

Living Word
BIBLE
STUDIES

JOSHUA

*All God's Good
Promises*

KATHLEEN BUSWELL NIELSON



JOSHUA

Living Word BIBLE STUDIES

Joshua: All God's Good Promises

Nehemiah: Rebuilt and Rebuilding

Psalms, Volume 1: Songs along the Way

Psalms, Volume 2: Finding the Way to Prayer and Praise

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Colossians and Philemon: Continue to Live in Him

1 & 2 Thessalonians: Living the Gospel to the End

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P U B L I S H I N G

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FOREWORD

Joshua is a challenging book to study, teach, and apply to daily Christian discipleship. I know this because my family has read it together for devotions after dinner—all seven of us, from age three to age forty-something.

There are some exciting battles in the book of Joshua. There are also some very long lists of people and places with strange-sounding names. What are we supposed to learn from this part of the Bible? What relationship does the book of Joshua have with the person and work of Jesus Christ? How does it help us in everyday life?

As a family we learned at least two important lessons from Joshua. The first is never to make any compromises with sin. Just as Joshua was called to fight a physical battle for every square inch of the Promised Land, we are called to fight a spiritual battle for every square inch of our souls. The second lesson is that there is a place for every one of God's children in the everlasting kingdom of God. Just as God gave a special piece of the Promised Land to every Israelite, he is preparing a special place for us in heaven.

You will learn these and many other valuable lessons as you read Joshua with the help of this study guide. The book of Joshua is a treasury of sacred truth. We know this because of everything the Bible says about itself. It is the very Word of God, breathed

out by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The one true and living God speaks to us in every word on every page. Thus we should believe that as we read and study the Bible we are hearing the voice of God.

This God-given Word was written by real human beings, who wrote under the direction of God the Holy Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:21). The Bible was written for people like us, by people like us. We should read the Bible, therefore, both as a divine book and as a human book. This means recognizing and understanding the conventional literary forms in which the Bible is written, finding pleasure and taking delight in the Bible's beauty, simplicity, and majesty. It also means that we should take as much care to study the Bible as the original authors took to write it, paying close attention to every word that was carefully chosen to fit into its proper context.

The Bible claims further that the Word of God is something we need to live, as much or even more than we need our daily bread (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3). Therefore, we should read and study the Bible every day as if our lives depended upon it.

To be more specific, the Bible has the life-giving power to bring us into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 3:15). The saving wisdom of Scripture is not limited to one part of the Bible or another, but holds true for every book in the Old and New Testaments, including the book of Joshua. As we read and study this part of the Bible, therefore, we see Jesus on every page. In Joshua we see him as the warrior of our salvation, the mighty captain of our faith, who will conquer all our enemies so that we can live in the Promised Land of his glory.

The Bible is also a practical book—a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119:105). The Bible tells us everything we need for godly thinking and holy living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It shows us the way to go in life. In short, the Bible is the most useful book ever written. As we read, therefore, we should be looking

for practical truth that will make a difference in what we think, what we say, and what we do in every situation in life.

This study guide will give you a helpful method for studying the Bible in all the right ways. It will encourage you in the daily reading, meditation, and memorization of Scripture. It will help you to be serious and systematic about studying the Bible for yourself. It will ask you questions that help you see the literary structure, the Christ-centered meaning, and the practical implications of the book of Joshua. It will give you growing skill and confidence in understanding the Bible, while at the same time helping you make progress in personal holiness and deepening your love for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And it will help you do all of this in relationship with other members of your spiritual family—your brothers and sisters in the church.

May the same Holy Spirit who first revealed these words enable you to understand what you read, find joy in what you study, trust more deeply in Jesus Christ, and return the glory to God by the way that you live.

Philip Graham Ryken

A PERSONAL WORD FROM KATHLEEN

I began to write these Bible studies for the women in my own church group at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. Under the leadership of Kent and Barbara Hughes, the church and that Bible study aimed to proclaim without fail the good news of the Word of God. What a joy, in that study and in many since, to see lives changed by the work of the Word, by the Spirit, for the glory of Christ.

In our Bible study group, we were looking for curriculum that would lead us into the meat of the Word and teach us how to take it in, whole Bible books at a time—the way they are given to us in Scripture. Finally, one of our leaders said, “Kathleen—how about if you just write it!” And so began one of the most joyful projects of my life: the writing of studies intended to help unleash the Word of God in people’s lives. The writing began during a busy stage of my life—with three lively young boys and always a couple of college English courses to teach—but through that stage and every busy one since, a serious attention to studying the Bible has helped keep me focused, growing, and alive in the deepest ways. The Word of God will do that. If there’s life and power in these studies, it is simply the life and power of the Scriptures to which they point. It is ultimately the life and

power of the Savior who shines through all the Scriptures from beginning to end. How we need this life, in the midst of every busy and non-busy stage of our lives!

I don't think it is just the English teacher in me that leads me to this conclusion about our basic problem in Bible study these days: we've forgotten how to *read*! We're so used to fast food that we think we should be able to drive by the Scriptures periodically and pick up some easily digestible truths that someone else has wrapped up neatly for us. We've disowned that process of careful reading . . . observing the words . . . seeing the shape of a book and a passage . . . asking questions that take us into the text rather than away from it . . . digging into the Word and letting it speak! Through such a process, guided by the Spirit, the Word of God truly feeds our souls. Here's my prayer: that, by means of these studies, people would be further enabled to read the Scriptures profitably and thereby find life and nourishment in them, as we are each meant to do.

In all the busy stages of life and writing, I have been continually surrounded by pastors, teachers, and family who encourage and help me in this work, and for that I am grateful. The most wonderful guidance and encouragement come from my husband, Niel, whom I thank and for whom I thank God daily.

May God use these studies to lift up Christ and his Word, for his glory!

INTRODUCTION

The book of Joshua offers adventure, great stories, vivid characters, and—above all—an amazing account of the way God fulfills his promises to his people. Joshua is not bare history; it is history with a point—and the point is that God’s Word is true—always, completely, without fail. This book’s challenge is for God’s people to live according to that Word.

Joshua opens the second section of the Scriptures, which in the Hebrew Bible is called the Former Prophets. However, Joshua also gives a kind of epilogue to the Bible’s first section, the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses). The story fulfilled in Joshua begins in Genesis, as God created a race of people to live with him and glorify him. As Genesis tells it, the first human beings God created rebelled against him and caused the race to be a fallen one, separated from its holy Creator. But God, even as he judged this rebellion, gave a promise—a promise that Satan, who lured Adam and Eve into rebellion, would ultimately be conquered by the seed of a woman (Gen. 3:15). God chose one man through whom to channel this promise: Abraham, he said, would be the one through whom this seed would come. Out of Abraham would come a great nation through whom the whole earth would be blessed, and God promised to give that nation the land of Canaan for their own (Gen. 12:1–7). Abraham went and lived in that land, but after several generations his extended

family moved to Egypt, where his descendant Joseph had risen to great political power. Abraham's people flourished there and grew numerous, just as God had said. In fact, they grew so numerous that they were feared and made a nation of slaves. Not until Moses' time were they delivered and brought back as a whole nation of God's people through the wilderness to their own land. Moses brought them to the brink of the land, but he was not allowed to take them in; Joshua was appointed as the leader for the conquest of the land of Canaan. Moses brought them out, and Joshua will bring them in. *The book of Joshua is the story of God's bringing his redeemed people into the land he promised them.*

Joshua, then, gives the happy end to the story of God's people. But, as the Bible goes on, we soon see that this was only a hint of the *very* end of the story. Even in Joshua itself there are clear warning signs that all is not completely well. But in Judges, the next book, those warnings prove all too true. After all God has provided for them, his people will not obey him and settle happily in the land he has provided. It is clear that the promised seed of Abraham who will finally accomplish the happy ending has not yet come. The deliverance from slavery in Egypt on that night of the Passover turns out to be a wonderful hint of the deliverance still to come—and it will come only through Jesus Christ, the true seed, the real Passover Lamb. The wilderness wanderings turn out to be an all-too-recognizable hint of the life journeys of God's people, graciously given his law but struggling to obey it. Only the true seed, Jesus Christ, was able to face temptation in the wilderness and never sin—for he relied on the true manna from heaven (Matt. 4:2–4). And the final inheritance of Canaan turns out to be a beautiful hint of the eternal inheritance and rest God gives to his people—both now, as we know rest for our souls through Christ the Lord and Savior, and eternally, in heaven. Canaan ultimately points toward the final, joyful rest in the presence of Jesus Christ, the certain hope and promised inheritance of everyone who trusts in him. The name Joshua

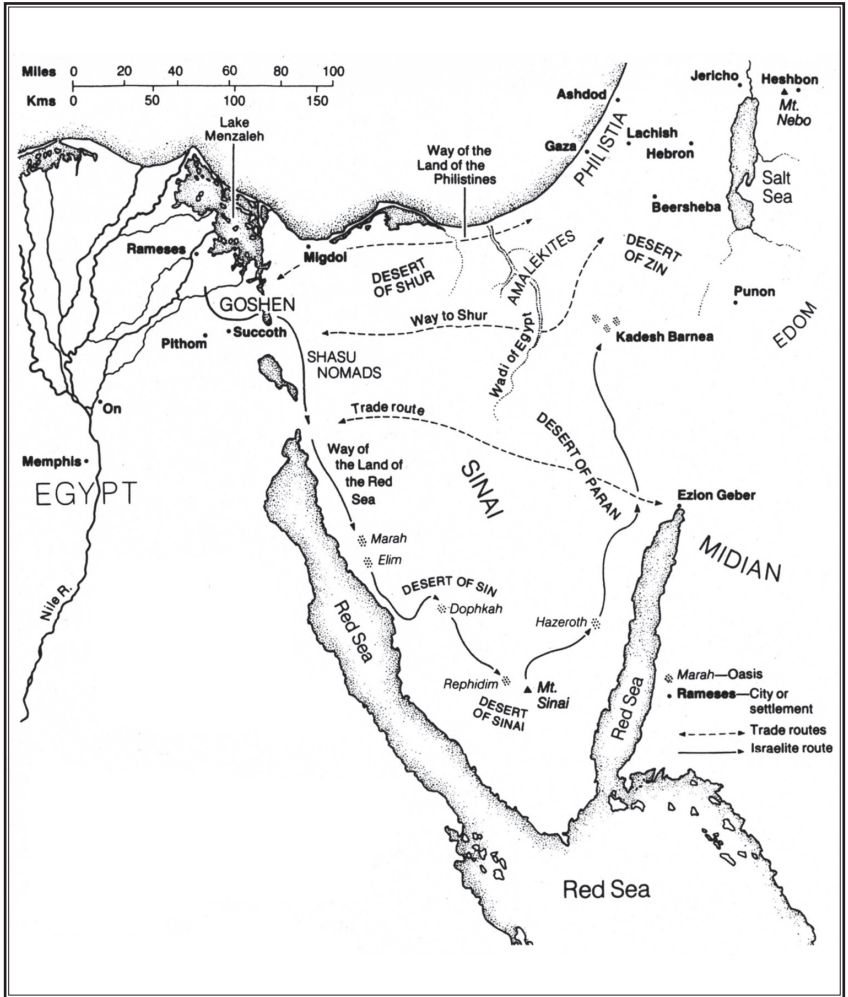
means “the Lord saves,” and in its Greek form is translated Jesus. Joshua was a great leader who faithfully and obediently delivered his people. But both Joshua and the book named after him point clearly ahead to Jesus Christ, the one who would finally and perfectly save his people, giving them an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade (1 Peter 1:3–5).

Joshua, then, stands at a pivotal point in Scripture, looking back to and confirming God’s word in the Pentateuch, but also looking far forward to the final fulfillment of all God’s good promises. Who wrote this masterful book? Scripture does not directly name the author of Joshua. The tradition of centuries holds that Joshua himself wrote most of it. Certainly passages like Joshua 24:25–26 show Joshua writing down records in the Book of the Law of God. Joshua’s authorship is confirmed by the fact that much of the story is told with vivid, seemingly firsthand detail and immediacy. It is generally agreed that careful editors finished and perhaps gave final, unifying touches to the book in ensuing years. In any case, what we can and must affirm is that this book offers a true, inspired account of the fulfillment of God’s promises to his people. God is the final author of this book, and he is the main character as well, for in Joshua it is God who acts to deliver and to settle his people according to his powerful word. “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass,” Joshua 21:45 tells us. This book is the account of a powerful, faithful, covenant-keeping God.

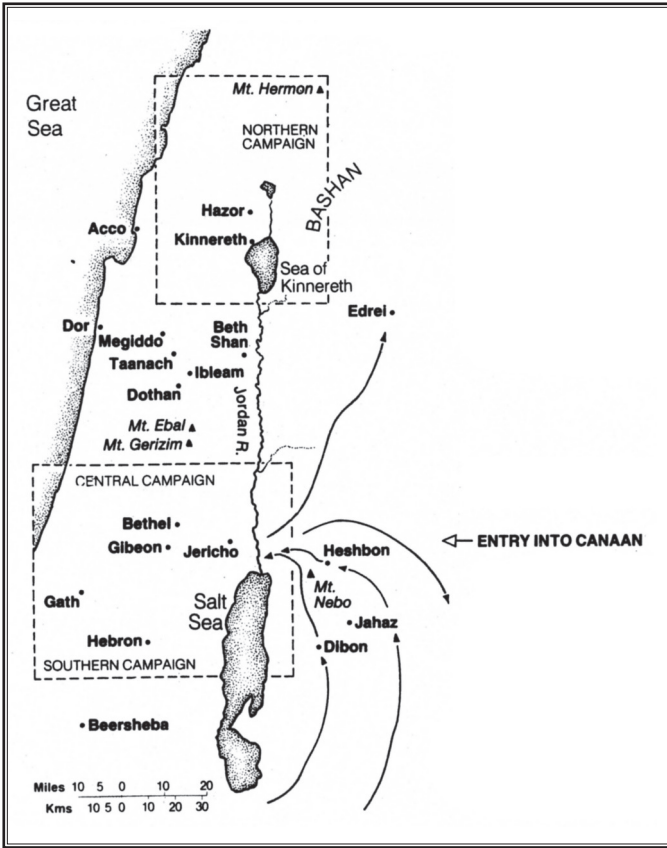
We can understand this book adequately just by following the narrative in Joshua itself. But we will understand it a great deal better with a bit of helpful context. The lessons in this study do refer to other books in the Bible, especially the five books that precede Joshua. Deuteronomy, for example, contains Moses’ final presentation of God’s law to the people; it is that law which Joshua aims to follow and live out, every step of the way. It will be helpful, if Bible study is new to you, to find the

table of contents in the Bible you are using and to be ready to use it to locate other biblical books. New Testament books will be referenced as well, as we look to find the final fulfillment of all God's good promises in the Lord Jesus Christ. Maps, too, are provided in order to make more vivid these stories of entering the land. At certain points, the lessons recommend looking at particular maps; throughout the study, however, you will benefit from regularly checking the maps to find the places mentioned in the stories.

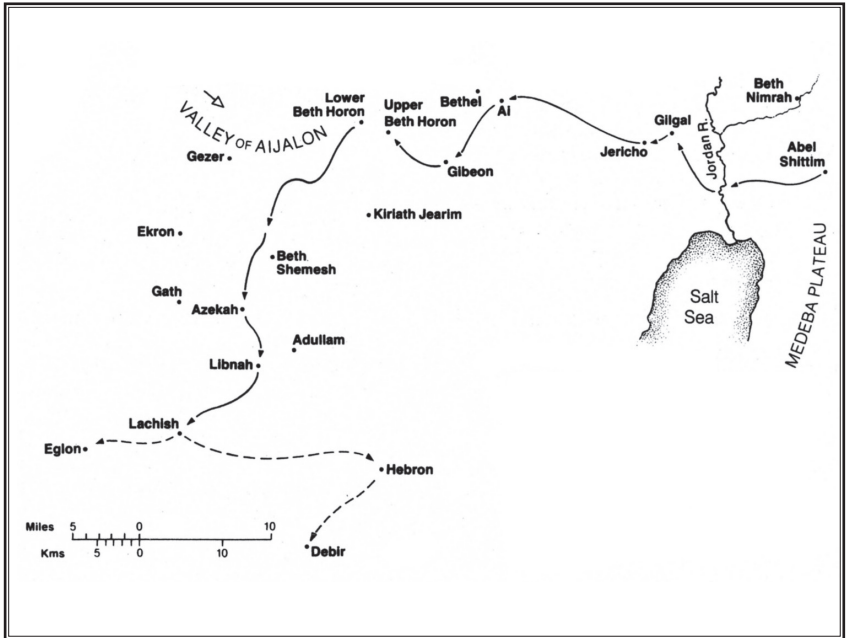
The point of such a study as this is to allow the Word of God to speak to us today. God's promises are just as good and true for God's people now as they were in Joshua's day. His Word has been completed and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and we have the privilege of holding the whole Bible in our hands and personally knowing the Lord to whom it all points. May we know the Lord Jesus Christ better through this study; may we learn more of what it means to trust and obey God's Word; may we find hope in all his good promises.



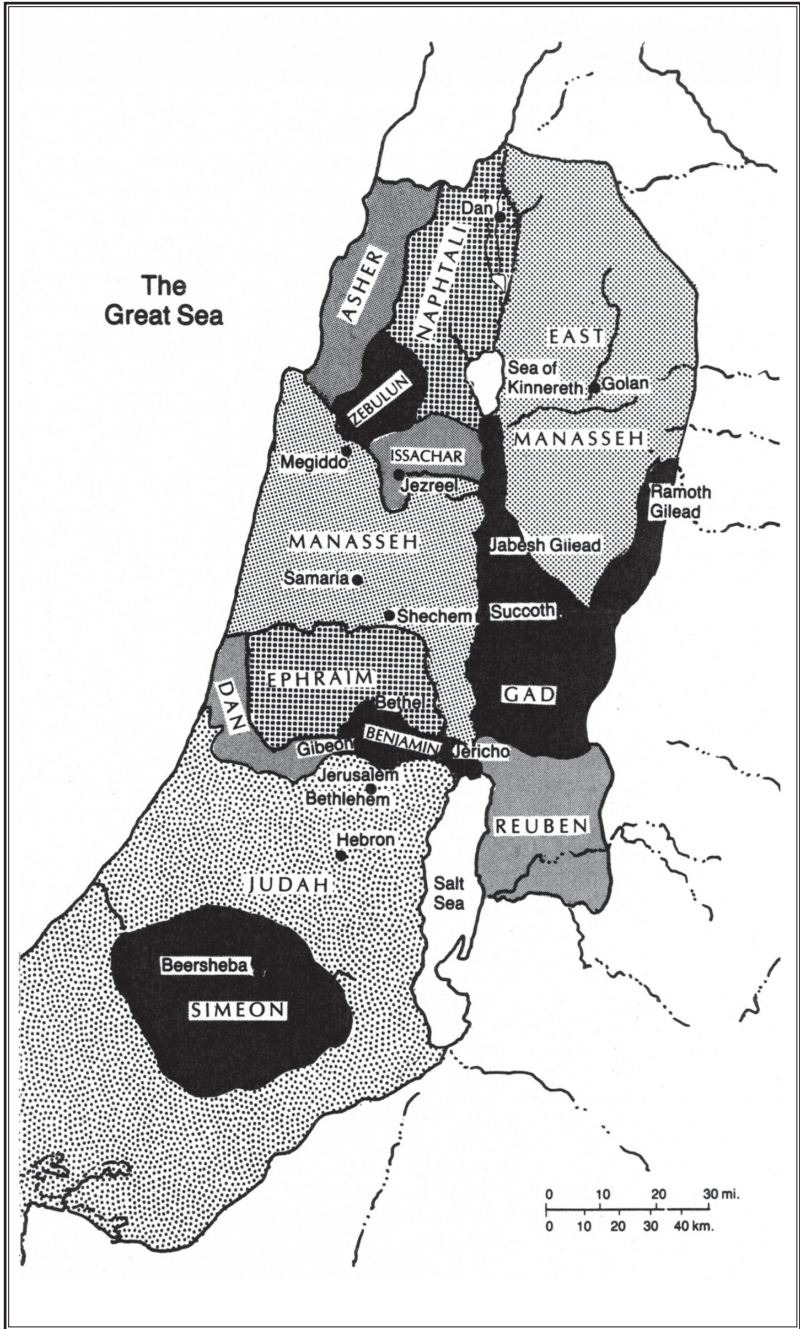
MAP 1: ROUTE OF THE EXODUS



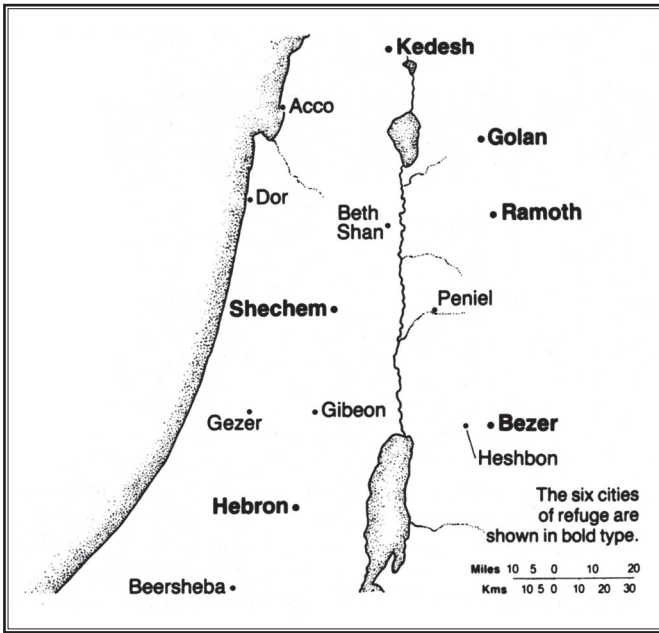
MAP 2: CONQUEST OF CANAAN



MAP 3: THE CENTRAL CAMPAIGN



MAP 4: LAND OF THE TWELVE TRIBES



MAP 5: CITIES OF REFUGE

Lesson 1 (Josh. 1)

GOD GIVES THE WORD

Opening the book of Joshua, we first hear God speaking to this newly commissioned leader of Israel. God's word is what he has given and what he continues to give his people as they stand on the brink of the promised land. We will do well to listen carefully as God speaks and as Joshua and the people respond; like them, may we grasp the power and the primary importance of God's Word. Because this book continues a much larger story, in this first lesson especially we will spend some time looking back to clarify the context in which Joshua comes to us.

DAY ONE—THE CONTINUING WORD (JOSH. 1:1–5)

- I. The opening verses remind us that this book continues a huge story in progress. Write down any phrases from Joshua 1:1–5 that refer to past events.

c. Genesis 26:2-3

d. Genesis 28:10-13

e. Exodus 3:7-8

f. Numbers 26:52-56

LESSON 1 (JOSH. 1)

g. Deuteronomy 1:6–8

h. Joshua 1:3–4

4. In what ways does this historical perspective expand your understanding of God?

LESSON 1 (JOSH. 1)

d. Numbers 11:24–30

e. Numbers 13:16

f. Numbers 14:6–9, 26–35

g. Numbers 27:12–23

2. In one sentence, summarize what Joshua had been privileged to learn about God through all these experiences.

3. Because it's all been written down in Scripture, we, too, are privileged to learn and believe these things about God. How might reading of Joshua's preparation experiences help prepare you for what you face today or in days to come?

DAY THREE—GOD SPEAKS COMMANDS
AND ENCOURAGEMENTS (JOSH. 1:1–9)

God had clearly been at work through centuries of preparation for this “Now therefore” of Joshua 1:2. So—now therefore, finally, it's time to “arise” and “go” (v. 2).

1. List all the commands given by God to Joshua in 1:1–9.

LESSON 1 (JOSH. 1)

2a. The “law” given by Moses (v. 7) and the “Book of the Law” (v. 8) refer to the Pentateuch, the inspired word written by Moses. What do you notice about the commands specifically relating to the written word of God (Josh. 1:7–8)?

b. How do these commands apply to us?

3. Each time God commands Joshua to “be strong and courageous,” he links the command to a different encouragement. What kinds of encouragements do you find in the following verses?

a. Joshua 1:6

b. Joshua 1:7

c. Joshua 1:9 (and v. 5)

4. How marvelous to see a God who clearly commands and personally encourages his people. What specifically encourages you in these verses so far? How or why?

4. What, specifically, challenges you as you see Joshua and then the people responding to the word given them from the Lord?

DAY FIVE—WE RESPOND,
ACCORDING TO THE WORD

1. Look back to Joshua 1:13, 15 and back further to Exodus 33:14. What word appears in each of these three verses to describe what God gives his people in the land?

2. Do people yearn for rest today? What kind of rest? How do they seek it?

LESSON 1 (JOSH. 1)

3. In Scripture, rest is both the blessing and the end of the journey that begins with redemption and follows the direction of God's law (see the introduction). According to the following verses, what can you say about the rest God offers to those who believe his word and put their faith in him?

a. Psalm 62:5–8

b. Matthew 11:28–29

c. Hebrews 3:16–4:11 (This is a beautiful but difficult passage; aim simply to get a central idea.)

d. Revelation 21:1–5

4. In believing and obeying the Word of the Lord, we find true rest, now and eternally, through our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ. Review again the life-and-death seriousness and the beautiful abandon of the people's response to the word of the Lord brought to them by Joshua (Josh. 1:16–18). Spend a few minutes in prayer, telling God your response to his Word.

Notes for Lesson 1