

Moses, Joshua, Jesus, and Rest

By Brian Verrett



I'm sure you know the feeling of restlessness. There is a longing deep in our bones that desires rest. No nap can fix this lack of rest. Augustine, a prominent Christian from the third and fourth centuries, knew of this restlessness. He prayed, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You."

The longing for rest goes back even further than Augustine. God appointed Joshua to give the ancient Israelites rest. Their restlessness came from being homeless. They wanted a safe place to live instead of traveling around the wilderness like nomads. News went out to Israel that "the Lord your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land" (Josh 1:13). In time, God gave Joshua this success. Through Joshua, Israel defeated their enemies and possessed the promised land. Indeed, the "Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them" (21:44). After forty years of wandering the wilderness and many years of fighting the Canaanites, Israel could finally rest.

But the rest Joshua gave was not a lasting rest. Though Israel was victorious, enemies still wanted to destroy them (17:12–13). Also, once Joshua died, the book of Judges tells us that Israel would commit sin over and over again leading to God's punishment and more restlessness. Eventually, Israel's sin was so great that God kicked them out from their land. Being exiled, they were once again homeless. The rest Joshua gave did not last.

What God's people needed was a deeper rest than what Joshua could give them. From where does this deeper rest come? From where can God's people find a lasting end to their weariness and brokenness? The book of Joshua lets us know in its own creative way that Jesus will give us this rest.

How does Joshua's rest point to the greater rest Jesus would give us? To answer that question, you have to know about Moses. Moses is the hero of the story in the first five books of the Bible. God does mighty miracles, defeats wicked nations, saves his people, and teaches his people how to live all through Moses. Whether he is splitting the Red Sea or a rock filled with water, Moses is incredible. Moses was so great, that God's people

wished they could have another leader like him. If only a new Moses could come and lead them again. This new Moses would be their Messiah. Like the first Moses, the new Moses would defeat the enemies, save God's people, and do mighty miracles. Who could this new Moses be? Who would be the hero of the story God was writing and bring lasting rest to his people?

At first, Joshua looks like he is the promised new Moses. God tells Joshua to be Moses' replacement (1:1–2). God promises to be with Joshua just like he was with Moses (3:7). God also honors Joshua just like he honored Moses (4:10). Like Moses, Joshua sent spies into the promised land to learn about it (Num 13:1–6; Josh 2:1). Joshua also parted the Jordan River, and Israel crossed on dry ground (Josh 4:23–24). This is like how Moses parted the Red Sea and Israel crossed on dry ground (Exod 14:21–22). Joshua even removed his sandals because he was on holy ground like Moses did at the burning bush (Exod 3:1–5; Josh 5:13–15b).

Joshua sure does look like Moses. Could he be the new Moses, the Messiah? He is not. But then came Jesus. Finally, the Messiah! Like baby Moses, a wicked king tried to kill Jesus at his birth (Exod 1:22–2:9; Matt 2:13). And like Moses, baby Jesus found safety in Egypt (Matt 2:15). Eventually Jesus returned to his place of birth after those trying to kill him had died like Moses did (Exod 4:19; Matt 2:20). Jesus also did many signs and wonders including giving bread to people in the wilderness like Moses did (Exod 16:31; Mark 6:41; John 6:13). Like Moses, Jesus even glowed white on a mountaintop from being in God's holy presence (Exod 34:29; Luke 9:28–29).

Moses and Joshua point to Jesus, and the rest Joshua gave points to a deeper and better rest that Jesus offers. Through Jesus, and only Jesus, God heals the restlessness our hearts are prone to have. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28–29). Jesus has come to give our hearts rest right now, and one day Jesus will give our bodies rest too. Just like Joshua defeated Israel's enemies and gave them a good land to live in, one day Jesus will defeat our enemies and give us new bodies to enjoy our lives in the new heavens and new earth forever. Then our rest will be complete, and nothing will ever take it away.