

Joshua 1:1–9

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[0 : 0 0] But again, Joshua chapter one, verses one through nine. 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 to this Jordan, you and all this people into the land that I am giving to you 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 in this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river of 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 courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses, my servant, commanded you.

[1 : 2 0] 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.

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. Do not be dismayed.

For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Our Heavenly Father, as we now give ourselves to a better understanding of your word, we pray that it would minister to our hearts, each one individually and to this church as a whole, that we would be your people living under your word with all strength and courage.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Well, the setting for our summer series in the book of Joshua is made known to us in the opening line.

And it's a setting that gives us imagery that is full with evocative imagination. Let me read it for you again. 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.

[3 : 0 3] Such is the setting for our summer series. Whoever it is who penned the story that we know as the book of Joshua decided to open his narrative, leading those of us who are reading it to a particular point.

We are moved directly from a cemetery scene to a church service, all in the space of the opening line.

Verse 1 has us leaving a graveside where a pastor of God's people has just been laid to rest, and we enter into the pews where we sit for a commissioning sermon delivered to his successor.

The time for eulogizing is over. The time for employing another to carry on is at hand. That is a jarring setting in which this book opens, and it shouldn't be lost on us.

Evidently, the very first thing the writer wants to plant in our minds is that people die before all the promises of God have been fulfilled.

[4 : 17] Even leaders, leaders to whom the promises of God were made, die before all the promises of God come to fruition.

In fact, the very end of the book is going to reiterate the evocative setting of its opening. For there, it will not be Moses who is dead, but Joshua himself will have died, and all the fruition of God's promises are waiting some future day, even beyond that of all of his generation.

To Moses was given the privilege of planting a church for God. He found his core group out of Egypt, ministered to them during 40 years in the wilderness, never having had a home, let alone geographical territory to call their own.

And while God had made a promise to Moses about the giving of the land, Moses never obtained the fullness of what God said would eventually be given.

He lived long enough, just long enough, to stand on a mountain top and to peer into the fulfillment of those promises, but he never set foot in it.

[5 : 41] And the same thing is said of Joshua decades later. Joshua himself will water the work that Moses began. Joshua will begin to see the promises of God growing, but then two, Joshua will die.

Our book begins and ends with the death of generations before the fullness of God's promises are being fulfilled. The point, by way of application to us, out of the opening line, simply must be this.

Don't think it will be any different for you. Don't think it will be any different for us. In all likelihood, you and I will pass from the scene long before God makes full payment on all his promises.

Did you know that there were at least four different architects that worked on the cathedral that you and I would visit in Paris called Notre Dame?

The architect had the drawings and he began and he died. And before dying, he handed on all that which was promised down on paper to the next one.

[6 : 54] And he labored and he died. And then to the next one and to the next one. The drawings for what God's building were in full were handed down from one generation to another.

And so it will be with us. Think of it. Look around. Within 50, 60 years, every face here in all likelihood will be new.

And you and I will have gone the way of Moses and Joshua after him. This then is the lens through which the book of Joshua must be read.

God's promises are kept, just not always in our lifetime. Oh, if we could get hold of that. As such, we are beginning to read a book that demands that we acknowledge that we are waiting on the word of God all our life long.

Life and death. In these pages, we're going to be fortunate enough to encounter a new day with newly appointed leadership and an entire people who's generationally are sold out for securing a better future.

[8 : 20] But we're also entering into a book that the opening line will make clear. We cannot escape from the non-accidental connection to the predecessor now dead.

To the one to whom even the divine promises had first been made. I'm going to call our summer series Promises Kept.

If you picked up one of our journals today to write notes through the whole series, that is the header under which I view Joshua. Promises Kept.

It's an apt header. It captures the journey that we're going to take over the next few months. But if I were to add a tagline to my title, it would be promises kept, comma, just not perhaps in your lifetime.

I like that. That's going to keep you and me and those others who preach alongside me from thinking that the promises that are kept here mean that somehow God owes you everything in the here and now.

[9 : 33] So as we take our seats in the pews of this text, what are the contours of the sermon that God delivered to Joshua during his commissioning?

I mean, that is what our text is. It is a speech delivered by God to Joshua concerning the generational transfer of his work.

And you and I are like congregants, seated in with God in the pulpit and Joshua, the object of God's attention. Two distinct ideas are communicated to Joshua in this text.

Verse 2b through 6, God wants Joshua to know that he is keeping his promise now by giving his people land. That's the substance of the first movement of God's sermon.

Joshua, I am keeping my promise now by giving my people land. And then verses 7 to 9, and we'll roll through God's sermon in the way in which he delivered it.

[10 : 45] He also wants Joshua to know that Joshua's loyalty to God will be known as he is keeping the law. That's it. It's that simple.

Promises kept. God giving land. Promises that must be made by Joshua. Joshua keeping law.

And each of these ideas have application for us. So let's take a look. Verses 2b through 6. Promises kept. God keeps his promise by giving his people land.

Interestingly, it says there right in the text that these are promises that were made to Moses. Verse 3. In particular, though, the promise of this book concerns the domain of land.

Notice how often it appears in form. Now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan. See, he's already put you into a topographical region.

[11 : 55] Into the land that I am giving to them. And notice, not only is the promised land as promised Moses, but the boundaries of that land are expansively set forward.

In verses 3 and 4. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon, I've given to you. From the wilderness in this Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river of Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites of 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. So the boundaries are given. In fact, if you read the scriptures for yourselves, you'll find that the boundaries given here are expansively laid out.

And only at a momentary time in Israel's history, under the later reign of David and Solomon, do you come anywhere close to approximating what was promised here.

But it's land. It's land that God promised. It's land where boundary lines are given. And notice again, verse 5 and 6. It's land, the idea of which, that no one can stand in the way of God accomplishing.

[13 : 18] It's amazing. Verse 6. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Now let me pause right there.

Your mind is probably spinning, as mine did earlier this week, by the moment I have arrived at this truth.

There's an elephant in the room for those of us who read. For those of us who read this kind of text today, the ideas expressed in these verses are tough to swallow.

They're difficult even to hear. They run up against our moral sensibilities. The Bible is presenting us a picture of God in this text who is opposed to some peoples to the point where he is expressly willing to dispossess them from their land.

And apparently, as we will read the text later, violently, and in this case, the newly appointed Savior leader Joshua, it's all going to be given to him and to the nation of Israel.

[14 : 28] This is supplanting work. I want to sit on the problem of the text. To our ears, this sounds nothing more than a Putin-esque land grab.

Let me put it in a different way. It sounds nothing less than a centuries-old American ideal now discarded on manifest destiny.

When you look at any of the events transpiring today in the global scene, it sounds little more than resembling a rationale for ethnic assault rooted in religious fervor.

I am dispossessing people from their place because I have God's divine promise to do so. This is some form of imperialistic colonization, the likes of which we don't know.

But we wrestle with this, do we not? Think of it at local levels. Think of the battle lines that are drawn over a nation's borders. You can't get past three o'clock today without seeing that.

[15 : 39] Let me bring it even closer. Think of the redistricting that is taking place along our cities in Aldermanic wards. Let me get it close to that.

Think of the turf wars that are taking place in our city over particular streets and who has domain over what and who. all of these we find displeasurable.

All of these from the neighborhood turf war to the global compartmentalization of land and especially to the religious fervor that looks to a divine God to substantiate and support them.

all of these things are here in this text. God the God of the Bible is presented to the reader as being willing to displace peoples and that so violently to fulfill a promise given to others.

what are we to make of a picture like this? Let me put it differently. Why would you or I why would we why would anyone still in this day consider believing in the God of the Bible and following a God that reveals himself as such?

[17 : 18] I'm not going to be answering I'm not going to be able to answer it fully in some time in the sermon although I will say if you come through the whole summer this question is not going away and there will have to be a variety of thoughts from the pulpit that properly help you work your way through this very complex problem.

So today I just want to say that there's something about the context the literary context in which we find this passage that might offer us some initial help.

To put differently this text while it's the beginning of a book is not coming out of thin air it is connected as we've already seen to Moses and the law and all the story that's been unfolding to this point.

in fact if you're not a reader of the Bible you would do well to at least know that the whole Bible story opens with God creating land all land and calling it good and exercising his dominion over it all.

people have often said you know why do you buy real estate or whatever and someone said well you buy land because it's the one thing God's not making any more of so get your hands on some.

[18 : 55] Well in the created story of Genesis God created the earth the land separated it from the waters and it was all his his land it's not Woody Guthrie this land is your land this land is my land no this is his land that's the that's where the Bible story starts and then he puts Adam and Eve in his land in his garden and says let blossom from your work out all the way to the ends of the earth my rule as you follow my word steward my world for me and yet the Bible story goes on and Adam and Eve displace God from his own land they evict him they put the notice on the window he didn't want to move out and they walked him out and they said this land is my land this world runs by my word and as a result

God who created all of this was naturally rightly justly in opposition to human race so the Bible says so then through one man sin entered into the world having disastrous divine consequences on us all until Genesis 12 to one man God will make a promise that will have delightful reversing effects on us all and to Abraham he said I will make of you fallen though you are I will put my hand on you because there's no one righteous here to put my hand on and I will nevertheless work through a promise to you where you will become a great nation to you will be given a great land and through you eventually the disastrous effects on all the families of the earth will be reversed and I will bring blessing to the ends of the earth

Genesis 12 1-7 that promise then is threefold I'm gonna make myself a people even though they're not my people I'm gonna secure them in this rebellious world even though they are rebellious and then through them I am going to bring deliverance that eventually wrestles back what is rightfully my own now we pick it up because the promise of land that was made initially to Abraham was also reiterated to Moses so God is now fulfilling in this book the second of his three great promises to Abraham they are now a great nation number two he will now give them the land and sometime after the book of

Joshua and not only until far after Joshua will we see the third fulfillment of the promise that blessing actually comes through what looks like a horrific scene in our text!

God is then declaring his intention in these verses to restore his rightful rule over his own world put it differently God is carving out a resting place for himself in the world he created he is now entering into rebel held territory and securing boundaries that were his that all people stole in other words God is doing justice not divine imperial colonialization if it's any help to you let me say one more thing and I'm sure we'll say many things over the summer it might help you to at least know that the

[23 : 41] Bible will present to you a picture of God from which even Israel will not be freed from his displeasure you need to know this at a literary level even Joshua previously sat in Deuteronomy 32 with Moses and heard God say the baton is going from you to him but as he's here as Joshua is here in my presence let this be known the people will rebel against me they too will not be able to hold on to the land so what I'm trying to say to you is that God's judgment on all the nations of the earth is not partial toward Israel he is impartial and for any who don't follow his word he has displeasure and will displace you might say well that's a great help to me today but at least it levels the playing field we all have an awesome

God in the Bible who rules the heavens and the earth who controls sovereignly the events of all the nations whose pleasure and displeasure whose grace and mercy whose kindness and justice is rolling over a world that roils in rebellion trying to hold on to their own corner indeed as crassly as it can be put all of humanity when it comes to boundaries and territory or place of rule is little more than a dog who walks the four corners of their own neighborhood we mark out things that will assist our partisan understanding not recognizing that we ourselves are out of sorts with a

God who is Lord over all so in this summer series we're going to have some opportunity to look at this but know this God in our text is taking back land that is rightfully his justly his and his land grab is far different than our own our ethnic violence our colonialization our religious fervor is rooted in each and every one of us in an unjust unrighteous fallen heart condition our wars over boundaries attempt to mark off territory for ourselves and we've all forgotten that all the land is first and foremost the geographical territorial domain of God that that is there later on in the Bible story you're going to find Jesus long after Joshua although the names are similar Joshua means is the

Hebrew name that Jesus will adopt Joshua God is salvation now here comes Jesus again the fulfillment of a third promise where blessings finally going to come to a world gone wrong it comes to Jesus and notice Jesus will not ever ask his followers to fight for land he doesn't do it no matter how many Christians you find today that are viscerally engaged in the establishment of land for their Lord Jesus never is looking for territorial domain on this earth not doing it in fact he says my kingdom is not of this world that's why my people don't fight regardless of how the church has missed this along the way through the centuries but in Jesus the territory that he wants let me tell you the territory that Jesus wants is your heart he's not concerned about the external realities as much as he is about the internal nature of who you are he wants you he wants you you rebel you he wants all of you he doesn't want you to draw district lines in your soul that he doesn't have access to he wants you now the question is will you give yourself to him or will you throw the

God of the Bible aside under some moral virtue within your own mind so that you can hold on to the territory of your own heart that would rather live under the sound of your own voice this is why first Peter chapter one verses three and four will indicate very clearly the kind of inheritance that comes on the backside of these promises where all things happen not merely a great nation not merely did he give land which was temporal from its beginnings but he will actually say in first Peter blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to his great mercy he's caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance here it is here's your land here's your land grab it is imperishable undefiled unfading kept kept in heaven for you let me put it this way you want to get on about land get on about that which is somewhere beyond the blue promises kept concerning land which is the second aspect of how

[30 : 02] God worked in human history to reverse the curse and bring blessing that's what the text says to us today as it was written to them but what it says to those of us today this is what it means for us today while his promises to Israel were kept on land his promise to you on an eternal inheritance!

is something you yet wait for! You wait!

And you're going to wait until like Moses you die! Because that is the moment of exchange with a complete fulfillment of God's promises will be yes and amen to you.

There will be a moment quickly or not perhaps on a hospital bed with children or grandchildren speaking into your ear days after you yourself are no longer able to even to take water from a straw and they will say to you what God says to Joshua here in the opening verses go arise be strong and courageous for the time of your inheritance is now at hand verse two through six to them promises are kept for us we yet wait well if that's the case then how do you wait how do you live that's the contribution that verses seven through nine make because in verses two through six just as

God kept promise of giving land to his people in seven to nine Joshua is to express his loyalty to God by keeping the law can I show this to you seven through nine the whole sermon of God changes he's going to bracket seven through nine under this be strong and courageous seven and nine but in verse eight there's going to be a surprise let me read it again only be strong and very courageous be careful to do all the law 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 that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it 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 do and the surprise is what you get in the middle notice what he says be strong and courageous verse seven and

[33 : 51] I expected to read something then because you're going into war with enemies with opponents so be strong and courageous because war is at hand but what does he actually say here he doesn't actually leverage strength and courage due to war he leverages strength and courage in relationship to his word this is stunning only be strong and courageous being careful to do all that the law of Moses my servant commanded you don't turn from the law to the right hand or the left that you may have good success the book of the law that is my word shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night that you may be careful to do all that is written in it then you make your way prosperous what he's saying is while you wait for me to fulfill my promises somehow even in your life live under my word we wait by giving attention to his word evidently the greatest obstacle facing

Joshua will not be the people who are already residing in the land I hope you can hear me today evidently the greatest obstacle facing Joshua rests in his own heart and in the heart of his own people the greatest obstacle that will detract Joshua is a failure of himself to live well under word the people of God who were preparing to enter into the promises fulfilled had within their own heart the seeds of their eventual downfall and displacement by God now what does that mean for you and me well if I was just to like throw the moral force of the text on you

I would say you got to keep the word thank God that the word here is actually to Joshua all the pronouns here are second person singular at this point in the text Joshua is the one who has to keep God's word God's appointed savior leader fulfills God's promises for the people as he fully obeys God's word it's not up to you it's up to Joshua new testament terms you can't do it Jesus did complete fulfillment of the word now hear me because some people will go thank God I went to church today I realized God was against us but somehow in Christ he's for us and so now I can just scoot out of here feeling good about it all because all the moral weight of the text is off of me and on to him in actual fact it ought to be heightened for us in elevated ways over the original hearer because they didn't know the fullness of

Jesus word but you can they didn't know that he says whoever listens to my word and keeps you build your life on the word of Christ you are going to be sure and strong but if you don't build it on Jesus you are going to be like a house that's just going to be washed away they don't have the advantages you and I have to know that the fulfillment of God's promises in Christ on the cross have made adequate payment for our rebellion and therefore out of love, not legalism, out of mercy, not moralism, we start learning to live under the word of Christ.

We meditate on it day and night. We eat the Sermon on the Mount as though it were our breakfast fueling. We know that every word of God will find its fulfillment, that not a single jot, nor a tittle is going to pass away until ultimately all things are under the very word of Christ. And so my heart is continually excising domains, surrendering territory, waving the flag, as well as I can understand the ministry of Christ to me. And when that happens, I'm successful wherever I go. They can lay me in the ground and I'm successful. What's that song we open with today?

[39 : 10] This world is filled with swift transitions from Moses to Joshua, from me to you, from this congregation to the one that will sit here in 40 years. And the word to them will be the same as the word I'm giving to you. Wait! He's not going to give you all the promises now. But how do I wait? Word made manifest in the flesh who paid for my sin, whose life I try to emulate to the best of my ability.

For this, I must be strong. For this, I must take courage. The words of this text, particularly the commands, perhaps then are best applied at the time of our own death.

I don't know if you will be here next Sunday or if I will, but you give this congregation enough time, none of us will be. They will have announced all of our death. And it won't be long before coffins that are rolled down this aisle and carried out by pallbearers into hearses, down to 67th Street and into a cemetery. And what you need to know before that day comes is simply this.

Go. Arise. Be strong and courageous. For those who die in the Lord, those who have his word until their wait is over, to them, they shall enter into everlasting rest.

Promises kept, just not perhaps in our lifetime. Do not think that God owes you everything here and now.

[41 : 30] Two to six, he's asking you to wait. Seven to nine, he wants you to surrender to his word. And as you do, he will grant you success.

Our Heavenly Father, as we enter now into this book for the summer with terrain that is going to require some thoughtful discourse, I pray that you would help us to first and foremost view our own heart as the territory that is yours.

And may we individually be men and women and children who know what it is to walk by faith and not by sight.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.