

# Taking Hold of God's Promises

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Part I

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All of us are familiar with the wonderful story of Joshua's leadership over the Israelites after Moses died. I have read and reread the Book of Joshua many times, each time going deeper and deeper into the powerful biblical truths and principles contained in it. The Book of Joshua has everlasting truths and principles in it that every Christian, and especially those in Christian leadership, should know.

Chapter one of Joshua sets the stage for the rest of the book. Let's look at the first 9 verses.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them--to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates--all the Hittite country--to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Jos 1:1-9 NIV)

From this Scripture we learn some powerful, spiritual truths that, if believed and acted upon, will take us into God's promises, just as they did Joshua and the people of Israel.

Let's review an earlier incident in Joshua's life. Remember when he was a young man and Moses sent him and eleven other men to spy out the land God had promised them? When the twelve returned, all twelve affirmed that there was great wealth in the land. They brought back one bunch of grapes that was so big it had to be carried on a pole by two men. They described other beautiful, large fruits and vegetables. They all affirmed that it was, "the land of milk and honey." Their description of the treasures only confirmed to the Israelites that this was indeed "the Promised Land."

So all twelve young men saw the promises of God in the land. But remember what ten of them went on to say

after they told of the riches they had seen? They said that the people were like giants and the cities were fortified. They insisted that Israel was not able to take the land, thereby leading the people into unbelief. In other words, these ten agreed that there were wonderful things in the land God had promised them, but that because of circumstances surrounding them, the Jews could never enter into the land. And the people ended up agreeing with them.

But not Joshua! He and his companion, Caleb, were the only two spies that said that the giants could be beaten and the land could be taken. This is what they said.

"The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." (Num 14:7-9 NIV)

In other words, Joshua not only believed in God's promises but he believed that they were attainable.

To deal with the unbelief of the people, God caused the Israelites to wander in the desert until all of those who had agreed with the ten spies were dead. They didn't make it into the promised land. But God, in His mercy, did not hold those under thirty years old accountable for this unbelief. So only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who believed, and those under thirty ever entered into the land God had promised them.

How sad this story is. All who left Egypt as part of God's chosen people were given the promise by God that they had a wonderful land awaiting them. But the vast majority of those who received the promise of God never entered into His promise because of unbelief. I fear it is still so today. Often when God speaks a word of promise to us, we, like the Israelites of old, receive it with great joy. Then when we begin to encounter the opposing giants and the fortified cities, unbelief surrounds us like a shroud. Then, just like the Israelites, if we allow ourselves to enter into unbelief, we die never entering into the promise.

## Rhema and Logos

I want to digress a bit here and explain the difference between God's general promises to us and a specific promise God makes to us personally. The Bible is the word of God. In the original Greek it is called the *logos*. The Bible is full of God's promises of wonderful things for our lives. And if we live righteously, we can count on the blessings given to us in Scripture. These

general promises are contained in the logos of God to us through all of Scripture.

But there is another Greek word used in Scripture which means "word" too. That word is *rhema*. The Greek text uses *rhema* as meaning concise, pointed words directed to a specific person. An example of a *rhema* in Scripture is when Jesus told Peter to leave the boat and "come." (Mt 24:27-29) This was the specific word to Peter which, because he believed it and acted upon it, enabled him to walk on the water toward Jesus.

So we can all rely on the logos of God, that is, the word of God in Scripture. The general promises we find in God's word are for financial provision, a healthy body, and so on. But we also, by the Holy Spirit, occasionally receive a *rhema* or specific word as a promise to us alone. If we take these promises, and if we believe them and act upon them, they too will come to pass.

### Joshua Leads

Back to Joshua, I am sure that Joshua's absolute belief was one of the reasons God chose him to lead the Israelites when Moses died. Up to that moment, all Joshua's life he had been an aid to Moses. So, while Joshua had actually experienced the promised land for a very short time, and he had proclaimed that the enemies in the land could be beaten, he was untested. I think God was saying to Joshua, in effect, "Put your money, your feet, your possessions, and your reputation where your mouth is. Now go and do what you said could be done, defeat the giants and take possession of the land across the Jordan that I promised to give to you!"

Joshua had one great advantage over the rest of the Israelites, he not only believed that the land could be taken, he had said so out loud to the people and to Moses. He had proclaimed with his mouth the reality of the promises of God. God knew Joshua's strength and unswerving belief in His promises and God wanted that kind of a leader for the Israelites.

But God also knew there were obstacles to be overcome. He knew that Joshua would be tested in his beliefs. He knew Joshua would have to learn to fight to become a strong warrior against the enemies that were ahead in order to take the land. And God also obviously knew that Joshua would be scared and discouraged at times. That's why God gave Joshua such awesome promises before he even tried to cross the Jordan into the promised land.

### The Promises

Now let's examine the promises contained in these early verses of chapter one of the book of Joshua.

**Promise One** - *I will give you every place where you set your foot.* (v. 3)

These are not mere words spoken to Joshua for a one-time application. They are alive and active today and they are for *anyone* who has ears to hear and a heart to believe. This literally is God's promise to us that, spiritually speaking, He will give us every place where we set our feet.

This promise says that if we are obedient and walk rightly before God, we can be absolutely confident that He will give us the land He has pointed out to us to possess. This promise is for the stout-hearted souls who will dare believe God's word. This applies to anyone who hears and sees the promises of God and has the boldness to step out to apprehend them. Where are some of the places we set our foot? In our workplaces, our families, our churches, our neighborhoods, our cities, and so on.

**Promise Two** - *No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life.*

The first thing we notice about this promise is that God didn't say to Joshua, "No one will ever *try* to stand up against you." It says "no one will be *able* to stand up against you."

Of course they will try to stand up against you. In fact, they will try to come against you again and again, year in and year out. And who are "they"? "They" may include demonic forces, our own flesh, other people, or simply the circumstances we encounter as we live in this world. Everyone who presses on to enter into God's promises will have opposition. It must be defeated every time it comes up against us, in whatever form.

The fight always gets much harder when we encounter someone who is taking a stand against us and we look at them with our natural eyes. When we look in the natural world, that opposition, that person, that circumstance does seem like a giant. Remember the giants in the promised land? To the natural eye they were impossible to overcome. So if we limit ourselves to trying to fight our giants with natural means and weapons, they will overcome us and we will never enter into God's promises. If we choose to fight them with natural means we are doomed to failure.

But if we fight with our God given supernatural weapons of divine power, we demolish the strongholds of opposition.

"For the weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor 10:4,5 NIV)

Note here that Paul tells us that the *arguments and pretensions* do not come against us. They come against the knowledge of God and His word *in us*! Paul clearly understood that the attacks were against his spiritual journey, and he knew how to counter them: *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ!*

**Promise Three - *I will never leave you nor forsake you.***

This is such a powerful, comforting promise. God was gracious to make this promise to Joshua and, in His everlasting love, He has made this promise to us as well. And never is a long time!

It's one thing to believe God when you are in an anointed meeting in the presence of the Lord and hear Him say, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." But it's quite another thing to believe that promise when you are in the midst of problems and trials. We need to remember that our feelings are dependent on circumstances but that God's promises are not. It is impossible for God to lie. (Heb 6:18) When He speaks, He speaks truth. His word is truth. (Jo 17:17) His truth is never subject to circumstances. His truth stands independent of our feelings and circumstances. His truth is sovereign. So we can know with absolute certainty that God has never, and will never, leave us nor will He ever forsake us, no matter what the situation.

Let me say again that all three of these promises are to and for every believer. God's word is truth. It can be taken as fact. And remember our earlier discussion of the rhema of God to us. We can also take these rhemas as facts just waiting to happen. When God makes a specific promise to us, whether it is about a healing, a call to ministry, to build a church, that a wayward child will come to Christ, financial provision for our ministry and family needs, whatever that promise is, stand on it and watch God fulfill it!

**Why These Three Promises?**

God knew that Joshua was going to have strong opposition. For Joshua, his opposition were real, live giants and real fortified cities. That's how real his opposition was. God knew that Joshua would experience times of disappointment and frustration. These three promises were given to strengthen Joshua as he began taking steps toward the promised land. And we must make them our own as well. Every step taken becomes your spiritual territory. It is yours. No one can take it away from you. This doesn't mean that there won't be setbacks. It doesn't mean that there will not be times when it seems all is lost. It doesn't mean that there will never be discouraging times. In fact, the enemy will often come against God's word to you. At times you will have to fight to make His promises become a reality. That's why God

told Joshua to...

**Be Strong and Courageous**

I love this phrase. It, or a variation of it, occurs five times in just the first chapter of the book of Joshua. Courage is defined by Webster's dictionary as the attitude of facing and dealing with anything recognized as dangerous, difficult, or painful, instead of withdrawing from it. Why did God tell Joshua so many times to be strong and courageous? Because He knew that Joshua would be discouraged at times and afraid at other times. He knew that Joshua could never take the promised land on his own strength, he would give out. This was God putting backbone and spiritual courage into Joshua. Having courage doesn't mean that you don't have fear. It does mean that you will go on and do what God has told you to do anyhow, in spite of your fear! Over all that Joshua would do in the next many years, this word to be strong and courageous would ring clear and true as an overarching command to Joshua, his leaders, and all the people.

And this word rings with as much truth to us today as it did the first time Joshua heard it. We will never, I repeat, never really move into all the promises of God for our lives if we are not strong and do not have courage. Courage is that inner core of strength that will make us do things that under natural circumstances seem foolish. Without this God given courage, we will not get all God has for us.

**More of God's Instructions on How to Enter the Promised Land**

Often, when we receive a promise from God, we sit passively and wait for Him to bring about what He promised. If we continue to be passive we will die without entering into the promise. You see, along with the promises God gave Joshua, He also gave him specific instructions as to how to enter into the promised land. Here are these instructions:

Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Jos 1:7,8 NIV)

These verses are more of God's instructions or commands to Joshua and the Israelites. In addition to telling Joshua and the people to be strong and courageous, He is also instructing them to 1) be careful to obey all the law Moses gave to them, 2) do not turn from it to the right or to the left, 3) do not let the Book of the Law depart from

their mouths, 4) meditate on it day and night, and 5) be careful to do everything written in it.

This kind of changes things, doesn't it? We loved the promises - take every place we set our foot, God always being with us and never forsaking us, no one will ever be able to stand up against us, and we will be successful and prosperous! Wow, couldn't all of us jump up and down and shout, "Hallelujah" about that!

God is doing and will always do His part. Where it gets messy is when we realize that He is also telling us that we must do our part. First we must obey all His laws. Remember all the laws and regulations God had given Moses and the Israelites. There were the Ten Commandments, there was the command to tithe, to worship only one God, to live righteous and moral lives, and so much more, a lot of it in great detail. So, if we are to claim all the promises God made to Joshua, we also must accept God's commands and instructions under which those promises will be fulfilled.

God also told Joshua and the people not to deviate from the law and go to the right or left. So too, we must not get sidetracked or drawn away. That is the turning to the left or right idea. If we get distracted by whatever is in our life, we will lose the focus needed to take the promised land. And that thing that gets us sidetracked may not even be a sin. It may just be a job, a child, politics, or whatever,

that causes us to turn to the right or left, thereby losing our aim.

God also instructed Joshua and the people to know His word and meditate on it continually. Here too, that command is for us today. How can we obey God's laws and walk in His righteousness if we are not constantly reading, hearing, and meditating on His word?

So the structure of the battle plan God gave Joshua and the Israelites is really shaping up, isn't it? First He gives them His promises that they will take the land and that He will be with them all the way. Then He tells them that they must be strong and courageous during the journey. And finally, God tells them that they are to learn His laws, they are to meditate on them, and they are to obey them. God has, in effect, given Joshua his battle plan before Joshua even put one foot into the Jordan to try to cross into the promised land. God was laying the groundwork for the rest of the journey. If Joshua, the people of Israel, and if we today, follow these instructions, then we will win every battle that we enter and we will take the land and receive His promises.

In Part II of this teaching we will explore the four barriers we find in the Book of Joshua that hinder us from reaching the promises God has given us.

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