



God's Promises and Our Faith

Joshua 4:14-24

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever (Joshua 4:23-24—ESV).

The Book of Joshua compares Joshua, who led the Hebrews across the Jordan River, to Moses, who led the Hebrews across the Red Sea. Consider how God's promises and their fulfillment by God created and developed His people's faith in Him. Think of how God's promises in the Bible and their fulfillment have created and built up your faith and the faith of others in Jesus Christ.

After about 400 years of slavery in Egypt, God fulfilled His promises to Abraham and prepared His people to enter and claim the land He had promised to give to Abraham's descendants. To fulfill His promise, the LORD God mercifully revealed His power so an oppressed people who had known nothing but oppression could learn to trust Him. Many had not seen the hand of the true God at work until the LORD sent Moses to free them from slavery through mighty miracles. The Passover and the Hebrews' crossing of the Red Sea are still remembered yearly by Jews around the world.

But when the Hebrews first came to the border of the Promised Land with Moses and refused to enter for lack of faith in the LORD, they began 40 years of wilderness wandering. During these wilderness years, the LORD taught and disciplined the younger generation that would enter the Promised Land. When they came to the border again, they would need faith and obedience to receive what God had promised.

The LORD chose Joshua to teach His people what the Apostle Paul called, “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5). As the Apostle Paul used the prophetic writings, today we use the writings of the Old and New Testaments to teach “the obedience of faith.” We teach the Bible “according to the command of the eternal God, *to bring about the obedience of faith*” (Romans 16:26).

Moses demonstrated “the obedience of faith” when he lifted his staff and stretched out his hand over the sea according to the LORD’s command. Then the LORD used a mighty wind to push back the waters and dry the seabed overnight (Exodus 14:16–31). When the people crossed safely, they showed “the obedience of faith,” believing that the LORD would give them safe passage.

Joshua demonstrated for the Hebrews “the obedience of faith” in the LORD when he commanded the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant to step into the overflowing river. These priests demonstrated “the obedience of faith” by stepping into the water as the LORD commanded them through Joshua. Immediately, the LORD stopped the flow of the river. Next, the priests showed “the obedience of faith” by standing firmly in the middle of the dry riverbed trusting the LORD would keep the water back until Joshua commanded them to come out.

The moment they set foot on the dry riverbank the river returned to overflowing. As the priests stood in the middle of a dry riverbed, the Hebrew people learned “the obedience of faith” by their example. When they themselves crossed over the Jordan they too practiced “the obedience of faith.” Learning “the obedience of faith” prepared them to trust in the Lord and obey all His commands when they had to fight to take possession of the Promised Land and receive what God had promised them.

God often fulfilled, and still fulfills, His promises through people who obey His commands by faith in Him. God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises does not depend on our obedience, but God graciously allows obedient believers to join in when He accomplishes His purposes. Paul called this “the obedience of faith” that God expects of every person who claims to believe in and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Think of John the Baptist; he showed “the obedience of faith” when he obeyed God, followed the leading of the Holy Spirit, preached, and baptized to prepare people for the coming of Jesus Christ as God promised.

Jesus demonstrated “the obedience of faith” that God expects from His followers when He fulfilled God’s promises to us and went to the cross for our salvation and then rose victoriously from the dead. True faith is not simply believing a few facts about Jesus; rather, “the obedience of faith” is faith that responds to Jesus by loving and obeying Jesus. Remember His words in Matthew 16:24-26: “Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?’”

Jesus practiced what He preached and we have benefitted from His sacrifice, His resurrection, and His ascension into heaven.

In this life, when we practice “the obedience of faith,” we may never know how God uses our obedience to fulfill a personal or biblical promise to someone. Perhaps God has used us to fulfill His promise to meet someone’s personal needs or deepen someone’s faith. The Bible shows how God fulfills many of His promises through those who obey Him in faith, showing forth His grace, love, mercy, truth, and faithfulness.

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