

People of Promise
Joshua
607 words

A Conditional Promise

Joshua:
Learning the Meaning of “If”

Joshua 1:8

When Moses went back to Egypt to lead the Hebrew slaves out of captivity, he essentially had one tool in his “Deliverer” tool kit: a promise of the presence of God. “I will be with you” (Exodus 3:12) might not have sounded like much, but it was all Moses needed (and it’s a good thing, because it’s all there was). But when Moses’ protégé, Joshua, got ready to take the Israelites into their new homeland, he was given two new things: a book and a different kind of promise.

To be sure, Joshua also received the same promise that God gave Moses--an unconditional promise of God’s presence: “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Josh. 1:5). An unconditional promise from God means he will act (“I will . . .”)--period. But then God spoke further to Joshua and gave him a different kind of promise--a conditional one (“If you . . . , then I will . . .”).

Are you familiar with conditional promises? You entered into them as a child (“If you let me ride your new bike, I’ll be your best friend.”), and have as an adult as well. An apartment lease, for instance, is a conditional promise. “IF you abide by the terms of this lease,” the contract (promise) says, “THEN you can live here for the next 12 months.” What Joshua received from God, in addition to an unconditional promise, was a conditional one. And the condition Joshua had to fulfill was something that didn’t even exist when Moses was called to be Israel’s deliverer: Adherence to the words of God’s book.

When Moses led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, their first stop was Mount Sinai where God’s law was revealed in the Ten Commandments. Additional laws and stipulations were given through Moses until an entire covenant existed between God and his chosen people. By the time Joshua was chosen to lead Israel into the promised land, Moses had recorded this covenant and given it to Joshua as a guide for the nation’s future. In Deuteronomy 28:1 we have a summary of the covenant’s condition: “If you fully obey the LORD your God . . . ,” and in 28:15 the negative summary, “However, if you do not obey the LORD your God” It was this conditional covenant (promise) that Joshua was reminded of when he became Israel’s leader: “[IF you] 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” (Josh. 1:8). God would never leave him (1:5), but prosperity and success might. God’s promise of success was conditioned upon Joshua’s careful following of God’s Book of the Law.

Sometimes we forget that God gives us conditional promises like he gave Joshua.

For instance, Jesus said, “IF you remain in me and my words remain in you, [THEN] ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7; cf. Phil. 4:6-7). The next time you are seeking success in an endeavor, think of Joshua:

- Have I discerned between God’s unconditional and conditional promises?
- Are there any conditions I need to meet in order to receive God’s blessing?
- What should I expect from God if I don’t meet his conditions?

We have even more of God’s book (his promises) than Joshua did. When our life depends on a promise, we must make sure the conditions, if any, have been met.