

The Covenant God

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The reason we're looking at this book in part because *we want to be a people of obedient faith because we have a shockingly good God of promise*. The next three weeks we will move through Joshua 1-2 focusing on the Presence of God, the People of God, and the Land, three themes which roughly align with our three core values as a church—gospel, community, and mission. As we do, I encourage you to ask, what am I attempting that requires the God of promise, that demands faith and prayer? Allow that to drive you to intimate prayer, fasting. Journal about it, send us stories, and we will celebrate what God is doing on Sunday, February 4. Today, let's take another look at the first nine verses to pick up some important things we missed: Joshua, Covenant, Prosperity.

Joshua

The Book of Joshua picks up where someone left off, "[After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant](#) (1-2). The book immediately preceding Joshua, Deuteronomy, records Moses leadership of Israel. Throughout that book Joshua peeks out. We find he becomes Moses assistant, putting himself in his service to learn as much as he can. He follows Moses into the presence of God on Sinai, and risks his life by spying out the land of Canaan. He becomes a kind of 2nd Moses. Like Moses he is filled with the Spirit, crosses a "Red Sea" the Jordan, leads God's people, and pays close attention to God's Law. Seeing Joshua's potential, Moses changes Joshua's original name from *Hoshea*, meaning salvation, to *Ye-shua*, the Lord saves. Joshua is a model, humble enough to follow and courageous enough to step out. Joshua watched Moses so closely he took on his best qualities and yet, he struggled with self-doubt. Early in his apprenticeship Moses told Israel to *encourage* Joshua: "[Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter \[the land\]. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it](#)" (Dt 1:38). Even leaders struggle with self-doubt and need encouragement. In Deut 31, Joshua is exhorted to "be strong and courageous" three times! If Joshua had it all together, Moses wouldn't have found it necessary to repeatedly encourage and exhort him. So while Joshua is an exemplary follower, he struggled to be a confident leader. [If you struggle with doubt you're not alone. God wants to work through you.](#) Despite his doubt, Joshua successfully led Israel across the Jordan, through military campaigns of considerable odds, and into God's Promised Land. How did he do it?! [He trusted in God's promises.](#) We find him trusting in promises God that made throughout Deuteronomy [[chart](#)]. [Every place your foot rests I have given to you, the boundaries of promised territory, no one will stand against you.](#) Promises so good, so true, so reliable God can say, "I [have given](#) to you." [The currency of God's promises are backed by the bank of his sovereign power. You see it's not faith in himself but faith in the sovereign promises of God that break spell of nagging self-doubt.](#) It's not enough to marvel at great leaders; God wants faith-filled followers. As my children grow, they face social rejection. I won't forget the night I knelt down by one of them asking about their day, and they broke down in tears sharing how they were bullied. Another child weeping over how one day a friend loves you to pieces, BFF, and the next they want nothing to do with you. After sympathizing with them, I tried to explain friends can be fickle and faith in them will fail you. But faith in God will not. He is the friend who never fails, the Father who never bullies, the one who always loves. When we tremble at

what our friends might think of our faith, contemplate what obedience may cost, it will help to remember the Friend who always keeps his promises: “By faith [Moses] considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward (Heb 11:26). Are you? Moses and Joshua beat self-doubt by faith in the promises of God. And all of the promises are yes and Amen in Christ Jesus. Will you look to the reward of Christ? Will you identify with him regardless of what society says?! He’s worth more than a thousand best friends. Trust in the promises of God.

Covenant

Next, covenant. The entire book of Joshua has covenant running in the background. Verse 8, [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.](#)” The Book of the Law is shorthand for God’s covenant with Israel. What is a covenant? A covenant creates a unique bond based on a combination of Law and Love (TK). In Exodus and Deuteronomy God establishes a relationship with Israel based on law and love. Out of his great, redemptive love he rescues Israel from Egypt. Then he establishes a law as a basis for maintaining the relationship. Curses or blessings follow depending on whether or not Israel responds keeps covenant. This kind of relationship is fading in our society. We kind of get one or the other but not the combination. Take *law/legal-based* relationships. We frequently sign contracts to enter into relationship with clients, credit card companies, and banks based on a set of laws or stipulations. If someone doesn’t hold up their end we sue. Legal but not intimate. We’re also familiar with what we consider *love-based* relationships. These relationships are based on *feeling* especially close to someone so we say, “I love you.” If this feeling fades, we often look for a way out of the relationship to find someone who will jumpstart the feeling again. Emotional but not durable. What we don’t like to do is **combine** law and love. We are all in on God’s loving rescue, but recoil at the idea of laws or commitments that govern the relationship. We don’t want to be tied down. But if God has rescued us from slavery and placed us in his redeeming love, shouldn’t we want to demonstrate commitment to him? Shouldn’t we desire to please and honor him? In fact, this kind of commitment is what makes a relationship truly great, for better or for worse, richer or poorer, till death do we part. We want people to be so committed to us that they will love us even when the feeling fades, to see it through. Lasting relationships are intimate and durable, committed and affectionate, a combination of law and love. If my wife had stuck only to feeling, she would have left me several times over. At times I’ve been awful. But she also possesses commitment. She made a vow, not just to me but to God, and 18 years later we have an incredibly rich relationship. When Joshua commits to being careful to do what is written in the Book of the Law, it’s with the understanding he’s in a relationship of *covenant love*. Intimacy and durability. It’s a love that can’t be earned but can be requited. Joshua along with all the other Israelites was rescued, receiving a love deserving of commitment. So he trusted in the God of promise and became strong and courageous. Wouldn’t it follow that the greater the love, the greater the commitment? It’s one thing to be rescued from Egypt, but quite another to rescue at your own expense, the expense of your Son. That’s great. What would it look like for you to requite God’s love this year? For the Book of the Law to not depart from your mouth, to meditate on it day and night, carefully study and *do it* (CS, FC, CG).

Prosperity

We've considered *Joshua*, a person whose self-doubt was overcome by faith in the promises of God. *Covenant*, the idea that God relates to us in a unique combination of law and love worthy of requital. And finally, *prosperity*. With each command to courageously study and obey God's word, there is a promise of success and prosperity, "[Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to 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](#)" (8). This promise of success is also related to the covenant. At the end of Deuteronomy, after the covenant commands, there's list of covenant blessings and curses. If Israel keeps covenant, they'll be blessed. If they break covenant, they will suffer curses, misery, death, and separation from God. The blessings, however, include a life of flourishing in the Land, which includes safety, provision, and the presence of God. Now some people take the promise of blessing and claim that if we have enough faith God will cause our health and wealth to increase. They put the material over the spiritual [slide]. But we've seen those who have the greatest faith in God, in Hebrews 11, often suffer temporary material loss but gain great spiritual reward. People of true faith put the spiritual over the material [slide]. As a result, they inherit more than the land—a renewed and just world (Rom 4.13). So God does care about our material well being, and all of the social and cultural order that goes with it, but he never puts it over our spiritual well-being. If he did, he'd break covenant, he'd make his gifts not himself the chief reward. But people of faith put God on top of their lives, allow him to order everything. They diligently obey God's Word not turning to the right or the left. Covenant relationship, its consequential blessings and curses, is the design of the universe. As children, we experience this reality all the time. As long as our parents stay married, keep covenant, we get to enjoy the blessing of family, go home on the holidays, and are not estranged from parental love. But when parents break covenant, transgress for better or for worse, distort or abandon marital love, we feel the curse—the drift of a parent, the instability of family, the loss of home. We can deny covenant intellectually, but experientially we know it is the design of the universe, how we are meant to flourish, law and love. Jesus, if you love me you'll obey me. The problem, of course, is that we're not good at keeping covenant. We abandon covenant love, put work or self or family on top of our lives, subordinate God, our true love. As a result, destined for the curses. But, there's a place in Deuteronomy that speaks of the ultimate curse, being sentenced to death and hung on a tree (21:23). The reason this is a curse isn't merely death; it's what's called post-mortem desecration of the remains. The body is left on the tree as disgrace, picked apart, symbolizes God's abandonment of the person. Israel does break covenant, but then an Israelite comes along who dies and is hung on a tree in our place, who suffers the ultimate curse—divine abandonment. His name is Jesus, and [he redeems us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us](#) (3:13-14) that we may receive covenant blessings: *spiritual then material*—the presence of God in a new heavens and earth. [chart] Jesus makes all the difference in the world, renewing covenant so God can dwell with us, and we can requite his love through Spirit-enabled obedience to his Word. Let's be a people of obedient faith because of a God of shockingly good promise, encourage one another to trust in his promises, enjoy his covenant love, and demonstrate his goodness to the world.