

Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit Joshua: God Fights for His People

Gary Johnson
May 17, 2026

From 35,000 feet, we are doing a fly-over of the Old Testament this summer. Throughout the Old Testament, God relentlessly pursued His people. Though they were fickle, God was faithful. Nothing has changed to this day. Though we are fickle, God—who never changes—is still faithful. He relentlessly pursues us. We are **never alone**.

It is a unique approach to study the Old Testament portion of the Bible as an overview. When we do so, we look for things that stand out to us in a broad section of Scripture. When we look out the window of a plane, we may see canyons, or mountains, or a shoreline or a skyline. There are sites that stand out to us, capturing our attention. In much the same way, we are looking at Scripture to see what stands out to us as individuals. What captures my attention may not capture your attention. Yet if we are looking for something, we will find that something. If we intentionally look for red in the room right now, we will find it. If we deliberately look for God in this moment, we will find Him.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me *and find Me* when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity.” (Jeremiah 29:11-14)

As we look at expansive passages of Scripture each week, we do so in FOUR distinct ways. Using the word LIFE, here's the sermon outline for all our note-takers for this summer.

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

Starting two weeks ago in Exodus, we learned that God *rescues* His people. Last week, in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we learned that God *provides* for His people. This week, our fly-over of Joshua reveals that God *fights* for His people, and with *only* 24 chapters, this is a light week for us!

LITERAL

As we make our fly-over of Joshua, we'll not that this is the first of twelve books of history in the Old Testament, recounting the story of God's people. This book, written by Joshua, covers twenty-five years of history (1400-1375 BC). It begins with the death of Moses and ends with the death of Joshua. It's divided into two simple sections. Chapters 1-12 describe how Joshua led the Israelites to possess the land, and chapters 13-24 describe how Joshua partitioned the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. In Exodus, the Israelites were basically a family—an enormous family—of slaves. In Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the Israelites were a new nation, and in Joshua, they were a new nation in a new land. They now had a home. Check out the opening nine verses of this history book.

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very

courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:1-9)

Flying over Joshua, we cannot help but think “battle.” This is a military history, a book filled with epic battles, with God at the center of them in four specific ways.

God’s Promise

Note God’s promises in these verses. “Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses” (vv. 2-3). “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (v. 6).

At long last, the promise of the Promised Land is fulfilled. The land of Canaan (i.e., belonging to the Canaanites) was roughly 10,000 square miles, about the size of Vermont. From the north to the south, it was 150 air miles. Simply put, it was—and still is—a small country. Being at the same latitude as Georgia, the weather and seasons are relatively the same—winter and summer, the wet season and the dry season. As to topography, Israel is home to the lowest and hottest place on planet earth, the Dead Sea at 1,300 feet below sea level. At the other extreme, Israel’s highest peak is Mt. Hermon at 9,200 feet above sea level and snow covered the majority of the year. But to receive the land as their own, they had to take the land from its inhabitants. To do so, they needed God’s presence.

God’s Presence

“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (v. 5). “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (v. 9).

Just as God was present with the Israelites while wandering for forty years in the wilderness, He would be with them as they crossed over into the Promised Land. They would need his presence because they would face enemies every step along the way. The book of Joshua chronicles how Joshua and the Israelites defeated thirty-one kings and their armies (12:24)! No wonder “All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel” (Joshua 10:24). Joshua and the fighting men of Israel were not alone on the battlefields; God was with them! God’s presence was constant as He was with them every step of the way.

God’s Power

“Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites” (v. 2)

Just as God unleashed His power against Egypt on behalf of the Israelites, He did the same for His people against the enemies in Canaan. God has all power and sovereignty over the earth. With His power, He divided the water of the Red Sea and the Israelites walked through it on dry ground as they fled the Egyptians who were trying to kill them. Similarly, look what God did with water as His people entered the Promised Land.

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground. (Joshua 3:14-17)

God's power was unleashed. How did the riverbed become dry (which was twice mentioned in the text)? The power of God accomplished this!

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!" (Joshua 6:15-16)

And what happened when the trumpets were blown and the people shouted? "When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:20).

Blowing trumpets and shouting people do not collapse city walls, particularly the enormous, gargantuan walls of Jericho. Archeologists have discovered not one wall, but two walls encircled ancient Jericho and only the power and presence of God fighting for His people brought down the walls. In yet another epic battle—and this one against five kings of the Amorites—God unleashed His indescribable power!

After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The Lord threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites. On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel:

"Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!" (Joshua 10:9-14)

One epic battle after another is described in Joshua, and God alone was the source of the Israelites' victory. During our fly-over of Joshua, something stands out that we cannot help but notice and it was all a part of God's plan.

God's Plan

Just before he died, Moses reminded the Israelites of God's command to take the Promised Land.

"However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites,

Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)

“The Lord your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.’ You must not worship the Lord your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31)

In Hebrew, this command of God was called *herem* (pronounced her-rem); God called the Israelites to capture the land and kill all the inhabitants of the land. This has troubled many of us. How could this have been ordered by a loving God? The people in Canaan were wicked and more! They even sacrificed their children, burning them to death. God wanted this evil to come to an end among the Canaanites, but also never to start among the Israelites, yet it did!

Syncretism is the merging together of belief systems; religious practices become fused with one another. In Exodus 32, Aaron (brother of Moses) made a golden calf for the Israelites to worship. Why? Even though the Israelites came out of Egypt, much of Egypt got into the Israelites. Egyptian worship of idols fused, merged in the thinking of the Israelites. Once the Israelites took the Promised Land as their own, they began to sacrifice their children, burning them to death (2 Kings 17:17). Hence, when the Israelites killed the Canaanites, including children, those little ones were immediately with the Lord in heaven, as they were morally innocent. God is holy, holy, holy, and having been made in His image, God desires that His people be holy, as well.

The battle for the land took roughly five years (Josh 14:6-13), “Then the land had rest from war” (v. 15) or so it appeared. The battle still raged, but it had nothing to do with spacious land, yet everything to do with the spiritual lives of God’s people. They did not remain faithful. A spiritual war raged within them individually. Though God remained faithful, His people did not. “Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel” (Joshua 24:31).

Soon after the leaders of Joshua’s generation died, the Israelites struggled spiritually to remain faithful, devoted to God. Though God relentlessly pursued them, they did not pursue God.

INCARNATIONAL

How is Jesus reflected in this book of the Old Testament? Quickly and most clearly, the name Joshua means “the Lord is salvation” or “the Lord saves.” The name Jesus, in Greek, means the very same thing—“the Lord is salvation” or “the Lord saves.” Joshua led God’s people into the Promised Land, and Jesus leads God’s people into THE Promised Land of heaven! Still, there is something more in Joshua 5, where we see what may have been more than a reflection of Jesus, but an actual appearance of Jesus.

A theophany is a momentary appearance of God (i.e., *theos* means God and *phaino* means to appear). Hence, God appears. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3), while appearing to Abraham as a traveler by the oak trees of Mamre (Genesis 18). The list is long. Similarly, a Christophany is a momentary appearance of Jesus. For example, Jesus appeared to the Apostle Paul in a blinding light on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and here in Joshua we find Jesus more than reflected, but actually appearing to Joshua. Remember, in Joshua 1:5, God told Joshua, “No one will be able to stand up against

you all the days of your life.” No man, no person will be able to oppose you, stand against you. Hold that thought as we read of an encounter Joshua had.

Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?” The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so. (Joshua 5:13-15)

When men meet men, they size one another up subconsciously. It happens on an athletic field, a conference board room, a battlefield and more. Joshua saw a man standing in front of him, and God said no man would be able to stand against you—and here we have Joshua falling face down on the ground in reverence (i.e., worship) before this stranger, who is not a man but the command of the Lord’s army! Moreover, this is not an angel as angels never permitted people to worship them (see Revelation 19:10, 22:8-9). The Hebrew word for “commander” means “prince or ruler.” Who is pictured as a conqueror with a sword in Revelation? That would be Jesus. Who is called the Prince of Peace? That would be Jesus. Many Old Testament scholars believe this is a pre-incarnate Christophany, a momentary appearance of Jesus to Joshua and the question is not if I am with you, Joshua, but are you with Me? No wonder the ground on which Joshua stood was holy, for the Holy One of God was there.

FORMATIONAL

How does Joshua apply to our lives, forming us more into the likeness of Jesus? Joshua is a book of battles and of how God’s people *had* to fight. Not fighting was not an option. In the same way, we are to fight. Why? We are at war, and I’m not referring to a war with Iran or any other nation. Our war, 24/7/365, is with the kingdom of darkness, with the demonic. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 3:12).

Satan, our enemy, leads a demonic army whose sole aim is to “lead the whole world astray” (Revelation 12:9). The word “world” does not refer to a planet, but to people, to you and to me. You and I are the target. We individually are in the crosshairs of the enemy who has taken aim at each of us to lead us away from Jesus. Nearing the end of his life and speaking with urgency, Paul wrote, “The Spirit clearly says that in later time some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

We are at war every hour of the day and night with an enemy who has never slept, rested, napped, taken vacation, etc. and relentlessly pursues us to abandon the faith! A bit further in his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, “But watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them so that you can save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:16).

By watching and protecting how he believed (i.e., doctrine) and how he lived, young Timothy would save both himself and his hearers (i.e., the congregation at Ephesus) from abandoning the faith to follow things taught by deceiving spirits and demons. So put up a fight! Like Joshua, we have...

God’s Promise

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man and God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear but when you are tempted, He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God said it so that settles it. With God, a promise made is a promise kept. God has promised that you and I can experience victory over temptation, but we need to turn to Him during the moment of temptation. While in the Garden of Gethsemane and right before His arrest, Jesus said to His disciples, ““Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

Victory comes when we turn to the Lord. Put up a fight!

God's Presence

“But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. You, dear children, have overcome them for greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:3-4).

God, the Holy Spirit, is in us! He, the Spirit of Jesus, will never leave us or forsake us. He is in us for the long haul. In 1757, a hymn was written that has been sung by untold millions of people over the years with lyrics that say, “*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love.*” Prone to abandon the faith and follow things taught by deceiving spirits and demons? Anyone connect with those lyrics? Each of us is under an unrelenting attack of a determined enemy. Put up a fight!

God's Power

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). “And take with you the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and pray in the Spirit on all occasions all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:17-18).

We have supernatural power constantly and readily available to us to put up a fight. Satan, the father of lies, cannot stand up against the Word of God. Think of it this way. Before going into battle, a soldier in the US Army is provided with what is called a “basic load.” Depending on the weapon the soldier is carrying, there will be a specific number of full magazines. For example, there may be seven magazines of ammunition, and the particular magazine will have twenty bullets, meaning that the soldier has 140 bullets to fire. Do you have 140 verses of Scripture to “fire” against the enemy?

The Bible is not a book that merely lies on a shelf or a table. The Word of God is to be in our hearts, our souls, our minds! Jesus said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. If we fill our lives with the Word of God, we can boldly speak it against the enemy. If we do not know the Word, we are weak and those who we love are unprotected against the kingdom of darkness. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

God's Plan

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Ephesians 6:11).

Paul did not suggest this. He commanded it. We are to put on the armor of God (vv. 14-17) and keep it on. Satan and his army of fallen angels are already defeated by the cross of Jesus Christ. Satan could not keep Jesus from the cross nor in the grave. We win the war in the end, and it is God's plan that we win every battle in the present—in His strength when we take our stand.

General George Patton said, “Victory is always possible for the person who refuses to stop fighting.”

ETERNAL

How does this book of Joshua point us to heaven and eternity? In a most powerful way and through a particular person. Before the Israelites attacked Jericho, they scouted it out by sending a couple of spies into the city (see Joshua 2). Rahab, a prostitute who lived in Jericho, protected these two Israelite spies by hiding them in her home and when it was safe for them to escape without being discovered and punished, she lowered them through a window in her home that was built into the wall of the city. She was directed by the spies to get all her family and friends into her house, then hang a scarlet cord from her window and everyone in her home would be spared death. Rahab is not only mentioned in the book of Joshua, but also in Hebrews.

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. (Hebrews 11:29-31)

Hebrews 11 is called the “Hall of Faith”; it lists the many people in the Old Testament who were saved by their faith, and Rahab, a prostitute, is listed among them! She was not saved by her good works, but by her faith in God. It is grace through faith that saves us. Eternal life through grace is clearly seen in the book of Joshua! Just as Joshua led God’s people into the Promised Land (a promised place), Jesus leads us into our Promised Land! “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me. For in my Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you. But if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back to take you to be with me so that you may be where I am also” (John 14:1-3).

Conclusion

When we do a fly-over of America while in a plane, something might stand out. The same happens when we do a fly-over of Scripture. What stood out to you from Joshua? How did the Lord speak to you through His Holy Spirit? Remember, God Himself said, “I, the Lord, do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

The late Bobbie Knight is a legend, not only as a winning coach of collegiate basketball, but he is a legend for the way he coached. Untold numbers of people have admired him as a coach but have cringed at his coaching style. Bobby Knight was a classic, old-school screamer who motivated his players with fear and shame. When they did something wrong, the players quickly heard from “the General” in no uncertain terms. Many people lead as old-school screamers; dads and moms, bosses at work, teachers in school, military officers, and more. We admire moms and dads, bosses and teachers, but we cringe at their old-school screamer methods.

Sadly, too many people think of God in this way because we have been impacted by authority figures who were old-school screamers. We admire God, but we think of Him as being mean-spirited, just waiting for us to mess up so that He can punish us; wanting to guilt us, shame us, and scare us to get into line and measure up.

This image of God could not be further from the truth. The Word reveals to us a loving Father who is with us and for us, who delights, who sings, who saves. “The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love and rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

God *still* **fights** for His people. We are **not alone**.