



EXPLORE **THE BIBLE**®

Adults

Joshua; Judges; Ruth

Personal Study Guide (CSB)

Summer 2026



MAKING HISTORY

History never occurs in a vacuum. Any number of forces move individuals toward action. And those actions shape history. It might be tempting to think people know they are making history in the moment, but, in most cases, that's not how it works.

Sure, we can identify times when historical figures knew they were setting a new standard. America's founding fathers probably had a sense of history in 1776. And Neil Armstrong recognized the importance of "one small step for man" as he touched the moon's surface in 1969.

But those moments are the exceptions, not the rule. For the most part, history only becomes history over time. The books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth give us a snapshot of Israel's history and the people who helped make it. Moses, the nation's main history maker since it left Egypt, was gone. Now, Israel looked to Joshua to lead them into the promised land.

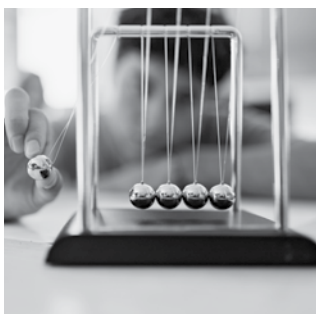
Later, in their own way, the judges made their mark on history. Meanwhile, an obscure Moabitess named Ruth rewrote the direction of history—for Israel and for every member of the human race. These people were not perfect, but God used them to make a difference because that's what God does.

God has a plan for your life, as well. He wants to use you to change history. But before you can touch the future, you've got to come clean with Him in the present. You do that through a personal relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus. If you've never made the decision to follow Him, you can do it today. Here's all you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITER



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FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**



“Moses my servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses” (Josh. 1:2-3).

From the very first verses of the book of Joshua, God communicated His plans for His people. They would (finally!) cross the Jordan River and enter the promised land. A generations-old commitment God made to Abraham would at long last be realized. Joshua would be their new leader. The next steps of their journey were important ones. Courage would be needed. Deep faith in God, the One who had painstakingly led them thus far, was a requirement. Stepping out in faith would be a daily exercise.

As we study the Israelites’ entrance into the promised land and the years that follow, let’s not miss the details. God’s plans for His people and His faithfulness to His promises shouldn’t be overlooked. He would use faithful men and women to accomplish what He had in mind. The Israelites’ faith would be tested. Through it all, God’s character would be on full display.

I hope this quarter’s study brings you a deeper understanding of God’s Word, preparing you for any “next steps” God has for you. May His promises give you daily strength to faithfully follow where He leads.

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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Explore

Discover





Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Achan [AY kuhn]—person whose theft of a portion of the spoil from Jericho brought God’s displeasure and military defeat of the Israelite army (Josh. 7).

Adam—a city near Jordan River, where waters of Jordan heaped up so Israel could cross over to conquer the land (Josh. 3:16).

Anakim [AN uh kim]—a people group living in Hebron before being destroyed by Joshua. Their remnants then lived among the Philistines (Josh. 11:22). These tall people were part of the Nephilim (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33).

Ashtoreth [ASH tuh reth]—Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war that appears to be the sister of the goddess Anath and the spouse of the god Baal (Judg. 2:13; 10:6).

Boaz [BOH az]—wealthy relative of Naomi’s husband who married Ruth and became Obed’s father, David’s grandfather, and an ancestor of Christ (Ruth 4:13-17).

Caleb [KAY luhb]—one of the twelve spies sent by Moses to scout out the territory of Canaan (Num. 13:6). He was one of only two who brought back a positive report (13:30). At the age of 85 he conquered Hebron (Josh. 14).

Hebron [HEE bruhn]—a major city in the hill country of Judah about 19 miles south of Jerusalem. After his separation from Lot,

Abraham moved to Hebron. Four centuries later, when Moses sent the twelve spies into Canaan, the tribe of Anak lived there. After the conquest of Canaan, Hebron was given to Caleb (Josh. 14:9-13).

Jerubbaal [jer uhb-BAY uhl]—personal name meaning “Baal judges”; another name for Gideon (Judg. 6:25-32; 7:1).

Manasseh [muh NASS uh]—one of the twelve tribes of Israel; when the promised land was allotted, half of the tribe of Manasseh settled on the east bank of the Jordan and half on the west (Josh. 14:4).

Rahab [RAY hab]—a prostitute in Jericho who hid the two Hebrew spies sent by Joshua (Josh. 2:1).

Og [AHG]—Amorite king defeated by the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan (Num. 21:33-35; Deut. 1:4; 3:1-13); he was the last survivor of the Rephaim or giants (Deut. 3:11).

Sihon [SIGH hahn]—Amorite king who allied with Og against the Israelites. The tribes of Reuben and Gad settled in the area formerly held by Sihon, just east of the Jordan River (Josh. 2:10).

Zabdi [ZAB digh]—a son of Zerah and the grandfather of Achan (Josh. 7:18).

Zerahite [ZEE ruh hight]—a clan from the tribe of Judah from which came Achan (Josh. 7:17).

BIBLE READING PLAN



JUNE

- 1. Joshua 1:1-18
- 2. Joshua 2:1-14
- 3. Joshua 2:15-24
- 4. Joshua 3:1-17
- 5. Joshua 4:1-13
- 6. Joshua 4:14-24
- 7. Joshua 5:1-15
- 8. Joshua 6:1-14
- 9. Joshua 6:15-27
- 10. Joshua 7:1-15
- 11. Joshua 7:16-26
- 12. Joshua 8:1-13
- 13. Joshua 8:14-29
- 14. Joshua 8:30-35
- 15. Joshua 9:1-15
- 16. Joshua 9:16-27
- 17. Joshua 10:1-15
- 17. Joshua 10:16-27
- 19. Joshua 10:28-43
- 20. Joshua 11:1-15
- 21. Joshua 11:16-23
- 22. Joshua 12:1-24
- 23. Joshua 13:1-33
- 24. Joshua 14:1-15
- 25. Joshua 15:1-19
- 26. Joshua 15:20-63
- 27. Joshua 16:1-10
- 28. Joshua 17:1-18
- 29. Joshua 18:1-28
- 30. Joshua 19:1-51

JULY

- 1. Joshua 20:1-9
- 2. Joshua 21:1-45
- 3. Joshua 22:1-12
- 4. Joshua 22:13-26
- 5. Joshua 22:27-34
- 6. Joshua 23:1-16
- 7. Joshua 24:1-13
- 8. Joshua 24:14-33
- 9. Judges 1:1-20
- 10. Judges 1:21-36
- 11. Judges 2:1-13
- 12. Judges 2:14-23
- 13. Judges 3:1-11
- 14. Judges 3:12-31
- 15. Judges 4:1-10
- 16. Judges 4:11-24
- 17. Judges 5:1-15
- 17. Judges 5:16-31
- 19. Judges 6:1-10
- 20. Judges 6:11-24
- 21. Judges 6:25-32
- 22. Judges 6:33-40
- 23. Judges 7:1-14
- 24. Judges 7:15-25
- 25. Judges 8:1-9
- 26. Judges 8:10-21
- 27. Judges 8:22-35
- 28. Judges 9:1-21
- 29. Judges 9:22-41
- 30. Judges 9:42-57
- 31. Judges 10:1-18

AUGUST

- 1. Judges 11:1-11
- 2. Judges 11:12-28
- 3. Judges 11:29-40
- 4. Judges 12:1-15
- 5. Judges 13:1-16
- 6. Judges 13:17-25
- 7. Judges 14:1-9
- 8. Judges 14:10-20
- 9. Judges 15:1-13
- 10. Judges 15:14-20
- 11. Judges 16:1-11
- 12. Judges 16:12-20
- 13. Judges 16:21-31
- 14. Judges 17:1-13
- 15. Judges 18:1-13
- 16. Judges 18:14-31
- 17. Judges 19:1-15
- 17. Judges 19:16-30
- 19. Judges 20:1-10
- 20. Judges 20:11-28
- 21. Judges 20:29-48
- 22. Judges 21:1-12
- 23. Judges 21:13-25
- 24. Ruth 1:1-15
- 25. Ruth 1:16-22
- 26. Ruth 2:1-9
- 27. Ruth 2:10-23
- 28. Ruth 3:1-9
- 29. Ruth 3:10-18
- 30. Ruth 4:1-12
- 31. Ruth 4:13-22

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



JOSHUA

The book of Joshua is named after the man who became the leader of Israel when Moses died. It contains the record of the Israelites who crossed the Jordan River to enter the promised land. The twenty-four chapters of the book are divided into four sections. The first section is chapters 1–5. It describes how the Israelites crossed the Jordan and how God prepared the nation for its conquest of Canaan. The second section, chapters 6–12, describes how the Israelites conquered the land and records who they defeated. Third, chapters 13–21 explain how Joshua and Israel's leaders divided and allocated the land to each of the tribes. The final section, chapters 22–24, comprises Joshua's final words of exhortation and warning to Israel.

JUDGES

The book of Judges is divided into three sections. Its introduction in 1:1–3:6 provides a general overview of what happened to the Israelites in the land of Canaan from the time just after Joshua died until the rise of Israel's first king, Saul. Because the Israelites violated the Lord's covenant He had made with their forefathers, He declared that He would no longer drive out the Canaanites who remained after Joshua died (2:21). As a result, the period of the judges was one of the darkest times in Israel's history.

Judges 3:7–16:31 is the main section of the book. It describes the events that took place during the time of the judges. There are twelve judges in all mentioned in the book. However, six of the judges receive much more attention than the other six judges. The final section of the book of Judges (17:1–21:25) describes two events that illustrate just how morally depraved Israel became as they lived in an anarchy when “everyone did whatever seemed right to him” during the period of the judges.

RUTH

The setting of the book of Ruth is the period of the judges, which bridges the time between the conquest and the rise of King David. David's genealogy forms the conclusion of this book. Therefore, Ruth was written sometime after David was born. The book shows that the messianic line goes through a heritage of godly people such as Boaz and Ruth to David. Their virtues stand in contrast to the corrupt nation of Israel during the period of the judges. Nevertheless, even in Israel's darkest times, the Lord did not forget His covenant promises to His people. This is also ironic given Ruth was a Moabitess, demonstrating that often God graciously includes and uses the most unlikely people to carry out His purposes.

OUTLINE



JOSHUA

- I. **Preparation for Possessing the Land** (Josh. 1:1-5:12)
- II. **Victories in the Land** (Josh. 5:13-12:24)
- III. **Allotment of the Land** (Josh. 13:1-21:45)
- IV. **Worship of God in the Land** (Josh. 22:1-24:33)

JUDGES

- I. **Prologue** (Judg. 1:1-3:6)
- II. **The Judges** (Judg. 3:7-16:31)
- III. **Epilogue** (Judg. 17:1-21:25)

RUTH

- I. **A Family Fleeing** (Ruth 1:1-22)
- II. **A Family Sought** (Ruth 2:1-3:18)
- III. **A Family Redeemed** (Ruth 4:1-22)



▶ *Strong and Courageous* ◀

JOSHUA'S COURAGE WAS GROUNDED IN THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S TRUSTWORTHINESS.

JOSHUA 1:1-11,16-18

Russell Kelso Carter was a professor at the Pennsylvania Military Academy in 1886 when he wrote “Standing on the Promises.” For well over a century this great hymn has been sung by believers all over the world. Why? Because its lyrics remind believers that God is trustworthy and His promises “cannot fail.” Consequently, those who are trusting in God “cannot fall.” Joshua discovered these truths and grounded his courage in the assurance of God’s trustworthiness.



What makes a person trustworthy?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 1:1-18

There are few things more intimidating than being the replacement of a person in leadership who is revered by those whom he led and is the only leader they have ever known. This was the situation when God called Joshua to be Moses's replacement and lead Israel into the promised land.

The Lord providentially prepared Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He was raised by Pharaoh's daughter and thus grew up knowing the ways of the Egyptians and the plight of the Israelites. God providentially moved him to Midian, where he learned the ways of the wilderness. Then God commissioned him to become His leader and bring Israel out of Egypt. God performed many wondrous miracles through Moses. At Mount Sinai, God gave Moses the law to give to the people. Exodus 33:11 states, "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face."

When God called Joshua to be Moses's replacement, humanly speaking, Joshua had every reason to be intimidated. He had witnessed many of the things God did through Moses. However, as with Moses, God had prepared Joshua for his task. Joshua had led the Israelites into battle and witnessed God give them victory (Ex. 17:9-13). He accompanied Moses part way up Mount Sinai when Moses went alone to the top to receive God's law, and he returned with Moses when Moses confronted Israel and its sin (24:13-18; 32:15-20). From the time he was a young man, Joshua served as Moses's assistant until Moses's death (33:11). Furthermore, Joshua along with Caleb were the only two spies who saw the promised land and believed that God would give it to them (Num. 14:6-10). Finally, just before Moses's death, God told Moses that Joshua had His Spirit in him. He instructed Moses to bring Joshua before the high priest and the entire community of Israel to lay his hands on him and commission him to be his replacement (Num. 27:18-22).

God's assignment for Joshua would be different in nature from what Moses's assignment had been. Nonetheless, as with Moses, God providentially prepared Joshua for the task before him. Therefore, there was every reason for Joshua to trust the Lord and be strong and courageous.



As you read Joshua 1:1-11,16-18, note God's words of encouragement. Consider how these words impacted Joshua.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

GOD'S PROMISE (JOSH. 1:1-5)

¹ After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. ³ I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great river, the Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or abandon you."

VERSE 1

Deuteronomy 34:1-8 records Moses's death. Moses had led Israel for forty years, and during that time Moses and Joshua became close. For instance, in Numbers 13:16, Moses changed Joshua's name from Hoshea, meaning "deliverance," to the name Joshua, which means "Yahweh saves." In the Greek traditions of the Old Testament, it is the same name as Jesus in the New Testament. Joshua's name foreshadows how the Lord Himself would deliver the Israelites from their enemies.

What's more, God had instructed Moses to be a mentor and encourager to Joshua because the Lord had chosen him to be Moses's successor (Deut. 3:21-22,28). Joshua learned to assist before becoming the leader. It is also significant that ***the LORD spoke to Joshua***. This demonstrated it was time for Joshua to take on the mantle of leadership. Just as God had personally spoken to Moses to instruct him on what he should do concerning Israel, the Lord was now doing the same with Joshua as He spoke to him.

VERSES 2-3

The Israelites mourned Moses's death for thirty days east of the Jordan River in the plains of Moab. After that, it was time for Joshua and the people to prepare to cross over the Jordan and enter Canaan. Although it may appear to be an obvious statement, God's pointing out that Moses His servant was dead was a way of saying the time for mourning was over. There was still more to be done. Moses's death may have marked the passing of the greatest leader

Israel had ever known, but God's promises and plans for His people lived on. Many centuries before, the Lord had promised Abraham that He would give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. Now was time for it to happen. As the Lord was ready to fulfill His promise by giving the Israelites the land, His people needed to be ready to follow Him by crossing over the Jordan and receiving it.

The beginning of verse 3, ***I have given***, is connected to the end of verse 2, ***I am giving***. The Lord was emphasizing that the land the Israelites were about to conquer and inherit was His gift to His people. This is a major theme in the book of Joshua. Giving His covenant people the promised land of Canaan was an expression of God's grace. Therefore, they needed to understand that they themselves would not and could not be able to take it themselves, even though God would use human agents to bring it to fruition. What's more, using both the present and past tense together here recognizes that, while the Israelites were presently receiving this gift, the land had already belonged to them since God declared it so. This concept began back in Genesis when God promised the land to Abraham (Gen 15:18; 35:12). Israel had been waiting on God's timing to possess what was already theirs.

Israel had been waiting on God's timing to possess what was already theirs.

VERSES 4-5

These words closely echo the words God spoke when He described the land to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-20. The statement, ***No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live***, repeats almost verbatim much of what God promised the people through Moses in Deuteronomy 11:25a. By carefully repeating these statements in this way, God was assuring Joshua and the people that He would be faithful to keep the promises He had made.

What God promised Joshua in the second part of verse 5 must have comforted Joshua and filled him with confidence at the same time. God promised, ***I will be with you, just as I was with Moses***. God made the same promise to Moses when He commissioned Moses to lead His people out of Egypt (Ex. 3:12). Joshua's memories of seeing what God did through Moses surely helped Joshua understand the meaning and weight of this promise. Also, God promised that He would ***not leave*** or ***abandon*** Joshua.

Joshua's success depended on the presence of God. This means the Lord would be an ever-present, faithful helper to Joshua.



How have you experienced God's faithfulness?

JOSHUA'S ASSIGNMENT (JOSH. 1:6-11)

⁶ **“Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their ancestors to give them as an inheritance.**

⁷ **Above all, be strong and very courageous to observe carefully the whole instruction my servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. ⁸ This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do.**

⁹ **Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” ¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, ¹¹ “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get provisions ready for yourselves, for within three days you will be crossing the Jordan to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you to inherit.’”**

VERSE 6

Earlier, the Lord instructed Moses to encourage Joshua because He would enable Joshua to lead the people into the land of Canaan and receive their inheritance from the Lord (Deut. 1:38; 3:28). Here, it was the Lord Himself who was encouraging Joshua. This was the first time out of three times that the Lord would command Joshua to ***be strong and courageous*** in this section. This echoed the words of Moses's encouragement in Deuteronomy 31:6-7. Israel would need to see Joshua's strength and courage as an example to follow in the face of what would appear to be insurmountable challenges in the land of Canaan. Joshua would be the one who would distribute the land to the people as their inheritance.

VERSE 7

Most importantly, Joshua needed to ***be strong and very courageous*** to ***carefully*** obey everything God commanded him. He was not to deviate from it at all. Obeying this command would be at the heart of Joshua's success. This is the reason the word *very* is added. Joshua's obedience to God's Word was more important than any military strategies he might employ in the heat of battle. The conquest would be more of a spiritual endeavor than it would be physical. Joshua would display his dependence on God and devotion to God through his faithful obedience to God. Then, God would receive all the glory for every victory won.



KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible is a perfect treasure of divine instruction.
(See Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

VERSES 8-9

The command to not allow God's Word to ***depart from your mouth*** is closely connected to the command to ***meditate*** on God's Word. In Hebrew, the word *meditate* literally means to read in an undertone or to mutter. The idea here is that Joshua was commanded to continually speak God's Word to himself so that he would not only know what it said but also so that he would thoroughly obey ***everything written in it***. While it is true that knowledge of God's Word does not guarantee obedience to it, it is safe to say that it is impossible to meticulously obey what one does not know. All who love the Lord will commit themselves to knowing His Word so that they may obey Him (John 14:15,21a).

God promised that Joshua would ***prosper and succeed in whatever*** he did if he obeyed Him. Prosperity and success in the Old Testament rarely focus on material wealth. The idea is that one will succeed in fulfilling a respectable purpose. Joshua would have success in doing everything God was calling him to do if he obeyed God's Word. He would fulfill God's purpose for his life. When believers seek to know God's Word and obey it to glorify God, then in their pursuit to honor Him they become more like Christ.

Finally, the Lord concluded His instructions to Joshua, stating a third time for Joshua to ***be strong and courageous***. Stating this command three times was the most emphatic way of

communicating its importance in their culture. Nevertheless, to emphasize the importance of this even more, God restated it negatively, imploring Joshua, ***Do not be afraid or discouraged.*** God's instructions to Joshua infer that from a human perspective, Joshua would have reason to be afraid, yet there was no reason to be afraid because God was with him wherever Joshua would go.

VERSES 10-11

As the Lord's appointed leader of Israel, Joshua wasted no time to act. Just as he received the Lord's commands, Joshua issued commands to the leaders of Israel. As a wise leader, Joshua knew he could not lead the people by himself any more than Moses could. The command was to have all the people gather provisions and ready themselves to break camp in three days to cross the Jordan River, to enter the land of Canaan, and finally ***take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you to inherit.***



What role does God's Word play in our definition of success?



How does God's Word provide courage and direction for our lives?

ISRAEL'S RESPONSE (JOSH. 1:16-18)

¹⁶ They answered Joshua, "Everything you have commanded us we will do, and everywhere you send us we will go. ¹⁷ We will obey you, just as we obeyed Moses in everything. Certainly the LORD your God will be with you, as he was with Moses. ¹⁸ Anyone who rebels against your order and does not obey your words in all that you command him, will be put to death. Above all, be strong and courageous!"

VERSES 16-17

When the Israelites came to the land east of the Jordan River, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh requested

of Moses to allow them to settle on that side of the river. Moses granted their request (Num. 32:1-42; Deut. 2:26-3:17). However, Moses required them to help the other nine and a half tribes in conquering the land on the other side of the Jordan. Therefore, as the people prepared to cross the Jordan, Joshua reminded the two and a half tribes of their promise to help with the conquest (Josh. 1:13-15). They replied to Joshua by saying they would obey everything he commanded them to do just as they had obeyed Moses. Furthermore, they declared they recognized that the Lord would be with Joshua just as He was with Moses.

VERSE 18

To communicate the gravity of this moment and the sincerity of their commitment to Joshua, these tribes committed to imposing the death penalty on any of their people who refused to obey Joshua. With that, they also encouraged Joshua as they communicated their solidarity with the Lord and support of Joshua by also calling on their leader to *be strong and courageous*.



How does a shared commitment to God's purposes encourage other people?



BIBLE SKILL: *Note repeated words and phrases to gain additional insights.*

Biblical writers sometimes used repetition of key words or phrases to emphasize a theme or message. Identify and examine the repeated message or challenge in Joshua 1:6,7,9,18. Who was the speaker in each instance? Who was the recipient of the challenge in each verse? Think about what this phrase's repetition helps communicate in Joshua 1:1-18. What message does the repeated phrase convey to Bible readers today?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We can find courage in the truth that God keeps His promises.
- + We can discern God’s best for our lives by studying His Word.
- + We can encourage the kingdom work of others by supporting them and partnering with them.



As a group, discuss how you can encourage, support, and partner with one another in kingdom work. What are the advantages to having a commitment to working together with other believers over having an individualistic mentality toward kingdom work?



What are some of God’s promises that help you find courage in day-to-day life? How does remembering the promises of God in day-to-day life help prepare you for the challenging or difficult seasons in life?

Memorize Joshua 1:8.

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.



▶ *Amazing Grace* ◀

GOD USED RAHAB, AN IMPERFECT PERSON,
TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PLANS.

JOSHUA 2:4-21

The Bible demonstrates how God often uses flawed, unlikely people to do His will. For example, Abraham and Sarah both laughed in unbelief when God told them they would have a son in their old age. God made David the greatest king of Israel and established an eternal covenant with him even though David came from humble beginnings and committed egregious sins. Paul had been a persecutor of believers before his conversion. Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, is another unlikely person God used to accomplish His plans.

 **Why does God so often use unlikely, imperfect people to accomplish His purposes?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 2:1-24

In Deuteronomy 9:1, Moses told the nation, “Listen, Israel: Today you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and drive out nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities fortified to the heavens.” Jericho was the first of these large, fortified cities the Israelites faced as they entered the promised land. Joshua sent two spies to scout the area so they could bring him a report on what his troops should expect when they went up against it.

Archaeologists believe Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world. It is located in the well-watered lower Jordan Valley. Its location was important because several routes that led west into the central hill country of Canaan emanated from the city. Therefore, it was a key junction for those traveling east across the Jordan into Moab and beyond.

Ancient Jericho must have been an incredible and alarming site to the spies when they saw it for the first time. It was built to defend the people who took refuge within it. Located on high ground, the city was surrounded by an immense stone wall at its base. Higher up at the crest stood another wall that towered about forty-six feet high. There was no way the Israelites had the means to conquer this massive, fortified city on their own. Archaeologists estimate there were thousands of people within the city when the Israelites approached it.

Rahab and her family were citizens of Jericho. Joshua 2:15 indicates her house was part of the outer fortifications located on the city wall. Archaeologists have discovered that at the north end of ancient Jericho’s ruins there is a small portion of the wall that was left standing and there were houses built against it. This area is only a short distance from the Judean wilderness where the two spies Rahab saved hid for three days before returning to Joshua. Some suggest this is possibly the area where Rahab lived.



Read Joshua 2:4-21. List the reasons Rahab was an unlikely candidate to serve the Lord.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

A BOLD ACT (JOSH. 2:4-7)

⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. So she said, “Yes, the men did come to me, but I didn’t know where they were from. ⁵ At nightfall, when the city gate was about to close, the men went out, and I don’t know where they were going. Chase after them quickly, and you can catch up with them!” ⁶ But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them among the stalks of flax that she had arranged on the roof. ⁷ The men pursued them along the road to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as they left to pursue them, the city gate was shut.

VERSES 4-5

Verses 1-3 indicate Joshua sent two spies to go and scout out the land before them, “especially Jericho.” Accordingly, the spies went as they were directed and ended up at the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Rahab’s house was a logical place for the spies to end up. It was likely an inn, tavern, or combination of the two. There is no indication the spies had immoral intentions in choosing to stay there. With people coming and going at night, such a venue in Jericho—which was a hub for travelers from various regions—should have allowed the spies to blend in without being noticed.

However, it is for the same reasons that the king of Jericho had his own spies there as well. Whether the informant was a spy or not, verses 2-3 indicate someone spotted and identified the Israelite spies and immediately reported their presence and location to Jericho’s king. The king sent men to Rahab demanding she turn in the men who “came to investigate the entire land” (v. 3). The king apparently knew why the spies had come, and Rahab’s refusal to cooperate would have been understood as an act of treason.

Rahab apparently expected the king’s men to come, understood the spies’ mission, and was sympathetic to their cause. Although she confirmed to the king’s men that the spies had been there, she communicated that she knew nothing about them. In fact, she said the men exited the city when it turned dark, she didn’t know where they were going, and the king’s men had better give chase quickly if they were to have any chance of catching up with them. In anticipation of the arrival of the king’s men, Rahab had hidden the spies from the king’s men.

VERSES 6-7

The flat roofs on houses in ancient Canaan enabled people to expose things to the sun—like fruit that needed to ripen and wet grain and laundry that needed drying. The making of linen from flax was a common activity in households. Part of this process required soaking the three to four feet stalks to loosen the fibers. After soaking them, people spread the stalks out on their roofs to dry. These drying stalks of flax provided a perfect place under which Rahab could hide the spies because of the size of the stalks and because the king’s agents would have been accustomed to seeing them on rooftops. The Scriptures do not justify Rahab’s lying any more than it does her life as a prostitute. Furthermore, the Lord in His omnipotence could have saved the spies any way He chose. What is commended in Scripture is Rahab’s faith in God; she put her life in danger to help the spies (Heb. 11:31). Rahab is also part of the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

The king’s men believed Rahab and quickly left in pursuit. Once they exited the city, its gate was shut. These agents went as far as *the fords of the Jordan* River to find and capture the spies while Rahab still hid them in her home.



What is the relationship between boldness and faith?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Titus 2:11-14.)

A KIND ACTION (JOSH. 2:8-13)

⁸ Before the men fell asleep, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and everyone who lives in the land is panicking because of you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings you completely destroyed across the Jordan.

¹¹ When we heard this, we lost heart, and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹² Now please swear to me by the LORD that you will also show kindness to my father's family, because I showed kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death."

VERSES 8-9

Before the spies settled down for the night on the roof of Rahab's house, she went up to them to explain why she covered for them. Rahab began by sharing her knowledge of Israel's God, declaring, ***I know that the LORD has given you this land.*** She used the Lord's personal, covenant name, revealing that she had an understanding of who He is. What's more, Rahab used the past tense, *given*, not "is giving" or "will give." Her faith in the Lord was such that she believed whatever He said was as good as already done. As a result, Rahab and everyone else in that region were terrified and panicking because of the Israelites.

God uses what He does for and through His people to reveal who He is to unbelievers.

VERSES 10-11

Before the Israelites took a step to cross the Jordan, God had instilled a fear within Israel's enemies because of the many victories He already had given them. Rahab mentioned two events her people had heard of. First, they had heard of how God parted the ***Red Sea*** and saved His people out of Egyptian bondage. Second, news had reached the citizens of Jericho of Israel's victories over the great conqueror •***Sihon***, king of the Amorites, and king •***Og***, who ruled over sixty fortified cities of the Amorites (Num. 21:21-26; Deut. 3:3-7). The psalmist refers to them as mighty kings whom the Lord "slaughtered" (Ps. 135:10-12).

After revealing her knowledge of what the Lord had done for Israel at the Red Sea and against their formidable enemies, Rahab described again the impact those events had on her and her people. They ***lost heart*** and ***everyone's courage failed***. Rahab's description of their reaction to the approaching Israelites reveals that the Lord was fulfilling the prophetic words Israel sang in praise to Him

after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 15:14-16). We can learn three important truths here: (1) God uses what He does for and through His people to reveal who He is to unbelievers, (2) He keeps His promises, and (3) unbelievers have reason to fear the Lord's judgment.

Rahab declared her faith in God, asserting that ***the LORD your God is God***. Rahab's proclamation, He is God ***in heaven above and on earth below***, indicates not only that she believed the Lord has dominion over all creation, but that He is the only God and there is no other.

VERSES 12-13

The Hebrew word translated ***kindness*** is *hesed*. It appears some 250 times in the Old Testament and almost always denotes solidarity between people. It is the word most often used in the Old Testament to denote the Lord's faithful, loving kindness toward His people. Rahab used this word twice to emphasize her commitment to God and His people. When people place their faith in the Lord, they commit themselves to His people. Rahab demonstrated this when she showed kindness to the spies. Her request was that they reciprocate by showing kindness to her and her family by sparing their lives when the Israelites conquered Jericho.



How should our beliefs about God impact the way we treat others?

A DARING ESCAPE (JOSH. 2:14-16)

¹⁴ The men answered her, “We will give our lives for yours. If you don’t report our mission, we will show kindness and faithfulness to you when the LORD gives us the land.” ¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, since she lived in a house that was built into the wall of the city. ¹⁶ “Go to the hill country so that the men pursuing you won’t find you,” she said to them. “Hide there for three days until they return; afterward, go on your way.”

VERSE 14

The spies promised Rahab they would give their lives for her life as long as she did not betray them to her people.

Additionally, they promised to show Rahab ***kindness and faithfulness*** when it was time for the Lord to give Israel Jericho and the surrounding area. These spies saw the formidable fortifications of Jericho yet were confident the Lord would give them the victory.

VERSES 15-16

The wall of the city was also a wall of Rahab's house. It was not unusual for large, populated, walled cities to utilize every inch of space within them in this way. Acting in good faith, Rahab lowered a rope out her window, allowing the two spies to escape. As she did, she gave them instructions to keep themselves safely hidden from the king's agents who were searching for them. She directed them to go to the Judean hill country in the opposite direction of the Jordan River where the king's men expected them to flee since Israel was camped on the other side of it. She instructed them to stay hidden in those hills for three days until the king's men gave up their search.



Why does faith in God require obedient action?

A FIRM ASSURANCE (JOSH. 2:17-21)

¹⁷ The men said to her, “We will be free from this oath you made us swear, ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you tie this scarlet cord to the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, mother, brothers, and all your father’s family into your house. ¹⁹ If anyone goes out the doors of your house, his death will be his own fault, and we will be innocent. But if anyone with you in the house should be harmed, his death will be our fault. ²⁰ And if you report our mission, we are free from the oath you made us swear.” ²¹ “Let it be as you say,” she replied, and she sent them away. After they had gone, she tied the scarlet cord to the window.

VERSES 17-21

As they were exiting the window, the spies gave Rahab some vital instructions. If she did not follow these instructions, then they would no longer be obligated to the oath they had sworn to her. First, they told her to tie a scarlet cord to the window through

which they were escaping. Its purpose was to show the Israelites what household's inhabitants they were to spare in their assault. It is reminiscent of the blood that was placed on the doorframes of the Israelites and the spared lives of the Israelite firstborn in Egypt during the tenth plague. As the Israelites trusted the Lord to spare their lives, Rahab had to trust God that His people would spare her.

Second, Rahab needed to bring her family into the house and make sure they stayed there. If any of her family members failed to stay within, then the spies would not be responsible for their deaths. However, if any of her family members were to be killed within the house, then the spies would bear responsibility for them.

Third, if Rahab should betray the spies by reporting their mission to the authorities in Jericho, they would be released from the oath they made.

Rahab communicated her faith in the Lord and His people again, saying she understood and would do as they had instructed her. As soon as the spies departed, she tied the scarlet cord to the window. Her obedience was yet another demonstration of her faith in God as she put her life and the lives of her family in His hands.



What are some signs that remind us of God's grace in our lives?



BIBLE SKILL: *Focus on a key word to gain a better understanding of a biblical text.*

Look up the word “kindness” (Hebrew *hesed*) in a Bible dictionary (Josh. 2:12). What special significance does this term have in the Old Testament? Read Exodus 15:13 and 2 Samuel 16:17 where the term is used. How did Rahab show loyalty to the spies? How did the spies demonstrate loyalty to her?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Following God often requires leaving one's comfort zone and stepping out in faith.
- + We can be encouraged that God's acts will always demonstrate His character.
- + Relying on God's grace leads to security, even in difficult situations.
- + We can be assured of God's work in our lives by regularly reflecting on what He has done in the past.



In your group, what are ways you can encourage one another to rely on God's grace even in difficult times? How does relying on God's grace lead to security during difficult times?



What has God done in your life in the past to assure you that He is at work in your life? How do God's acts in your life demonstrate His character?

Memorize Hebrews 11:31.



Prayer Needs



▶ *Remembering God's Works* ◀

GOD INSTRUCTED THE PEOPLE TO SET UP A MEMORIAL
AS A REMINDER OF HIS POWER.

JOSHUA 3:14-4:9

Archaeologists have discovered that ancient civilizations erected statues and built monumental structures to celebrate and memorialize significant people and events. These memorials helped following generations understand their identity and recognize how they became who they are. In the Bible, God often instructed His people to erect memorials. It was so that they would never forget who God is, never forget they belonged to Him, and always remember they could trust Him in the present and for the future.

 **What are some prominent memorials you can think of? Why are they significant, and what impact do they have on people today?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 3:1–5:15

Chapters 3–5 accentuate three essential things the Israelites needed to remember as they entered the land of Canaan: God’s presence, God’s power, and God’s promises. Joshua instructed the people to break camp and follow the ark of the covenant as it was carried by the levitical priests. The ark represented God’s presence with Israel. It would be the Lord who would lead His people into the promised land. We should also note that it is called the ark of the *covenant*. One of God’s covenant promises to Abraham’s descendants was the land of Canaan (Josh. 3:1-5).

When it was time to cross the Jordan, the Lord instructed the priests carrying the ark to step into the waters. Normally, this would have been a precarious situation. At that time of year, the Jordan’s banks were overflowing. Nevertheless, when the priests stepped into the water, the waters receded, making a dry path for all of Israel to cross (3:6-17; 4:23).

When every Israelite had completed crossing the Jordan, the Lord commanded Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe, to each take a stone from the riverbed. They were to carry it to their new camp west of the Jordan at Gilgal to set up as a memorial so that future generations would know this miraculous thing God had done. When the priests stepped out of the Jordan’s riverbed, the river resumed its course, flowing over the banks, flooding the area just as it was before (4:1-24).

Before the Israelites proceeded, three significant things happened. First, the men were circumcised. Apparently, their parents in the wilderness disobeyed God in this matter. God required circumcision as a sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:9-14). Second, they celebrated Passover, the commemoration of their redemption from slavery in Egypt. Finally, the Lord appeared to Joshua, again revealing His presence with him and the people (5:1-15).

 **Compare the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3:14-17 to the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14:15-31. What are the similarities?**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

DRY GROUND (JOSH. 3:14-17)

¹⁴ **When the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carried the ark of the covenant ahead of the people.** ¹⁵ **Now the Jordan overflows its banks throughout the harvest season.**

But as soon as the priests carrying the ark reached the Jordan, their feet touched the water at its edge ¹⁶ and the water flowing downstream stood still, rising up in a mass that extended as far as Adam, a city next to Zarethan. The water flowing downstream into the Sea of the Arabah—the Dead Sea—was completely cut off, and the people crossed opposite Jericho.

¹⁷ **The priests carrying the ark of the LORD’s covenant stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed on dry ground until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.**

VERSE 14

Verses 1-13 emphasize three important details that prepare us for verse 14. First, these preceding verses emphasize the ark of the covenant. It is mentioned seventeen times in chapters 3–4. When God established His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the Lord gave them His design for this sacred chest and commanded them to construct it to contain the Ten Commandments, the terms of the covenant God made with Israel. Later, Moses had Aaron place a jar of manna inside of it as a memorial of God’s faithful provision in the wilderness along with Aaron’s staff (Heb. 9:4). Importantly, the ark of the covenant also represented the presence of God. The lid of the ark was called the mercy seat, representing God’s throne. It rested in the holy of holies in the tabernacle. As verse 14 indicates, ***the priests*** were responsible for carrying it ***ahead of the people***.

Second, in verse 7 God told Joshua that He would exalt him before the people to demonstrate that, just as He was with Moses, He would be with Joshua when they crossed the Jordan. Exodus 14:31 indicates that it was when God parted the Red Sea and saved Israel from the Egyptians that the people believed Moses was truly God’s servant. Third, the crossing of the Jordan should be understood in light of the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14. In both instances, God separated the waters and heaped them up so that the Israelites could cross on dry ground. Both miracles were

displays of God's power on behalf of His people as He confirmed who His chosen leader was for Israel. As the priests carried the ark before the people, it was important for Israel to see God's demonstration of His power and glory again. Just as He led Israel out of captivity in Egypt by defeating their enemies, He was now victoriously leading them into the promised land. There the Lord would again defeat Israel's enemies and give His people their inheritance.

VERSES 15-16

This event happened in the spring when the Jordan River was in its flood stage. Typically, the Jordan was not difficult to cross. Throughout most of the year, the Jordan was anywhere from three to ten feet deep and ninety to a hundred feet wide. However, its being at flood stage means that the water was overflowing its banks, which also means that the depth and width of the river were significantly deeper and wider than normal. Jeremiah mentions that the Jordan had a dense thicket growing along its banks on both sides. This would have made the crossing even more difficult in its flooded state (Jer. 12:5; 49:19; 50:44). With these conditions, the river appeared to be impossible to cross. These circumstances highlight just how amazing this miracle was. When the priest's feet touched the water at its edge, the flowing water of the river stood still and then rose up just like the waters of the Red Sea. The city of **•Adam** was located about eighteen to nineteen miles north of the Dead Sea, meaning that nearly one third of the Jordan Valley was affected by what God did. The Lord delights in demonstrating His power in circumstances that are impossible for us. No one could take credit for what happened except the Lord.

The Lord delights in demonstrating His power in circumstances that are impossible for us.

VERSE 17

The priests carrying the ark of the LORD's covenant are important to what transpired because the ark represented God's throne and presence with His people. As the priests ***stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan*** with the ark of the covenant, it showed that Israel's mighty God was the One who miraculously did this. Every Israelite was able to cross the Jordan ***on dry ground*** just as their parents did when they crossed the Red Sea. The Lord

“completely cut off” (v. 16) the waters and patiently waited until every single Israelite got across to the other side. The Lord did not allow any one of His covenant people to be left behind.

 **Why are barriers an important part of our spiritual journey?**

The Lord does wonderful things for His people in the present with an eye to their future.

MEMORIAL STONES (JOSH. 4:1-7)

¹ **After the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD spoke to Joshua:** ² **“Choose twelve men from the people, one man for each tribe,** ³ **and command them: Take twelve stones from this place in the middle of the Jordan where the priests are standing, carry them with you, and set them down at the place where you spend the night.”** ⁴ **So Joshua summoned the twelve men he had selected from the Israelites, one man for each tribe,** ⁵ **and said to them, “Go across to the ark of the LORD your God in the middle of the Jordan. Each of you lift a stone onto his shoulder, one for each of the Israelite tribes,** ⁶ **so that this will be a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean to you?’** ⁷ **you should tell them, ‘The water of the Jordan was cut off in front of the ark of the LORD’s covenant. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan’s water was cut off.’ Therefore these stones will always be a memorial for the Israelites.”**

VERSE 1

Verse 1 is connected to everything that transpired in the previous chapter. This is purposely demonstrated by the writer’s repetition of the phrase ***the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan*** (3:17; 4:1). Old Testament writers repeated words and statements for the purpose of emphasis. Verse 17 in chapter 3 speaks of what was happening while all Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground, and verse 1 of chapter 4 addresses what happened after all the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

Everything that follows in chapter 4 must be understood in light of this miraculous thing God did for His people. Israel needed to remember this demonstration of His awesome power and faithfulness as they entered the land of Canaan and faced its challenges. This sets the tone for what is to follow. The Lord does wonderful things for His people in the present with an eye to their future.

VERSES 2-3

Verse 2 is also repetitive as it reiterates the instruction Joshua gave to the Israelites to choose a man from each tribe, as the Lord commanded in 3:12. This demonstrates that in all that was happening Joshua was careful to do what the Lord commanded him. Joshua was becoming the leader God called him to be in chapter 1. Obedience to God's Word is essential to being a servant of the Lord and a leader of His people. In verse 3, Joshua explained what God wanted the twelve men to do. Joshua commanded each of them to return to the riverbed of the Jordan, to take a stone from the place where the priests were standing in the middle of it, and carry their stones to the place where they would camp that evening.



KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.
(See Exodus 20:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:17.)

VERSES 4-7

What happens in verse 4 may seem rather unremarkable, but it continues to highlight the obedience of Joshua and all twelve tribes of Israel. The obedience of this generation of Israelites stands in stark contrast to their parents. Their parents saw the mighty acts of the Lord as He brought Egypt to its knees with the ten plagues. They experienced His wondrous salvation as He led Israel across the Red Sea on dry ground. They witnessed God's manifest presence at Mount Sinai. Nevertheless, they feared the Canaanites more than they feared the Lord. They were unwilling to trust and obey God, refusing to enter into the promised land. They had forgotten how powerful and faithful to His people the Lord is. It is a wonderful thing when the people of God trust and obey Him in light of who He is and what He has done.

Joshua instructed the twelve men representing each of the tribes of Israel to **go across to the ark of the LORD your God**. This highlights what Joshua 3–4 describes—Israel’s crossing the Jordan on dry land and entering into the place of God’s inheritance, the land of Canaan.

The writer’s description of what transpired here should remind believers that when Jesus saved us, He brought us out of the bondage of our sin and our wandering in the wilderness of disobedience and into our inheritance, which is in Him.

When the men reached the middle of the Jordan where the priests stood with the ark, each of them was instructed to **lift** what apparently was a sizable stone **onto his shoulder**. Each man’s stone would represent the tribe to which he belonged.

The stones would be a memorial of what God had done that day, cutting off the waters of the Jordan in front of the Lord’s ark and allowing the people to cross the river on dry ground into the promised land. Certainly, this memorial was to serve as a reminder to the people who crossed the Jordan that day, but it also was to be a witness to generations to come. When their children would ask them what the meaning of the stacked stones was, the parents could tell them what God had done. This should remind believers that, when God does a wonderful work in our lives, it is important for us to remember what God has done. Not only that, but it is essential we tell others what He has done, especially future generations.



What are some milestones that could remind people of God’s work in their lives?

LASTING REMINDERS (JOSH. 4:8-9)

⁸ The Israelites did just as Joshua had commanded them. The twelve men took stones from the middle of the Jordan, one for each of the Israelite tribes, just as the LORD had told Joshua. They carried them to the camp and set them down there.

⁹ Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing. The stones are still there today.

VERSES 8-9

The Israelites' obedience to Joshua demonstrates how God kept His promise of exalting Joshua in the sight of all Israel so that they would know God was with Joshua (3:7). Their obedience also demonstrates that the people recognized Joshua's commands came from God. Though Joshua is never called a prophet, he would be God's servant and spokesman to Israel.

Verse 8 indicates the twelve men set the stones in *the camp*. Verse 9 indicates Joshua set twelve stones in *the middle of the Jordan* where the priests stood. Most commentators indicate that this was probably not a second memorial but a reference to the same twelve stones that were carried to the west side of the Jordan. Verse 19 indicates the camp was located in Gilgal, a place that would have great significance in the life of Israel going forward. Thus, generations to come would have the opportunity to learn the meaning of the twelve stones. The writer of the book of Joshua indicates they still stood as a memorial at the time the book was written.



How can previous experiences with God strengthen a person's faith? How can we pass on our faith stories to future generations?



BIBLE SKILL: *Reflect personally on how a biblical passage applies to your own life.*

Joshua and the Israelites erected a memorial of twelve stones to help them remember and testify to what the Lord had done for them in the past. What specific memorials help you recall spiritual mountaintops in your experience with the Lord? What do you want to remember from those events? What tangible object can you use to help you remember God's work in your life at that time?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We can be sure that God never fails to provide perfectly for His people during their time of need.
- + We should establish memorials in our lives that consistently remind us of God's work on our behalf.
- + God expects believers to remember and testify to what He has done for them.



Discuss how God has been at work in your Bible study group. What significant things has God done over the years in your church? How could you as a group share these things with others?



Think about significant, specific spiritual milestones in your life when God has demonstrated His power and faithfulness to you. How could you make memorials of these events in your life to help you remember what God has done and give you opportunities to testify to others of God's faithfulness and goodness?



Memorize Psalm 77:11-12.

Prayer Needs



▶ *Winning Strategy* ◀

GOD GAVE HIS PEOPLE VICTORY WHEN
THEY TRUSTED AND OBEYED HIM.

JOSHUA 6:12-25

Parents of toddlers want to teach their children to trust them. Building this trust involves providing for their needs and protecting them. Some parents build trust by encouraging their child to leap into their arms when the jump appears to be a very long, dangerous leap to the child. When the child makes the jump and the parent catches him, both the parent and the child are exuberant. God often calls upon His children to make what appears to be enormous leaps to demonstrate to them that they can always trust in Him as they obey Him.



What is involved in learning to trust someone?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 6:1-27

About seven hundred years had passed since God promised Abraham He would give “this land” to Abraham’s offspring as their inheritance (Gen. 12:7). The Lord was about to fulfill that promise.

God determined that it was to be Joshua who would lead the people across the Jordan into the promised land to defeat the Canaanites and then settle into the land as the Lord had commanded them. In Joshua 1, God promised Joshua that He would always be with him and give him victory over Israel’s enemies. But He told Joshua that it would be essential for him to study and meditate on God’s Word so that he would obey God and be successful in everything that God was calling him to do.

In chapter 2, Joshua sent two spies into Jericho on a reconnaissance mission. The spies came upon Rahab. There, Rahab told the spies that the people in Jericho had heard how God saved Israel at the Red Sea and how the Israelites soundly defeated the Amorites east of the Jordan River. News of these events had struck fear in the hearts of the men of Jericho. Be that as it may, God was not finished demonstrating His might and commitment to Israel overall and to Joshua in particular.

In chapters 3–4, God exalted Joshua as His ordained leader over Israel as He parted the flooded waters of the Jordan River and led the Israelites into the land of Canaan on dry ground.

In Joshua 5, the men of Israel renewed the covenant with the Lord by being circumcised as He had commanded. They celebrated Passover and ate from the bounty of the land of Canaan. A mysterious figure identified as the “commander of the LORD’s army” (5:14) appeared to Joshua, confirming the Lord’s presence with Joshua as they prepared for the conquest of Jericho.

Chapter 6 recounts the dramatic and miraculous conquest of Jericho, the first major Canaanite city the Israelites faced after crossing the Jordan River.

 **As you read Joshua 6:12-25, pay attention to how Israel’s victory was tied to their faith and obedience.**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

INSTRUCTIONS OBEYED (JOSH. 6:12-14)

¹² Joshua got up early the next morning. The priests took the ark of the LORD, ¹³ and the seven priests carrying seven rams' horns marched in front of the ark of the LORD. While the rams' horns were blowing, the armed men went in front of them, and the rear guard went behind the ark of the LORD. ¹⁴ On the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

VERSES 12-14

Chapters 6–12 describe Israel's conquest of Canaan. Chapter 2 anticipated that the first city the Israelites would need to conquer was Jericho. Verse 1 indicates the city “was strongly fortified because of the Israelites—no one leaving or entering.” This recalls the city being on alert because of the two spies who had been spotted infiltrating the city. Rahab reported to the spies that the victories God had already given Israel over their enemies had completely sapped the residents of Jericho of their courage (Josh. 2:1-11).

God laid out the plan for Joshua (6:2-5). Of first importance, the Lord told him that He had already given Jericho to Joshua. When God makes a promise for the future, it is as good as done. What the Lord required of Joshua and the people was their trust and obedience. God commanded Joshua that he and his army were to march around the city with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant in the front and seven priests ahead of the ark carrying ram's horns.

Verses 6-11 indicate Joshua instructed the army not to “let one word come out of” their mouths while they were marching around the city until he gave the command. On the first day, everyone did as they were instructed. After having made their first circuit around the city, part of the army went to the front of the priests as they were blowing their horns, and the other part stayed in the rear behind the priests carrying the ark of the covenant. When all was completed according to the word of the Lord and Joshua's instructions, they returned to their camp for the night.

Verses 12-14 indicate that *early the next morning*, on the second day, Joshua, the priests, and the army arose and repeated what they had done the previous day. They continued doing this for six days just as the Lord had commanded them.



What was about to happen was because of what God had already done; they needed to act in light of it.

VICTORY ASSURED (JOSH. 6:15-19)

¹⁵ Early on the seventh day, they started at dawn and marched around the city seven times in the same way. That was the only day they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ After the seventh time, the priests blew the rams' horns, and Joshua said to the troops, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city. ¹⁷ But the city and everything in it are set apart to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live, because she hid the messengers we sent. ¹⁸ But keep yourselves from the things set apart, or you will be set apart for destruction. If you take any of those things, you will set apart the camp of Israel for destruction and make trouble for it. ¹⁹ For all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron, are dedicated to the LORD and must go into the LORD's treasury."

VERSES 15-16

All the instructions and activities that were given and transpired during the previous six days were in anticipation of what happened on the climactic seventh day. Unlike verses 12-14 that state they started early in the morning the first six days, verse 15 states that on the seventh day it was not just *early* but *they started at dawn*. That is, they started as early as they possibly could. Furthermore, they did not march around Jericho only once as they had done the previous six mornings. On the seventh day they marched around it seven times just as the Lord had commanded them.

This statement recalls the Lord's repeated instruction to Joshua to carefully observe the Lord's instruction. Their obedience to God's word would be the key to success (1:7-8). After marching around Jericho for the past six days, marching around the city seven times on the seventh day must have been exciting to the

Israelites while at the same time disconcerting to the residents of Jericho as they undoubtedly watched the circling spectacle transpire before them.

After they completed the seventh lap, the priests blew the rams' horns. Then Joshua told the troops, ***Shout!*** But before the soldiers had an opportunity to shout, Joshua continued addressing them. He had three important last statements to make before everything went down. First, Joshua reported what the Lord had said to him before they started marching around Jericho on the first day: ***the LORD has given you the city.*** This is a prophetic past tense. The event in the future is already as good as done since God said He would do it. This is how faithful God is to His promises. Every Israelite needed to know that what was about to happen was because of what God had already done; they needed to act in light of it. Furthermore, they needed to learn that when you follow God's plan, you will enjoy His victory.

VERSE 17

Second, because Rahab put her faith in the God of Israel and her life on the line to save the two Israelite spies, Joshua declared she and her family were to be spared (2:1-22). Everyone and everything else in the city were to be ***set apart to the LORD for destruction.***

This command refers back to the Lord's instruction to Israel through Moses that when they entered Canaan they were to destroy all its inhabitants. If the Israelites disobeyed God in this, then the people groups in Canaan would teach the Israelites to worship idols and Israel would sin against the Lord (Deut. 20:16-18). The fertility cult of the Canaanites with its promotion of immorality and materialism would be too much for the people of Israel to resist, as the book of Judges demonstrates.

This should serve as a reminder to believers today that we are to be separated from the world system that is under the power of the evil one (1 John 2:15-17).

***Everything we have comes from God
and belongs to Him.***

VERSES 18-19

Third, Joshua told the Israelites to understand the importance of keeping themselves away from everything that was ***set apart***

for the Lord. If they didn't, they too, along with all of the camp of Israel, would be **set apart for destruction**. The Israelites would have opportunities to plunder their enemies in other cities they would conquer. However, given Jericho was the first, the principle of firstfruits surfaces here. This principle that the people of God should recognize that everything we have comes from God and belongs to Him. Dedicating the first of what one receives acknowledges God as the Giver and also demonstrates one's trust in Him for the future. Firstfruits are also an acknowledgment of one's responsibility to be a faithful steward of what one has received from God to be used to serve and honor Him.



Why did God set the treasures of Jericho apart for Himself?



KEY DOCTRINE: *Stewardship*

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. (See Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 24:1.)

WALLS DESTROYED (JOSH. 6:20-21)

²⁰ **So the troops shouted, and the rams' horns sounded. When they heard the blast of the ram's horn, the troops gave a great shout, and the wall collapsed. The troops advanced into the city, each man straight ahead, and they captured the city.**

²¹ **They completely destroyed everything in the city with the sword—every man and woman, both young and old, and every ox, sheep, and donkey.**

VERSES 20-21

Verse 20 provides a brief summary of the fall of Jericho. The seven priests blew their rams' horns and the army **gave a great shout**, just as Joshua had commanded them. The magnificent wall surrounding the city of Jericho **collapsed**. The collapse was so sudden that their war shout very likely turned into a shout of victory as they witnessed what the Lord had done for them. After that, every soldier advanced into the city and together captured it.

The Israelites did exactly as the Lord had commanded them. They ***completely destroyed everything in the city***. No person or animal was spared. God’s judgment was complete as was His victory. The text gives little attention to Israel’s warriors. Instead, the emphasis of the narrative is that this victory over the people of Jericho as well as the execution of judgment on them belonged to the Lord. If only others in Jericho had put their faith in the Lord like Rahab did.



What potential victory is God asking you to trust Him to provide?

PROMISES KEPT (JOSH. 6:22-25)

²² Joshua said to the two men who had scouted the land, “Go to the prostitute’s house and bring the woman out of there, and all who are with her, just as you swore to her.” ²³ So the young men who had scouted went in and brought out Rahab and her father, mother, brothers, and all who belonged to her. They brought out her whole family and settled them outside the camp of Israel. ²⁴ They burned the 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. ²⁵ However, Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father’s family, and all who belonged to her, because she hid the messengers Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho, and she still lives in Israel today.

VERSES 22-23

Throughout chapters 1–6, emphasis has been placed on the importance of obedience to God and to His servant, Joshua. In 6:17, as the priests were about to blow the rams’ horns and the troops were about to shout, Joshua instructed his men to spare **•Rahab** and her family because she protected the two spies from the king of Jericho. Her faith in the Lord, her kindness to these men, and the promise they made to her would not be forgotten (Heb. 11:31). Therefore, it was fitting that Joshua instructed those same two men to retrieve Rahab and her family. The men brought them out of the city and settled Rahab and her family outside Israel’s camp, probably because of ceremonial uncleanness according to God’s law.

VERSE 24

Regarding the city of Jericho, the Israelites ***burned the city and everything in it*** except for all the items of silver, gold, bronze, and iron. This also highlights Israel’s obedience to Joshua. These items were to be set apart, dedicated to the Lord, and put into the Lord’s treasury as Joshua had instructed in verse 19. Joshua warned that their failure in this matter would result in setting apart “the camp of Israel for destruction and bring disaster on it” (v. 18).

VERSE 25

In this message of God’s righteous judgment of the Canaanites, we must not overlook the message of God’s wondrous salvation. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who, like all the other residents of Jericho, was deserving of God’s wrath. However, by God’s mercy and grace through faith in the God of Israel, Rahab was saved from the wrath that was to come. Rahab not only declared her faith in the Lord but demonstrated it when she saved the spies. By faith, this outsider became part of the Lord’s covenant people. Moreover, Matthew indicates Rahab married an Israelite named Salmon and became an ancestress of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).



What victories does God promise His people today?





BIBLE SKILL: *Examine New Testament passages to better understand an Old Testament passage.*

The writers of both Hebrews and James referred to Rahab in their letters to first-century believers. Examine Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 to see what these passages say about her. What are some key points each writer draws out? What are they trying to emphasize with their readers? How does that help you understand Rahab better?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We should obey God’s directions, even when they don’t make sense.
- + We experience victory in life when we obey God completely.
- + We can trust God to do what only He can do.
- + We can live in victory by trusting in God’s promises.

 **As a group, discuss ways that the people of God in general and you as a group in particular can and should unite together to demonstrate their trust in and obedience to God.**

 **When was a time you trusted and obeyed God even when at first it was difficult to believe God would intervene or act on your behalf, but you saw that He did? Is there anything happening in your life right now where you are struggling to trust in God’s promises and obey Him?**

 **Memorize Joshua 6:20.**

Prayer Needs



Sin Revealed

ACHAN'S ACTIONS WERE DISCOVERED AND JUDGED BECAUSE HE DISHONORED GOD.

JOSHUA 7:10-23

One of the central truths of the Bible is that every human being is a sinner. We sin against others, and every sin is a sin against God. The Bible also reveals that though we may try, we cannot hide anything from God—including our sins. What's more, the Bible clearly declares that there will always be negative consequences for one who tries to conceal one's sin from God. Nevertheless, there is good news. God's Word teaches that whoever confesses and renounces their sins to God will find mercy and forgiveness.

 **What should be a person's motivation to confess sin and seek forgiveness?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 7:1-12:24

After the account of the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6, chapters 7-12 summarize the rest of the conquest of Canaan. Joshua 7 reveals that an Israelite sinned against God when the Lord brought down the walls of Jericho. When Achan saw some of the items that were to be set apart for the Lord, he coveted them and took them for himself. Achan's sin resulted in Israel's initial defeat at Ai. Only when Achan was confronted and his sin dealt with could Israel move on. Joshua 8 describes how God turned away from His anger and handed over the city of Ai to the Israelites.

Israel's victories over Jericho and Ai resulted in some of the people in Canaan forming an alliance to oppose Joshua and Israel. When the inhabitants of the city of Gibeon heard about Israel's victories, they disguised themselves as foreigners from outside of Canaan and said they had traveled to meet the Israelites because of the reputation of their God and a desire to make a treaty with them. Without consulting the Lord, Israel made a treaty with Gibeon. When the Israelites discovered they had been tricked, Joshua conscripted the Gibeonites to serve Israel at the tabernacle (chap. 9).

When the king of Jerusalem heard that Gibeon made a treaty with Israel, he formed an alliance with four other kings and together they laid siege on Gibeon. When Joshua received news of the attack, he led his troops to Gibeon and attacked the coalition. The Lord threw the enemy into confusion. As they tried to escape, God sent down large hailstones that killed more of the enemy than Israel did. The Lord stopped the sun in the middle of the sky for almost a full day while Israel completed the rout of their enemies. Then Joshua led his troops south, defeating their enemies as the Lord had commanded them (chap. 10).

Chapters 11-12 describe how Joshua turned his attention northward, destroying the great city of Hazor and enjoying one victory after another over Israel's enemies. In all, Joshua and his troops vanquished thirty-one kings.



Read Joshua 7:10-23 in your Bible. Identify the corporate effect of sin and the corporate responsibility of Israel for the sin.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

COVENANT VIOLATED (JOSH. 7:10-15)

¹⁰ **The LORD then said to Joshua, “Stand up! Why have you fallen facedown? ¹¹ Israel has sinned. They have violated my covenant that I appointed for them. They have taken some of what was set apart. They have stolen, deceived, and put those things with their own belongings. ¹² This is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies. They will turn their backs and run from their enemies, because they have been set apart for destruction. I will no longer be with you unless you remove from among you what is set apart. ¹³ Go and consecrate the people. Tell them to consecrate themselves for tomorrow, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There are things that are set apart among you, Israel. You will not be able to stand against your enemies until you remove what is set apart. ¹⁴ In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the LORD selects is to come forward clan by clan. The clan the LORD selects is to come forward family by family. The family the LORD selects is to come forward man by man. ¹⁵ The one who is caught with the things set apart must be burned, along with everything he has, because he has violated the LORD’s covenant and committed an outrage in Israel.”**

VERSE 10

After having conquered Jericho, the conquest of Ai appeared to be a small thing in comparison. Like he did at Jericho, Joshua sent spies to scout Ai. When they returned their report was significantly different from that of the spies in Jericho. The spies in Jericho reported that the Lord had handed over the land to them, but these spies did not mention the Lord. They were self-confident, concentrating on their own ability to defeat and conquer Ai with a smaller contingent of just two to three thousand soldiers. This was a fraction of Israel’s army according to its number of 601,730 men recorded in Numbers 26:51 as they were preparing to enter the promised land. But when about three thousand of their soldiers attacked Ai, they were soundly defeated.

Israel’s self-confidence melted away. In an act of mourning and submission, Joshua and the elders fell facedown on the ground before the ark of the Lord. Fear gripped them. Given that the

Jordan River was to their back, they had no way of escape and feared that when the Canaanites learned what happened, they would attack and kill every Israelite. Joshua asked the Lord what this would do to His reputation among the nations (Josh 7:9).

It seems Joshua had forgotten everything he had seen the Lord do for them. Nevertheless, he and the elders knew that the right thing to do was to take their worries to God. This is a sign of godly leadership.

God's response in verse 10 was a rebuke. He would not listen to any more of Joshua's allegations that God was untrue to His promises to Israel (see v. 7). Furthermore, God was not going to listen to Joshua question His wisdom as He led the people to this place. It is amazing how people are quick to question God's character and wisdom when they reap what they have sown because of their own sin. Instead of lying facedown on the ground feeling sorry for himself and his people, Joshua needed to **stand up** and deal with the problem.

People are quick to question God's character and wisdom when they reap what they have sown because of their own sin.

VERSES 11-12

The Lord got right to the point—**Israel has sinned**. They had **stolen** from the Lord and then deceitfully hid what they had stolen **with their own belongings**. How had they stolen from the Lord? When Israel was about to defeat Jericho, Joshua instructed that “all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron were to be set apart for the LORD and must go into the LORD's treasury.” (6:19). Joshua also warned them that if they took for themselves anything from the things set apart to the Lord that they and the camp of Israel would be set apart “for destruction” (6:18). This is what happened.

The Lord revealed that it was because of this sin that the people of God could not defeat their enemies. He had warned them that there would be dire consequences if they disobeyed Him concerning the things that were to be devoted to Him. If they were going to act like enemies to God by disregarding Him, then they would experience a taste of what that meant. Therefore, the Lord declared His holiness, the egregiousness of their sin, and its profound

consequences by stating He was going to withdraw His presence from Israel until they removed the sin from among them.

This declaration was both disheartening and hopeful at the same time. While God had abandoned them on the battlefield, there was the hope for restoration once they were purified and their sin was removed. As the people of God, believers are to be holy as the Lord our God is holy (Lev. 11:44). Peter spoke of this truth saying, “Therefore, repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19-20a).

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections.
(See Isaiah 6:1-5; 1 Peter 1:14-16.)

VERSES 13-15

God gave Joshua instructions detailing what the people needed to do. First, God told Joshua to go and ***consecrate the people*** and to ***tell them to consecrate themselves for tomorrow***. This meant they needed to prepare themselves for an encounter with God. This may have involved seeking to discover the items that needed to be removed from among them. Second, the next day the people were to present themselves to the Lord in the order He chose, tribe by tribe, clan by clan, and family by family.

God knew who the guilty party was, but this way would emphasize the corporate effect of the sin and the corporate responsibility of Israel for this sin. There is also a play on words in verse 14. The word ***selects*** appears three times. This Hebrew word can also mean “captures” or “catches.” As the Lord ***selects*** the tribes, clans, and families, it will lead to the identification of the guilty party.

The lawbreaker thought he could get away with stealing from God. But as he watched what would methodically transpire, it would dawn on him that he was going to be found out. It should remind us that we can be sure our sin will catch up with us (Num. 32:23).

The guilty party had the opportunity to confess his sin when he, along with everyone else, received Joshua’s instructions to prepare for what was to happen the next day. He could have turned dishonoring God to honoring God if only he had demonstrated sincere confession and repentance of his sin. When David sinned against God, he realized this truth. He wrote that God does not

“despise a broken and humbled heart” (Ps. 51:17). Nonetheless, this guilty party remained silent.

There is also another likely reason God brought to light the guilty party the way He did. Israel needed to see the importance of not taking lightly God’s Word, His holiness, and His glory. The images of what would transpire the next day were to make a lasting impression on them. The discipline of one can serve as an essential lesson to others (Prov. 19:25).



Why is it important for us to recognize sin’s impact on us and our relationship with God?

ACHAN REVEALED (JOSH. 7:16-19)

¹⁶ **Joshua got up early the next morning. He had Israel come forward tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was selected.**

¹⁷ **He had the clans of Judah come forward, and the Zerahite clan was selected. He had the Zerahite clan come forward by heads of families, and Zabdi was selected.** ¹⁸ **He then had Zabdi’s family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was selected.** ¹⁹ **So Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make a confession to him. I urge you, tell me what you have done. Don’t hide anything from me.”**

VERSES 16-19

Joshua *got up early* so there would be no delay in obeying God’s instructions. He was eager to remove the sin against God from among them. Joshua had the tribes of Israel *come forward* as the Lord instructed. As he did, the Lord selected the tribe of **Judah**. Next, the Lord selected the **•Zerahite** clan. Then, the Lord selected the family of **•Zabdi**. Finally, **•Achan** was selected. It was essential the people witnessed that it was the Lord who was making the selections, just as He said He would in verses 13-15. He was the one superintending what needed to be done to bring about Israel’s reconciliation to Him.

When Joshua addressed Achan, Joshua spoke to him as a father would to a son who has sinned. Joshua told Achan to do four things. First, he told Achan to *give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel*.

Achan would do this by making a **confession** to the Lord. This is the second command Joshua gave Achan. Third, Joshua implored Achan to tell him what he did. Fourth, Joshua told Achan not to hide anything of what he had done from Joshua.



What might prevent one from confessing and seeking the Lord's forgiveness?

CONFESSION MADE (JOSH. 7:20-23)

²⁰ Achan replied to Joshua, “It is true. I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: ²¹ When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Babylon, five pounds of silver, and a bar of gold weighing a pound and a quarter, I coveted them and took them. You can see for yourself. They are concealed in the ground inside my tent, with the silver under the cloak.” ²² So Joshua sent messengers who ran to the tent, and there was the cloak, concealed in his tent, with the silver underneath. ²³ They took the things from inside the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out in the LORD’s presence.

VERSES 20-23

Achan finally decided to confess his sin. His explanation is similar to what happened in the garden of Eden—he **saw**, he **coveted**, and he **took**. Also reminiscent of the garden is the effect. Adam and Eve’s sin affected the entire human race after them. Achan’s sin affected the entire nation of Israel. Both should remind us that our sins always have an effect on others. Achan’s stolen goods consisted of **a beautiful cloak from Babylon**, two hundred **silver** shekels, which weighed about eighty ounces, and a bar of **gold** weighing fifty shekels, the equivalent of about twenty ounces. Once Achan confessed, he told Joshua where he had hidden the stolen treasures.

Joshua sent messengers to Achan’s tent, and they found the stolen items exactly where he said he hid them. The messengers retrieved them and spread them out before the Lord, the One to whom they rightfully belonged.

Verses 24-26 indicate Achan and his entire family were stoned to death, and everything he owned along with the stolen items were buried in stones with them. Achan's household died with him because they implicitly knew about Achan's sin. Achan had plenty of opportunities to confess but did so only when forced to. His sin had caused the deaths of his brothers (v. 5), and he had disregarded God's holiness. God allowed Israel to plunder Ai when Ai was finally defeated (8:27). Achan could have enjoyed that plunder if he had only trusted God and waited on God's timing.



Why is it important for us to view sin as seriously as God does?



BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a biblical principle.

Read the article on “Holy War” in a Bible dictionary. Why did the Lord sometimes require the Israelites to dedicate everything in a “ban,” which meant that the inhabitants and possessions of an entire city would be set apart to the Lord and destroyed? How would you respond to someone who questioned why a loving God would order the wholesale extermination of the nations that were occupying the promised land? (Hints: The Lord had given these people time to repent. See Gen. 15:13-16. The Lord is a God of both love and judgment. See Ex. 34:6-7.)



▶ *Unwavering Determination* ◀

CALEB FOLLOWED THE LORD COMPLETELY AND RECEIVED WHAT GOD HAD PROMISED HIM DECADES EARLIER.

JOSHUA 14:1-15

A lot of us are like the little boy who prayed, “God give me patience, and give it to me right now!” The Bible teaches us that we need to learn to trust God’s promises and at the same time trust God’s timing. For instance, thousands of years passed from the time God first promised the coming of the Messiah until Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Yet the Bible says God sent His Son at just the right time (Gal. 4:4). We can depend on God to keep His promises—no matter how long He takes to do so.



What have you learned about trusting God’s timing?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 13:1-21:45

Joshua 1-5 records God's preparation of Israel for the conquest of Canaan. Chapters 6-12 explain Joshua's military strategy and records the specific cities, lands, and peoples conquered. Joshua 11:23 states, "Joshua took the entire land, in keeping with all that the LORD had told Moses. Joshua then gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. After this, the land had rest from war." It is important to note that the statement, "Joshua took the entire land," means he defeated all of the enemies he fought and took all of their lands. However, Joshua did not fight everyone, nor did he conquer all of the promised land. Joshua got too old to finish the work he had begun (13:1-7). The Lord promised Joshua that He Himself would drive out the remaining Canaanites. Thus, God instructed Joshua to go ahead and distribute the land to the tribes. Chapters 13-21 record how Joshua did this.

Most allocations of the tribal territories are described using combinations of the listings of towns and geographic features of the land, linking them in order to trace the boundaries. Lists like these were common in administrative texts in the ancient Near East. Some scholars believe these similarities suggest these records of tribal allotments would have contained the legal force of a treaty. When new towns sprung up in the various territories, they were added to the document throughout Israel's history. This procedure would update and recognize the existence of new settlements in those tribal areas for as long as Israel possessed them. Consequently, the tribal allotments served as a record of God's faithfulness to keep the promises He made in His covenant with Israel.

In Joshua 20:1-21:45, Joshua assigned the Levitical cities and the cities of refuge. The Levites did not receive a land inheritance. Typically, four cities from each tribe were Levitical cities. The cities still belonged to the tribes, but the priests could live there and be provided fields to pasture and farm. Being spread out among the tribes provided the priests the opportunity to teach the law to the people, one of their most important responsibilities. The six cities of refuge were Levitical cities that provided sanctuary for a person who accidentally killed someone (20:2-6).



Read Joshua 14:1-15. Take note of how Caleb's faithfulness to God had an impact on others.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

OBEDIENCE (JOSH. 14:1-5)

¹ **The Israelites received these portions that the priest Eleazar, Joshua son of Nun, and the family heads of the Israelite tribes gave them in the land of Canaan. ² Their inheritance was by lot as the LORD commanded through Moses for the nine and a half tribes, ³ because Moses had given the inheritance to the two and a half tribes beyond the Jordan. But he gave no inheritance among them to the Levites. ⁴ The descendants of Joseph became two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. No portion of the land was given to the Levites except cities to live in, along with pasturelands for their cattle and livestock. ⁵ So the Israelites did as the LORD commanded Moses, and they divided the land.**

VERSES 1-2

Verse 1 introduces the individuals who were central to the process of distributing the allotments of land to each tribe. Eleazar's name appearing before Joshua's name is not coincidental. *Eleazar* was Aaron's third son and Aaron's successor as the high priest. He had assisted Moses with a census of the people as they prepared to enter the land of Canaan. He also served Moses as an advisor. When Moses commissioned Joshua to be Moses's successor, Eleazar consulted the Lord before the entire congregation of Israel to demonstrate to Israel that Joshua was God's choice to be Moses's successor (Num. 27:18-23).

Therefore, it is no surprise Eleazar was a key figure on this momentous occasion. He served as a visual reminder that God was faithful to keep the promises of His covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It is for this reason that God had instructed Moses that, when it was time to allocate the land to the tribes, He wanted Joshua, Eleazar, and one leader from each of the tribes to distribute the land to the tribes (Num. 34:16-29). Thus, the information in this verse is important because it highlights God's faithfulness and demonstrates how Joshua and Israel's leaders meticulously obeyed God's instructions. It is also noteworthy that this is the first time in the book of Joshua that the promised land is referred to as *the land of Canaan*.

The lands were allocated to the *nine and a half tribes* still waiting for their tribal inheritance. These were to be determined

according to the Lord's instructions first given to Moses and handed down to Joshua. The central role of Eleazar in the distribution of the tribal allotments was not the only indicator that it was the Lord who was central to what was taking place. God had commanded Moses that Israel's tribal allotments were to be determined **by lot** (Num. 26:52-56; 33:54).

Lots were used to determine God's will in a matter. For example, the high priests used the Urim and Thummim as sacred lots to receive a divine answer (Ex. 28:15-30). In the New Testament, the apostles used the lot to replace Judas with Matthias (Acts 1:26). No one is sure what lots looked like or how people knew how to interpret them. What is most important is that Scripture indicates the outcome of the lot was not random. Proverbs 16:33 states, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." Therefore, the determining of each tribe's allotment was not a matter of chance; God was in control of the procedure and outcomes.

VERSES 3-4

Verses 3-4 help clear up the breakdown of the tribes and their allotments. Jacob had twelve sons. From oldest to youngest they were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Joseph received a double inheritance from his father, so Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, became the heads of two tribes. That totals thirteen. However, the tribe of Levi did not receive an inheritance of land. Because the Levites were commissioned to serve the Lord at the tabernacle and then later at the temple, their special inheritance was "the LORD . . . just as he promised them" (Deut. 18:1-2; Josh. 13:33). Joshua 21:1-41 indicates forty-eight cities distributed throughout the twelve tribal allotments were designated for the Levites with **pasturelands for their cattle and livestock**. Rabbinical records indicate they served in a rotation at the tabernacle and then the temple two weeks out of the year. The rest of the time would have been dedicated to teaching God's law where they lived.

At their request, Moses had already promised land allotments east of the Jordan River to **two and a half tribes** on the condition they joined the other tribes in the conquest of the land west of the Jordan (Num. 32:28-33). These were the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half of the tribe of **Manasseh**. Joshua reconfirmed this promise with them when the conquest was about to commence in Joshua 1:12-18. When the conquest was complete, they returned to their lands east of the Jordan (Josh. 13:8-13).

VERSE 5

Every preceding verse demonstrates how Joshua, Eleazar, and the elders of the tribes of Israel did exactly as the Lord had commanded them through Moses. Verse 5 concludes this section accentuating that all of ***the Israelites did as the LORD commanded Moses***—in contrast to the previous generation with the exceptions of Joshua and Caleb. None of God’s commands are trivial. Consequently, it was because of the people’s obedience that the Israelites enjoyed the blessing of dividing the land.



How was the dividing of the land a demonstration of trust in God and His wisdom?

None of God’s commands are trivial.

DEVOTION (JOSH. 14:6-9)

⁶ The descendants of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the LORD promised Moses the man of God at Kadesh-barnea about you and me. ⁷ I was forty years old when Moses the LORD’s servant sent me from Kadesh-barnea to scout the land, and I brought back an honest report. ⁸ My brothers who went with me caused the people to lose heart, but I followed the LORD my God completely. ⁹ On that day Moses swore to me, “The land where you have set foot will be an inheritance for you and your descendants forever, because you have followed the LORD my God completely.””

VERSES 6-9

Before his death, Jacob had prophesied what was to come concerning his descendants. He foretold that Judah’s brothers would praise Judah and bow down to him. Jacob also said that Judah would conquer his enemies, become king, and the nations would obey him (Gen. 49:8-12). When the tribal allotments were distributed, it is no surprise that Judah received the largest portion of land with the most detailed description of all the tribes. There should be no

surprise that ●**Caleb** was a descendant of Judah. Caleb approached Joshua and reminded him of Moses’s promise at Kadesh-barnea.

After the Israelites left Mount Sinai and were readying themselves to go into the promised land, they settled at Kadesh-barnea, an oasis south of Canaan. Then Moses sent twelve spies, one from each tribe, to scout out the land so that they would know what to expect when they entered it. When the spies returned, ten of them said that while the land was everything God had said it was, Israel would not be able to defeat its inhabitants. The two spies who said Israel could defeat them because the Lord would give them the victory were Joshua and Caleb. Nevertheless, the people believed the report of the ten spies instead of Joshua and Caleb (Num. 13–14).

Numbers 32:12 indicates that “None except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun” followed the Lord completely. “Completely” means “wholeheartedly.” Here, Caleb repeated the phrase that he **followed the LORD . . . completely** with the same wording in Hebrew. It was because of their unwavering faith and devotion to God that Joshua and Caleb, along with their families, were the only ones God permitted to enter the promised land from that generation. In Numbers 14:24, God promised He would bring Caleb into the promised land and that his descendants would receive their inheritance there because Caleb “had a different spirit” and “remained loyal to me.” In these verses, Caleb reminded Joshua of this promise when he was **forty years old**.



What does it look like to follow the Lord wholeheartedly?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.
(See Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Luke 14:27.)

INHERITANCE (JOSH. 14:10-15)

¹⁰ **“As you see, the LORD has kept me alive these forty-five years as he promised, since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel was journeying in the wilderness. Here I am today,**

eighty-five years old.¹¹ I am still as strong today as I was the day Moses sent me out. My strength for battle and for daily tasks is now as it was then.¹² Now give me this hill country the LORD promised me on that day, because you heard then that the Anakim are there, as well as large fortified cities. Perhaps the LORD will be with me and I will drive them out as the LORD promised.”¹³ Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as an inheritance.¹⁴ Therefore, Hebron still belongs to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite as an inheritance today because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, completely.¹⁵ Hebron’s name used to be Kiriath-arba; Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. After this, the land had rest from war.

VERSE 10

Caleb was forty years old when he saw the promised land for himself. He was eager to receive the inheritance God had promise him and his family. Regrettably, Caleb was forced to wait *forty-five years* to pass before he could receive this inheritance while he wandered for forty of those years in the wilderness, not because of any wrong he had done but because of the lack of faith and the disobedience of others. The remaining five years indicate that the Israelites had already been involved in the conquest of Canaan for at least five years.

Caleb’s trust in the Lord’s faithfulness never wavered. He realized that God had kept him alive for this and stressed that now it was time. He had waited long enough, and with the Lord’s help Caleb was ready to claim the inheritance the Lord had promised him.

Caleb’s trust in the Lord’s faithfulness never wavered.

VERSES 11-12

Not only did the Lord keep Caleb alive at eighty-five years old, but He also kept Caleb as ***strong*** as he was forty-five years prior when Moses sent him out to scout the land of Canaan with Joshua and the other ten spies. Caleb was not too old or too weak to do what God had promised him he could do. Moreover, Caleb was eager to go to the ***hill country***, the location of the fortified cities of the ***Anakim***. Caleb was eager to take on the same giants that had

terrified the other ten spies who caused Israel to be too frightened to trust God and conquer the land. Joshua 11:21-22 indicates Israel had already defeated the Anakim, but some had gotten away only to return later. Caleb was ready and eager to go in and finish them off.

VERSES 13-15

After hearing Caleb's request, **Joshua blessed Caleb** and gave him the land he requested as his inheritance. Joshua's blessing is significant. As God's servant and spokesman, Joshua's blessing communicated to Caleb that he indeed would experience God's favor as he faced the Anakim. When the writer wrote this account, the land still remained the inheritance of Caleb's family.

Furthermore, the city Caleb took in the hill country had been formerly named **Kiriath-arba**, meaning the city of Arba. Arba had been the most powerful man of the Anakim, but he was no more. The city was renamed **Hebron**, meaning "the place of alliance," possibly commemorating how after forty years the once fearful Israelite tribes finally trusted God and joined together to conquer the land of Canaan.



Which of God's promises do you rely upon when facing unknown challenges?




BIBLE SKILL: Use a cross reference to learn more about what the Bible says about a particular subject.

The word "inheritance" essentially refers to a "legal transmission of property following death." However, the Hebrew terms translated "inheritance" did not necessarily presuppose a death; they could be used in other ways. Determine how many times "inheritance" or a similar term appears in Joshua 14:1-15. Then read and reflect on these verses to learn more about how it's used in Scripture: Joshua 1:15; 13:33; Jeremiah 10:16; Matthew 19:29; 25:34; and Romans 8:17.

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We will face daily opportunities to obey or disobey God's instructions.
- + We can be assured that God knows and rewards those who follow Him wholeheartedly.
- + We can be assured of God's presence and aid when we follow Him wholeheartedly.

 **What are some of the things people face daily that pose an opportunity to obey or disobey God's instructions? What can people do to prepare themselves for these situations before they face them?**

 **Is there any situation in your life at the present where you are faced with a decision to obey or disobey God's instructions? What should you remember and do in order to make the right decision and obey God?**

 **Memorize Joshua 14:8.**

Prayer Needs



Vital Decision

IN HIS FAREWELL ADDRESS, JOSHUA CHALLENGED THE PEOPLE TO CHOOSE THE LORD OVER THE GODS OF THE CANAANITES.

JOSHUA 24:14-24

Crash landings of commercial jets are extremely rare. Nevertheless, one of the normal routines before a commercial jet takes off is flight attendants giving passengers instructions on what to do in case of an emergency landing on land or water. Most passengers seem to ignore the flight attendants. People might get away with that on a plane, but it is always costly when people ignore warnings in the Word of God.

 **Why are people tempted to ignore warnings of potential danger?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 22:1–24:33

Chapters 22–24 contain Joshua’s farewell message to Israel. This last section can be divided into two subsections. Chapter 22 describes how Joshua summoned the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh that had requested to have their tribal allotments in lands east of the Jordan River. Moses had promised them these allotments if they helped the rest of the tribes defeat the Canaanites (Num. 32:1-32; Josh. 1:12-18). Now that the fighting was done, Joshua commended them for keeping their oath. Before pronouncing a blessing on them and sending them to their homes, Joshua instructed them to obey God’s Word and to remain His faithful servants.

When the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh reached the Jordan River, they built a large altar on the western side, Israel’s side. The other tribes, thinking that this action would bring God’s wrath on all of Israel as they had experienced in the past, prepared to wage war with them. However, before commencing their attack, the nine and a half tribes west of the Jordan sent a delegation to speak with the two and a half tribes to the east. The eastern tribes appealed to God and said they built the altar as a memorial of their solidarity with the other tribes even though they were separated by the Jordan River. This pleased the delegation and averted hostilities.

Chapters 23–24 contain Joshua’s last words to Israel. He challenged the people to remain faithful to the Lord and stay away from the false gods of the peoples still remaining in the land. Joshua warned them that if they worshiped these idols, then the Lord would destroy them. The people insisted they would remain faithful. Consequently, Joshua made a covenant for the people and set up a memorial stone as a witness to the oath they made to the Lord. Israel worshiped God as long as Joshua and their elders who served beside Joshua lived. Finally, the book concludes with the burials of Joshua, Joseph’s bones, and Eleazar the high priest.



Read Joshua 24:14-24. Highlight all the ways Joshua encouraged the Israelites to be faithful to the Lord.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

CHALLENGE (JOSH. 24:14-18)

¹⁴ **“Therefore, fear the LORD and worship him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the LORD.**

¹⁵ **But if it doesn’t please you to worship the LORD, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the LORD.”** ¹⁶ **The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods!**

¹⁷ **For the LORD our God brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, and performed these great signs before our eyes. He also protected us all along the way we went and among all the peoples whose lands we traveled through.** ¹⁸ **The LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will worship the LORD, because he is our God.”**

VERSE 14

Verses 1-13 record that Joshua gathered Israel at Shechem. Even though this is the first time the book of Joshua mentions Shechem, it would become an important political and religious center in Israel. Shechem was already significant to the nation because it was there that God first promised Abraham that He would give Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan. So as Joshua was about to die, he stood before all of Israel at Shechem and proclaimed that they themselves were evidence of and witnesses to the truth that God kept His promise to Abraham.

As Joshua began his final address to Israel, he told how God had provided for His people. He reminded them how the Lord brought Abraham to the land of Canaan and multiplied his descendants. He reminded the people that God had been with them in Egypt, how He destroyed their enemies, and brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Next, Joshua reminded his audience how, after spending time in the wilderness, God brought them into the promised land. Even though the inhabitants of the land fought against Israel, the Lord handed Israel’s enemies over to them and gave them the land. God had given them every good thing they now possessed.

Based on these truths, Joshua brought his challenge to the nation. He exhorted the people to ***fear the LORD and worship him in sincerity and truth.*** This means they were to have a deep-seated reverence and awe for God that would cause them to hate evil and reject all other gods including the gods that their ancestors worshiped ***beyond the Euphrates River*** and in Egypt. In this way, the Israelites could avoid the Lord's loving but painful discipline. It meant desiring to honor and worship Him above everything else. It meant living unto God with ongoing acknowledgment, dependence, submission, obedience, consideration, attentiveness, wonder, admiration, and love, inspired by His salvation, provision, eternal attributes, and all-encompassing authority.

***Indecision is a decision that leads
to more wrong decisions.***

VERSE 15

Joshua challenged the people to ***choose*** whom they would worship. They could not wallow in indecision. Indecision is a decision that leads to more wrong decisions. It is clear that Israel had a poor track record when it came to their faithfulness to the Lord. Their forefathers worshiped other gods in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and now the Israelites were in a land where its populace, the ***Amorites*** (Canaanites), worshiped more false gods. The gods of the Canaanites' seductive fertility cult would tempt the Israelites with its materialism and immorality.

Either the Israelites would worship the Lord alone and reject all other gods, or they would worship other gods and in so doing reject the Lord. They could not do both, although going forward, many of them would try and pay a price for having done so. The Lord requires undivided devotion. Rahab had provided a perfect example for Israel at Jericho when she rejected the gods of her people and placed her faith in the "LORD," the "God in heaven above and on earth below" (Josh. 2:9-11). Joshua's challenge was that it was now time for all the people of Israel to declare their loyalty to the Lord.

Commitment to the Lord is either total commitment or it is not commitment at all. Just as the Lord had been unwavering in His faithfulness to His covenant people, He expected His people faithfully to be devoted to Him. The same is true today.

At this point, Joshua did not warn them of the dire consequences that would result if they chose to reject the Lord. Instead, he demonstrated the godly leader he was by displaying before them his own example. He stood before the entire nation and declared that he and his family were going to **worship the LORD**. Boldly, Joshua left no doubt where he and his family's allegiance lay and what they were going to do. Joshua's decision did not depend on what those around him would or would not do. After all that the Lord had done for Israel since the time of Abraham up until this moment, it was an obvious choice for Joshua. In so doing, Joshua communicated that the decision to worship the Lord should be an obvious one for all of Israel too.

VERSES 16-18

We should never underestimate the influence a godly example can have on others. Joshua provides an example of how a man devoted to the Lord had a positive influence on a multitude of others. When Joshua had addressed the people earlier, he instructed them to literally “cling” to the Lord their God because of what the Lord had done for them (23:8-9). Now, with the most emphatic language possible, the people replied to Joshua, exclaiming that there was no way they would **abandon the LORD to worship other gods**. They promised to do what Joshua had challenged them to do, to cling to the Lord. This means they were promising they would stay away from the influence of pagan gods, obey the Lord, cultivate love for and devotion to Him, and worship Him alone. This is the commitment of everyone who truly loves the Lord.

Joshua had recounted the good things the Lord had done for Israel in verses 1-13. Beginning in verse 17, the people recounted God's history of blessing them as well. By doing so, they were indicating that they realized they had good reason to cling to the Lord and reject all other gods. They identified themselves with their ancestors as they recounted how God saved them out of Egyptian slavery and **performed these great signs before our eyes**. This is likely a reference to the ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. The people also remembered how God protected them from their enemies as they made their way through the wilderness to the western shore of the Jordan River, enemies such as the Amalekites (Num. 14; 24), the king of Arad (21:1-3), king Sihon of Heshbon (21:21-23), the giant king Og of Bashan (21:33-35), and king Balak of Moab (Num. 23-24). Finally, the people recognized that beginning with their first battle at Jericho, it was the Lord who defeated and

drove out before them all of the Amorites they had faced in the land of Canaan.



Why is it important to consciously choose whom you will serve?



How does your decision to serve the Lord influence people around you?

WARNING (JOSH. 24:19-24)

¹⁹ But Joshua told the people, “You will not be able to worship the LORD, because he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions and sins.” ²⁰ If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, he will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after he has been good to you.” ²¹ “No!” the people answered Joshua. “We will worship the LORD.” ²² Joshua then told the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship the LORD.” “We are witnesses,” they said. ²³ “Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and turn your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” ²⁴ So the people said to Joshua, “We will worship the LORD our God and obey him.”

VERSES 19-20

Joshua’s response to the people in verse 19 may appear harsh. However, he had witnessed their parents give a similar response of commitment to the Lord at Sinai. It was not long after they declared their loyalty to the Lord that they made a golden calf and worshiped it (Ex. 19:8; 32:1-4). Joshua knew that it was easier to make a promise of devotion to the Lord than it was to keep it.

The statement, *he will not forgive your transgressions and sins*, was not an absolute, eternal statement for the Lord’s covenant people. The remainder of the Scriptures demonstrates this (see Rom. 11:11-24; Eph. 2:11-22). Nevertheless, it did mean that God would not overlook their unfaithfulness and there would be

consequences for their sin. The law warned that if the Israelites were unfaithful to the Lord, then they would experience drought, famine, disease, defeat, and ultimately exile from the promised land (Deut. 28:15-68). Joshua knew this.

God is not to be taken lightly. Believers today need to recognize that while we are secure in Christ, there is great blessing when we obey our Lord but loss of blessing when we sin against Him (1 Cor. 3:13-14; Gal. 6:7-9).

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See John 5:24; 10:27-29.)

Joshua was present when the Lord told Moses that the Israelites would “turn to other gods and worship them, despising me and breaking my covenant” (Deut. 31:14-20). Breaking a covenant was seen as an act of treason, so there would be severe consequences for what Israel would do. After that, God gave Moses a prophetic song to share with the Israelites. It described God’s holiness and declared His jealousy for His people. The Lord also promised that His judgment would not last forever. He would have compassion on His people when He saw their suffering because the Lord is a merciful and gracious God. When the Lord finished dictating this song to Moses, Joshua helped him recite it to Israel (Deut. 32:1-44). Therefore, Joshua knew that after all the good things God had done for Israel up to that point, they would be unfaithful to Him.

VERSES 21-22

After hearing Joshua say they would break their covenant with the Lord by worshipping other gods, the people of Israel doubled down. They emphatically denied the possibility they would reject the Lord and serve other gods, insisting that they would be faithful servants who would **worship the LORD** just as they had vociferously declared already. With that said, Joshua commenced to put them under oath. He made the people responsible to be witnesses against themselves that they had **chosen to worship the LORD**. Having a witness or witnesses was part of the ceremony of making

an ancient covenant. Verses 26-27 indicate Joshua recorded their covenant and erected a stone to memorialize it to serve as a visual witness to the promise they made that day.

VERSES 23-24

Verse 23 reveals that what God had previously predicted had already begun. Some of the Israelites had possession of idols and were worshiping these *foreign gods*—even after all the things they had seen the Lord do and after everything He had given them. Notwithstanding, one more time they emphatically insisted, ***We will worship the LORD our God and obey him.*** In the final comments of the book, verse 31 indicates Israel worshiped the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders of his generation who had witnessed all that the Lord had done for Israel.



What idols or false ideas compete for your loyalty and attention?



BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible study resource to learn more about a biblical principle.

Joshua 24 highlights a renewal of the covenant between the Lord and His people. Use a Bible atlas to locate Shechem on a map of ancient Israel. Look up the word “covenant” in a Bible dictionary. Read and reflect on the following Scripture passages to learn more about ancient covenants: Genesis 9:8-17; 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; Exodus 19:1-8; 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Consider how the Israelites responded to God’s covenants through the years. Why was a new covenant sealed by Jesus’s death and resurrection necessary for God’s people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Each person must consider how he or she will respond to the Lord.
- + We're to put away any idols that might demand our devotion that rightfully belongs to the Lord.

As a group, discuss ways you might encourage one another to respond rightly to the Lord when He challenges you to be wholeheartedly devoted to Him. What does it look like in your context to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord?

What are some of the consequences for failing to put away idols in your life? Who might you influence this week to encourage to strengthen their devotion to the Lord?

Memorize Joshua 24:23-24.

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.



Consequences

AFTER JOSHUA'S DEATH, ISRAEL FELL INTO A CYCLE OF SIN, JUDGMENT, CONFESSION, AND RESTORATION.

JUDGES 2:11-23

Intending to do well doesn't always result in something being well done. We recognize this to be true regarding the people of Israel when Joshua died and the era of the judges began. Before Joshua's death, the Israelites insisted they would be faithful to the Lord and never worship the gods of the Canaanites. However, as soon as Joshua and the elders who served alongside of him died, Israel broke their promise and suffered the consequences of their infidelity to the Lord.



What factors might cause people to break their commitments, and how can we guard against this in our own lives?


UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

In Joshua 13:1, God said to Joshua, “You have become old, advanced in age, but a great deal of the land remains to be possessed.” Then in verses 2-6, the Lord listed all the lands in Canaan that were yet to be possessed by the Israelites. Next, God promised that since Joshua could not do it, He Himself would drive out Israel’s enemies, but in the meantime Joshua should go ahead and distribute the tribal allotments of the land to Israel as their inheritance. Therefore, Joshua 13:1-6 indicates that even though the Lord had given all of the promised land to the Israelites when Joshua died, there were still areas in their tribal allotments where they needed to go in, drive out their inhabitants, and possess them. It is essential to recognize this as we begin a study of the book of Judges.

As the book begins, it looked as if all would go well for the tribes as they set out to possess the unconquered areas. The tribe of Judah took the lead with a measure of success at first but were unable to drive out the Canaanites in the lowlands (Judg. 1:2-19). After that, with the exception of a couple of bright spots, the continuing narrative is one of failure and compromise. The Israelites were not supposed to make agreements with the Canaanites and coexist with them, but they did. Because of their sins, the angel of the Lord confronted Israel with a declaration of judgment. He declared that God would no longer drive out the Canaanites but instead would allow them to remain in the land to be thorns in Israel’s sides (2:1-3).

As soon as Joshua and the elders who served with him died, a new “generation rose up who did not know the Lord or the works He had done for Israel” (2:10). This generation abandoned the Lord and began worshiping the gods of the surrounding peoples in Canaan. Instead of ridding the land of the Canaanites, Israel became like the Canaanites. As a result, whenever the Israelites went out to war, the Lord was against them and caused them to be defeated (2:15).

 **As you read Judges 2:11-23, pay attention to the cycle of sin, judgment, repentance, and restoration.**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE EVIL (JUDG. 2:11-15)

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight. They worshiped the Baals ¹² and abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They angered the LORD, ¹³ for they abandoned him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ The LORD’s anger burned against Israel, and he handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies. ¹⁵ Whenever the Israelites went out, the LORD was against them and brought disaster on them, just as he had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly.

VERSES 11-13

Verse 11 says literally, “The sons of Israel did the evil thing in the sight of the LORD.” This statement highlights three important matters. First, the “sons of Israel” is a reminder that they were descendants of their patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose name the Lord changed to Israel (Gen. 32:28). The tribes of Israel were named after the sons of Jacob and Joseph’s two sons since Joseph received a double blessing from his father. It was to these forefathers and their descendants that God made His covenant. The Lord made several promises to Abraham. Among them, He promised to make Abraham a great nation. After many centuries, Israel was beginning to see evidence of this happening. Also, God promised them Canaan as their inheritance. They were now in Canaan, and much of the land was in their possession.

Second, what was “the evil thing” Israel did? Using the word “the” means it was not just any evil thing they did. It was the most egregious thing they could do. They **worshiped the Baals and abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors**. This statement recalls Moses’s warning to the nation in Deuteronomy 30:15-20. He set before the people the way of life and blessing in the land of Canaan that would come with faithful devotion to the Lord, or the way of curse and death that was sure to come if they worshiped other gods and served them.

In this instance, the Israelites worshiped ***Baal and the •Ash-toreths***. *Baal* literally means “lord, master, owner, possessor, or husband.” As a proper noun, it referred to the supreme god of the fertility cult of the Canaanites. He was the storm god whose worshipers believed gave his rain to the earth so that it could bear fruit. Ashtoreth was the Canaanite goddess of fertility, love, and war. The fertility of the land depended on the sexual activities of Baal and his consort. Therefore, the false religion of the Canaanites promised its adherents material prosperity while incorporating flagrant sexual immorality into its manipulative practices. The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth became a tremendous temptation to Israel up to the time of the Babylonian exile. Instead of being a witness to the nations by living in such a way that pointed them to the one and only true God as Moses had instructed in Deuteronomy 4:1-8, Israel ***abandoned the LORD***. Their failure to separate themselves from the Canaanites led Israel to incorporate the ways of the Canaanites, including their religion.

Third, the Lord saw their sin; it was not hidden from Him. Just because the people of God took their eyes off of the Lord does not mean He took His eyes off of them. The writer of Hebrews said, “No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account” (Heb. 4:13). The unfaithfulness of the Israelites angered the Lord, and they were going to give an account for this evil thing they had done.

VERSES 14-15

The Israelites ignored Joshua’s charge to faithfully worship the Lord. Instead, they broke the promise of commitment they had declared at Shechem (Josh. 24:14-24). It was inconceivable that after everything the Lord had done for them, they abandoned Him. What the Israelites did was a breach of trust. While verses 13-15 describe what the Israelites did, verses 14-15 describe what the Lord did in response. ***The LORD’s anger burned against Israel***. They would experience the grave consequences of their infidelity. The Lord would not stand by idly as His covenant people committed spiritual adultery against Him. Though they are not identified here, the Lord raised up marauders to attack and plunder Israel. Without the Lord’s help, Israel was defenseless against their enemies. They would be helpless without His protection.

What’s more, whenever Israel went out to fight against their attackers, ***the LORD was against them and brought disaster***

on them. The enemies who raided them were His pawns. The events described here echo the warning God gave to Israel through Moses in Deuteronomy 31:16-21. The Lord warned Israel that if they “prostitute themselves with the foreign gods of the land,” despising Him and breaking His covenant, that His anger would “burn against them on that day,” that “they will become easy prey,” and “many troubles and afflictions will come to them.” The Israelites ignored God’s numerous warnings through both Moses and Joshua. Consequently, **they suffered greatly.** Their abandonment of the Lord brought about the dire consequences of which they had been warned. God is always faithful to keep all of His promises.



What factors contribute to a person or group abandoning God?

THE CYCLE (JUDG. 2:16-19)

¹⁶ **The LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders,** ¹⁷ **but they did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their ancestors, who had walked in obedience to the LORD’s commands. They did not do as their ancestors did.** ¹⁸ **Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for the Israelites, the LORD was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies while the judge was still alive. The LORD was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them.** ¹⁹ **Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their ancestors, following other gods to serve them and bow in worship to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.**

VERSE 16

Verse 16 is amazing. While the Lord was against the Israelites (v. 14), He was actually for them. In a situation that appeared hopeless, there was grace and hope. **The LORD raised up judges, who saved them.** In the book of Judges, the judges functioned as military deliverers who saved their people from their enemies. With that said, the true Savior of Israel was the Lord Himself who raised up and empowered these leaders to deliver their people.

The emphasis is on God’s compassion for His people as they suffered from His discipline and on His power to raise up deliverers who saved them from those who attacked and plundered them.

VERSE 17

One would think that when the Israelites witnessed God raise up judges to save them they would have realized the only way to be protected and to flourish would be to repent. Instead, the Israelites **prostituted themselves with other gods**. In Exodus 34:15-16, Moses foretold that when Israel entered the land of the Canaanites they would “prostitute themselves with their gods.” This language recalls the marital language of the covenant relationship the Lord had with His bride, Israel. At the same time, this statement appears to allude to the lewd activities of the Canaanite fertility cult that involved cultic prostitution in an attempt to manipulate their gods. **Bowing down to them**, the Israelites demonstrated their reverence and submission to these false gods instead of to their ever-present, faithful God who took them from nothing and made them a nation.

It is amazing how quickly they turned back to the false gods. The Israelites not only witnessed and experienced God’s salvation from their oppressors through the judges, but they also had the testimony of the Lord’s faithfulness and powerful deliverances of their forefathers **who walked in obedience to the LORD’s commands**. With all of that, the Israelites still **did not do as their ancestors did**.



KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. (See Luke 3:8; Romans 2:4-5.)

VERSE 18

Verse 18 indicates the Lord repeatedly raised up judges to deliver His people from their adversaries. The Lord was with the judge, and He enabled the judge to deliver and protect the people from their enemies. The people **groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them**, and they “cried out to the LORD” (see Judg. 3:9). However, there is no indication the Israelites ever repented of their sins against God. It seems they cried out

because of their affliction, not because of conviction of their sin. Nevertheless, the Lord raised judges to save the Israelites because of His compassion; He *was moved to pity*. Even though they were unfaithful to Him and His anger burned against them, the Lord would not turn His back on His people whom He loved. The impotent false gods and idols the Israelites bowed down to were powerless to respond in such a way.

It seems they cried out because of their affliction, not because of conviction of their sin.

VERSE 19

When a judge died the people obstinately continued their downward spiral into deeper corruption than the previous generation. The book of Judges describes repeated cycles of (1) the abandonment of the Lord and the worship of the Canaanite gods, (2) the anger of the Lord with the Israelites and His raising up enemies to oppress them, (3) Israel's groanings and cries out to God, (4) the Lord's compassion on His people as He raised up judges to deliver them, (5) a period of peace for the Israelites as long as the judge lived, and (6) the Israelites stubbornly acting more corruptly than the previous generation as they returned to the Canaanite gods.

 **What does God's providing a deliverer tell us about His character?**

THE DECLARATION (JUDG. 2:20-23)

²⁰ The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and he declared, "Because this nation has violated my covenant that I made with their ancestors and disobeyed me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I did this to test Israel and to see whether or not they would keep the LORD's way by walking in it, as their ancestors had." ²³ The LORD left these nations and did not drive them out immediately. He did not hand them over to Joshua.

VERSES 20-23

By repeating verse 14, verse 20 emphasizes how angry God was with Israel. Next, the Lord referred to Israel as ***this nation***. This expression indicates a sense of alienation and speaks to Israel's infidelity to God as Israel violated the covenant the Lord made with their forefathers. Consequently, the Lord emphatically declared He would no longer give the Israelites the ability to drive out the Canaanites who still lived in areas of Israel's tribal allotments that were yet to be possessed. So even when the Israelites had some success in battle during the time of the judges, it did not result in the possession of more land.

The Lord made clear His intention in allowing the Canaanites to remain. It was to test the Israelites. Would they turn back to God and walk in His ways like their forefathers, or would they continue in their rebellion against Him? The writer then stated the Lord did as He declared. The Lord did not give Joshua victory over the remaining Canaanites in the land. Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord resulted in the loss of His blessing.



When and how has God tested you? How is your faith stronger as a result?


BIBLE SKILL: *Learn more about a person in the Bible.*

The “angel of the LORD” appears in Judges 2:1, the first of four times in the book of Judges (see also 5:23; 6:11; and 13:1-24). Many scholars believe this was a “christophany,” an appearance of Jesus prior to His incarnation in the Gospels. Read and reflect on other possible christophanies in the Old Testament, such as Genesis 32:24-30 and Daniel 3:24-25. Why do you think Jesus appeared in situations like these? How does the presence of Jesus affect your life each day?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + God's people must guard against the danger of forgetting what the Lord has done for them.
- + Believers can be assured that God's faithfulness to act on behalf of His people is rooted in His character, not in ours.
- + Believers can expect their obedience to God to be tested.

 **Discuss as a group how you might help one another guard against the danger of forgetting what the Lord has done for you.**

 **Why is it essential that you always remember that God's faithfulness to act on behalf of His people is rooted in His character, not in ours? What will result if you doubt or forget this truth?**

 **Memorize Judges 2:10.**

Prayer Needs



Called

THOUGH GIDEON CONSIDERED HIMSELF INADEQUATE, GOD CALLED HIM TO DELIVER HIS PEOPLE FROM THE MIDIANITES.

JUDGES 6:1-4,7-16

We often compare ourselves to others. This rarely has a positive result. It either leads to pride because we think we are better than others, or it leads to discouragement because we believe others are better than us. It is especially confounding when God calls a person to serve Him in some capacity when someone else seems better fit to do it. God does this so that when the task is accomplished, God will receive the glory for it. Such was the case with Gideon.

 **When have you felt inadequate for a task? Where did you turn for help?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 3:7–6:40

Chapter 3 introduces readers to the first three judges of Israel. The judges were men and women God raised up and empowered to deliver the Israelites from foreign oppressors and to establish order during their lifetimes. Verse 8 indicates a powerful Aramean king, Cushan-rishathaim, subjugated the Israelites for eight years. But the Lord raised Othniel, Caleb's nephew and son-in-law to defeat him. Israel enjoyed peace for forty years until Othniel's death.

When Othniel died, Israel rebelled against the Lord again. So the Lord gave Eglon, the king of Moab, power to form a coalition with Ammon and Amalek and attack and defeat Israel, resulting in his possession of the City of Palms (Jericho). Eglon's dominance over Israel lasted for eighteen years, until the Lord raised up Ehud of Benjamin who assassinated Eglon. Ehud led Israel in battle to defeat the Moabites. After that, Israel had peace for eighty years. Following Ehud, Shamgar became a judge and delivered Israel on his own by striking down six hundred Philistines with a cattle prod.

Chapter 4 recounts how Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord again, and that the Lord handed Israel over to the Canaanite King Jabin of Hazor. Then the Lord raised Deborah as the judge to save His people. Barak, a military leader in Israel, called upon Deborah to go with him to defeat the Canaanites. When the Canaanite commander, Sisera, tried to hide from the Israelites, a woman named Jael killed him while he slept. Then the land had peace for forty years. Chapter 5 records the song Deborah and Barak sang praising the Lord for saving Israel.

Judges 6 indicates the Israelites abandoned the Lord again, so the Lord raised up the Midianites, accompanied by the Amalekites and the Qedemites, who oppressed Israel for seven years. As a result, the Israelites were impoverished and cried out to the Lord. The Lord sent a prophet to remind them of how He had saved them out of Egypt, gave them the land of Canaan, and how they responded to Him with disobedience. After that, the Lord called Gideon to be the next judge to deliver Israel from their oppressors. Gideon's account is the largest section in the book of Judges.



As you read Judges 6:1-16, note how God was in control of everything that happened.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

OPPRESSION (JUDG. 6:1-4,7-10)

¹ **The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD handed them over to Midian seven years,** ² **and they oppressed Israel. Because of Midian, the Israelites made hiding places for themselves in the mountains, caves, and strongholds.** ³ **Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and the people of the east came and attacked them.** ⁴ **They encamped against them and destroyed the produce of the land, even as far as Gaza. They left nothing for Israel to eat, as well as no sheep, ox, or donkey. [. . .]** ⁷ **When the Israelites cried out to him because of Midian,** ⁸ **the LORD sent a prophet to them. He said to them, “This is what the LORD God of Israel says: ‘I brought you out of Egypt and out of the place of slavery.** ⁹ **I rescued you from the power of Egypt and the power of all who oppressed you. I drove them out before you and gave you their land.** ¹⁰ **I said to you: I am the LORD your God. Do not fear the gods of the Amorites whose land you live in. But you did not obey me.’”**

VERSES 1-2

As before, the fickle Israelites *did what was evil in the sight of the LORD* (see 4:1). They once again abandoned the Lord and began worshiping other gods. And as before, the Lord handed them over to their enemies. This time it was the Midianites for seven years. It is important to recognize that this was the Lord’s demonstration of His hatred of sin and of His love for His people. (See Prov. 3:11-12.)

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by his concubine, Keturah. They had been enemies of Israel since the time they opposed Israel when Moses led the nation into the region east of the Jordan in preparation to enter Canaan (Num. 25:1-18). Like swarming locusts, the Midianites often made decimating, swift strikes on their enemies using camels over long distances. They would leave little of value behind them and get away before any counterstrike could be made.

The effects of the Midianite raids on Israel were devastating. For seven years, the Israelites existed in constant fear as they resorted to living in *the mountains, caves, and strongholds* because of the terrifying lightning strikes of the Midianites that could happen

at any moment. The Israelites were always anxiously having to look over their backs.

VERSES 3-4

The Midianites had allies who joined them in these annihilating raids: the ***Amalekites, and the people of the east***. The *Amalekites* were descendants of Esau and longtime enemies of Israel. They resided in the southernmost region of Canaan in the wasteland of the Negev. *The people of the east* were nomadic people who resided on the edges of the Arabian desert. Both groups were eager to join the Midianites in crossing the Jordan to wreak havoc on the Israelites and plunder the riches of the fertile land of Canaan.

Verses 4-5 describe the tactics Israel's enemies employed. They crossed the Jordan River from the east with their livestock and camels and deployed to locations that gave them a tactical advantage. They allowed their herds to pasture as they launched swift attacks on their camels against the Israelites. Their strategy was comprehensive in both its reach and effect.

These hordes of invaders timed their raids to coincide with the time Israel's crops were ready to harvest. The marauders were like a great swarm of locusts, plundering everything they could and laying waste to everything else. They took all of Israel's food and means of producing more food by leaving them with ***no sheep, ox, or donkey***. Israel's economic base and its means for sustenance were eliminated.

All of these events fulfilled what God warned Israel would happen in Deuteronomy 28:50-51. Israel's covenant unfaithfulness resulted in the covenant curse. Verse 6 states that "Israel became poverty-stricken because of Midian, and the Israelites cried out to the LORD." Even then, their cry was a plea for help without any hint of repentance.

VERSES 7-9

When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of the oppression of the Midianites, the Lord graciously ***sent a prophet to them***. This is reminiscent of Deborah (Judg. 4:4). But the mission of this prophet was different from Deborah's. God raised Deborah to be a judge to call on Israel's military to act. In contrast, this unnamed prophet did not come with the intent of mobilizing Israel to resist their enemies. However, God's sending of the prophet highlights His responsiveness to the plight of His people. While the prophet's name was unimportant, the message was of utmost

importance because he came bearing a message from God to His covenant people.

There are two parts to the Lord God's message to Israel. Repeatedly, the Israelites appear to have had poor memories when it came to all the wonderful things that the Lord had done for them. Therefore, the first part of the prophet's message in verses 8b-9 rehearses certain extraordinary deeds that God had already done for Israel.

The prophet began his message by stating, ***This is what the LORD God of Israel says***. His audience needed to know that he was the Lord's messenger with the Lord's message. Then, using emphatic language, the Lord reminded the Israelites of five things He had done for them. (1) I brought you up out of Egypt; (2) I delivered you from bondage; (3) I rescued you from your oppressors, the Egyptians; (4) I drove out the Canaanites before you; and (5) it was I who gave you the promised land. The Israelites needed to be reminded again of the wondrous deeds the Lord had done for them.

They were focused on getting relief when what they needed was repentance.

VERSE 10

The second part of God's message through His prophet was an indictment of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord. God reminded them that He said, ***I am the LORD your God***. This statement is reminiscent of when the Lord told Moses to tell the Israelites that "I AM WHO I AM" sent him to deliver them from Egypt (Ex. 3:14). In this title, the Lord was declaring, "I will always be who I have always been." Therefore, God was stating that as He has always been faithful to His covenant people, He would continue to be faithful to them.

Given everything the Lord had already done for Israel, they had every reason to be faithfully devoted to Him. Instead, they abandoned the Lord for the gods of the Amorites. The distress they were experiencing was because they ***did not obey*** the Lord. They were focused on getting relief when what they needed was repentance. One might think God's message to Israel was harsh, but nothing could be further from the truth. In His kindness, the Lord exposed their sin and the reasons for their distress, and in so doing gave them an opportunity to repent of their sin and

experience restoration. The people needed to recognize that rejecting their false gods and being faithfully devoted to the Lord was the only way they would experience true and lasting peace.

 **What outcomes should we anticipate if we live in disobedience to God?**

COMMISSION (JUDG. 6:11-14)

¹¹ **The angel of the LORD came, and he sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the winepress in order to hide it from the Midianites.** ¹² **Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, “The LORD is with you, valiant warrior.”**

¹³ **Gideon said to him, “Please, my lord, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about? They said, ‘Hasn’t the LORD brought us out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian.”** ¹⁴ **The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian. I am sending you!”**

VERSES 11-12

Verse 11 introduces **Gideon**, the judge whom God chose to save Israel from the Midianites and their allies. Gideon’s name means “to mutilate” or “to hack.” It was a fitting name for one who would mutilate and hack down an altar to Baal. Some biblical scholars believe he previously had a different name, and that *Gideon* became his nickname or new name after what he did.

As the account begins, Gideon was **threshing wheat in the winepress** on his father’s farm in Ophrah **in order to hide it from the Midianites**. The winepress would have been a safer place than a more exposed threshing floor. This indicates that Gideon shared the same fear the rest of the Israelites had of the Midianites. The location of Ophrah is unknown, but given Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh, it was probably located within its tribal allotment.

As Gideon was working, **the angel of the LORD** appeared and said, **The LORD is with you, valiant warrior**. This is an amazing statement. Gideon did not appear to be a *valiant warrior*.

He was hiding like everyone else just hoping to survive. Furthermore, given the hesitancy he will show when he receives his commission to rise up against the Midianites, it may have been frustrating for Gideon to be called *valiant warrior*. But the angel of the Lord knew that the Lord could and would take this timid man and make him into a valiant warrior.

The Lord could and would take this timid man and make him into a valiant warrior.

VERSES 13-14

Upon hearing the messenger's greeting, Gideon's frustrations with God rose to the surface. He asked, "If the Lord is with me, then why has He allowed all of these terrible things to happen to us? And if the Lord is so mighty, then where are all the wondrous things we have heard from our forefathers that He is capable of doing? How could the Lord bring us out of Egypt and then turn around and abandon us to the hateful Midianites?" Gideon's facts were correct, but his conclusion was wrong. He blamed God for the perilous situation when it was Israel that was responsible for it.

The angel appeared to ignore Gideon. He told Gideon, ***Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the grasp of Midian.*** Since the Lord was sending him, the Lord would give Gideon the strength to accomplish it. When the Lord calls His servants to do what is impossible for them, He will always instill within them everything they need to accomplish it.



How might our circumstances impact our response to God's calling?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service. (See Judges 14:6; Acts 1:8.)

REASSURANCE (JUDG. 6:15-16)

¹⁵ He said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s family.” ¹⁶ “But I will be with you,” the LORD said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.”

VERSES 15-16

Gideon’s fear accentuated his sense of inadequacy. How could he *deliver Israel*? His family was the *weakest* in his clan, Manasseh. He was the *youngest* of his father’s children. From Gideon’s point of view, he did not have the credentials or the ability to deliver Israel. However, the Lord supplied Gideon everything he needed to accomplish God’s will, saying, *But I will be with you*. The Lord’s presence was everything Gideon would need to strike down the entire host of Midianites as if they were but *one man*. When God is with you, everyone else might as well be also.



How does the assurance of God’s presence negate our excuse of inadequacy?



BIBLE SKILL: Do a word study to gain a better understanding of a passage.

Scripture is full of “calling” experiences where God selected servants to carry out kingdom work. Study the following passages: Genesis 12:1-4; Exodus 3-4; 1 Kings 19:19-21; Isaiah 6:1-9; Jeremiah 1; Jonah 1; Luke 1:26-38; Mark 1:16-20; and Acts 9:1-9. Identify similarities and differences. Note the particular ways each person was called and how they responded. Examine your own calling from God. Have you experienced a specific call from Him? How have you responded?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We can anticipate that when people turn their backs on God, they will experience undesirable consequences.
- + We can be encouraged to know that God calls unlikely people to do great things for Him.
- + Believers should trust God when being called upon to take a specific action for Him.



As a group, discuss how you might encourage one another to do great things for God. How can believers be encouraged by the truth that God calls unlikely people to do great things for Him?



Why do people, especially believers, who turn their backs on God experience undesirable consequences? What causes you to have difficulty trusting in God? How can doubting God be turned into trusting God?



Memorize Judges 6:16.

Prayer Needs



Trust

GOD PROVIDED VICTORY AND BROUGHT HIMSELF
GLORY THROUGH GIDEON'S ARMY.

JUDGES 7:1-8,19-23

The expression, “Cinderella story,” is an analogy that originates from the children’s story of “Cinderella.” It refers to someone who has come from obscurity to surprisingly gain significant recognition or success. Most people enjoy a good Cinderella story. Someone like Abraham Lincoln, who came from a humble background to become president, is an example of a Cinderella story. There are many occasions in the Bible when God used unlikely people to do extraordinary things so that He would receive the glory.

 **Why do stories of people rising from humble circumstances to achieve success resonate so strongly with us?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 7:1-12:15

Judges 7:1-8:21 recounts Gideon's victory over Midian. He began with thirty-two thousand men, but God reduced the number to three hundred. This was to ensure that Israel knew the victory was by God's power, not their own strength. In the aftermath of victory over Midian, the Israelites wanted to make Gideon king. But he refused, saying God would be their king (Judg. 8:22-23).

Though there was peace in Israel for forty years until Gideon died, Gideon himself led all of Israel to worship an idol in his hometown. When Gideon died the Israelites began worshipping the Baals again (8:24-32).

Judges 8:33-9:57 demonstrates how much Israel turned away from God. Though Gideon had refused an offer to become king, his son, Abimelech (meaning "my father is king"), maneuvered himself into a position that led the citizens of Shechem and Beth-millo to make him king. Abimelech had all his brothers killed, except for the youngest, Jotham, who escaped. Jotham pronounced a curse on Abimelech and his subjects. After three years, God dealt with their wickedness by causing a civil war to break out between them. The citizens of Shechem, who made Abimelech king, were slaughtered, and Abimelech perished when a woman dropped a millstone on his head.

Judges 10:1-5 mention two minor judges, Tola and Jair. After them, Jephthah was the next major judge to save Israel after Israel "abandoned the LORD" and began worshipping other gods. Jephthah led Israel to victory over the Ammonites and judged Israel for six years (10:6-12:7). After Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon judged Israel (12:8-15).

It is notable that after the Gideon narrative, instead of indicating "the land had peace" for a number of years (3:30; 5:31; 8:28), the remaining narratives conclude with the phrase, "judged Israel" (a number of) years (10:2-3; 12:8-9,11,13-14; 16:31). Israel may have experienced some stability, but there was no more rest.

 **As you read Judges 7:1-8,19-23, identify how Israel continued its downward spirals of unfaithfulness to the Lord.**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TOO MANY (JUDG. 7:1-3)

¹ Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the troops who were with him, got up early and camped beside the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them, below the hill of Moreh, in the valley. ² The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many troops for me to hand the Midianites over to them, or else Israel might elevate themselves over me and say, ‘I saved myself.’” ³ Now announce to the troops, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand of the troops turned back, but ten thousand remained.

VERSE 1

At the beginning of verse 1, the writer referred to Gideon as •**Jerubbaal**. This refers to what transpired in Judges 6:25-32. God commanded Gideon to tear down the altar of Baal that belonged to his father along with the Asherah pole beside it. Gideon commissioned the aid of ten of his servants and did what the Lord told him to do, though he did it at night so that no one would know he was the one. The angry men of the city discovered Gideon was responsible for what they deemed as sacrilege. Consequently, they wanted to kill Gideon, but Joash, Gideon’s father, spoke up for him. When the men of the city stood down and dispersed, Joash called Gideon, “Jerubbaal,” meaning “let Baal contend.” Gideon’s action proved Baal was unable to defend his own honor much less himself.

Gideon was camped about five miles south of the Midianite army of one hundred twenty thousand men (Judg. 8:10) with only thirty-two thousand troops **beside the spring of Harod**. Ironically, *the stream of Harod* means “The Spring of Trembling.” This was an apt name for the spring, for according to verse 3 it describes the mental and physical state of the majority of Gideon’s troops as they anticipated the looming battle.

VERSES 2-3

Given the Midianite army outnumbered the Israelites by nearly four to one, Gideon received an instruction from God that must have been completely unexpected. The Lord told him he had **too many troops** for the Lord to give the Israelites a victory over the Midianites. Certainly, the Lord could do whatever He wanted to do.

The issue was not the Lord's ability but Israel's misplaced trust and lack of humility. The Lord knew that if He gave Israel the victory with their thirty-two thousand troops over Midian's one hundred twenty thousand troops, then Israel would boast and take credit for the amazing victory instead of recognizing that it was God who did it for them.

Therefore, the Lord instituted a two-pronged Israelite army reduction plan. The first stage was straightforward. God told Gideon to announce to his troops that whoever was *fearful and trembling* at the prospect of fighting the Midianites could leave. Gideon must have been shocked to see twenty-two thousand of his thirty-two thousand men abandon him. With only ten thousand men remaining, Gideon's army went from being outnumbered by almost four to one to being outnumbered by his enemies twelve to one.



In what ways might we try to do God's work by our might and for our glory?

The issue was not the Lord's ability but Israel's lack of humility.

STILL TOO MANY (JUDG. 7:4-8)

⁴ Then the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many troops. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there. If I say to you, 'This one can go with you,' he can go. But if I say about anyone, 'This one cannot go with you,' he cannot go."⁵ So he brought the troops down to the water, and the LORD said to Gideon, "Separate everyone who laps water with his tongue like a dog. Do the same with everyone who kneels to drink."⁶ The number of those who lapped with their hands to their mouths was three hundred men, and all the rest of the troops knelt to drink water.⁷ The LORD said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the three hundred men who lapped and hand the Midianites over to you. But everyone else is to go home."⁸ So Gideon sent all the Israelites to their tents but kept

the three hundred troops, who took the provisions and their rams' horns. The camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

VERSE 4

Gideon had lost nearly seventy percent of his army, yet with the best strategy his remaining ten thousand troops could have perhaps defeated the Midianites. It was for this reason the Lord had not finished downsizing Gideon's army. There had to be no doubt that a victory over the Midianites would be because God did it. So the Lord said to Gideon, ***There are still too many troops.*** It is also difficult to imagine that Gideon was perfectly calm when he received this word. God instructed Gideon to take his troops down to the spring where He would ***test them.*** Gideon needed to accept the Lord's assessment of each man. If the Lord said one could go with Gideon into battle, then that one could stay. But everyone the Lord said could not to go into battle would not be permitted to stay.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. (See Psalm 47:8; Job 42:2.)

VERSES 5-7

Gideon obeyed the Lord and brought his troops to the water. God instructed him to separate the men into two groups based on how they drank from the spring. Everyone who lowered themselves and lapped the ***water with his tongue like a dog*** was put in one group. The ones who knelt, scooped the water up, and drank it from their cupped hands were to be separated into a second group. Of the ten thousand men who drank at the spring, only ***three hundred*** scooped up the water and drank it from cupped hands. The Lord told Gideon He would save Israel using these three hundred men.

Some Bible teachers have suggested that the first test was a test of courage and this second test was one of vigilance. However, the text provides no explanation. Such speculations can easily sidetrack one from the main point. The main thing and the plain thing is that the Lord downsized the army so that He would receive all of the glory for defeating Israel's enemies. The weaker Israelites would be forced to completely trust in the Lord if they were to defeat

the Midianites. The emphasis is on Israel's utter weakness and the Lord's absolute power. All of Israel needed to learn what Jonathan, Saul's son, would know years later when he went into battle vastly outnumbered, declaring, "Nothing can keep the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

VERSE 8

Gideon obeyed and *sent* everyone back *to their tents* except the three hundred men the Lord had chosen to stay. The three hundred left behind took the *provisions* and *rams' horns* from those who returned home. This insured every one of the three hundred men had everything they would need for what lay ahead of them.

The following verses indicate Gideon's growing fears made him reluctant to launch an attack against the Midianites. So the Lord instructed him to take his servant with him to spy on their enemy. God assured Gideon that he would then be "encouraged to attack the camp" (v. 11). Though the Midianites and Amalekites were "like a swarm of locusts" (v. 12), Gideon overheard Midianite men discussing a dream one of them had revealing that God would give Gideon victory over them. Gideon finally trusted the Lord when he heard the words of these Midianites.

The Lord recognized Gideon's human frailty. In His patience and kindness, He used the enemy to confirm what He had promised Gideon. Gideon then worshiped the Lord and returned to his camp, realizing that the Lord had already given him and his men victory over their enemy (v. 15). Worship is always a proper response to God's goodness.



When have you had to trust God despite not understanding what He was doing or asking?

JUST RIGHT (JUDG. 7:19-23)

¹⁹ Gideon and the hundred men who were with him went to the outpost of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch after the sentries had been stationed. They blew their rams' horns and broke the pitchers that were in their hands. ²⁰ The three companies blew their rams' horns and shattered their pitchers. They held their torches in their left hands and their rams'

horns to blow in their right hands, and they shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!”²¹ Each Israelite took his position around the camp, and the entire Midianite army began to run, and they cried out as they fled.²² When Gideon’s men blew their three hundred rams’ horns, the LORD caused the men in the whole army to turn on each other with their swords. They fled to Acacia House in the direction of Zererah as far as the border of Abel-meholah near Tabbath.²³ Then the men of Israel were called from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, and they pursued the Midianites.

VERSE 19

In verses 16-18, Gideon became the “valiant warrior” God had called him to be (6:12). He divided his men into three groups of one hundred in each company. He equipped each man with a rams’ horn in one hand and an empty pitcher with a torch inside of it in the other hand. They had dispersed themselves around the camp. When Gideon’s company blew their rams’ horns, the other companies were to do the same. Verse 19 indicates Gideon’s men went to *the outpost* of the enemy camp *at the beginning of the middle watch*, which was midnight. This was a good time because the guards leaving their posts would have been tired and their replacements were still getting themselves correctly situated. It was then *they blew their rams’ horns and broke the pitchers that were in their hands*.

VERSE 20

First, they blew their horns. Second, they smashed their jars. Third, they held up their lit torches that had been concealed in the jars. In a normal nighttime military maneuver, only someone at the front of a company would have been carrying a lit torch. Gideon’s three hundred men appeared to be three hundred companies surrounding the Midianites. Finally, they shouted, **A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!** Even though “sword” was probably metaphorical for “battle,” it is ironic they said *sword*, because it does not appear that any of them were carrying a sword.

VERSES 21-22

When the Midianites heard the horns blowing and the jars smashing and saw the torches, they thought they were surrounded by a large enemy. Pandemonium broke out as the terrified Midianites cried out as they attempted to escape. We must not forget

that the Lord had set the stage with the foreboding dream of defeat that apparently had been circulating throughout the Midianite camp (vv. 13-14).

There was so much chaos that the Lord caused all of the Midianites to begin attacking each other with their swords. The actual locations to which they fled is uncertain, but it makes sense that they fled east toward the Jordan so they could return to their desert homelands.

VERSE 23

After the Lord had won the battle for Israel, Gideon called upon men ***from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh***, most likely those whom the Lord rejected for the assault on the Midianite camp (v. 8), to pursue the fleeing Midianites. It is not clear if God had given Gideon His blessing to call these new men, possibly from those rejected earlier, into the battle. It is possible that Gideon, caught up in the overwhelming triumph, called these men back into service despite God's directions.

God fulfilled His word and gave Israel and victory. He still stands ready to go into any battle with His people.



How should knowing that God acts in unpredictable ways impact how we live?



BIBLE SKILL: *Respond emotionally to a passage from Scripture.*

Gideon had his doubts when God said He would deliver Israel through him. He also may have wondered why God so drastically reduced his army. Prayerfully consider times when you had questions about what God was doing. How do you tend to respond when God doesn't make sense in your life? What can you do to trust Him more fully?



Compromise

SAMSON'S PHYSICAL STRENGTH COULD NOT SAVE HIM FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS WEAK MORAL CHARACTER.

JUDGES 16:16-31

Parents, grandparents, teachers, and anyone who has spent time with young children recognize the importance of teaching the concept of cause and effect. The idea is that for every cause there is an effect and that for every effect there was a cause. In other words, there are consequences to every person's thoughts, behaviors, and actions. In the Bible, Samson is one example among many who suffered the consequences of a weak moral character.

 **How has understanding the principle of cause and effect influenced the choices you make in life?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JUDGES 13:1-21:25

The concluding nine chapters of the book of Judges contain two sections. The first is an account of Samson, the last of the judges (Judg. 13:1-16:31). It begins with his unusual birth. The angel of the Lord appeared to his barren mother and informed her that she and her husband would have a son and that they must raise him as a Nazirite (13:2-7). This meant that he was not to consume anything derived from the grapevine, he was to abstain from alcohol, his hair was never to be cut, and he was to avoid contact with any corpse (Num. 6:1-21). The Spirit of the Lord stirred Samson, and he was a judge in Israel for twenty years (Judg. 13:25; 15:20).

Samson, however, had a flawed character and kept the wrong company. Despite his parents' protests, he demanded that they arrange for him to marry a young Philistine woman in Timnah. On his way there, Samson killed an attacking lion with his bare hands, later returned to it, and scooped honey out of its carcass. He kept this secret from his parents because it was a violation of his Nazirite vow.

He married the Philistine woman, but after she betrayed his trust, her father had her marry someone else. When Samson learned what his father-in-law had done, he exacted revenge on the Philistines. He burned up their grain, vineyards, and olive groves, and then killed one thousand of their men with the jawbone of a donkey (14:1-15:20).

Next, Samson became romantically involved with another woman, Delilah. This account is the focus of this week's study.

The last section of the book of Judges (17:1-21:25) contains two accounts that, taken together, describe what some have called the "Canaanization of Israel" because the Israelites behaved as wickedly as the Canaanites did. Israel's behavior was characterized by political, civil, moral, and spiritual chaos as "everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (21:25).



As you read Judges 16:16-31, identify the sins Samson committed.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

STRENGTH DEPARTED (JUDG. 16:16-20)

¹⁶ Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out, ¹⁷ he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.” ¹⁸ When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: “Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth.” The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the silver with them. ¹⁹ Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. In this way, she made him helpless, and his strength left him. ²⁰ Then she cried, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” When he awoke from his sleep, he said, “I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

VERSE 16

Judges 16:4 introduces Delilah, whose name means “flirt,” stating that Samson “fell in love” with her. When the five Philistine governors learned of this, they saw it as a possible opportunity to capitalize on Samson’s vulnerability. Therefore, they went to Delilah to convince her to persuade Samson to reveal the source of his tremendous strength so that they could take him captive. If she did this, each leader promised to give Delilah 1,100 pieces of silver—5,500 in all.

Consequently, Delilah asked Samson, “How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?” (v. 6). He made up different false ways it could happen (vv. 7,11,13). After trying each of them and failing, Delilah questioned Samson’s love for her. She failed to realize he was already bound by his love for her. Also, Delilah was committed to getting her silver. So *she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him*. The Hebrew word translated *nagged* literally means “to torment, oppress, and harass.” Delilah relentlessly nagged Samson until *she wore him out*, literally “to being just short of death.” Samson had now allowed himself to be taken advantage of twice because of his relationships with the wrong kind of women.

VERSE 17

Because of Delilah's constant nagging, Samson ***told her the whole truth***. This was in response to her accusation in verse 15, when she said to him, "your heart is not with me." Another reason Samson told her his secret was apparently because he loved her (v. 4). His strength came from his relationship with God as a Nazirite from birth. His hair was not to be cut as one of the signs of his special calling of God—his separation to God. It is surprising Samson told her of the vow, because up to this point it seemed as if Samson did not take his vow seriously.

Also noteworthy is Samson's statement, ***I will become weak and be like any other man***. Perhaps this is a third reason he confided in Delilah. He wanted to be rid of the expectations and burden of God's call upon his life and be like any other man. This seems incredible, but given that Delilah had acted on all of the false claims Samson had made about the source of his strength, he surely must have known she would act on this one too. It is as if he was inviting her to cut his hair. Maybe he wanted to settle down with Delilah and live according to his own desires. After all, Samson never made the Nazirite vow to the Lord himself. It was placed upon him before he was born. Whatever Samson was thinking, he was tragically mistaken. Even if Samson expected Delilah to cut his hair, he could not have predicted everything that happened to him next.

VERSES 18-20

This time ***Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth***. She was so confident she knew the whole truth concerning the source of Samson's strength that she sent for the ***Philistine leaders*** to come. It is noteworthy that she was not going to do anything to Samson until they came. She had to be sure they would deal with Samson after she had betrayed him. Furthermore, the Philistine leaders obviously believed Delilah because they came to her and brought with them her immense reward of silver.

In the course of events, Samson fell asleep as he had done before (v. 14). He slept while the enemy was in the next room. Ready for the opportunity, she had a man waiting close by to ***shave off*** Samson's ***seven braids*** of hair. Everything worked perfectly according to Delilah's plan. She finally got the result she desired. She succeeded in making Samson ***helpless*** as ***his strength left him*** while he slept. Yes, Delilah made Samson helpless, but Samson put himself into the situation that brought all of it on.

When believers entwine themselves with unbelievers, they become spiritually vulnerable. Paul wrote, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Cor. 15:33). What happened to Samson should remind believers that we have an enemy, the devil, who is seeking our ruin. Learning from Samson’s mistakes, we must not drop our guard but be sober-minded and vigilant (1 Pet. 5:8).

As she had done before, Delilah cried out, ***Samson, the Philistines are here!*** As before, the Philistines were in the next room waiting to ambush Samson (vv. 9,12). This time, when he awoke from his sleep and said, ***I will escape as I did before and shake myself free,*** it did not happen.

Samson ***did not know that the LORD had left him.*** It is notable that it was not really Samson’s hair that had given him his power. It was the Lord Himself. Samson’s uncut hair was a sign of his vow to God, an indicator of the Spirit of the Lord’s power that had stirred within him (13:25). So, the statement that the Lord had left Samson means that the Lord withdrew His strength from Samson. However, it did not mean that the Lord had altogether abandoned him. While believers will experience His discipline, the Lord will never forsake His people.



How can the people with whom we choose to associate impact our ability to remain faithful to God?

SAMSON DEFEATED (JUDG. 16:21-25)

²¹ The Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes. They brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze shackles, and he was forced to grind grain in the prison. ²² But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved. ²³ Now the Philistine leaders gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon. They rejoiced and said: Our god has handed over our enemy Samson to us. ²⁴ When the people saw him, they praised their god and said: Our god has handed over to us our enemy who destroyed our land and who multiplied our dead. ²⁵ When they were in good spirits, they said, “Bring Samson here to entertain us.” So they brought Samson from prison, and he entertained them. They had him stand between the pillars.

VERSES 21-22

Ironically, the man who lived his life by the lust of his eyes had his eyes gouged out. The man who could not be restrained was bound in bronze shackles. The man who proudly went wherever he pleased was now forced to grind grain in prison like an animal. And the man who appeared to have little regard for others was now humiliated. In many ways, Samson was experiencing personally what the nation of Israel repeatedly experienced during the time of the judges.

However, the story did not end there. At the same time, the Lord was still at work in Samson's life—***his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved***. The Lord was in the process of restoring Samson because He was committed to completing the work in Samson that He had begun. The Lord had called Samson before his birth to be a judge in Israel who would “begin to save Israel from the power of the Philistines” (13:5). God's promise and purpose for Samson had not changed.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See John 10:27-29; Colossians 1:12-14.)

VERSES 23-25

At the beginning of Samson's narrative in Judges 13:1, the writer indicated the Israelites again did what was literally “the evil” in the Lord's sight. That evil was abandoning the Lord to worship the Baals and other gods of Canaan. ***Dagon*** was a Canaanite god that was tied to the fertility of grains and believed to be the father of Baal. When the Philistines entered Canaan, they adopted Dagon as their patron god. They believed their god had delivered their most feared enemy, Samson, to them. Therefore, they ***gathered together to offer a great sacrifice to their god Dagon*** and praise him for what he had done.

Next, the Philistines decided their gathering would be even more enjoyable if they brought Samson in from prison to ***entertain***. They would amuse themselves at Samson's expense. Archaeological evidence of Philistine temples suggests that the roof and upper story of this large temple were supported by two cedar

pillars set on round stone bases. It would have been between pillars like this where they placed Samson.



What do you think was Samson's greatest loss, and why?

PHILISTINES DESTROYED (JUDG. 16:26-31)

²⁶ Samson said to the young man who was leading him by the hand, “Lead me where I can feel the pillars supporting the temple, so I can lean against them.” ²⁷ The temple was full of men and women; all the leaders of the Philistines were there, and about three thousand men and women were on the roof watching Samson entertain them. ²⁸ He called out to the LORD, “Lord God, please remember me. Strengthen me, God, just once more. With one act of vengeance, let me pay back the Philistines for my two eyes.” ²⁹ Samson took hold of the two middle pillars supporting the temple and leaned against them, one on his right hand and the other on his left. ³⁰ Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He pushed with all his might, and the temple fell on the leaders and all the people in it. And those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed in his life. ³¹ Then his brothers and his father’s whole family came down, carried him back, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. So he judged Israel twenty years.

VERSES 26-30

The once mighty Samson was now being led by the hand of a young servant boy. Samson asked the young man to lead him to the pillars supporting the temple so he could *lean against them*. It appears Samson was already thinking about how he could literally take them all down, as there were about three thousand men and women watching what the large crowd of Philistine dignitaries in the main area below them was doing to Samson.

Then Samson *called out to the LORD*. Samson addressed Him as **Lord God**, the Lord’s personal name to His covenant people. First, Samson called upon the Lord to *remember* him. In Hebrew, “remember” is not the opposite of “forget” in English. It means “to be mindful of” or “to act on behalf of.” Second, Samson asked

the Lord to give him the strength to **pay back the Philistines** for gouging out his eyes. His motivation for killing the Philistines was selfish, just as it had been before. Samson was not concerned about the Lord’s reputation or the appalling falsehoods the Philistines were spewing about Dagon. Nor did Samson express concern about the well-being of his own people. In the end, Samson was all about Samson. Therefore, Samson leaned into the pillars supporting the entire temple, and as he prayed that the Lord would let him die with the Philistines, Samson **pushed with all his might**. The entire temple collapsed killing everyone there. In fact, Samson killed more Philistines in that instant than he had killed all together previously.

VERSE 31

Samson may have forgotten his own people, but they did not forget him. Both of his parents apparently were deceased, but his father’s entire family came and retrieved Samson’s body and buried him in his father’s tomb. The statement that Samson **judged Israel twenty years** indicates that even though Samson suffered because of his sinful choices, the Lord nonetheless accomplished His purpose through Samson, which was “to save Israel from the power of the Philistines” (13:5).



In light of Samson’s story, how would you counsel someone who is experiencing the consequences of sinful choices?

BIBLE SKILL: *Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.*

Memorize Psalm 28:7, then write the verse in your own words. Reflect on ways Samson’s life illustrated this verse and ways that he fell short. Write a brief prayer, asking God to help you trust Him more, celebrate His work in your life, and show gratitude for all He has done.

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should avoid putting themselves in situations that will tempt them to sin.
- + Believers who compromise their faithfulness to God will eventually be put to shame.
- + Believers can be confident that God does not abandon them, in spite of their sin.



How can your Bible study group encourage one another to avoid putting yourselves in situations that will tempt you to sin? In what areas of your lives are you susceptible to being tempted to compromise your faithfulness to God?



When was a time you sinned against God and discovered He did not abandon you? How should you respond to God's faithfulness to never abandon you in spite of your sin? How does God's faithfulness to you affect your faithfulness to Him?



Memorize Psalm 28:7.

Prayer Needs



Faithfulness

IN THE MIDST OF NAOMI'S TRAGEDY, GOD DEMONSTRATED HIS CARE AND SOVEREIGNTY.

RUTH 1:11-18; 2:5-12

In his book, *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.”¹ People who face tragedy feel both grief and fear. They wonder what the loss means for their future. When grief and fear cloud your path, nothing comforts your heart and gives you the courage to take steps into the unknown like knowing that God cares and controls every moment of your life.

 **How might faith in God's care and control help a person navigate grief and fear?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

RUTH 1:1–2:23

The book of Ruth comes toward the end of the judges' rule over Israel just before the start of Israel's reign of kings. To this point, Israel had been a conquering people. Joshua exhibited great faith as he led the people into the promised land by conquering Jericho. God displayed the beauty of His faithfulness through people like Rahab (Josh. 2), and through Israel's obedience to march around the walls of Jericho blowing their trumpets (Josh. 6). Later, Caleb demonstrated his trust in the Lord's sovereignty by asking Joshua to give him the land the Lord promised him years before. In each story, God's people rose to honor the Lord for His providential care.

However, throughout this period in their history, Israel struggled with idolatry and immorality. God ordained judges to rule the people as they proceeded through cycles of sin, judgment, confession, and deliverance. Israel's leaders, the judges, and the people needed direction.

The book of Ruth reminds the reader that God's providence and faithfulness will not fail no matter how dark the times. As the book opens, the writer introduces a Judean family moving from Bethlehem to Moab. Elimelech and Naomi's two sons married Moabite wives, Orpah and Ruth. Within ten years, Elimelech and his two sons died.

The story is one of tragic loss, deep loyalty, and God's faithfulness to Ruth, a foreigner who trusted Him. As the story unfolds, Ruth decided to remain with Naomi after the loss of her husband. She followed God into an unknown future and found God faithful through every trial and hardship. In chapters 1–2, Ruth met a close relative who would have a significant role in God's redemptive story. Through a foreigner and someone God providentially placed in Ruth's path, God continued to fulfill His promise of redemption (Gen. 3:15). Assured of His faithfulness, we can walk confidently into every situation in life.

 **Read Ruth 1:11-18; 2:5-12. How do you see God's care and sovereignty demonstrated?**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

LOSS (RUTH 1:11-15)

¹¹ **But Naomi replied, “Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, ¹³ would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me.” ¹⁴ Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law.”**

VERSE 11

Prior to her plea for Orpah and Ruth to *return home* to Moab, Naomi experienced the unimaginable loss of her husband and two sons. In ancient times, widows and orphans were the most vulnerable people in society. Laws were set in place to protect widows from extortion and mistreatment (Deut. 14:29). Naomi felt the weight of providing for her two daughters-in-law. Her security was lost and her future bleak.

Furthermore, Naomi rebuked Orpah and Ruth for their desire to stay with her; it did not make sense. On the one hand, if they went with Naomi, would they be accepted by the people in Bethlehem? Would the daughters-in-law be beyond childbearing age by the time Naomi found a new husband and had two sons? Naomi knew the best option was for Orpah and Ruth to return home to find husbands and raise children. One thing seemed obvious, the two young women felt at home with Naomi and did not want to leave her.

Orpah and Ruth could have considered the Israelite custom of levirate marriage. Levirate marriage involved a close family member, such as a brother-in-law marrying his brother’s widow to preserve the family through progeny (Deut. 25:5-6). The oldest brother-in-law had the obligation to marry his brother’s widow, and as such, he inherited all of his dead brother’s estate. The importance of levirate marriage was the perpetuation of the deceased’s name in Israel.

Two stipulations had to be met. First, levirate marriage was obligatory only if the one it fell to was alive when his brother died. Someone who was born after his brother's death did not hold this obligation. Second, both of the brothers had to be born of the same father. If either of these two stipulations were not met, the widow was free to marry anyone of her choosing. Naomi gives no evidence of pursuing this for her daughters-in-law. More than likely, she did not think of this since the two girls were Moabite women.

VERSES 12-13

Naomi revealed her true feelings. She loved the two girls as her own daughters. But logically speaking, it made no sense for them to stay with her. They had their whole lives ahead of them. Even if Naomi could bear children, it would be foolish to think they would wait since it would put them beyond childbearing years. They needed to remarry, and, in Naomi's mind, the best place for them to find husbands was in Moab.

Naomi's concluding statement expressed the pain of her loss: ***No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD's hand has turned against me.*** Naomi's losses embittered her soul. Later, as they entered Bethlehem, Naomi expressed her bitterness by calling herself *Mara* (bitterness), "for the Almighty has made me very bitter." She continued, "I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has opposed me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" (1:20-21). Loss can embitter our hearts and cloud the realities of God's care and provisions. Naomi soon discovered that God had not abandoned her but provided through her a greater expression of His faithfulness.

VERSES 14-15

When Naomi's speech ended, the three felt the soberness of the moment. Orpah took the reasonable route, kissed her mother-in-law, and left for home. Nothing more was said of Orpah.

There was no hesitation with Ruth. The text uses the word ***clung*** to describe her decision to stay with Naomi. Genesis 2:24 uses the same word as it describes how a man "leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife." Ruth bonded with Naomi and entered into her uncertain future. She felt deeply the loss of her husband but also the loss in Naomi's heart, and she would not allow Naomi to suffer alone. Sacrificial love enters into the bitterness and pain of another without prejudice.



Why does loss draw some people closer to God, while others struggle with anger toward God? How can the church community be a source of compassion to both?

LOYALTY (RUTH 1:16-18)

¹⁶ But Ruth replied: Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.

VERSES 16-18

Ruth's reply to Naomi's plea to return home demonstrated a deep loyalty birthed out of sincere love. She fully committed herself to Naomi's country, home, people, and God. Ruth not only committed to live alongside Naomi and adopt all the nuances of her life, but to stay with her until death.

Ruth's words capture the beauty of true love. She opened her heart to her mother-in-law without reservation or hesitation. She begged for Naomi to accept her decision to remain with her. She enjoined her life to Naomi's and called on God to witness her promise. Ruth's unselfish loyalty has been quoted, praised, and shared throughout generations. In an age of self-promotion and individualism, loyal love stands out like a rare jewel.

Naomi could say nothing else. Rather than enter into another round of arguments, she accepted Ruth's position. The two widows continued their travels toward Judah, entrusting their futures to the Lord.



What role does loyalty play in our relationships with God and others? What value does society place on loyalty?



How can loyalty be a way to view God's provision and protection?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Proverbs 16:33; Romans 8:28.)

PROVISION (RUTH 2:5-12)

⁵ Boaz asked his servant who was in charge of the harvesters, “Whose young woman is this?” ⁶ The servant answered, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the territory of Moab.” ⁷ She asked, “Will you let me gather fallen grain among the bundles behind the harvesters?” She came and has been on her feet since early morning, except that she rested a little in the shelter.” ⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen, my daughter. Don’t go and gather grain in another field, and don’t leave this one, but stay here close to my female servants.

⁹ See which field they are harvesting, and follow them. Haven’t I ordered the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go and drink from the jars the young men have filled.” ¹⁰ She fell facedown, bowed to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor with you, so that you notice me, although I am a foreigner?” ¹¹ Boaz answered her, “Everything you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband’s death has been fully reported to me: how you left your father and mother and your native land, and how you came to a people you didn’t previously know.” ¹² May the LORD reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”

VERSES 5-7

After Naomi and Ruth entered Bethlehem, Ruth took the initiative to find work. She gained permission from Naomi to pursue gleaning the grain fields. Gleaners followed behind harvesters, gathering leftovers and reaping the corners of the field. By Jewish law, Ruth

had the right to glean in any field with the landowner's permission. Finding Boaz's field, a close relative to their family, was not by chance. Her steps were established by the Lord (Ps. 37:23).

When Ruth gained permission to glean, she did not know the field belonged to **•Boaz**, a relative of her deceased father-in-law, Elimelech. When Boaz noticed her gleaning in his field, he asked, **Whose young woman is this?** He knew Ruth was out of place. His inquiry could have been to her clan or tribe status, but the question also probed whether she was engaged or married to another landowner like himself.

Through the servant's response, Boaz discovered a family connection. In addition to answering Boaz's question, the servant added a previous conversation he and Ruth exchanged at the start. Ruth had asked to follow **behind the harvesters** and gather the fallen grain from the bundles they carried. Harvesting fallen grain in the heat of the Judean fields would take a toll on anyone. The servant commented on Ruth's work ethic and need for a brief rest in a nearby shelter. Seeing her determination despite the harsh physical conditions must have endeared Boaz's heart to Ruth even more than his initial attraction.

VERSES 8-9

Boaz approached Ruth. His tender address gives the reader the sense of immediate desire to protect Ruth. Boaz told Ruth not to glean in another field. He did not want her to go outside of his protection but to stay close to the other female servants.

Boaz ordered his young men **not to touch** Ruth. He also provided for her to drink from the vessels of water reserved for the male servants. Boaz did not treat Ruth with dishonor or disrespect. Her character captivated him. Character held a high status among Jews and early Christians, especially with widows. In the early church, older women taught younger women to live with character and focus on the qualities of godliness (1 Tim. 5:9-10; Titus 2:3-5).

VERSES 10-12

Ruth was bewildered by Boaz's kindness. She had two strikes against her. She was from Moab and a woman. Strangers and widowed women were often targets of prejudice and abuse. However, Boaz noticed Ruth. The word **notice** means Boaz valued her. Such is the love of God who values every person.

Boaz recounted Ruth's story, highlighting her care for Naomi, the decision to leave her parents and homeland, and coming to a

place where she knew no one. Think of the courage, commitment, and faith this took for Ruth. She had no idea how God would provide. But by faith, she trusted God with the remainder of her life.

Moved by Ruth's character and commitment, Boaz prayed for the Lord to reward Ruth for her love to Naomi. Ruth, being a Moabite woman, had performed kindness to one of God's covenant people. Not only that, she had come *under* the *wings* of the Lord as her Protector and Deliverer. Boaz used the imagery of a bird. Ruth sought refuge under the care of a close relative. By offering his protection, Boaz honored God and acted as the wings of God's care (Ps. 91:4; Prov. 14:31).



How has God provided for you in a way that assured you of His care?



How does God's provision impact the way you view the needs of your family during life's uncertainties?




BIBLE SKILL: *Use Bible study tools to learn more about a place in the Bible.*

Using a Bible atlas, locate Moab and note its proximity to Israel. Why would Elimelech take his family to Moab during the famine in Israel? Read an article about Moab in a Bible dictionary. Use a concordance to find other times Moab is mentioned in the Bible. For each verse, write a summary statement that describes the role Moab played in the biblical narrative.

APPLY THE TEXT


- + Believers will suffer loss.
- + We need to allow others to minister to us.
- + Believers can be confident in God's sovereign ability to provide for our needs.

 **What are some moments of loss experienced by members of your group? How did the loss impact their faith? What specific ways could your group minister to others most effectively during difficult seasons?**

 **God builds our trust through times of loss and uncertainty, but these moments can also shake our faith. How has your faith been impacted during tough seasons? Who has walked alongside you through the pain? What are some life lessons you have learned from God and those He has graciously placed in your life?**

Memorize Ruth 1:16.

Prayer Needs



1. Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed* (HarperCollins, 1961) 3.



Redemption

BOAZ PLAYED THE ROLE OF KINSMAN-REDEEMER BY MARRYING RUTH, POINTING TO JESUS AS THE ULTIMATE REDEEMER.

RUTH 3:8-13; 4:13-17

Nobody likes feeling helpless and insecure during crises. People often struggle to ask for help. Some isolate and withdraw from others, making things worse. Crises challenge our faith to the point that we may wonder if God is in control or cares about our situation. Social media allows people to put on their best face, hide, and pretend they have it all together. Down deep, everyone knows they need something more than what society offers. God has answered the world's cry with an ultimate solution.

 **What has provided you a sense of hope when everything seemed out of control?**


UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

RUTH 3:1-4:22

Ruth's story demonstrates the magnitude of God's providential care for all people. From an uncertain future to a future secured by the redeeming grace of God, Ruth's story reminds the reader that God's promises and love are immeasurable. The story of Ruth demonstrates God's grace and reveals His glory, foreshadowing His redemptive plan through Jesus.

Simply trying to survive, Ruth went to the fields of one of their family's close relatives. While there, she met Boaz, "a prominent man of noble character" (2:1). Immediately, Boaz was attracted to Ruth's integrity (2:11-12), and he invited her to glean from the best parts of his field under his protection. Naomi knew this budding relationship could be a chance for their family redeemer to take notice of their plight. Boaz recognized Ruth's character and promised that if the nearest kinsman would not redeem her, he would. Boaz fulfilled his promise when the nearest family redeemer refused, thus offering the opportunity to Boaz. Boaz and Ruth married. From their union, Obed was born. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of Israel's most renowned king, David.

Naomi and Ruth needed security for their futures and to trust in God for their fears. According to Old Testament law, a family's real estate was inalienable (1 Kings 21:3). Due to Naomi's poverty, the land would be sold. However, the family could redeem it through a kinsman who would purchase the land, and it would not be lost. When this occurred through Boaz's fulfilled promise, all the problems in chapter one were resolved. God specializes in resolving life's most significant problems. God sent humanity's Redeemer, Jesus Christ, years later to another young family in the lineage of King David. When Jesus died for the world's sins, He redeemed all that people had lost from the original fall (Gen. 3). The Lord secured humanity's eternity so that all who believe in Him might be saved under the shelter of His wings. Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer.

 **As you read Ruth 3:8-13; 4:13-17, take notice of how God worked through Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz to unfold His sovereign plan.**

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

FUTURE UNCLEAR (RUTH 3:8-10)

⁸ At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! ⁹ So he asked, “Who are you?” “I am Ruth, your servant,” she replied. “Take me under your wing, for you are a family redeemer.” ¹⁰ Then he said, “May the LORD bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor.”

VERSE 8

Once Naomi learned that Ruth had been gleaning in the fields of **Boaz**, she initiated a plan that would give the most advantageous route to Boaz claiming the right of kinsman-redeemer. She told her daughter-in-law to prepare herself as a bride would do before her wedding night. Naomi’s urgency had to do with her concern for Ruth’s future security. How could Ruth truly know rest and security without a husband? Therefore, Naomi decided to take advantage of their present circumstances and see if God’s provision of food extended to the provision of a husband for Ruth.

The scenario leading to Boaz’s discovery of Ruth at his feet has given rise to various interpretations. We must reject any interpretation that suggests that Naomi wanted Ruth to act seductively. There are many reasons why this viewpoint must be rejected. First, Naomi was viewed by the people in Bethlehem as an honorable woman. She would not have encouraged Ruth to act dishonorably or shamefully. Second, Ruth’s clothing was not indicative of a prostitute’s dress. Common outer garments were used as blankets, but Ruth’s outer garment was ornamental since Naomi told her to “wear your best clothes” (v. 3). Third, Ruth laid at Boaz’s feet but did not act aggressively toward him. Fourth, Boaz’s response to Ruth showed his integrity by not taking advantage of Ruth at the moment. Rather, he complimented her kindness demonstrated in her purity, and he showed appreciation for her nobility, which was known throughout the town.

No matter how unusual the circumstances, when a person honors God and pursues godly character, others recognize their actions. Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth acted with integrity and grace as this scene unfolded.

VERSE 9

Ruth humbled herself but boldly requested Boaz to take her under his wing as their family redeemer. Being a Moabite widow, Ruth was not bound by Jewish laws. Still, she decided to follow the Lord in response to Naomi's faith (1:16). Naomi had explained the levirate law, which stated that when a husband died without children, the nearest brother-in-law (*levir*) might be asked to marry his brother's widow to give her security in the name of the deceased brother.

Ruth did not have a brother-in-law, since both sons of Elimelech were dead. Therefore, she asked Boaz to take her under his wing and serve as the redeemer. Ruth's expression, ***Take me under your wing***, was a beautiful way to express a redeemer's action. Psalm 91:4 says, "He will cover you with his feathers; you will take refuge under his wings. His faithfulness will be a protective shield."

In a world filled with danger, uncertainty, and insecurity, the Lord offers refuge under His wings to all who trust Him. The expression of being under His wing is highly descriptive. If parents will do anything to protect and care for their children, think of God's infinite love for all who take refuge in Him.

***The Lord offers refuge under His wings
to all who trust Him.***

VERSE 10

With the most tender response, Boaz called Ruth ***my daughter***. Boaz was several years older than Ruth. This fact became evident when Boaz mentioned Ruth not pursuing ***younger men***. His reference could have been to other men of means.

Ruth's request for Boaz to pursue the role of family redeemer did not go unheard or ignored. Boaz understood the situation well and expressed his delight in Ruth's trusting him to be her husband. The circumstance is certainly untraditional and unconventional for modern readers, but the unfolding story of God's redemption shows how God's ways are not ours (Isa. 55:8).

The way the Lord works might seem mysterious, but when God's people walk in integrity, focused on bringing God glory, His plans unfold beautifully. Naomi sent Ruth to the threshing floor in hope that God would provide. Ruth went to the threshing floor in faith, not knowing how God would work. Boaz responded in love to the inward beauty of Ruth's character.



How has God's guidance through moments of uncertainty influenced your faith?

FUTURE SECURED (RUTH 3:11-13)

¹¹ **“Now don’t be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. ¹³ Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, that’s good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn’t want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie down until morning.”**

VERSES 11-13

Boaz assured Ruth of his willingness to help her. He commended her for her noble character, which all the people in Bethlehem had witnessed. Ruth’s story impacted everyone who heard it. She had followed Naomi to a strange land with an uncertain future out of love for her mother-in-law. Now, Ruth acted with virtue in her approach before Boaz.

Boaz knew he was not the closest redeemer for Ruth and explained the circumstances to her. A closer family redeemer had the right to their land and Ruth. How would Ruth respond to this new reality? Boaz’s tenderness toward her calmed her heart. He promised Ruth, ***But if he doesn’t want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will.*** With her future secured, Ruth could sleep at peace, and peace was what Boaz offered by telling her to ***lie down until morning.*** Nothing gives you peace like knowing you are secure in God’s promises. Nothing allows you to truly rest like knowing you are safe in God’s gracious care.



What might keep us from trusting God with our fears?

FUTURE REDEEMED (RUTH 4:13-17)

¹³ **Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. He slept with her, and the LORD granted conception to her, and she gave birth**

to a son.¹⁴ The women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel.”¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”¹⁶ Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and became a mother to him.¹⁷ The neighbor women said, “A son has been born to Naomi,” and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

VERSE 13

Boaz fulfilled his promise to find the closer family redeemer. He went to the city gate where men would conduct business in the presence of witnesses and under the approval of the city elders. When Boaz confronted his family member, he explained the details of the transaction, which included Elimelech’s land. When Boaz told him that the deal hinged on taking Ruth as his wife, he refused. The man stated that acceptance would have ruined his inheritance. The reasons could have been the apparent awkwardness of bringing another woman into his home, and he could have had grown sons already enjoying the inheritance of their lands.

We may not understand God’s ways, but we can always trust His protection and care.

Boaz called the witnesses to hear his commitment. They agreed and blessed Boaz. Shortly afterward, he fulfilled his promise to be Ruth’s kinsman-redeemer. They married, and the Lord granted her a son. Ruth had not been able to conceive during her marriage to Mahlon. Her infertility to this point might explain the obvious mention of the Lord’s gracious conception of Ruth. Her conception now, rather than in Moab where they worshiped Chemosh, the national deity whom they believed demanded human sacrifice (2 Kings 3:27), was God’s divine providence. We may not understand God’s ways, but we can always trust His protection and care.

VERSES 14-16

Children in Israel were considered a blessing from the Lord. Now Naomi had a grandson. The people recognized God’s favor over Naomi’s family, who provided them with a ***family redeemer***. As Naomi entered Bethlehem months earlier, she arrived a bitter and

broken woman (1:20-21). Now, she held her grandson, who would further her son's name and be well known in Israel.

They praised Ruth's dedication and love as ***better . . . than seven sons***. Resting in her arms was the providential love of God. Naomi could not see it earlier. In her human frailty, she could only see the unfavorable circumstances of her life. But God's timing was perfect, and His plan was fulfilled. Even when we cannot understand God's ways, we can rest in His love. God works "all things together for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

***Even when we cannot understand God's ways,
we can rest in His love.***

VERSE 17

The celebration had begun. Neighboring women throughout Bethlehem gathered to celebrate with Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi the fulfillment of their family redeemer. Mahlon's name and his descendants would continue. Jewish history would record and speak the names of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi. Throughout church history, their story would be read and retold. Obed's name meant "servant." In Hebrew, his name was shortened from Obadiah, a common Hebrew name that meant "servant of the Lord."



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Romans 5:6-10; Ephesians 1:7.)

Naomi's crisis had come to an end. Her family redeemer secured her future, and the generations who followed would know God's providential care. ***Obed*** was known only for being the father of ***Jesse*** and the grandfather to ***David***. But in Jewish history, he maintained the line to Israel's most illustrious king. In the genealogical list (Ruth 4:18-22), the father of Boaz is listed as Salmon. Salmon was married to the prostitute Rahab (Josh. 2:8-24).

Throughout Scripture, God uses men and women from every walk of life to fulfill His sovereign plan. Through His redeeming love, He settles our fears and replaces our shame with His grace.

The Lord reminds us that He has not abandoned us but has shown compassion as our Redeemer (Isa. 54:4-8).

Jesus is the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer.

Ruth's story is every person's story. God's love reaches the religious and the irreligious. His grace covers every sin and secures the eternal future of each one who trusts in Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer.



How do you feel knowing that God is at work in every generation?



In what ways does God's redemptive work change the way you live daily and give you confidence for the future?

BIBLE SKILL: *Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.*

In ancient Israel, the kinsman-redeemer pointed to the coming Messiah. Review these passages from Ruth again and consider how Boaz served as an illustration for what Jesus would do centuries later. Record your comparisons on the chart below:

Boaz as Redeemer	Jesus as Redeemer

APPLY THE TEXT

- + When believers face times of uncertainty, we will have to step out in faith.
- + We can turn to God with our fears and trust Him to respond.
- + We can be assured of God’s continual care for us since He demonstrated it in His redemptive plan.



Who in your small group has been walking through circumstances that are causing anxiety? How can your group encourage them to trust in the Lord? How can you communicate this week God’s redemptive love as their source of strength?



We constantly face moments in life where our faith is tested and our fears dominate our emotions. How can knowing God’s providential care defeat fear’s domination and renew your faith so you experience God’s peace and joy through seasons of uncertainty?

Memorize Colossians 1:14.

Prayer Needs

The Time of the Judges

W. Wayne VanHorn

The time of the Judges extended from the end of the conquest of the promised land until the selection of Saul as Israel's first king, approximately 1350–1050 BC.

Events in the book of Ruth took place during the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1) and depicted a famine-stricken family forced to journey from Bethlehem to find work and sustenance in Moab.

Several interesting bits of information arise from Ruth's story related to the time of the judges. First, in Ruth 1:15, Naomi's daughter-in-law Orpah returned to her people and to her god. Ruth, however, vowed to stay with Naomi, accepting her people and her God (v. 16).

Second, during the time of the judges, both Israelites and their neighbors believed each people group had its own gods. Israel was monotheistic; their God was Yahweh. The other nations worshiped multiple gods.

Third, the common people of the land were agrarians, surviving off the land, raising meager crops, and having a semi-nomadic lifestyle tied to finding grazing land for sheep and cattle. Life was hard.

The occasion of Saul's selection as Israel's first king marked the end of the time of the judges. Samuel, the last judge, asked to be declared honorable in all aspects of his leadership as Saul took the reins of power (1 Sam. 12:1-5). The book of 1 Samuel then describes the time of the judges as one in which the Israelites forgot the Lord their God (vv. 9-12). Each episode of forgetfulness resulted in oppression at the hands of an enemy nation. As their faithfulness to Yahweh waned, their idolatrous worship of Baal and Asherah intensified (vv. 9-19). Apparently, this cyclical problem persisted well into the monarchical period as well, being condemned by the eighth century prophet Hosea in Israel and by Jeremiah in Judah a century later.

A TIME OF UNFAITHFULNESS

When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, they marched in with a belief Yahweh had delivered them from Egyptian bondage and had made them His covenant people.



Just as the Lord had delivered them from Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:14), so Moses promised God would fight for them during the conquest of the promised land (Deut. 1:30; 20:4). The conquest, under the leadership of Joshua, was deemed Yahweh's victory.

According to Judges 2:7, the Israelites worshiped Yahweh throughout the lifetimes of Joshua and the elders who outlived him. The firsthand experiences of seeing the Lord's great works emboldened the people to be faithful. Tragically, as Joshua and his generation passed from the scene, the next generation did not know the Lord or His works on their behalf. The brutal realities of having to squeeze out a crop from an often-stubborn land prompted the Israelites to enhance their chances by worshiping the gods of the peoples around them.

In Canaan, the non-Israelites worshiped Baal, the storm god, and his female counterpart Asherah. The Israelites erroneously believed that worshiping Baal would guarantee the rains needed for their crops. Similarly, worshiping Asherah would guarantee the fertility and productivity of the land. Apparently, at times they worshiped Baal and Asherah to the extent of forgetting Yahweh altogether (1 Sam. 12:9). At other times, they apparently worshiped both Yahweh and Baal, seeing no problem with this syncretistic approach to religion (1 Kings 18:21).

Additional forms of idolatry also occurred during the time of the judges. For example, Judges 17 recounts the story of a man named Micah, who stole 1,100 pieces of silver from his mother. Upon returning the silver, his mother consecrated the silver to the Lord. She then promptly commissioned a silversmith to cast the metal into the form of an idol, which Micah then enshrined in his home.

A TIME OF FAITHFULNESS

The roll call of the faithful in the book of Hebrews names four judges: Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah (Heb. 11:32). They serve as a sampling of faithful people whom the Lord used to restore His people during the time of the judges.

The Lord used Gideon to usher in a forty-year period of peace after he defeated the Midianites (Judg. 8:28). Barak, with Deborah's encouragement, was able to defeat Sisera and his king, Jabin of Hazor (chaps. 4–5). Samson, perhaps the least competent of all the judges, was Yahweh's servant in delivering Israel from Philistine oppression (chaps. 13–16). The Lord also used Jephthah to subdue the Ammonites (11:1–12:7).

THE JUDGES OF THE TIME

The book of Judges mentions twelve judges by name. Modern commentators refer to six of these judges as “major judges” because of the importance attached to their administrations. These “major judges” were Othniel, Ehud, Deborah (and Barak), Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. The six named “minor judges” are: Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. Most of these judges were military leaders who marshaled Israel's forces to fight against whatever nation was oppressing them at a given time. In the case of Deborah, she provided the spiritual and moral encouragement for her general Barak, who carried out the military campaigns.

During the time of the judges, not all of the tribes necessarily fought in each of the battles, though they no doubt did perceive themselves as a homogeneous

kinship group. For example, according to Judges 4:6–10, Barak summoned only the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to fight against Sisera and his forces. Similarly, Jephthah seems to have summoned warriors from part of the tribe of Manasseh and from among the Gileadites (11:29). Samson, though, was a solo act (16:27–31).

We consider the time of the judges to be an era in which the Lord used charismatic military leaders to deliver His people from oppressing nations. In each case, Yahweh raised up the oppressing nations in order to discipline His wayward people. Only by Yahweh's prompting did the judges arise to deliver His people. From the biblical writer's perspective then, the time of the judges was marked by the vicissitudes of the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of God's people. When they sinned against the Lord, He sent oppressing nations to discipline them. When the people cried out to Yahweh, He sent liberating judges to drive the oppressors out of the land. All along, the common people worked the recalcitrant land to secure a meager crop to survive another day.

This article originally appeared in the Spring 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. W. Wayne VanHorn is a professor in the Department of Christian Studies at Mississippi College.

COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



ROMANS

Session 1: **True Power** (Romans 1:13-25)

Session 2: **Coming Judgment** (Romans 2:1-13)

Session 3: **Saving Faith** (Romans 3:21-4:5)

Session 4: **Restored Relationship** (Romans 5:1-11,18-21)

Session 5: **Freedom** (Romans 6:1-14)

Session 6: **Struggle** (Romans 7:4-6,14-25)

Session 7: **Indwelt** (Romans 8:14-27)

Session 8: **Believe** (Romans 9:30-10:3,9-17)

Session 9: **Kindness** (Romans 11:11-24)

Session 10: **Sacrifice** (Romans 12:1-13)

Session 11: **Represent** (Romans 13:1-14)

Session 12: **Unity** (Romans 14:5-20)

Session 13: **Purpose** (Romans 15:14-21,30-33)

Explore

“You will seek me and find me when you search for me
with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

The Conquest of Canaan



"The Conquest of Canaan" is adapted from "The Conquest of the Promised Land," *The Old Testament Bible Handbook* (Holman Reference, 2023), p. 79. Used with permission.

JOSHUA; JUDGES; RUTH

In this life, leaders come, and leaders go. No matter who we are or what we do, we answer to a leader one way or another. In fact, the question really isn't if we will follow a leader, but what kind of leader we will choose. The biblical history books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth examine the highs and lows of leadership. While Joshua celebrates the blessings of leadership at its best, Judges offers a cautionary tale of leadership gone wrong. And Ruth reminds us that even in the worst of times, God is still at work, raising leaders from the most unlikely of places. By studying Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, we see leadership from every angle—and we're challenged to reserve our ultimate loyalty for our ultimate Leader.

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