

# I

## CONFIRMING THE PROMISE (1–2)

### Introduction

The people of Israel, having arrived on the plains of Moab, spend some time there being instructed by Moses. He teaches them the Law of God and its particular relevance for the new situation into which they are about to enter – ‘East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab Moses began to expound this law ...’ (Deut. 1:5).

This was a vital part of their preparation for the occupation of Canaan. But Moses is not to be the person to lead Israel into the land (see Num. 20:12). A new leader has to be appointed – that leader is Joshua (see Deut. 31:1-8). As the book of Deuteronomy closes, there is no doubt as to what is to happen next:

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses (Deut. 34:9).

As we read straight on from Deuteronomy into the book of Joshua, we are conscious of an unbroken sequence of events and purposes.

Chapters 1 and 2, though they are written in a narrative style, are a record of some important dialogues, which set the tone for the whole book. These dialogues reach back into Deuteronomy – God reiterates to Joshua the commission given to him by Moses (cf. Josh 1:1-9 and Deut. 31:1-8). They reach back into Numbers and the allocation of East Bank lands to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh (cf. Josh. 1:12-18 and Num. 32). Indeed, the dialogues reach back as far as the Exodus (cf. Josh. 2:10 and Exod. 14 :19-31). The original foundation on which these dialogues are built is, in fact, God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). They are about to enter the land as a united people and they know the blessing of God's presence with them. There will also be blessing for those outside of Israel, in accordance with God's promise – Rahab and her family exemplify this.

## Listening to the text

### *Context and structure*

These two chapters, as with the whole book, cannot be isolated from their relationship to the Pentateuch. This is the moment in the Bible's story when a temporal fulfilment of God's centuries-old promise is about to happen. As that fulfilment begins to unfold, Joshua and Israel hear and see God confirm His promise to them. Each scene in the narrative is marked by a speech or statement, which uncovers the significance of the event.

The scenes and the respective speeches unfold like this:

- ✦ God to Joshua 1:1-9
- ✦ Joshua to the leaders 1:10-11
- ✦ Joshua to the two-and-a-half tribes 1:12-18
- ✦ Joshua to the spies 2:1
- ✦ Rahab to the King of Jericho 2:2-7
- ✦ Rahab to the spies 2:8-14
- ✦ Spies to Rahab 2:15-21
- ✦ Spies to Joshua 2:22-24

When we examine the content of each of these episodes, they all have a connection to the idea of ‘promise’.

This can be outlined as follows:

- ✦ 1:1-9            Continuity and the Promise  
(God to Joshua)
- ✦ 1:10-11        Preparation for the Promise  
(Joshua to the leaders)
- ✦ 1:12-18        Remember *your* promise  
(Joshua to the two-and-a-half-tribes)
- ✦ 2:1-7            Promise in jeopardy  
(Rahab to the King of Jericho)
- ✦ 2:8-14         Recognising the Promise  
(Rahab to the spies)
- ✦ 2:15-21        Making their own promise  
(Spies to Rahab)
- ✦ 2:22-24        Confidence in the Promise  
(Spies to Joshua)

### *Working through the text*

#### *Continuity and the Promise (1:1-9)*

As the book of Deuteronomy closes, we find the people of God, led by Moses, gathered together and about to move into their inheritance – the Promised Land. The great moment has arrived, but the book ends ... with a funeral.

The book of Joshua opens with the people still in the same place, the plains of Moab, but without their great leader. But he is not forgotten! Moses' name is used three times in the opening verses, eleven times in the first chapter and forty-eight times in the whole book. Moses, of course, is rightly honoured by the people of Israel.

He is the one who:

- ✦ brought the Word of God to a whole generation
- ✦ was instrumental in displaying the signs and wonders of God
- ✦ was the mediator for the people when, because of their sin, they were in danger of being wiped out
- ✦ led them through the wilderness
- ✦ brought them to the edge of the Promised Land.

All of this simply highlights the fact that, while Moses is important to the flow of biblical history, he is not indispensable. It is now time for the new leader to step up and take command. But even the new leader, Joshua, is not the key to the life and continuance of the nation. The essential element of both Moses' and Joshua's leadership is contained in just three words, 'and God said' (1:1). They are leaders under the command, the promise, the Word of God.

The steady repetition of Moses' name signals the continuity of the promise. What God called Moses to do in terms of that promise, now Joshua is called to accomplish. A simple comparison of God's words to Joshua (1:3-5) and to Moses (Deut. 11:24-25) makes this clear. So, God speaks to Joshua in the opening verses of the chapter, and fundamental to all He says is His promise of old. The threefold theme we identified from creation, through the promise to Abraham and reaffirmed to Moses, now appears afresh in God's words to Joshua. Very clearly, the promise of *a place to live* is reaffirmed (1:2-4). It is a land of defined boundaries and, as Joshua and the people have already learned from Moses, it will be a land of complete contrast to their desert experience the last forty years (see 5:6). There is also an implicit progression in their acquisition of the land built into God's words.

I will give you every place where you set your feet, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates – all the Hittite country – to the Mediterranean Sea in the West (1:2-4).

This 'now and not yet' tension exists throughout the book as the land is subdued, but there remains work to be done (cf. 11:16 and 13:1 and comments on them). The other major element of the words about the land is that it comes as 'gift' not 'reward'. The tenses used in vv. 2 and 3 are significant, 'I am about to give to them' and 'I have given to you' (v. 3 ESV, not as NIV, 'I will give you'). This use of language underlines the certainty of the promise and the process by which it is fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> In this opening section of the book,

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1. D. Howard *Joshua* NAC (Nashville, USA: Broadman & Holman, 1998) p. 86.