

God Keeps His Promises!



SABBATH—DECEMBER 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Joshua 21:43–45; Joshua 23:1–5; Joshua 23:6–8, 12, 13; Joshua 23:15, 16; Joshua 23:11.

MEMORY VERSE: “The LORD kept every promise that he made to the Israelites. There were no promises that he failed to keep. Every promise came true” (Joshua 21:45, ERV).

WHEN JOHN F. KENNEDY became the president of the USA, on January 20, 1961, he spoke to the country. Kennedy's talk was only 1,366 words long. But his words became famous. Kennedy encouraged Americans to serve their country first and not ask the country to serve them. Kennedy said, “Our reward shall be knowing that we do right. History will be our judge. History will show that we chose to do the right thing. So, let us be leaders in this land that we love. Let us ask God for His blessing and His help. While we are here on this earth, God's work must become our work.”

When Joshua was old, he knew he was going to die soon. So, he decided to talk to the leaders of Israel and the people (Joshua 23 and 24). Joshua 23 talks more about the future and **how** to worship God. Joshua 24 talks about God's promises to His people in the past. This chapter also talks about the only Person **who** is worthy of our worship. **How** should we worship God? With all our hearts. **Who** is worthy of our worship? The Lord.

This week, we study the first talk of Joshua. In this talk, he looks back at the wars God won for Israel. At the same time, Joshua looks at how Israel can enjoy success in the future.



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GOD KEPT HIS PROMISES (Joshua 21:43–45)

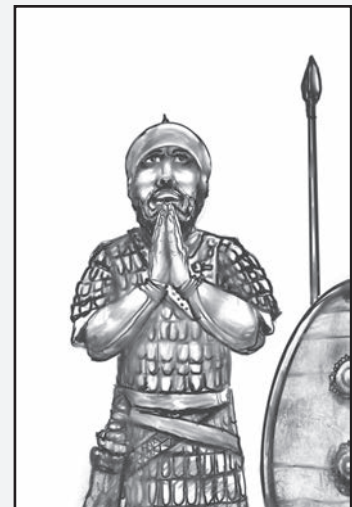
What does Joshua 21:43–45 tell us about God and the Promised Land? What do these words teach us about God’s plan to save us (2 Timothy 2:11–13)?

Joshua 21:43–45 talks about one of the most important topics in the whole book: the Lord keeps His promises. These verses also tell us, in short, everything that has happened in the book of Joshua so far. Joshua 21:43 talks about how the land was divided and settled. (We can read all about those things in Joshua 13–21.) Joshua 21:44 talks about the wars Israel fought. This verse also says that Israel got control over the land. (We can read more about that topic in Joshua 1–12.) All this past history shows Israel that God keeps His promises to them. The Israelites must remember not to say they won the wars or the land on their own. They won because God kept His promises. God promised to fight for them and give them the land.

God “gave the people all the land that he had promised” (Joshua 21:43, ERV). “The LORD allowed the Israelites to defeat every enemy” (Joshua 21:44, ERV). The Lord “promised their people of long ago that he would do that” (Joshua 21:44, NIV). “The LORD kept every promise that he made to the Israelites” (Joshua 21:45, ERV). These verses show that the land is the Lord’s gift to His people. Israel can’t brag that they got the land on their own. The Lord promised to give them the land. He won their wars.

All of Israel’s success came from God. The same thing is true about our being saved. “God’s grace [mercy] has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation [God’s saving mercy] doesn’t come from anything you do. It [mercy] is God’s gift. It [God’s mercy] is not based on anything you have done. No one can brag about earning it” (Ephesians 2:8, 9, NIV). Paul also wrote, “If we died with him, then we will also live with him. If we accept suffering, then we will also rule [be a leader] with him. If we say we don’t know him, then he will say he doesn’t know us. If we are not faithful [don’t keep our promises], he will still be faithful [keep His promises], because he must be true to who he is” (2 Timothy 2:11–13, ICB).

God kept all His promises in the past. How does this Bible truth help us trust that He will keep all His promises for the future?



The Israelites must remember not to say they won the wars or the land on their own. They won because God kept His promises.

SUCCESS DEPENDS ON OUR TRUST IN GOD (Joshua 23:1–5)



**Jesus goes to God for help
for us today.**

God's promises to Israel depend on if the people obey. They won't enjoy success if they don't obey God. That's because success is always connected with their obedience to Bible truth. The land is proof of God's love for His people. The land shows that God keeps His promises (Nehemiah 9:8). As long as the Israelites continue to obey God, God will give them the rest of the land. Will the people hold on to what God already gave them?

Read Joshua's sermon in Joshua 23:1–5. What are the important parts of Joshua's introduction to his sermon?

The Israelites will need to finish the work God gave them to win the rest of the land. Joshua explains how Israel will do that. They can win only if the Lord helps them. But first Israel must learn from its past. The Israelites doubted the Lord and His promises after He helped them escape from Egypt. So, the Lord taught Israel a lesson. Israel needed to learn to trust God. That's why God allowed Israel to fight with Him. The Israelites also must remember that they didn't win because of their strength. They won because God fought for them. He gave them their land, too.

God also gave Israel peace and rest. But now the Israelites must fight some of the people who live in the rest of the land God promised them. God's people can win these fights. But they must remember that they will win only with God's help.

Compare how the Israelites won the Promised Land with how Christians can win the fight against sin. How are these two fights the same? Read Joshua 23:10; Colossians 2:15; 2 Corinthians 10:3–5; and Ephesians 6:11–18 for the answer.

The Israelites didn't win their fights because of their own strength and skill. They won because the Lord fought for them. In the same way, we win the fight against sin because of the things Jesus did for us and is doing now. Jesus died for us on the cross. He goes to the Father for help for us today. We must depend completely on God for success. The Holy Spirit will help us win the fight over sin.

God gives us so many wonderful promises to win the fight against sin. So, why do we keep on sinning?

STRONG BORDERS (Joshua 23:6–8, 12, 13)

Joshua tells Israel that the work that they must do includes more than fighting wars. Their work is spiritual. Their work includes obeying God and keeping His laws.

Why do you think Joshua was so strict with the Israelites about their relationships with people from foreign countries? Read Joshua 23:6–8, 12, 13 for the answer.

The people from the countries around Israel are a danger to Israel. Why? God fought for Israel. So, Israel didn't need to be afraid of the weapons of its enemies. The real risk was friendship with the enemy. The Israelites needed to be on guard against the false ideas and beliefs of the people around them. These could be a worse danger than any army. Joshua helps the leaders of Israel to remember that their war is a spiritual one, not just a military battle. So, the Israelites must be careful not to worship the false gods of their enemies. If the Israelites do, they will no longer be God's special people. They will become the same as the people around them.

Joshua commands the Israelites not to say the name of any false god. The Israelites must not make promises in the name of these gods. The Israelites must not bow down to them or serve them either. In Bible times, a god's name held his power and life. If you said the name of one of these foreign gods, then you gave that god power over you. So, the Israelites must not say these gods' names in their everyday greetings or in their business deals. The Israelites must not seek help from these gods in their time of need (compare with Judges 2:1–3, 11–13).

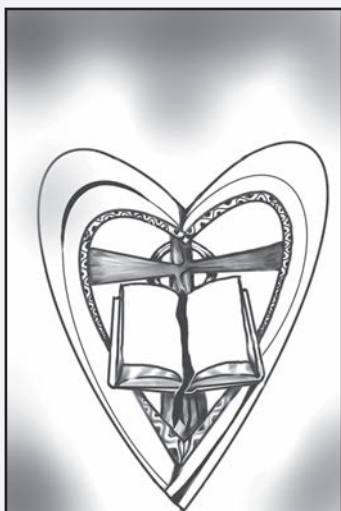
Also, the people of Israel must not marry any of the Canaanites who lived in the land. Why? Because marriages with Canaanites would cause Israel to stop worshiping God. Just look at what happened with Solomon later on. His story is a sad example of what happens when we marry people who don't worship the Lord (1 Kings 3:1; 1 Kings 11:1–8). In the New Testament, Christians are warned not to marry people who don't believe in Jesus (2 Corinthians 6:14). Paul does say that a Christian who is married to a non-Christian should not divorce. Paul commands them to stay married and to live a powerful Christian life. Then maybe they will win their husband or wife to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:12–16).



The Israelites must not bow down to false gods or serve them either.

THE LORD'S ANGER (Joshua 23:15, 16)

What does Joshua say about the Lord's anger and His punishment of sin (Joshua 23:15, 16)? What does the Bible say elsewhere about this topic? Read Numbers 11:33; 2 Chronicles 36:16; Revelation 14:10, 19; Revelation 15:1.) How should we understand these Bible truths?



The Bible tells us that God is loving. He also is love.

God was very angry with the Israelites at times when they were in the desert (Numbers 11:33; Numbers 12:9) and in the Promised Land (Joshua 7:1). So, the Israelites knew what would happen if they broke God's law. Joshua 23:15, 16 may surprise us because Joshua uses very sharp words. The Lord will destroy Israel, the same as the Canaanites, if the people break their agreement with Him. Then the Lord will punish Israel with all the curses in their agreement (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). These verses show that the Lord is the Judge of the whole earth. The Lord announces His war against sin, even when He finds it in Israel. Israel wasn't made holy because of the people's good behavior. Their fighting in God's holy wars didn't make them holy either.

Israel must choose if it wants to have a future filled with glory. Or it can choose a life of sin and face God's anger.

The Bible's teachings on God's anger may confuse us at first. The Bible tells us that God is loving. He also is love (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8). So, we may think the idea is strange that God's anger can help us understand His love. The Bible shows us a powerful picture of this love. God is caring and patient. He is ready to forgive (Exodus 34:6; Micah 7:18). At the same time, God's anger is part of His holy love against sin and evil. God's anger isn't a feeling. His anger is never mean and nasty. God's anger is not revenge. When God punishes sin, He isn't getting even with us for breaking His law. The New Testament teaches that Jesus became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). When Jesus died, He made a way for God to accept us (Romans 5:10). Whoever believes in God will not be punished with His anger (John 3:36; Ephesians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). God's anger helps us understand that God is a holy Judge. So, we can trust God always to be fair when He punishes sin and evil (Psalm 7:11; Psalm 50:6; 2 Timothy 4:8).

HOLD ON TO GOD (Joshua 23:11)

The Israelites must not worship false gods. How can they guard against this sin? They must “hold” on tight to God (Deuteronomy 4:4). This same Hebrew word is used to talk about marriage (Genesis 2:24) and Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). Joshua says that Israel has held on tight to God to this day. Sad to say, no one can say that about Israel later on, as we see in the book of Judges (Judges 2:2, 7, 11; Judges 3:7, 12; Judges 4:1).

Joshua tells Israel to love the Lord their God (Joshua 23:11; compare with Deuteronomy 6:5). Love can’t be forced. If love is forced, it will not be love. So, what does Joshua mean when he commands Israel to love the Lord?

If the Israelites want to continue to enjoy the blessings of God’s promise, they must stay loyal to God. So, the Israelites must be very careful. They must always remember to “love” the Lord. The Hebrew word “’ahabah” can be used to talk about many different types of love: friendship, sex, a mother’s love, romance, and loyalty to God. Love for God is a decision we make to give our lives fully to Him and serve Him. When we understand this Bible truth, we can understand better Joshua’s command to Israel to love God. (Compare with John 13:34.) God wants our obedience to His commands to come from our personal love relationship with Him (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 6:5; compare with Matthew 22:37). We love God because of everything He does for us. He did these things because of His love and mercy.

The command to love God also helps us to understand God’s love. God wants to enter into a personal relationship with every person who accepts His love. So, God’s love for everyone helps us to love Him, too.

Jesus gave a new commandment to His followers. How is this commandment both old and new at the same time? Read John 13:34; John 15:17; and 1 John 3:11 for the answer. (Compare with Leviticus 19:18.)



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**“As long as sin continues,
suffering and death
will happen.”**

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Words of Joshua,” pages 521, 522, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“God is the Life-Giver. From the beginning, God’s laws gave life. But sin broke God’s law and His peace. Sin caused evil to fill the earth. As long as sin continues, suffering and death will happen. But the Savior became sin for us. He accepted its penalty for us. So, now we have hope. Because of Jesus, we can escape the terrible penalty of sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 522, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Look at all the proof in your life that God loves you. Share some examples with the class. At the same time, what should you do when things don’t happen the way you hope or pray for? What do you do when you ask God to keep His promises, and He is silent?
- ② Talk about what the Bible teaches about God’s anger. Why is God’s anger a part of the Good News?
- ③ What important rules can you take from this week’s lesson about friendship with people who don’t believe in God? How can we be friends and, at the same time, honor God? What important rules can help us to do that and keep us safe while we serve our friends who don’t know Jesus?
- ④ What are some of the things that keep you from holding on tight to the Lord with all your heart? How can you let go of them?

“TELL US ABOUT THE BIBLE”

The woman didn't want help when Kim Sun arrived at her house.

Sun asked, “Why? Have I done something to upset you?”

The woman said, “No, no. I want you to take a break. You need to rest. You have more people to help around the neighborhood this afternoon. Here, eat some cookies and relax.”

The woman's kindness touched Sun's heart. Sun helped people free of charge since he arrived in the village three months ago. Sun didn't tell the villagers he was a Bible worker. He wanted to be their friend and show them God's love first. For three months the villagers accepted Sun's help without thinking about his needs. But now, this woman showed that she cared about him. Sun knew that he made his first real friend in the village.

But the woman wasn't his last friend. Around the same time, many villagers began to think of Sun as their friend. They started to ask him many questions.

One villager asked, “Why are you helping us for free?”

Another said, “Where are you from?”

Sun said he was a Bible worker with the 1,000 Missionary Movement. Sun added, “I want you to know Jesus, so I chose to serve you to show you His love for you.”

The villagers were amazed to learn that Sun was a Bible worker. They said, “If you're a Bible worker, why don't you tell us all about the Bible?”

Sun asked, “Do you really want to study the Bible?”

“Yes!” the villagers said. “Teach us about the Bible.”

Before long, no one wanted Sun's help as a handyman anymore. Everyone was studying the Bible with Sun. A few people didn't ask for Bible studies at first. But they agreed when Sun invited them. After three months of Sun's helping them free of charge, how could the villagers say no?

Sun remembered the mistake he made with his parents. As a new Seventh-day Adventist, Sun tried to convince his parents to accept his beliefs. He failed for five years. Now he taught the villagers that each Bible truth showed God's love.

Sun shared the Bible story about how God made everything. Sun said, “This story shows God's love for you.” Next, Sun read the picture stories about the Good Samaritan and the Lost Son. Sun said, “These picture stories show God's love for you, also.” Then Sun told the villagers that Jesus died on the cross for them. Sun said, “The cross shows God's love for you, too.”

Kim Sun is a manager for the 1,000 Missionary Movement, in Silang, Philippines. The headquarters were built with help of the 13th Sabbath Offering from 1996. Read more about Sun next week.

INSIDE Story



**“Eat some cookies
and relax.**



Kim Sun