

# Gymea Baptist Church

Not  
*one*  
Failed  
Promise.

*13 Week Study Series in the Book of Joshua*



## *Study Series*

Joshua: Week One

## *Bible*

Joshua 1:1-6 (NIV)

Joshua Installed as Leader

**1** After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: **2** "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. **3** I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. **4** Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. **5** No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. **6** Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

# *Sermon Summary*

Joshua 1, like all good introductions, sets the scene for the narrative that follows. This opening chapter reaches back to what has preceded and prepares us for what's next. And what's next is the conquest of the land of Canaan. The conquest is troubling to us as Christians. The justification of holy war strikes us as un-Christian. We will deal with some of this as we move through the story but it is helpful to recognise that the context for the conquest is the promise, sovereignty and holiness of God. The promises of God to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-7) included the promise that his descendants would inherit the land. This is the driving plot of most of the first five books of the Bible and brings us to Joshua 1 on the very edge of the Promised Land. The giving of this land to the people of Israel is based on God's sovereignty; that the earth is his and everything in it. However, it is also based on his holiness. The conquest is not just the result of a promise, but is a judgment on the people of Canaan (see Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:5-6). The people of Israel, camped on the east side of the Jordan, are preparing to conquer the land. They are not refugees or nomads, but an army.

The opening chapter is made up of four speeches: the Lord to Joshua, Joshua to the officers, Joshua to the Trans-Jordan tribes and the Trans-Jordan tribes to Joshua. The opening speech of the Lord to Joshua reminds us that Moses, the first leader of Israel, is dead and Joshua has been appointed to lead them into the land. The Lord promises to be with Joshua and calls him again to be "strong and courageous". As we saw in Joshua's commissioning, this charge is not just about the strength and courage necessary to fight a war, but about remaining faithful to the Lord. We are reminded of this in Joshua 1:7-9 where the Lord commands Joshua to keep the Law close at hand so he might be successful in everything he does.

The second speech is never going to make the top 100 speeches of all time, but is important nonetheless. Joshua speaks to the officers and tells them exactly what the Lord had told him to say. This immediate obedience is important for our understanding of Joshua as a leader and indicates that he's at least starting well.

Then Joshua speaks to the Trans-Jordan tribes. These are the 2 1/2 tribes who possessed the land on the eastern side of the Jordan. The story of how they came to this is found in Numbers 21:21-35 and Numbers 32. In brief, the people of Israel, making their way towards Canaan from the east, had to travel through the territory of Sihon king of the Amorites. When they asked for safe passage the Amorites attacked them and the people of Israel defeated them. This was followed up with a victory over King Og of Bashan. So, without really meaning to, the people of Israel now controlled all the territory on the eastern side of the Jordan! The men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh asked Moses if they could stay. Moses' response is to charge them with discouraging the rest of the nation, but when they promise to go with the rest of Israel and help them conquer the land, Moses agrees to grant them the eastern side.

However, this is the people of Israel. Will these 2 1/2 tribes follow through on what they said? We might hold our breath between verses 15 and 16, but are quite relieved when they answer in the affirmative. They will obey Joshua and will go before the people of Israel!

So we find that the people of Israel appear ready to enter the land. They have passed a couple of hurdles that suggest that they will be faithful and we ought to be encouraged!

For us, we are left to consider the dynamic of participating with God in his promises. While God had given the land to the people of Israel they were called to be active participants in that and were called to put in a mighty effort, especially to be faithful, in order to see it come to pass.

We have been given tremendous promises in Christ and have been invited to participate in their fulfilment too. The question is: Are we putting in a tremendous effort to be faithful in this? The promise to renew and restore all things is what we have been invited to join God in doing and this should call from us a mighty effort to be and do all that God has called us (and equipped us) to do!

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Share a specific moment from your life that, upon reflection, you recognise you had been prepared for in advance. This may be (e.g., a new role at work, a new school, marriage, a new responsibility)
2. Take a moment to read Joshua 1:1-6. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
3. The context of the Israelites conquest is the promise, the sovereignty and the holiness of God. How does this help you understand the theme of war in the book of Joshua?
4. Hindsight is a wonderful thing, Israel would likely have found much of their journey easier if they knew what we know now about how things turned out. But what does this account remind us about God's character, that helps us have faith for the unknown circumstances of today?
5. There is a curious tension in our participation with God. At one level, the work is all His and yet, we are invited (and equipped) to participate. How do we work *from* our salvation, whilst resisting the dangers of trying to work *for* it?
6. The participation of the people of Israel required a mighty effort. What might our effort look like as we participate in the plans and purposes of God in Christ?

7. The sermon suggested that the modern interpretation of Joshua 1:8 is that we might value God's word like we do our mobile phones? What practical steps can we take to remind ourselves of God's character as we face the work he has called us into? [Try to move beyond the obvious answers of 'pray' and 'read my Bible more', how practically and creatively can we do this.]

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 7. Pray that God might continue to help us to relax, remembering He is Sovereign over all things, and that this gives us strength and confidence as we do all God intended us to do.



## *Study Series*

Joshua: Week Two

## *Bible*

Joshua 2:1 (NIV)  
Rahab and the Spies

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

## *Sermon Summary*

After the encouraging opening chapter, in which Joshua is immediately obedient and the Trans-Jordan tribes make good on their promise, the narrative takes a turn to the ambiguous when the spies that Joshua has sent end up in a brothel in Jericho! This is especially poignant because Shittim, the place Israel is encamped, was the scene of moral failure of the people of Israel (see Numbers 25; Psalm 106:28; Hosea 9:10) that involved sexual immorality and idolatry. We should be a little apprehensive when we find that the spies went to a prostitute’s house **and stayed there**. And our apprehension only grows when we find out that they aren’t actually very good spies as the king of Jericho finds out about them almost immediately. 007 and 8 they are not.

This is when something very unexpected happens: Rahab, the prostitute in whose house the spies are, protects them, hiding them on the roof and sending the king's men on a wild goose chase. If that wasn't unexpected enough, her confession of faith should floor us. She acknowledges the Lord, the paralysing fear that has overcome the people of the land, and bases her acknowledgement of the Lord on what she has seen the Lord do: how the Lord dried up the Red Sea and how the Israelites destroyed the Amorite kings on the eastern side of the Jordan. What is so surprising about this confession is that she is the epitome of the Canaanites; she is a prostitute (see Leviticus 18:24-28 for the sexual wickedness of the Canaanites)!

The rest of the narrative tells how she bargains for her life and those of her family. The spies swear to spare all who are gathered in her home (identified by the scarlet cord hanging from the window) as long as Rahab doesn't tell anyone what they are doing (even though the king already knows!).

At this point, it is worth remembering Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and 20:16-17 in which the Lord commands the people not to make a treaty with any Canaanites or to show them mercy. The spies have made a promise to spare the first (and only) Canaanite they've met as well as her family and those who belong to them! What is so interesting is that the narrator doesn't judge their actions, nor are we told that Joshua was upset with the spies when they returned or that the Lord was angry either! We are left to ask if they've done the right thing!

And they have. The reality is that this story, while it demonstrates the Lord's provision and bolsters the confidence of the people and introduces Rahab for her role in Joshua 6, also functions to remind us that while judgment was coming to the people of the land, **the Lord delights to save**. And he incorporates people into his kingdom from the most unlikely places. If a Canaanite prostitute could be incorporated into the people of God (and the lineage of Jesus; see Matthew 1) where else might He be at work in our world.

We have been sent by the Lord to a world that He delights to save. We are not spies – covert agents who need to keep our identity secret – but participants in the mission of God to restore all things in Christ. In fact, we should be a bit like the Israelite spies; totally obvious. **Let's be terrible spies.**

Where might God be at work in the people you care about? Where might you hear an unexpected confession of faith? Let's keep our eyes open to where the Lord is at work.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

8. Opening Discussion: Share a moment from your life where you think you've seen God at work in an unexpected place. This could be in a situation or in someone's life, it could be almost anything, however great or small it may seem.

9. Take a (brief!) moment to read Joshua 2:1. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
10. Now take a quick look at Deuteronomy Chapter 7 and chapter 20, how might the spies' disobedience in saving Rahab be justified?
11. It's easy to read the Bible and make justifications subconsciously for things that are actually quite surprising. For example, the narrator leaves the spies' activity in Rahab's house ambiguous. Why do you think he did this?
12. Rahab's confession in chapter 2:8-11, is based on what the Lord had done for the Israelites. What has the Lord done in your life that could help others see and understand more about God?
13. In many ways Rahab was an unlikely candidate to confess God as her Lord, who is the least likely person you know to confess God as Lord? Why do they seem so far away from faith in God?

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Pray that the Lord would continue to do His work in their life, and that we might have the eyes to see it.



## *Study Series*

Joshua: Week Three

## *Bible*

### Joshua 4:1-7 (NIV)

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

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

## *Sermon Summary*

In this week's passage the people of Israel cross the Jordan River (under miraculous circumstances) into Canaanite territory. The intriguing thing about the text is that it doesn't contain what we ought to expect; a battle. The last thing that the Canaanites would want to allow would be for the Israelites to cross into their territory uncontested. And yet, that is exactly what happens. In fact, the whole narrative reads more like a religious ceremony than a strategic military manoeuvre! The action centres on the ark of the covenant – the portable throne of God – carried by four priests who lead the people out. When the priests' feet touch the water the flow of water ceased and piled up in a great heap upstream to allow the people to cross on dry ground. The people were to consecrate themselves (prepare for a sacred event) and keep their distance from the ark (as they had kept their distance from the mountain of God). The crossing takes place on the 10th day of the 1st month when preparations were being made for Passover and the entire purpose of the crossing was to confirm the presence of the Lord with Joshua and Israel. Before the priests came up out of the dry river bed, representatives from each tribe of Israel gathered a stone from the middle of the river bed. These stones were set up as a memorial where the Israelites camped that evening and even this memorial had a religious meaning. It was to remind the people of what God had done so that they would always fear him – and remember, that faithfulness to the Lord was the largest threat to the Israelites! But the memorial was also designed to invite questions, "What do these stones mean?" And when the question was asked, the memory of what God had done was to be shared and, as it was shared it also served as a reminder of how they were to live. Imagine a young Israelite boy walking with his father and asking about the stones. As his father shares how the Lord dried up the Jordan the son would hopefully understand why the family worshipped and followed the Lord! Alternatively, he might ask why they were not faithful to the God who can stop a river!

For us, our very lives are to be a memorial. Our lives ought to be organised around what God has done for us; shaping our priorities, values, attitudes and actions. And a life that revolves around what God has done, will inevitably invite questions. And when they ask, tell them what God has done.

Joshua 3-4 serves as another reminder that the main interest of the narrator is the faithfulness of the people and that this is not so much a book of conquest (though that's coming) as it is a book about the struggle to remain faithful; the same struggle we have.

## *Questions*

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

14. Opening Discussion: Share a favourite photo (even if you just have to describe it), telling the story behind it and why it's so special.

15. Take a moment to read Joshua chapters 3 + 4. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
16. Having shared more generally, what are the notably *religious* aspects of the river crossing?
17. The memorial of stones was a reminder to Israel of what God had done, are there times in your lives that you can recall God carrying out a significant shaping work that changed or formed you?
18. Do you have ways that help you remember the work God has done? Take some time to share those with the group.
19. When people ask questions about our lives, they are often more receptive to hearing about the work of God than if we just tell them uninvited. What kind of life and living might invite questions from your friends, family and work colleagues that don't know Jesus? Describe the sorts of attitudes, actions, values and priorities that would be most counter-cultural.

## Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Pray that the Lord would continue to lead you into a life that invites questions about God's faithfulness.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Four

## Bible

### Joshua 5:2-12 (NIV)

Circumcision and Passover at Gilgal

**2** At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” **3** So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

**4** Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt—all the men of military age—died in the wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt. **5** All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. **6** The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the Lord. For the Lord had sworn to them that they would not see the land he had solemnly promised their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

**7** So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. **8** And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

**9** Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

**10** On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. **11** The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. **12** The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate the produce of Canaan.

## Sermon Summary

Joshua 5 continues to focus on the spiritual preparation of the people of Israel. Instead of immediately commencing with the conquest, the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the men of Israel before the nation celebrated the Passover. You would be forgiven if you find the account more than a little odd.

The practice of male circumcision began in Genesis 17:9-14 when the Lord established circumcision as the sign of the covenant; the mark in the flesh that symbolised relationship with the Him. Circumcision was also a requirement to celebrate the Passover (Exodus 12:48-49). However, circumcision could also be used metaphorically as a circumcision of the heart; describing a life marked by a dedication to the Lord (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Leviticus 26:41). It is this metaphorical connection that is important in Joshua 5. Essentially, while you would not be able to tell if a man was circumcised from looking at him clothed, you should be able to tell he was by observing how he lived. If he lived in accordance with the Law of God – which expressed the relationship with God – you could reasonably assume he had been circumcised. In other words, the external act was meant to reflect an inner reality.

And this is the point of comparison between the two generations that Joshua 5 speaks of. The first generation – the one that came out of Egypt – had been circumcised externally but were not circumcised of heart as was evidenced by their disobedience. The second generation – the one that had entered Canaan – had not been circumcised externally but were, at least to this point in the book, obedient to the Lord. This reflected their circumcision of heart. We see the obedience in Joshua 5 in that, as soon as the Lord commands Joshua to circumcise the men he does. Once this act has been completed the Lord states that he has taken away the reproach of Egypt. It isn't entirely clear what this means, but appears to refer to all that Egypt symbolised: slavery and disobedience in particular. And now, faithful in heart and body, the people celebrate the Passover, remembering not only God's great salvation but also reflecting on His provision as the manna stopped falling from heaven after they ate of the produce of the land.

The question that this text raises is, "What is Israel preparing for?" And the answer is that **they are preparing to be God's people in the land**. This was the Lord's plan from the beginning; that his people might be a living, breathing example of what it meant to live in relationship with him. It reminds us (again) that the main threat for the people wasn't Jericho or Canaanite alliances, but remaining faithful to the Lord.

And this leads us into application for we have been invited to participate with the Lord in the same mission; to be a living, breathing example of what it means to live in relationship with God through faith in Jesus and in the power of the Spirit. The question is, "**Are we prepared?**" The people of Israel prepared themselves to be the Lord's people in the land, are we ready for what God may have in store for us? This preparation isn't for some far distant event, but for the places that He sends us each and every day. It is this readiness that will be the focus of your discussion this week.

Next week we finally get to a battle; the battle for Jericho. This is what we often assume Joshua is all about (though I think we're seeing that this is not precisely true) and we struggle with the destruction of the city. We invite you to read that text through and be ready for next Sunday.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

20. Opening Discussion: What does being prepared look like for you? Take some time to share with the group how you prepare for a particular event or situation, what you do, what you think about etc... (This might be an exam, a presentation at work, a chat with someone challenging at the school gate.)
21. Take a moment to read Joshua chapters 5:2-12. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you into that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
22. The connection between internal faithfulness (the attitude of our heart) and external signs of faithfulness (what we do) are important in Scripture. What are the pitfalls of focusing on one over the other?
23. We have been invited to participate with God in His mission to restore and renew all things in Christ Jesus. How might you be being called specifically to be involved in this restoration and renewal?
24. What holds us back from participating more fully in this mission?
25. What could we do that would help us prepare for this mission? How might that shape your life? Your disciplines? Your values and priorities?
26. The celebration of the Passover in Joshua 5:10-12 focuses on the provision of God: from miraculous bread from heaven to a more mundane 'natural' provision of the land. How do you remember the provision of God? What sort of provision has he provided for you?

## Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 7. Thank God for his faithfulness and provision, and then pray for God's help to prepare for what He has called you to do (answers to question 4).



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Five

## Bible

Joshua 5:13 - 6:27 (NIV)

The Fall of Jericho

**13** Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”

**14** “Neither,” he replied, “but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, “What message does my Lord have for his servant?”

**15** The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

**6 1** Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

**2** Then the Lord said to Joshua, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

**3** March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. **4** Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.

**5** When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in.”

**6** So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, “Take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it.” **7** And he ordered the army, “Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord.”

**8** When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the Lord’s covenant followed them. **9** The armed guard marched ahead of the priests

who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. **10** But Joshua had commanded the army, “Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!” **11** So he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

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

**15** On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. **16** The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army, “Shout! For the Lord has given you the city! **17** The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. **18** But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. **19** All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into his treasury.”

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

**22** Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the prostitute’s house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her.” **23** So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.

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

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

**26** At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho:

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

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

## Sermon Summary

The fall of Jericho presents us with some unique challenges. Apart from the miraculous collapse of the wall (which is often our focus) we have the troubling command of Joshua – from the Lord – to completely destroy the city; men, women, children and animals. The city, he says, is “devoted” to the Lord (v. 17). In my Bible, there is a textual note stating that “The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord, often by totally destroying them.” The same term is used in vv. 18 and 21. This description horrifies us and raises the spectre of genocide and holy war. So how are we to understand this passage?

There are two ways to address a text like this. The first is to know a bit about the original context and the second is to place it in the context of the wider narrative of Scripture. Regarding the first there are a few things that are helpful to note. First, the language of totally destroying a place for the gods was well known in the ancient near east. Scholars have found several examples of this sort of language in the nations surrounding Israel. Second, as one commentator points out, this type of warfare was limited by geography (it was only to be practiced against nations in Canaan; Deut. 20:10-18), time (it was practiced during the conquest and only rarely outside of it; see 1 Sam. 15:1-3), and intent. The destruction of the Canaanites was a judgment of God on their wickedness (see Gen. 15:13-16; Lev. 18:24-28) and was motivated by a desire for religious loyalty (see Deut. 7:1-6). This context is helpful by removing the language of ethnic purity or racial superiority, but still doesn't really help us escape the destruction of Jericho.

The second way to address this is in the context of the big story of the Bible. This grand narrative begins in Eden and ends in Jesus. The destruction of Jericho begins to make a bit more sense in this context. It reminds us that God's plan from the beginning was the restoration of all things after the entry of sin and death into the world. The promises to Abraham and his descendants was that they would be a blessing to all nations and that they would be living, breathing example of what it looked like to live in relationship with the one true God. The violence of the conquest was aimed at the establishment of a kingdom of peace. In this regard, the battle of Jericho is a partial, incomplete and temporary step to this final destination. We should read the text and be dissatisfied. It doesn't sound like a blessing, it doesn't sound like peace! However, this dissatisfaction should point us to **the violence that Christ endured so that we might have peace**. This is the complete and eternal solution of God and replaces the violence of conquest with a peace that endures.

This wider perspective, perhaps, makes some sense of the emphasis on the salvation of Rahab in Joshua 6. The report of the destruction of the city alternates with reports of Rahab's salvation. The two reports are almost identical in length!

Like Rahab, we have dedicated ourselves to the Lord and are therefore not dedicated to destruction and wrath. We have been saved and brought into a kingdom where violence has been taken upon Christ and we, the redeemed, have peace. This story, for all its difficulties, points us to the cross and should inspire gratitude for our salvation!

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

27. Opening Discussion: What does being dedicated to something look like for you? Take some time to share with the group what you think this dedication or commitment looks like. (This may be a cause, a job or a task etc...)
28. Take a some time to read Joshua 5:13-6:27. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
29. Marc spent some time setting this passage in the wider context of the Bible, how does understanding the original context change how you view this text?
30. The big story of the Bible is summarised in four terms: creation, fall, redemption and perfection. The story of Joshua falls between fall and redemption. How does this big story inform or change your understanding of this passage?
31. The narrator has an obvious interest in Rahab's salvation, why do you think this might be?
32. The concept of dedicating something or someone to the Lord is a bit troubling in the context of war, but how do we meaningfully express our dedication to the Lord today?

## Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. How might God be encouraging your dedication to Him? Invite the Holy Spirit to empower each other's dedication to God.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Six

## Bible

### Joshua 7 (NIV)

#### Achan's Sin

**1** But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel.

**2** Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai.

**3** When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the army will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary the whole army, for only a few people live there."

**4** So about three thousand went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, **5** who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of

the people melted in fear and became like water.

**6** Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. **7** And Joshua said, "Alas, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! **8** Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? **9** The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

**10** The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"

**11** Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them

to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. **12** That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

**13** “Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There are devoted things among you, Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove them.

**14** “In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe the Lord chooses shall come forward clan by clan; the clan the Lord chooses shall come forward family by family; and the family the Lord chooses shall come forward man by man.

**15** Whoever is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the Lord and has done an outrageous thing in Israel!”

**16** Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was chosen. **17** The clans of Judah came forward, and the Zerahites were chosen. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was chosen. **18** Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Karmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.

**19** Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me.”

**20** Achan replied, “It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: **21** When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath.”

**22** So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath.

**23** They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord.

**24** Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold bar, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. **25** Joshua said, “Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today.”

Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.

**26** Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

## *Sermon Summary*

The contest began with a bang in Joshua 6 with a famous victory at Jericho. The chapter concludes with this note, “So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.” Things have gone well for the people of Israel, so we are taken aback by the ominous note that sounds to open the next chapter. “But the Israelites were unfaithful in regard to the devoted things.” One man, Achan the son of Karmi, had taken some of the things that were to be given over to the Lord and the Lord’s anger was aroused against Israel. Joshua and the people, however, are not aware of this reality and prepare for the

next battle as if nothing has changed. Their overconfidence makes us wince. Joshua does not lead the army out. In fact, most of the army stays behind since the spies feel Ai is hardly worth the effort. Everyone is shocked when the men of Ai rout the Israelites, killing 36 of them and chasing them all the way to the quarries. Joshua's response is instructive. He doesn't rethink his strategy or send more men, but comes before the Lord where he is told by the Lord that the people have taken some of the devoted things and the people are liable for destruction. To make matters worse, the Lord will no longer be with the people until the devoted things are destroyed. The abandonment of the gods was one of the worst things that could happen in the ancient near east and Joshua and the people take swift action. The next morning, at the command of the Lord, all Israel gathers and the tribe of Judah is selected (probably by lot), the clan of Zerah, the family of Zimri and finally, Achan is selected. He admits to taking a Babylonian robe, some silver and some gold. In a move that shocks us, the people took Achan, his family, his flocks and herds and everything he owned, stoned them to death, burned them and piled stones over them that stand 'to this day'. This might strike us as barbaric, and by today's standards it is, but in the ancient world it was normal practice. Furthermore, Achan's actions had cost the lives of 36 soldiers and the presence of the Lord. Without the Lord's presence the people of Israel would not be able to stand before their enemies and would be wiped out (see Lev. 26:8 and Deuteronomy 32:30 for positive and negative examples of the importance of God's presence in battle).

With the sin purged from their midst the Lord's anger turns away and they attack Ai a second time. This time, the whole army goes out and, in a classic ruse, ambush the city. The victory, however, has nothing to do with a superiority in numbers or in a clever strategy, but because the Lord is with them.

This story reminds us of two things. First, the importance of the presence of God in the completion of his mission. For Israel and for us, the presence of God was crucial and we are foolish if we think we can do anything of lasting value without him. Second, it highlights the significance of sin and of what Jesus has done. Because Jesus has taken the wrath of God for our sin, the presence of God is never jeopardised. We are always assured of the presence of God because we are in Christ. Third, our holiness still matters. Not because it allows a holy God to dwell with us, but because it is the heart of our testimony and witness. We live out what it means to follow Jesus and, in so doing, we show the world the kingdom.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

33. Opening Discussion: What in your life holds the position of 'most important'? The answer to this may genuinely be your relationship with God, but take a moment to discuss whether this is truly a reality in your day to day life. (Answers may include, your job, your status, your wealth, your family, your health...) This question is not about judgement, but about honest reflection with each other.
34. Take a some time to read Joshua 7. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
35. The sin of one man (Achan) jeopardised the whole conquest for Israel. What does this tell us about the significance of sin?
36. The punishment on Achan and his family may strike us as barbaric or perhaps unfair, but highlights the importance Israel placed on the presence of God. How important is the presence of God in your life?
37. We can tend to do things in our own strength rather in the the strength of God. How do you know that you are relying on yourself rather than God? How can you rely on God more regularly?
38. Our corporate faithfulness to the Lord is important for our testimony to the world. What sort of testimony does your group have? What sort of testimony does GBC have? How would the world describe us?

## Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Where do we see differences between our actual testimony and the testimony we believe God is calling us towards? Pray for each other and for our church, that we might greater reflect the plans and purposes of God in this world.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Seven

## Bible

### Joshua 9 (NIV)

#### The Gibeonite Deception

**1** Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—the kings in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Mediterranean Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)— **2** they came together to wage war against Joshua and Israel.

**3** However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, **4** they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. **5** They put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and mouldy.

**6** Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the Israelites, “We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us.”

**7** The Israelites said to the Hivites, “But perhaps you live near us, so how can we make a treaty with you?”

**8** “We are your servants,” they said to Joshua.

But Joshua asked, “Who are you and where do you come from?”

**9** They answered: “Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the Lord your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, **10** and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. **11** And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, ‘Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, “We are your servants; make a treaty with us.”’ **12** This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. **13** And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see

how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey.”

**14** The Israelites sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the Lord. **15** Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath.

**16** Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them.

**17** So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim.

**18** But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel.

The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, **19** but all the leaders answered, “We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. **20** This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that God’s wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them.” **21** They continued, “Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers in the service of the whole assembly.” So the leaders’ promise to them was kept.

**22** Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, “Why did you deceive us by saying, ‘We live a long way from you,’ while actually you live near us?”

**23** You are now under a curse: You will never be released from service as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God.”

**24** They answered Joshua, “Your servants were clearly told how the Lord your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. **25** We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you.”

**26** So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them.

**27** That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the assembly, to provide for the needs of the altar of the Lord at the place the Lord would choose. And that is what they are to this day.

## *Sermon Summary*

Joshua 9 begins a new section that extends to the end of chapter 12 and is focused on the conquest. To this point in the narrative there have only been three battles, but in this next section that all changes! The interest of the narrator has been on the ‘religious’ aspects of the conquest: the consecration of the people, the crossing of the Jordan, the circumcision of the wilderness generation, and the Passover. Even the battles have been focused on the obedience/disobedience of the people. Even in this new section the interest is not exclusively military as we see in our text.

In Joshua 9 the kings west of the Jordan, who have heard all that the Lord has done for Israel, respond by gathering for war. All except the Gibeonites who resort to a ruse. Dressing up in old clothes and bearing old wine skins and mouldy bread, they appear in the Israelite camp claiming to be a delegation from a long way off. They had heard of the fame of the Lord and what he had done to Egypt and the kings east of the Jordan and have come to make a treaty with Israel.

There was provision for this in the Law: Deuteronomy 20:10-15 the Lord commands the people to offer cities outside of the promised land peace through forced labour. However, the men of Israel, who had just heard the Law read (8:30-35) have no way to verify that this group is actually from far off. But they sample their goods and without inquiring of the Lord they made a treaty with them.

Three days later they find out that the land far, far away was only just up the road and march up to confront the Gibeonites. The treaty they made cannot be broken (see 2 Samuel 21 for an illustration of how serious this treaty was) but Joshua curses them and makes them woodcutters and water bearers in the community.

End of story.

Or is it? For there are a number of curious features of this story that suggest more is going on that first meets the eye. To begin with, Joshua asks the Gibeonites why they lied to Israel and the Gibeonites respond by saying they feared for their lives. At first glance this seems totally unnecessary dialogue. However, it actually points to something quite significant and that is that the Gibeonites, who heard what all the kings west of the Jordan had heard, hadn't hardened their hearts and turned to battle, but had feared for their lives and sought to approach the God of Israel.

On top of that, the narrator tells us that the Gibeonites remained among the people of Israel "to this day". While we don't know when "this day was", we know that the Gibeonites remained among the people until after the exile (Neh. 3:9; 7:25). Furthermore, the "curse" of Joshua was to serve the community and the tabernacle of the Lord.

Nowhere else in Scripture is serving before the Lord seen as a "curse" (see Psalm 84 for one opinion on being at the temple). And finally, there is the silence of God. He doesn't rebuke Joshua for not inquiring of Him or for making a covenant with some of the land's inhabitants or express anger that some of them "got away".

It seems that what we have here is another example of the Lord's interest to save rather than judge. Like Rahab, who's deception of the king of Jericho and confession of faith saw her incorporated into the people of God, so the Gibeonites are included in God's people.

The conquest narratives that follow ought to be read in the light of this opening section: though God's judgment has come on the people of the land for their idolatry, immorality and wickedness, those who turn towards Him – even in unconventional ways – are saved with no complaint from Him. It is the Old Testament illustration of 2 Peter 3:9!

So, this week, consider what this attitude of the Lord means for you and for our stance toward our wider community.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

39. Opening Discussion: Where have you been surprised by God's work in your life or the world around you? This might include a time where you have seen God answer a prayer in a surprising way, or do something in your life, that upon reflection, you never expected He would do.
40. Take some time to read Joshua 9. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
41. The narrator points out that the people of Israel didn't inquire of the Lord about what they should do with the Gibeonites, but doesn't make any editorial comment on this whether it was good or bad. What do you think? And if they had inquired of the Lord what might He have said?
42. If God's primary stance towards humanity is to look for anyone that is open to Him, what implications does this have for repentance of sin? We are still called to repent, but if God is looking for good, rather than bad, how does that change things?
43. In summary, Jesus says in John 17:16, that believers no longer belong to the world, that our values, priorities and behaviours would be different to the world around us. But if God's stance towards us and towards our world is one of looking for good, for those who are open to Him, how might this shape our attitude towards our world?
44. Are there any potential "Gibeonites" in your workplaces, school, and neighbourhoods? What are indicators that someone might be open to hearing more about Jesus? What does this story suggest about our approach towards them?

## Prayer

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6. Who do we know that might be open to hearing a little more of this life that Jesus has invited us into? Pray for openness, courage and opportunities.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Eight

## Bible

### Joshua 10:1-15 (NIV)

#### The Sun Stands Still

**1** Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and had become their allies. **2** He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters. **3** So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon. **4** “Come up and help me attack Gibeon,” he said, “because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites.”

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

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

**7** So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. **8** The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.”

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

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

“Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.”

**13** So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of

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

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

## *Sermon Summary*

The conquest section of Joshua (chs. 9-12) continues with a major battle that is sparked by the treaty between the Gibeonites and Israel that was narrated in Joshua 9. The king of Jerusalem calls his allies and attacks Gibeon – an important city (in part because it controlled the cross roads through the hill country from the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean) and its men were all good fighters. The Gibeonites call on their new ally and Joshua immediately marches out.

From this point the narrative is not what we might expect of a conquest account. There are no details about the size of the armies or the technology they may or may not have possessed (e.g., chariots). As strange as it might seem to us, it would have made perfect sense to those in the ancient world. K. Lawson Younger has done extensive study of ancient near eastern conquest literature and drawn parallels with Joshua 9-12. There are several aspects of the narrative in Joshua 10:1-15 that would have been expected by an ancient reader.

First, the interest in the activity of the gods in the success of the campaign. This is clearly evident in Joshua 10:1-15. Joshua marches through the night and surprises the Jerusalem alliance but the Lord throws them into confusion. Joshua and the Israelites chase them down the road, but the Lord hurls hailstones down on them killing more than the Israelite swords do. Joshua speaks and the Lord extends the day until the battle is finished.

Second, it was common for ancient near eastern conquest literature to employ figurative language in their descriptions. This has implications for how we understand the confusion of the Lord, the hailstorm and the long day. A closer look at the long day illustrates this for us. The narrator says that Joshua speaks to the Lord but then cites a poetic quote from the Book of Jashar that is actually addressed to the sun and moon and includes the outcome of Joshua’s statement. There are several suggestions about what this long day may have been ranging from a simply astronomical event (e.g., a comet or eclipse) to a religious event (e.g., Joshua is calling on the oft-worshiped sun and moon to ‘be still and know that the Lord is God’) to a literal event in which God stopped the world spinning for a full day. None of these suggestions are totally satisfying and, to tell the truth, the narrator doesn’t appear to be interested in the nature of the event as much as in the significance of the event.

This leads to the third feature of conquest accounts which is hyperbole; purposeful exaggeration to make a point. We seem to have an example in 10:14 when the narrator

affirms there has never been a day like it. If he had said that it was unique because it was twice as long, we'd have to go along with it, but his reasons are that God listened to a human being; surely God was fighting for Israel!

This is not actually all that amazing. God is routinely described as hearing his people and fighting for them! So what is the narrator getting at here? If this is hyperbole, what is the point? For at one level there is nothing amazing about the fact that God listens or acts on behalf of his people. On another level, it is totally amazing! I wonder if the narrator isn't wanting to draw our attention to things God always does to increase his people's confidence (the Israelites and us) in approaching him.

While the Lord doesn't fight for us like he does in Joshua, we are told in the New Testament that we are still in a battle and that the Lord will protect us and that we ought to cast all our anxieties on the Lord because he cares. What we have, then, is an encouragement to boldly approach the throne of grace knowing the Lord hears and acts on our behalf.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

45. Opening Discussion: When we grow accustomed to something good in our lives, it can become easy to take it for granted, or forget its significance or blessing. Reflect on some of the best parts of your life now, and share those with the group. (These may be special moments you regularly get to spend with someone, a family member who often cooks for you, the privilege of living where you do, etc...)
46. Take some time to read Joshua 10. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
47. We often give greater responsibility to those in whom we have confidence, or deep trust. What does this mean for the confidence we have in God?
48. Share a time when you felt that God heard you and acted on your behalf. How did that increase your confidence in the Lord?
49. Psalm 113 speaks of God's greatness, whilst also revealing His willingness to act in the simple areas of our lives. What is your response to the truth this psalm reflects?
50. Why do you think the Israelites in Joshua need to be reminded of God's willingness to hear and act on their behalf? Why do we need to be reminded of this?
51. This passage invites us to '*re-member*' that God is *for* us, renewing our confidence in Him. For what could we more boldly be approaching the throne of God (Heb. 4:16)?

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 7, then join together in prayer, boldly, confidently seeking God to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Nine

## Bible

### Joshua 11:1-23 (NIV)

#### Northern Kings Defeated

**1** When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Akshaph, **2** and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah south of Kinnereth, in the western foothills and in Naphoth Dor on the west; **3** to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah. **4** They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. **5** All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

**6** The Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.”

**7** So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, **8** and the Lord gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. **9** Joshua did to them as the Lord had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

**10** At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.) **11** Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed, and he burned Hazor itself.

**12** Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded.

**13** Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds—except Hazor,

which Joshua burned. **14** The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed. **15** As the Lord commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.

**16** So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, **17** from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and put them to death. **18** Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. **19** Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city

made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. **20** For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

**21** At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns. **22** No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.

**23** So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

## *Sermon Summary*

Joshua 10:16-12:24 completes our examination of the conquest narrative but also brings us face to face with the violence of God in the Old Testament. How are these passages – which describe the total destruction of the Canaanites, at the command of the Lord and with His help – related to the teachings of Jesus that we should love our enemies?

This is an important issue for us to look in the face, for if we do not, we can either be left with whole sections of Scripture that we ignore (at our peril – see 2 Timothy 3:16-17) or a loss of confidence in our view of God because we cannot answer the question!

To understand this mystery we need to consider the wider context of Joshua and attempt to make some sense of how these passages are consistent with God's character in Christ. Perhaps the first thing to acknowledge is that in Christ it was God's plan to restore and renew all things; to bless the whole world. Keep this in mind as we dig into Joshua.

Second, it is worth recognising again that Joshua 9-12 is a conquest narrative and that it is unique in Scripture. There are other battles in the Bible and passages that are far gorier than we find here, but nowhere is there quite the same concentration of violence. This reminds us that the total destruction strategy was only in play during the conquest and was not business as usual for the people of Israel. It is also worth remembering that ancient conquest narratives used hyperbole and that we may have some here too.

Third, there are a number of parallels between Joshua and Exodus that suggest that these are meant to be read as two parts of the same story. The parallels include the encounter with God, parted waters, Passover and circumcision and hard hearts. These two stories – of salvation and conquest – are two sides of one story; the story of God's faithfulness to his promises. These promises were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

and were made in order that God might bless all nations through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). God desired to bless the world through the people of Israel. To do that, they were to live as a display home among the nations; a living breathing example of what it looked like to be in relationship with God. And this is one reason why the Canaanites were to be destroyed. As it says in Deuteronomy 7, if the Canaanites remained, the Israelites might worship their gods and become wicked and no longer be a blessing. This means that some of the destruction of the Canaanites was judgement (which is not contradictory with the character of God) and was designed to enable the blessing.

And recall the Gibeonites – referred to here again – as the ideal conquest! They reached out to God and made a treaty of peace with Israel and were incorporated into the people. This is what God wants, but when the nations harden their hearts to His work He uses this to drive them to judgment. (This is the centre of the mystery of hardened hearts – one that the Bible doesn't answer).

The relationship between these passages and Jesus' teaching is that they are both concerned with the restoration of all things and the blessing of God. This draws these two passages together and binds them in the character and motivation of God.

The context has changed. The times have changed. But God's motivation and desire have not.

And we, as His people, are called to be a blessing to those around us! To be careful of the wickedness of our society and separate ourselves from it, but to be a blessing nonetheless.

## *Questions*

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

52. Opening Discussion: Some of the content of this passage is for many, a challenge to resolve. Take some time to share with the group any thoughts or concerns you might have, when considering God's command to bring destruction to the Canaanites. Allow the tension to sit with the group, don't try to explain away or excuse your thoughts and feelings at this point, the rest of the study will help you explore them.
53. Take some time to read Joshua 11. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there is a word/phrase in this passage that 'jumps out at you'. What is it? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something new from a text that might be familiar). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.
54. Have you ever had someone reject Christianity on the basis of the violence of the Old Testament? If so, how have you tried to answer their concerns? If you haven't found yourself in this situation, how might you try to answer them?

55. The blessing of God through Israel, was to be an example to the world of what it meant to live in relationship with Him, a “display home.” This meant that any threat to that purpose had to be eliminated, and as we see here, resulted in the destruction of the wicked nations. How have things changed in Jesus?
56. Having considered in more detail God’s actions in this passage, how do you now understand judgment as being consistent with God’s character?
57. We are invited to participate in God’s plan to be a blessing to the world around us, how are we as a group, and as individuals, engaging in this mission?

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on each other’s answers to question 6, then join together in prayer, asking God to lead you more fully into His plans and purposes.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Ten

## Bible

### 13

**Joshua 13:1-6 (NIV)**  
Land Still to Be Taken

**1** When Joshua had grown old, the Lord said to him, “You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.

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

**6** “As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the

Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have instructed you, **7** and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh.”

### 14

**Joshua 14:1-5 (NIV)**  
Division of the Land West of the Jordan

**1** Now these are the areas the Israelites received as an inheritance in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel allotted to them. **2** Their inheritances were assigned by lot to the nine and a half tribes, as the Lord had commanded through Moses. **3** Moses had granted the two and a half tribes their inheritance east of the Jordan but had not granted the Levites an inheritance among the rest, **4** for Joseph’s descendants had become two tribes—Manasseh and

Ephraim. The Levites received no share of the land but only towns to live in, with pasturelands for their flocks and herds.

**5** So the Israelites divided the land, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

### Joshua 14:6-15 (NIV)

#### Allotment for Caleb

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

**10** “Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old!

**11** I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.

**12** Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.”

**13** Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. **14** So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord,

the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

**15** (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)

Then the land had rest from war.

## 17

### Joshua 17:14-18 (NIV)

#### The Complaint of the People of Ephraim

**14** The people of Joseph said to Joshua, “Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people, and the Lord has blessed us abundantly.”

**15** “If you are so numerous,” Joshua answered, “and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites.”

**16** The people of Joseph replied, “The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the plain have chariots fitted with iron, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel.”

**17** But Joshua said to the tribes of Joseph—to Ephraim and Manasseh—“You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment **18** but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have chariots fitted with iron and though they are strong, you can drive them out.”

## 20

### Joshua 20:1-6 (NIV)

#### Cities of Refuge

**1** Then the Lord said to Joshua: **2** “Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses, **3** so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee

there and find protection from the avenger of blood. **4** When they flee to one of these cities, they are to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state their case before the elders of that city. Then the elders are to admit the fugitive into their city and provide a place to live among them. **5** If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbour unintentionally and without malice aforethought. **6** They are to stay in that city until they have stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then they may go back to their own home in the town from which they fled.”

## 21

### Joshua 21:1-3 (NIV) Towns for the Levites

**1** Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua

son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel **2** at Shiloh in Canaan and said to them, “The Lord commanded through Moses that you give us towns to live in, with pasturelands for our livestock.” **3** So, as the Lord had commanded, the Israelites gave the Levites the following towns and pasturelands out of their own inheritance:...

### Joshua 21:43-45 (NIV)

**43** So the Lord gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. **44** The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the Lord gave all their enemies into their hands.

**45** Not one of all the Lord’s good promises to Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.

## Sermon Summary

This week we are dealing with the largest section so far in our series: 13:1-21:45. Nine chapters in all and nearly all of it filled with tedious descriptions of places we’ve never heard of! This is the allotment of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel and, while it might be a bit of tough slog, it is the theological heart of the book (as well as the transition to the final chapters). There are a number of indicators that this section is as religiously motivated as the rest of the book, as well as pointers in the direction of this section’s main challenge.

The first clue is the sheer length of this part of Joshua. It is easily the longest section in the book and this should indicate its importance. However, there are other indicators that religious concerns are still dominating. For instance, we are told in 9:51 that the allotment of the land was not made by legal experts or surveyors, but by Eleazar the high priest in the presence of the Lord at Shiloh. To this can be added a couple of features of the arrangement. For example, the section ends with the allotment of cities of refuge – cities for people to flee too if there was an unintentional murder (20:1-6) – and the cities for the Levites – whose task it was to teach the people to live faithfully (21:1-3). This focus on the law and worship are consistent with the themes of the book. Likewise we have the stories of Caleb and the men of Ephraim in Joshua 14 and 17. The allotment of land to the tribe of Judah is preceded with a story of Caleb’s desire to receive his inheritance as the Lord had promised. The allotment of land to the tribes of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) is

followed by a complaint by the men of Ephraim and an expression of fear over the Canaanites (17:14-18). This chiasmic structure: a story of courage and faith by a man of Judah, followed by the allotment to Judah, the allotment to Ephraim, followed by the story of complaint and fear by Ephraim, reminds us that the response to the promises of God is central to Joshua. Will the people respond in courage and faith, or will they respond with complaint or fear?

However, the theological heart of this entire section is focused on the faithfulness of God to Israel and the invitation that is extended to Israel. The section concludes with a summary statement of God's faithfulness, but opens with a reminder that there was more land to be conquered. Deuteronomy 7:22 states the Lord would not allow Israel to conquer the whole land all at once, and He has been true to this promise. There are Canaanites still in the land and this is not described either as a deficit in the Lord's faithfulness nor as a failure on behalf of Israel. However, it is not neutral. The presence of the Canaanites invites the Israelites to faithful living while they wait for the promises of the Lord to be fulfilled in their entirety. They were to live in such a way as to invite the nations to join them in following the Lord, but were faced with the threat of being invited to follow the ways of the nations! This introduces the theme of the final chapters of Joshua which focus on faithfulness.

The invitation to faithful living, given to Israel, is also given to us. We live 'between the times'; between the complete work of Jesus and the consummation of the kingdom. As we wait, we are invited to live faithfully so that everyone might know the Lord and begin to follow him!

We'll deal with faithful living in the weeks to come as we look at the closing chapters of Joshua. However, it is worth asking, are we living faithfully as we await the fullness of the kingdom?

## *Questions*

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

58. Opening Discussion: What does God's faithfulness look like in your life? Take some time to consider this question and share your reflections with the group. Your experiences may seem great or comparatively small, but try not to judge them. We are often unaware at the time, of the significance a seemingly small intervention or provision from God might have.
59. Take some time to read the listed sections taken from Joshua chapters 13-21, there are fewer questions this week, so you have time to consider this larger section of scripture. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words/phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain why this word/phrase jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something). Invite

the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word/phrase. Take some time to share what these words/phrases/pictures are.

60. The story of Caleb (From the tribe of Judah - 14:6-15) is meant as a contrast with the people of Ephraim (From the tribe of Joseph - 17:14-18)? Who do you most relate to and why?
61. The Lord's plan was to drive out the nations slowly (see Deut. 7:22). This left open the possibility of his people being tempted to follow the gods of the nations. Why do you think God allowed this possibility?
62. The ideal conquest, as we have seen in the accounts of Rahab and the Gibeonites, is for the nations to respond to the Lord in faith. We are called to the same faithful response. What does it look like for us to be faithful to God, as we live in expectation of Jesus' return?

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 5, then together, ask God to increase your faith as you live out lives of faithfulness to Him.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Eleven

### Bible

Joshua 22:1-34 (NIV)

Eastern Tribes Return Home

**1** Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh **2** and said to them, “You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded.

**3** For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. **4** Now that the Lord your God has given them rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

**5** But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to keep his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

**6** Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes.

**7** (To the half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given land in Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan along with their fellow Israelites.) When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them, **8** saying, “Return to your homes with your great wealth—with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing—and divide the plunder from your enemies with your fellow Israelites.”

**9** So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the Lord through Moses.

**10** When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there

by the Jordan. **11** And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Gilead near the Jordan on the Israelite side, **12** the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.

**13** So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. **14** With him they sent ten of the chief men, one from each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans.

**15** When they went to Gilead—to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh—they said to them: **16** “The whole assembly of the Lord says: ‘How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? **17** Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the Lord! **18** And are you now turning away from the Lord?

“If you rebel against the Lord today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel. **19** If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the Lord’s land, where the Lord’s tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the Lord or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the Lord our God. **20** When Achan son of Zerah was unfaithful in regard to the devoted things, did not wrath come on the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.”

**21** Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel: **22** “The Mighty One, God, the Lord! The Mighty One, God, the Lord! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the

Lord, do not spare us this day. **23** If we have built our own altar to turn away from the Lord and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the Lord himself call us to account.

**24** “No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, ‘What do you have to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? **25** The Lord has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the Lord.’ So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the Lord.

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

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

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

**30** When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community—the heads of the clans of the Israelites—heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased. **31** And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, “Today we know that the Lord is with us, because you have not been unfaithful to the Lord in this matter.

Now you have rescued the Israelites from the Lord's hand."

**32** Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites. **33** They were glad to hear the

report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived.

**34** And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us—that the Lord is God.

## *Sermon Summary*

As we saw last week, the allotment of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel forms the theological heart of the book of Joshua, as it demonstrates the Lord's faithfulness to his promises and invites the people of Israel to be faithful in response. The closing chapters of Joshua are primarily concerned with the topic of faithful living.

In Joshua 22 the Transjordan tribes (Reuben, Gad and 1/2 of Manasseh who had inherited land on the eastern side of the Jordan) are sent home by Joshua. They had been faithful to their promise, given to Moses and Joshua, to fight with their brothers in Canaan until their fellow Israelites had possessed the land. Now that this is done, they are able to return home. Joshua sends them off with a blessing and a warning against unfaithfulness. On the way, however, just before they return to their land, they build a large altar. When the rest of Israel hears about this, they fear the worst; the Transjordan tribes have rebelled against the Lord's command to only worship in one place (Deuteronomy 12:1-14) and gather for war against these tribes. Before launching an offensive, they send a delegation led by Phineas the priest to confront them. When the delegation arrives and presents its accusations the Transjordan tribes respond by saying that they had no intention of offering sacrifices on their altar (the reason behind the prohibition of worshipping anywhere they wanted), but had built a replica so that the tribes on the western side of the Jordan could never say that the Transjordan tribes had no share in the Lord. This answer relieved the delegation who returned home with the good news that their brothers on the eastern side of the Jordan were still faithful to the Lord.

This story about faithfulness suggests several fruitful avenues for discussion on faithful living. To begin with, it is important to recognise that past faithfulness does not guarantee future faithfulness. The story begins with Joshua's affirmation of their faithfulness. However, this does not exclude the Transjordanians from future unfaithfulness. To some degree, we are only as faithful as our last decision.

This leads to a reflection on the bias of our decisions. The altar was not wicked in and of itself, but the tribes in Canaan saw that it was not a neutral action either. The presence of this second altar could lead to idolatrous practices and this bias led to the confrontation. Are we aware of the bias of our actions? Do we consider whether our decisions lean towards God or away from Him?

A third point of reflection is on the tendency to focus on unfaithfulness rather than faithfulness. We are certainly to be alert to unfaithful actions and to confront them too. However, if we are only on the lookout for unfaithfulness we may miss opportunities to encourage faithfulness.

Fourthly, we can see the value of the past for encouraging faithfulness. The Israelites refer back to the sin at Peor and the sin of Achan as examples of unfaithfulness and their impact. We can, and should, learn from the past – both our failures, but also our successes.

Finally, it is intriguing that the people of Israel in Joshua 22 are dealing with faithfulness in times of peace. Faithfulness to the Lord in times of difficulty has its own challenges, but faithfulness in times of peace is equally challenging. See Deuteronomy 8:6-18 for Moses' warning about faithfulness in the midst of ease.

Each of these points of reflection (and there are others) are valuable places for us to stop and think about our own faithfulness and how we respond to one another as we all seek to follow the Lord.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

63. Opening Discussion: Throughout history the Christian faith has often thrived in the face of adversity or persecution. Whilst the battles most of us face in a modern, western context look different now, they still exist. What are the 'battles' we face in our lives today? What are the challenges to our faithfulness to God and His plans and purposes? Share your thoughts with the group.
64. Take some time to read Joshua chapter 22. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain why it jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Take some time to share what what you've been lead to.
65. Why is it easier to focus on unfaithfulness in others than faithfulness?
66. What keeps us from confronting unfaithfulness in others? How might we begin to allow this kind of accountability?
67. The building of the altar was not in itself wicked, but it had the potential to lead the Israelites into idolatrous practices. List some of the decisions you may have made this past week. What contributes to a decision leaning towards God, or one that leans away?
68. Whilst this may be challenging for some, take some time to share one example of faithfulness in another's life that encourages you. If you're not sure you know anyone in your group well enough to do this, share an example of faithfulness in the life of someone you do, that may be external to the group.

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on each other's answers to question 6, praise God for those characteristics and the way He has been at work growing them in each other. Continue to pray for each other that God would help us to discern and engage in practices that will encourage greater faithfulness in our lives.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Twelve

### Bible

#### Joshua 23:1-16 (NIV)

Joshua's Farewell to the Leaders

**1** After a long time had passed and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, **2** summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am very old. **3** You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. **4** Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. **5** The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

**6** “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of

Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. **7** Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. **8** But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

**9** “The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you.

**10** One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. **11** So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

**12** “But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, **13** then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips

on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.

**14** “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. **15** But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised

you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. **16** If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.”

## *Sermon Summary*

As we near the end of the book of Joshua the narrator lays the foundation for the ongoing story of Israel as told in the book of Judges. Here, in chapter 23, Joshua gives his farewell address to the nation and identifies two challenges that Israel will face moving forward. These two challenges are: a) to avoid the temptation of following the gods of the nations among whom they live (until the Lord drives them out) and, b) there is no succession plan after Joshua. These challenges will provide the crucible in which Israel will prove how well they have learned the lessons of faith, trust and obedience. And there is some reason to be optimistic since the book of Joshua has presented Israel as immediately obedient to the commands of the Lord and, apart from Achan’s sin, there is little to complain about. How will they fare without a national leader in times of peace?

In Joshua’s speech he identifies four things that Israel should do in order to remain faithful and these are as applicable today as they were then.

First, Joshua urges Israel to remember what the Lord has done on their behalf. When doubts come (as they do), recalling the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord in the past will sustain them into the future. As believers, we do this as we gather for worship and it is an important discipline to commit to, in order that we too might recall what God has done for us.

Second, Joshua encourages them to be careful to keep the Law of Moses. The Law outlined what a relationship with the Lord looked like and, to receive the blessing of living in relationship with the Lord, it was critical that they kept the Law close to their hearts. The same is true for us (and this is a corporate task) and is a key reason why we continue to make the reading and teaching of the Word of God central to what we do together. While it is important to read the Bible on our own, but also to talk about it together.

Third, Joshua reminds the Israelites of the importance of remaining distinct from the nations among whom they live. They are not to call upon the gods of these nations or intermarry with them (for reasons of faithfulness rather than ethnic purity). This reminds us of the reason why the Lord has settled them in the land; to be a witness to the nations of what it looks like to live in relationship with him. The plan was that there might be more like Rahab and the Gibeonites – those who might turn to the Lord and be incorporated into the people of God. We will only be able to consider our engagement in our world if

we have a clear understanding of the character of the Lord as revealed in his Word. For we too are meant to be a light to the nations!

Finally, Joshua warns the people about the cost of failure. To fail to be faithful will result in their destruction and perishing from the land. The stakes are high! Not only will they perish, but the plan of God for a royal priesthood and holy nation will be impeded and the nations will not see relationship with the Lord lived out. We too must keep the consequences of our failure in mind. Now, the Lord will accomplish his plans and purposes, that is certain, but it appears that the Lord invites us into genuine partnership with him and that our failure has real consequences.

The question for Israel is whether they are ready for the challenges they are about to face. And we can ask ourselves if we are ready as well. Are we learning the lessons of faith, trust and obedience so that, when the challenges come, we are prepared? This is the question that Joshua 23 urges us to ask.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a LifeGroup discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

69. Opening Discussion: Think of a time when you faced a challenge that tested how well you had learned certain lessons (e.g., taking up a new role at work, becoming a parent, an apprenticeship). What did that challenge reveal about what you had learned? Share your thoughts with the group.
70. Take some time to read Joshua chapter 23. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain why it jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Take some time to share what you've been lead to.
71. Joshua urges Israel to learn the lessons of faith, trust and obedience in four ways. Remember the Law (v6), remain distinct from the other nations (v7), hold fast to God (v8), and remember the consequences of not following God (vs15,16). Discuss what these four lessons mean, and why they were important for Israel to learn.
72. What are the consequences for our world, when *our community* of faith is **weak** in each of these four areas? (You might want to think both locally and globally about your answers.)
73. What is the impact on our world, when *our community* of faith is **strong** in each of these four areas? (You might want to think both locally and globally about your answers.)
74. What are the challenges that you face in life that would be positively affected by growing strong in one or more of these four lessons of faith?

## *Prayer*

Take some time to reflect on your answers to question 6, pray for each other that you might be strengthened by the power of God's Holy Spirit in each of these four lessons of faith, particularly as you face the challenges you've mentioned.



## Study Series

Joshua: Week Thirteen

### Bible

#### Joshua 24:1-28 (NIV)

The Covenant Renewed at Shechem

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

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

**5** “Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. **6** When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with

chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. **7** But they cried to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

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

**11** “Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. **12** I sent the

hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. **13** So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

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

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

**19** Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God;

he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. **20** If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

**21** But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.”

**22** Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

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

**24** And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.”

**25** On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws.

**26** And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord.

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

**28** Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

## *Sermon Summary*

This final chapter of Joshua ties up a few more loose ends and invites the Israelites to greater faithfulness. The loose ends in this case include a seemingly random one that goes all the way back to Genesis 50:24-25 where Joseph made his brothers promise to bring his bones back to Canaan from Egypt. In Exodus 13:19 we’re told that Moses brought Joseph’s remains with them and now, in Joshua 24 we’re told that the Israelites buried Joseph’s bones at Shechem. This interest in the patriarchal story plays out in a couple of other ways in this chapter. To begin with, Shechem was very important to the people of Israel. It was the first place that Abraham had stayed in the land (Genesis 12:6) and was the site of the only land (the burial plot where Joseph was buried) that the patriarchs possessed until the conquest. In Deuteronomy 27:12-13 Moses commands

Israel to read the blessings and curses at Shechem when they enter the land (which they did in Joshua 8:30-35). However, the more interesting connection with the patriarchs is found in the Lord's speech that opens the chapter. Joshua here acts as a prophet, speaking the words of God to the people and it is very interesting history of the people of Israel.

The twin themes of protection and provision place the focus purely on the activity of God and invite a response which Joshua turns to verse 14. It is, however, very interesting to note that this history doesn't contain; namely any reflection on Israel's failures. Verse 7b (the second half of verse 7) is incredibly interesting – it is the most compressed retelling of Exodus 16 to Numbers 21 that you'll ever find! The focus, even here, is squarely on God.

So, how should Israel respond? Should they give thanks to the Lord and worship him? Should they declare his goodness to the nations and bear witness to what the Lord had done? These are certainly appropriate but Joshua calls the people to a more foundational commitment – “Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.” Without faithful service, worship and praise are only empty religious ceremony. Without faithful service, witness to God's goodness only exposes our hypocrisy. This is a fundamental commitment that Joshua calls them to.

Immediately following this, however, we have a very surprising command - “Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt.” It seems that, even after all this time, the people still had their ancestral gods. The Lord's speech also makes reference to them in verse 2 (and for a strange confirmation of this read Genesis 35:1-5). The people hold, in their own tents, the means for their downfall; there is no talk of the nations around them now. In the most famous verses from this text Joshua challenges them to choose who they will serve to which the people respond, “We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”

What follows is a strange back-and-forth dialogue between Joshua and the people. In response to their affirmation to serve the Lord he states that they are unable to serve the Lord, warning them that if they are unfaithful the Lord will destroy them. The people say a second time, “We will serve the Lord.” Joshua then urges them a second time to be rid of their other gods to which the people respond, a third time, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.” What's missing, however, is any action in getting rid of their gods. The Israelites are all talk, but no action.

This call to commitment – in word and deed – is the final word in the book of Joshua (which, incidentally, opened the same way) and invites us to do more that reflect on the failure of the people of Israel. It invites us to consider our commitment to the Lord. And it invites us to go one better than Israel and actually repent of our unfaithfulness so that our recommitment is unhindered by those things that trip us up!

Who will you serve? And if it is the Lord, will you rid yourself of those things that hinder you? Ultimately, this is what the book of Joshua is about; the Lord's faithfulness which invites a response of faithfulness to Him. We have not read the book properly unless we too seek to answer this question.

## Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a Group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

You might want to have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

75. Opening Discussion: Take some time to share the things you have learned from this series that will shape you into the future, and what have you learnt that is already impacting the way that you live? (Take some time to consider the past 13 weeks, you may want to look over the previous weeks notes as a reminder.)
76. Take some time to read Joshua chapter 24:1-28. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain why it jumped out – this is about observing, not judging, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Take some time to share what you've been lead to.
77. What are the implications of foreign gods among the people of Israel? How does their presence affect how we read their struggles in Exodus-Numbers to be faithful?
78. Without faithful service, worship becomes empty ceremony and witness is emptied of its power. How else is faithful service the fundamental response to the Lord?
79. Whilst words can often be hollow, declarations of intent are still important. What is the connection between our words and our actions in these sorts of aspirational moments.
80. What are the characteristics of true repentance before God? And if you feel comfortable sharing with the group, what might God be asking you to repent of?

(If you are uncomfortable sharing this with your group, you may want to write your answer to this question down, to share with another you trust, or to bring before God in the quiet of your heart. But may we encourage you where possible to be honest with your group. Vulnerability in a safe space, builds trust, depth and prepares us for the work of the Holy Spirit to shape our walk with Jesus.)

81. What are the characteristics of true commitment to God?

## Prayer

Take some time to reflect on your answers to question 6 and 7, pray for each other that you might be reminded of the power of repentance, as well as the forgiveness Jesus brings. And, continue to pray for God's strength to remain faithful in our service of Him.