



## 1. Instructions for Inheriting the Land ([1:1–18](#))

This chapter begins the story of God's giving the land of Canaan to the Israelites, and what a beginning it is! We find here God's charge to Joshua (vv. [1–9](#)), in which he promised Joshua that he would be with him in the same way he had been with Moses the prophet, whom God had met face to face ([Deut 34:10–12](#)). This is a very impressive promise! The issue of whether Joshua was up to the job also begins to be addressed here. Indeed he would be, because of God's presence with him, if he was careful to keep his priorities correctly lined up: the key to success for Joshua was that he was to be immersed in God's word (vv. [7–8](#)). Here are Joshua's initial instructions about entering the land, which set the stage for action later (vv. [10–11](#); cf. chap. [3](#)). We also read about special instructions for the tribes who planned to settle west of the Jordan River (vv. [12–15](#)); these concern their commitment to their fellow Israelites and raise the issue of the unity of the nation, which is a concern throughout the book. Finally, these tribes, along with the rest of the nation, affirm Joshua's place of leadership and encourage him in this (vv. [16–18](#)).

### (1) *God's Charge to Joshua* ([1:1–9](#))

**<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."

[1:1](#) The Book of Joshua begins as though it were a continuation of something written previously, which, of course, it is. A wooden translation of the first portion of the verse would read "And it happened, after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord said to Joshua ..." The phrase "the death of Moses" ties this material in with an earlier event (which is recounted in the preceding chapter in the Bible: [Deut 34:1–8](#)).

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Howard, *New American Commentary – Volume 5: Joshua*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 69-95.

Several other books in the Old Testament narrative corpus also begin with a reference to a leading person's death by using the wording found here: “and it happened, after the death of .” These include the books of Judges (Joshua's death), 2 Samuel (Saul's death), and 2 Kings (Ahab's death).

Moses' death was an important event in the life of the new nation of Israel. He is the towering figure who casts his shadow not only across the entire corpus of Exodus–Deuteronomy, but also across the Book of Joshua and later Scriptures. Deuteronomy ends by affirming,

*Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel ([Deut 34:10–12](#)).*

This sounds like an evaluative passage added many years after Moses had died. It would not be a very impressive comment if it were penned, for example, only a decade or less after his death. The longer the interval between Moses' death and the writing of this evaluation, the more impressive Moses' stature becomes. Yet Moses' death should not cripple the nation. The Lord was faithful in all ages, and he would be in this instance as well. Joshua was designated as Moses' successor, and the people were to carry on under him. As one scholar notes, “Yahweh's fidelity does not hinge on the achievement of men, however gifted they may be, nor does it evaporate in the face of funerals or rivers.”

As we noted in the Introduction, Moses was the great lawgiver and leader par excellence. He is here called the “servant of the Lord.” This title for Moses is found far more often in the Book of Joshua than in the rest of the Old Testament combined (fourteen of eighteen times. This is a special title used in the Old Testament only of Moses (fourteen times), Joshua ([Josh 24:29](#); [Judg 2:8](#)), David ([Pss 18:1](#); [36:1](#)), and, pejoratively, of the nation of Israel ([Isa 42:19](#)).

This labeling of Moses as the Lord's servant is important in the Book of Joshua, since Joshua, for whom the book is named, is only called the “servant of the Lord” once, at the end of the book ([24:29](#)). The Book of Joshua is concerned with showing how God's earlier promises were now in process of being fulfilled and with how God's commands were being carried out. Many of these promises and commands were spoken by Moses, who is depicted in this book as the Lord's special servant.

God is referred to in this verse as “the Lord.” This rendering, found in most English versions (as well as the Septuagint, which renders it *kurios*, “lord”), obscures the fact that here is God's personal name, which most scholars today agree was pronounced “Yahweh.” This is the most holy, personal name of God, revealing much of his character, and it is praised repeatedly throughout the Psalms. It is the name whose meaning was revealed to Moses at the burning bush ([Exod 3:11–15](#); cf. [6:2–3](#)), and it tells us about God's eternal existence and his enduring faithfulness to his people. “Yahweh” was God's personal name just as “Baal” and “Marduk” were the personal names of the high gods of the Canaanites and the Babylonians, respectively.

In addition to Moses and Yahweh, Joshua the son of Nun, the main protagonist of the Book of Joshua, also is introduced in v. [1](#). He is named about 205 times in the Old Testament, 148 times in this book. After this, his name appears most often in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Judges. Joshua is mentioned twice in the New Testament, first, in Stephen's speech, where Joshua's leadership in bringing

the tabernacle into the land of Canaan is mentioned ([Acts 7:45](#)) and second, in the Book of Hebrews, in the great passage on rest ([Heb 3–4](#)): Joshua's rest is depicted here as incomplete, not fulfilled until one enters Christ's rest ([4:8](#)).

Joshua's name usually is given in the Hebrew Bible as “Yehoshua,” which means “Yahweh saves/delivers.” His name is rendered in the Greek traditions (LXX) as *Iēsous*, which is the same form as Jesus' name in the New Testament. His original name was “Hoshea,” which means “salvation” or “deliverance” ([Num 13:8](#) and [Deut 32:44](#)). [Numbers 13:16](#) explains that Moses himself gave Hoshea his new name “Joshua.” Joshua stands out from the other characters listed in the [Numbers 13](#) passage (vv. [3–16](#), which list the twelve spies Moses sent into the land of Canaan), by virtue of this explanatory gloss about his name: “Moses gave Hoshea son of Nun the name Joshua.” Joshua is the first person in the Bible to be explicitly given a name that incorporates God's holy, personal name, “Yahweh.”

While the Book of Joshua does not make a point of saying anything about the meaning of his name, surely his name change by Moses is significant since (1) it is singled out for mention in [Numbers 13](#), and (2) it went from a generic name meaning “deliverance” to one containing a glorious affirmation of trust in God: “Yahweh delivers” (or perhaps “may Yahweh deliver”). That God himself was Israel's deliverer is an important point made repeatedly in the Book of Joshua, and Joshua's new name is a not-so-subtle reminder of this.

Joshua's father's name was “Nun.” Nothing is known of his father except for his lineage: [1 Chr 7:20–29](#) gives a list of descendants of Ephraim and some of their holdings; Joshua and Nun are mentioned in v. [27](#).

Finally, v. [1](#) tells us that Joshua was “Moses' aide.” This too is a significant fact. First, Joshua is distinguished from Moses in that he is not called “the servant of the Lord,” as Moses is. A question throughout the book is whether Joshua would be worthy of filling Moses' shoes. On one level, the answer was “no”; no one would succeed Moses as Israel's lawgiver, and no prophet would arise like him ([Deut 34:10](#)). The Book of Joshua carefully refrains from calling Joshua by this honorific title until the very last chapter; when Joshua dies, he is finally accorded the title of “servant of the Lord” ([24:29](#)) as we already have noted. In contrast, Moses is called by this title seventeen times in the book. Yet, on another level, the fact that Joshua finally does receive this title shows that he did indeed fulfill the instructions that God gave him, in a similar way to Moses.

Joshua is called “Moses' aide” only four times in Scripture: [Exod 24:13](#); [33:11](#); [Num 11:28](#); [Josh 1:1](#). The word for “aide” here (*mēšārēt*) means “one who serves.” Usually this Hebrew word refers to service in a worship context, but it can also mean (as here) service to an individual. An interesting and important theological truth can be seen by comparing the two sets of relationships in this verse: (1) Yahweh and Moses (Yahweh's “servant”) and (2) Moses and Joshua (Moses' “aide”). The relative sociological distance between a “servant” and his master was far greater than that between an “aide” and the one he served. Here then is a subtle yet powerful reminder that God's sovereignty is infinite and that he was infinitely greater than even the towering figure of Moses. The gulf between Moses and God was infinitely greater than that between Joshua and Moses.

[1:2–5](#) The initial portion of God's charge to Joshua is concerned with (1) the land that God had promised to Israel, (2) God's encouragement of Joshua in his new role as Moses' successor, and (3) God's promise to be Israel's strong protector. In vv. [2–4](#), God addressed not merely Joshua, but all of the Israelites (the grammatical forms for “you” and “your” are plural); in v. [5](#), Joshua himself is addressed. Portions of these verses are very similar to [Deut 11:24–25a](#), where Moses promised the Israelites the land and God's protection. Compare the following:

<b>Joshua</b>	<b>Deuteronomy</b>
I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. ( <a href="#">1:3</a> )	Every place where you set your foot will be yours. ( <a href="#">11:24a</a> )
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. ( <a href="#">1:4</a> )	Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the western sea. ( <a href="#">11:24b</a> )
No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. ( <a href="#">1:5a</a> )	No man will be able to stand against you. ( <a href="#">11:25a</a> )

Such careful repetitions assure us that God was indeed committed to keeping his promises. The very same words he had uttered earlier through his servant Moses indicate that there was no renegeing on the promises and no “revising” of them. Both of these passages hark back to earlier promises of God, beginning with the promises to Abraham ([Gen 12:7](#); [15:18–20](#)). The wording in [Deut 11:24–25](#) and [Josh 1:3–5](#) also is anticipated closely in [Exodus 23](#).

The most direct route from Egypt to the land of Canaan would *not* involve crossing the Jordan River. However, the Israelites had earlier forfeited their right to enter the land directly when they embraced the spies' discouraging report about the impossibility of taking the land ([Num 13–14](#)). God sentenced the people to wander in the wilderness for forty years, during which time the generation that came out of Egypt would die off ([Num 14:26–35](#)). The Israelites attempted an entrance directly into the land from the south, but they were rebuffed by the Canaanites there ([Num 14:40–45](#)). Consequently, they wandered for another thirty-eight years and arrived at the entrance to the land of Canaan at a different spot, this time east of the Jordan River, on the plains of Moab ([Num 22:1](#); [33:48–50](#); [36:13](#); [Deut 1:1–5](#)). This is where the Book of Joshua begins.

[1:2](#) God stated in v. [2](#) that he was “about to give” the land to the Israelites (so NIV; cf. RSV, NASB: “I am giving”). According to v. [3](#), “every place upon which the sole of your foot will tread, to you I have given it” (literal translation). In both verses the pronouns are plural, embracing not just Joshua, but all Israel. Also in these verses, the two forms of the verb “give” are different in Hebrew, and their use here reflects two significant truths about God's giving of the land to his people. In one sense God was still in process of giving Israel the land. After all, Israel had not yet even crossed the Jordan River, and only the land east of the Jordan actually had been taken by Israel. Most of the land remained to be taken. But in

another sense God had *already given* Israel the land. It is as though Israel already possessed legal title to the land (ever since Abraham's day), but they were awaiting God's timing for the actual possession. In [Gen 15:16](#) God promised Abraham that it would be several generations before his descendants would actually possess the land, since “the sin of the Amorites [i.e., Canaanites] has not yet reached its full measure.”

[1:3](#) Verse [3](#) ends by stating that this gift of the land was in fulfillment of God's promise to Moses. God's promises, and their fulfillment, receive special attention in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets (i.e., Joshua–2 Kings). Whereas in the Latter Prophets (i.e., Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets), the fulfillment of most prophecies is not indicated, the opposite is usually the case in the Former Prophets: the words of the true prophets are usually shown to come to pass. In 1, 2 Kings, for example, G. von Rad has identified eleven cases where a prophecy is given and its fulfillment is explicitly detailed, to which several more can be added. In each case, these are explicitly stated to be in fulfillment of “the word of the Lord” or of a prophet speaking for the Lord.

[1:4](#) The extent of the land that God was giving Israel is detailed in v. [4](#), a “map” of sorts. The description is general, giving the southern and northern boundaries first: “the desert” in the south and “Lebanon” in the north. “The desert” is a generic term that may refer in the Old Testament to any barren area; the reference here to a southern desert is deduced from the context.

“Lebanon” is roughly what is present-day Lebanon, north of Israel, including two mountain ranges. This name occurs seventy-one times in the Old Testament, but here in [1:4](#) is the only time it is called “this Lebanon.” A similar phrase, “this Jordan,” occurs in [1:2](#) (see NASB, RSV), as well as five other times in the Old Testament. In all of these cases, the Jordan River was visible at hand when the phrase “this Jordan” was uttered. However, Lebanon is not visible near at hand to someone east of the Jordan. The statement “this Lebanon,” then, may have been an ironic one, intended to emphasize the inclusion of this (not-visible) land.

After the general north-south boundaries are delimited, the east-west ones are given. The Euphrates River is often designated as “the great river” when it is mentioned in the Bible (as here). In reality, the Euphrates represents the northeastern border; the Jordan River or the Arabian desert is the true eastern border. However, in biblical geography, the Euphrates represented a convenient eastern border. The “Great Sea on the west” is the Mediterranean Sea.

The land between the eastern and western extremities is called here “all the Hittite country.” The term “Hittite” is used to mean different peoples in the Bible. Here, it is essentially a synonym for “Canaanites,” perhaps designating all of the hill country west of the Jordan, although there was a great Hittite kingdom to the north in roughly the period of Joshua (and preceding).

As we have noted, this is a general description of Israel's borders. The intent here is not to give the specific boundaries of the land, or of various tribes' inheritance within the land, that we find in many other passages (see especially [Josh 14–19](#)). Rather, it is a general summary painted with broad brush strokes. The details will come later.

[1:5](#) This verse is the spiritual climax and highlight of the first part of God's charge to Joshua. It is a heart-warming promise to Joshua himself that (1) his and the Israelites' efforts would succeed and (2) God would never leave him. It is doubly encouraging when we see that God promised to be with Joshua *in the same way* that he was with Moses. The words in the first part of the verse are identical to those in

God's promise to Moses in [Deut 7:24b](#): “No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them.” The promise is repeated almost verbatim in [Deut 11:25a](#): “No man will be able to stand against you.”

God's impressive promise to Joshua in the second half of the verse that he would be with him just as he was with Moses begins to answer the question whether Joshua would be able to fill Moses' shoes as a leader (see comments on v. [1](#)). On the one hand, as we have noted, no one could ever do this. Yet, God's presence would accompany Joshua just as it had Moses. The words “I will be with you” recall identical promises made to Isaac ([Gen 26:3](#)), Jacob ([31:3](#)), Moses ([Exod 3:12](#)), and Joshua himself ([Deut 31:8, 23](#)). The promise to Moses in [Exod 3:12](#) is especially significant, since it is tied in with the revelation of God's very name, “Yahweh” ([Exod 3:14–15](#)). This God whose name was Yahweh promised Moses that he would be with him; indeed, his name was inextricably tied in with this idea of his keeping covenant to be with his people.

The promises to Joshua in Deuteronomy likewise are most significant. In [31:8](#), Moses assured Joshua that God would be with him, and in [31:23](#), God himself stated the same thing. The verbatim repetitions of God's promise here are yet another way in which the Book of Joshua shows how God was being faithful to his words spoken in earlier times. He was faithful to whatever generation of Abraham's descendants he was dealing with. Jesus told his disciples that “surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” ([Matt 28:19–20](#)), showing that God's presence was not just promised to particular generations, but to every generation of faithful believers.

In the last clause of the verse, God expands on this promise to Joshua of his presence: he would never leave nor forsake him. This too echoes earlier promises, most notably in [Deut 11:25a](#) and [Deut 31:6, 8](#).

The second part of God's charge to Joshua consists of his instructions and encouragement. Three things stand out prominently here. First, as in the first section, much of the language derives from God's earlier instructions and encouragement. Second, the threefold command to “be strong and courageous” (vv. [6, 7, 9](#)) is important, and it also helps to give structure to the section. Third, the emphasis on Joshua's keeping of the law in order to succeed in his responsibilities (vv. [7–8](#)) is significant.

The command to “be strong and courageous” brackets this paragraph, introducing it and bringing it to a close (vv. [6, 9](#)). The middle occurrence of this command is highlighted by the addition of the modifier “very” (*mē'ōd*, “be strong and *very* courageous”). This introduces the heart of the paragraph, God's instructions about Joshua's keeping the law (vv. [7–8](#)).

[1:6](#) The verb “to be strong” (*h̄zq*) is common in Hebrew (occurring almost three hundred times), but the verb “to be courageous” (*'mš*) occurs only forty-one times. Both words are actually similar in meaning. The context in [Joshua 1](#) shifts back and forth between “courage” and “resoluteness” for the latter verb. “Courage” is perhaps more appropriate in vv. [6](#) and [9](#), which are coupled with statements about conflict (“no one will be able to stand up against you” [v. [5](#)]; “do not be terrified; do not be discouraged” [v. [9](#)]). However, God's commands to Joshua in vv. [7–8](#) about keeping the law call for “resoluteness” rather than “courage.” In about one-third of its uses, the latter verb (*'mš*) is used as a command (fourteen times). Whenever this is the case, it is invariably coupled with *h̄zq*.

God was echoing identical exhortations that he and Moses gave to Joshua earlier ([Deut 31:6, 7, 23](#)). With these words Moses had exhorted the people ([Deut 31:6](#)), the people would exhort Joshua ([Josh 1:18](#)), and Joshua would later encourage the people ([10:25](#)). Each statement is accompanied by an assurance that God would be with Joshua or the Israelites, or that he would fight for them. This motif of God's presence is an important one throughout the Old Testament.

The need for Joshua to be strong and resolute was acute because he was the instrument for the people to inherit the land. The Hebrew grammatical construction here highlights Joshua himself: if he, of all people, was weak and irresolute, then the cause was in deep trouble.

Not only did God promise Moses that he would give the land to the Israelites (v. [3](#)), but this had been promised to earlier generations too, and God specifically acknowledged this here (on these promises, see on v. [3](#)).

[1:7–8](#) The heart of God's instructions to Joshua is introduced by a variant of the command in vv. [6](#) and [9](#), adding the word “very,” which highlights the instructions here about keeping the law. In a paragraph of this length, the amount of space devoted to keeping the law might seem to be disproportionate (about half: forty-five of ninety-two words); however, keeping the law would be the key to Joshua's success. It is striking that God's instructions here to Joshua are not about military matters, given that Joshua and the Israelites faced many battles ahead. However, the keys to his success were spiritual, directly related to the degree of his obedience to God. The keys to Joshua's success were the same as those for a king: being rooted in God's word rather than depending upon military might ([Deut 17:14–20](#), esp. vv. [16](#), [18–19](#)).

The command in v. [7](#) to be strong and very resolute is to ensure Joshua's scrupulous obedience to the law of Moses. The NIV's wording (“Be careful to obey”) translates the verbs *šmr* and *‘śh*. The first, *šmr*, means “to keep, observe,” and the second, *‘śh*, means “to do, obey.” They are used as a word pair forty times in the Old Testament, almost always with reference to keeping and obeying God's words or commands. In such cases, *šmr* is often translated “be careful” and *‘śh* “do, obey” (as NIV does here).

The importance of obedience to the law as the key to Joshua's success cannot be overestimated. This is emphasized over and over in these two verses. (1) Joshua was to “be careful to do” this law (v. [7a](#)). (2) It was “all” the law that was to be obeyed (v. [7a](#)). (3) Joshua was not to deviate from it even slightly, neither to the right nor to the left (v. [7b](#)). (4) The Book of the Law was not to depart from Joshua's mouth, since he was to meditate upon it by day and by night (v. [8a](#)). The idea of meditating here is not the one commonly familiar in the late twentieth century, namely, of emptying the mind and concentrating on nothing or on self or on visualizations of various types; much of this type of meditation is indebted to Eastern mystic religions. Rather, the Old Testament concept of meditation involves two things: First, a focus upon God himself ([Ps 63:6](#)[Hb. [7](#)]), his works ([Pss 77:12](#)[Hb. [13](#)]; [143:5](#)), or his law ([Josh 1:8](#); [Ps 1:2](#)), and second, an activity that was done aloud. This is why God told Joshua that this lawbook should not leave his *mouth* (as opposed to, e.g., his heart or his mind). (5) Joshua was to “be careful to obey” everything *written* in the lawbook. This represents something permanent, since it was written down.

The result (*‘āz*, “then”) of Joshua's keeping the law was that his way would prosper and be successful. Joshua's obedience to God's will (vv. [7–8](#)) and God's presence with him (v. [9](#)) guaranteed this. Many Christians make much of passages such as this in the Old Testament that speak of prosperity and success. Other passages often cited include the following:

*“Whatever [the righteous] does prospers”* ([Ps 1:3](#)).

*“The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing”* ([Ps 34:10](#)).

*“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread”* ([Ps 37:25](#)).

*“The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor”* ([Prov 10:15](#)).

*“Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will succeed”* ([Prov 16:3](#)).

*“If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment”* ([Job 36:11](#)).

Many Christians read these and other passages as guarantees that all Christians will (or should!) succeed in every venture they undertake and that they will prosper financially if they are truly following God. Christians who do not succeed, or who are not financially well off, are condemned as living in some persistent sin or lacking in proper faith.

Much could be said in response, but here we will make only three points. First, the message of the Book of Job points in precisely the opposite direction as that argued by these Christians. That is, Job was stripped of his financial wealth for reasons that had nothing to do with any lack of faith or obedience. Job's wealth was restored again at the end of the book, but he came to a position of peace with God and acceptance of God's will in his life *before* his wealth was restored ([Job 42:5–6](#)). This was because he had now had a firsthand encounter with God, whereas previously his knowledge of God had been primarily secondhand.

Second, the Book of Proverbs, which contains many statements about wealth and prosperity (see the passages quoted above, and such passages as [Prov 3:1–10](#)), nevertheless is clear about a balanced view of wealth. Kaiser notes that “Proverbs does emphasize the moral restraints that God has placed on gaining wealth. It is not to be achieved through deceit ([21:6](#)), or by using false balances ([20:10](#)), or by shifting boundary markers ([22:28](#)), or through oppression ([23:10–11](#)).” Such verses as [Prov 23:4–5](#) and [30:7–9](#) show us that wealth is *not* the ultimate good to be sought or even guaranteed by God:

*“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle”* ([Prov 23:4–5](#)).

*“Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God”* ([Prov 3:7–9](#)).

Third, the two words we find here in our passage in Joshua ([1:7–8](#)) speaking of prosperity and success are almost never used in the Old Testament to speak of financial success. Rather, they speak of succeeding in life's proper endeavors. This happens when people's lives are focused entirely on God and obedience to him. The focus of people's endeavors is *not* to be prosperity and success but rather holiness and obedience. A believer's consuming obsession should be holiness, for God himself is holy ([Lev 11:45](#); [19:2](#), etc.), to love God with one's entire being ([Deut 6:5](#)), to keep his word with the same fervor ([Deut 6:6](#); [2 Kgs 23:25](#); [Ezra 7:10](#); etc.), and to “fear God and keep his commandments” ([Eccl 12:13](#)). When this happens, then God does bless (usually!), although not always in exactly the ways we might like him to. In this, the Old Testament has the same message that Jesus spoke when he said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [food, drink, clothing] will be given to you as well” ([Matt 6:33](#)). Our priority is to seek God.

The Hebrew roots in question here are *ślh* (“prosper”) and *śkl* (“be successful”). The first term occurs sixty-nine times in the Old Testament, and the majority of the time (fifty-nine times) it means “to prosper [or, better, “to succeed”] in one's endeavors,” almost always because of God's gracious and ever-present hand. For example, Abraham's servant was given success by God in his mission to find a wife for Isaac ([Gen 24:12](#), [40](#), [42](#), [56](#)). Joseph succeeded in Potiphar's household because God was with him ([Gen 39:2](#), [3](#), [23](#)). The Messiah himself, when he was bruised, nevertheless would cause God's will to “prosper” in his hand ([Isa 53:10](#)). Jeremiah spoke several times of the wicked not succeeding in their evil intents ([Jer 2:37](#); [5:28](#); [13:10](#); [22:30](#)[2x]; [32:5](#)). Daniel and his friends succeeded in their efforts in exile in Babylon, with God's help ([Dan 3:30](#); [6:28](#)[Hb. [29](#)]). The people's efforts in Ezra and Nehemiah also succeeded because of God's good hand upon them ([Ezra 5:8](#); [6:14](#); [Neh 1:11](#); [2:20](#)). Solomon succeeded as king and as builder ([1 Chr 22:11](#), [13](#); [29:23](#); [2 Chr 7:11](#)).

A very revealing passage comes in [1 Chr 22:13](#), when David was giving his son Solomon instructions about building the temple. The key to Solomon's success was the same as for Joshua: “Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the LORD gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.” The vocabulary in this passage echoes that of [Joshua 1](#) in remarkable ways. In both cases, God's chosen leader was to focus on knowing and obeying God's laws. That was the key to their success as leaders.

The second term in [Josh 1:8](#) (*śkl*, “to be successful”) occurs a total of seventy-eight times in the Old Testament (as a verb or a noun), most commonly with the meaning of “have insight, understanding, be wise.” In ten or eleven cases—including twice here in [Josh 1:7–8](#)—it means “to have success.” And, in these cases, almost without exception, success is to be achieved because individuals seek the Lord earnestly or carefully obey his commandments. Success is specifically equated with obeying God's law or the covenant in [Deut 29:9](#) [Hb. [8](#)]; [Josh 1:7–8](#); [1 Kgs 2:3](#); and [2 Kgs 18:7](#). In [1 Kgs 2:3](#), for example, David instructed Solomon to “observe what the LORD requires: Walk in his ways and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go.” Hezekiah was a good king who trusted in the Lord, clung to him, and “kept the commands the LORD had given to Moses” ([2 Kgs 18:5–6](#)). As a result of this, he enjoyed God's presence with him, and “he was successful in whatever he did” ([18:7](#)). David succeeded because God was with him ([1 Sam 18:5, 14–15](#)). He was “a man after God's own heart” who, the text of [1 Sam 13:14](#) implies, “kept the LORD's command,” and God's Spirit was upon him ([1 Sam 16:13](#)). Jeremiah speaks of false religious leaders who do *not* seek the Lord, and, as a result, they are *not* successful ([Jer 10:21](#)).

The context here in Joshua is very clear about what is to be the key to Joshua's success ([1:7–8](#)): he is “to be careful to obey all the law”; he is not to turn from it to the right or the left; he is to have it constantly on his lips and to meditate on it at all times; and he is carefully to do everything written in it. His focus is to be upon God's word and will; then, as he leads Israel in taking the land of Canaan, success will come to him.

Nothing at all is said here about financial success. In fact, of the fifty-nine times that *śkl* refers to success, and the ten to eleven times that *śkl* does, only *once* are finances even remotely in view. This is in [Ezek 16:13](#), which states about the city of Jerusalem, “So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen.” In this passage, the NIV's “rose to be” translates *śkl*, and it refers to Jerusalem and God's blessing upon her. It can scarcely be used to justify personal financial reward for individuals as the meaning of *śkl*.

Thus, in the Old Testament “prosperity” is not financial in its primary orientation, if at all. Rather, it refers to succeeding in proper endeavors. Also, it comes only when it is not the focus of one's efforts in any case. It comes when one's focus is on God and one's relationship with him. The success is granted by God, not attained by human achievement.

Here in [Josh 1:8](#) is the only place in the entire Old Testament that these two words are found together. Their use in this fashion underscores the importance of Joshua's mission in leading Israel in taking possession of the land of Canaan, particularly the importance of his obedience and faithfulness to God. The same, it can safely be said, would be the case today: the keys to success in life lie in being intensely focused upon God and in consistent faithfulness to him and his revealed word.

[1:9](#) God's charge to Joshua ends by reiterating words of encouragement and commitment (see esp. vv. [5–6](#)). Joshua was not to fear or be discouraged precisely because the Almighty God promised him his presence (see on v. [5](#)).

(2) *Joshua's Instructions for Breaking Camp (1:10–11)*

**<sup>10</sup>So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: <sup>11</sup>“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.’”**

**1:10** The “officers” here are more administrative officials than military officers. Previously, God had appointed them to help Moses in his administrative duties. They were respected leaders in Israel, who had the Spirit of the Lord on them ([Num 11:16–17](#); [Deut 1:15–16](#)), and who had some judicial and/or religious (Levitical) duties ([Deut 1:15–16](#); [16:18](#); [2 Chr 19:11](#); [34:13](#)).

A key word in chap. 1 is “order, command” (*šwh*), which occurs in [1:7](#), [9](#), [10](#), [11](#), [13](#), [16](#), [18](#). The word is especially important in the Pentateuch and in Joshua, referring most often to God's commands for his people. However, as we noted earlier with reference to “give,” God also delegated his authority to various representatives. Here, God commanded Joshua ([1:7](#), [9](#)), who in turn commanded the officials ([1:10](#)). The officials were to pass on Joshua's commands to the people ([1:11](#)), and the people pledged to respond in obedience to Joshua's commands ([1:16](#), [18](#)). This adds to the picture of Joshua's leadership painted in this book.

**1:11** In keeping with the nonmilitary instructions that God gave to Joshua in vv. [6–9](#), Joshua's instructions to the people here likewise concern not military strategy or equipment, but for breaking camp, for readying food supplies for their journey. The possession of the land was, in effect, an already-accomplished fact; the Israelites merely needed to load up with supplies, since God would be giving the land into their hands (see the end of v. [11](#)).

Joshua told the officials that sometime within the next three days they would be crossing the Jordan River in order to take possession of the land. It is possible that Joshua meant they would merely be setting out from their present encampment within three days, not actually crossing within three days. Or, it may indicate that his estimate of when they would be able to set out simply was erroneous, since, as it turned out, the crossing did not take place until the seventh day, due to delays encountered, as there are two three-day periods mentioned in chap. [3](#). The first three-day period was spent preparing provisions ([1:11](#)), at the same time the spies went into Jericho and then hid in the hills (see [2:22](#); [3:2](#)). Then, it was another three days before Israel actually crossed the Jordan (see [3:2](#)).

The purpose of the Jordan crossing was that Israel might go in and actually take possession of the land that the Lord their God was giving them as part of their inheritance. Just as God's *giving* of the land is important in Joshua, so also are the related concepts of Israel's *inheriting* and *taking possession* of the land. Israel inherited the land that God gave and then had to take possession of it. These latter two concepts are expressed by two related Hebrew words: *nhl*, “to inherit” (used in v. [6](#)), and *yrš*, “to take possession” (used twice here in v. [11](#), which are obscured somewhat by the NIV's rendering as “take possession” and “for your own,” respectively). These are very important words, integral to the theology of the Book of Joshua and are dealt with at length in an excursus entitled “Israel's Inheritance of the Land of Joshua,” after [13:7](#).

(3) *Joshua's Charge to the Transjordan Tribes (1:12–15)*

**<sup>12</sup>But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, <sup>13</sup>“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.’ <sup>14</sup>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<sup>15</sup> 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.”**

Joshua's charge to the two-and-one-half tribes who were to settle east of the Jordan (in Transjordan) springs from their earlier transaction with Moses, when these tribes were granted the right to settle there (see [Num 32:1–42](#); [Deut 2:26–3:17](#)). Verses [13–15](#) here quote [Deut 3:18–20](#) virtually word for word. A change in v. [14](#), from Deuteronomy's “cities” to Joshua's “land,” highlights the Book of Joshua's special interest in the land as a whole. These Transjordan tribes were required to keep covenant solidarity with their brethren settling west of the Jordan (Cisjordan) by helping them in the conquest. They agreed to do this (vv. [16–18](#)), just as they had earlier pledged ([Num 32:25–27](#)). [Joshua 22](#) indicates that they followed through on their commitments, and Joshua blessed them for their faithfulness in this matter ([Josh 22:1–8](#)).

**1:12** The grammatical construction introducing Joshua's words to the Transjordan tribes in vv. [13–15](#) sets off these words from the three other speeches in chap. [1](#). Usually commentators assume that vv. [12–18](#) are a unit consisting of Joshua's instructions to the Transjordan tribes and their response. They assume that the disjunction in v. [12](#) shows that these verses are an “aside” and that the main narrative action does not resume until [2:1](#). The close correspondence between Joshua's words in vv. [13–15](#) and the people's response in vv. [16–18](#) naturally reinforces this assumption.

However, this is only an assumption, made possible by the fact that the verb in v. [16](#)—*wayya ʾānû*, “Then they answered”—does not specify who precisely did the answering. In reality, it is more probable that the disjunction in v. [12](#) functions to tie Joshua's two speeches together into one unit, so to speak, and that the response recorded in vv. [16–18](#) represents not just the Transjordan tribes of vv. [12–15](#) but also the representatives of the entire nation addressed in vv. [10–11](#). Thus, what transpired here was that Joshua first gave his instructions to the officials of the people (vv. [10–11](#)), then gave another set of instructions to the Transjordan tribes (vv. [12–15](#)), and finally the nation as a whole (or its representatives) responded by affirming his leadership (vv. [16–18](#)).

**1:13** “Moses’ command” is the one recorded in [Num 32:20–22](#) and reiterated in [Deut 3:18–20](#) and here. The promise of “rest” is found in all of these passages, and it is God's gift, part of Israel's inheritance. In [Exod 33:14](#) God had stated: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Not only would Israel inherit the land, however, but they would have rest from their enemies while they were in that land (see, e.g., [Deut 12:10](#); [25:19](#)). In addition, the land itself would have rest from war ([Josh 11:23](#); [14:15](#); cf. similar passages in [2 Sam 7:1](#), [11](#); [1 Kgs 8:56](#)).

**1:14** Contrary to the usual deemphasis on military matters in the book, we find in this verse a cluster of military vocabulary. “Fully armed” translates a Hebrew term (*hāmūšîm*) whose exact meaning is disputed. The Hebrew word is related to the words for “five” (*hāmēš*) and “fifty” (*hāmiššîm*), and many scholars suggest it means something like “lined up in battle array, in groups of fifty,” but it must be admitted that this is only a guess. The term is used in a similar way in [Exod 13:18](#); [Josh 4:12](#); [Judg 7:11](#); and elsewhere. The “fighting men” (*gibbōrê haḥayil*) are the “mighty men of valor” or “valiant warriors” of other versions (e.g., KJV, NKJV; and NASB, respectively). These men were the military elite. Joshua chose thirty thousand of them for the ambush at Ai ([Josh 8:3](#)) and took them into battle at Gilgal ([10:7](#)). Groups of four hundred mighty men ([1 Sam 22:2](#)) and later six hundred ([27:2](#)) accompanied David when he was fleeing from Saul; later, we read of an elite group of thirty or more who were his special warriors ([2 Sam 23:8–39](#)).

**1:15** The importance of the unity of the nation comes out clearly in Joshua's words here. They echo motifs already introduced: rest (v. [13](#)), possession of the land (v. [11](#)), the land as a gift from God (vv. [2-3](#)), the men's responsibilities (v. [14](#); cf. [Num 32:17, 22](#); [Deut 3:19-20](#)), and even Moses' role (v. [13](#)). These provide a fitting wrap-up to this short set of instructions.

*(4) All Israel's Response ([1:16-18](#))*

**<sup>16</sup>Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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!”**

**1:16** As already indicated, the grammar of the narrative framework of the chapter (vv. [1](#), [10](#), [12](#), [16a](#)) points to this response coming from representatives of all twelve tribes of Israel. That is, the officials of the people (v. [10](#)) and the Transjordan tribes (v. [12](#)) joined together in affirming their loyalty to Joshua and his instructions to them after he had spoken to each of them (see above on [1:12](#)).

The people's affirmation of Joshua was warm and enthusiastic, and it echoed elements of God's charge to Joshua in vv. [1-9](#). They blessed him with the statement about the Lord his God being with him, just as he had been with Moses (v. [17](#); this is similar to God's promise to Joshua of his presence in v. [5](#)). Also in these verses is the fourth and final occurrence of the exhortation to be strong and courageous (v. [18c](#); see also vv. [6, 7, 9](#)), which forms a fitting conclusion to this chapter, one that is full of exhortations and encouragements.

On the face of it, the people's pledges of obedience and loyalty to Joshua certainly must have been encouraging to this new leader who was not yet worthy of being called the “servant of the Lord” (see note on v. [1](#)). And there is no indication in the text that the people were anything but sincere in their words.

However, the Israelites had been a very disobedient people over the years, despite earlier promises to obey. For example, when Moses brought them the laws that God had given him and read from the Book of the Covenant, they had solemnly sworn obedience, saying, “Everything the Lord has said we will do” and “We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey” ([Exod 24:3, 7](#)). Yet, within a very short time, Aaron was leading the people in building a golden calf ([Exod 32](#)); and the Israelites' subsequent history is replete with examples of complaining, rebellion, and outright disobedience. So, we must wonder about the people's words here. If their promise was to obey Joshua in the same way they had obeyed Moses, the prospects were not as bright as they might first appear, since, of course, they did *not* “fully obey” Moses. Quite to the contrary! And Israel did not fully follow through on their obligations in Joshua's day either. For example, it is abundantly clear that the Israelites were to annihilate the Canaanites when they entered the land. God had so informed Moses that Israel was to carry out this complete destruction in Canaan ([Deut 7:2](#); [20:16-17](#); [Josh 11:15, 20](#)), and Moses had so instructed Joshua ([11:12, 15](#); cf. [10:40](#)). God spoke to Joshua directly about this, as well ([6:17](#), with reference to Jericho).

And yet, Israel did not follow through on these instructions in many instances. The most notorious incident of disobedience was Achan's taking of the spoils of Jericho when the explicit instructions were to the contrary ([6:17-19](#); cf. [7:1](#)). Furthermore, on several occasions the people as a whole did not follow through on their obligations to drive out the land's inhabitants (see [11:22b](#); [13:1](#); [15:63](#); [16:10](#);

[17:12–13](#)). Thus, a tension is introduced here between the people's words and their actions, one that simmers below the surface throughout the entire book (see Introduction).

**1:17** The aforementioned tension is evidenced by use of the adverb *raq*, meaning “only,” which occurs in the middle of this verse (NIV does not translate it). Before an imperfect verb form (as here), it “expresses something which either contradicts or varies from that which precedes it.” The question is, What is there in vv. [16–17a](#) that contrasts with what follows in v. [17b](#)? In light of the discussion immediately above, the answer should be obvious: Joshua would not be able to rely on the people's obedience—despite their promises! Rather, his success would come from the Lord's presence, not from the people's obedience (or lack of it). The people's words may have been well-intentioned, but their use of this word—and what follows—makes it very clear where Joshua needed to look for help: not to their obedience to him, but to God.

The NIV's rendering here (“Only may the Lord your God be with you”) gives the impression that this is the people's wish or blessing for Joshua. However, the verb form behind NIV's “may” is indicative in mood, not jussive, and the clause should therefore be translated, “Only the Lord your God will be with you” (i.e., substituting “will” for “may”). It is a statement of fact, not wish. The verse affirms that, in the end, the Lord will indeed be with Joshua.

**1:18** The words in this verse echo the sentiments already expressed several places in the chapter. The statement “Whoever rebels against your word” is literally “Whoever rebels against your mouth.” This expression is found previously in Scripture only three times, all referring to the earlier generation of Israelites' rebellions against God's commands ([Deut 1:26](#), [43](#); [9:23](#)). Here, the next generation commits itself, in word at least, to obeying Joshua's commands and to imposing severe sanctions (death) to anyone who would disobey. The final “Be strong and courageous” is the fourth time this exhortation has appeared in the chapter, the first three coming from God himself (vv. [6](#), [7](#), [9](#)).