

Recipe for Success



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 18:15–22; Joshua 1; Heb. 6:17, 18; Eph. 6:10–18; Ps. 1:1–3; Rom. 3:31.*

MemoryText: “ ‘Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go’ ” (*Joshua 1:7, NKJV*).

Benjamin Zander, musical director of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, taught a music interpretation class. He observed the students' anxiety as they faced the evaluation of their performance. In order to put the students at ease and to open them up to their full potential, he announced on the first day of the class that everybody would get an “A.” This “A” was not an expectation to live up to “but a possibility to live into.” The only requirement was for the students to write a letter within the first two weeks of the semester but dated at the end of the class. The letter explained why they deserved the high grade.

The book of Joshua is about new possibilities. Moses, who had dominated 40 years of Israel's history, belonged in the past. The Exodus from Egypt and the wanderings in the wilderness, tragically marked by rebellion and stubbornness, had ended. A new generation, willing to obey God, was ready to enter the Promised Land, not as an expectation to live up to but as a possibility to live into.

Let's study the way God opened up a new chapter in Israel's life and how He can do the same in ours, as well.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 4.*

A New Moses

Read Deuteronomy 18:15–22 and Joshua 1:1–9. Why is it significant that the book of Joshua starts by echoing a promise related to what would happen after the death of Moses?

Though Moses had died and a new leader, Joshua, had been appointed by God, there are parallels between them. Both men had been told by God that they would lead their people into the land promised to their fathers. As the Lord said to Joshua: “ ‘Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses’ ” (*Josh. 1:3, NKJV*). Joshua would finish the work that had originally been given to Moses. He was, really, a new Moses.

Read Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:6, 30, 38; Numbers 27:18; Numbers 32:12; Deuteronomy 1:38; Deuteronomy 31:23; and Deuteronomy 34:9. What do these texts tell us about Joshua?

At this stage, the promise that God would “raise up” a prophet similar to Moses (*Deut. 18:15*) is only a possibility rather than an accomplished reality. The opening words of the book of Joshua remind the reader of this promise and, at the same time, create an expectation to see it fulfilled.

Though dead, Moses still dominates the first chapter. His name is mentioned ten times, Joshua’s only four. Moses is called “the servant of the LORD” while Joshua is referred to as “Moses’ assistant” (*Josh. 1:1, NKJV*). It will take a lifetime of faithful service and obedience for Joshua to receive the title “servant of the LORD” (*Josh. 24:29, NKJV*).

Even if the first chapter of Joshua captures a transition between two great leaders of Israel, the most important character is the Lord Himself, whose words open the book and whose guidance dominates it. There are no questions as to who is the real leader of Israel.

Throughout the ages, God has called men and women to lead His people. Why is it crucial to remember who the true, invisible leader of the church is?

Cross! Take! Divide! Serve!

Read Joshua 1. What can we learn about the structure of the book from this opening chapter?

The first chapter of Joshua serves as an introduction to the whole book. It comprises four speeches that correspond to the four main sections of the book: crossing (*Josh. 1:2–9*); conquering (*Josh. 1:10, 11*); dividing the land (*Josh. 1:12–15*); and serving by obedience to the law (*Josh. 1:16–18*).

The book of Joshua can be seen as a series of divine initiatives. In each initiative, God gives a specific task to Joshua related to the conquest of Canaan, and each one is acknowledged later in the book after its successful completion.

In the end, the promises of God concerning the occupation of the land would be fulfilled. From then on, the responsibility of keeping the land lay in the hands of the Israelites and could be accomplished only by true faith and by the obedience that such faith always engenders.

God's initiatives, expressed by the three verbs—"cross," "take," and "divide"—receive a proper answer in the people's obedience, which derives from the final initiative: service.

Again, the book of Joshua has four major sections, each characterized by a specific concept expressed through the dominating presence of a Hebrew word:

1. Cross (*Josh. 1:1–5:12*)
2. Take (*Josh. 5:13–12:24*)
3. Divide (*Josh. 13:1–21:45*)
4. Service (*Josh. 22:1–24:33*)

Thus, the structure of the book itself conveys its main message: God's initiatives are not accomplished automatically. Instead, they require the faithful response of His people. That is, with all that God has done for us—including all that He has done for us that we cannot do for ourselves—we are then called to do what we can do for ourselves, which is to obey what God commands us to do. This is how it has always been in all of sacred history, and it remains so today. For example, the depiction of God's end-time people in Revelation 14:12 conveys the same idea: faith in what God has done for us, which leads to obedience.

Think about some of the promises of God's Word that are most precious to you. What kind of response do they require on your part in order for them to become reality?

Heirs of Promises

In Joshua 1:2, 3, the Lord tells Joshua that He is giving the land to them. On the other hand, He said that He has already given it. What does that mean?

The land was a gift from the Lord, who was the real Owner. In Joshua 1:2, 3, two different forms of the verb “to give” are used, reflecting two significant aspects of inheriting the land. The first form expresses the process of giving the land. Only the Transjordan territories had been occupied by Israel. Most of the Promised Land had yet to be taken.

In Joshua 1:3 the verb is used in its perfect form, giving the impression that the land had already been given to them. When God is the subject of such actions, the form is called “the prophetic perfect.” And that’s because what He promises in His Word is an assured fact that can be trusted as present reality.

The pronouns in verse 3, “you” and “your,” are plurals, so the promise is given not only to Joshua but to the entire people of Israel. The reference to the promise given to Moses conveys the continuity of God’s cause.

Also, the word *kol*, “all,” “every,” is repeated numerous times in the first chapter. The pervasive presence of this noun expresses the totality and integrity that is crucial to attaining the objective set before Joshua. There has to be a perfect alignment between God, Joshua, and the people of Israel in order to assure success in the forthcoming conquest of the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 1:4–6 and Hebrews 6:17, 18. At that moment, the Promised Land was exactly that, a promise. Yet, God calls it an inheritance. What does it mean to be the heirs of God’s promises?

There is nothing magical about the promises of God. They don’t have the power in and of themselves to secure their own fulfillment. The guarantee that they will come true lies in the presence of God, who says: “ ‘I will be with you.’ ” Indeed, the presence of the Lord was crucial for the survival of the Israelites. Without it, they would be only one among many nations, with no special call, identity, or mission (*Exod. 33:12–16*). The presence of the Lord was everything Joshua needed to succeed.

Nothing today has changed, which is why we have the promise of Jesus found in Matthew 28:20.

Be Strong!

Read Joshua 1:7–9. Why did the Lord need to emphasize twice to Joshua that he had to be strong and courageous?

The task set before Joshua seemed to involve overwhelming challenges. The walls of the Canaanite cities appeared unassailable, and the population of the land was trained for battle. In contrast, the Israelites, simple nomads, did not possess even the most primitive war machines to take on the fortified walls. History tells us that not even Egypt, the superpower of those times, was able to gain a steady foothold in Canaan.

Yet, the summons to be strong and courageous is not related here only to battle morale or to war strategies. Courage and strength are needed to stay faithful to the Torah and its specific requirements, which defined Israel's covenant with Yahweh.

Read Ephesians 6:10–18. Although we are not required today to participate in military combat, how can we apply the words of encouragement given to Joshua in our daily spiritual struggles?

Today, in fulfilling the mission entrusted to them by Christ, Christians face similar challenges to those of Joshua; that is, they are required to wage war against their own sinful tendencies, against the principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the hosts of wickedness. Like Joshua, they also have the assuring promise of Christ's presence: " 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age' " (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*). As the supporting presence of the Lord was enough to expel the fears of Joshua, so it should be sufficient to banish our doubts and anxieties today.

The challenge for us is to know the Lord well enough to trust in Him and His promises to us. And that is why, more than anything else, we need that personal relationship with Him.

The crucial question for us today is not different from that faced by Joshua. How can we stay true to what the Word of God says, even when it is unpopular or inconvenient to do so?

Prosperous and Successful

Read Joshua 1:7–9 together with Genesis 24:40, Isaiah 53:10, and Psalm 1:1–3. Based on these texts, what does it mean to be prosperous and successful?

The Hebrew term *tsalakh*, “prosperous” (*Josh. 1:8*), implies the satisfactory accomplishment of what was planned, or a state of favorable circumstances.

The term *sakal*, “to be wise” (*Josh. 1:8*), can be translated as “prosper” or “be successful.” But it also can mean “to be prudent,” or “to act wisely.” It occurs frequently in Job, Proverbs, and Psalms, where the notion of success is closely tied to acting wisely by fearing God and obeying His Word.

According to this insight, success is not necessarily defined as material prosperity, though it does not exclude it. Success has to be seen as a state of harmony with the spiritual values and principles that lie at the foundation of God’s created world and that are expressed in His law.

Indeed, trust in God’s promises, especially the promise of salvation by faith alone and obedience to His law, are not opposed to each other. They represent two sides of the same coin.

Read Romans 3:31. What does this text say about the relationship between law and faith?

To pit faith in the atoning and sacrificial death of Jesus in our behalf against obedience to God’s law is to set up a false and dangerous dichotomy. Law and grace always go together. Only a superficial understanding of the role of the law can lead to perceiving “law” and “grace” as opposites.

The writers of the Old Testament had a high regard for the law and considered it a source of delight (*Ps. 1:2; Ps. 119:70, 77, 174*). Rightly regarded and used, the law will lead to a deeper understanding of one’s own sinfulness (*Rom. 7:7*) and the need for Christ’s righteousness (*Gal. 3:24*).

However much by God’s grace you seek to keep His law, how has your own experience shown you your need for Christ’s covering righteousness?

FurtherThought: Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pp. 481, 482, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Entering the Promised Land,” p. 175, in *The Story of Redemption*.

“In His promises and warnings, Jesus means me. God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that I by believing in Him, might not perish, but have everlasting life. The experiences related in God’s word are to be my experiences. Prayer and promise, precept and warning, are mine. . . . As faith thus receives and assimilates the principles of truth, they become a part of the being and the motive power of the life. The word of God, received into the soul, molds the thoughts, and enters into the development of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 390, 391.

“There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 19.

Discussion Questions:

- ① However different the circumstances of Joshua’s life and experiences are from ours, what spiritual principles can we take away from his life that we can apply to our own? Why, though, must we always keep context in mind when seeking to draw analogies?
- ② Discuss the relationship between God’s promises and our obedience to Him. How do they complement one another? What are the dangers of overemphasizing one at the expense of the other? That is, what danger comes from pushing the law at the expense of eclipsing grace? Or of pushing grace at the expense of eclipsing the law?
- ③ Based on this week’s lesson, how would you define success from a biblical perspective? What place does prosperity have in a Christian definition of success?
- ④ Imagine how Joshua might have felt, following Moses. What promise did God give to him that surely sustained him (see *Josh. 1:5*) in his great responsibilities?

Worshiping a Tree

Sudhakar immediately noticed the tree when he arrived on the Bangkok Noi campus to work as a Global Mission pioneer in Thailand. Colorful ribbons were tied to the tree. Small images of stone and wood encircled it. Bananas, apples, and burning incense sticks were placed in its trunk. Sudhakar learned that townspeople believed that an ancestral spirit lived in the tree. So, they worshiped the tree according to their traditions.

Sudhakar was confused because the spirit tree stood on land that a kind-hearted woman had donated to a Seventh-day Adventist mission hospital. He asked the pastor why the community people came onto the campus to worship the spirit tree. The pastor explained that townspeople had been worshiping the spirit tree long before the land was donated to the church.

Sudhakar understood the cultural sensitivities, and he thought, "If the ribbons and other objects suddenly disappeared, townspeople might overreact."

But he was determined to do something. With much prayer to the God of heaven, he befriended the community leader and other townspeople. He invited them to cooking courses, English classes, and worship services in a new center of influence that he was organizing in a building near the spirit tree. Then, slowly, he started cleaning up the tree, removing the ribbons, the images, the bananas, the apples, and the incense sticks. It took about a week.

No one in the community said a word to him about the spirit tree.

Then one day, Sudhakar had an unexpected encounter. As he passed by the tree after a class in the center of influence, a voice called out to him by name. The voice offered wealth if Sudhakar would only obey.

But Sudhakar was not tempted. He didn't want anything from the spirit. He wanted the spirit to go. "I command you in Jesus' name to leave this campus and never come back," he said.

Three days later, Sudhakar noticed that the tree was dying. All of its leaves fell to the ground. Four weeks later, only a dry, dead tree remained. Sudhakar took an ax and chopped it down.

Townspeople were astounded as word spread around town about what had happened. Large numbers flocked to the center of influence. Sudhakar taught the townspeople to pray to the only true God. Seven people began to attend Sabbath worship services in the center of influence and later were baptized.



Pray for Global Mission pioneers who, like Sudhakar, have accepted the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to unreached people groups around the world. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers: bit.ly/GMPioneers