

Promises, Promises

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks. Oh, dear me. Turn me down quickly, Joe. Far too echoey. There we go. Well, thanks very much, Ralph, for leading this morning, and thank you, Ian, for reading. As you can see there, we've finished our studies in John, looking at the I Ams. We're going right the way back into the Old Testament, and we're going to be going through Joshua over the next few weeks. I don't know how you feel about going into the Old Testament. As I looked at my Bible on Monday morning, I thought to myself, why on earth didn't you just stay in John?

It's a little bit easier than going back to the Old Testament. Sure, it's boring, and it's just full of history. Well, I'm hoping not to make it boring, but exciting, and it's not just history. It's a story about Jesus. Even in the Old Testament, it's a story about Jesus. That's what we're going to discover this morning. Let's pray together as we ask for God's help. Our Father God, we thank you so much for these wonderful true stories in the Bible. Although written hundreds and thousands of years ago, although they happened so long ago, we thank you that they are there for us, written to tell us something about how great God is, to tell us about his promises, and to tell us ultimately about his Son, the

Lord Jesus. Please help us to understand your Word to us. May it encourage us, build us up, and above all, may it cause us to be people who trust you, the God who makes promises, and the God who keeps his promise. So please help us all this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

There was pens and notes going around. They've all gone, have they? Okay. So you can use the back of your news sheet if you want to, and please do come back to me if there's any questions later on.

Well, it's been hailed as Barack Obama's finest moment since he took office. Last Sunday evening, as I'm sure you saw in the news, he gave the order for US Special Service Unit to attack the residents of Osama bin Laden. After months of surveillance and intelligence gathering, bin Laden was finally shot, killed, and then buried at sea. The man behind the 9-11 attacks in New York and the 7-7 bombings in London has finally been found and removed. Now, when Obama took office, he promised the world that he would make it a safer place. Top of his priority was finding Osama bin Laden. He promised that no stone would be left unturned until those behind the attacks were defeated. But now that bin Laden has been killed, I wonder, is the world any safer?

[3 : 5 8] Of course, Barack Obama's not the only one to make such promises. Political leaders in our own country have made similar statements. They vowed to end all sectarian violence and acts of terrorism. But I think it's very clear that the promises that our world leaders make, despite their best efforts, are never truly realised. The world is still very broken. There is an unrest that hangs over us all like a dark cloud. The safer world that we all want is still being sought for.

Of course, presidents are not alone in making their promises. God has promised to restore and to renew this broken world and to bring about an everlasting rest. But again, as we look around the world in which we live, it seems that God's promises are no better. It's still a very broken world. So the big question we want to ask as we get stuck into Joshua is this. Can we trust the God of the Bible who makes such big and grand promises? Can we trust him?

Well, the book of Joshua is here to give us confidence and assurance that God will do what he said he will do.

Let's see how all of this is worked out. Let's meet the promise maker. Look at verse 2. Now this promise, which is restated here, given to Joshua, was given to Moses, but it was first given to Abraham way back at the beginning of the Bible story in Genesis 12.

[6 : 1 1] In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that he would build a great nation, a big community, that they would have their own land and they would be blessed.

And as the years have passed, God kept repeating that same promise to each new generation and to each new people.

He kept giving a new promise. He gave it to Isaac and then on to his grandson. Listen to what Jacob says to his son. It comes from Genesis 48.

Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty has appeared to me And they said to me, I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers.

I will make you a community of peoples and I will give you this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.

[7 : 11] So God has said he's going to gather together a people that belong to him and they would have their own place in which they can live with God and be blessed. Now when God made that first promise in Genesis 12, now we're in Joshua, 600 years have passed.

They've become a great people. Someone's worked out there was about 3 million of them at this stage. But they're still wandering around the desert, still without any place to live, no land of their own and without any sign of blessing.

Has God forgotten his promise? Added to that, we're told in verse 1 that Moses, their great leader, is dead. He was the one who had rescued them from slavery, brought them out of Egypt, he'd performed miraculous signs, he'd showed great power, he'd done it for over 40 years, and if anybody was going to bring about God's promises, surely it would be Moses.

But we're told right at the beginning, Moses dead. It seems like God's promises are all set to fail. But in this first chapter, God is reminding us who he is.

He is the promise maker. He is the one who is in control. He is telling us, the years may pass, leaders may come and go, but God's promise will remain firmly on track.

[8 : 52] No one and nothing can hinder or stop what God has promised to do. Look at verse 3 again. He says, I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

But what is that promise? Yes, it was a promise of land, but what exactly was it? Well, look at verse 4. He says, Your territory will extend from the desert, which was way down in the south, right up to Lebanon in the north, and from the great river, the Euphrates, which was right over on the east, all the Hittite country in between, right across to the great sea, the Mediterranean, which was on the west.

It was a huge land. I pulled out my Bible atlas and got my ruler out and tried to measure it. It's about 500 by 800 miles. It was huge.

It was a prosperous land. You could imagine the sunny shores of the Mediterranean. Think of all those luscious grapes growing. The fine wines they would enjoy.

The fertile plains of the Euphrates, where land would grow and cattle would graze. People call this land the land flowing with milk and honey.

[10 : 21] So rich was its produce. But this land was ultimately going to be a place of rest. Look at verse 13.

Remember the command that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you. The Lord, your God, is giving you rest and has granted you this land.

It's repeated again for us at the end of verse 14. You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest as He has done for you.

Of course, this promised rest had been experienced once before. We've come across it in the Bible story right at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden.

God had been busy creating the world over the first six days and then on the seventh day, what did He do? He rested. This was a place where God's people would live and enjoy intimacy with God.

[11 : 31] All of creation was in perfect harmony, a place of beauty. It was paradise. The Garden of Eden was the perfect rest. And now in keeping with His promise, since the world had been cursed, God was saying, I am going to bring that rest again.

I am going to provide a place for my people where they can enjoy rest, peace and prosperity. Just like it was way back in the Garden of Eden.

So God again would bring His people together so that they could enjoy rest in the new garden, the promised lands. Did God do what He said He would do?

Well, look at chapter 21 of Joshua. This is a key passage. It's like the big theme, the theme tune of the whole book.

Joshua chapter 21, verse 43. Verse 43. Verse 43. Joshua 21, verse 43.

[12:49] So the Lord gave Israel all the land He had promised to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it, and they settled there. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as He had promised to their forefathers.

Verse 45. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed. Every one was fulfilled.

You see, God is the promise maker. Not even time, not even the death of His leaders, not even, as we'll discover, the disobedience of His people will stop His promise of rest being realized. So He's made a promise, a promise of rest. But what about the rest for us? Does that mean that we today have to go looking for the same land? Do we all have to pack our bags and head up to Cork airport and head off to Palestine in search of this great land?

Unfortunately, that's how many people see it. If you look at what's going on in Israel today and all the battles and the fighting that's going on, they're still fighting over land.

[14:08] But I think they're not reading their Bibles properly. You see, we must understand the promise as God understands it, not as we understand it.

You see, the land that God had promised His people, for God, yes, it was the promise of land, but that wasn't it. It was never just the physical land, it was always so much more. the land that we read about in Joshua was only a picture of a much greater land that God had promised. Keep your finger, please, in Joshua chapter 1 and jump all the way to Hebrews chapter 4.

I think we've got the page number there. It's 1203. Hebrews chapter 4. Hebrews chapter 4, verse 8. Remember, in Joshua, it's all about a land of rest. Look what it says in verse 8. For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken about another day.

[15:31] there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. So, the rest wasn't actually about the land.

God was saying, there's another day. There's going to be another rest to come. Well, what's that rest? Well, keep going on in Hebrews and we find the answer. Look at chapter 11.

Chapter 11, verse 9. Remember we said the promise was first made to Abraham?

Well, here it's talking about Abraham. Chapter 11, verse 9. By faith, Abraham made his home in the promised land. Like a stranger in a foreign country, he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.

for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. Well, what's that about?

[16:39] Look at verse 13. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

Verse 16. Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Verse 39. He goes on listing all the people, Joshua included. It says, these were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. You see, people like Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the promises were all made to them, but they were looking forward, the Bible says, to something not that was temporary like the promised land, but something eternal.

They were looking forward to the true city, the ultimate city, heaven itself, because that is the final rest, a place of true peace and prosperity, the new creation, the new, ultimate garden of Eden, where all evil is gone.

[18:15] and the good news is that God has promised it to his people and nothing and no one is going to stop him bringing it about.

God has made a promise of rest, heaven itself, the new creation. So, back to Joshua. Joshua, how are all these people, and there's about three million of them, we can imagine them all sitting alongside the river Jordan, how are they all going to get into this promised land?

Well, they need a leader, don't they? And we're told who that leader is. Verse 6, God says to Joshua, be strong and courageous because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

Joshua is God's chosen leader. Moses, who had led them for 40 years, well, he was dead and buried at this stage. They needed a new leader, and Joshua was going to be that man.

Verse 7, So Joshua, be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law of my servant Moses gave you.

[19 : 42] Do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. He says the same thing in verse 9, Have I not commanded you, Joshua, be strong and courageous.

Now we have to be very careful to read this properly. Last night I was doing a Bible reading with Ethan, and it just so happened that the notes that he's going through is on the story of Joshua. And I had a look in his Bible, it's a children's Bible, and I had a little note to one side about this passage here, verse 6. And it was encouraging people like Ethan and me to be strong and courageous.

And the way they described it was, it was like a football manager talking to his team, a little pep talk to give them great encouragement. Go on out there, be strong and courageous.

And I think in some ways that's how we read this passage, isn't it? It's like a little kind of bit of energy boost, a bit of LucasAid. Go on out there, be strong and courageous. But it's not really written to us, is it?

[20 : 58] And it shouldn't be read that way. It was written and it was spoken to their leader. The people are not to be strong and courageous.

The leader is to be strong and courageous. Joshua is to be strong for the people. And he can be strong because, look at the end of verse 9, God says, don't be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

God is going to be with this leader, that's why he can be strong and courageous. Now I don't think it's a mistake that Joshua's name actually means the Lord is salvation.

So God is saying to these people, see Joshua over here? He's my chosen leader. He's going to be the one who's going to save you. And he is the one who's going to bring you into the promised land. My chosen leader. Now I'm sure we're beginning to make connections here, aren't we? But we don't want to rush ahead too quickly.

[22 : 15] The question is, will these people trust God's chosen leader? Will they fall in behind him? Will they follow him? Well, Joshua fresh from his instructions from God goes back to the people, verse 10.

So Joshua ordered the officers and the people, go through the camp and tell the people, get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is going to give you for your own.

Are they going to do as he says? Are they going to trust him? Will they obey their leader? History tells us, if we know anything of the Israelites up to this point, that they're actually quite a rebellious and stubborn lot.

So there's no telling what they might do. One possible obstacle might be the tribes who were going to settle where they were. There were twelve tribes in all.

Well, thirteen. There were two halves. The sons of Jacob and all their families. And two and a half of those tribes had said they wanted to settle on the east side of the Jordan.

[23 : 28] So were they going to follow Jacob? Were they just going to say, well, we've got our land here, we're going to stay put? What were they going to do? Well, look at verse 12. But to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, remember the command that Moses, the servant of the Lord gave you.

The Lord, your God, is giving you rest and has granted you this land. Your wives, your children, and all the animals may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan.

But all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers, because all the rest of the tribes, they had to go across. You are to go with them.

You are to help your brothers until the Lord gives them rest as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the Lord, your God, is giving them.

After that, you may go back to occupy your own land, which Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you east of the Jordan towards the sunrise. So again, we're asking the question, are they going to obey him?

[24 : 37] Are they going to trust Joshua? Well, look at verse 16. Then they answered Joshua, whatever you have commanded us, we will do.

And whatever you send us, and wherever you send us, we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you.

You see, if the people are going to experience rest, if they are going to enjoy the promise that God has given them, they have to follow, they have to trust God's leader.

They have to fall in behind them and do what he says. Well, in the coming weeks, we're going to find out how they got on.

how did they follow their leader? But again, at this point, we're forced to ask the question for ourselves. What leader are we going to follow?

[25 : 45] Well, the book of Joshua starts, surprisingly, with a death, verse 1. It tells us that Moses has died. And the very end of the book finishes with a death.

Go to Joshua chapter 24. It starts with the death of Moses, and it finishes with the death of Joshua. Chapter 24, verse 28. Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance. After these things, Joshua, son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at an age of 110, and they buried him in the land of his inheritance at Timna, Sarah, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gash.

So, Moses is dead. Joshua is dead. Who's going to lead the people now? Well, look at verse 33.

Next in line was Eleazar. He was the next one to take the position after Joshua. But look what happened to him. Eleazar, son of Aaron, died and was buried at Gibba, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.

[27 : 12] Do you see what's happening? All the leaders are dying. They kind of get, Moses didn't even get into the promised land. Joshua kind of just about gets there, and as soon as he's about to enjoy it, he dies.

You see, all of these funeral notices are not a mistake. It's forcing us to keep on reading through, saying, okay, well, who's the next leader?

leader. Because as we keep on going, they all seem to die. So it's forcing us to look for a leader who won't die. Somebody who will lead us into the eternal promised rest.

And of course, as we know, as the story unfolds of the Bible, God sends his final leader, the greatest leader, the king, his own son, Jesus Christ, who would come as God's leader for the people.

But what would happen to his leader? He would die. But his death was a death for us. As our representative, as our leader on behalf of the people, he would go to the cross for us.

[28 : 28] He would die in our place. He would go for our disobedience. But there's something quite different about this leader, isn't there?

This leader wouldn't stay dead. This leader would rise again from the grave. This king would rise triumphant.

Death would be defeated. He would conquer the grave so that we could live forever. The one thing that stops us enjoying the rest that God has promised to us is sin and death.

And it has all been conquered by his leader, Jesus Christ. Jesus, the risen leader, the true Joshua. Joshua means the Lord saves. What does Jesus mean? It's the New Testament name. He's the Saviour. And he comes into the world inviting us to trust him.

[29 : 34] He commands us to follow him. so that we may enjoy heaven. The ultimate rest with him. Rest from all evil.

Rest from violence and terrorism. Rest from every kind of tragedy imaginable. Rest from all sin. A new world which would be marked by peace and prosperity.

as Jesus came on to the world scene. Come unto me all you who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest.

The true leader, Jesus Christ has come for us his people. He says, I will go before you. I want you to follow me and that's why you can be strong and courageous because not even death can defeat you if you are following me.

And as we his people follow our true leader, Jesus, so we are showing others the way that they can find ultimate rest.

[30 : 45] we are on a journey. Israel, we are on a journey. We are on a journey. We are just strangers in this land.

We are just visiting. We are only here for a short time. We have eternity to look forward to. But as we go on our journey, so people will look and see, where are they going?

We are going to be with him in that final rest. You see, the story of Joshua is not just a book of history about a people thousands of years ago unrelated to us.

It's the story of Jesus. The world has promised and produced some great leaders.

And the world's leaders have made some great promises, haven't they? Now, I don't doubt the sincerity or the efforts of Barack Obama to bring about world peace.

[31 : 52] I think he's doing a good job. I don't knock the plans or the promises of Ender Kenny to change Ireland's future. I think he's doing a good job too. But as history has proved, promises will always be broken and leaders will always die.

the good news of God's story, which is not only a true story, it's our story. This is about us. It's that God's chosen leader, Jesus Christ, not only makes promises, but he will keep his promise. What God says he will do, he will do. we can trust him and he will bring us to his eternal rest. Let's pray together. Our Father God, we thank you so much for these stories.

[33 : 06] Thank you for Joshua. Thank you for his leadership, his leading of your people. But most of all, we thank you for him because he pictures, he shows us who our true leader is.

We thank you for Jesus. We thank you that he has conquered the grave, he has defeated sin. He has called us to follow him so that we may have rest, rest today and rest for all eternity.

Father, thank you that you have invited us on that journey. We pray that we would be people who go into this week living that journey, telling others about the journey, encouraging others to get on board.

Father, go before us. Help us to trust you, the God who has made his promise, the God who will keep his promise.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you, Johnny.

[34 : 38] We're going to take an opportunity to respond by singing together, respond to what we've heard. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.