

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

2009 - 2010

JOSHUA

A Journey of Faith

Outlines for Bible Moderators

by Sandy Sturch

**An alternative study or to use in combination with
the *Horizons* Bible Study**

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PW Bible Study 2009 – 2010

Joshua: A Journey of Faith

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE NOTES:

If you don't already have it, I recommend that you order the 2009-2010 Horizons Bible Study, *Joshua: A Journey of Faith*, for the rich historical and geographical material you will find there. It is filled with excellent resources that I cannot duplicate here. In the past, I have tried to follow the chapter titles and scripture passages of the Horizons study, but this year there will be some variations. I hope you will read Mary Mikhael's excellent material, even if you choose to use only these outlines in leading your group. There are many helps in Horizons study that you may want to use.

The scriptures that are printed in these notes are from the New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise noted. I will try to include references and quotes that I use in endnotes, but please understand virtually nothing that I write is original with me. I am totally dependent on teachers and authors whom I consider trustworthy and who reflect my view of Scripture, that it is totally the inspired Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20). I do not believe the Bible *contains* the Word of God; I believe *it is* in its entirety the Word of God.

A word about inclusive language. When a passage of scripture refers obviously to both male and female, though the translation uses the male pronoun "he," I will try to use an inclusive pronoun. In using pronouns for God, I do understand that God is both male and female, for he created humankind in God's own image. However, in the original language, male pronouns are used to refer to God, and I choose to retain them in these notes. It becomes very cumbersome to try to use words like "God's self" rather the "himself." I don't think it reads well, and for me, it seems forced and unnatural. I mean no offense to those who are sticklers for inclusive language.

My impression is that *The Book of Joshua* is not an easy book to study. And because of the brevity of time you have for teaching these lessons, I'm going to have to be as concise as possible. That will be a challenge! Remember, it is always good for the teacher to know more than her students, so if you think I short-change you, please do more research on your own. A good study Bible will probably be sufficient for most of you, and if you have a good commentary on Joshua, so much the better.

Remember to always begin your own study by praying and reading the scripture. Trust the Holy Spirit to speak to you and emphasize those things that will be especially appropriate for the women in your group. We have different levels of understanding and different needs. The goal is not to gain intellectual knowledge but to be more and more

transformed into Christ's image. As I must always remember that it's not about me as I write these notes, so I pray you'll remember it's not about you as you teach. So once you've prayed for the Spirit to take over as you study and teach, to give you insights that are needed for you and your group, relax and let him do the work that *only* he can do. We cannot give what we have not received. Pray that the Lord will give you the power of concentration, that he will open your mind and heart to see spiritual truth that will change your life. If you are moved by the power of the Word, it will come through in your teaching.

The following is a brief summary of what takes place from Genesis through Deuteronomy, when Moses dies and leadership is passed to Joshua. If there are people in your group with little or no Bible background, they will need this summary to understand what is happening as we begin our study of Joshua. You may be able to say this in your own words more succinctly than I can write it. What follows here is to refresh your own memory. If it would be helpful to copy this for your group, feel free to do so. If you have purchased the 2009-2010 Horizons Bible Study, *Joshua, a Journey of Faith*, you will find additional information, including maps.

WHAT PRECEDES JOSHUA? -- BACK TO THE BEGINNING

God's story of redemption begins with Genesis 1-2, with the creation of heaven and earth. God's work of creation is completed in six days, and on the seventh day God rests. Inherent in creation is the cycle of work and rest (Sabbath) that humankind is to observe throughout life to enjoy physical health and time for worship. In the N.T., Sabbath takes on theological meaning, enjoying rest through Christ's redemption: "*There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his*" (Heb. 4:9-10).

It is in these first two chapters of Genesis that we discover the attributes of God, who exists from eternity past, who has no beginning and no end; is all-powerful, loving and good. God creates humankind and provides for them all that is needed to live a fulfilled life. God creates male and female, bringing them together in marriage union, with the command to "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground,*" (1:28). They are created in God's image, without sin, created for fellowship with God. God places them in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. They live there in peaceful harmony with each other, with the animals, and with God, who comes to the garden to walk and talk with them.

God has provided for Adam and Eve all that they need to live a fulfilled life. They have fellowship with God, meaningful work, and plentiful food, but with one restriction: They are not to eat of the tree of "*the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die,*" (Gen. 2:16). In Genesis 3, they are tempted by Satan, appearing in the image of a serpent. He approaches Eve with doubt about God's word, "*Did God really say....?*" He both misquotes what God has said and adds to what God

has said, so that Eve doubts the instruction God has given her and makes a decision to disobey God. Adam was with her, and he readily succumbs to the same temptation without a word. Thus sin enters the world and fellowship with God is broken (Gen. 3:8-13).

Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness before God and each other. They try to provide an inadequate covering with fig leaves, and they hide from God. Here we see the principle that sin separates us from God and from each other. But God, knowing full well that they have disobeyed, seeks them in the Garden, confronts them, and provides a covering for their nakedness, using garments of skin (Gen. 3:21). Thus, God provides the first blood sacrifice for sin, and this becomes a principle throughout scripture, that “...*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins,*” (Heb. 9:22b).

Adam blames Eve for his sin, and Eve blames the serpent. God pronounces a curse, first on the serpent, then on Adam, and then on Eve (Gen 3:14-19). Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden, and he placed cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24). The Garden (Paradise) represents the place of eternal blessing, without sin, restored fellowship with God that will ultimately be opened through the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, securing eternal salvation for all who believe. But between now and then, sin infects all life, indeed, the whole world. The first couple gives birth to children, who are born already infected by sin. In Genesis 4, we read of the first murder (Cain and Abel), and the consequences of that sin.

Sin increases on the earth, to be point that God is sorry he created humans, which leads us to the story of Noah and the Flood (Gen. 6-9). God destroys all life through the flood, except for Noah and his family, and two (male and female) of all animal life, who are safe in the ark God has commanded Noah to build. When the flood has subsided, God makes the first covenant with Noah, promising never again to destroy the earth with a flood. God puts a rainbow in the sky as a reminder. However, no sooner do Noah and his family disembark from the ark onto dry ground than sin is blatantly demonstrated by his sons (Gen. 9:18-29). We see here the principle that sin comes from within; that from the sin nature comes acts of sin (“*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned,*” (Rom. 5:12).

But God loves his creation; he loves the humans he has created, and he wants to provide the means to be restored to fellowship with him. So, in Genesis 12, God calls a man named Abram (later to be called Abraham in Gen. 17:5) to become the father of a nation that is to be separate from all the nations of the world; a nation that will become a light to the rest of the world, showing the way to God. God calls Abram to leave his country, his people, and his father’s household, to “*go to the land I will show you,*” (Gen. 12:1). God makes a covenant with Abram: “*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you,*” (Gen. 12:2-3). This covenant can only be experienced through

faith and obedience. Abraham is helpless to make this happen without God's power and provision. It is demonstrated through the barrenness of Abraham's wife Sarah, who will give birth to Isaac (Gen. 21:1-3) when both Abraham and Sarah are well past childbearing years. Barrenness becomes a symbol throughout scripture of our inability to provide our own way of salvation. God does what is impossible to fulfill his covenant blessings. To enjoy the covenant promises of God, one must accept by faith God's provision, which will ultimately come through Jesus Christ. The land promised to Abraham in the O.T. is a picture of the ultimate rule of Christ over all the earth in the N.T. In the meantime, God will demonstrate his love, faithfulness, and deliverance in the O.T. through Israel, and the N.T. through the Church.

To establish the nation of Israel, Isaac gives birth to Jacob, and from Jacob (whose name will be changed to Israel) will come twelve sons who form the twelve tribes of Israel. One of those sons is Joseph, the youngest son who is hated by his brothers. They sell him into slavery in Egypt, telling their father Jacob that he has been killed by a wild animal. Potifer is a high official in Pharaoh's court, and Joseph is brought into his household as a slave. Potifer's wife tries to seduce him, and when Joseph refuses her, she falsely accuses him of attempted rape. Joseph is thrown into prison, where he stays for many years. He is finally released because of his supernatural gift of interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, and he is brought into Pharaoh's own household. He achieves the highest position in the land, governor under Pharaoh. In interpreting the Pharaoh's dream, God revealed to Joseph a coming severe drought, and God gives him a plan of storing up grain that will be sufficient to feed the whole country.

When the drought comes, Jacob and his sons, who have settled in the land of Canaan, are suffering from famine. Having heard that there is food in Egypt, Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to get grain. It is there that they discover their brother Joseph in the highest position of the land, second only to Pharaoh. It is Joseph, whom they do not recognize at first, who will give them food. The story of intrigue covers Genesis 42-50. Joseph is a powerful demonstration of forgiveness and reconciliation, resulting in Jacob and his sons moving to Egypt and settling in land of Goshen. Genesis closes with the story of Jacob's death, and then Joseph's death. Before Joseph dies, he declares to his brothers that God will surely deliver them from the land of Egypt and take them back to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And he asks his brothers to swear that, upon his death, they will carry his bones with them out of Egypt.

As the Book of Exodus opens, God has blessed the Israelites greatly. Many years have passed since Joseph's death, and Egypt's king knows nothing of Joseph. What he does know is that the Israelites have become so numerous, Pharaoh fears that in a time of war, they could join with the enemy and defeat them. Therefore, they subject the Israelites to forced labor. And to decrease their number, he instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill the boy babies during delivery. But the midwives ignore orders, and when Moses is born, his mother hid him for three months, and then put him in a basket among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister Miriam watched him closely, and when Pharaoh's daughter came to the river to bathe, she heard a baby crying, found Moses and decided to keep him as her own son. Miriam appeared and offered to get

someone to nurse the baby for her. So Moses' mother became the nurse, and Moses' mother was able to keep Moses at home until he was weaned.

Not only was baby Moses spared, for the first forty years of his life, he was raised in the palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, where he received the finest in education available in the world. Then he went out to where his own people were, and he saw the hard labor imposed on them. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people, and in his anger, he killed the Egyptian. When Pharaoh learned of this, he tried to kill Moses. Moses fled and went to live in Midian, where he lived for the next forty years. Then came the call of God from the burning bush, instructing Moses to return to Egypt to deliver the Israelites from slavery. In spite of many protests, Moses obeyed God.

The Israelites spent 430 years in slavery in Egypt (Ex. 12:40). We know the story of God's miraculous deliverance from Egypt and the subsequent wandering in the wilderness for the next forty years, under the leadership of Moses. It was during this time that God gave to Moses the commandments, and the instructions for the building of the tabernacle (which was portable so it could be moved from place to place), the furnishings for the tabernacle, and the whole priestly system for offering of sacrifices. The journey through the wilderness is one of tests and disobedience, and rebellion. Moses' patience was tried to the limit again and again. One day when the Israelites were complaining about lack of water, God instructs Moses to speak to the rock from which water would gush forth. But instead of speaking to the rock, Moses strikes the rock in a fit of anger. When Moses eventually comes to the border of the Promised Land, God takes him to the top of Mount Nebo where he can see the land, but he will not be permitted to go into it because of his disobedience. And the Israelites who rebelled in the wilderness will also not be permitted to enter; only their children who were less than twenty years old.

Joshua, when he was only a youth, became Moses' aide. Before Moses' death, he sent ten men into Canaan to spy out the land which God has promised to Israel. Joshua and Caleb were two of the ten. When they returned to give their report, only Joshua and Caleb give a good report, while the others said there are giants in the land and they cannot possibly overthrow them (Numbers 14:26-38). Before Moses' death, the Lord told Joshua that he would be the one to succeed Moses, that he would lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

The Book of Deuteronomy closes with Moses on top of Mount Nebo in the land of Moab.

Deuteronomy 34:1-8

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land — from Gilead to Dan, 2 all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3 the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land

I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."

5 And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. 6 He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. 7 Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. 8 The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

9 Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

10 Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, 11 who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt — to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. 12 For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

With the death of Moses, Israel is now ready to enter the Promised Land. But it is not a land without inhabitants. In fact, it is a land filled with evil; a land that must be purged in order for it to be the dwelling place for God's chosen people. Israel must take the land by conquest. This will test their faith and obedience, for they have no strength in themselves to meet this challenge. Joshua will be their leader, as Moses was their leader through the wilderness. He has been trained well. But is he up to the challenge?

The book opens with God's commands to Joshua before crossing the Jordan River. What we will see is God's faithfulness, his power, and his specific directions to accomplish what he has commanded Israel to do. This is not unlike Paul's letter to the Ephesians in the N.T. The conquest of Joshua in the O.T. is not unlike the spiritual conquest described in Ephesians. Through Christ, we, the people of God, live as God's new creation, barriers broken down, living in love and harmony through the power of the Spirit. God provides every believer with the full armor needed to be victorious in the spiritual battle.

The God of Joshua is the *same God* we know in the N.T., in Jesus Christ. In reading the O.T., look for insights about the attributes and character of God, and for principles of victory in the battle against sin. The Israelites had to take the land by conquest. So as Christians today, we are engaged in ongoing spiritual warfare. While our ultimate victory is assured, we are not spared the battle. The principles of victory found in the O.T. still apply today as we are engaged in battle against the unseen forces of evil in this world.

1 Peter 5:8-9

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

2 Corinthians 10:4-6

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

LESSON ONE

The Commissioning of Joshua **Joshua 1:1-9**

Read the preceding Introduction and begin your lesson with a brief summary of what happens from Genesis 1 to Joshua 1. Include what you think is necessary for your group to understand the context of Joshua.

As the scene of Joshua opens, Israel is camped on the Plains of Moab. Israel is being prepared for the coming invasion of the Promised Land which will necessitate the dramatic crossing of the Jordan River. It has been many centuries since God gave the promise of land to Abraham (Gen. 12:7). The promise was passed from Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob, and to his twelve sons who became known as the Israelites. Their sojourn in Egypt turned into long and hard slavery, which culminated in their miraculous exodus under the strong leadership of Moses. Forty years of wilderness wandering followed, during which time God gave to Moses the law that spelled out in detail how the Israelites were to live as God's people in this world. They received the Ten Commandments, instructions on how to worship God, how to treat each other, and how to deal with other nations. God promised to be with them and bless them, and he commanded them to be obedient to the laws he gave them, to abstain from the worship of idols, and to serve God with all their heart all their lives. The promises God gave them were conditioned on faith and obedience.

The first five books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch (Books of the Law). It ends with the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34. Joshua, Moses faithful aide since his youth, is now Israel's leader.

READ THE TEXT:

Joshua 1:1-9

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 2 "Moses my servant is dead. 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. 3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4 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. 5 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.

6 “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. 7 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. 8 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. 9 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.”

HOW DOES THE BOOK OF JOSHUA BEGIN?

- There are three scenes in this chapter:
 - God’s *commissioning* of Joshua (vv. 1-9).
 - Joshua’s *instructions* to his officers (vv. 10-11).
 - *Dialogue* between Joshua and two-and-a-half tribes of Israelites that live on the other side of the Jordan River—the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh—called the Transjordanian tribes (vv. 12-18).
 - Joshua’s concern is to guard against any possible estrangement of the two-and-a-half tribes from the rest of Israel.
 - We shall see later the consequences that resulted from their being cut off from the rest of Israel by the Jordan River and from their being exposed to their enemies through lack of natural boundaries.¹
 - The purpose here is to show that all twelve tribes participated in the conquest.
- Our focus in this lesson is the commissioning of Joshua.

WHY WAS MOSES’ DEATH SO IMPORTANT TO ISRAEL?

- For forty years Moses had been their leader in religious, domestic, judicial, military, and civil concerns.
 - Moses was the only leader the Israelites had ever known.
 - Because of disobedience, Moses was not permitted to lead the people into the Promised Land—he could only see it from the top of Mt. Nebo before he died.
- Transitioning from the leadership of Moses to Joshua could be difficult not only for Israel, but also for Joshua himself, in spite of his years of training under Moses.
- Everything that Joshua will accomplish will be the fulfillment of what God had begun with Moses.

WHAT IS THE SETTING OF JOSHUA 1?

- Because the narrative of Deuteronomy continues into Joshua, we are to regard everything that follows as a continuation of events in Moses' life.
 - The setting in Joshua 1 remains the same as the close of Deuteronomy, the Israelite camp in the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT ISRAEL IS ABOUT TO DO?

- Just as crossing the Red Sea had marked their departure from Egypt, the crossing of the Jordan marked Israel's entrance to the Promised Land—both required God's supernatural power.
- Israel was challenged by flood conditions and the presence of the enemy on the other shore.
- This would mark the *fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham* in Genesis 12:6-7 and 15:18, a major theme throughout patriarchal history, the Exodus, and the Book of Deuteronomy. (See also Gen. 13:14-15; 17:8; 24; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 35:12; 48:3-4; 50:24.)

Genesis 12:6-7

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 15:7

He also said to him, "I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it."

Genesis 15:18-21

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

- The land is God's gift, but it is occupied with idolatrous nations. The land must be cleansed as a condition for occupation.
- The conquest will require faith and obedience to God's Word.
- Israel must learn dependence on God; they will discover God's power and faithfulness to his word.

- The generation that is about to enter the Promised Land must learn obedience to God firsthand, for the previous generations are not permitted to enter.
- The complete fulfillment of occupation will not be experienced by Israel until the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Kings 2:21, 24).

WHT ARE THE GENERAL BOUNDARIES OF THE PROMISED LAND?

- North – Lebanon, roughly what is present-day Lebanon, which is north of Israel, including two mountain ranges.
- South – “the desert,” a generic term in the O.T. that may refer to any barren area—in this case, it refers to a southern desert.
- East – the Euphrates River (sometimes referred to as the “great river”) is the true northeastern border; the Jordan River or the Arabian desert is the true eastern border. But in biblical geography, the Euphrates River represented a convenient eastern border.²
- West – the Mediterranean Sea, called “the Great Sea on the west.”
 - Though the vast area on both sides of the Jordan was promised to Israel (Deut. 11:24), another tradition describes on the land on the west side of the Jordan as the Promised Land, indicating that the land possessed by the two-and-a-half tribes east of the Jordan lay outside the Promised Land (Joshua 2:19).
 - Moses stated that Israel would arrive at the Promised Land *after* they had crossed the Jordan (Deut 12:10).
 - In Joshua 1, the word *desert* refers to the Negev in the south, and *Lebanon* refers to the Lebanese mountains.
 - Palestine was referred to as *the Hittite country* by both Egypt and Babylonia even after the Hittites had withdrawn from the area (NIV Study Bible, p. 292 n. 1:4).³

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DOES JOSHUA BRING TO HIS NEW COMMISSION?

- He has been *Moses’ aide since his youth*—he had been mentored by the best!
- He was the *hero of Israel’s first military victory*, the defeat of Amalek (Ex. 17:9, 13).
- His name was changed from Hosea (*salvation*) to Joshua (*Yahweh is salvation*), implied in Numbers 13:16.
 - Moses’ intention in changing Joshua’s name was possibly to identify him as *an Israelite who consistently obeyed Yahweh*.⁴
 - *Joshua* is the N.T. name for *Jesus* (Matt. 1:21). It is the first personal name in the Bible to incorporate God’s personal name, *Yahweh*.⁵
- He was *first commissioned by Moses*:

Numbers 27:18-23

So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. 19 Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. 20 Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. 21 He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.”

22 Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses.

- From this passage, we learn that Joshua was *a man in whom God’s spirit resided*.
- He was a leader who led only at God’s command, not according to his own whim. This required a spirit of *humility and total dependence on God*.
- Now that Moses has died, God himself commissioned Joshua:
 - God says that he is the one to lead Israel into the Promised Land.
 - Access to the land will mean crossing the Jordan River, a feat that will only be accomplished by faith.
 - They will only realize victory as they move forward in obedience: *I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses (1:3)*.

WHAT WAS GOD’S COMMAND AND PROMISE TO JOSHUA?

- He is to be *strong and courageous* (v. 6, 7, 9).
 - Why? Because God fulfills his promises.
 - God swore to his forefathers to give them this land—the promise still stands.
- Is the fulfillment of this promise *conditional*?
 - Yes! It is based on obedience to God’s Word:

Joshua 1:7-9

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.

8 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.

- Joshua’s success will depend not just on knowing (head knowledge) God’s Word; it will depend on his meditating on it—thinking about it, rehearsing it, memorizing it—day and night.

CONSIDER THESE VERSES:

Psalm 77:12

I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

Psalm 119:15-16

I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Psalm 119:23-24

Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

Psalm 119:97-98

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me.

Psalm 119:148

My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT GOD SO FAR, BASED ON ISRAEL’S PAST AND HIS COMMISSION TO JOSHUA?

- God is sovereign over the world he has created. He gives land to whomever he will; he defeats nations; he sets up kings and takes them down.

Job 34:21-24

“His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. God has no need to examine men further, that they should come before him for judgment. Without inquiry he shatters the mighty and sets up others in their place.

Psalms 76:11-12

Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared. He breaks the spirit of rulers; he is feared by the kings of the earth.

Daniel 2:20-22

Praise be to the name of God forever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

- God chooses human leaders to lead his people. He not only calls to leadership, he chooses a leader's replacement.
- God gives his appointed leaders instructions for accomplishing the task he has assigned, and requires obedience and faithfulness to his commands.
- God imposes consequences for a leader's disobedience, as we see in Moses not being permitted to enter the Promised Land, but only to see it from the mountaintop prior to his death.
- Obedience to God is possible only in knowing God's Word and meditating on it day and night. God's Word must be imbedded in a leader's mind and heart.
- God gives his leaders courage to do what he commands and it is God himself who brings to pass what he has decreed will happen.
- God reveals himself and his ways to his leaders; he does not leave them guessing.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What do you think Joshua learned from Moses during the years he was his aide?
2. What did God say to Joshua in his commission that you want to apply to your own life?
3. What would be the secret to Joshua learning to be strong and courageous? How have you learned to be strong and courageous?
4. What qualities of leadership do you look for in a pastor?
5. Ephesians 6:10-18 tells us that we are in a spiritual battle. What is our only offensive weapon listed in that passage? How would this correspond to Joshua's instructions?
6. For the Israelites to occupy the Promised Land, it had to be cleansed. For Jesus Christ to totally occupy and control your life, what needs to be cleansed?
7. Had you been Joshua, in spite of your training under Moses, how would you have felt as Israel's new leader?
8. What do you think can ruin a strong leader?
9. God promises Joshua that he will never leave him nor forsake him. Do you have a difficult time claiming this promise for yourself? In what circumstances are you most filled with fear?

10. God tells Joshua that his success is dependent on knowing and obeying “the Book of the Law.” Is this still true today? If you believe what God told Joshua, how do you incorporate this into your own life and the lives of your children?

¹ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 258.

² *The New American Commentary*, p. 82.

³ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 256.

⁴ *The New NIV Application Commentary*, p. 76.

⁵ *The New American Commentary*, p. 73.

LESSON TWO

Rahab and the Spies **Joshua 1:10-2:24**

BACKGROUND FOR THIS LESSON

In most families, as the children grow into adulthood, they begin asking questions about family history, something like: *Where did my great-grandparents come from? What caused them to move to this city? How did great aunt Susie die, and why won't anyone talk about it? Why is there a different name on my birth certificate? Why did you divorce Dad?* Questions like these often lead to bringing skeletons out of the closet, and stories unfold that put pieces of the puzzle together for the first time. Sometimes we get a clue as to why we are the way we are, or we see how the foolish choices of past generations helped form our own destiny. Sometimes we learn lessons from those stories, but sometimes we only repeat the sins of our parents.

As Joshua is about to lead the Israelites into Canaan, he was surely remembering his own history, the deaths of his own family and the whole nation except for the young ones, and the death of his mentor Moses. He had already seen the land God had promised to Israel, but only he and Caleb had believed God would give them the ability to occupy it, and therefore, only he and Caleb would go with the younger generation into the Promised Land. What were the tragic events behind this?

Joshua had been prepared for leadership since he was a young man, when Moses chose him to be his aide (Ex. 24:13; Num. 11:28). In Numbers 13, God had told Moses to send some leaders to explore the land of Canaan, the land God promised to the Israelites. Moses chose one man from each tribe, including Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, and Hoshea, from the tribe of Ephraim. Moses changed Hoshea's name to Joshua. This is what happened:

Numbers 13:17-33

When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. 18 See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. 19 What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? 20 How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land." (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)

21 So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath. 22 They went up through the Negev and came to Hebron, where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. (Hebron had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 When they reached the Valley of Eshcol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs. 24 That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there. 25 At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

26 They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 They gave Moses this account:

“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. 28 But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan.”

30 Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

31 But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” 32 And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. 33 We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

Numbers 14:1-25

That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. 2 All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell face down in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. 6 Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7 and said to the entire Israelite assembly,

“The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

10 But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. 11 The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? 12 I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.”

13 Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. 14 And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. 15 If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 16 ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.’

17 “Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared:

18 ‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’

19 In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

20 The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. 21 Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, 22 not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times — 23 not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. 24 But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. 25 Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the

valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.”

The bad report and lack of faith of the ten spies resulted in the whole nation rebelling against God, and the consequences were fatal:

Numbers 14:26-38

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: 27 “How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. 28 So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: 29 In this desert your bodies will fall — every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. 30 Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

31 As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. 32 But you — your bodies will fall in this desert. 33 Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. 34 For forty years — one year for each of the forty days you explored the land — you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.’ 35 I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this desert; here they will die.”

36 So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it — 37 these men responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. 38 Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

We could stop right here and spend the rest of our time talking about the consequences of sin—consequences that spread to the whole family, for those who were permitted to enter the Promised Land with Joshua and Caleb had to watch their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and close family friends die. They had to bury them in the desert and leave their graves behind. We can’t imagine the magnitude of the grief they endured. There were no stories of grandeur and faithfulness to God to be told about their ancestors, only stories of the deadly plague they suffered as a consequence for unbelief.

Now, leaving the past behind them, with Joshua having been commissioned by God to be their leader after the death of Moses, they are ready to begin their conquest of Canaan.

Joshua 1:10-18

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

12 But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, 13 “Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.’ 14 Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers 15 until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.”

16 Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. 17 Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. 18 Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”

At this point, it seems the surviving Israelites have learned some lessons from their deceased loved ones. They are not about to repeat their mistakes. Is this the *good* that can come even from our sin?

And now begins the amazing story of Rahab and the spies.

THE HARD QUESTION FIRST: WHY WOULD A “LOVING GOD” USE WAR TO FULFILL HIS COVENANT?

- The easiest answer is that *heathen people were already settled in the land God promised to Abraham*—they had to go before the Israelites could take possession.
- However, God had watched the *progression of sin in Canaan for 400 years*, since Abraham left Haran and traveled through Canaan.
 - God’s *holiness and justice* would not permit unlimited sin to permeate any nation indefinitely.
 - To say it another way, *God is always true to his character*. Because God is holy and just, he cannot co-exist with sin.

- Israel was called to be God’s representatives to the world; a *light* to the Gentiles.
- Therefore, they were to *reflect God’s character*, which means, among other things, living a life of obedience to God.
- If they were to settle in the midst of unholy people, they would be tempted to adapt to their ways, worship their gods, resulting in living in darkness rather than light.
- Israel’s history will attest to their inability to remain a holy people while living in the midst of wickedness.

Isaiah 42:5-7

This is what God the LORD says — he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: 6 "I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, 7 to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

- Israel ultimately failed in her mission. It was fulfilled by Jesus Christ, the *light* of the world.

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

- We must remember the *patience of God* in waiting so long to bring judgment.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

- We also learn that *God is aware of sins of heathen nations*, for all humankind is *God’s creation*, and the land that is defiled is *God’s land*.

Leviticus 18:1-5

The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

- The land of *Canaan* was filled with sexual sins. The laws of Leviticus 18 speak to the sins that were being committed in Canaan. They had to do with incest, sex with the wife of one's neighbor; homosexuality, bestiality, and child sacrifice (to the god of Molech).
- Wars were between military men—usually women, children, and animals were moved to a protected place during the battle.
- We are never told of any Canaanites who confessed Israel's God who were destroyed, which illustrates God's *mercy and grace*. For example:
 - *Rahab and her family* are spared because *she chose to believe in the God of the Israelites*, and putting her faith in action, she risked her life to hide the spies.
 - The *Gibeonites* escaped destruction through their *confession of faith in Israel's God* (2:8-13; 9:9-10, 24-25).
 - As to the slaughter of innocents, there is no specific mention of killing children.
 - Wars were usually fought at fortresses, which were not necessarily population centers. Women and children were usually not in the midst of battle. Surely some were killed, but the Bible rarely informs us of such details.

RE-READ THE JOSHUA TEXT IN ORDER TO MAKE FURTHER OBSERVATIONS:

Joshua 1:10-18

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: 11 "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

12 But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, 13 "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.' 14 Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your

brothers. You are to help your brothers 15 until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

16 Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. 17 Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. 18 Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JOSHUA'S INSTRUCTIONS TO HIS OFFICERS:

- "Three days" is a stereotyped phrase that is common throughout the Bible. It means "the day after tomorrow," or "in a few days" (2:16, 22; 3:2; 9:16).
- "Supplies" would have included manna that God continued to provide until Israel crossed into the land (5:12).
 - Each man was responsible for his own supplies.
 - Once in the land, because they *invaded during the harvest season*, there would be plenty of food (3:15).
- The Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh are mentioned to show that *all twelve tribes participated in the conquest*, even though their assigned territory seems to place them outside the Promised Land.
 - Later history shows the consequences that resulted from their being cut off from the rest of Israel by the Jordan River and from their being exposed to their enemies through lack of natural boundaries.
 - Moses' command about these tribes is recorded in Deuteronomy 3:18-20.
 - "Rest" implies secure borders and peace with all their enemies, and in the N.T., it is a *type of spiritual salvation* (Heb. 4:1-11).
- Joshua is confirmed as Israel's leader; they pledged to Joshua the same support they had shown Moses.
 - It is unclear if the words, "may the Lord your God be with you," are meant as a prayer or as a condition of allegiance.
 - They may be saying they will follow Joshua's leading so long as there is evidence that he is being led by God. Their allegiance to Moses had waned in the wilderness when their circumstances did not jibe with their idea of God's provision.

WHY DID JOSHUA SEND THE SPIES?

Joshua 2:1-7

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

2 The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." 3 So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. 5 At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." 6(But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) 7 So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

- Sending spies before a battle was *customary military intelligence*; it did not indicate lack of faith in God.
- Joshua may have wanted their *mission to be kept secret* to the other Israelites because of the demoralizing report the 10 spies had given previously, resulting in Israel's rebellion and God's judgment of not being permitted to enter the land.
- Jericho was chosen as the first target city because it was a formidable fortress guarding the pass leading westward into the mountainous region.
 - It has *already been condemned by God*, and the time was near for its destruction:

Deuteronomy 7:1-6

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations — the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you — 2 and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. 3 Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

5 This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. 6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

Deuteronomy 7:17-26

You may say to yourselves, "These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" 18 But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. 19 You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. 20 Moreover, the LORD your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. 21 Do not be terrified by them, for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. 22 The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. 23 But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. 24 He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. 25 The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God. 26 Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Utterly abhor and detest it, for it is set apart for destruction.

Deuteronomy 12:2-5

Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. 3 Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.

4 You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. 5 But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling.

- For the most part the towns of Palestine were independent city-states at this time, and their rulers were called kings.
- The spies had been detected, and it was reported to the king that the Israelites had come to spy out the land, which was the worst news conceivable (2:2).

- Rahab reports that the people of Jericho were in *great fear of the Israelites* because they had heard of the Lord's deliverance from the Egyptians through the Red Sea and the destruction of the Amorite kings (2:9-11).
- The king was informed of the arrival of the spies, and he assumed they had gone into Rahab's house because prostitutes were often involved in intelligence activities.
- The king expected Rahab to do her patriotic duty to turn in the spies. The ancient law of Hammurabi states that if felons are banded together in a prostitute's house and she does not turn them in to the palace, she shall be put to death.¹

WHY DID THE SPIES CHOOSE TO STAY AT RAHAB'S HOUSE?

- Her house was part of Jericho's wall.
 - There were inner and outer walls surrounding the city, which was about eight acres. The inner wall was 12 ft. thick; the outer wall was 6 ft. thick; about 30 ft. high.
 - There were houses in the wall and the flat roof afforded useful space, which Rahab used for drying stalks of flax. They would become a good hiding place for the spies.
- Her house was likely *an inn or a tavern*, a good place to gather intelligence and have no questions asked in return.
- Being in the city wall, it was also a good place for a quick escape.
- God directed the spies to Rahab's house because God knew her heart was open to him and she would be an instrument in Israel's victory. God often uses people with simple faith to accomplish great things for him, regardless of their past.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT RAHAB?

- She was a *prostitute*, although there is nothing in the text to indicate that the spies had any intention of sexual activity with her. Their knowledge of God's law and the history of consequences of Israel's sin and rebellion would have made this very unlikely.
- Rahab manufactured and dyed linen, indicated by the stalks of flax on her roof, where she hid the spies (2:6).
- She and all the other residents of Jericho *had heard about the Exodus* from Egypt (2:10), which had taken place 40 years before.
 - This had stirred in her heart *belief in Israel's God*, which caused her to hide the spies, in spite of the danger of discovery.
 - Insight: Romans 10:17-20

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. 18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:

"Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

19 Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." 20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

RAHAB'S COVENANT WITH THE SPIES: (2:8-21)

Joshua 2:8-21

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof⁹ and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

- Rahab spoke of the takeover of the land as if it were an accomplished fact (v. 9).
 - What God had done for Israel in Egypt and the Transjordan convinced Rahab that God was also able to give them this land.
- The *great fear* that had fallen on the people was predicted in the song of Moses and Miriam:

Exodus 15:15b-16:

"The people of Canaan will melt away; terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone—until your people pass by, O LORD, until the people you bought pass by."

- *Fear* is contagious and can even cause the defeat of an army that is superior in all other respects (v. 11).
- The high point of the chapter is *Rahab's confession of her faith* (v. 11), which is remarkable for a pagan and evidence of her conversion.
 - Keep in mind that all the other people of Jericho had heard the same reports that Rahab did, but they did not respond in faith.

- It is also significant that Rahab is referring to events that had happened as long as forty years ago.
- Her declaration of faith leads to her plea for safety for *herself and her family* (vv. 12-13):

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death."

- *Kindness* represents the Hebrew word *hesed* (often translated *love* in the NIV, especially in the Psalms).²
- In this context, it means a reciprocal relationship of caring, shown in Rahab's words, "you will show kindness to my family because I have shown kindness to you."
 - Rahab might have meant only that she and her family be taken alive as prisoners, but they were assimilated into the nation (6:25).
 - In the Scripture, *salvation* is often a *family matter*. The Israelites celebrated Passover by families (Exodus 12:3).
 - Joshua decided for his *whole family* that they would serve the Lord (24:15).
 - The jailer in Acts asked Paul and Silas how to be saved. They replied, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household*" (Acts 16:31-32).
 - Rahab's family *demonstrated their personal faith* by gathering in Rahab's house and remaining there.
 - The Bible *does not* teach that we can have faith *on behalf of another* person. But we can intercede for our family members and live a witness before them that may (and often does) result in their own personal belief. This is stated in the vows that parents and the church take at a child's baptism.
- In delivering the spies from the king's officers, she risked her life and she set herself against her own people. In return for this, she asks for safety for herself and her family.
- She asks for a *sure sign* the she and her family will be spared (v. 13). The answer is *their safety for hers and her family*. This will result in their assimilation into the nation when Israel takes possession of the land.

WHAT IS THE CONDITION OF DELIVERANCE?

- The spies lay out these conditions:

14 "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

- "If you don't tell" means not just Rahab but her whole family.

15 So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 16 Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

- Rahab sent the spies to the west of Jericho, a barren wasteland. The king's officers had gone in the opposite direction.
- "Three days" is the same timeframe Joshua had given his officers to prepare for invasion.

17 The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us 18 unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. 19 If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. 20 But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

21 "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

22 When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. 23 Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. 24 They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."

- These, then, are the *three conditions of deliverance*:
 - The scarlet cord must be placed in Rahab's window (v. 18a).
 - Rahab's whole family must stay in her house (v. 18b-19)).
 - The covenant between Rahab and the spies must be kept secret (v. 20).
- The scarlet cord would identify Rahab's house.

- The spies, unaware of the miracle God was about to perform, were anticipating a house-to-house battle in which the Israelites would have been instructed to *spare the house marked with the scarlet cord*.
- The end of Rahab's story of deliverance will come in Ch. 6.

➤ Note the *similarities to the Passover*:

- Compare the *scarlet cord* with the *sprinkled blood* identifying the house that was to be spared death.
- Note the requirement that Rahab's family *remain in the house* with the command that the Passover be eaten in family units and that *no one was to leave the house* (Exodus 12:21-23).
 - In vs. 19, "*If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head,*" means that whoever disobeys the instruction to stay in the house will be responsible for his own death.
- In both cases, faith was expressed through obedience.

James 2:18

But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

James 2:25-26

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What lessons have you learned from the stories of your ancestors or your parents?
2. What lessons have you learned from your own mistakes? Are you willing to share those lessons with your children or with other young people?
3. When you decided to follow Christ, how much did you actually know about him then compared to what you know now?
4. Do you think that nations today are in danger of the judgment of God because of their sins? Including our own nation?
5. In what ways do you think we are violating God's standards of holiness and justice today? Do you think that even Christians are in danger of judgment for these violations?
6. Had you been Rahab, would you have risked your life for the spies? How did she know the spies would come through with their end of the bargain?
7. What do we do in the church today that might be a parallel to Rahab bringing her family into her house for safety? Is it possible for someone to have faith for another? Or are members of one's family more disposed to believe when a family member intercedes for the salvation of the others?

8. Rahab is known as a prostitute. Was that her *only* identification? How would you describe her, based on this lesson? Do you know someone with a bad reputation who has possibly been misjudged? On what do you base your opinion?
9. How have you changed since you met Christ? On what basis do you want to be judged by your peers? What has been the greatest influence for change in your life?
10. Jesus makes a *covenant* with those who trust him as Savior. How is the scarlet cord a symbol of our salvation?
11. There are many scripture references that speak to *remaining* in Christ, warnings about *falling away*, and many “if” clauses in referring to salvation. Perhaps this can be compared to remaining *in the house*. So you believe salvation is *guaranteed* once one has proclaimed faith in Christ, regardless of lack of evidence of faith in one’s life? (See Mark 4:15-17; Matt. 26:24; John 15:5-6; Heb. 6:4-6).

¹ S. R. Driver and J.C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1956], 2:45.

² *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 3, p. 262.

LESSON THREE

Crossing the Jordan **Joshua 3:1-5:1**

NOTE FOR LEADERS:

- Text for personal study to read ahead of Circle meeting – Joshua 3:14-5:12
- Horizon Readings (supplemental) – pages 36-42
- “Encountering the Text” from Horizons – page 37

The preparations have been made for the invasion of Jericho. Rahab, who hid the spies in her house, has tied the scarlet cord in her window, marking her house as the one to be spared when the city is conquered. She and her family will be spared as long as they stay inside the house. Rahab’s faith in Israel’s God is so strong that she is willing to risk her life and that of her family in facilitating the conquest of Jericho. The salvation of Rahab is an example of what God would have done for others also, had they believed in Israel’s God. The king and the other citizens of Jericho knew all that she knew, but they did not turn to Israel’s God for mercy: “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient,” (Heb. 11:31). We see that all people are accountable for the revelation of God that they receive.

We now come to the great climactic event in the Book of Joshua—crossing the Jordan. This marks the completion of God’s redemptive act that began with the Exodus.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CROSSING THE JORDAN:

Joshua 3:1-13

Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. 2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp, 3 giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. 4 Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."

5 Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

6 Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.

7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. 8 Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

9 Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. 11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.

12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT?

- The presence of the ark indicates that the crossing of the Jordan was much more than a military maneuver; it was a *religious procession*.
- The ark was a portable shrine built as a rectangular box, 27 inches wide by 27 inches high by 45 inches long, overlaid with gold.
- The cover of the ark had a golden cherub on each end facing toward the middle. It was between these two cherubs that God met with Israel (Ex. 25:10-22).
 - The ark symbolized God's presence among his people.
 - When the ark was carried across the Jordan, the Lord was marching in to claim his land.¹
 - Only the priests (Levites) were permitted to carry the ark.
- The people were warned to keep a distance away from the ark because it was very holy.
 - *God* is holy, and thus the *ark* that represented him was holy, and the *event* was holy.

HOW WERE THE PEOPLE TO PREPARE THEMSELVES? (3:5)

- The people were to be holy (*consecrated*). Consecration involved bathing, washing one's clothing, and abstinence from sexual activity (cf. Ex. 19:10, 14-15).
- *Amazing things* (v. 5) means miraculous things.

WHAT WERE THE LORD'S INSTRUCTIONS TO JOSHUA?

- First, the Lord assured Joshua that he would be with him, just as he had been with Moses.
- The manner in which this conquest would take place would validate the leadership of Joshua, just as the crossing of the Red Sea validated the leadership of Moses.
- The miraculous crossing of the Jordan, the boundary of the Promised Land, will assure them that God is indeed with them and he will surely dislodge the present inhabitants of Canaan.
- This will affirm that God is the One and all-powerful God, not Baal, the god of the Canaanites.
 - The Canaanites believed Baal to be the king among gods because he had triumphed over the sea-god. By opening the way through the flooded Jordan, the Lord would show both Israel and the Canaanites that he is Lord over the waters and that he is able to establish his own border in the world.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CROSSING:

- The priests were commanded to take up the ark and cross over the Jordan, which was at flood stage (3:15), but they were not told *how* they would accomplish this feat.
 - In a similar way, Israel was not told *how* they would cross the Red Sea when they fled the Egyptians.
 - Flood stage was due to the spring rains and the melting snow on Mount Hermon.
- This was the **instruction for the priests:**

Joshua 3:8

Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'

 - Lesson: God often waits for us to take a step of faith before he opens the way for us.
- This was the **instruction for the people:**

Joshua 3:9-13

Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. 11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.

12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.

13 And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

- God is promising that he not only is with them, but he is able to act and to perform mighty deeds in contrast to the pagan gods that have eyes but cannot see (cf. Psalm 115:3-7).
- The ark precedes them into the water, signifying that God will go with them and prepare the way.
 - By passing safely through the Jordan at the head of his army the Lord showed the rightness of his claim on the land.
 - The Lord would enter the Jordan first and then remain there until his whole army had crossed safely over. Thus his claim to the land would be vindicated before the eyes of all who would hear about it.

CROSSING THE JORDAN:

Joshua 3:14-17

So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 15 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, 16 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 (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

- Stating that the river was at flood stage (v. 15) suggests the natural impossibility of what was about to happen.
- The water from upstream was completely cut off, and the water flowing downstream was soon emptied into the Dead Sea.
- The priests standing firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan signifies that the Lord himself remained in the place of danger until all Israel crossed the Jordan.²

- “Dry ground” does not require that the riverbed be powdery dry but simply means that it was no longer covered with water—terra firma as contrasted to the flooding river.

TWELVE MEMORIAL STONES -- THE IMPORTANCE OF REMEMBERING!

Joshua 4:1-9

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 2 "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. 9 Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

- The Lord had commanded Joshua to choose one man from each tribe of Israel before they crossed the Jordan, in anticipation of building a monument (3:12).
- There would be a stone in this monument from every tribe of Israel, to remind future generations what the Lord did in this place.
- The stones were taken from the middle of the riverbed, near the place where the priests carrying the ark were standing. This was evidence that the river had actually stopped flowing to allow Israel to cross over.
- The monument was to be a reminder to future generations of the miracle Lord did in that place.
 - Monuments elicit questions, and questions allow for the telling of a story over and over again, enabling future generations to participate in the great acts God had done for Israel.

THE CROSSING COMPLETED – STAGE ONE:

Joshua 4:10-24

Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, 11 and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the LORD and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. 12 The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, armed, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. 13 About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war.

INTERJECTION: WHO ARE THE TRANSJORDANIAN TRIBES?

(Note: There might be more information here than you really want to know, but for some of you who are as inquisitive as I am, enjoy! No obligation to include all this in your lesson.)

- For Moses' assignment of the land on the east side of the Jordan, see Numbers 32. This land was given to the Ruebenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.
 - Manasseh and his brother Ephraim were sons of Joseph, born in Egypt.
 - Joseph's portion of the land was divided between these two sons before Jacob's death. Jacob said these sons would be reckoned as *his*, whereas the sons born to Joseph in Egypt *after* Manasseh and Ephraim would not be included in the inheritance of Jacob's twelve sons.
 - Manasseh was Joseph's *firstborn*, but when Jacob was blessing his sons before his death, he insisted on giving the blessing of the firstborn to Ephraim instead (see Gen. 48:17-20).
 - This is reminiscent of Isaac giving Jacob the blessing of the firstborn ahead of his brother Esau, though that happened through deception, a scheme between Rebekah and Jacob, her favorite son (see Gen. 27).
 - The Ruebenites and Gadites requested of Moses that they be given the land on the east side of the Jordan because it was good land for grazing their cattle. (Though you don't need to include this in your lesson, I think you will find the dialogue in Numbers 32 very interesting.)
- According to Joshua 1:10-15, it was important to stress that the Transjordanian tribes had a primary role in the conquest of the land of Canaan:

Joshua 1:10-15

So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: 11 "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

12 But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said,

13 "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.' 14 Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers 15 until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

- Throughout the book, special attention is given to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (4:12-13; 13:8-32; 22:1-34).
 - In his concern to guard against any possible estrangement of the two and one-half tribes from the rest of Israel, the author emphasizes that *all twelve tribes participated in the conquest* (cf. 22:24-25).
 - Although their territory was included in the larger boundaries promised to Israel (1:3-4), the narrative at times seems to place the two and one-half tribes outside the Promised Land, strictly speaking, as is the case here (cf. 22:19).
 - Later history demonstrated the consequences that resulted from their being cut off from the rest of Israel by the Jordan River and from their being exposed to their enemies through lack of natural boundaries.³
- To stress the important role of the Transjordanian tribes, they went *ahead* of the other Israelites.
- The number participating (40,000) does not represent all the people of the Transjordanian tribes, for it would not have been wise to leave their families unprotected as they remained on the east side of the Jordan.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP:

Joshua 4:14

That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.

- Joshua was now firmly established as Israel's leader in place of Moses, and through remarkably similar circumstances.
- Notice that leadership gifts and assignments come from the Lord.

THE CROSSING COMPLETED – STAGE TWO:

Joshua 4:15-20

Then the LORD said to Joshua, 16 "Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan."

17 So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan."

18 And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

19 On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. 20 And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan.

- The day was very important, for it coincided with the day that the Passover lamb was to be selected (Exodus 12:3). The fact that this happened at Passover helps to connect the crossing of the Jordan even more closely with the events of the exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea, which is made explicit in v. 23.⁴
- Gilgal was the first of three religious bases the Israelites occupied in Joshua's day. The others were Shiloh (18:1) and Shechem (24:1; cf. 8:30).
 - It was strategically located—just east of Jericho, in the Jordan valley. The Jordan provided security on one side, and the plains on the other prevented any surprise attack.
 - The river provided an abundant water supply.
 - Gilgal was Israel's base of operations for some time.

MEMORIALIZING THE CROSSING:

Joshua 4:21-24

He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' 22 tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' 23 For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. 24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."

- The people of future generations were to tell the story as if it had happened to them.

- The purpose was two-fold (v. 24);
 - It was to be a sign to all people of the greatness of God.
 - It was to be an inducement to the Israelites to fear God all their days.
- The mighty miracles of the Red Sea and the Jordan were to be celebrated by Israel forever. They marked Israel's exodus from the land of bondage and entrance into the Promised Land; signs of Israel's transition from slavery to freedom. (See Psalm 114.)
 - Miracles are infrequent—thus they must be remembered from one generation to the next.

THE FINAL SUMMARY OF THE EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE ON THE NATIONS:

Joshua 5:1

Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.

- Compare these words with Rahab's words:

Joshua 2:10-11

We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. 11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

- With Israel's enemies in Canaan now paralyzed with fear, the stage was set for Israel to move into the land and to take it.⁵

CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY:

- **When in distress:**

Psalms 77

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.

2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands

and my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint.

4 You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.

5 *I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;*

6 *I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:*

7 *"Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?"*

8 *Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?*

➤ **In teaching children:**

Deuteronomy 4:9-10

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Deuteronomy 6:1-2

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

Psalms 63:6-8

On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.

7 *Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. 8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.*

➤ **In sharing the Lord's Supper:**

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

25 *In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In a time of crisis, did the Lord ever ask you to take a step of faith *before* he showed you his plan? What persuaded you to take that step?
2. What “monuments” do you have that remind you of the Lord’s mighty acts in your own life?
3. The ark represented God’s presence. The priests carried the ark into the middle of the Jordan before the others followed. Has there been a time in your life when the Lord preceded you into a difficult situation and asked you to follow? How did you feel? What was the outcome? How did you know the Lord went before you?
4. Do you think God still performs miracles? Why do you think God does not do more miracles today? What is the danger of depending on miracles?
5. In building the memorial at Gilgal, all the tribes of Israel were represented. How might you apply this today in the church? What memorials do we have that represent *all* believers?
6. Symbols can be a valuable aide to worship, but they can also become a snare if we focus on the symbol rather than the spiritual reality behind the symbol. Can you think of some helpful symbols? Are there some you think are a hindrance?
7. Who passed on God’s redemption story to you? How did you learn to story? Did you grow up with any “monuments” in your home or in your church that influenced you to receive Christ?
8. What are the spiritual high points in your life that you want to pass on to the next generation? How do you plan to do this?
9. In what ways have hymns preserved memory for you? What theology have you learned from hymns?
10. What are the most significant events of your spiritual life? What keeps those events alive to you? The celebration of a date? An object that reminds you of the event? Have you written the story for the next generation to read?
11. What are the significant events in the life of the church? How does your church celebrate them? What role do children have in the celebrations? What role to older people have in teaching the next generation?

¹ *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 265.

² *NIV Study Bible notes*, p. 292.

³ *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, p. 258.

⁴ *The New American Commentary, Joshua*, p. 141.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 144.

LESSON FOUR

The Fall of Jericho and the Covenant Renewed **Joshua 5:13-6:27**

Text for personal study to read ahead of Circle meeting: Joshua 5:13-6:27; Joshua 7:1-8:35

Horizon Readings (Supplemental): pages 44-50

ABOUT THE LAND

(Optional)

Again, these notes are a departure from Lesson Four in the *Horizons Bible Study on Joshua*, which is “The Land of Promise, or the Promised Land?” (Joshua 1:2-3, 10-15; 5:10-12). I do think it is very important for us all to read and seriously consider what Mary Mikhael has written about the boundaries of the land, which are indeed a confusing subject when comparing various Old Testament passages. She, writing as a Palestinian Christian, brings the conflict over definition of *land* in Old Testament history to the present day ongoing warfare that we hear about in daily newscasts. It is a hotbed of political controversy and the topic of sermons in some churches that preach our responsibility to defend Israel at all costs because of the irrevocable promises given to Abraham and his offspring, regardless of Israel’s rejection of their Messiah. In the midst of the controversy, Palestinian Christians are often forgotten by their brothers and sisters around the world as they suffer continuing threats of loss of land, possessions, and life itself. We who live in relative safety cannot begin to imagine the trauma the Palestinians face, and of course, Israel would make the same claims. Who has a right to live in the land, and exactly what are the boundaries of the land? Does Israel own the land by covenant? Or do Palestinians own the land by virtue of their own ancestry and history in the land? So the conflict over the *land* is as real today as it was in the Old Testament. And I am convinced that we, as Christians, have very little understanding of the situation because there is no teaching in most of our churches today about the interpretation of *land* in the New Testament—and possibly that is because we spend so little time studying the Old Testament, we don’t know enough to ask questions. Consequently, some of us become embroiled in political controversies and misplaced loyalties simply out of ignorance. So I have included some information here that I hope will be helpful. As we used to hear Paul Harvey say, “And now, for the rest of the story....”

Scripture teaches that the fulfillment of God’s covenant given to Abraham—to become a great name, nation, to possess land, and to be blessed and be a blessing—was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It has always been *by faith* that one enters into the covenant, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, blessing to the whole world was to come through Israel, through whom God would reveal himself. They were to be a light to the nations. But because of Israel’s unfaithfulness,

she forfeited God's promises—except for a *believing remnant*. God promised there would always be a remnant. The Old Testament closes with both the northern and southern tribes of Israel defeated by their enemies and dispersed throughout the world so that they no longer had an identity as God's people. But it would still be through Abraham and the tribe of Judah that God's promises would be fulfilled. The darkness that blanketed the whole world would be pierced by the coming of Messiah, the Light of the world.

The New Testament opens with the pinnacle of salvation history, the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah and demanded his crucifixion, which was achieved through the cooperation of the Gentiles, in fulfillment of prophecy. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, salvation was forever secured for *all who would believe in him*, both Jew and Gentile alike. The great mystery that is revealed, according to Paul in Ephesians, is that now, through Christ, Gentiles have equal access with Jews into God's kingdom and are now equal inheritors of the promises of God. In both Old and New Testaments, it is *by faith, not by works*, that we are saved. No one comes into Christ's kingdom by virtue of natural birth, whether Jew or Gentile (John 3). *All who are born again* inherit God's covenant promises. The *evidence* of our faith is works—transformation into Christ's likeness—produced in the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who reject Jesus, the Son of God, reject God, for Jesus *is* God (John 8:12-58). And consequently, they forfeit the inheritance that could be theirs through Christ—both Jews and Gentiles.

The *Church* becomes to the world what Israel was intended to be. Whereas in the Old Testament, Israel was to be the "light" to the Gentiles, in the New Testament, the Church is the *New Israel* (Rom. 9-10; Heb. 8). It is through the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that the gospel is to go into the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20). Jesus taught that those who believe on him are his kingdom people, *inheritors of the covenant promises*. He said in Luke 17:21 that *the kingdom of God is within you*. Paul describes our citizenship as being not this world but Christ's eternal kingdom, going so far as to say that we are *aliens* and *strangers* in this world (Eph. 2:19-22). Jesus also said that his kingdom is here and now, and we will enjoy it forever (Rev. 11:15). Jesus' reign over his kingdom is both present and future, and over the whole earth, not just a small piece of land in the Middle East. Ultimately, when Jesus comes again, there will be a final judgment, and then we will enjoy a *new heaven and a new earth* (Rev. 21).

So what does this have to do with *land*? Dr. Bruce Waltke, in his commentary on Genesis, pp. 48-49, explains it this way:¹ (I've added underlining for emphasis.)

God reckons Abraham's faith in the Lord's promise to give him innumerable offspring as qualifying Abraham to become the recipient of an irrevocable land grant, idealized as extending from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:6-19). In this land flowing with milk and honey, his people will be protected and sustained. This land promise is fulfilled progressively several times but never consummated. God initially fulfills the promise through Joshua (Josh. 21:43-45), but not completely (Josh. 13:1-7); through David and

Solomon (1 Kings 4:20-25; Neh. 9:8), but still not completely (see Ps. 95:11; Heb. 4:6-8; 11:39-40).

There is an obvious paradigm shift in the New Testament concerning land. The physical aspect of land is downplayed in favor of its spiritual significance. The paradigm shift can be inferred from the fact that the term *land*, the fourth most frequent word in the Old Testament, is never used in the New Testament with reference to Canaan. Indeed, the Old Testament's use of the term *land* with reference to Canaan is re-signified to encompass the whole earth in Matt. 5:5 and Rom. 4:13. Neither Christ nor his apostles ever teach that dispersed ethnic Israel will again return to Canaan. Rather, for them *Canaan* seems to function as a type of the Christian's life in Christ, both from a historical or chronological perspective and from a conceptual perspective. As Wright explains, "According to Hebrews [13:14], the only thing which we do not have is an earthly, territorial city."²

Regarding the historical aspect, one notes a number of important parallels between Israel and the church and their relationship to the "land":

- (1) Israel is saved from slavery and death in Egypt under the tyranny of Pharaoh; the church is saved out of the slavery of sin and death in the world under Satan.
- (2) Israel is delivered by the blood of the Passover lamb and by the wind at the Red Sea; the church is delivered by Christ the Passover Lamb and by the Spirit (Acts 2; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- (3) Israel is baptized with Moses in the sea and feeds on manna in its pilgrimage to the land; the church is baptized in Christ through water and feeds upon Christ the true manna from heaven (John 6; 1 Cor. 10:1-4).
- (4) Israel is tested in the wilderness before inheriting the land; the church suffers in its wilderness on the way to the celestial city where Christ is the light.
- (5) Israel finally enters the land, but they will not enter its antitype with the church (Heb. 11:39-40).

Significant parallels between the two "lands" also exist on the conceptual level:

- (1) both are a divine gift (Gen. 15:7, 18; Deut. 1:8; Rom. 6:23);
- (2) both are entered by faith alone (Num. 14:26-45; Josh. 7; John 3:16);
- (3) both are an inheritance (Deut. 4:20; Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:14;

(4) both uniquely offer blessed rest and security (Ex. 23:20-31; Deut. 11:12; 12:9-10; 28:1-14; Matt. 11:28; John 1:51; 14:9; Heb. 4:2-2;

(5) both offer God's unique presence;

(6) both demand persevering faith (Deut. 28:15-19; Heb. 6; 10);

(7) both have an already-but-not-yet quality (see Heb. 11:39-40; Rev. 21:1-22:6).

Here is why I think this is important. Bottom line is this: The controversy over boundaries of the land of Israel today is an important political/justice issue. We should be concerned, just as we should be concerned about *all injustice*, wherever it exists in the world. But ethnic Jews today are not the same as the Israel of the Old Testament. The New Testament is clear: those who are the true Israel are God's people by faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. It is *believing* Jews and Gentiles who inherit God's covenant promises. Paul is clear that God is not through with the Jews yet—good things are in store. Their spiritual blindness will one day be taken away. But the *land* is God's—the whole earth is God's. As followers of Jesus Christ, we must be concerned about justice for *all* people, including Jews *and* Palestinians. But it is not appropriate to say that today's Israel is *entitled* to the Promised Land as outlined geographically in the Old Testament, wherever you draw the boundaries. We are to be as concerned about injustice to Palestinians as we are the Jews. They also have a history in the land. But keep in mind that *only God owns the land*, for God owns all the land of the whole world. We are stewards who are responsible for the land God has entrusted to us during our lifetime. And when we die, *it is still God's land*, which will then be passed on to someone else to be stewards as we have been.

We *do* care about the people of Israel, and we ought to be praying for them in the ongoing conflict. But we must also care about the Palestinians—they too need our prayers. Our government leaders also need our prayers as they seek to be an influence for peace in the Middle East. While each of us no doubt has a political position concerning the ongoing conflict over land, we cannot appropriately base our position on Scripture, *except for issues of justice and mercy* (Micah 6:6-8). God has his eye on the land; great things are yet to take place there—he hasn't abandoned Israel. God continues to grieve over sin and unbelief, but he has a plan, and nothing will prevent his plan from becoming reality. Someday God's plan will be fulfilled and we will be filled with praise. In the meantime, continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in *both* Israel and Palestine. Believers reside there as well as here.

THE FALL OF JERICHO

In our last lesson, we left Israel in Gilgal, where they have erected an *Ebenezer*, a monument of stones from the bed of the Jordan River, to mark the miraculous crossing made possible by God parting the water so they could cross over on dry ground. As they were to remember the Exodus, when God parted the Red Sea, providing Israel's escape from the Egyptians, so now they are to always remember the parting of the Jordan as they began their conquest of the land of Canaan. The memory of God's miracles on behalf of Israel are to bolster their faith as they march forward into battle. But those same miracles produce stark terror in the hearts of their enemies. This has happened to the people of Jericho—except for one woman and her family. Rahab, who hid the spies when they came to scout out the land, had declared her faith in Israel's God, based on what she had heard of what God had done in delivering them from Egypt. She is the only one in Jericho who responded in faith to God's miracle on Israel's behalf. Her faith was life-changing. She was willing to risk her own life and the lives of her family in hiding the spies, but she also was ready to identify herself and her family forever as belonging to Israel's God. This was not just a matter of doing a good deed on a certain day; it was a total change of identity, a change in loyalties, a turning her back on Canaan to become part of Israel. Anyone in Jericho could have done the same, for they had all heard about Israel's God. But Rahab chose to believe, and therefore, she and her family were about to see God's mercy poured out on their behalf as her whole context for living would be changed in a day. Wouldn't we have loved to hear the testimony she gave after Jericho was destroyed and she found herself living as one of God's people!

So now Israel is ready to begin the conquest.

BEFORE CONQUEST, GOD'S CALL TO HOLINESS:

Joshua 5:13-15

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?"

14 "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?" 15 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 was apparently surveying the wall surrounding the city and inspecting its fortifications when he "looked up," indicating an element of surprise.
- At first, Joshua thought he saw a man, but subsequent events would reveal that this was no ordinary man.

- The man had a drawn sword in his hand, and Joshua’s immediate response was to ask the man if he was friend or foe. His reply was “Neither.” Joshua, the commander of Israel’s army, was speaking with the *commander of the Lord’s army*.
 - The drawn sword was *symbolic of God’s participation in the battle* that was about to begin.
 - The “*drawn sword in his hand*” is found again only twice in the O.T., referring to the *angel of the Lord*: (1) Num. 22:23, 31, where the Lord stood before Balaam, barring his way; and (2) in 1 Chr. 21:16, where the angel of the Lord stood before David, threatening Israel because of David’s sin.³
 - As in Joshua 1:7-8, spiritual concerns, not military concerns, were to be the first priority.
 - This is still true today—God wants our undivided loyalty and holiness (Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16).
 - The implication is that the Lord will fight for Joshua and Israel as long as they maintain the proper priorities.
- Was *the army of the Lord* referring to the army of Israel, acting on God’s behalf? Or was it a celestial army, fighting for Israel?
 - In several other scriptures, we find *Israel’s armies designated as God’s armies* (Exod. 7:4; 12:41; 1 Sam. 17:45), and that seems to be the case here.
 - However, an equally common usage of *army* refers to the realm of the *heavenlies*, referring to *God’s armies*. In Psalm 103:19-21, God’s *heavenly hosts* (*saba* = *army*) are equated with his mighty *angels*.
 - Therefore, it is possible that the man whom Joshua encountered was saying that he was the commander of the heavenly army that would fight for Israel. (Knowing in advance how Jericho was destroyed, how could we believe otherwise!)
- **Excursus:** The Identity of the Angel of the Lord⁴
 - It means an *angel with a special commission*.
 - It may be a *momentary descent of God himself* into visibility.
 - It may be *Christ himself*, a kind of *temporary pre-incarnation* of the second person of the Trinity.

WHAT WAS JOSHUA’S RESPONSE TO THIS ENCOUNTER?

- The question was not whether the commander of the Lord’s army was *for Israel*; the question was only if Joshua was on *God’s side*—the same question that God asks of us.

- Joshua knows that he is subservient to the commander of the army of the Lord. The army of the Lord was an *angelic host*, and they assured victory to Israel if Israel was *obedient* (cf. Gen. 32:1-2; 2 Kings 6:17).
 - Though Joshua fell face down before him, we cannot be sure he realized he was in the presence of a supernatural being because in that culture persons would prostrate themselves before anyone in authority.
 - In addition, when Joshua said “Lord,” he used the Hebrew word *adoni*, which was used to address human beings. He did not use the divine name “*Yahweh*,” which is translated LORD in English, written with small capitals.
- The purpose of this encounter was not to impart commands but to inspire Joshua with *humility and reverence*, and to *instill in him the confidence that God was with him and was in control* (cf. 1:9).
- The command “*Take off your sandals*” does not indicate that this incident occurred at an ancient shrine, but rather, any place where God reveals himself is hallowed by that revelation (cf. Jacob at Bethel, Gen. 28:10-22; Moses’ experience at the burning bush, Exod. 3:1-6).
 - **Question: Do you have any places in your life that are *hallowed ground*?**
- All this is to emphasize that the conquest of Jericho was to be accomplished by God’s power, not man’s.

THE FORMULA FOR VICTORY—“MY WAYS ARE NOT YOUR WAYS”!

- These words of the prophet Isaiah speak powerfully as we remember the conquest of Jericho:

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

WHAT WAS GOING ON INSIDE JERICHO?

Joshua 6:1

Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

- The inhabitants of Jericho were paralyzed by fear of the Israelites and of Israel’s invincible God (cf. 2:9-11; 5:1). Fear of infiltration or trickery by the enemy would keep them from allowing anyone to enter.
 - That no one was let out shows how desperate the situation was, for it was not uncommon in a time of siege to send warriors out to harass the enemies or to engage them in battle.

- Sometimes a small group would be sent out secretly in search of help or supplies, but they obviously did not want to risk any of these strategies, nor did they want to weaken their defenses by defectors or deserters.

HOW WAS THE ARMY OF ISRAEL BEING PREPARED FOR BATTLE?

Joshua 6:2

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

- Notice the words, "*I have delivered Jericho into your hands,*" (v. 2), indicating a *completed action*.
 - This reminds us of Rahab's words to the spies in Joshua 2:9, "*I know that the LORD has given this land to you.*"
 - Joshua was reminded that victory comes only from the Lord. When the Lord is fighting our battles for us, there is no question of victory.

Psalms 108:12-13

Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.

THE CHALLENGE FACING ISRAEL:

- Jericho was a walled city, something Israel had never before encountered. Their wandering in the wilderness gave them no preparation for this challenge.
 - High walls had discouraged the spies forty years earlier (Num. 13:28). The citizens and the king of Jericho were all great warriors, and Jericho was strategically located as an imposing fortress guarding the fords across the Jordan and the passes into the hill country.
 - Normally, a walled city could be captured by five ways: (1) by going over the wall using ladders, ramps, etc.; (2) by digging a tunnel under the wall; (3) by smashing a hole through the wall; (4) by laying siege until the city is starved into submission; (5) by some sort of subterfuge (e.g., the use of the wooden horse by the Greeks to conquer Troy and the use of an ambush and decoy by the Israelites in capturing Ai (8:1-23).

GOD'S STRATEGY:

- God's strategy was none of the above. Here are the instructions:

Joshua 6:4-5

Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. 5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."

- Separate orders were given to the priests and to the people.
- Seven priests were to *precede* the ark, carrying *seven trumpets* made of rams' horns. The number *seven* is the number of *divine perfection and completeness*.
 - The emphasis on the number seven (14 times in this chapter), the use of ceremonial trumpets made from rams' horns, the presence of priests, and the prominence of the ark all indicate that the conquest of Jericho was more than a military campaign; *it was a religious event*.⁵
 - Israel must always remember that the land was *God's gift* to them.
- The priests, who would precede the troops, would be sounding their trumpets as they marched around the city for six days (v. 9), but the troops were to march around the city in *silence*.
 - Imagine what the troops might have been thinking as they spent hours walking around the city in silence—what an opportunity for doubt and fear to plague their minds!
 - What would you had felt like had you been in their shoes?
- Then on the *seventh day*, they were to march around the city *seven times*, with the priests blowing the trumpets. But on the *seventh time around*, the priests were to sound a *long blast* on the trumpets—a *distinct sound* from the continual blowing as they marched around the city six times. This was the signal for all the people to *shout*—and the walls would *collapse*, enabling them to walk right into the city.
 - Again, without *faith*, these instructions would have seemed like suicide to troops who were expecting to fight conventional warfare.

THE CONQUEST BEGINS:

Joshua 6:6-7

So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." 7 And he ordered the people, "Advance! March around the city, with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD."

- *Advance* (v. 7) means that the troops were to march from their camp to Jericho, and then march around the city once each day for six days.
 - This seemed senseless and *required faith* that God would keep his promise to deliver the city into their hands.

Hebrews 11:30

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days.

2 Corinthians 5:7

We live by faith, not by sight.

- **Lesson: Confidence in our own ideas and plans is a risk we should not want to take! Satan easily deceives self-confident people.**

Joshua 6:8-11

When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the LORD went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the LORD's covenant followed them. 9 The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding.

10 But Joshua had commanded the people, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" 11 So he had the ark of the LORD carried around the city, circling it once. Then the people returned to camp and spent the night there.

- *Before the Lord* (v. 8) is a vivid reminder that the ark symbolized God's presence.
- The *armed guard* ahead of the priests and following the ark is a reminder, contrary to the opinion of many, that there was fighting to be done by the Israelites.⁶
 - No details are given as to how the march was conducted—how many marched abreast or how long the column was. Since Jericho occupied only about 5-6 acres of land, it is possible that the head of the column had arrived back at the camp before the last of the rear guard left.

LEAD ON, O KING ETERNAL, THE DAY OF MARCH HAS COME!

Joshua 6:12-26

Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 13 The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the LORD and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets kept sounding. 14 So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

15 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.

16 The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!"

- Before telling us what happened, the author inserts vv. 17-19, which are no doubt commands that Joshua had given to the people earlier, for it would have been difficult for Joshua to have given these commands with the army spread all round the city.

17 The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

18 But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.

19 All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."

- Joshua's instructions (vv. 17-19) had to do with how the Israelites were to deal with the city of Jericho, its inhabitants, and its booty once these fell into their hands, which had been made clear in earlier instructions to Israel:

Deuteronomy 20:16-18

However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. 17 Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. 18 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.

- Joshua made it clear that everything in the city was “*devoted*” to the Lord for destruction—that is, they were off limits to the Israelites because they were to be completely destroyed, as an offering of sorts to the Lord.
 - *Devoted* comes from the Hebrew verb *hāram* and noun *hērem*.
 - The verb can mean *to devote to the LORD*, or *devote to destruction*, or *to completely destroy*.
 - The noun can mean *devoted things* or *destruction*.
 - In this case, the Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them.
 - If they were disobedient in carrying out these instructions, the camp of Israel itself would be liable to *destruction* [*hērem*].
 - Rahab and her family were the only ones who were to be spared destruction. As we have stated earlier (Lesson Two), the crucial difference between Rahab and the other Canaanites was her *faith*, demonstrated in both *words and deeds*.

THE BATTLE IS DESCRIBED:

20 *When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. 21 They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.*

22 *Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her."*

23 *So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.*

- Evidently the part of the wall where Rahab's house was located was miraculously preserved. The text does not require that every foot of the wall was leveled.⁷
- Rahab and her family were placed outside the camp as a kind of ritual quarantine. The camp of Israel was holy, and nothing unclean could be allowed to enter (cf. Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:3; 31:19; Deut. 23:3, 14). After the required amount of time and observing appropriate rituals, they were received into the congregation.

24 *Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD's house.*

- The treasures of Jericho were set apart for the Lord. The term used here for *treasury* is the same one used for those in Solomon's temple, built many years later (1 Kings 7:51).
- Since there was no temple in Joshua's day, the exact nature and location of this treasury is unknown. The references here in Joshua may have been to the tabernacle as the Lord's house, not the temple.

25 *But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.*

- It was appropriate that the spies who went into the land and hid in Rahab's house were the ones to bring her out, along with her family. They kept their oath to her.
- Reference to Rahab living among the Israelites *to this day* could have meant until these words of the Book of Joshua were written (assuming it was written within a few years after the battle), but it could refer to her descendants.

- Rahab is one of four Old Testament women listed in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew, who records Christ's genealogy through the line of Joseph:

Matthew 1:5-6

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

- These four women are Gentiles: Tamar was a Canaanite; Rahab was from Jericho; Ruth was a Moabitess; Bathsheba was a Hittite.
- The inclusion of Gentiles in Christ's genealogy can be seen as a foreshadowing of the day when, through Christ, all barriers are broken down:

Ephesians 2:11-18

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)- 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

JERICHO WAS NEVER TO BE REBUILT:

Joshua 6:26-27

At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: "Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:

"At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates."

- The city of Jericho was to remain an object lesson of God's great victory in Israel's first battle.
- The city was soon resettled (18:21; Judges 3:13-14; 2 Samuel 10:5), but the curse was not fulfilled until the time of King Ahab, when Hiel, a resident of Bethel, rebuilt the wall around Jericho to make it a fortress once again (1 Kings 16:34).

- It is not clear whether the curse was fulfilled by a plague or an accident or whether Hiel offered his sons as sacrifices.⁸

THE LORD'S BLESSING ON JOSHUA:

27 So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

- This echoes two earlier statements, where God promised Joshua his presence, just as he had been with Moses (3:7) and where God began to exalt Joshua in the eyes of the people (4:14).
- Now Joshua was firmly established as Israel's leader.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. What parallel do you see between Rahab being spared from destruction when Jericho was destroyed and our being saved through faith in Christ? Did others also have an opportunity to believe in Israel's God?
2. Has the Lord ever asked you to do something you thought was totally beyond reason? Did you do it? How did you feel? What was the outcome? Does it make sense to you now?
3. As a leader, how do you rate Joshua? What do you think was the hardest thing he had to face in leading the Israelites?
4. Have you ever had to destroy or get rid of something that at one time was a hindrance or a source of stumbling to you or someone else? How did you conclude it could have no part of your life? How did you feel when you got rid of it?
5. Israel's great ongoing temptation was to compromise, to not completely obey God's instructions. What compromises do you see today that you think hurt Christians and the church?
6. If you had been one of the troops marching around Jericho in silence for six days, what would you be thinking about? What would have made you afraid? What would or could have given you courage?
7. The priests and the ark leading the way designated this as a "spiritual battle." What do you think should lead the way in our spiritual battles? Is all conflict a spiritual battle?
8. What do you think this verse means? *"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ,"* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).
9. How do you think the walls of Jericho really fell? How could the loud shout of the troops make the walls fall?
10. What are some strongholds in our lives or in the church that you think need to come down? How can this happen?

¹ Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis, a Commentary* (Zondervan 2001), pp. 48-49.

² C.J.H. Wright, "A Christian Approach to OT Prophecy concerning Israel," in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purpose of God*, ed. P.W. L. Walker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), pp. 18-19.

³ David Howard, *The New American Commentary*, p. 156.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 159.

⁵ *Bible Expositor's Commentary, Vol. 3*, p. 278.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 280.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 282.

⁸ *Ibid*.

LESSON FIVE

The Sun Stands Still and the Land is Conquered **Joshua 10:1-43**

Text for personal study to read ahead of Circle meeting: Joshua 9:1-27; Joshua 10:1-43

Horizon Readings (Supplemental): pages 52-59

In Lesson Six, we saw the miraculous work of God in the fall of Jericho. Joshua led the Israelites according to God's instructions; Rahab and her family were spared as promised, and the world witnessed the power of God working through the Israelites once again. Joshua 6 closes with, "So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land," (Joshua 6:27). All is well—but not quite.

About Joshua 7 --

There was disobedience in the Israeli camp. It pertained to the "devoted things." Joshua had commanded the people, in Joshua 6:17-19: "*The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord.....But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.*" (For an explanation of *devoted things*, see Lesson Four, p. 58.) Achan, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things, and "*the Lord's anger burned against Israel,*" (7:1). The consequence of this disobedience was that, though the men of Ai were few in number and Israel should have been able to defeat them easily, Ai won the battle. They killed thirty-six Israelite men. Joshua was devastated! He fell on his face before the Lord, lamenting that the Lord had brought Israel this far, only to be defeated. He was sure that Israel's defeat would cause the Canaanites to take advantage of them, defeat them, and God's reputation would be ruined.

God's reply was that Israel had disobeyed by taking some of the devoted things—they had stolen, lied, and put the devoted things with their own possessions. God made it clear that they could not stand against their enemies until this sin had been uncovered and dealt with. A search was made, tribe by tribe, and when the Lord identified the tribe, an interrogation was made clan by clan, family by family. Finally, Achan, of the tribe of Judah, confessed that he was the one who had taken the devoted things, that he had coveted them and hidden them inside his tent. Joshua sent men to search Achan's tent and retrieve all Achan had stolen. Then they spread everything out before the Lord. Joshua and all Israel took Achan and his family, the stolen things, and all he owned to the Valley of Achor (another form of Achan's name), where Achan and his family were stoned and all his possessions burned. This was to purge the land of evil. Then they

erected a pile of rocks over Achan as a memorial to the consequences of sin. It was a very hard lesson indeed!

There is a lesson here for us all. Our sin impacts the body of Christ; it's not just an individual, private thing. Sin may be hidden or it may be known, but if it is not dealt with, if it is not confessed, it hurts the body of Christ. This is graphically illustrated in 1 Corinthians 5. It's a short chapter, and it is well worth the read.

About Joshua 8 --

The Lord was no longer angry at Israel—atonement had been made for their sin—and he gave Israel another chance to defeat Ai. However, one thing changed in the Lord's instructions this time. They were to destroy everything, but they were permitted to carry off the plunder and livestock for themselves. Joshua's ingenious battle plan worked perfectly and Ai was defeated. The chapter ends with Joshua building an altar to the Lord on Mount Ebal and offering sacrifices to the Lord. *“There in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written. All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the Lord, facing those who carried it—the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel. Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them,”* (8:32-35).

We don't always get a second chance after we've blown it. But in this chapter, we see God's mercy, forgiveness, and the opportunity of getting it right the second time around. That's grace! And we see Joshua's spiritual leadership in reading *all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—to everyone*; no one was excluded and no one opted out. The people heard again the law of God that they were to live by, not just the blessings that everyone likes to hear, but also the curses, the consequences of disobedience. Are we guilty of picking and choosing which scriptures we want to hear and those we'd rather ignore? Are we quick to repent and seek God's forgiveness? And do we have the courage to go back and try something again the right way? This is worth thinking about.

About Joshua 9 --

In spite of confession and forgiveness, we must still live with the consequences of our disobedience, sometimes for the rest of our lives. In Deuteronomy 28, the Lord had spelled out the consequences of disobedience. This is about to become reality as Israel faces new challenges. Whereas Israel's opposition had previously come from individual cities, now they will be faced with coalitions of cities rising against them. The Canaanites, who had previously feared the Israelites, joined forces with others so that their courage was renewed. There was still the memory of Ai having defeated Israel in

that first battle. If it happened once, it could surely happen again, especially with a coalition of cities rising up against Israel. What now begins to unfold in the Book of Joshua is the fulfillment of the warnings of Deuteronomy 28, such as verses 15, 25: *“However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you....The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth.”* The ultimate fulfillment of this will be Israel’s exile, when they are dispersed among the nations, having lost their land, their temple, and their identity as a nation, hundreds of years later. But now we are seeing the beginning of their decline, instigated by disobedience.

First, Israel will make a treaty with the Gibeonites, accomplished by deception. The Gibeonites, who lived just north of Jerusalem, and who were in league with a number of neighboring towns, lied to Joshua, saying they were from a far country, that they were destitute, hungry, that they had heard about Israel’s God and feared for their lives. They wanted Joshua to make a treaty with them, saying they would be Israel’s servants in exchange for a promise not to kill them. According to Israel’s law, all treaties were binding (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 19:12). We must remember Deuteronomy 20:16-18, *“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.”*

The journey to destruction begins by taking the first step away from God. Israel’s memory was short, in spite of Joshua so recently having read to them all the words of God’s law recorded by Moses. It is not blatant sin that usually gets us into trouble but the first small compromise that seems so rational at the moment. What seems reasonable on the surface is often Satan’s deception in getting us to redefine or reinterpret what God has plainly said. It goes all the way back to Genesis 3, “Did God really say....?”

In this case, Israel failed to seek the Lord’s guidance before agreeing to make a treaty with the Gibeonites. It is especially noteworthy that Joshua failed to inquire of the Lord, for he had gone up the mountain of revelation with Moses (Ex. 24:13-14), and in his training for leadership, he had been trained in the use of the Urim and Thummim for determining the will of God (Num. 27:18-21). Unfortunately, the treaty not only guaranteed to spare the Gibeonites’ lives, it also committed Israel to come to their defense in all kinds of danger.

When Joshua discovered the deception, he put the Gibeonites under a curse, that of becoming woodcutters and water carriers. To Joshua, an honorable death was preferable to degrading subservience. But the Gibeonites had escaped the sentence of death.¹

It is difficult to judge this situation of compromise, as is sometimes the case in our own lives. There is no record that the Gibeonites ever became a snare to Israel, as was true with other nations whom Israel failed to drive out (Judges 3:5-6). Now Israel was faced with judgment if they failed to keep the treaty they had made with the Gibeonites. "The Gibeonites lived peaceably in Israel for many years. Nehemiah 3:7 and 7:25 suggest that ultimately they were assimilated. This is another example of the omnipotence of God, for his divine purpose was served even by the foolish error of his people. Whoever earnestly seeks deliverance from God always receives it."²

This chapter causes us to question if God sometimes blesses the outcome of decisions that were made in violation of his commands, even if those decisions were based on less than full disclosure? To what extent are vows binding, even if made in willful disobedience?

Now we begin Chapter 10.

This chapter is about Israel's victory over the southern coalition of the Canaanites, beginning with the rescue of the Gibeonites. Adoni-Zedek (means "Lord of Righteousness") gathered the whole region together to fight against Israel. He had heard of Israel's victories at Jericho and Ai, with the extermination of all their inhabitants. Jerusalem was a stronghold of the Jebusites, one of the seven nations the Israelites were to drive out of the land (3:10). Though the king and his army were killed by Joshua and Israel, the city itself was not captured until after Joshua's death (Judges 1:8). Years later David captured it again (2 Sam. 5:6-9) and made it his royal city.³

Joshua 10:1-6

Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and were living near them. 2 He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters.

3 So Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem, appealed to Hoham, king of Hebron, Piram, king of Jarmuth, Japhia, king of Lachish, and Debir, king of Eglon. 4 "Come up and help me attack Gibeon," he said, "because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites."

5 Then the five kings of the Amorites—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon—joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

6 The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: "Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us."

FIVE CANAANITE KINGS ARE IDENTIFIED: (V. 3)

- These men are identified as five kings of the Amorites, whose cities were located southwest of Jerusalem:
 - Adoni-Zedek, King of Jerusalem, leader of the coalition; Hoham, king of Hebron; Piram, king of Jarmuth; Japhia, king of Lachish; Debir, king of Eglon.
 - Amorites in Hebrew is always singular, and used collectively refers to a tribe descended from Canaan (Gen. 10:16), and one of the seven nations whose lands were given to Israel (Deut. 7:1; comp. Gen. 15:16).
 - At times Amorites refers to Canaan itself.
 - The history of the Canaanites goes back to Noah's three sons. After Noah and his family came out of the ark, Noah became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw Noah's nakedness and told his brothers. *"When Noah awoke and found out what Ham had done to him, he cursed Ham's son Canaan, saying, 'Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers,'"* (Gen 9:24-25). Some scholars think that Noah was saying that Canaan would be even worse than his father Ham.
 - The Canaanite worship was polytheistic and included child sacrifice, idolatry, religious prostitution and divination (cf. Deut. 8:9-12).⁴

WHY DID THE DEFECTION OF THE GIBEONITES CAUSE SUCH GREAT ALARM IN THE SOUTHERN REGION?

- It was threatening that such a large city, with an excellent army, surrendered to the enemy.
- Without Gibeon the southern coalition was severely weakened.
- The Gibeonites constituted a fifth column that would fight with Israel in time of war.
 - Though they had no king, they were like one of the royal cities.
 - It was as strong and influential as any city-state (cf. 11:12).

WHAT WAS THE SOLUTION TO THIS UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS?

- Gibeon had to be punished for their alliance with Israel.
 - There must be no more defections to Israel.
 - The southern coalition must eliminate the threat of the Gibeonites siding with Israel in time of war.

WHAT WAS THE GIBEONITE'S RESPONSE?

- They turned to Joshua for help because the peace treaty obligated Joshua to defend his vassals (9:15). Even though the treaty was the result of trickery, Joshua was bound to keep his word.

HOW DID JOSHUA RESPOND TO THE GIBEONITES' PLEA FOR HELP?

Joshua 10:7-15

So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men.

8 The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."

9 After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. 10 The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makedah. 11 As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

12 On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel:

"O sun, stand still over Gibeon,

O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon."

13 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.⁵

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. 14 There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

15 Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

WHAT WAS THE LORD'S ROLE IN THIS BATTLE?

- First, Joshua appealed to the Lord for help, and the Lord assured Joshua that he would be victorious (v. 8).
- The Lord threw the enemy into confusion, causing them to flee (v. 10).
- As they fled, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, so that more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the Israelites (v. 11).
- The Lord caused the sun to stand still for a full day so that there was extended daylight for battle. This has never happened since (v. 13).

WHAT WAS ISRAEL'S ROLE IN THE BATTLE?

- Israel had to obey the Lord's orders, which meant marching into battle, an all-night ascent of 3,300 ft. from Gilgal to Gibeon.
- This march in the darkness, covered a distance of about twenty miles, and it would have taken eight to ten hours.
- This allowed Israel to take the enemy by surprise, creating disorder—an illustration of human efforts and divine intervention working hand in hand.

HOW ARE WE TO INTERPRET THE SUN STANDING STILL?

- Some scholars think this is poetic language for Joshua possibly requesting that the sun not shine with its normal brightness and heat.
- Others say that cloud cover could have been a by-product of the hail storm (v. 11).
- R. D. Wilson, in "*What Does 'The Sun Stood Still' Mean?*" (Moody Monthly 21 [October, 1920]: 67) proposes that the passage refers to an eclipse of the sun. He translated vv. 12b-14 as follows:

Be eclipsed, O sun, in Gibeon, And thou moon in the valley of Aijalon!

And the sun was eclipsed and the moon turned back, while the nation was avenged on its enemies. Is it not written upon the book of Jashar?"

And the sun stayed in the half of the heaven, and set not hastily as when a day is done.

And there never was a day like that day before or since, in respect to Jehovah's hearing the voice of a man.

- Many stories have circulated about this being verified by a Professor Pickering of the Harvard Observatory, who traced this missing day back to Joshua's time. Astronomers from Greenwich and Yale have reached the same conclusion, but such claims have not been verified. Stories have also been circulated about this verification coming from NASA, but this also cannot be verified.⁶
- A principle to remember is that the Bible tells us *what* and *why* but not *how* and *when*. It is a book of *theology*, not a book of science. We accept the Scriptures by faith, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Peter writes this about the O.T. scriptures:

2 Peter 1:20-21

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

EXCURSIS: WHAT ARE MIRACLES?

(This is from the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 723; underlining is added for emphasis.)

In understanding miracles it is important to bear in mind that the biblical concept of a miracle is that of an event which runs counter to the observed processes of nature. The word “observed” is particularly important here. This was emphasized as early as Augustine, who stated in his *City of God* that Christians must not teach that miracles are events which run counter to nature, but rather that they are events which run counter to what is known of nature. Our knowledge of nature is a limited knowledge. Clearly there may be higher laws which remain unknown to man. In any case, miracles are not correctly conceived of as irrational disruptions of the pattern of nature, but as only the known part of that pattern. This understanding of the biblical conception may well erode some of the contemporary man’s objections to miracles. It is purely a corrective to the erroneous view that miracles are complete violations of nature.

Biblical miracles have a clear objective: they are intended to bring the glory and love of God into bold relief. They are intended, among other things, to draw man’s attention away from the mundane events of everyday life and direct it toward the mighty acts of God.

In the context of the OT, miracles are viewed as the direct intervention of God in human affairs, and they are unquestionably linked to his redemptive activity on behalf of man. They help to demonstrate that biblical religion is not concerned with abstract theories about God’s power, but with actual historical manifestations and experiences of that power.

HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND V. 14, THAT NEVER BEFORE OR SINCE THEN HAS GOD LISTENED TO THE VOICE OF A MAN?

Joshua 10:14

There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

- “*There has never been a day like it before*” is a stereotyped expression found also in 2 Kings 18:5 and 23:25. It means that something spectacular occurred that day that elevated Joshua as a man of God:
- His prayers were unusually effective—another parallel between Joshua and Moses.
 - Moses is described as one with whom God spoke “face to face: (cf. Num. 12:6-8). Here we see the effectiveness of Joshua’s prayers.
 - This reminds us that Israel was not winning the land by their own strength; God was giving it to them.

THE EXECUTION OF THE FIVE AMORITE KINGS:

Joshua 10:15

Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

- This verse seems out of place here. It seems that this verse and v. 43 are describing the same event. It is unlikely that Joshua would have returned to Gilgal in the middle of the battle.

Joshua 10:16-28

Now the five kings had fled and hidden in the cave at Makkedah. 17 When Joshua was told that the five kings had been found hiding in the cave at Makkedah, 18 he said, "Roll large rocks up to the mouth of the cave, and post some men there to guard it. 19 But don't stop! Pursue your enemies, attack them from the rear and don't let them reach their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand."

20 So Joshua and the Israelites destroyed them completel—almost to a man—but the few who were left reached their fortified cities. 21 The whole army then returned safely to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah, and no one uttered a word against the Israelites.

- In other words, no one dared to even raise his voice against the Israelites anymore.

22 Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me." 23 So they brought the five kings out of the cave—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon.

24 When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, "Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks.

25 Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight." 26 Then Joshua struck and killed the kings and hung them on five trees, and they were left hanging on the trees until evening.

- See Deuteronomy 21:22-23 for the explanation of this practice.

27 At sunset Joshua gave the order and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had been hiding. At the mouth of the cave they placed large rocks, which are there to this day.

- This is the fifth monument in the land to the events of the conquest of Canaan.

28 That day Joshua took Makkedah. He put the city and its king to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it. He left no survivors. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

- The people of Makkedah were destined for death because of their wicked deeds, the same fate that came to the other major cities of the south, described in vv. 29-42.

THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN IS COMPLETED: (VV. 29-43)

➤ **Seven cities destroyed:**

Joshua 10:29-39

That day Joshua took Makkedah. He put the city and its king to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it. He left no survivors. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

29 Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Makkedah to Libnah and attacked it. 30 The LORD also gave that city and its king into Israel's hand. The city and everyone in it Joshua put to the sword. He left no survivors there. And he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

31 Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Libnah to Lachish; he took up positions against it and attacked it. 32 The LORD handed Lachish over to Israel, and Joshua took it on the second day. The city and everyone in it he put to the sword, just as he had done to Libnah. 33 Meanwhile, Hiram king of Gezer had come up to help Lachish, but Joshua defeated him and his army-until no survivors were left.

34 Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Lachish to Eglon; they took up positions against it and attacked it. 35 They captured it that same day and put it to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it, just as they had done to Lachish.

36 Then Joshua and all Israel with him went up from Eglon to Hebron and attacked it. 37 They took the city and put it to the sword, together with its king, its villages and everyone in it. They left no survivors. Just as at Eglon, they totally destroyed it and everyone in it.

38 Then Joshua and all Israel with him turned around and attacked Debir. 39 They took the city, its king and its villages, and put them to the sword. Everyone in it they totally destroyed. They left no survivors. They did to Debir and its king as they had done to Libnah and its king and to Hebron.

➤ **Summary of the campaign:**

Joshua 10:40-43

So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. 41 Joshua subdued them from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and from the whole region of Goshen to Gibeon. 42 All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.

Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

- There is no way to determine the length of this one campaign, but it must have taken a considerable amount of time.
- Victory in the south clearly demonstrated that the Lord fought for Israel.

WAS THIS THE FINAL VICTORY?

- We should anticipate here that other indications in the Book of Joshua point to a longer-lasting and less all-inclusive campaign.

Joshua 11:18

Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time.

- These other passages (Joshua 11:22; 13:2-6; 14:12; 15:63; 16:10; 16:12-13; 18:2-3; 19:47; 23:4-5, 12-13), as well as Judges 1, show people remaining in areas supposedly conquered and destroyed completely by the Israelites.
- Such a long-lasting campaign had been anticipated many years earlier, when the Lord told the Israelites:

Exodus 23:27-30

"I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run. 28 I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. 29 But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

- We don't know exactly how long Joshua's campaign against the southern cities lasted, though it is described as one campaign.
- The campaign against many different enemies and over a wide territorial expanse was effortless because Israel's God fought for it—Joshua reminds its readers that God was in control of all the events.

WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM CHAPTER 10?

- We must be reminded that God cannot co-exist with evil—evil must be routed out, not only in the Promised Land, but in our own lives today.
- We do not have the strength to fight our spiritual battles any more than the Israelites did. We are totally dependent on God, who through the power of the Spirit, is able to demolish strongholds of sin in our lives:

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the

knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- On the other hand, we cannot sit passively waiting for God to fight our battles for us. We must participate in the battle, following God's instructions whereby we can attain victory.

1 Timothy 1:18-19

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

1 Timothy 6:11-12

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Ephesians 4:22-24

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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.

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

- No battle won is forever. Satan continues to attack us, often when we feel the most invincible. However, our victory is in Christ as we follow his instructions for our spiritual battle:

1 Peter 5:8-10

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. Joshua's treaty with the Gibeonites (see Introduction, Ch. 9) was in violation of God's command not to make a treaty with the Canaanites. How have you seen God work in a situation that was riddled with violations of God's commands, yet good ultimately came from it? How would you explain this?
2. Is God able to make the sun stand still? Why would God do this for Joshua when sometimes our own pleas for a miracle seem unheeded?
3. Is it necessary to verify miracles with scientific fact? "Why or why not? What is the basis for your viewpoint?"
4. Considering Joshua as our example, what do you think makes the prayers of a pastor or spiritual leader effective or not effective? In other words, what hinders prayer? Does God listen to the prayers of some more than others?
5. In Romans 6:23, we read this: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." In our study of Joshua so far, how have you seen the wages of sin at work? And what examples have you seen of the grace of God?
6. Many situations in life are not black or white. Sometimes we make wrong choices out of deception or ignorance. How have you seen God's grace at work in your life when you have made a bad choice?
7. Have you considered that what you can see is not necessarily all there is? What illustrations can you think of in the N.T. that indicate reality beyond human limitations? How does this comfort or encourage you?
8. Joshua's military campaign began with the southern cities of Canaan. When this was accomplished, there was still far more to accomplish in the conquest of Canaan. How does this illustrate spiritual warfare in your own life?
9. What is the N.T. parallel to Israel and the Promised Land? Why is there no specific land that the Church must conquer and claim for Christ? What is the sphere of Christ's rule?
10. Do you think Joshua was right or wrong to make a treaty with the Gibeonites? How might he have avoided being deceived? Did he show weakness in not seeking God's guidance? Or did he demonstrate strength in showing compassion to those he thought were destitute? What would you have done had you been Joshua?
11. Can you think of a time in your life when you made a bad decision because of lack of prayer?

¹ *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 3, p. 299.*

² *Ibid, p. 300.*

³ *Ibid, p. 301.*

⁴ *The NIV Study Bible, p. 28.*

⁵ The Book of Jashar is an ancient source apparently containing heroic songs, cited twice in the O.T.: in the account of Joshua's battle at "Gibeon (Joshua 10:13) and again in David's lamentation for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:18). It was apparently a collection of archaic poetry which, though well known in ancient Israel, has not survived, perhaps because it was transmitted primarily in oral form by professional singers. (*Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, Paul J. Achtemeier*)

⁶ For more information, see *The New American Commentary, Joshua, p. 242.*

LESSON SIX

The Division of the Land **Joshua 13-19**

Text for personal study to read ahead of Circle meeting: Joshua 13-19
“Encountering the Text” from Horizons Bible Study, p. 29

Note: This will be a difficult lesson to fit into your timeframe. You might want to select certain parts to emphasize and summarize the rest.

We are now beginning the second half of the Book of Joshua, chapters 13-21. However, this lesson will cover chapters 13-19, and Lesson Seven will cover chapters 20-21, about the unique function of cities of refuge and designated towns for the Levites, the priests.

The second half of Joshua is different from the first half in several ways. There are no more battles recorded, narrative stories are replaced by lists, and there is a relative lack of action, a sedentary pace, and a relaxed tone. The emphasis of these chapters is that God is the *landowner* and *land giver*. Therefore, it is God’s decision to give his land to whomever he pleases, for his divine purposes in human history.

In Genesis, God made this covenant with **Abraham**:

Genesis 12:1-3

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 15:18-21

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — 19 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites."

Genesis 17:7-8

I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. 8 The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an

everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."

And God said to **Isaac**:

Genesis 26:1-6

Now there was a famine in the land — besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time — and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. 2 The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. 3 Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." 6 So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

And God said to **Jacob** in his dream at Bethel:

Genesis 28:13-15

"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

And God said to **Moses** just before he died:

Deuteronomy 34:1-4

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land — from Gilead to Dan, 2 all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3 the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.'" I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."

And God said to **Joshua**:

Joshua 1:6

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them."

In the first half of Joshua, God guided and fought for Israel; he gave Israel's enemies into their hands. In the second half, God is the one who gave Israel their land. The boundary descriptions and lists of cities emphasize that God has always been in control of the land—it is his—and he has always had the authority to parcel out the land to whomever he chooses. The theme of this second half of the book is the inheritance and distribution of the land. While we naturally are drawn to the action stories in the first half of Joshua, the inclusion of the details of the second half show us the importance of documenting each tribes' inheritance and demonstrating God's faithfulness to his promises.

This is something like the reading of a will when someone has died. The details are important. In addition to dividing up the estate, we often see indications of the deceased person's attitudes and feelings toward those left behind. In the same way, in addition to boundaries of land given to each tribe of Israel, they saw God's attitude and feelings toward them. It is clear in these chapters that God had fought his people's battles for them, and he would follow through and give them the lands that had been promised to them. This surely caused great joy among the Israelites. This reminds us of the joy expressed by the psalmist when he says in Psalm 16:5-6:

*LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;
You have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
Surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

If you were an heir at the reading of a will, every detail would interest you. But if the will did not directly pertain to you, you might become quite bored. That is the problem with these chapters—we tend to read these details through our own eyes and not the eyes of the Israelites. Nevertheless, since we know that “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17), let's proceed to look for the nuggets of truth that can be applied to our lives today.

GOD'S COMMAND TO JOSHUA TO DISTRIBUTE THE LAND

WHAT WAS GOD'S INSTRUCTION TO MOSES CONCERNING THE LAND?

- Drive out...destroy...demolish...take possession...distribute:

Numbers 33:50-56

On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the LORD said to Moses, 51 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, 52 drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. 53 Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. 54 Distribute the

land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes.

55 "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. 56 And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them."

- The division of land was to be done according to *lots*.
 - “The casting of lots was used to determine the will of God. The method is not clearly defined. Some scholars believe that the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30; Deut. 33:8; Ezra 2:63) were objects, possibly small round pebbles, which were placed on the ephod of the high priest. One signified “Yes,” and the other, “No.” When the priest reached blindly into the ephod and took out one stone, the question was answered either affirmatively or negatively by the stone which he found in his hand. There were, however, many instances recorded where lots were cast without the use of the Urim and Thummim.”¹
 - The belief was that casting of lots was *not chance*, but that God was behind the casting of lots so that his will was made known.
 - The same usage persisted in N.T. times (the soldiers cast lots for Jesus’ clothing; the replacement of Judas Iscariot was selected by casting lots), but it never appears in the activities of the church after Pentecost. The guidance of the Spirit seems to have been manifested in other ways, such as through prayer and prophecy.
- If Israel failed to obey God’s command to cleanse the land, God’s judgment would fall on them—the same judgment God had planned for the idolatrous people who occupied the land.

- The O.T. is filled with examples of disobedience and the consequences that followed. Sin always comes with a price.
- The same principle is found in the N.T., expressed differently:

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

- In that sense, when we persist in sin, we determine our own destiny.
- When we confess our sins, God’s grace intervenes with forgiveness and cleansing, yet often the consequences of our sin remain.

- As we study the history of Israel, judgment for their sin does not necessarily come fully in the lifetime of one person or family; it comes over a long period of time. In Israel's case, from birth to their dispersion spanned hundreds of years.

GOD'S PROMISE:

Joshua 13:1-8

When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the LORD said to him, "You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.

2 "This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites: 3 from the Shihor River on the east of Egypt to the territory of Ekron on the north, all of it counted as Canaanite (the territory of the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron-that of the Avvites); 4 from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, from Arah of the Sidonians as far as Aphek, the region of the Amorites, 5 the area of the Gebalites; and all Lebanon to the east, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.

6 "As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have instructed you, 7 and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh."

JOSHUA'S LEADERSHIP IN OLD AGE:

- Joshua was a young man when he was trained under Moses' leadership, and now he is well advanced in years, indicating that the conquest up to this point had taken a long time.
- Joshua and Caleb were two of the ten spies Moses sent into Canaan. Caleb was now 85 years old (14:10), and some speculate that Joshua was between 90 and 100 years old. Yet at this age, Joshua's assignment from the Lord was not yet completed.
 - The *division of the land* was part of his original commission from the Lord, and it had to be completed before he died.

Deuteronomy 31:7

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance.

Joshua 1:6-7

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

- Joshua had accomplished much of his assignment by the conquest of the southern part of Canaan, but the conquest of the northern part was yet to be accomplished.
 - This included territories of the Philistine corridor and their neighbors in the southwest (vv. 2-3); the Phoenician coastland to the north (v. 4); the northern, mountainous territories of Lebanon (vv. 5-6).
 - All this land was in one sense the edges of Israel's land, but it implies that Israel had achieved a significant measure of dominance in the main part of Canaan—not total, but substantial.
 - Now it was time to allot the land to the tribes who would follow up and extend the conquest (vv. 6b-7).
 - Joshua would not be involved in the remaining struggle for the land, because he was too old, but his task was to apportion the land to the various tribes.
 - God himself said he would drive out the remaining inhabitants (v. 6a); Joshua was merely to apportion the land to the nine-and-one-half tribes west of the Jordan, under God's guidance (vv. 6b-7).
- However, the Lord's promise to drive out the inhabitants of the land was conditional and was never completely fulfilled due to the incompleteness of Israel's obedience (cf. v. 13).

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- *Transjordan*: Territory of the Promised Land located *east* of the Jordan River.
- This land was given to the tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad, and to one-half of the families of the tribe of Manasseh.
 - Manasseh and Ephraim were the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt.
 - Jacob, before his death, said that Manasseh and Ephraim would be reckoned as his sons, whereas any other sons born to Joseph would be reckoned as Joseph's sons.
 - Since the Levites had been set aside to serve in the tabernacle, and they were to be apportioned towns and agricultural lands throughout the territories of the other tribes (Numbers 35:1-8), the two sons of Joseph inheriting his portion of the land would still make twelve tribes.
 - History will show that the Transjordan tribes would never feel as much responsibility for the welfare of Israel as those tribes west of the Jordan, and they will be the first to identify with their heathen neighbors (Joshua 16-17; Judges 1).
- *Tribe*: Descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. While each tribe had its own proper name, it was a tribe, properly speaking, only by virtue of the fact that it was one of the tribes of Israel.

- By being a part of Israel, the individual tribe had a place as one of the primary segments of the whole people, and shared in that status equally with all other tribes.
 - A tribe was part of the social structure that dealt with regional needs, provided for its own military self-defense through a tribal militia, and performed religious and legal functions.
- *Clans*: A group of extended families belonging to the tribe. The members of the Israelite “clan” typically lived in the same or nearby villages, rural neighborhoods, or sections of a larger settlement, provided mutual aid to all the extended families constituting the “clan,” and provided troop quotas to the tribal assessment when going to battle.
- The extended family, in the O.T. called a *father’s house*, clusters of which made up the clans, was the primary residential and productive unit in the social structure.

THE DIVISION OF LAND EAST OF THE JORDAN

A DANGEROUS SIGN: (13:8-13)

Joshua 13:8-13

The other half of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites had received the inheritance that Moses had given them east of the Jordan, as he, the servant of the LORD, had assigned it to them.

9 It extended from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, and from the town in the middle of the gorge, and included the whole plateau of Medeba as far as Dibon, 10 and all the towns of Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, out to the border of the Ammonites.

11 It also included Gilead, the territory of the people of Geshur and Maacah, all of Mount Hermon and all Bashan as far as Salecah- 12 that is, the whole kingdom of Og in Bashan, who had reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei and had survived as one of the last of the Rephaites. Moses had defeated them and taken over their land . 13 But the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day.

- This is the first accusation of tribal failure to follow up the initial conquest.
- It was one thing to invade and conquer a territory, but another to persevere over a period of time to occupy the whole territory allotted to a tribe.
 - *Incomplete obedience* brought no immediate crisis, as is usually the case.
 - In fact, we often do well in severe crises, rising to the occasion, but we lack the tenacity and dogged endurance required in the lesser challenges of life.

- It is easy to disobey in the “smaller” things where the consequences of our disobedience are not immediate.

Matthew 25:21 (Parable of the Talents)

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

1 Corinthians 4:2

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Galatians 6:8-10

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Proverbs 10:29

The way of the LORD is a refuge for the righteous, but it is the ruin of those who do evil.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

REMINDERS OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS IN THE PAST: (13:8-33)

- These verses outline the division of land east of the Jordan.
 - This is land that God had given Moses through previous conquest.
 - These details should jog Israel’s memory and fortify their faith in the face of any contemporary enemies, for it is in remembering how Yahweh won victories in the past that Israel should be fortified for future conquests.
 - It is when we *forget* our history, fail to remember God’s faithfulness in the past, that we compromise our obedience to God’s commands and attempt to meet our needs in inappropriate ways.
 - Israel did this as a nation, and we do the same as individuals.

THE SPECIAL STATUS OF THE TRIBE OF LEVI:

- The Lord commanded Moses to take a census of the men of Israel. All men twenty years or older were to be counted, except for the tribe of Levi:

Numbers 1:47-53

The families of the tribe of Levi, however, were not counted along with the others. 48 The LORD had said to Moses: 49 "You must not count the tribe of Levi or include them in the census of the other Israelites.

50 Instead, appoint the Levites to be in charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony —over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and encamp around it. 51 Whenever the tabernacle is to move, the Levites are to take it down, and whenever the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall do it. Anyone else who goes near it shall be put to death. 52 The Israelites are to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. 53 The Levites, however, are to set up their tents around the tabernacle of the Testimony so that wrath will not fall on the Israelite community. The Levites are to be responsible for the care of the tabernacle of the Testimony."

Deuteronomy 18:1-2

The priests, who are Levites — indeed the whole tribe of Levi — are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the offerings made to the LORD by fire, for that is their inheritance. 2 They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as he promised them.

Joshua 13:14

But to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance, since the offerings made by fire to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them.

Joshua 13:33-14:1

But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as he promised them.

Joshua 14:3-5

Moses had granted the two-and-a-half tribes their inheritance east of the Jordan but had not granted the Levites an inheritance among the rest, 4 for the sons of Joseph had become two tribes—Manasseh and Ephraim. The Levites received no share of the land but only towns to live in, with pasturelands for their flocks and herds. 5 So the Israelites divided the land, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- Further discussion of the towns for the Levites will be discussed in Joshua 21 (PW Lesson Seven).

THE DIVISION OF LAND WEST OF THE JORDAN

WHAT INHERITANCE MEANT TO THE ISRAELITES:

- These lands were still inhabited and needed to be cleaned out, according to God's instructions.

- Inheritance meant *conquest*. The land was theirs by God's decree, but Israel couldn't possess the land until it was cleaned out.
 - It's like having a deed to property that is still occupied, and the task at hand is to remove the tenants in order to enjoy the blessings promised by God.
- This requires *obedience, faith, and persistence; no compromise*.
- Another truth to remember is that Israel is God's *possession*—not God's inheritance—and therefore, Israel cannot belong to any other gods.
 - The Hebrew word translated *inheritance* in referring to Israel's relationship to God, means *ownership* (Deut. 4:12; 32:8-9; 1 Sam. 26:19).
 - Israel *inherited* the land, but God *owns* Israel.

CALEB'S INHERITANCE: (14:6-15)

- Moses had sent 10 spies, including Joshua and Caleb, into Canaan to bring him a report. Only Joshua and Caleb brought a good report; the others were filled with fear:

Joshua 14:6-15

Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, 8 but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. 9 So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.'

10 "Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. 12 Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

13 Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. 14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly. 15 (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)

Then the land had rest from war.

- Caleb had the *courage to stand alone*; to go against the grain; to cast the minority vote.
- The source of his courage was his total faith in God's ability to fulfill his promises. He hammers home this point five times (vv. 9, 10a, 10b, 12a, 12b).
- In the N.T., Paul is like Caleb:

2 Timothy 4:16-18

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. 17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE INHERITANCE OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH: (CH. 15)

- The *details* of this chapter deal with God's promises, like one of the buds on the tree of Genesis 12 and 15.
- The boundaries of this territory extended south, and the description is the most detailed of all the tribes.
 - This is not surprising, considering the importance of Judah in salvation history. David would be from the tribe of Judah, and Jesus from the line of David.
 - The boundary would include Jerusalem, which would become known as the City of David.
 - Jerusalem would become the site of the Temple; the place of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ; the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost; the birth of the Church.
 - Details about the towns would be important to the people inheriting the land, even though not particularly interesting to us. Every detail is an indication of God's provision and fulfillment of his promises.
- Caleb's inheritance includes Hebron and Debir, part of Judah (vv. 13-19).
 - God promised Caleb that he would inherit the land he explored (14:9; Num. 14:29).

THE INHERITANCE OF THE JOSEPH TRIBES: (16:1-17:18)

- The allotment of Joseph was divided between the tribe of Ephraim (16:5-10) and the half-tribe of Manasseh (17:1-13).
 - Remember, the other half-tribe of Manasseh received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. The reason for splitting the tribe of Manasseh

was to compensate for the tribe of Levi, which received no territorial allotment (14:3-4).

- The importance of the tribe of Joseph is reflected in their lot being drawn second and in the comparatively large amount of space devoted to the description of their territory.
- The record of Ephraim first ahead of Manasseh is not accidental. It reflects Genesis 48, when Jacob intentionally blesses the younger (Ephraim) first, over Joseph's objection.
- God's divine order is often contrary to what we expect, expressing his divine will, totally apart from human judgment. God's ways are not our ways:

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

NOTES OF FAILURE AT THE END OF EACH TRIBAL ALLOTMENT:

➤ Judah's failure:

Joshua 15:63

Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah.

- The reason for this might have been that Jerusalem sat astride the boundary between Judah and Benjamin territory, and it was not strongly identified with either tribe.
- Later we are told that Judah did capture Jerusalem (Judges 1:8), but then we are told that Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites in their portion (Judges 1:21).
- Judah's success may have been limited and temporary, while Benjamin's failure was total.
- The city was not taken decisively by the Israelites until the time of David (2 Sam. 5:5-10).

➤ Ephraim's failure:

Joshua 16:10

They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor.

- Manasseh's failure:

Joshua 17:12-13

Yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region. 13 However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely.

- This accommodation plainly contradicted Yahweh's clear directions (Ex. 23:23-33; 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-6).
- God had told Israel that the residents of Canaan 'must not live in your land' (Ex. 23:33).
 - He had commanded Israel to destroy them completely and show them no grace (Deut. 7:2).
 - The cancer of Baal worship would surely infect Israel unless the most radical surgery removed it (Ex. 23:32-33; Deut. 7:4).
 - Even though Yahweh had told Israel that there would be a gradual aspect to the conquest (Deut. 7:22-23), Ephraim and Manasseh show that by the compromise they have already begun to lose this vision (16:10; 17:12-13).
 - The time came when Israel became dominant, yet they made forced laborers out of the Canaanites. They had the power to expel them, but instead, they used them for their own advantage.
- Calvin put it this way:
- But another crime still less pardonable was committed when, having it in their power easily to destroy all, they not only were slothful in executing the command of God, but, induced by filthy lucre, they preserved those alive whom God had doomed to destruction.²*
- In Joshua 16-17, Ephraim and Manasseh's failure brings no immediate dire consequences, but it will be seen in the Book of Judges.

THE DIVISION OF THE REST OF THE TRIBES: (CH. 18-19)

- Joshua's rebuke of the seven tribes: Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan.

Joshua 18:1-7

The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there. The country was brought under their control, 2 but there were still seven Israelite tribes who had not yet received their inheritance.

3 So Joshua said to the Israelites: "How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?" 4 Appoint three men from each tribe. I will send them out to make a survey of the land and to write a description

of it, according to the inheritance of each. Then they will return to me. 5 You are to divide the land into seven parts. Judah is to remain in its territory on the south and the house of Joseph in its territory on the north. 6 After you have written descriptions of the seven parts of the land, bring them here to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the LORD our God. 7 The Levites, however, do not get a portion among you, because the priestly service of the LORD is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh have already received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. Moses the servant of the LORD gave it to them."

- Apparently a significant amount of time had passed, and these tribes had become complacent.
- Joshua has changed the procedure, perhaps because of complaints of the Joseph tribes that Judah's land was too large and theirs was too small.
- The casting of lots was done by Joshua's authority, but Eleazar the priest would be the one to actually do it. "In the presence of the Lord" meant the lots would be cast near the Ark of the Covenant.

JOSHUA'S INHERITANCE:

Joshua 19:49-51

When they had finished dividing the land into its allotted portions, the Israelites gave Joshua son of Nun an inheritance among them, 50 as the LORD had commanded. They gave him the town he asked for—Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he built up the town and settled there.

51 These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And so they finished dividing the land.

- The land allocation west of the Jordan begins with granting an inheritance to Caleb and ends with granting an inheritance to Joshua.
 - Joshua and Caleb stand out in striking contrast for their complete faith in God's provision of the land, not daunted by appearances of the Canaanites (Num. 13:30; 14:6-9).
 - It was these two believers who would enter the land, while the rest would die for their unbelief.
 - This is a witness to the fact that the majority may be neither faithful nor right (Num. 13-14). And it is a witness to the fact that Yahweh keeps his promises (Num. 14:24, 30).

HOW DOES OUR INHERITANCE AS BELIEVERS COMPARE TO THE INHERITANCE OF THE ISRAELITES?

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Ephesians 1:18-23

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

1 Peter 1:3-9

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. How have you seen incomplete obedience take its toll on your own life or the lives of your family?
2. How has obedience in your younger years been rewarded in your older years?

3. How has disobedience in your younger years brought consequences in your later years? How have you dealt with it? What has given you hope and encouragement?
4. Compare Israel's inheritance of land in the O.T. to our inheritance through Christ in the N.T. What similarities do you see? What differences?
5. If you were to single out one message to the church from this lesson, what would it be?
6. Why do you think Israel failed to clean out the land of their inheritance, in spite of God's specific command? What do you think was their rationale?
7. Who do you know today who is a Caleb? Are *you* a Caleb?
8. What do you admire most about Joshua? What do you think was the secret of his strength into old age?
9. What does it mean to you that you are God's *possession*—that you *belong* to God?
10. Think about some mundane details of your daily life. How do they reflect God's provision for you? What do you see behind the details of life that reflect God's love for you and your family? Give examples.
11. Explain the difference between God's judgment in the O.T. and reaping what we've sown in the N.T. Or is there a difference?
12. Have you ever taken a stand for what you knew was right, though the majority was against you? What motivated you? How did you feel? What was the outcome?
13. Israel was to be separate from pagan nations, and their own nation was to be cleansed from all forms of idolatry. What was the danger in co-existing with idolatry? What would be a parallel today?

¹ Tenney, Merrill C., *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 988.

² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Joshua*, Vol. 4 of Calvin's Commentaries, p. 217.

LESSON SEVEN

The Cities of Refuge Joshua 20:1-9

Text for Personal Study: Joshua 20:1-21:45

Horizon Supplemental Readings: Pages 70-76

Read “Encountering the Text” in Horizon: page 71

With the task of assigning land to the twelve tribes of Israel completed, there were two remaining tasks: (1) the establishment of cities of refuge; (2) the establishment of the descendants of Levi in the land, designating their cities and providing for their livelihood. This lesson concerns only the cities of refuge.

It is the nature of humankind, apart from God’s law, to seek justice when a wrong as been committed—to get revenge. Justice is an attribute of God, and being created in the image of God, we instinctively are driven to seek justice when our rights, or the rights of a loved one, have been violated. However, justice in the hands of sinners is often unjust in that we often seek punishment for the offender that is out of proportion to the crime committed. Our perception of truth is often distorted, and the quest for justice results in retaliation, driven by hatred and anger and a stubborn refusal to forgive. God, whose justice is tempered by mercy and grace, and whose judgment is always right and true, punishes evil, and yet forgives. His children are commanded to do the same.

It is easier to demand obedience to the letter of the law than to judge offenses based on extenuating circumstances. The taking of a life demands the life of the offender—but what about accidental death? Justice cannot be properly exercised without an investigation of circumstances. But in the outrage of the moment, the relative or friend of one who had been killed sets out to kill the offender, without consideration of the facts of the case. Therefore, among many ancient Near Eastern people there was a long custom of understanding that specified shrines were places where criminals could seek safety, and could not be apprehended for their crimes. This was to allow time for justice to be done based on intent and circumstances.

God gave Moses instructions for dealing with intentional and unintentional loss of life, both of humans and animals. The horns of the altar provided a safety zone where one could go for safety until the circumstances of a death were determined (e.g., 1 Kings 1:49-53). However, if one was found to be guilty of murder, he was to be put to death; there was not to be an asylum for the criminal. “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he *does not do it intentionally*, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. *But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death,*” (Exodus 21:12-14).

Now, the Israelites having entered Canaan, the laws concerning justice were passed on from Moses to Joshua. Six Levitical cities were set aside as cities of refuge, three on the east side of the Jordan and three on the west. These cities were only intended as an asylum *for those who killed another person accidentally*—not those who killed someone intentionally.

The circumstances surrounding the taking of a life are very important. God is not hard and arbitrary; he is just and merciful. God, the Creator, who judges with perfect knowledge, gave the Israelites explicit instructions for how to deal with death, whether by natural causes, the result of murder, or accidental death. Cities of refuge are indicators of both God's justice and mercy. They provide protection for the one who has unintentionally killed a person, and they also serve as a prison where justice is served.

Our task as we study this lesson is to look for the indications of God's character in the provision of cities of refuge, and to look for *principles* that can guide us today in judging fairly when a life has been unnecessarily taken. While we are all equally sinners before a holy God, not all crimes are equal. It is comforting to know that God cares about the circumstances of our failure to keep his law. God grieves when a person's life is taken, but he also understands when the cause of death has been unintentional and sometimes unavoidable. God grieves when we break any of his laws, but he is merciful in that he knows us inside and out. He knows what has caused us to stumble or to even deliberately sin; he knows our weakness because he was tempted in every way as we are (Heb. 2:18; 4:15, 16). Circumstances must be considered in assessing penalties. This should not encourage license to sin—to hide behind excuses—but to be *merciful*, to look more deeply into what has caused us and others to sin.

It is possible to define and discuss cities of refuge in only a surface way and be finished in five minutes. But there are many gems hidden in this biblical teaching. Please give this serious thought—don't rush—and ask the Lord to show you what is not obvious at first glance.

READ JOSHUA 20 -- CITIES OF REFUGE:

Joshua 20

Then the LORD said to Joshua: 2 "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, 3 so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood.

4 "When he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state his case before the elders of that city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live with them. 5 If the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not surrender the one accused, because he killed his neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought. 6 He is to stay in that city until he has stood trial

before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled."

7 So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah.

8 On the east side of the Jordan of Jericho they designated Bezer in the desert on the plateau in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the tribe of Manasseh. 9 Any of the Israelites or any alien living among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger of blood prior to standing trial before the assembly.

WHY IS TAKING A LIFE SO IMPORTANT?

- We are made in the image of God:

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

- Life is in the blood:

- Since life is sacred, blood (a symbol of life) is to be treated with respect:

Genesis 9:5-6

And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

WHY WERE CITIES OF REFUGE NECESSARY?

- They served to modify the harshness of an impersonal application of the law of retribution which demanded punishment equal to the crime committed (e.g., Gen. 9:6; Exod. 21:12-14; Lev. 24:17; Ezek. 18:20).
- An adjunct of this law was the duty of a relative of the dead man to kill the murderer. No consideration was given to the nature of the act, whether deliberate or accidental.¹

WHAT WERE GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS TO MOSES ABOUT THE CITIES OF REFUGE?

- God gave these instructions to Moses to provide a system of justice when settled in the Promised Land:

Numbers 35:6-34

"Six of the towns you give the Levites will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone may flee. In addition, give them forty-two other towns. 7 In all you must give the Levites forty-eight towns, together with their pasturelands. 8 The towns you give the Levites from the land the Israelites possess are to be given in proportion to the inheritance of each tribe: Take many towns from a tribe that has many, but few from one that has few."

9 Then the LORD said to Moses: 10 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, 11 select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. 12 They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. 13 These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge. 14 Give three on this side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge. 15 These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites, aliens and any other people living among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.

16 "If a man strikes someone with an iron object so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. 17 Or if anyone has a stone in his hand that could kill, and he strikes someone so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. 18 Or if anyone has a wooden object in his hand that could kill, and he hits someone so that he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. 19 The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. 20 If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at him intentionally so that he dies 21 or if in hostility he hits him with his fist so that he dies, that person shall be put to death; he is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

22 "But if without hostility someone suddenly shoves another or throws something at him unintentionally 23 or, without seeing him, drops a stone on him that could kill him, and he dies, then since he was not his enemy and he did not intend to harm him, 24 the assembly must judge between him and the avenger of blood according to these regulations. 25 The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send him back to the city of refuge to which he fled. He must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil.

26 "But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled 27 and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. 28 The accused must stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; only after the death of the high priest may he return to his own property.

29 *"These are to be legal requirements for you throughout the generations to come, wherever you live.*

30 *"Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.*

31 *"Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death.*

32 *"Do not accept a ransom for anyone who has fled to a city of refuge and so allow him to go back and live on his own land before the death of the high priest.*

33 *"Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34 Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites."*

- These verses highlight God's concern to *prevent injustice*, especially in cases of *revenge*.
- Ancient peoples thought of their clan or family collectively—that is, as an integrated, organic whole—not simply a roster of individuals. Thus, they believed that the entire clan bore the loss suffered by an individual or family within it.²
 - Therefore, the killing of a relative or loved one called for revenge. But this often set off a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge that could go on for generations. (We see this today in the Middle East between Arabs and Jews.)
 - Cities of refuge would provide a *safe place* until a person could receive a fair trial.
 - The six cities were scattered throughout the land, three on the east side of the Jordan River (Golan, Ramoth-gilead, and Bezer), and three on the west side (Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron).
 - No one would be more than a day's journey from a city of refuge.
 - The roads were to be prepared (Deut. 19:3) and the cities strategically located so that safety for the unintentional killer was near.
 - The very number and location of the cities show how available God's justice was meant to be and how practical his ways are.³
 - Levites, the priests, who did not inherit their own land, would likely be the most impartial judges to be in charge of these cities.
 - They would hold a preliminary hearing outside the gates while the accused person was kept in the city until the time of his trial.

- If the killing was judged *accidental*, the person would stay in the city until the death of the high priest. Then he would be allowed to go free and could start a new life without worrying about avengers.
 - Since the Israelite religious law did not provide for any sacrificial or ritualistic removal of guilt for the manslayer, the guilt of the man who killed accidentally was removed by the natural death of the high priest.
 - After the death of the high priest the man was free to leave his “prison” with the burden of the accident resting on him. Paying a fine or ransom could not free him sooner.
 - If the killing was *not accidental*, the person would be delivered to the slain person’s avengers.
 - This system of justice shows how God’s *law* and God’s *mercy* go hand in hand.
- Only under the United Kingdom were all six cities of refuge under the control of the Hebrews so they could function, and there are no stories in the O.T. which illustrate the functioning of these cities as places of refuge.

WHY THE DEATH OF THE HIGH PRIEST PERMIT A PRISONER TO GO FREE?

- No definitive answer is given in scripture.
- “Curiously, when the current high priest dies, the refugee receives an amnesty that permits his return home. Boling avers that the high priest’s death apparently occasioned a ‘general amnesty’ (Boling, *Joshua*, p. 474), while for Nelson this provision reflects common postexilic practice, the high priest assuming the king’s amnesty-granting authority (Nelson, *Joshua*, p. 231). More likely, however, the applicable laws view the high priest’s death as somehow expiating the people’s sins in general and hence, mark the appropriate occasion to free those living in asylum.”⁴

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF JOSHUA’S REFORM?

- It was not meant to eliminate or even reduce violence, but one purpose was to take as much as possible of the violence that did occur out of the hands of families and commonalities and put it into the hands of the state.⁵

WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ABOUT REVENGE?

- *Revenge* is action that is taken to avenge a wrong; an avenger is the one who brings punishment.
- Before the Law of Moses, almost everywhere where the state had not yet been formed or was still in the first stages of development, there was an ancient code of blood revenge and seeking satisfaction for personal injury.

- For instance, among the Arabs today, if a man is slain there can never be peace between the tribes again unless the man who killed him is slain by the avenger.⁶

➤ The Mosaic Law outlines instructions for justice, for example:

Leviticus 24:17-22

"If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. 18 Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution — life for life. 19 If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: 20 fracture for fracture, eye for eye , tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. 21 Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. 22 You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God."

Deuteronomy 19:16-21

If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, 17 the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. 18 The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, 19 then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. 20 The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. 21 Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

➤ Jesus and the apostles expand further:

Matthew 5:38-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye , and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well....43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Romans 12:19-21

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Concerning civil government, Paul writes:

Romans 13:1-5

*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 *For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.* 4 *For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.* 5 *Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.**

WHAT DO THE CITIES OF REFUGE TEACH US ABOUT GOD?

- God's passion and requirement for *justice*.

Micah 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Deuteronomy 16:20

Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Psalms 33:5

The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

Psalms 106:3

Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.

Proverbs 21:15-16

When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers. A man who strays from the path of understanding comes to rest in the company of the dead.

- God values *all* human life—both the victim and the accused.
 - The city of refuge was both a place of *safety* for the manslayer and also of *exile*.
 - The accused enjoyed protection but also suffered penalty. He could not—assuming the case was decided in his favor (20:6a)—return to his home town and resume normal life; he had stay in the city of refuge until the death of the current high priest (20:6b).
 - He could not leave the city of refuge, for if he did, he was fair game for the slain man’s relative (Num. 35:26-28).
 - The city of refuge was at the same time both a refuge and a prison.⁷
- God’s *justice must be satisfied*.
 - The unintentional taking of life was so serious that there could be no release from one’s confinement in the city of refuge except by the death of the high priest (20:6). This may point to the satisfaction of God’s justice.
 - According to Num. 35: 31-34, in the case of some crimes where capital punishment was the penalty, one could ransom his life by substituting a monetary compensation. But *such an option was not available to a murderer* (Num. 35:31).
 - The reason is that *blood pollutes the land*, and only the blood of the blood-shedder can atone for the land; the only acceptable payment is the murderer’s own life—only that will purge away the pollution and cleanse the land of defilement.

Numbers 35:32-34

"Do not accept a ransom for anyone who has fled to a city of refuge and so allow him to go back and live on his own land before the death of the high priest. 33 "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. 34 Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites."

- A similar stipulation holds in the case of unintentional manslaughter—blood still pollutes the land.
- “Both incur blood guilt and pollute the land, and both require atonement: murder by the execution of the murderer and manslaughter through the natural demise of the high priest.”⁸
- According to this interpretation, the high priest’s death is the only ransom for the manslayer, that his death, in some way, atones for the blood shed and satisfies the claims of justice.

- Only the high priest's death can release the offender from banishment and bring him home again; a remarkable picture of what our "merciful and faithful high priest" (Heb. 2:17) has done for us.⁹

➤ God's justice includes the native Israelite and the sojourner (alien).

Joshua 20:9

Any of the Israelites or any alien living among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger of blood prior to standing trial before the assembly.

Deuteronomy 10:18

He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.

- The N.T. perspective:

Ephesians 2:13, 19-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ....¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

IN CLOSING, A STORY OF MERCY AND GRACE:

On Wednesday, April 2, 1987, in San Antonio, a small group of Bible study leaders had just finished studying the lesson we were going to present the next morning at church, when one of the leaders, Maryanne Seale, casually announced that she would not be there because she was having "routine" surgery mid-morning at a downtown hospital. We all lamented that the time of the surgery would not permit our being there to pray with her, nor would our pastor be there because he would be teaching. We would all be at the church while she would be only a few blocks away in the hospital. She was not at all concerned. She insisted it was not serious surgery, that she would be fine.

The next day, as the family was waiting during surgery, the anesthesiologist suddenly appeared and said he had made a dreadful mistake that had resulted in cardiac arrest. Every effort was being made to save her. He was devastated! That afternoon, Maryanne died.

Because Palm Sunday would be on Sunday, arrangements for the funeral were made immediately so the service could be on Saturday. The sanctuary was filled to capacity with friends deep in grief, struggling to sing hymns of resurrection through tears, and desperately clinging to scriptures that assured us that Maryanne was in Christ's presence. She was a dearly loved leader in the church and community; her husband was

a prominent in businessman and leader in the church. The loss to us all was unimaginable.

After the funeral, that same day, Maryanne's daughter, Marty, went to the home of the anesthesiologist and told him it was okay, that she forgave him, and she hoped he would someday be able to forgive himself. The hospital expected Maryanne's husband to sue them, but he would not. Two weeks later, a doctor called Marty and asked that she please call the anesthesiologist because he had not been able to anesthetize anyone since the dreadful day of Maryann's death. She did.

We still remember and miss Maryanne. But the story of the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of the family, offered freely to the doctor who unintentionally killed their wife and mother, speaks powerfully to our lesson. Because of the death of our High Priest, Jesus Christ, the family was set free from anger and revenge. The doctor did not have to seek asylum in a city of refuge; he didn't even have a trial. No charges were filed; no restitution sought. Yes, he will surely always carry the burden of his mistake—that is his "prison," a nightmare he will never forget. But he is free to move on, to live a productive life—all because of Jesus, our High Priest, who changes everything.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. What parallels can you see in cities of refuge and our criminal justice system? What contrasts?
2. Does the penalty in scripture for accidental killing seem too harsh to you? Why or why not?
3. What responsibility do we have to guard against the accidental or injury or killing of an innocent person in your home, your office, and in your church? And in your car? Illustrate.
4. The person guilty of murder was not eligible to seek protection in a city of refuge. Why?
5. What is your position on capital punishment and what is your biblical support?
6. Should repentance and forgiveness of a guilty person have any influence on the penalty of one's crime? If the victim and/or the victim's family are believers, how should this influence their attitude toward the guilty party? Do you know of someone who actually faced this challenge?
7. Is it right to insist on biblical standards of justice in our culture? Should our laws interpret God's justice?
8. Should the laws of justice of the United States protect citizen and alien alike? Should illegal aliens also be protected by our laws? What is the biblical basis for your opinion?
9. God's justice means judgment. Why do we not discuss judgment as much as mercy and grace?
10. Explain how the death of Christ, our High Priest, has set us free from the guilt and penalty of our sin. What happened on the cross? What does it mean?

¹ Ibid, p. 869.

² *The New Application Commentary, Joshua*, p. 461.

³ Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua*, p. 148.

⁴ *The New Application Commentary, Joshua*, p. 453.

⁵ *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. II*, p. 696.

⁶ *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 149.

⁷ *Joshua*, Davis, p. 149.

⁸ Gordon Wenham, *Numbers*, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (1981); also Gustav Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 237-38.

⁹ Davis, *Joshua*, p. 150.

LESSON EIGHT

Joshua's Farewell **Joshua 23:1-16**

Text for Personal Study: Joshua 22

Horizon Supplemental Readings: Pages 78-82

Read "Encountering the Text" in Horizon: Page 79

Joshua is now nearing the end of his life, and he is preparing for his departure, having been trained by Moses as a teenager, and then taking on the mantle of his leadership after his death. The last three chapters of Joshua each begin with Joshua calling together Israel or some significant segment of it (22:1; 23:2; 24:1). These chapters follow the theological text of 21:43-45, which underscores God's fidelity to his promise:

Joshua 21:43-22:1

So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. 44 The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. 45 Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.

Now the book closes with three assemblies of the people of God. The theme of Joshua's message to each assembly is the *urgency of Israel's fidelity to God*: Israel must respond in kind to God's unwavering faithfulness in order to retain the land.

OPTIONAL: An overview of Chapter 22 — for your own edification or to share with your group, if time permits.

The Israelites are in Canaan, though they have not completely cleaned out the land as God has instructed them to do; a remnant of Canaanites remained. Much work is still to be done. The cities of refuge have been established so that one who has accidentally killed someone can be protected from revenge and be dealt with justly. Joshua had charged the Reubenites, Gadites, and half of Manasseh, who had settled east of the Jordan (called the Transjordanian tribes), to send their fighting men over into Canaan to assist their brothers in conquering their territory, and they had complied, leaving their families behind. Now, in chapter 22, Joshua commends them by saying "you have kept all the Moses commanded you" (v. 2); "you listened to my voice (v. 2); 'you have not forsaken your brothers' (v. 3). Joshua sets an example of good leadership by commending the people when they have done well. Mathew Henry says this:

Though it was by the favor of God and his power that Israel got possession of this land, and he must have all the glory, yet Joshua thought there was a thankful acknowledgement due to their brethren who assisted them, and whose sword and bow were employed for them. God must be chiefly eyed in our praises, yet instruments must not be altogether overlooked.¹

Notice that Joshua gives words of commendation to his troops from the Transjordanian tribes *before* his exhortation to faithfulness:

Joshua 22:3-5

For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you. 4 Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. 5 But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."

We find that the pattern of godly leaders throughout scripture is *first to commend, then command*. For instance, Paul spends three chapters in expressing thanksgiving and joy over the Thessalonians before he begins to command and instruct them (1 Thess. 1-3, then 4-5).² In Revelation 2-3, the Lord *commends* the churches before he critiques them (“*I know....I have this against you*”).

In chapter 22, a crisis develops when, as they return home, the eastern tribes build an altar at Geliloth, near the Jordan on the west side. This appears to have been the site of Gilgal, the place where they had first entered the land and set up a pillar of memorial stones and circumcised the nation (4:19-20; 5:9-10). This was a very large altar, visible from a long distance away, including the east side of the Jordan. It was intended to express their loyalty to God and their unity with the western tribes. Had it been smaller, the people living east of the Jordan could not have seen it, and they might have potentially forgotten the altar and what it stood for. Thus, its imposing size could be seen from vantage points across the river and thus remembered.

But the western tribes totally misunderstood the reason for building the altar. They were astounded that the Transjordan tribes had built an altar west of the Jordan, in the land belonging to Judah or Benjamin, rather than in their own land east of the Jordan. The basis for their reaction is found in the law against offering a burnt offering or sacrifice on the altar of any location other than the tabernacle (Lev. 17:8-9), which was located at Shiloh, and in the more general law in Deuteronomy 13:12-15 against worshipping other gods. The tribes west of the Jordan (referred to as Israel) saw this altar as a rival altar to the one at Shiloh, and they presumed it was devoted to sacrifices to false gods. The narrator draws an obvious distinction between the western tribes, the “true Israelites” living in Canaan, and the Transjordan tribes, living outside Israel, until the

altar's true nature and intent has been made clear. Only then are all twelve tribes treated as part of one nation, Israel.

How is the conflict resolved? Leaders representing each tribe of Israel, along with Phinehas, the priest, went to Gilead to speak with the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They confronted them with the accusation that they were turning away from the Lord by building the altar. They also feared that the Lord would turn against *all Israel* because of their disobedience. They give an illustration of how one person's sins in the past (Achan, in Joshua 7) had brought judgment on the whole nation. They also cite the sin committed at Peor many years earlier in the wilderness. It had involved the Israelites' prostituting themselves by bowing to the Moabite gods, specifically the Baal of Peor. They had been seduced by the women of Moab to do so, and a plague broke out in the Israelite camp, killing 24,000 people, before Phinehas had intervened and caused the Lord's anger to abate (see Num. 25:6-9). They feared that such a horror could happen again, in sort of a domino effect. In fact, they said that the stain of this sin remained with them "up to this very day," that the plague was still in the congregation—not meaning that the plague itself was still raging, because it had been stopped, but that its effects were still being felt in a very real way. The implication is that Israel had never truly rid itself of this sin, that it always flirted with—if not participated in—idolatry and the allure of pagan religious systems. So they pointed an accusing finger at their fellow tribes, accusing them of having turned their back on the Lord. They even urged their Transjordanian brothers to take drastic action (v. 19), to abandon their inheritance east of the Jordan and settle west of the river, if the land of their possession was defiled. The tabernacle resided in the western tribes, at Shiloh, symbolizing God's presence and standing as the fulfillment of God's instructions about setting his name in the place where he would choose. From their perspective, it was better that the Transjordanian tribes abandon their possession and pursue true worship than to keep their land and engage in apostasy. It is also true that they feared for their own lives, sure that their fellow Israelites' "sin" would result in the entire nation's being punished, just as it had in Achan's case.

It is easy to understand the fear of the western tribes and their insistence that no possibility should exist for disobedience and apostasy of the eastern tribes, and therefore, action should be taken immediately. Then the Transjordanian tribes give their defense:

Joshua 22:21-29

Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: 22 "The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day. 23 If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account.

24 "No! We did it for fear that someday your descendants might say to ours, 'What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?'

25 *The LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites!*³ *You have no share in the LORD.' So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the LORD.*

26 *"That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar—but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.'* 27 *On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have no share in the LORD.'*

28 *"And we said, 'If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the LORD's altar, which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.'*

29 *"Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle."*

The eastern tribes made it very clear that their intentions were *not evil*, but only that the *unity of Israel* be maintained and that their *loyalty to be the Lord alone*. We learn that their intentions, previously suspected to be sinful, were entirely honorable. Building the altar was motivated by their fear of being cut off from the fellow Israelites in the future. It was never intended for sacrifice, which would have been a violation of God's command, but for a *sign of unity*. They were divided by the Jordan River, and they feared that someday only those living west of the Jordan, in "*the Lord's land*," would claim to have a legitimate portion in the Lord (cf. v. 19). In this way, their descendants might be completely cut off from the blessings promised to Israel. The altar was to be a witness between the two parts of Israel. It would represent the unity of eastern and western tribes in the proper worship of the Lord at his true sanctuary. They would offer the sacrifices and offerings at the prescribed altar, not at the altar they had built. The altar they had built was only a *replica* of the true altar. And by building it on the west side of the Jordan, yet seen from the east side, it would be a reminder of the true altar at the Lord's sanctuary, and it would stand as a call to the eastern tribes to offer sacrifices on the altar at the tabernacle.

The climax of the chapter reveals the full meaning of the altar: it was to testify to God himself (v. 34). Previously, it is stated that the altar was to be a witness (vv. 27, 28), but the earlier verses do not reveal the precise nature or function of the "witness." Now we see that it was to *affirm that Yahweh was God*.⁴ This could be compared with Jesus telling his disciples that people would know they were his disciples by seeing their love for each other—that is, their love would point people to Christ (John 13:35). In a sense, as we follow Christ, becoming more and more like him, we point unbelievers not to ourselves, but to Christ. In the same way, the altar that was built as a replica of the altar

in Shiloh was to stand as a reminder of the unity of the twelve tribes of Israel and the call to worship according to God's instructions.

This chapter presents excellent illustrations about how to deal with discord within the body of Christ. For instance, the importance of going to the person or groups of people with whom we disagree, to talk face to face, calling each other to accountability, clarifying motives and intentions behind actions. It stresses the importance of removing any temptations to fall away from Christ or to cause someone else to fall, or to cause division. It shows the urgency of maintaining unity within the body, but without compromising obedience to God's Word.

History will show that the very thing that the western tribes feared did, in fact, come to pass. The Transjordan tribes fell away, as did the rest of Israel eventually, because of incomplete obedience. The worship of false gods continued among the Canaanites who remained in the land, contrary to God's command, and this destroyed Israel. The story continues in the Book of Judges, and then on into the history of the kings and the divided kingdom. Idolatry eventually destroyed all Israel and led to the exile of Israel first, then Judah. It is obvious that the commitment of one generation does not guarantee the faithfulness of the next generation. No one can flirt with evil without eventually falling. Proverbs 6:27-28, "*Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?*" It is right to be concerned about the purity of the church and to hold each other accountable. We must realize that the consequences of evil are not necessarily seen in one's lifetime, but impact generations to come. We cannot control the obedience of future generations, but we must bear the responsibility of our own disobedience.

JOSHUA 23:1-16

Joshua's Farewell Address to the Leaders of Israel

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOD'S WITNESSES: (23:1-3)

Joshua 23:1-2

After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, summoned all Israel---their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them:

"I am old and well advanced in years.

- Joshua refers to the *passage of time*—many years after the events of chapters 13-21.
 - He was old and well advanced in years; his death was close at hand.
 - Joshua was 110 years old when he died, and if he was near Caleb's age of 85 when the land was distributed (14:10), then his farewell

speeches would have come about 25 years after the main events in the book.⁵

- A long time has passed since the distribution of land was completed, and God had finally given rest to the land.
- It is Joshua's responsibility, and the leaders' responsibility, to give witness to what they have seen and how they have experienced God's faithfulness..

THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S HELP: (23:3-5)

- This was an all-inclusive speech, delivered to a wide range of the nation's leaders.

Joshua 23:3

You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you.

- Joshua reminds the people that *the land was God's*; that *God has fought for them*, and *they have seen it with their own eyes*.
 - Because they themselves have witnessed God's fidelity to Israel, they must be spearheads of fidelity to him; they must take on Joshua's role after his death.
 - But they, like Joshua, will one day die, and they are responsible to pass on the stories of God's faithfulness to the next generation.
 - While passing on the testimony of God's deeds *cannot guarantee* the *faithfulness* of the next generation, their *failure to pass it on* will certainly guarantee their *unfaithfulness*.

Psalms 78:2b-8

I will utter hidden things, things from of old — 3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. 5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, 6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. 7 Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.

8 They would not be like their forefathers — a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him.

- Joshua's warning to the leaders of Israel applies just as surely to us today. The apostasy of Israel can easily become our own story if we fail to teach and train our children the truth of God's Word.

THE PICTURE OF CONQUEST SEEN THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE:

- First, a *decisive conquest* (v. 3) — but a *gradual* aspect of the conquest:

Exodus 23:29-30

But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

- Joshua's point in explaining the manner of conquest is to furnish a *basis for confidence*.
 - If God's promise has proven true thus far, why would they doubt his faithfulness in the future? (See Psalm 105, 114, 135, 136)

- Second, a *continuing occupation*—with *work* still to be done:

- God has given *rest* (23:1)—yet there is *work to be done*:

Joshua 23:1a

After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them....

Joshua 23:4-5

Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west.

5 The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

THE CAREFUL OBEDIENCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE: (23:6-13)

- Joshua is addressing primarily leaders, but he addresses them as *representatives* of the people.
 - What is demanded of the leaders is demanded of every Israelite—and what is demanded of the people is demanded of the leaders. Everyone is equally accountable to God.
- The standard of obedience:

Joshua 23:6-8

"Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. 7 Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them.

8 But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

- The standard of obedience is the Word of God.
- Joshua received this standard in 1:7-8, and all Israel is under the same standard:

Joshua 1:7b-8

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. 8 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.

- Joshua is stressing that all of God's people are called to the same standard of obedience as the leaders.
- This obedience requires *separation* from the nations that remain in Canaan (23:7).
 - Mixing with these nations and adopting their worship practices was the most serious threat facing Israel.
 - This was the source of Israel's downfall in every era—the period of the judges (Judges 2:10-19; Solomon's downfall and the split in the kingdom (1 Kings 11); the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:7-23); the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 21; 24:3-4).
 - It was Israel's problem in the postexilic period (Ezra 9:1-2; Neh. 13:23-27).
- Instead of following the Canaanites' gods, Israel was to *cling* (*cling tightly*, as in the soldering process; joined together inseparately) to her own God (v. 8).

- Joshua looks back to stress God's faithfulness to his promises:

Joshua 23:9-10

"The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. 10 One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised.

- All of the exhortations to obey the law and to avoid pagan entanglements are a means to an end—to love God; to have a close relationship with him.

Joshua 23:11

So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 6:5-6

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Matthew 22:37-39

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

- Joshua's warning is that if Israel fails to obey, then God will no longer do what he has promised:

Joshua 23:12-13

"But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, 13 then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.

- See these earlier passages with the same idea: Exodus 23:33; Deuteronomy 7:16; Numbers 33:55.
- This prediction came true in the period of the judges (Judges 2:14-15, 21-23; 3:1-6).

JOSHUA'S CONCLUSION—ADMONITIONS AND WARNINGS: (23:14-16)

Joshua 23:14-16

14 "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.

15 But just as every good promise of the LORD your God has come true, so the LORD will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. 16 If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you."

- These are important "last words" of Joshua. He wants Israel to know with certainty that the Lord keeps his promises.
- But just as every promise of the Lord has come true for Israel's good, so also the Lord's devastating punishment will surely come upon Israel if they violate the covenant.
- God's anger would burn against his people—and this did indeed happen many times in Israel's history—usually at the hands of a foreign enemy. For instance:

Judges 3:8

The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.

Judges 10:6b-9

And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, 7 he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, 8 who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites.

2 Kings 13:3

So the LORD's anger burned against Israel, and for a long time he kept them under the power of Hazael king of Aram and Ben-Hadad his son.

Joshua 7:1

But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

- But this time, Joshua promised Israel that the results would be even more devastating—they would perish from the good land in which they lived if they forsook the Lord (cf. also v. 13).
 - Because the land belongs to God, it is his to give or to take away.
 - This promise was fulfilled when Judah was carried into Babylonian captivity because of repeated violations of the covenant (2 Kings 25).
 - God gave Israel many warnings through prophets and foreign oppressors, but Israel refused to repent. When God's patience came to an end, he sent them into exile.
- At the end of Joshua's life, he did not shrink from speaking the truth to Israel. Knowing and obeying the Word of God was the only way to enjoy God's promises. If Israel persisted in disobedience, God would surely fulfill his promise to remove them from the land. Joshua spoke his last words with great passion.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. If you knew you were going to die soon, what would be the most important thing you would say to your children, your church, and your friends?
2. Some say that the God of the O.T. is not the same God of the N.T. What do you say? Are there consequences today for Christians disobeying God's commands? If so, what are they?

3. Can a true believer in Jesus Christ persist in disobedience indefinitely?
4. Israel was to stay totally separate from the nations that remained in Canaan so they would not adopt their pagan worship and lifestyle. What does the following N.T. passage mean to you?

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

How would you relate this passage to God’s commands to Israel? Are there consequences today for disobeying this N.T. scripture, just as there were consequences to disobeying the O.T. scripture? What are they?

5. What promises has God kept for you that give you assurance of his faithfulness in the future?
6. Describe how you think Israel felt as they faced losing their leader? What kind of challenges faced them? Can you compare this to anything in your own experience?
7. Many are trying to remove the distinctions of Christianity from our society—even some Christians, so that we do not offend people of other religions. If Joshua were addressing us today, what do you think he would say are the biggest threats we face?
8. Has Jesus removed the obligation to keep God’s commands? Explain.
9. How would you define an idol today? Are there idols in your life? In your home?
10. How can you be separate from unbelievers and still be a witness for Christ?

¹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible, 6 vols.* (New York: Revell, n.d.), 2:102.

² Dale Davis, *Joshua*, p. 165.

³ Note that the tribe of Manasseh is not mentioned here because half of the tribe is located already on the west side of the Jordan.

⁴ Howard, *Joshua*, p. 415.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 420.

LESSON NINE

The Covenant Renewed Joshua 24

Text for Personal Study: Joshua 24:1-27

Horizon Supplemental Readings: Pages 84-90

Read “Encountering the Text” in Horizon: page 85

The last three chapters of *Joshua* (22, 23, and 24) begin with Joshua calling together all Israel, or some segment of it, in preparation for his earthly departure. In 21:43-35, Joshua emphatically stressed God’s fidelity to his promise. Then, in chapters 22-24, Joshua also stresses the importance of Israel’s faithfulness to God. They must be faithful to God as he has been to them, which is their only rational and appropriate response. The depth of their faithfulness would determine whether Israel retains the land (23:12-13; 15-16; 24:20).

In chapter 23, we looked at the farewell speech Joshua delivered at the end of his life to the leaders of Israel, which is similar to the speech Moses delivered when he also was about to die, recorded in Deuteronomy. This reinforces again the picture that is presented many times in the book, that Joshua is a worthy successor to Moses. Joshua’s address was given at Shiloh, which had been the Israelites’ religious center for some time (see 18:1, 8-10; 19:51; 21:1).¹ This is where the tabernacle was located, where sacrifices were offered to God; the symbolic place of God’s presence. Joshua gathered together the leaders of Israel here. Because these leaders had seen God’s faithfulness firsthand, and were the recipients of God’s promises, and because they would remain after Joshua died, it was their responsibility to establish Israel in faithfulness to the Lord and spur them on to total occupation of the land. They must not allow any ecumenical movement to destroy Israel’s fidelity to the Lord. Joshua passionately urged Israel to be steadfast in loving God, obeying his law, and in keeping themselves uncontaminated by the religious practices of their neighbors. Joshua promised that God would be faithful to Israel in their unfinished task of driving out their enemies, just as he had been in the past. He reviewed the promises God made to them and their fulfillment (23:10, 14-15; cf. 21:45). The standard for their obedience was, is, and always must be, the Word of God. They were to know it, meditate on it, and obey it (23:6; see also 1:6-9). This was God’s mandate to them as Joshua became their leader after Moses’ death, and it is the same now as Joshua is about to die. God’s blessing would be the reward for faithfulness, and God’s judgment would be the consequences for unfaithfulness.

In chapter 24, Joshua gives his second farewell address, this time at Shiloh. After the initial victories at Ai and Jericho, there had been a ceremony of covenant renewal on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (8:30-35). Now, in chapter 24, there is another ritual of covenant renewal. All this indicates that the Conquest was a religious event and not simply a military exploit. The Lord, the God of Israel, was marching into his own land with his own people.²

We don't know much about Joshua's private life. We don't know who was behind the scenes grieving the personal loss they were about to endure. And we don't know what private, personal words Joshua had for his intimate circle. We know him as a powerful leader who carried incredible responsibilities on his shoulders. Had Joshua lived today, the whole Church would be mourning the anticipated loss of such a great leader, one who could never be replaced. We would be reviewing his conquests and victories; reviewing his words. We would probably be talking about what made him great. And our conclusion would have to be that God called him, and gave him the ability and courage to fulfill his call. His assignment had to have been dreadfully difficult, surely on some days too much to bear. Had this just been about military conquest, it would have been hard enough. But Joshua was a great spiritual leader who was responsible to speak God's message to the people, messages of instruction and promises of blessing, but also warnings of judgment that would be the consequences of disobedience. Everyone likes to hear about blessing; no one wants to hear about judgment. Those of Joshua's inner circle surely knew of sleepless nights, exhaustion that comes from the constant pressure of leading.

Now Joshua's life was almost over. If he had lived in Paul's time, he surely would have said, "The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing," (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Few people know precisely when they are going to die. But if the Lord were to tell you today to get your affairs in order, that your time was very short, how would you prepare for your departure? Who would you want to see? What would you want to say? What has been your experience with God that needs to be passed on to your children and grandchildren? How would you describe God's faithfulness; his mercy and grace? His compassion and forgiveness? What warnings would you want to give them? What have you learned that you want your family and friends to remember after you are gone?

But even more important, when you have said it all, done your last deed, and breathed your last breath, the moment will come when it's just you and Jesus. What do you need to do now to be ready for that encounter?

FIRST, READ THE CHAPTER TO GET THE OVERALL MESSAGE:

Joshua 24:1-13

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

2 Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says:

'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. 3 But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, 4 and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

5 "Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. 6 When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. 7 But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time.

8 "I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. 9 When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. 10 But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

11 "Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. 12 I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. 13 So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.'

WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN CH. 24 THAT HAVE NO COUNTERPART IN CH. 23? OR, WHY TWO FAREWELL SPEECHES?

- The review of Israel's history from the call of Abraham to the present.
- This chapter contains a covenant renewal ceremony in which the people actually committed themselves to serving the Lord.
- The covenant that Joshua drew up for the Israelites.

WHY WAS SHECHEM CHOSEN AS THE LOCATION FOR JOSHUA'S LAST SPEECH?

- Joshua is now addressing the tribes of Israel at Shechem, which is in the hill country of Ephraim; these may have been the tribes west of the Jordan.

- Shechem was one of the towns of Ephraim that were given to the Levites (21:21), and it was also a city of refuge (20:7).
- Since there is no account of the conquest of Shechem in the Book of Joshua, this has led to the assumption that Shechem and the surrounding area were already populated with Israelites who were there before Joshua entered Canaan and welcomed him with open arms.
- Shechem may have been chosen for Joshua's last great act of covenant renewal because of its illustrious history.
 - This is where the Lord first promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 12:6-7), and now centuries later, this promise has finally come true.
 - This is where Jacob buried all the idols found in his entourage in preparation for meeting the Lord at Bethel (Gen. 35:4), an appropriate reminder that Israel is to forever reject the temptation to worship the idols of other nations.
 - The tabernacle and the ark of the covenant were possibly in Shechem at this time, evidenced by the fact that they presented themselves "before God."
 - However, some scholars insist that the sanctuary was still in Shiloh. It is possible that the ark was brought to Shechem just for this occasion and was placed in a temporary sanctuary.
 - The earlier covenant renewal ceremony was at Mount Ebal, near Shechem (8:30-35).
 - The essential point is that the people were made to feel accountable to God.

PART I: THE FIRST STAGE OF GOD'S GRACIOUS ACTS ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL – 24:2-4

Joshua 24:2-4

Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. 3 But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, 4 and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.'

- Israel's history goes back to Terah, Abraham's father, and continues up to the taking of the land.
- It begins with the reminder that Israel's ancestors had served other gods (v. 2), and it is followed by an exhortation not to serve these or any gods (vv. 14-15).

- Evidence of some of their ancestors' worship of many gods can be found in the account of Laban, Jacob, and Rachel, where Rachel stole the household gods in Laban's house (Gen. 31:19, 34-35).
 - In Gen. 35:2-4, Jacob urged his household to divest themselves of the foreign gods they had kept among them, which they did.
- Terah had three sons, Abraham, Nahor, and Haran (Gen. 11:27). God chose only Abraham, however, to bless and to use as a means of blessing to others, and the text states that God took Abraham from his homeland.
 - God led Abraham through all the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:6-9; 13:17-18), and gave him many descendants, beginning with his son Isaac and his grandsons Jacob and Esau (vv. 3-4).
 - Of these two grandsons, the blessing passed through Jacob, who went down to Egypt (v. 4; cf. Gen 15:13; 28:10-15; 35:9-13; 46:5-7).
 - Esau was granted land east of the Jordan (Gen. 32:3; 36:8).
 - Even though Jacob was the one through whom the promise to Abraham would be mediated, he and his descendants spent a long "exile" in Egypt before finally returning to the Promised Land. God's plans for the Canaanites had not come to fruition until now (Gen. 15:26).³

PART II: THE SECOND STAGE OF GOD'S GRACIOUS ACTS ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL – 24:5-7

Joshua 24:5-7

"Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. 6 When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. 7 But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time.

- Egypt was the second phase of God's gracious acts on behalf of his people.
- He gave them leaders, Moses and Aaron.
- He afflicted the Egyptians with plagues (cf. Exodus 7-12) and brought the Israelites out of Egypt (v. 5; cf. Exodus 12:31-39), delivering the Israelites through the Red Sea and destroying the Egyptians (Exodus 14-15).
- Following this, there was the long sojourn in the desert, due to the previous generation's rebellion against the Lord (Numbers 14), but not mentioned here because this was a new generation that did not participate in that rebellion.
- In this section there is a shift in perspective. Previously God had spoken of the people's ancestors in the distant past and in third-person address ("he," "they"), but now "you" occurs for the first time, alternating with "they," showing the

unity of this generation with their fathers. A great number of these people had actually witnessed and experienced many of the great deeds God had done for his people. They would have been under 20 years old when the nation had left Egypt (Num. 14:29-33).

- After v. 7, “you” will be used exclusively, focusing on what God has done for those now alive and present with Joshua at Shechem. This shows that God did not just make himself known in ages past, but he also worked mightily and graciously for the people being addressed.
 - Christians today are still part of this great spiritual heritage (see Rom. 11:11-24; Hebrews 11).

PART III: THE THIRD STAGE OF GOD’S GRACIOUS ACTS ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL – 24:8-10

Joshua 24:8-10

"I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. 9 When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. 10 But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

- This stage involved God’s work on Israel’s behalf before they crossed the Jordan River:
 - First, the victories against Sihon and Og (v. 8; cf. Num. 21:21-35).
 - Second, the thwarting of Balak’s evil intentions (vv. 9-10; cf. Num. 22-24).
 - When God said he was not willing to listen to Balaam (v. 10), he was referring to Balaam’s implicit request that God should put a curse on Israel, which he refused to do (Num. 22:10-12). Instead, he blessed Israel.

PART IV: THE FOURTH STAGE OF GOD’S GRACIOUS ACTS ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL – 24:11-13

Joshua 24:11-13

"Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. 12 I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. 13 So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.'

- This final phase of God’s gracious acts concerned his interventions and blessings in the land of Canaan—those acts covered in the Book of Joshua.
 - First is the great encounter at *Jericho*.
 - The other battles are referred to by references to the *seven peoples of the land* and to the *hornet* (vv. 11-12).
 - God’s gift of the *land* is emphasized in v. 13.
- What is the “*hornet*” in v. 12?
 - It is usually understood as a metaphor representing the terror or panic that an encounter with Israel’s God would engender (see 2:9-11, 24; 5:1; 6:27; Exodus 15:14-16; 23:27).
 - Some identify the hornet as the power of the pharaoh of Egypt, whose symbols were a bee or hornet. However, the text does not mention Egypt or even hint that Egypt is in view here; furthermore, nowhere in the Bible is such an identification made.
 - Others take the word literally, arguing that such insects have been used at different points in history in warfare.⁴
 - It seems most likely that *hornet* is used as a metaphor, but we should remember that the main point is that God fought for Israel, regardless how we interpret the meaning of hornet.
- It ends with a reminder that the land was God’s gift to Israel (vv. 12-13); cf. Deut. 6:10-11).
 - Israel’s presence in the land was entirely God’s doing.
 - Not only did God send the “hornet” to drive out the Canaanites, but this was accomplished even without their own weapons as the instruments.
 - The victory was God’s, not dependent on any military power:

Psalms 44:2-3

With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.

- Obviously, the Israelites did use their weapons on occasion, such as at Jericho when they “destroyed with the sword every living thing in it” (6:21), or at Ai the enemy “had been put to the sword” (8:24), or in the battle of Gibeon when many “were killed by the swords of the Israelites” (10:11). However, this must be understood as saying that it was *not by their own power or might or their own weapons that they had success*. Joshua affirms over and over again that it was *only by God’s power* that they were successful.

- The writer to the Hebrews describes God's power in warfare this way:

Hebrews 11:32-38

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

- Paul describes the power of God in spiritual warfare:

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- Who can understand the mysterious ways of God? Some seem to have a relative life of ease; others must engage in literal warfare, suffering, even death. But God gives us victory through his mighty power at work in us. It is by God's grace that we are victorious, no matter what our circumstances.

THE DEMAND FOR COVENANT COMMITMENT: 24:14-24

➤ These verses contain four statements by Joshua and four responses by Israel:⁵

- Joshua - demand:

Joshua 24:14-15

"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

- Israel - decision:

Joshua 24:16-18

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! 17 It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. 18 And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

- Joshua – caution:

Joshua 24:19-20

Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."

- Israel – insistence:

Joshua 24:21

But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."

- Joshua – query:

Joshua 24:22a

Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD."

- Israel – acknowledgment:

Joshua 24:22b

"Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

- Joshua – demand:

Joshua 24:23

"Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

- Israel – reaffirmation:

Joshua 24:24

And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."

A LOGICAL COMMITMENT: 24:14A

- Because of God's power, faithfulness, and goodness in the past, the covenant calls for a logical commitment: *"Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness,"* (Joshua 24:14a). This is their only *reasonable* response.
 - There is the same pattern in the N.T., where, in light of the lavish mercies of God described in Romans 1-11, Romans 12:1-2 calls us to our only rational response:

Romans 12:1-2

So then, my brothers, in view of all these mercies that God has bestowed on you, I now make this plea. Present your bodies to God, present them as a sacrifice—a living one, not a lifeless one; a holy one (because it is offered to a holy God), and one in which He will take pleasure. For, when you consider your indebtedness to God, the consecration of your lives to His service is your logical act of worship.⁶

AN EXCLUSIVE COMMITMENT: 24:14B-15

Joshua 24:14b-15

Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

Joshua 24:23

"Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

- The word "serve" is used 18 times in chapter 24.
 - Joshua commands Israel to "serve Yahweh," (v. 14).

- But if Israel will not serve God, then they must choose some god(s). Notice that Joshua presses them to then make a choice—either the ancestral Mesopotamian gods or the contemporary Amorite gods. As Matthew Henry says, if they don't choose Yahweh, then they must take their pick from “these dunghill deities.”
- Joshua uses an absurd choice to show how ludicrous it would be for Israel to refuse to serve the one and only true God, who has poured out his mercy and grace upon them. There really is no choice.
- In any case, Joshua has taken his stand: “*As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord,*” (v. 15).
- Joshua has pushed Israel to an all the way or nothing decision. They must be totally devoted to God or not at all.

A CAUTIOUS COMMITMENT: 24:16-24

Joshua 24:16-18

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! 17 It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. 18 And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

- But listen to Joshua's response:

Joshua 24:19-20

Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. 20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."

- In other words, Joshua is saying they dare not make this commitment lightly. They dare not come to God thinking that, if they change their minds later, God will forgive and make it right again. Don't bank on cheap grace! He was not trying to discourage them, but to help them count the cost before making a commitment.
- Joshua knew his people—he had lived with them all his life. He knew them better than they knew themselves. He was right to be skeptical. Though Israel followed the Lord many years after Joshua's death, Israel could not keep their commitment for the long haul, as the opening chapters of the Book of Judges will testify.
- This should remind us of Jesus' warning about the *cost of discipleship*:

Luke 14:26-33

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sister—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

- A hasty, thoughtless, uninformed so-called commitment to Christ can be very short-lived, and in the end, turn some people away from Christ because they conclude that “Christianity doesn’t work.”
- “We must retain Joshua’s paradox, must constantly stand between his ‘serve Yahweh’ (v. 14) and his ‘you cannot serve Yahweh’ (v. 19). His purpose is not to drive us from Yahweh but to him.”⁷

➤ The dialogue continues:

Joshua 24:21-24

But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."

22 Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD."

- If at any time in the future they were to go back on their commitment, their own words would condemn them.

"Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

23 "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

- The outward action of discarding their idols was essential, but it had to be combined with the determination of their heart.

24 And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."

SEALING THE COVENANT: 24:25-28

Joshua 24:25-28

On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. 26 And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

27 "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

28 Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

- The exact process that Joshua followed is disputed by scholars. It could have been a copy of the Law of Moses (1:8; 22:5; 23:6). There is no record of a covenant or law originating with Joshua.
- The covenant bound the people in a strong commitment to serve and obey only Yahweh their God, as over against the gods of the Canaanites or any other foreign gods.⁸ But it also would entail Israel keeping the entirety of the law.
- Because commitments are too easily forgotten, the covenant was sealed by two things: (1) recording the words in a book; (2) setting up a stone as a “witness” to it.
 - Many years prior in the same place, Joshua had written the word of the Law of Moses on the stones of an altar (8:32).
 - “Holy place” suggests that they had erected the Tent of Meeting here temporarily for this very occasion.
 - A stone cannot see or hear anything, but its presence would be a constant reminder of the covenant promises made by Israel that day. It may have borne some appropriate inscription, though the text does not mention it.
- Significantly, it was here at Shechem that God promised to Abram, “To your seed I will give this land,” (Gen. 12:7). Now approximately 600 years later, here is Abraham’s seed at Shechem, having this land.

THREE BURIALS: 24:29-33

Joshua 24:29-33

After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. 30 And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

31 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.

32 *And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.*

33 *And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.*

- We don't know how much time passed "After these things...."
- Joshua's burial:
 - For the first time the title "the servant of the Lord" was granted to Joshua, elevating him close to the stature of Moses.
 - When Joshua died, he was ten years younger than Moses, indicating that Joshua never became fully equal to Moses.
 - He was buried at Timnath-Serah (see 19:50), the city he had asked for and built.
 - With Joshua's death, a certain style of leadership came to an end. No one became Joshua's successor.
 - That the people were faithful *throughout the lifetime of Joshua* speaks to the power of Joshua's influence. They evidently followed his example when he challenged them to choose whom they would serve and when he asserted that he and his household would serve the Lord (vv. 14-15).⁹
 - The memorials, confessions, and rituals of covenant renewal were designed to keep the people loyal, but these were not adequate indefinitely. The following verses tell us what happened in the next generation:

Judges 2:10-15

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.

- Joseph's burial:
 - The burial of Joseph's bones symbolized the completion of an era and the fulfillment of God's promises to the Patriarchs. When he gave instructions

for his remains to be buried in Canaan, Joseph manifested great faith in the promises of God.

- The burial plots purchased by Abraham and Jacob were symbolic of their faith that God would give the whole land to their descendants. The burial of Joseph's remains provides a fitting conclusion to the long saga that began with the call of Abraham.¹⁰

➤ Eleazar's burial:

- When Eleazar the high priest, son of Aaron died, a whole generation of those who had left Egypt came to an end.
- He had figured significantly in the land distribution, and now he too received a decent burial on his own land.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. What is the benefit of telling someone of a commitment you've made rather than keeping it to yourself? What's the downside?
2. Have you ever made a commitment that you later regretted? Was that commitment made on impulse? Without full understanding? Were you deceived? What were the consequences of breaking the commitment? Or did you keep the commitment and suffer the consequences?
3. What is your definition of an idol?
4. Is it easier to get rid of a secret idol or one that is obvious to others?
5. Had you been Joshua, would you have viewed the day of covenant renewal a day of victory, or a day that would eventually result in condemnation?
6. As Joshua faced his own death, how do you think he might have evaluated his life? What do you think were his toughest assignments? What lasting impact do you think he had on the nation Israel? Do you think he had any regrets? What might he have considered his biggest blessing?
7. What do you own that are symbols of commitments you have made? If a stranger walked into your house today, what would they see that would indicate your commitments and priorities?
8. Jesus tells us to count the cost before deciding to follow him. What has following Jesus cost you?
9. Joshua was adamant in telling Israel to think through their commitment to serve God—to choose between God and idols. He said they couldn't have it both ways. Do you think we have it both ways? Are there idols in our home? School? Church? Office?
10. What do you think made Israel especially vulnerable to idols? How could/should this have been avoided?
11. What qualities do you think made Joshua a strong leader? Are these the same qualities we look for in a leader today? Explain.
12. What are you doing in your family to see that the next generation follows the Lord?

¹Howard, David, *The New American Commentary*, p. 416.

²*The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 3*, p. 364.

³*The New American Commentary*, p. 430.

⁴Ibid, p. 432.

⁵Dale Ralph Davis, *Joshua*, p. 192.

⁶F. F. Bruce, *An Expanded Paraphrase of the Epistles of Paul* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1965), p. 223, 225.

⁷Davis, *Joshua*, p. 196.

⁸*The New American Commentary*, p. 438.

⁹Ibid, p. 444.

¹⁰*The Bible Expositor's Commentary, Vol. 3*, p. 371.