshua points backward to the exodus from Egypt and forward to the time of the judges and kings. This account of early Israelite history consists of two major divisions—the conquest of the promised land (chaps. 1–12) and the division of that land among the tribes (chaps. 13–24).

Traditionally, much of the book of Joshua has been credited to Joshua himself or to one of his contemporaries. With that, a few parts of the account, such as the account of Joshua’s death (Josh. 24:29–31), had to be added at a later point. As with every word of Scripture, the book of Joshua was written under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration and provides a faithful, trustworthy account of the conquest and settlement of Canaan.

Several major themes appear in Joshua:

The Lord’s faithfulness: God proved Himself faithful to His covenant. In leading the Israelites into Canaan, He fulfilled a promise made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

God’s work through human leaders: The Lord worked through Joshua and others (such as Caleb, the spies, and Rahab) to lead His people into the promised land and to drive His enemies out of Canaan. This reminds believers today that He continues to work through His followers. God remains in control, but He often chooses to use human agents to bring about His purposes.

The importance of obedience: The Lord blesses those who rely on Him and obey the teachings He has revealed in His Word. The book also reminds readers that from God’s perspective, anything less than full obedience is disobedience.

An interesting parallel exists between the book of Joshua and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. The book of Joshua records the historic nation of Israel entering and possessing the earthly inheritance the Lord had promised the patriarchs. In Ephesians, Paul described the church entering and possessing the heavenly inheritance that Christ has promised believers (the church). Both books also embrace the themes of rest, holiness, and obedience.

JUDGES

The book of Judges derives its name from the key characters in the narrative. However, as with Joshua, the Lord remains the most important actor in the book as He dealt with Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him. Significantly, the title of “Judge” is applied to the Lord in Judges 11:27. This usage further emphasizes God’s work and authority in human affairs.

The human leaders mentioned in this book did not function the same way we think of judges today. Rather than focusing on judicial matters in courts, they primarily served as military deliverers. Scripture records that Deborah did play an important role in settling disputes among the Israelites (Judg. 4:4–5), but her leadership in defeating the Canaanites is the main focus of the passage.

Some scholars view the designation of judge as carrying the broader meaning of governing. Thus, they see all these leaders as functioning as judges in the sense of dealing with external enemies, along with resolving internal conflicts among Israelite citizens.

Six judges play a prominent role in the book: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah (assisted by Barak), Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. We designate



these as “major judges” because the inspired writer provided more information about them than the “minor judges” mentioned in passing. The six minor judges are Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon.

The main framework for Judges is centered on the “cycle of sin” that occurs throughout the book. Each cycle begins with the Israelites doing evil in the Lord’s eyes. The Lord responds by handing them over to their enemies. Next, the people cried out to the Lord, leading the Lord to raise up deliverers to save them. As a result, the nation that had oppressed God’s people became subject to them, and the land of Israel experienced peace for a season. Finally, the judge died.

In each case, the judge is presented in a worse light than the previous one so that each cycle spirals the nation deeper in sin. The recurring cycle has sometimes been abbreviated as apostasy, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. The final chapters of Judges illustrate the depths of Israel’s religious and moral degeneration (chaps. 17–21).

Two major themes surface in Judges:

God’s mercy: Again and again, the unfaithfulness of God’s people sharply contrasts with His patience and mercy.

God’s sovereignty: In Judges, the Lord used His people’s enemies to discipline them, revealing His rule over all nations. Yet, His primary goal always involved bringing Israel to repentance. In addition, Judges affirms that God can use imperfect human leaders to accomplish His purposes.

RUTH

Events in the book of Ruth occurred during the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1). The divinely inspired writer of Judges described the severe moral and spiritual decline that characterized this period of Israel’s history. Nevertheless, Ruth reminds readers that covenant loyalty still exists, even in a depraved culture.

The book’s title is drawn from its main character, a Moabite woman named Ruth.

Because of a famine, Elimelech journeyed with his wife Naomi and their sons from Bethlehem to the nation of Moab. Elimelech died, while the sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. After a decade or so in Moab, Mahlon and Chilion died. Naomi and her two daughters-in-law set out to return to Judah. At Naomi’s urging, Orpah returned to Moab, but Ruth refused to do so. In beautiful words of commitment, she pledged her loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17).

Back in Bethlehem, Ruth gathered fallen grain in the fields to provide for Naomi and herself. In the providence of God, Ruth chose the field of Boaz, who belonged to Elimelech’s family. Boaz became the family’s kinsman-redeemer.

The term “kinsman-redeemer” identifies a close relative who had several obligations. These included raising up a male heir for the relative who had died without fathering a son. Boaz married Ruth, the widow of his deceased kinsman, and they had a son. This child, named Obed, became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David (Ruth 4:13-17). Thus Ruth the Moabite appears in both the lineage of King David and of David’s greatest son, Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 1:5-6).

Three major themes appear in Ruth:

God’s sovereignty: Ruth’s story includes both joys and sorrows, yet God’s presence remains constant and active.

Lovingkindness: The blessings of showing such loyalty and compassion to others often exceed anything one can imagine.

God’s grace: Ruth was a foreigner and an outsider. Yet, the Lord’s grace extends beyond the religious and ethnic boundaries we might set.



JOSHUA

- **I. Preparation for Possessing the Land** (Josh. 1:1-5:12)
- **II. Victories in the Land** (Josh. 5:13-12:24)
- **III. Allotment of the Land** (Josh. 13:1-21:45)
- **IV. Worship of God in the Land** (Josh. 22:1-24:33)

JUDGES

- **I. Prologue** (Judg. 1:1-3:6)
- **II. The Judges** (Judg. 3:7-16:31)
- **III. Epilogue** (Judg. 17:1-21:25)

RUTH

- **I. A Family Fleeing** (Ruth 1:1-22)
- **II. A Family Sought** (Ruth 2:1-3:18)
- **III. A Family Redeemed** (Ruth 4:1-22)



Strong and Courageous

JOSHUA'S COURAGE WAS GROUNDED IN THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S TRUSTWORTHINESS.

Scripture Passage: Joshua 1:1-11,16-18 Memory Verse: Joshua 1:8

One of my favorite approaches to Bible study involves focusing on key characters in God's story of redemption. For these personalities, responding to God's call demanded courage. Abram leaving his homeland. Moses confronting Pharaoh. Stephen preaching to the Sanhedrin. Paul repeatedly facing persecution. They all required courage.

God specifically commanded Joshua to be courageous as He called him to lead Israel into the promised land (Josh. 1:9). That courage was grounded in the assurance of God's trustworthiness as He promised to stay with His people and to give them Canaan.

As you prepare to lead this quarter's opening session, reflect on situations in your life that required courage in following the Lord. Maybe it was sharing the gospel or venturing into a new service opportunity outside your comfort zone. It may be a spiritual challenge you are facing right now. Pray for the strength and courage to act boldly in the assurance of God's trustworthiness. And ask God to help you to communicate that assurance to the adults in your group, challenging them to trust God with courage as well.



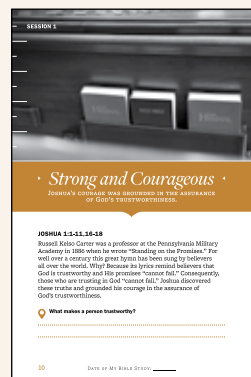
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



Russell Kelso Carter was a professor at the Pennsylvania Military Academy in 1886 when he wrote “Standing on the Promises.” For well over a century this great hymn has been sung by believers all over the world. Why? Because its lyrics remind believers that God is trustworthy and His promises “cannot fail.” Consequently, those who are trusting in God “cannot fail.” Joshua discovered these truths and grounded his courage in the assurance of God’s trustworthiness. (PSG, p. 10)

What makes a person trustworthy?



Understand the Context (Joshua 1:1-18)

The name Joshua means “Yahweh delivered” or “Yahweh is salvation.” However, the central character in the narrative is the Lord, the One who led His people into the promised land and drove out their enemies. God was the One who rescued His people, using Joshua as His human instrument.

Joshua, son of Nun, succeeded Moses as Israel’s leader after their decades of wilderness wandering. Following Moses’s death, the Lord commanded Joshua to cross the Jordan River and enter Canaan in fulfillment of His promises. While His promises included an extensive tract of land (Josh. 1:3-4), God also promised His presence with this new leader (v. 5). The book of Joshua has been divided into two main parts that highlight his calling: conquering the land (chaps. 1-12) and distributing the land (chaps. 13-24).

The Lord instructed Joshua to be strong and courageous in carrying out His commission, a command that He repeated three times (vv. 6,7,9). By a threefold repetition of His directive, the Lord emphasized the requirement of Joshua’s complete obedience. Israel’s human leader could be strong and courageous only by leaning on the Lord, not by depending on his own strength.

The key to Joshua’s success lay in obeying God’s laws (vv. 7-8). Although the Israelites would face many battles in conquering the promised land, the Lord’s instructions to Joshua concerned keeping His Word (a spiritual matter) rather than depending on military strength or planning.

Verses 10-11 reveal Joshua’s obedience to the Lord’s command about crossing the Jordan (v. 2). He ordered the Israelites’ leaders to instruct the people to prepare for their move into Canaan. Such preparation would have included breaking camp and assembling food supplies for the journey. While the people needed to get ready, Joshua emphasized that the Lord would give His people the victory.

Verses 12-15 focus on the tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with half of Manasseh. These tribes had requested and received Moses’s permission to remain on the east side of the Jordan River, an area known as the Transjordan. Reuben and Gad particularly viewed the Transjordan as more suitable for their large flocks and herds of livestock. While Moses had allowed them to remain on the east side of the river, his blessing came with an expectation. They had to cross the Jordan and help the other tribes conquer the western territory when the time came (see Num. 32).

The Transjordan tribes again affirmed their loyalty to Joshua and their commitment to their brothers. Likely, their positive response to Joshua reflected the feelings of all the tribes (vv. 16-18). The chapter concludes with the command to “be strong and courageous.”

As you read Joshua 1:1-11,16-18, note God’s words of encouragement. Consider how these words impacted Joshua. (PSG, p. 11)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Prior to the group time, display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Conquest of Canaan*) and **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) on a focal wall. Attach construction paper circles to the posters to highlight key places and people in this session. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Gather pens and index cards for the “Challenge” activity.

INTRODUCE:

Invite the group to read the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG.

ASK:

What makes a person trustworthy? (PSG, p. 10)

SHARE:

Point out that trust is earned. Note that as people demonstrate trustworthiness, it becomes easier to trust them. Highlight Joshua on **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) and summarize this content (PSG, p. 11):

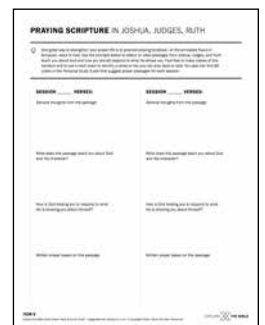
“When God called Joshua to be Moses’s replacement, humanly speaking, Joshua had every reason to be intimidated. He had witnessed many of the things God did through Moses. However, as with Moses, God had prepared Joshua for his task. . . . God’s assignment for Joshua would be different in nature from what Moses’s assignment had been. Nonetheless, as with Moses, God providentially prepared Joshua for the task before him. Therefore, there was every reason for Joshua to trust the Lord and be strong and courageous.”

ASK:

What might have been going through Joshua’s mind when God installed him as the leader after Moses?

TRANSITION:

Today’s study examines the transition from Moses’s leadership to Joshua’s leadership. It was a huge challenge. But while the human leadership had changed, God had not.



Group Activity Option

Music

Ask: **What is a promise? How are people’s promises different from God’s promises?** Distribute hymnals and direct adults to “Standing on the Promises” (No. 339, *Baptist Hymnal*, 2008). Review the lyrics of the hymn and compare them to the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG. Ask: **Why is it important to stand on God’s promises? How do stanzas 2 and 5 describe the doubts we might face? What does it mean that God’s promises can’t fail?**

God's Promise (Josh. 1:1-5)

1 After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant: **2** "Moses my servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. **3** I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses. **4** Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great river, the Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. **5** No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you."

After Moses's death, the Lord chose Joshua as Israel's leader. Joshua's first assignment involved preparing the people for conquest of the promised land. It was time for the people to move forward and see God keep His promises.

(v. 1) The biblical writer identified Moses as *the LORD's servant*, a title Joshua would later receive (Josh. 24:29). The designation *LORD* translates a Hebrew term often written as *Yahweh*. This personal name for God emphasizes the truth that He always has existed and remains faithful.

Before becoming Israel's leader, Joshua served as *Moses's assistant*. The Hebrew word rendered *assistant* comes from a verb meaning "to serve." The verb can designate a servant's work on behalf of a master or a ministry of worship performed by priests.

(v. 2) Because of Moses's rebellion at Meribah-kadesh, the Lord had prohibited him from entering Canaan (Num. 20:1-13). This typically faithful leader had struck the rock to bring forth water instead of speaking to it as God commanded. As a result, Moses had died while the nation still stood on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

God's words, *Moses my servant is dead*, may have awakened Joshua more fully to his new reality. Instead of serving as Moses's assistant, he was commanded to lead the people across the Jordan River into the promised land.

Note that the Lord identified this territory as *the land I am giving the Israelites*. Joshua had been one of only two faithful spies among those who had scouted out Canaan (Num. 13-14). He, along with Caleb, had presented the positive report that the Israelites could conquer the land's powerful inhabitants because the Lord was with them. They had challenged the people to remember that the Lord would fight for them as they depended on Him.

(v. 3) The Lord promised His people *every place where the sole of your foot treads*. Although the Lord pledged to give them the land, His people had to act in faith to take possession of it. From God's perspective, Israel already owned Canaan, but God's timing would determine when they finally took possession. (See Deut. 11:24-25.) The biblical writer highlighted God's fulfillment of His promises through the conquest.

(v. 4) This verse describes the general boundaries of the promised land (see Deut. 11:24). The term *wilderness* designates a southern desert area, sometimes called the Negev. *Lebanon* roughly identifies present-day Lebanon located in the north. The *Euphrates* is called *the great river* and, in biblical geography, represented a useful eastern border. Finally, *the Mediterranean Sea* would serve as Israel's western boundary.

The Israelites would not own the full extent of these borders until the reigns of David and Solomon. Still, God described the land between the eastern and western limits as *all the land of the Hittites*. The term *Hittites* can refer to a number of groups living west of the Jordan River. Here, it seems to serve as a general term for Canaanites.

(v. 5) The Lord assured Joshua of His continuing presence. In fact, He promised to be with Joshua just as He had been with Moses (Deut. 11:25a). Verses 6-9 delineate the conditions for the Lord's promise that *no one will be able to stand against you*. The Israelites' failure to meet these conditions later resulted in their defeat at Ai (Josh. 7:1-5).

God's presence with Joshua would be the guarantee of his success. It remains the vital cog in His people's success today. We can find courage in the truth that the Lord keeps His promises.

EXPLORE Joshua 1:1-5



APPLICATION POINT: We can find courage in the truth that God keeps His promises.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Joshua 1:1-5 as the group listens for God's promise to Joshua.

RECAP:

Briefly note that Moses had not been allowed to enter the promised land because of his sin. Provide more information about Israel's new leader, Joshua:

Deuteronomy 34:1-8 records Moses's death. Moses had lead Israel for forty years, and during that time Moses and Joshua became close. For instance, in Numbers 13:16, Moses changed Joshua's name from Hoshea meaning "deliverance" to the name Joshua which means "Yahweh saves." In the Greek traditions of the Old Testament, it is the same name as Jesus in the New Testament. Joshua's name foreshadows how the Lord Himself would deliver the Israelites from their enemies. . . . The Israelites mourned Moses's death for thirty days east of the Jordan River in the plains of Moab. After that, it was time for Joshua and the people to prepare to cross over the Jordan and enter Canaan. (PSG, p. 12).

EXPLAIN:

Share that God had promised a home for His people in the days of Abraham. Note that Joshua's first order of business, as the new leader of the Israelites, was to get them ready to move into the promised land. Highlight the borders of the promised land using **Pack Item 1** (Map: *The Conquest of Canaan*). Emphasize God's faithfulness in keeping His promises to His people.

ASK:

How have you experienced God's faithfulness? (PSG, p. 14)

TRANSITION:

God's promise of land also included the promise of His presence with Joshua and the Israelites.



Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Rings

Encourage volunteers to show their engagement rings or wedding rings. Ask: **What do these rings represent? What is the difference between giving a ring and getting a ring?** Share that when we give this type of a ring, we make a promise for the future. Note that those getting the ring expect us to keep that promise. Compare this to how we expect God to be faithful in fulfilling His promises.

Joshua's Assignment (Josh. 1:6-11)

6 “Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their ancestors to give them as an inheritance. **7** Above all, be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. **8** This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. **9** 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.” **10** Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, **11** “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get provisions ready for yourselves, for within three days you will be crossing the Jordan to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you to inherit.’”

(v. 6) Joshua needed to **be strong and courageous** to lead the Israelites. The command translated *be strong* most often appears in a military context. The term actually is similar in meaning to *courageous*. Joshua needed boldness and resolve to carry out God's commands.

The mandate to show strength and courage occurs in verses 6, 7, and 9. The number three in biblical thought often emphasized completion. The Lord required Joshua's total obedience.

(v. 7) The Lord associated Joshua's strength and courage with careful observance of the **whole instruction** of the law. The Hebrew word for *instruction* is *torah*. It designated Israel's covenant responsibilities to the Lord. Eventually, the term was used for the Pentateuch, the first five Old Testament books. Joshua could not deviate **to the right or the left**, a vivid way of stating he could not stray from absolute obedience to God.

Obedience was key to Joshua's **success**. The term *success* rarely referred to financial wealth in the Old Testament. Instead, it commonly related to wisdom. It describes prospering through right choices and actions. Such success occurs when people are centered on God and His ways.

(v. 8) In Hebrew, **meditate** can mean “utter” or “mutter.” It also can describe groaning. While we tend to mutter about things we don't like, the Lord instructs us to mutter His Word, to keep it on our lips and in our hearts. Doing so helps keep life in the right perspective.

Day and night suggests a continual, disciplined study of God's Word (see Ps. 1:2). The Old Testament concept of meditation has nothing to do with trying to empty one's mind. Rather, it

requires focused attention on God's works and ways. It was an activity practiced aloud.

(v. 9) The Lord expressed His command negatively, as well as positively. For Joshua, strength and courage meant refusing to **be afraid or discouraged**. The verb translated *discouraged* can depict the panic of a military leader whose courage has failed. Only the Lord's presence would enable Joshua to stand courageously.

(vv. 10-11) Assured of the Lord's presence, Joshua turned to **the officers of the people**, most likely a group of administrative officials. His commands to them offered a perfect reflection of God's instructions to him. In turn, the *officers* passed those instructions to the people (v. 11). In a nutshell, the time of waiting was over. They would be moving into the promised land.

The term **provisions** designates food and other supplies that would be needed to cross the Jordan and **take possession** of Canaan. Joshua emphasized preparation or readiness.

Israel would succeed only if the people acted in accordance with the Lord's commands. Likewise, we can discern and experience God's best for our lives only by studying and obeying His Word.

Key Doctrine

The Scriptures

The Holy Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. (See Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)



APPLICATION POINT: We can discern God’s best for our lives by studying His Word.

READ:

Call for a volunteer to read Joshua 1:6-11 as adults consider why believers don’t have to be afraid when following God.

SHARE:

Highlight “strong and courageous” in verse 6. Note that the phrase appears three times in Joshua 1. Emphasize the importance of Joshua demonstrating these qualities.

Earlier, the Lord instructed Moses to encourage Joshua because He would enable Joshua to lead the people into the land of Canaan and receive their inheritance from the Lord (Deut. 1:38; 3:28). Here, it was the Lord Himself who was encouraging Joshua. . . . Israel would need to see Joshua’s strength and courage as an example to follow in the face of what would appear to be insurmountable challenges in the land of Canaan. Joshua would be the one who would distribute the land to the people as their inheritance. (PSG, p. 14)

DISCUSS:

Note how God connected strength and courage to full obedience to His Word in verses 7-9. Allow volunteers to describe what it means to meditate on God’s Word and to suggest practical ways to meditate on Scripture each day.

ASK:

How does God’s Word provide courage and direction for our lives? (PSG, p. 16)

MEMORIZE:

Point out that Joshua 1:8 serves as the memory verse for this session. Lead adults to read aloud the verse three times. Encourage them to memorize it this week.

TRANSITION:

Responding to God’s challenge, Joshua prepared the people to move into the promised land.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Biblical writers sometimes used repetition of key words or phrases to emphasize a theme or message. Identify and examine the repeated message or challenge in Joshua 1:6,7,9, and 18. **Who was the speaker in each instance? Who was the recipient of the challenge in each verse?** Think about what this phrase’s repetition helps communicate in Joshua 1:1-18. **What message does the repeated phrase convey to Bible readers today?**

Israel's Response (Josh. 1:16-18)

16 They answered Joshua, “Everything you have commanded us we will do, and everywhere you send us we will go. **17** We will obey you, just as we obeyed Moses in everything. Certainly the LORD your God will be with you, as he was with Moses. **18** Anyone who rebels against your order and does not obey your words in all that you command him, will be put to death. Above all, be strong and courageous!”

(v. 16) In verses 12-15, Joshua reminded the tribes settling east of the Jordan River—Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh—that they had promised to help conquer the land. So in verses 16-18, **they** indicates the commitment of these tribes, but it probably mirrors the sentiment of every Israelite. The people’s pledge of loyalty must have encouraged Joshua, as they promised to do **everything** he commanded and to go **everywhere** he sent them.

(v. 17) However, the people’s next words may have raised some concern. The Israelites sincerely pledged to **obey** Joshua as they had **obeyed Moses**, but the nation’s history of disobedience may have been discouraging. At the very least, their response was ironic.

For example, at Mount Sinai, the Israelites had solemnly sworn obedience (Ex. 24:6-7). Yet, Aaron had led them in making and worshiping a golden calf. Repeated grumbling, rebellion, and waywardness had characterized the Israelites’ lengthy period in the wilderness.

The generation that entered the promised land did not fully carry out the Lord’s instructions either. Yet various Scriptures record how the people failed to completely carry out their spiritual obligations (Josh. 11:22; 13:1; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13). The book of Joshua highlights this tension between what Israel said and how Israel acted.

After pledging obedience, the Israelites affirmed Joshua’s leadership. **Certainly the LORD your God will be with you** could be another affirmation of their loyalty or spoken as a prayerful blessing. The people may have been saying they would follow Joshua’s leadership as long as they saw evidence of God’s leadership in his life.

(v. 18) The Israelites’ assertion to Joshua that **anyone who rebels against your order . . . will be put to death** stressed the degree of their devotion. They were willing to

hold themselves accountable for disobedience. The military situation in which the Israelites were engaged under Joshua’s command required strict discipline and thus severe punishment for rebellion.

The death sentence was actually carried out in Joshua 7:24-26. At the conquest of Jericho, Achan took some spoil that belonged to the Lord. When God revealed Achan’s sin, Joshua commanded the man’s entire family and his possessions be destroyed.

Verse 18 concludes with the people’s reiteration of the Lord’s command to Joshua to **be strong and courageous**. We can encourage the kingdom work of others by supporting them and partnering with them.

Praying Scripture

Joshua 1:8

Spend time praying Scripture using Joshua 1:8. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Ask God to give you a deeper desire to study His Word. Reflect on how you can demonstrate practical obedience each day.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.

EXPLORE Joshua 1:16-18



APPLICATION POINT: We can encourage the kingdom work of others by supporting them and partnering with them.

READ:

Read Joshua 1:16-18 as adults identify key ideas in the Israelites' words to Joshua.

RECAP:

To help adults understand the serious response of the Israelites, share this from pages 16-17 of the PSG:

When the Israelites came to the land east of the Jordan River, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh requested of Moses to allow them to settle on that side of the river. Moses granted their request (Num. 32:1-42; Deut. 2:26–3:17). However, Moses required them to help the other nine and a half tribes in conquering the land on the other side of the Jordan. Therefore, as the people prepared to cross the Jordan, Joshua reminded the two and a half tribes of their promise to help with the conquest (Josh. 1:13-15). They replied to Joshua by saying they would obey everything he commanded them to do just as they had obeyed Moses.

EXPLAIN:

Point out that the commitment voiced by the tribes east of the Jordan River was shared by the entire nation. Note that to emphasize the significance of their commitment, the tribes promised to hold themselves accountable, even to the point of putting rebels to death.

ASK:

How does a shared commitment to God's purposes encourage other people? (PSG, p. 17)

DISCUSS:

Lead the group to discuss how believers, like the Israelites, often make promises to God but fail to keep them. Discuss the difference between intent and action. Emphasize the importance of holding one another accountable.

PRAY:

Joshua's courage was grounded in the assurance of God's trustworthiness. This came from the words of his people, but also from the Word of God. Review Joshua 1:8. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) and encourage adults to pray Joshua 1:8 back to God as noted on page 22 of the Leader Guide.



CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- We can find courage in the truth that God keeps His promises.
- We can discern God's best for our lives by studying His Word.
- We can encourage the kingdom work of others by supporting them and partnering with them.

SHARE:

Remind adults that while this session focused on God's promises to Joshua thousands of years ago, we serve the same God today. Emphasize that the God who kept His promises to Moses and Joshua still keeps His promises today.

DISCUSS:

Guide the group to discuss the second question set on page 18 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion of specific promises found in Scripture and the impact those promises can have on our lives as Christ followers.

PRAY:

Distribute index cards and pens. Direct adults to record an area in which they need strength and courage on one side of the card. As they are working, play the song "Promises" by Maverick City Music. On the other side of the card, encourage them to write a prayer related to what they wrote on the front of the card. Give them a moment of silent prayer. Challenge them to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*) to pray through these issues this week.

AFTER THE SESSION

Email the group to let them know that you are praying for them to stand strong and courageous for God this week. Share one of your favorite promises from God and ask them to share one of their favorite promises from Scripture. Direct them to reflect on and respond to the first question set on page 18 of the PSG. Encourage them to suggest ways the group can partner with other believers in the days ahead.

LEADER EXTRAS



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