



JOSHUA

Dale Ralph Davis







JOSHUA

No Falling Words



Dale Ralph Davis

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





Dale Ralph Davis is pastor of Woodlands Presbyterian Church, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Previously he taught Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi. He has previously written commentaries on *Judges* (978-1-84550-138-9), *1 Samuel* (978-1-85792-516-6), *2 Samuel* (978-1-84550-270-6), *1 Kings* (978-1-84550-251-5) and *2 Kings* (978-1-84550-096-2).

Copyright © Dale Ralph Davis

ISBN 978-1-84550-137-2

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This edition published in 2000,
reprinted in 2003, 2006, 2008 & 2010

by

Christian Focus Publications Ltd.,
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK.

www.christianfocus.com

Previously published in 1988 and 1996 by
Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, USA

Cover design by Alister MacInnes

Printed and bound by
Bell & Bain, Glasgow



Mixed Sources
Product group from well-managed
forests and other controlled sources
www.fsc.org Cert no. TT-COC-002769
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying. In the U.K. such licences are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1 8TS www.cla.co.uk.





Contents

Part 1: Entering the Land (Joshua 1–4)

- 1. The Promise of God and Four Funerals (Joshua 1:1-18; 24:29-33) .15
- 2. How to Listen to a Shady Lady Story (Joshua 2)..... 25
- 3. Going Across the Flow (Joshua 3–4)..... 31

Part 2: Taking the Land (Joshua 5–12)

- 4. Celebrating the Sacraments (Joshua 5:1-12) 45
- 5. Joshua Did *Not* Fight the Battle of Jericho (Joshua 5:13–6:27) 51
- 6. The Church in the Hands of an Angry God (Joshua 7) 57
- 7. Combat and Covenant (Joshua 8) 67
- 8. The Trouble with Common Sense (Joshua 9)..... 77
- 9. In Canaan’s Dixie (Joshua 10)..... 85
- 10. Not by Chariots, Not by Horses (Joshua 11:1-15)..... 95
- 11. War Wrap-up (Joshua 11:16-23) 103
- 12. Great Is Thy Faithfulness (Joshua 12) 107

Part 3: Possessing the Land (Joshua 13–21)

- 13. Receiving Our Inheritance (Joshua 13) 113
- 14. For Example (Joshua 14) 119
- 15. Promise Geography (Joshua 15)..... 127
- 16. Tragic Trends (Joshua 16–17) 133
- 17. Lots of Lots (Joshua 18–19) 143
- 18. Final Provisions (Joshua 20–21) 153

Part 4: Retaining the Land (Joshua 22–24)

- 19. What Can an Altar Alter? (Joshua 22) 169
- 20. Staying on Edge (Joshua 23) 181
- 21. Covenant Renewal at Abraham’s Place (Joshua 24:1-28) 193
- Subject Index 213
- Scripture Index 219







Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
IBD	<i>Illustrated Bible Dictionary</i>
ISBE	<i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
IDB/S	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible/Supplementary Volume</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TEV	Today's English Version
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
ZPEB	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible</i>







Preface

I remember learning one rule in Speech 101 in college: never begin a speech with an apology. Since this is not a speech but is a book, I will break the rule – at least with some disclaimers.

This commentary is obviously not a critical, linguistic, grammatical, archaeological thesaurus on Joshua. There is a reason for that: I neither can nor want to write that sort of commentary. Certainly, you will find grammatical details or critical discussions – at least bits and pieces of them – in this study. But the focus is necessarily elsewhere. I do not know multiple Near Eastern languages (such as Ugaritic or Akkadian) and so cannot stress linguistics; I am not a trained archaeologist or historian and so do not emphasize backgrounds; and I am skeptical of the usefulness of cerebral critical positions, which frequently seem intent on considering everything but the text as it stands, and so will not enter barren disputes. My purpose has been to provide a model of what a pastor can do in biblical study if he will sweat over the Hebrew text and assume that the text as we have it was meant to be bread from God for his people. My conviction is that if one is willing to keep his Hebrew Bible before his eyes, a congregation of God's people next to his heart, and the struggle of hermeneutics (i.e. what does this writer intend to proclaim to God's people in his time, and how do I faithfully hold on to that intention and helpfully apply that text to God's contemporary flock?) in his mind, he will have manna to set before God's hungering people.

Clearly, I think commentaries should be written from this conviction and after this pattern. I do not think I can expect



my seminary students to *warm* to the Old Testament unless they sense it *nurturing* them as they hear it taught. (Why should not the Spirit be at work in our classrooms?) But if once they feel the *fire* of the Old Testament text – well, then, the Old Testament becomes a new book to them! Certainly, all the technical matters (linguistic, archaeological, critical) are in order; but we must bring the fragments together in an expository treatment that is not ashamed to stoop to the level of application.

In recent years, evangelicals have made much of the inspiration, infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. Rightly so. But three ‘i’s’ are not enough. We must push the ‘instructability’ of Scripture. The apostle was surely completely sober when he wrote that the Old Testament is ‘profitable’ (2 Tim. 3:16). We must demonstrate that. If the church is to recover the Old Testament, our expositions of it must show that, without torturing or twisting, it speaks for the comfort and correction of the saints.

I trust *No Falling Words* approximates such standards. The title comes from Joshua 21:43-45, the sheet anchor of the book (precisely, from verse 45; see also 23:14). There were no falling words among the ancient Genesis promises; no *falling* words means no *failing* words. I trust readers will find the same – that God’s promise contains no falling words, only *standing* ones, upon which we, too, can stand.

A couple of mundane matters should be noted. I assume that the reader will have Bible in hand as he or she uses this book. I have drawn on a number of English translations, but, frequently, the translations are my own.

I owe multiple thanks to students, colleagues, and former parishioners for their stimulation and encouragement. I originally finished this volume on Reformation Day, 1987. It was a ‘manse’ production, written amid the delights and distresses of pastoral ministry. I don’t think that is in any way a deficiency! And I am most grateful to Christian Focus for sending it forth in a new format. The book remains dedicated to Yahweh’s gift (Prov. 19:14), Barbara, for two reasons: no other human being so richly deserves it, and she wanted me to dedicate it to her!



Introduction

There is no effort here to provide a full introduction to the Book of Joshua. A proposal about the date and setting of the book will be made later (see introductory comments on Joshua 22, including the footnotes). Critical conclusions should be drawn only after careful exposure to the text itself. However, I believe it is important to answer the question, is Joshua among the prophets?

Don't we usually stick Joshua among the historical books, which is the term we use to designate the books of Joshua through 2 Chronicles in our English Bibles? Jewish tradition was probably closer to the truth when it dubbed Joshua through 2 Kings as former prophets.¹

But why torture ourselves over terms? What difference does it make whether we look on Joshua as a historical or as a prophetic book? It has to do with the way some people think of history. I used to have theological students (who had just begun to get excited about the Old Testament) tell me, 'I never read or studied the Old Testament very much, because it seemed like it was all *history*.' What did they mean by that? They meant that they had viewed the Old Testament as a mere record of historical facts – and a dry one at that. Some of them never liked history in school, and when the Bible was cast in the same form ... alas!

What happens when one looks at Joshua as primarily prophecy rather than history? What is this difference between

¹ In distinction from the latter prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (the minor prophets) – 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings were viewed as one book each, so that the former prophets comprised four books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.



former prophets and historical books? To oversimplify, it is like the difference between preaching and a world history book. The ‘prophecy of Joshua’ means to convict, not merely to inform; to comfort, not simply to enlighten. The Book of Joshua is preaching material beamed to Israel in the form of historical narrative. We need to see clearly that ‘history in the O[ld] T[estament] is a declaration from God about God’.² But until we begin to think of history that way, we will do well to keep thinking of Joshua as one of the former *prophets*.

As you read and study Joshua, try to keep asking yourself the question: What is the writer *preaching about* when he tells me this story? He is not telling you the story only to inform you (although that is part of it); he has a message to proclaim, a God to press upon you.³

Keeping this in mind, let us begin.

² J. A. Motyer, ‘Old Testament History’, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 1:154.

³ I agree with Sidney Greidanus when he asserts that historical texts ‘do not merely relate past facts but proclaim these facts in a relevant manner to the church at various stages of redemptive history’. He holds that the ‘nature of the historical text can best be described ... as proclamation’ (*Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* [Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970], 212). None of the preceding remarks should be viewed as impugning the importance or reliability of biblical history; they are only an attempt to clarify the true nature of that history.



Part I

Entering the Land

(Joshua 1–4)







The Promise of God and Four Funerals (Joshua 1:1-18; 24:29-33)

Several months ago I was reading Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolboy* to one of my sons. We'd had the book in our collection for some time but had never read it. Finally, Seth and I tackled it. He was quite taken with it and really became caught up in the story. In fact, he read the last chapter on his own so that he would know all along how 'it finally turned out'. That is not a bad idea – even for a biblical book. Normally, one might expect a writer to raise some of his foremost concerns in his introduction and conclusion. Hence, we propose to look at the very beginning *and* the very end of Joshua first in order to gain a perspective from which to view the whole book.

In the case of Joshua, this means that we find ourselves attending four funerals. Let's attend Moses' funeral first and save the rest for later in our discussion.

The Promise of God and the First Funeral (1:1-18)

Before entering into an exposition of the themes of chapter 1, it will be well to notice how the chapter is put together. The chapter falls into two major sections, both of which follow the same main pattern:



Death of Moses, 1a

Yahweh's charge to Joshua, 1b-9

Yahweh's command to action, 1b-4

'Cross over...'

'The land I am giving...'

Yahweh's encouragement to Joshua, 5-9

'I will be/am with you' (beginning and end of section)

'Be strong and be bold' (three times in the middle of section)

Joshua's charge to Israel, 10-18

Joshua's command to prepare for action, 10-15

To people (via officers), 10-11

'You are going to cross over...'

'The land Yahweh ... is giving'

To eastern tribes, 12-15

'You must cross over...'

'The land Yahweh ... is giving'

People's encouragement to Joshua, 16-18

'Yahweh ... be with you'

'Be strong and bold'

From this sketch at least two emphases emerge: the land is God's gift and yet there is the command to lay hold of that gift, and encouragement is given to the leader of God's people. The encouragement in both cases comes to Joshua, who, as we shall see, doubtless needed it greatly. This theme carries into chapters 3-4 (see 3:7; 4:14). Interestingly, chapter 1 is almost entirely direct speech rather than descriptive narrative; the writer uses the speeches of others to tell his story. Now for a more detailed exposition.

The Vitality of Yahweh's Promise (1:1-4)

The first theme the writer underscores is the vitality of Yahweh's promise. The *content* of the promise has to do with Yahweh's gift of the land (vv. 2-4, 6, 11, 15). And some land! As in Genesis 15:18, Deuteronomy 1:7, and 11:24, the eastern boundary is the Euphrates River. You must get out your Bible atlas to believe or disbelieve it!¹ But what is important to see is that this is the promise God made long ago to Abraham



and company (Gen. 12:6-7; 13:14-15; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8; 24; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 35:12; 48:3-4; 50:24). Hence the theological roots of Joshua 1 are sunk deeply into the soil of Genesis 12 and following, and that ancient promise is about to receive its contemporary fulfilment.

However, the *context* of the promise – ‘after the death of Moses’ (v. 1) – is particularly significant. ‘Moses my servant has died,’ Yahweh says, ‘and now, rise, cross over this Jordan ... into the land which I am giving to them’ (v. 2). In order to appreciate this reference to Moses’ death, one must remember the pentateuchal tradition of the greatness of Moses. Israel stood within an inch of her covenant death in Exodus 32–34; Moses was the only Israelite in covenant fellowship with Yahweh (this is the implication of Exodus 33:7-11 in context), and, as Israel’s mediator, he attached their destiny to his (33:16). Unlike prophets in general, Moses received revelation from Yahweh in the most direct manner (Num. 12:1-8). Indeed, Deuteronomy 34:10-12 (the three verses right before Joshua) makes crystal clear how incomparable Moses was. There was no one like Moses; no one as great as Moses until the One greater than Moses came. And now Moses had died. You can imagine the dismay in Israel. Although you expected it, were informed of it, were prepared for it (Deut. 31), what do you do when *the* servant of God dies and a raging river lies between you and the land you are to inherit? (You might wonder if Moses died after all – he is mentioned eleven times in Joshua 1!) What do you have left when everything the first five books of the Bible have been preparing you for ends in a funeral?

It is against this background of the death of ‘Moses the Incomparable’ that the writer sets the continuity of Yahweh’s promise. ‘Moses my servant has died, so you must wait’? No. ‘You must weep’? No. But, ‘Rise, cross over ... into the land.’ Moses may die; God’s promise lives on. There is the passing

¹ Regarding the borders of the promised land noted in verse 4, see Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The MacMillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 41; Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, rev. and enl. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979, 67-77; and Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 231-33. Never in her history did Israel occupy the extent of territory described in Joshua 1:4.



of an era yet the endurance of the promise. Yahweh's fidelity does not hinge on the achievements of men, however gifted they may be, nor does it evaporate in the face of funerals or rivers.²

The Encouragement of Yahweh's Presence (1:5, 9, 17)

Secondly, Joshua 1 highlights the encouragement of Yahweh's presence. 'I will be with you' (v. 5). It is interesting to note that these simple words were spoken once before to a very reticent, backward, excuse-making, ask-George-not-me sort of fellow, that is, Moses, in Exodus 3:12, when he was called to face both Israel and pharaoh. The same God now gives the same assurance in similar threatening circumstances to Joshua. Indeed, a case can be made for the name *Yahweh* being intended as theological (or devotional) shorthand for the implications and message of the statement 'I will be with you' (see Exod. 3:14-15 in light of 3:12).³ Hence Moses has died, but Yahweh has not changed. He is still Yahweh, the God who is *present* with his servant and his people to help and deliver (contrast Hosea 1:9).

It is because of this assurance that Yahweh can exhort Joshua to 'be strong and bold' (vv. 6, 7, 9). Joshua is not told to grit his teeth and screw up his courage on his own; he is to be strong only because Yahweh is with him (v. 9) and not because Yahweh prefers leaders who are positive thinkers. Note how this assurance keeps reappearing throughout the book (2:24; 3:7, 10; 4:14; 6:27; 10:14, 42; 13:6; 14:12; 21:44; 23:3, 10).

² John Calvin nicely stated the matter: 'This suggests the very useful reflection, that while men are cut off by death, and fail in the middle of their career, the faithfulness of God never fails. On the death of Moses a sad change seemed impending; the people were left like a body with its head lopped off. While thus in danger of dispersion, not only did the truth of God prove itself to be immortal, but it was shewn in the person of Joshua as in a bright mirror, that when God takes away those whom he has adorned with special gifts, he has others in readiness to supply their place, and that though he is pleased for a time to give excellent gifts to some, his mighty power is not tied down to them, but he is able, as often as seemeth to him good, to find fit successors, nay, to raise up from the very stones persons qualified to perform illustrious deeds' (*Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, trans. Henry Beveridge, in vol. 4 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. [reprint ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], xix).

³ See Morris S. Seale, *The Desert Bible* (New York: St. Martin's, 1974), 154-56; Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969), 81-82; and Karl-Heinz Bernhardt, 'Hayah', *TDOT*, 3:380-81.



A contemporary Christian reader might see this and say that's all very nice for Joshua, but he was a noteworthy character; he had to lead all of Israel. What about the plain Christian like me? Is this promise for ordinary Christians? Look at the use of this promise in Hebrews 13:5-6:

Keep your life free from love of money,
and be content with what you have;
for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.'
Hence we can confidently say,
'The Lord is my helper,
I will not be afraid;
what can man do to me?' [RSV].

Here the promise of Joshua 1:5 is applied to a Christian congregation. The promise of God's abiding presence in Joshua 1 is also for you (note the 'for' in Hebrews 13:5b) and is the solution to the sin of covetousness and discontent, which in turn (note the 'hence' of Hebrews 13:6) leads to the great freedom of life without fear! There is nothing more essential for the people of God than to hear their God repeating to them amid all their changing circumstances, 'I will be with you' or 'I will not forsake you.'

The Centrality of Yahweh's Word (1:7-8)

The third theme we observe is the centrality of Yahweh's word. Joshua is commanded to be especially strong and bold 'to be careful to do according to all the torah (instruction) which Moses my servant commanded you' (v. 7). God does not withhold the formula that leads to such obedience: 'you shall meditate (mutter) over this torah document day and night, so that you will be careful to do according to all that is written in it' (v. 8). Constant, careful absorbing of the word of God leads to obedience to it. Lack of study results in lack of obedience. Notice how the writer stresses this urgency of obedience to Yahweh's word in the last chapters as well (22:5; 23:6; cf. 8:30-35).

This command is given specifically to Joshua as the leader of God's people. Can we legitimately assume that it also obligates every Israelite or Christian? Yes. If we don't like



Joshua 1:7-8, we still have to face Psalm 1:2, which describes what should be true of every godly believer (i.e. 'but his delight is in Yahweh's torah, and in his torah he meditates day and night'). There is no escape! Indeed, the torah should be our delight. Life in the kingdom of God must be lived out of the Word of God. Joshua 1 and Psalm 1 alike tell us that a life pleasing to God does not arise from mystical experiences or warm feelings or from a new gimmick advocated in a current release from one of our evangelical publishers; no, it comes from the word God has already spoken and from obedience to that word.

The Unity of Yahweh's People (1:12-18)

Finally, Joshua 1 uses much space to describe the unity of Yahweh's people. One might think there is little theological meat in these verses, but when they are read in light of Numbers 32 they take on new significance. When the two (or two and one-half) tribes request Moses to assign them an inheritance to the east of the Jordan, Moses suspects that their query hides a fresh conspiracy to abort the fulfilment of God's promise. In a flash of white heat he lambastes them as a 'brood of sinful men' (Num. 32:14), apparently content to possess their land now, sit out the Cis-jordan conquest, allow the other tribes to fend for themselves, and thus to discourage and dishearten (Num. 32:7) the majority of God's people. So, Moses says, there will be another Kadesh-barnea! Numbers 13-14 all over again! It is in the light of the peril of rebellion against Yahweh that the unity of God's people becomes so crucial (Num. 32:16-27).

Now perhaps we can see why the unity of all Israel portrayed in Joshua 1 was so critical. Here Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh are models of willing obedience and instruments of encouragement. Indifference on their part or snubbing their noses at the western tribes would have discouraged and disheartened the rest of God's people and led to rebellion and unbelief. It is interesting to note the concern for 'all Israel' throughout the Book of Joshua (chs. 3-4; chs. 7-8; 10:29ff.; 22:12, 16; 23:2; 24:1).⁴

One can detect implications here for the doctrine and practice of the church – unity among God's people is no idle



luxury. This does not mean that we have to feel all sticky and gooey about each other, but it does mean that we must care enough that we don't want any of the Lord's children to get discouraged. It seems that such caring encouragement should take place in our public meetings (Heb. 10:25; see a beautiful example in 1 Sam. 23:16). And it is crucial because, ultimately, unity is a prerequisite for fidelity.

So Moses has died. But Yahweh has not left Israel – or us – orphans; we still have God's promise, God's presence, God's Word, and God's people. And that should be enough until the kingdom of God comes in power and great glory.

The Promise of God and the Last Three Funerals (24:29-33)

These verses seem to be a rather dry-as-dust way to end an otherwise interesting book: an obituary column for a conclusion. However, we should ask why the writer closes his book this way. Does he want merely to supply burial details, provide a 'where they are now' section about the main cast, or furnish information so that relatives can find the right graves for Veterans' Day each year? I propose that these are theological obituaries and that the writer has deliberately placed them at the end of the book to underscore his concerns.

The Veracity of Yahweh's Promise

First, he emphasizes the veracity of Yahweh's promise. Observe the places where Joshua, the bones of Joseph, and Eleazar are said to be buried (vv. 30, 32, 33). Obviously a definite location is given in each case, but the important point is that each of them is buried *in the land* that Yahweh promised them. They have died; but their tombstones are monuments to the fidelity of Yahweh to his promise of the land.

The reference to the 'bones of Joseph' is particularly interesting (v. 32). The Book of Genesis closes with Joseph clinging to God's promise of the land. It is an astounding picture. Joseph is both over Egypt and in Egypt but certainly not of Egypt; for even as he dies his eyes are glued to another

⁴ The unity of Israel throughout the Book of Joshua will form a healthy contrast to the increasing fragmentation of Israel in the Book of Judges.



land, which Yahweh has promised. He is so taken with that promise – it is such a passion with him – that he requires his kin to take his bones to that land when God leads them out of Egypt (cf. Heb. 11:22), which they did (Exod. 13:19). And now (Josh. 24:32) they find their resting place.

A tremendous amount of time has elapsed since Abraham received the promise – 500 to 600 years! But, so our writer avers, the passage of time does not void the promises of God. Joshua, Joseph, Eleazar – these, being dead, yet speak.

The Test for Yahweh's People

Secondly, our writer hints at the test for Yahweh's people. Verse 31 seems to be both positive and negative: 'Israel served Yahweh all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the work of Yahweh that he had done for Israel.' Here is a record of fidelity and a hint of wavering. In this section we hear of the deaths of both Joshua and Eleazar. The Book of Joshua constantly links Eleazar and Joshua (14:1; 17:4; 19:51; 21:1) just as the Pentateuch links Aaron and Moses. Thus the deaths of Eleazar and Joshua signify the complete passing of that conquest generation. So the question lingers: Whither Israel? Will Israel still serve Yahweh now that Joshua and Eleazar and the elders are gone? In verse 31 the writer already seems to see the situation of Judges 2:10 and fears the answer is no.⁵ (Maybe that's why he wrote this book – to depict the fidelity of Yahweh so that a wavering Israel might respond in kind before it was too late.)

Can the church remain faithful after the eyewitnesses are gone? That is no small test. Here is the continual danger of second-generation religion: Will we remain warm and faithful without the gentle pressure of our spiritual mentors on whom we once leaned? Although we ourselves have not seen the cutting off of the Jordan and the crumbling of Jericho, can we still cling to the God who did these acts?

⁵ As Calvin states (*Joshua*, 282): 'Accordingly, attention is indirectly drawn to their inconstancy, when it is said that they served the Lord while Joshua survived, and till the more aged had died out. For there is a tacit antithesis, implying lapse and alienation, when they were suddenly seized with a forgetfulness of the Divine favours.'

The Need for Yahweh's Victory

Third, perhaps we are not wrong in seeing here the need for Yahweh's victory. True, these graves witness to the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise and yet there is an incompleteness, a tragedy about it, since it is marked by death. Why does Israel's saga of faith and life have to keep closing its chapters with death notices? Genesis ends with Joseph's death. Deuteronomy ends with Moses' death. The Book of Joshua ends with Joshua's death. Is this not the sting of sin we see here amid the fidelity of God? Is this not a sign of the wrath of God against us (Ps. 90:9, 11-12)? How much better when the One who 'abolished death' (2 Tim. 1:10) causes the last chapters to shimmer with resurrection (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21).

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever felt like your end was near but you needed to trust God's promises?
2. In what has God reassured you of his presence, of his never "leaving you or forsaking" you?
3. How does the centrality of God's word make a difference in your life?
4. How were the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh able to encourage all of Israel?
5. What particular promises of God have caused you to hang on in the midst of the impossible?