

Book of Joshua



Lesson 2: Preparing to Cross the Jordan, Rahab the Harlot

Suggested Responses

1. In Joshua 1:1, Joshua is described as the “son of Nun” and “Moses’ minister,” or faithful servant. We learn from the Points to Ponder that Joshua is a descendant of the tribe of Ephraim, who was one of Joseph’s sons. His name is the Hebrew form of the name “Jesus,” which means “Yahweh saves.”
2. The Lord commands Joshua to lead the Israelites into the land of Canaan, which is currently inhabited by numerous and fearsome enemies of God’s people. The Lord promises Joshua that “no man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you” (Josh 1:5). Because God has promised to be with him, Joshua cannot fail—unless he neglects to do two things. He must be “strong and of good courage” (Josh 1:6, 7), and he must “meditate on [the book of the Law of Moses] day and night” and “be careful to do according to all that is written in it” (Josh 1:8). The Lord tells Joshua if he does these two things, he will be successful and prosperous.
3. The Points to Ponder explain that crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land is not a simple and celebratory gesture for the Israelites, who have wandered in the desert for 40 years. Rather, it is a massive logistics effort that involves preparing daily provisions for the people and their livestock as well as preparing for war. Joshua is leading an army of over 600,000 “men of valor” plus women and children. We can infer from the text that the tribes are well organized and capable of executing such a considerable transportation and military campaign because each tribe has “officers” and “men of valor” who are armed and prepared to do all that Joshua commands (Josh 1:10, 14).
4. In the Points to Ponder, we learn that while the Promised Land is not a huge territory, its fertile lands and strategic location within the region make it a marvelous gift from God to the people. In Joshua 1:4, God describes the boundaries of the land of promise: “From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory.” With some variation, this area roughly covers the State of Israel today. For ancient Israel, this land forms a bridge between the great civilizations. All travelers passing between northeastern Africa and Europe and Asia must pass through the land of Canaan. The potential for controlling the trade route is immeasurable. On a spiritual level, the waters of the Jordan River would one day provide the marvelous gift of Baptism, by which the people of God would cross over from death to eternal life (CCC 1220). Before his ascension, Jesus commands his disciples to go out into the world from this region in order to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). In these verses we can clearly hear the echo of the Lord’s command

to Joshua to cross over the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land, to be obedient to all God's laws, and to remember that the Lord is with him wherever he goes.

5. The two spies sent into Jericho by Joshua are hidden by a woman named Rahab. She is a harlot whose name appears in St. Matthew's genealogy as an ancestor of Jesus Christ: "and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab..." (Mt 1:5). The Points to Ponder explain that the inclusion of Rahab, a harlot and a convert to the faith, suggests that God intends to save all mankind through the nation of Israel. In spite of her sinful occupation and pagan family history, Rahab is grafted like a branch into the tree of Israel (cf. Rom 11:24) because she chooses to do what is right and acceptable to God (cf. Acts 10:34-35).
6. In the Points to Ponder, we learn that several Church Fathers have seen in Rahab a type of the Church. In Joshua 2:18-21, the spies tell Rahab the conditions by which she and all her family may be saved during Israel's invasion of Jericho. She must (1) tie a scarlet cord outside her window which shall remain visible throughout the attack, (2) keep all her family inside her home for the duration of the attack, and (3) not betray their arrangement, lest their promise to her and her family become void. The Points to Ponder explain that Rahab's display of the scarlet cord, a symbol of the blood of Christ, has been seen as a sign of salvation, where all who gather within the Church (just as Rahab's family gathered within her home) will be saved on the day of destruction. However, for those who after obtaining the grace of the Church nevertheless abandon the Church, then, according to St. Cyprian of Carthage, their blood shall be upon their own heads, and they shall be responsible for their own destruction.
7. St. James teaches that faith alone cannot save; only faith completed by works can save: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (Jas 2:24-26). The Points to Ponder explain that if Rahab had simply declared her belief in the God of Israel (Josh 2:11) without also helping the spies escape and doing all that they had asked of her, then her family would not have been saved and her name would not have appeared in St. Matthew's genealogy. As St. Paul notes in Hebrews 11:31, it is Rahab's "faith-filled works" that justify her before God and enable her name to be included among all the great workers of faith in the Old Testament (cf. Heb 11).