

# Writers for This Study Guide

**Vivian Conrad** wrote **lessons one through three and the Easter lesson** in this *Study Guide* and the accompanying teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide*. Since returning to the United States after twenty-four years as missionaries in Asia, Vivian and her husband John have served as staff musicians at Clear Fork Baptist Church in Weatherford, Texas. Vivian is the director of community ministries for Parker Baptist Association in Texas. She is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.A.Th.) and Dallas Baptist University (B.A. Christian Education). A mother of five, she and John enjoy eleven grandchildren.

**Bob DeFoor**, of Harrodsburg, Kentucky wrote **lessons four through six**. Dr. DeFoor served more than forty years as pastor of churches in Kentucky and Georgia, serving the last twenty-eight prior to retirement as pastor of Harrodsburg Baptist Church. Both Bob and his wife Sandy are native Georgians, and both are graduates of Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

**Don Raney** wrote **lessons seven through nine**. Dr. Raney is an adjunct professor at Wayland Baptist University and has also taught for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Texas Christian University, Mid-America Christian University, and Logsdon Seminary. He has served as pastor of Westlake Chapel in Graham, Texas and First Baptist Church in Petersburg, Texas. He is a graduate of the University of Alabama (B.A.) and received his Ph.D. in Old Testament from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Charles Glidewell** wrote **lessons ten through thirteen** in this *Study Guide* and the accompanying teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide*. He is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church, New London, New Hampshire. He received the Master of Divinity degree from Logsdon Seminary, Abilene, Texas.



# Choices and Consequences

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**JUDGES**


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# Introducing

## Choices and Consequences

### A STUDY OF JOSHUA & JUDGES

#### Approaching This Study of Joshua and Judges

Choices and their inevitable consequences. We just can't seem to get around them. Whether it's the food we choose to eat, the speed we choose to drive, the relationships we choose to enter, the people we choose to follow, or the habits we choose to form; we all live with the positive and negative consequences of our choices. Fortunately, God has provided us an "owner's manual" that can serve to guide our choices. The Bible contains stories of real people, their choices, and the resulting consequences.

The Books of Joshua and Judges are full of such stories. Stories of courageous faith and miraculous victories as well as stories of deception and rebellion that spiraled into defeat and chaos. In this study we will encounter heroes and heroines (some expected and some unexpected) as well as examples of what can happen when God is ignored and people choose to "do as they see fit."

The Bible is full of principles that can teach us how to make God-honoring choices. Be encouraged in your pursuit to choose wisely. "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" (Joshua 1:9).



# Introducing

## Joshua

### A NEW NATION COMES HOME

The Book of Joshua opens with the Lord instructing Joshua after the death of Moses that Joshua should lead Israel to cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1). The book concludes with Joshua leading the people in a grand covenant renewal worship ceremony in the Promised Land. In between these two events, chapters 1—12 describe the lightning-like military campaign by which Israel's army conquered—by and large—much of the Promised Land. Then chapters 13—22 tell of how the land on both sides of the Jordan was apportioned to the tribes of Israel. The book concludes with two chapters, Joshua 23—24, in which Joshua challenged the people to follow God.

The lessons in this study can be understood on their own. However, we can understand them better if we recognize that the Book of Joshua fits into two larger categories of Old Testament books.

### Joshua in the Former Prophets

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First, the book is the first book in a set of books that the Hebrews called *the prophets*. Jewish leaders saw the Hebrew Bible as having three major divisions—the law, the prophets, and the writings. The law consists of the first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The prophets consists of the former prophets and the latter prophets. The latter prophets are what we call the prophetic books—books

like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest of the prophets. The former prophets include what we sometimes call the historical books—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. The former prophets were named “former” simply because they were placed before the latter prophets in the Hebrew Bible.

Israel considered that the books in both the former and the latter prophets were needed to understand the events that had happened during the long stretch of history they cover—about 700 years.

### **Joshua and Deuteronomic History**

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A second category into which the Book of Joshua fits focuses even more on Israel’s need to understand its history. As thoughtful Hebrew worshippers of God looked back on their history, they struggled to understand why bad things had happened to their nation. The Northern Kingdom had been destroyed in 722 B.C. The Southern Kingdom would be destroyed and taken into Exile in 587 B.C. When the last of the former prophets was written, the Southern Kingdom had already been destroyed, in fact (see 2 Kings 25:1–12).

Devout followers of God looked around at the tragedy they saw and asked what had gone wrong with the dream. They found the answer as they looked back on the nation’s history. Think of them as putting on a pair of eyeglasses to improve their vision. These eyeglasses enabled them to see that the reason the dream had turned into a nightmare was that the people had disobeyed God. These eyeglasses were the ideas that we find in the Book of Deuteronomy. The major ideas that gave clarity to the vision of these devout Hebrews were these: *Sin brings punishment; obedience brings blessing.*

These complementary ideas guided these ancient Hebrew writers, inspired by God, as they wrote what we call deuteronomic history. The former prophets—the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings—consider the history of Israel from this theological point of view. The focus is not simply on events but on the meaning of those events. The focus is particularly on what those events revealed about God’s call and Israel’s response down through the centuries.

## Learning from the Book of Joshua

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Therefore, as you study the Book of Joshua, keep in mind that one major reason the book contains the particular event being studied is that it helped Israel understand how God had led them and how they had responded. The record of God’s call to Israel rings loud and clear in the Book of Joshua.

Sometimes the Hebrews obeyed, but often they did not. When Israel obeyed, God blessed them. When they did not, God punished them.

Let us allow the Book of Joshua to remind us also of God’s call to commitment. What Paul wrote of other Old Testament events also speaks to these events: “These things . . . were written down as warnings for us” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Learning these instructions is important to us, too, even though they come from a different culture and a different time and even though we will find we must struggle to reconcile some of the events with what we understand of Jesus. The lesson passages have been selected to help us understand the book’s message and consider how it applies to our lives.

### JOSHUA: A NEW NATION COMES HOME

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Lesson 1	Courage in the Midst of Change	Joshua 1
Lesson 2	An Unlikely Heroine	Joshua 2
Lesson 3	All In!	Joshua 3:5–17; 4:14–24
Lesson 4	Self-reliance and Secret Sin	Joshua 7
Lesson 5	A Foolish Assumption	Joshua 9
Lesson 6	Concrete Commitment	Joshua 23; 24:14–15

## Additional Resources for Studying the *Book of Joshua*<sup>1</sup>

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John Bright and Joseph R. Sizoo. “The Book of Joshua.” *The Interpreter’s Bible*. Volume II. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1952.

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Richard D. Nelson. *Joshua*. The Old Testament Library. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997.

## Notes

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1. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.

# lesson **1**

## Courage in the Midst of Change

### MAIN IDEA

God's presence provides us courage in the midst of change.

### QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How can we find and demonstrate courage in the midst of change?

### STUDY AIM

To trust God's presence and his word during times of change

### QUICK READ

After Moses died, God appointed Joshua as Israel's new leader and charged him with taking the people into Canaan. Though facing conflict, Joshua was reassured by God's promises.



## Introduction

When my husband and I first felt God's call to foreign missions, we were the parents of a newborn, a toddler, and two preschoolers. The thought of uprooting our young children and leaving the protective circle of family and friends for the dangers of international residence was terrifying. After many weeks of ardent prayer, we reached a point of submission. God helped us to understand that the center of his will is the safest place on earth.

Joshua faced a daunting life change. For decades, he had served Moses as a loyal assistant. At Moses's side, Joshua personally experienced God's glory, power, and sovereignty. But upon the death of Moses, Joshua suddenly found himself thrust into the role of Israel's leader. It was a huge responsibility for a man who had spent the first half of his life as a slave. God's promise of presence and help ultimately resolved any doubts Joshua had.<sup>1</sup>

## Joshua 1

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: <sup>2</sup> "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. <sup>3</sup> I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.”

**10** So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: **11** “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 giving you for your own.’”

**12** But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, **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.’ **14** Your wives, your children and your livestock 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. You are to help your brothers **15** 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 and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

**16** Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. **17** Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. **18** Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”

## A Daunting Task (1:1–4)

God uniquely prepared Moses for the job of leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Growing up as a member of Pharaoh’s royal household (Exodus 2:10), Moses had a keen grasp of Egyptian culture and court protocol. In his speech before the New Testament Sanhedrin, Stephen said, “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action” (Acts 7:22). Moses’ formal education included training in administration, public speaking, military strategy, and even hand-to-hand combat. Moses was a groomed leader.

Joshua, on the other hand, was raised in slavery. Slaves had no place on Egypt's social ladder— they lived below the bottom rung. They had no rights, no voice, and no choice. Generally speaking, a slave fell into the same category as cattle or other livestock. Four centuries of slavery had branded fear, uncertainty, and distrust in the hearts of those Israelites who followed Moses into freedom.

Where Moses was simply unwilling to accept the task of leadership when God first called him (Exod. 4:13), Joshua must surely have felt overwhelmed by such an appointment. With no formal training in administration or warfare, Joshua might have balked at the thought of this great responsibility.

In Joshua's case, though, the job was even bigger than merely leading the people. He was given the additional task of securing the Promised Land. The Canaanite armies the Israelites would encounter were trained and armed. Joshua could anticipate fierce resistance from every people group in the region. It was an intimidating prospect.

### **God's Assurance (1:5–9)**

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God followed his charge to Joshua with immediate assurance. Divine promises accompanied every command given to Joshua.

God's instructions were specific:

- Cross the Jordan River and take the land (1:2)
- Be strong and courageous; lead the people (1:6)
- Be strong and courageous; obey God's law (1:7)
- Learn, internalize and follow the law (1:8)
- Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid or discouraged (1:9)

How would Joshua be able to accomplish these directives? God's presence would enable and empower him:

- I will give you the land (1:3)
- No one will stand against you; I will be with you; I will never leave nor forsake you (1:5)
- I will be with you wherever you go (1:9)

In his own eyes, Joshua may have seemed an unlikely candidate for the job of leadership. But God had prepared Joshua in unique ways, just as he had prepared Moses before him. Joshua had experienced God's power and deliverance during the Exodus from Egypt (Exod. 7–14). During every major event throughout forty years of wilderness wanderings, Joshua had witnessed God's glory, might, and judgment as an aide at Moses' side (Exod. 24:13, 33:11, Numbers 11:28). God had given Joshua victory in battle (Exod. 17:8–13). Joshua was on the mountain when God gave Moses the law (Exod. 24:13). He witnessed God's punishment of sin (Exod. 32:35, Num. 16). Joshua had seen God provide food and water for his people in the wilderness (Exod. 15:25; 16; 17:6).

More than anything else, the time Joshua spent alone with God enabled him to receive, trust, and follow God's commands. Joshua stayed for hours and days at a time inside the Tent of Meeting upon which God's presence rested (Exod. 33:9–11). Joshua's personal devotion and communion with God had a huge impact on his faith. Because God was close and real to him, Joshua knew he could trust God's word. The strength and courage God commanded Joshua to maintain would flow directly from God's empowering presence.

### **God Keeps His Promises**

Although Israel's conquest of Canaan remained incomplete during Joshua's lifetime (Joshua 13:1–7), God's promise did not fail. The Promised Land dimensions, outlined in Joshua 1:4, were fully realized when King David captured the Aramean state of Zobah, which bordered the Euphrates River (2 Samuel 8:3; 1 Kings 4:21, 24; 2 Chronicles 9:26). Later, the account in 1 Kings 4:21 reports "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the [Euphrates] River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt." Eventually, Israel's sin resulted in the loss of their land to foreign invaders. But his people's disobedience would not invalidate God's word. God's faithfulness to us is not conditional upon our faithfulness to him. He can be trusted to keep his promises in every situation. Even if we do not personally see a particular promise fulfilled, we can rest assured that God is at work and will always keep his word.

God's assurance that "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Josh. 1:5b) must have been especially comforting to Joshua. God led, helped, and empowered Moses. He revealed himself to Moses, answered his prayers, and was a constant presence. God was promising to do the same for Joshua. Throughout his whole life, there would not be a single moment in which Joshua would have to wonder if God were near.

### The People's Response (1:10–18)

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Joshua lost no time putting his faith into action. Immediately upon receiving God's commission, Joshua transmitted instructions to his people. The appointment of Israel's officers, summoned by Joshua in verse 10, originated with Moses. Moses described the event in Deuteronomy 1:15, saying, "So I took the leading men of your tribes, wise and respected men, and appointed them to have authority over you—as commanders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens and as tribal officials" (see also Deut. 16:18 and 20:5–9). Joshua charged these men with the task of preparation for the river crossing.

During four decades of wilderness wanderings, the Israelites had survived on the manna and quail God provided each day (Exod. 16:35). When they entered their new home in Canaan, though, the manna and quail supply would end. The land itself would support them. Until they could begin gathering provisions from their new territory, the Israelites would have to carry a food supply with them. (The Hebrew word [*dseydah*] Joshua used in commanding his officers to gather provisions can be literally translated "food," broadly used for grain or vegetables but most commonly denoting various meats. The same word is used in Genesis 27 to describe the meat that Esau prepared for his father.)

It is possible that the three-day period Joshua allowed for preparation (Josh. 1:11) had some ceremonial significance. A three-day pattern often accompanied biblical events (Exod. 3:18; 10:22–23; 19:10–11; Num. 10:33; Nehemiah 2:11; Esther 4:16; Jonah 1:17). In these and other accounts, the three-day motif carried various connotations of completeness in spiritual preparation, built expectation for what was next to come, or signaled the beginning of an important development. Whether there was any spiritual

symbolism connected to it, Joshua's decision to wait and prepare showed an attitude of practical restraint. It also allowed time for the spies he had deployed to return and report their findings (Josh. 2:1, 15–24).

Each Hebrew tribe was expected to participate in the conquest of Canaan. When God instructed Moses and Eleazar to conduct a national census in Numbers 26, they learned that Israel had 601,730 men who were eligible to fight. They all would cross the Jordan River and help rout the foreign people groups who had settled in the region. In the end, every family would receive a land allotment to begin building a new life.

The Israelite tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were predominantly shepherds. Impressed by the fertile pastures east of the Jordan River, they had asked and received permission to settle there (Num. 32, Deut. 3:12–21). Although their wives, children, and herds would stay behind when Israel crossed into Canaan, Joshua reminded those tribes of their promise to deploy their fighting men to support Israel's army.

Forty years earlier, Joshua and Caleb had joined Moses in trying to persuade the Israelites to trust God's promise. At that time, the nation of former slaves balked at the idea of battle, paralyzed by fear (Numbers 14).

Now those people were gone, having died in the wilderness. But their children had grown up experiencing the power and presence of God in the pillars of cloud and fire that guided them (Exod. 13:21–22; Num. 14:14), in the Tent of Meeting where God tabernacled with them (Exod. 40:35), and in God's daily provision of food and water (Exod. 16). God's glory and faithfulness were a fact of life for this new generation. Moses and Joshua were the only leaders they had known, and they trusted and respected them.

## God Equips Those He Calls

God never calls anyone to service without enabling and empowering him or her to accomplish the task. When some Christians feel God's call to a specific work, they might say things like: "I don't feel qualified." "That job is too big for me." "I'm not sure I can do it." "Someone else could do it better." Which of God's promises to Joshua might wary individuals claim?

The response of these second-generation Israelites reflected their faith in God and in the new leader he appointed over them. With whole-hearted obedience they declared, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go” (Josh. 1:16). On their very lives, they pledged full obedience to Joshua, acknowledging that God had endowed him with the same authority as Moses (1:17–18). As a result, Joshua’s leadership would be marked by national faithfulness unprecedented in Israel’s history (Josh. 24:31, Judges 2:7).

In a fitting benediction to this passage, the Israelites themselves echoed God’s command when they urged Joshua to be strong and courageous (1:18). It was an expression of their confidence both in his ability to stand firm and also in God’s empowering presence.

### **Applying This Lesson to Life**

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When change harshly intrudes on daily life, some people feel acutely unprepared. It is not uncommon for individuals, even Christians, to panic when a job loss occurs, a relationship shatters, an illness disables routines, or an unanticipated ministry call reroutes the future.

God’s exhortations to Joshua carry a message for today’s Christians: Our strength and confidence come from Christ’s presence and power in our lives. His indwelling Spirit can dispel fear and discouragement. His word guides us and gives us wisdom for holy living. Just as God assured Joshua, Jesus promises us, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will be with you wherever you go.” As believers, trusting Christ’s promise will sustain us through any situation, and relying on his power will enable us to accomplish whatever he requires.



