



THE BOOK OF  
**JOSHUA**  
— BIBLE STUDY —

*Stepping into the Promise*

FAITH, COURAGE, AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1<sup>ST</sup>, 8<sup>TH</sup>, AND 15<sup>TH</sup>  
10:30am – 12:00pm



FRIENDSHIP UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
22 W. Friendship Rd., Friendship, MD 20758

Facilitator: *Pastor Rudy*

Join us for an engaging and enriching study of the Book of *Joshua* as we prepare for our trip to **Sight & Sound Theatres** in Lancaster, PA on **Wednesday, April 22nd** to see *Joshua* live on stage!



## Session One, Part 1 of 3

### Joshua 1–5

The Book of Joshua opens not with movement, but with stillness. It begins in the quiet aftermath of loss, in the space that follows the death of a great leader and precedes whatever comes next. Moses, the one who confronted Pharaoh, stretched out his staff at the sea, climbed Sinai, and interceded for a stubborn people, is gone. Israel stands on the eastern edge of the Jordan River, no longer wandering, not yet settled, suspended between memory and promise. This in-between moment is not incidental. It is the theological soil out of which the entire book grows.

Joshua does not ask us first to consider land or conquest. It asks us to consider continuity. The opening verse states the transition plainly, “After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ assistant” (Joshua 1:1). The title matters. Moses is called the servant of the Lord, and Joshua is identified not by his future authority but by his past faithfulness as Moses’ assistant. Leadership in Israel is portrayed not as self-promotion but as continuity of service under God’s calling.

God’s first words to Joshua do not introduce a new vision or strategy. They reaffirm an old promise. “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.” David M. Howard Jr. notes that this statement establishes the central theological claim of the book. Joshua is not about Israel becoming something new, but about God remaining who God has always been. The same God who spoke to Abraham, delivered Israel from Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, and revealed the law at Sinai is the God who now speaks again. The future is uncertain, but God is not.

This promise of presence is followed by a command. Joshua is told to arise and cross the Jordan. The land is described not as something to be seized, but as something already given. God speaks of the land in completed terms. “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you.” The gift precedes the action. Obedience does not earn the promise. Obedience responds to it.

Yet obedience will not be easy. Three times God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous. This repetition signals that courage is not optional in the life of faith. It also clarifies what kind of courage is required. Dale Ralph Davis reminds us that biblical courage is not bravado or emotional fearlessness. It is the resolve to act faithfully in response to God’s word, even when outcomes are unclear. Courage in Joshua is not rooted in confidence about circumstances. It is rooted in confidence about God.

This is why Joshua is instructed to meditate on the law day and night. Leadership is framed as attentiveness before effectiveness. Joshua is not told to rely on instinct or charisma. He is told to listen, remember, and obey. The success promised in Joshua 1 is not military success as the world defines it. It is covenant faithfulness. Prosperity and success are redefined as alignment with God’s instruction.

Joshua then speaks to the people, and their response is telling. They pledge obedience and echo God's call to courage. Yet their commitment is conditional. "Only be strong and courageous." The people recognize that leadership will require more than authority. It will require faithfulness under pressure. The community's future is bound to Joshua's willingness to trust God rather than fear uncertainty.

The narrative then slows, introducing a story that appears, at first glance, to interrupt the forward movement. Joshua sends spies into Jericho. This episode recalls an earlier spy story from the time of Moses, one that ended disastrously. The echo is intentional. The question lingers. Has anything changed? The answer emerges not through the spies themselves, but through Rahab.

Rahab is a Canaanite woman living within the walls of Jericho. She occupies a marginal social position, yet she speaks with remarkable theological clarity. She confesses that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below. Her faith is grounded not in direct revelation but in testimony. She has heard what God has done. This is significant. Faith in Joshua is already crossing boundaries. Grace is already at work outside Israel.

Rahab's protection of the spies and her request for mercy reveal a truth that will echo throughout Scripture. God's redemptive purposes are not confined to ethnic or social boundaries. Richard S. Hess emphasizes that Rahab's inclusion signals that the covenant story has always had a wider horizon. Faith, not lineage, is the decisive factor.

The spies return to Joshua with confidence. Unlike the earlier generation, fear does not dominate their report. They affirm that God has given the land into their hands. Yet the real theological work has already been done. Faith has been modeled not by Israel's representatives, but by a woman whose life exists on the margins of the promised land.

Joshua chapter 3 brings the people to the edge of the Jordan. The river is at flood stage, an important detail that heightens the sense of impossibility. God instructs the priests carrying the ark to step into the water. Only then will the waters stop. This reverses expectations. At the Red Sea, the waters parted before the people moved. Here, movement precedes miracle.

Richard S. Hess notes that the ark symbolizes God's presence, not as a talisman but as a reminder that God goes before the people. Israel does not conquer space to bring God with them. God leads, and the people follow. The stopping of the waters is not a reward for bravery. It is a confirmation of trust.

The crossing itself is described with restraint. The focus is not on spectacle, but on obedience. The priests stand firm while the people pass over. The entire community crosses together. No one advances alone. Faith in Joshua is communal. Salvation is experienced together.

After the crossing, God commands Joshua to establish a memorial. Twelve stones are taken from the riverbed and set up as a sign. These stones are explicitly didactic. They are meant to provoke questions from children. "What do these stones mean?" The answer rehearses God's saving action. Faith is sustained through memory. Forgetfulness is the enemy of obedience.

Joshua chapter 4 emphasizes that remembrance is not nostalgia. It is formation. By telling the story, each generation learns who God is and who they are. The stones bear witness not to Israel's achievement, but to God's faithfulness.

Joshua chapter 5 introduces a surprising pause. Instead of advancing immediately toward Jericho, the people stop for circumcision and Passover. These covenant rituals re-anchor Israel's identity. Gordon McConville observes that before Israel can claim the land, they must reclaim who they are. The land is not a prize. It is a trust.

The manna ceases, signaling a transition in God's provision. God remains faithful, but the form of faithfulness changes. This moment teaches Israel that dependence on God does not look the same in every season. Faithfulness adapts, but it does not disappear.

The chapter closes with a mysterious encounter between Joshua and a divine commander. Joshua asks whether this figure is for Israel or for their enemies. The answer reframes the question. God is not aligned with human agendas. Joshua must align himself with God. Leadership begins with humility.

For Christian readers, Joshua 1 through 5 invites a Christological reflection grounded in Scripture itself. The New Testament looks back on Joshua and declares that the rest he offers is incomplete. Hebrews speaks of a greater rest still to come. Jesus fulfills what Joshua anticipates. Not by conquering land, but by reconciling humanity to God.

Joshua 1 through 5 therefore addresses every community standing between memory and promise. It asks whether we will trust God's presence when familiar leaders are gone. It asks whether we will step forward before certainty is guaranteed. It asks whether we will remember who God is when circumstances change.

Friendship United Methodist Church, like Israel at the Jordan, stands not alone but together. The invitation is not to fear the future, but to trust the God who has been faithful in the past. The stones of remembrance are already in place. The question is whether we will step into the water.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Israel stands between memory and promise, with Moses gone and the future uncertain. Where do you recognize an "in-between" season in your own life and what fears or hopes surface in that space?
2. God promises Joshua presence rather than certainty and calls him to step forward before the waters part. What might it look like for you to trust God's presence even when clarity, control, or guarantees are absent?

3. The stones taken from the Jordan are meant to provoke remembrance across generations. What experiences, stories, or practices help you remember God's faithfulness, and how might those memories shape your willingness to step forward in faith now?

## Session One, Part 2 of 3

### Joshua 1–5

One of the most important theological movements in Joshua 1 through 5 is the way leadership is reframed. Joshua is clearly identified as Moses' successor, yet the text resists any attempt to turn him into a second Moses. God does not say, "You will be like Moses." God says, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." The focus is not on replicating a personality or a leadership style, but on trusting the same faithful God. This distinction matters for communities of faith who often struggle with transition. Joshua teaches that continuity in God's work does not depend on sameness in human leadership.

The emphasis on God's presence also reshapes how success is understood. Joshua 1 does not promise ease. It promises accompaniment. God does not say the road will be smooth or the people will be spared fear. God says, "I will be with you wherever you go." This promise redefines courage. Courage is not the absence of anxiety. It is faithfulness practiced in the presence of anxiety. Many people of faith assume courage means confidence. Joshua reveals that courage means obedience sustained by trust.

The command to meditate on the law day and night further grounds this understanding. In a culture that often prizes innovation and speed, Joshua presents attentiveness as the foundation of faithful leadership. Meditation here does not mean passive reflection. It means sustained engagement with God's instruction so that obedience becomes instinctive. The law is not presented as a burden, but as a guide that shapes life in the land. Obedience is not a means of control. It is a means of freedom.

As the narrative moves toward the Jordan, the people are instructed to consecrate themselves. This act signals readiness, not perfection. Consecration is about orientation. The people are preparing to witness God's work, and preparation involves aligning their hearts and actions with God's purposes. Faith in Joshua is never accidental. It is intentional.

The Jordan crossing itself becomes a theological hinge in Israel's story. The waters pile up far upstream, creating a passageway that is both miraculous and understated. The text does not linger on spectacle. Instead, it emphasizes order, obedience, and communal movement. Everyone crosses. No tribe advances ahead of the others. Faith is practiced together.

This communal dimension challenges modern assumptions about faith as a private endeavor. Joshua insists that obedience and trust are shared responsibilities. When one person falters, the community is affected. When the community remembers, individuals are strengthened. The stones taken from the riverbed embody this truth. They are tangible reminders that faith must be rehearsed, not assumed.

The placement of the memorial stones also matters. Some are set up at Gilgal, Israel's first camp in the land. Others are placed within the river itself. Memory is anchored both in the place of transition and in the place of arrival. God's faithfulness is remembered not only after success, but during vulnerability. This rhythm of remembrance guards against arrogance and despair alike.

Joshua chapter 5 introduces a moment of theological recalibration. Circumcision, neglected during the wilderness years, is restored. This act reconnects Israel to the covenant with Abraham. It is not a regression, but a renewal. Gordon McConville emphasizes that covenant identity must be reclaimed before covenant responsibility can be fulfilled. The land will shape Israel, but only if Israel remains grounded in who they are.

The celebration of Passover reinforces this identity. Passover recalls liberation, dependence, and divine deliverance. As the people prepare to face fortified cities, they are reminded that their story begins not with conquest, but with rescue. God's power is revealed not through domination, but through deliverance. This memory reorients how the people are to live in the land.

The cessation of manna marks a subtle yet profound transition. God's provision does not cease. It changes form. In the wilderness, daily manna trained Israel in dependence. In the land, provision will come through cultivation, cooperation, and patience. Faith matures, but it does not become self sufficient. Dependence remains, even as responsibility increases.

The encounter between Joshua and the commander of the Lord's army brings the theological focus to a climax. Joshua asks a question that reflects a common human impulse. "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" The response dismantles the assumption behind the question. God is not enlisted to support Israel's agenda. Israel must align itself with God's purposes. Joshua's response is worship. He removes his sandals, recognizing holy ground.

This moment echoes Moses at the burning bush, reinforcing continuity without replication. Joshua is not Moses, but the God who calls him is the same. Leadership is framed as submission before command. Authority flows from humility.

For Christian readers, this encounter raises important Christological questions. The text does not identify the commander explicitly, yet Christian tradition has often read this figure as a manifestation of God's presence. Regardless of interpretation, the theological message is clear. God is not a tribal deity who fights for one side simply because it is ours. God's holiness demands alignment, not assumption.

Joshua 1 through 5 therefore resists simplistic readings that portray God as a guarantor of human ambition. Instead, it presents a God who calls people into participation in divine purposes that transcend self interest. Faith is not about winning. It is about trusting.

This section of Joshua also speaks powerfully to communities navigating change. The death of Moses represents more than leadership transition. It represents the end of a familiar chapter. Joshua invites the people to grieve without becoming paralyzed, to remember without clinging, and to move forward without forgetting.

For individuals, Joshua 1 through 5 asks difficult but necessary questions. Where are we waiting for certainty before obedience? Where are we confusing courage with control? Where are we forgetting the stories that once sustained us? Faith often requires stepping into the water while it is still flowing.

For the church, these chapters challenge communities to anchor identity in God's presence rather than in personalities, programs, or past successes. Friendship United Methodist Church, like Israel at the Jordan, is invited to trust that God's faithfulness does not end with one chapter of leadership or one season of ministry. The God who has been with us remains with us.

The promise that frames Joshua is not the promise of ease, but the promise of presence. "I will be with you." That promise carries Israel into the land, sustains them in uncertainty, and shapes their identity as a people called to trust.

Joshua 1 through 5 does not rush us toward conquest. It slows us down so that when movement comes, it is grounded in faith. The river is crossed, not because fear disappears, but because God's presence remains.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Joshua is not called to become another Moses, but to trust the same faithful God. Where might you be tempted to equate faithfulness with repeating the past rather than trusting God's presence in a new season?
2. The crossing of the Jordan requires the people to move together, consecrate themselves, and remember God's faithfulness both in vulnerability and arrival. How does this communal vision of faith challenge the way you normally think about obedience, courage, or spiritual growth?
3. Joshua learns that God is not aligned with human agendas, but calls people to align themselves with divine purposes. In what areas of your life might God be inviting humility, surrender, and deeper trust rather than control or certainty?

## Session One, Part 3 of 3

### Joshua 1–5

As Joshua 1 through 5 draws to a close, the text leaves us not with a military victory, but with a people newly grounded in identity, memory, and trust. Before a single wall has fallen, Israel has been shaped spiritually for what lies ahead. This ordering is deliberate. Joshua insists that faithfulness precedes effectiveness, and obedience precedes outcome. The land will test Israel's courage, but the deeper test is whether Israel will remain anchored in the God who brought them there.

One of the most enduring theological insights of these chapters is the role of memory in sustaining faith. The stones taken from the Jordan are not relics meant to glorify the past. They are prompts for storytelling. Each generation is expected to ask questions, and each generation is expected to answer them by recounting God's acts. Faith, in Joshua, is never assumed to be inherited automatically. It must be taught, rehearsed, and embodied.

This emphasis on memory speaks directly to communities of faith today. In seasons of transition, people often either romanticize the past or dismiss it. Joshua resists both impulses. Israel is instructed to remember without remaining stuck. The past becomes a witness to God's faithfulness, not a substitute for present obedience. The stones do not block the way forward. They point toward it.

Joshua 5 reinforces this rhythm by restoring covenant practices that had been neglected. Circumcision and Passover reconnect Israel to its foundational story. These rituals are not empty formalities. They are embodied theology. Through them, Israel remembers that it belongs to God before it belongs in the land. Identity precedes mission.

This ordering challenges the tendency to measure faithfulness by visible success. Joshua presents a different metric. Faithfulness is measured by attentiveness to God's word, responsiveness to God's presence, and willingness to trust God's timing. Success, as Joshua understands it, is alignment rather than achievement.

Theologically, Joshua 1 through 5 also reframes how divine power is understood. God's power is revealed not through overwhelming force, but through presence that invites participation. The Jordan does not part until the priests step forward. The miracle is real, but it requires trust. God does not remove risk. God meets people within it.

This dynamic speaks powerfully into Christian theology. Faith is not certainty rewarded. It is trust enacted. The New Testament echoes this pattern repeatedly. Jesus does not promise his disciples safety. He promises presence. "I am with you always." The continuity between Joshua and Jesus is not found in conquest, but in companionship.

The Letter to the Hebrews explicitly reflects on Joshua's leadership to make this point. Hebrews 4 states that if Joshua had given the people rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. The rest Joshua offers is real, but incomplete. It is provisional. It points beyond itself. Jesus

fulfills the promise by offering a deeper rest, one rooted not in geography or security, but in restored relationship with God.

This Christological reading does not diminish Joshua. It deepens it. Joshua becomes part of a larger story of God's saving work. Joshua leads Israel across a river into land. Jesus leads humanity through death into life. Joshua's obedience anticipates Christ's faithfulness. The ark leads the people into the Jordan. Christ goes before us into suffering and resurrection.

For Christian communities, this connection reshapes how Joshua is read and taught. The goal is not to imitate conquest, but to embody trust. The question is not how to claim territory, but how to live faithfully where God has placed us. Joshua teaches us that God's promises are fulfilled not through domination, but through obedience grounded in grace.

Pastorally, Joshua 1 through 5 speaks directly to the experience of uncertainty. Many people today stand at their own Jordans. Transitions in leadership, changes in family structure, shifts in health, or uncertainty about the future can leave people feeling suspended between what has been and what will be. Joshua does not rush past this experience. It names it and meets it with promise.

The promise that sustains Israel is simple and profound. "I will be with you." This promise does not eliminate fear. It transforms it. Fear no longer has the final word. Trust does. The presence of God becomes the ground on which courage stands.

For Friendship United Methodist Church, Joshua 1 through 5 offers a pastoral word of encouragement and challenge. It invites the church to remember the stones that mark God's faithfulness in its own history. It invites the church to consecrate itself, not in pursuit of perfection, but in readiness for what God will do next. It invites the church to step forward together, trusting that God's presence goes before us.

Joshua does not ask the people to know the whole path. It asks them to take the next faithful step. The river is crossed one step at a time. The land is entered one act of obedience at a time. Faithfulness unfolds gradually, sustained by memory, community, and trust.

As this first session concludes, Joshua leaves us with a posture rather than a plan. The posture is attentiveness. The posture is trust. The posture is obedience grounded in grace. Before walls fall, before battles are fought, before land is settled, God forms a people who know who they are and whose they are.

That is the work of Joshua 1 through 5. It is the work God continues to do among God's people today.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Joshua emphasizes that faithfulness precedes effectiveness and identity precedes action. Where are you tempted to measure faithfulness by visible success rather than by attentiveness to God's presence and obedience in daily life?

2. The stones from the Jordan are meant to spark memory and storytelling across generations. What stories of God's faithfulness shape your faith today, and how might you intentionally pass those stories on to others?
  
3. Joshua offers a provisional rest that points beyond itself to the deeper rest found in Christ. In this season of uncertainty or transition, what would it look like for you to trust God's presence one faithful step at a time rather than trying to see the whole path ahead?

## Session Two, Part 1 of 3

### Joshua 6–12

Joshua chapters 6 through 12 move Israel from preparation into practice. Yet these chapters resist being read simply as stories of conquest or military success. Instead, they expose the tensions, temptations, and complexities of living faithfully once the people have stepped into the promise. If Joshua 1 through 5 asks whether Israel will trust God enough to move forward, Joshua 6 through 12 asks whether Israel will continue to trust God once movement begins.

The fall of Jericho in Joshua chapter 6 is among the most well-known stories in the Old Testament, yet it is often misunderstood. The narrative is frequently reduced to a lesson about perseverance or obedience, but the text itself is more demanding. Jericho is presented not merely as a city to be defeated, but as a theological test. The question is not whether Israel can conquer Jericho, but whether Israel will resist the temptation to rely on its own strength rather than on God.

God's instructions concerning Jericho are intentionally unconventional. The people are told to march around the city once a day for six days, led by priests carrying the ark. They are commanded to remain silent. On the seventh day, they are to march around the city seven times and then shout. From a strategic perspective, this approach makes little sense. From a theological perspective, it makes a great deal of sense. It strips Israel of control.

Trent C. Butler notes that the silence imposed on the people is itself an act of obedience. Israel is not allowed to boast, intimidate, or provoke. They are required to wait. The only sound heard during the march is the sound of priests' trumpets. Worship replaces warfare. The presence of the ark again reinforces that God is the primary actor. Israel does not bring God into battle. God leads Israel forward.

When the walls fall, the text is careful to attribute the victory to God rather than to Israel. There is no description of combat. There is no celebration of military prowess. The emphasis rests entirely on obedience. This framing challenges any reading of Joshua that glorifies violence. The focus is not on domination, but on dependence.

At the same time, the story of Jericho confronts modern readers with difficult theological questions. The language of devotion and destruction can be unsettling, particularly when read through contemporary ethical lenses. L. Daniel Hawk urges readers to approach these texts with humility rather than defensiveness. These narratives arise from an ancient context shaped by assumptions very different from our own. Yet even within that context, Joshua does not portray violence as an end in itself. The narrative consistently emphasizes God's sovereignty and Israel's accountability.

The story of Rahab stands as a crucial counterpoint to the destruction of Jericho. Rahab is spared, along with her family, because of her faith and her actions. Her inclusion is not incidental. It reveals that God's judgment is never indiscriminate. Mercy is present even in moments of

severity. Richard S. Hess emphasizes that Rahab's salvation demonstrates that faith, not ethnicity, defines belonging within God's purposes.

Rahab's story also challenges simplistic moral categories. She is neither idealized nor dismissed. She acts with courage and discernment, aligning herself with God's work as she understands it. Her confession of faith in Joshua chapter 2 continues to reverberate throughout the book. God's grace is already breaking through expected boundaries.

For Christian readers, Rahab's story takes on added significance. The Gospel of Matthew includes her in the genealogy of Jesus. This deliberate inclusion connects Joshua's narrative to the broader story of redemption. Grace that appears at the margins in Joshua becomes central in the gospel. What Joshua anticipates, Christ fulfills.

Joshua chapter 7 abruptly interrupts the narrative of success. Israel's defeat at Ai exposes a sobering truth. Obedience cannot be assumed. The sin of Achan reveals that covenant faithfulness is communal rather than individualistic. One person's disobedience affects the entire community. David M. Howard Jr. observes that this episode underscores the seriousness of covenant life. God's presence cannot be treated casually.

The defeat at Ai also challenges the assumption that God's favor guarantees uninterrupted success. Israel has experienced miraculous victory at Jericho, yet they suffer unexpected defeat immediately afterward. Faith is not a formula. God does not promise predictable outcomes. Instead, God calls the people into ongoing attentiveness and humility.

The resolution of Achan's sin is among the most difficult passages in Joshua. It raises profound ethical questions that should not be minimized. Yet within the theological framework of the book, the episode emphasizes the destructive power of hidden disobedience. Covenant life requires honesty, accountability, and communal responsibility. Restoration comes only after truth is brought into the open.

Joshua chapter 8 marks a turning point. After repentance and renewal, Israel returns to Ai and experiences victory. Yet even this victory is framed differently than Jericho. Strategy is employed, but it is guided by divine instruction. Success follows obedience, not the other way around. Importantly, Joshua pauses the campaign to renew the covenant publicly.

The covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim recalls instructions given earlier in the Torah. Joshua reads the law aloud in the presence of the people. Worship interrupts warfare. Instruction takes precedence over expansion. This moment reinforces that Israel's identity as a covenant people must be continually reaffirmed.

Joshua chapters 6 through 8 thus establish a pattern that will continue throughout the book. Obedience leads to life. Disobedience leads to disruption. Grace makes restoration possible, but it does not remove responsibility. Faith is not static. It must be practiced, examined, and renewed.

For individuals today, this section of Joshua raises difficult but necessary questions. How do we respond when obedience feels counterintuitive or costly. How do we deal with failure without abandoning faith. How do we remain attentive to God's guidance rather than assuming God's endorsement.

For the church, Joshua 6 through 8 offers a warning and a hope. Success can breed complacency. Defeat can breed despair. Faithfulness requires discernment in both seasons. Friendship United Methodist Church is invited to practice obedience not as a means of control, but as a response to grace, trusting that God remains present even when outcomes are uncertain.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. The fall of Jericho emphasizes obedience over strategy and dependence over control. Where in your life or ministry might God be asking you to trust Him in ways that feel counterintuitive or uncomfortable?
2. The silence of Israel during the march around Jericho replaces noise and control with trust and worship. What would it look like for you to practice this kind of intentional silence and dependence in a season where you feel the need to act or speak quickly?
3. The contrast between Jericho's victory and Ai's defeat reveals how quickly faith can shift from dependence to assumption. Where might you be tempted to rely on past successes rather than ongoing attentiveness to God's guidance?

## Session Two, Part 2 of 3

### Joshua 6–12

Joshua chapters 9 through 12 introduce a different kind of challenge for Israel, one that is subtler and, in many ways, more dangerous than open opposition. After dramatic victories and painful failure, Israel now faces the temptation of presumption. The Gibeonite deception in chapter 9 exposes how easily discernment can be compromised when success breeds confidence.

The Gibeonites approach Israel not with armies, but with worn clothing, dry bread, and a carefully crafted story. They present themselves as travelers from a distant land, seeking a treaty. The text highlights a critical omission in Israel's response. "The leaders partook of their provisions, and did not ask direction from the Lord" (Joshua 9:14). This single sentence reveals the heart of the problem. Israel acts on reasonable evidence rather than seeking God's guidance.

Gordon McConville observes that this episode illustrates how unfaithfulness often masquerades as practicality. Israel's decision is not reckless. It is sensible. It is diplomatic. It is even compassionate. Yet it is made without prayer. The danger here is not rebellion, but independence. Israel assumes it can navigate this situation on its own.

The consequences of this decision are long lasting. Israel honors the treaty once the deception is revealed, recognizing the seriousness of covenant commitments. This restraint demonstrates a maturing sense of responsibility. Yet the episode also serves as a warning. Even good intentions can lead to compromise when discernment is replaced by assumption.

For modern readers, the Gibeonite story speaks directly to how decisions are made in seasons of relative success. When things are going well, the temptation is to rely on experience, logic, or momentum rather than prayerful attentiveness. Joshua reminds us that faithfulness is not most threatened by adversity alone. It is threatened by self sufficiency.

Joshua chapters 10 and 11 shift the narrative again, describing a series of military campaigns in the southern and northern regions of the land. These chapters are often read quickly, and the text itself encourages that pace. The accounts are compressed, summarizing outcomes rather than detailing tactics. This literary choice is significant. Joshua is not interested in celebrating warfare. It is interested in affirming God's faithfulness.

L. Daniel Hawk points out that the brevity of these chapters signals that the focus is theological rather than tactical. Victories are attributed consistently to the Lord. Joshua is portrayed as obedient to God's commands, and the people are depicted as acting in accordance with God's direction. The emphasis remains on faithfulness rather than force.

One of the most striking moments in this section is Joshua's prayer for the sun to stand still. This episode has generated much debate, but within the narrative, its theological function is clear. Joshua prays boldly, not to demonstrate power, but to complete the task God has given. The text emphasizes that the Lord listened to Joshua. This moment underscores the relational nature of covenant life. God responds to faithful prayer.

At the same time, these chapters confront readers again with the troubling language of devotion and destruction. The text reflects an ancient worldview in which warfare was understood in theological terms. Modern readers rightly wrestle with these passages. Rather than offering easy answers, Joshua invites careful, humble engagement. God's holiness, justice, and mercy are held together in tension.

David M. Howard Jr. emphasizes that Joshua does not present Israel as morally superior to its enemies. The land is not given because Israel is righteous. It is given because God is faithful to promises made long before. Israel's own failures throughout the book make this clear. The narrative does not allow triumphalism.

Joshua chapter 11 concludes with a summary statement that the land had rest from war. This rest is partial and provisional. It marks a pause rather than a conclusion. The battles have ceased for the moment, but faithfulness must continue. The transition from conflict to settlement introduces a new set of challenges.

Joshua chapter 12 lists defeated kings. The list functions as a theological ledger rather than a victory parade. Each name represents a reminder that God has been at work. The list also prepares the reader for the next major movement of the book, the distribution of the land. Victory gives way to responsibility.

Throughout Joshua 6 through 12, a consistent theological pattern emerges. God acts faithfully. Israel responds imperfectly. Grace makes room for restoration, but obedience remains essential. Faithfulness is not a static state achieved once and for all. It is a dynamic practice that must be renewed continually.

For individuals, this section of Joshua raises important questions about discernment. Where are we making decisions without prayer because they seem reasonable. Where might success be dulling our attentiveness to God's guidance. How do we respond when faithfulness becomes complicated rather than clear.

For the church, Joshua 9 through 12 offers a sober reminder that covenant life involves both trust and vigilance. Friendship United Methodist Church is called to seek God's direction not only in times of crisis, but in times of stability. Discernment remains essential even when momentum is strong.

Joshua does not present a simplistic picture of faith. It presents a realistic one. Faith includes victories and failures, clarity and confusion, bold prayer and costly consequences. Through it all, God remains faithful, inviting the people to grow in trust rather than retreat into certainty.

## Reflection Questions:

1. The fall of Jericho emphasizes obedience over strategy and dependence over control. Where in your life or ministry might God be asking you to trust Him in ways that feel counterintuitive or uncomfortable?
2. The silence of Israel during the march around Jericho replaces noise and control with trust and worship. What would it look like for you to practice this kind of intentional silence and dependence in a season where you feel the need to act or speak quickly?
3. The contrast between Jericho's victory and Ai's defeat reveals how quickly faith can shift from dependence to assumption. Where might you be tempted to rely on past successes rather than ongoing attentiveness to God's guidance?

## Session Two, Part 3 of 3

### Joshua 6–12

As Joshua 6 through 12 comes to a close, the text leaves us with a picture of faith that is neither triumphant nor tidy. Instead, it offers a mature portrayal of covenant life shaped by obedience, failure, repentance, and grace. These chapters resist being reduced to moral lessons or historical curiosities. They confront readers with the reality that faithfulness unfolds in complex, morally demanding contexts.

One of the most important theological insights of this section is that God's faithfulness does not eliminate human responsibility. Jericho falls through obedience, yet Ai exposes vulnerability. The Gibeonites reveal the danger of unexamined assumptions. The victories in the south and north demonstrate God's power, yet they do not remove the need for discernment. Faith in Joshua is not a shield against error. It is a call to continual attentiveness.

The ethical challenges raised by these chapters cannot be ignored, and Joshua does not ask us to ignore them. The language of devotion and destruction reflects an ancient context in which warfare was understood through theological categories that differ sharply from modern sensibilities. L. Daniel Hawk reminds us that Scripture does not flatten these tensions. Instead, it invites wrestling. Faithful reading includes lament, questioning, and humility.

Within the narrative itself, the emphasis consistently falls not on violence as virtue, but on obedience as trust. Joshua does not glorify warfare. It compresses battle accounts and foregrounds covenant renewal, prayer, and worship. The land is not gained through brute force alone, but through alignment with God's purposes. Even when strategy is used, it is framed as response rather than initiative.

This theological framing guards against triumphalism. Israel is not portrayed as morally superior or inherently righteous. Their failures are recorded honestly. Achan's sin, Israel's deception by the Gibeonites, and the need for repeated covenant renewal all testify that God's people are recipients of grace, not possessors of moral perfection. God's promises move forward despite human weakness, not because of human strength.

From a Christological perspective, Joshua 6 through 12 anticipates the New Testament's redefinition of victory. Jesus does not conquer through force. He conquers through faithfulness, suffering, and self-giving love. Where Joshua leads battles that bring temporary rest, Jesus leads a kingdom that breaks cycles of violence and offers reconciliation. The victories in Joshua are provisional. They point beyond themselves.

Rahab's story remains central in this regard. Her inclusion within Israel, and later within the lineage of Jesus, reveals a redemptive trajectory already present in Joshua. Grace reaches across boundaries. Faith redefines belonging. What appears as a marginal story in Joshua becomes foundational in the gospel. This continuity reminds us that God's purposes have always been broader than human categories.

The prayer of Joshua in chapter 10 offers another Christological bridge. Joshua prays boldly, trusting that God listens and responds. In the New Testament, Jesus embodies this same trust, praying with confidence in the Father's will. Yet Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane also reveals the cost of obedience. Faithfulness does not guarantee ease. It requires surrender.

Joshua 11's statement that the land had rest from war is both hopeful and incomplete. The rest is real, but it is not final. It anticipates the deeper rest described in Hebrews, where rest is not defined by the absence of conflict, but by trust in God's completed work. Joshua prepares the ground for this later theological development.

Pastorally, Joshua 6 through 12 speaks powerfully to communities navigating complexity. Many people expect faith to simplify life. Joshua suggests otherwise. Faith deepens responsibility. It sharpens discernment. It exposes assumptions. It calls for humility in success and honesty in failure.

For individuals, these chapters raise searching questions. Where might success be dulling our dependence on God. Where might fear be tempting us to control rather than trust. How do we respond when obedience leads to unforeseen consequences. Faithfulness often requires patience when clarity is incomplete.

For the church, Joshua 6 through 12 offers both caution and hope. Friendship United Methodist Church is invited to examine how decisions are made, not only when challenges arise, but when things seem to be going well. Discernment grounded in prayer remains essential. Momentum must be matched by humility. Vision must be shaped by obedience.

Joshua also reminds the church that restoration is possible. Failure does not end the story. Repentance opens the door to renewal. God's faithfulness remains constant even when human faithfulness falters. This truth guards against despair and arrogance alike.

As this session concludes, Joshua leaves us with a realistic vision of covenant life. Faith is not a straight line. It involves setbacks and recoveries, victories and losses, clarity and confusion. Through it all, God remains present, inviting trust rather than certainty.

Joshua 6 through 12 does not offer a blueprint for control. It offers a testimony of trust. The call is not to master outcomes, but to remain faithful. God's promises continue to unfold, not through perfection, but through grace shaped obedience.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Joshua presents faith as complex, involving obedience, failure, repentance, and grace. Where in your own life have you experienced this kind of non-linear faith journey, and what has it taught you about trusting God?

2. These chapters challenge both triumphalism and despair by reminding us that God's faithfulness continues despite human weakness. How do you respond when your own faithfulness feels inconsistent, and what helps you return to God with honesty and trust?
  
3. Joshua emphasizes that faith is not about controlling outcomes but remaining attentive and obedient to God. In what areas of your life or ministry might God be inviting you to release control and embrace trust instead?

### Session Three, Part 1 of 3

#### Joshua 13–24

Joshua chapters 13 through 24 represent a decisive shift in the book's focus. The urgency of battle gives way to the slower, more demanding work of settlement, memory, and faithfulness. If earlier chapters ask whether Israel will trust God enough to enter the land and confront its challenges, these final chapters ask a deeper question. How will Israel live once the promise has been received.

This shift is theologically significant. Scripture consistently portrays beginnings as dramatic and endings as demanding. Liberation from Egypt is spectacular. Wandering in the wilderness is formative. Living faithfully in the land proves to be the greatest challenge of all. Joshua understands that faith is not most threatened in moments of crisis, but in seasons of stability.

Joshua chapter 13 opens with an arresting statement. "Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the Lord said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land still remains to be possessed.'" The bluntness of this declaration disrupts any sense of closure. The conquest is incomplete. The promise has been entered, but it has not been exhausted. Faithfulness will now take a different form.

Richard S. Hess notes that this acknowledgment prevents triumphalism. Israel's presence in the land is real, but it is partial. The future will require patience, cooperation, and ongoing trust. The land is not magically transformed into a place of peace. It must be inhabited faithfully over time.

The extensive land allotment sections that follow often test the patience of modern readers. Lists of boundaries, towns, and tribal regions can feel tedious. Yet within the narrative of Joshua, these chapters are deeply theological. They emphasize that the land is not a reward for heroism, but a gift carefully entrusted by God. Each tribe receives a portion. No tribe receives everything.

This distribution reinforces the communal nature of Israel's identity. Faithfulness is not individualistic. It is shared. Each tribe depends on the others. Boundaries are meant to foster responsibility, not rivalry. The land becomes a space where covenant life is lived out daily, through farming, justice, worship, and neighborly care.

Joshua also gives particular attention to groups that might otherwise be overlooked. Caleb's inheritance is highlighted, honoring long term faithfulness that endured decades of waiting. The Levites are given no land, reminding Israel that worship and teaching remain central. Cities of refuge are established, embodying concern for justice and mercy. These details reveal that covenant life involves more than possession. It involves care for the vulnerable and accountability for wrongdoing.

David M. Howard Jr. emphasizes that these chapters portray God as attentive to the ordinary rhythms of life. The promise is not fulfilled only in dramatic victories. It is fulfilled in equitable distribution, sustained community, and structures that protect life. Faithfulness becomes visible in how the land is shared and governed.

Joshua chapters 18 through 21 underscore this point by showing Joshua urging the remaining tribes to claim their inheritance. Delay is presented as a spiritual danger. Complacency can erode trust just as surely as fear. Joshua challenges the people to complete what God has begun, not through conquest, but through obedience.

The allocation of cities of refuge deserves special attention. These cities reflect a theology of restraint and compassion. They acknowledge human fallibility while protecting against cycles of revenge. Gordon McConville notes that these provisions reveal God's concern for justice that restores rather than destroys. Covenant life is marked by mercy as well as order.

Joshua chapter 21 concludes with a summary statement that echoes earlier promises. "Not one of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass." This declaration does not deny ongoing challenges. It affirms God's faithfulness despite them. The promise has been fulfilled, yet faithfulness remains an ongoing task.

This tension between fulfillment and responsibility lies at the heart of Joshua's final chapters. God has kept promises. Now the people must decide how they will live in response. Faith does not end with blessing. It begins anew.

For Christian readers, these chapters invite reflection on life after decisive moments of faith. Many believers experience seasons of dramatic spiritual clarity followed by long stretches of ordinary faithfulness. Joshua affirms that these seasons are not lesser. They are where faith is tested most deeply.

Joshua 13 through 21 teaches that grace does not eliminate effort. The land is given, yet it must be inhabited. The promise is fulfilled, yet it must be stewarded. This pattern echoes throughout Scripture. Salvation is God's gift. Discipleship is our response.

For the church, this section raises important questions about sustainability. How do communities remain faithful once initial excitement fades. How do structures support long term discipleship rather than momentary enthusiasm. Friendship United Methodist Church is invited to see these chapters not as irrelevant lists, but as a vision for ordered, gracious communal life shaped by covenant commitment.

As Joshua ages, the narrative subtly prepares the reader for transition once again. The book began with the death of Moses. It now moves toward the death of Joshua. Leadership changes, but the covenant call remains. The question is not whether God will remain faithful. The question is whether the people will.

Joshua 13 through 21 therefore sets the stage for the book's final and most searching section. Having entered the land, having received the promise, Israel must now choose how it will live. Faithfulness is no longer tested primarily in battle, but in memory, loyalty, and daily obedience.

## Reflection Questions:

1. Joshua shifts the focus from dramatic victories to the steady work of living faithfully in the promise. Where in your life has faith required persistence in ordinary, everyday faithfulness rather than dramatic moments?
2. The land is given as a gift, yet it must be inhabited responsibly and shared within the community. What has God entrusted to you, and how might you live more intentionally as a steward rather than an owner?
3. Joshua warns that delay and complacency can become spiritual dangers once the promise is received. In what areas of your life or the life of the church might comfort or stability be quietly weakening your attentiveness to God?

## Session Three, Part 2 of 3

Joshua 13–24

Joshua chapters 22 through 24 shift the narrative from land distribution to spiritual discernment, from geography to loyalty. These chapters recognize that possession of the land does not automatically produce covenant faithfulness. The greatest threat to Israel is no longer external opposition, but internal division and forgetfulness. The question before the people is not whether God has been faithful, but whether they will be.

Joshua chapter 22 opens with the return of the eastern tribes to their allotted land beyond the Jordan. This moment, which could have passed quietly, becomes a flashpoint of tension. When the western tribes hear that an altar has been built near the Jordan, they immediately fear apostasy. Their reaction is swift and intense. They assume betrayal of the covenant and prepare for conflict.

This episode reveals both the fragility and the seriousness of Israel's covenant life. On one hand, the people are quick to assume the worst. On the other, they demonstrate a deep commitment to faithfulness. They understand that worship matters. Allegiance matters. Covenant unity matters. Before violence erupts, however, dialogue intervenes.

The eastern tribes explain that the altar is not for sacrifice, but as a witness. It is a tangible reminder that they share the same God, the same covenant, and the same story. Gordon McConville notes that this episode highlights the importance of memory and testimony in sustaining unity. Faithfulness is preserved not only through rules, but through shared narrative.

Joshua chapter 22 therefore models a crucial lesson for covenant communities. Conflict is inevitable, but violence is not. Discernment requires conversation. Unity requires patience. The willingness to listen prevents tragedy. Faithfulness is protected when communities choose understanding over assumption.

Joshua chapter 23 marks the beginning of Joshua's farewell addresses. As Joshua grows old, he gathers the leaders of Israel and speaks with pastoral urgency. His speech is not a celebration of military success. It is a warning against complacency. Joshua reminds the people that God has been faithful in driving out enemies and fulfilling promises. He then shifts the focus forward. Faithfulness must be sustained.

Joshua's concern is not hypothetical. He knows the human tendency to drift. He warns against forming alliances that dilute loyalty and against adopting practices that undermine covenant identity. His language is direct because the stakes are high. Covenant faithfulness is not self-sustaining. It requires intentional commitment.

David M. Howard Jr. emphasizes that Joshua's farewell speech echoes earlier biblical leaders who understand that the future of God's people depends not on strength or numbers, but on obedience. Joshua frames faithfulness as love expressed through loyalty. "Love the Lord your God" is not an abstract command. It is embodied through choices, practices, and restraint.

Joshua chapter 24 brings the narrative to its theological climax. The covenant renewal at Shechem is carefully constructed and deeply symbolic. Shechem is not chosen at random. It is a place already saturated with memory. Abraham built an altar there. Jacob buried foreign gods there. The location reinforces the continuity of God's work across generations.

Joshua recounts Israel's story, beginning not with Moses, but with God's call to Abraham. This retelling emphasizes God's initiative at every stage. God chose. God delivered. God provided. God protected. The people are reminded that their identity is rooted in grace before it is shaped by obedience.

Only after rehearsing this story does Joshua issue his famous challenge. "Choose this day whom you will serve." This choice is not presented as a theoretical exercise. It is grounded in history and consequence. Joshua does not pretend that faithfulness is easy. He acknowledges competing loyalties and the pull of other gods.

Joshua's declaration, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord," is often quoted as a slogan. Within the context of Joshua 24, it functions as a testimony. Dale Ralph Davis notes that this statement is not a boast of moral superiority. It is a confession of dependence. Joshua recognizes that faithfulness is a daily choice sustained by God's grace.

The people respond enthusiastically, pledging their loyalty to the Lord. Joshua's response is unexpected. He cautions them against making casual promises. Covenant commitment is serious because God is holy. This exchange reveals a mature theology of grace. God's faithfulness invites commitment, but it does not trivialize obedience.

Joshua then establishes a covenant, records the words, and sets up a stone as a witness. Once again, memory is anchored in something tangible. The stone is not magical. It is pedagogical. It stands as a reminder that faith must be remembered and renewed.

This covenant renewal brings together the major themes of Joshua. God's faithfulness. Human responsibility. Communal identity. The danger of forgetfulness. The necessity of choice. Faith is not inherited automatically. Each generation must respond.

For Christian readers, Joshua 23 and 24 resonate deeply with the language of discipleship. Jesus similarly calls people to count the cost, to choose allegiance, and to follow with intention. Grace does not eliminate decision. It sharpens it. Joshua's challenge anticipates Christ's call to wholehearted devotion.

For the church, these chapters offer a sobering reminder that programs, property, and success cannot substitute for faithfulness. Friendship United Methodist Church is invited to hear Joshua's words not as ancient history, but as a living call. Choose whom you will serve. Renew your covenant. Remember what God has done.

Joshua's farewell is not nostalgic. It is forward looking. He understands that the future of the community depends on how well they remember and respond. Faithfulness is sustained not through fear, but through gratitude grounded in God's grace.

## Reflection Questions:

1. The conflict over the altar in Joshua 22 shows how quickly assumptions can lead to division. Where in your life or in the church might misunderstanding or lack of communication be creating unnecessary tension, and how might intentional listening lead to unity?
2. Joshua calls the people to remember God's faithfulness before asking them to choose whom they will serve. How does remembering God's work in your life shape your commitment to follow Him in the present?
3. Joshua warns against making casual promises and emphasizes that faithfulness requires intentional, ongoing choice. What does it look like for you to "choose this day" to serve the Lord in practical, everyday decisions?

### Session Three, Part 3 of 3

#### Joshua 13–24

As the Book of Joshua draws to a close, the narrative slows once more, ending not with celebration or conquest, but with reflection and remembrance. Joshua's final actions emphasize continuity rather than completion. The covenant is renewed. The people are reminded of their story. The future is entrusted to God's faithfulness rather than to human certainty.

Joshua chapter 24 concludes with a series of burials. Joshua himself is buried. Joseph's bones, carried from Egypt for generations, are finally laid to rest. Eleazar the priest is buried as well. These details might seem anticlimactic, yet they are deeply theological. They signal that God's promises endure beyond individual lifespans. Leaders come and go, but the covenant remains.

The burial of Joseph's bones is particularly significant. It connects Joshua directly back to the Exodus story and beyond, to the promises made to Abraham. The land that is now inhabited is the same land promised centuries earlier. This continuity reinforces the central claim of the book. God is faithful over time. God's purposes unfold across generations.

Joshua's death echoes the book's opening. The story began with the death of Moses. It ends with the death of Joshua. In both cases, leadership transitions frame the narrative. This structure underscores that no human leader is indispensable. God alone remains constant. The future of the people depends not on charismatic figures, but on covenant faithfulness.

The closing verse states that Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. This statement is hopeful, yet it carries an implicit warning. Faithfulness is sustained through memory and leadership, but it is not guaranteed indefinitely. The Book of Judges will soon expose the fragility of this faithfulness. Joshua prepares us for that reality without despair.

Theologically, Joshua 13 through 24 affirms that God's promises have been fulfilled, yet they remain open ended. The land is given. Rest is experienced. Covenant is renewed. Still, faithfulness must be chosen again and again. The promise does not eliminate responsibility. It intensifies it.

From a Christological perspective, the conclusion of Joshua invites us to see both fulfillment and limitation. Hebrews reminds us that Joshua did not give final rest. The land provided stability, but it could not heal the human heart. Jesus fulfills what Joshua anticipates by offering rest rooted not in territory, but in relationship with God. Through Christ, the people of God are invited into a covenant sustained by grace rather than fear.

Joshua's call to choose whom to serve finds its ultimate expression in Jesus' call to discipleship. "Follow me" echoes "Choose this day." Both demands are grounded in grace. Both require commitment. Both recognize that divided loyalty undermines faithfulness.

The Book of Joshua also offers a mature vision of grace. Grace is not opposed to effort. It enables it. God's faithfulness does not negate human responsibility. It makes obedience possible. This dynamic shapes both personal faith and communal life.

Pastorally, Joshua speaks to the long arc of discipleship. Many people come to faith through dramatic moments. Yet most of life is lived in quieter seasons. Joshua affirms that these seasons matter deeply. Faith is sustained through daily obedience, shared memory, and communal commitment.

For individuals, Joshua 13 through 24 invites reflection on how faith is practiced over time. Where might complacency be eroding trust. Where might gratitude be renewing commitment. Faithfulness is not measured by intensity alone, but by endurance.

For the church, Joshua offers a compelling vision of covenant life. Friendship United Methodist Church is called to remember God's faithfulness, renew its commitments, and choose loyalty anew in each generation. Structures, ministries, and traditions are means, not ends. The goal remains faithful witness shaped by grace.

Joshua closes with a people settled, but not secure in themselves. Their security rests in God. The book ends not with certainty about Israel's future, but with clarity about God's character. The God who has been faithful will continue to be faithful.

The question that remains is the same question Joshua posed at Shechem. Whom will you serve. This question is not meant to burden. It is meant to invite. It invites a response rooted in gratitude, trust, and hope.

The Book of Joshua, taken as a whole, is not a story about conquest. It is a story about covenant. It is about a God who keeps promises, a people who struggle to respond faithfully, and a grace that persists across generations.

As Joshua ends, the people stand not at the edge of a river, but at the threshold of everyday faithfulness. The invitation remains open. Choose this day. Trust the God who has been faithful. Walk forward together.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. The book ends with burials and reminders that leaders come and go, but God's promises endure. How does this perspective shape the way you think about legacy, leadership, and what truly lasts in your life and in the church?
2. Joshua emphasizes that faithfulness must be chosen again and again, even after the promise has been fulfilled. Where might God be inviting you to renew your commitment, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude for God's faithfulness?

3. The final question, “Whom will you serve,” remains open for every generation. What does it look like for you to answer that question in your daily life, and how can our church help one another walk forward in faithful, consistent obedience?

## **Closing Reflection for the Entire Study**

Where do you sense God inviting you to choose faithfulness in a new or renewed way?