

COMMITMENT KEPT

Always in control, God uses all situations to bring about His purposes.

JOSHUA 10:6-14

MEMORY VERSE: JOSHUA 1:7

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Joshua 7:1–12:24 and Understand the Context (pp. 34-35). When reading Joshua 9, take note of the treaty with the Gibeonites. Even though this was rare, it was a recognition of the power of God upon the Israelites.
- **STUDY** Joshua 10:6-14, using Explore the Text (pp. 35-39). As you study, list ways God intervenes and what His intervention reveals about His character.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 40-41) and More Ideas (p. 42), in *QuickSource*, and on *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible*. Brainstorm creative ways to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 42) that are appropriate for your group.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (*MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible*).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 1** (*Map: The Judges of Israel*); **PACK ITEM 10** (*Poster: Mighty Acts of God in Early Israel*); **PACK ITEM 11** (*Poster: Joshua 1:7*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God the Father

God the Father is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise.

Storms always seem to bring out the best in a community. We usually see the photos of the destruction left behind and rarely hear about how the survivors and others in the community rally around those affected. Neighbors will help neighbors clear debris from each other's yards. Churches and other organizations become sources for food and other assistance. Teams of people help secure tarps on roofs, provide meals, and man chainsaws. Local college students volunteer to clean, salvage, and sort. New friendships are forged while old friendships are strengthened. Opportunities to share with others about Jesus abound as believers demonstrate His love and compassion.

(In PSG, p. 33) **What are some ways you have seen God use extremely difficult situations to bring about His purposes? How can God bring good out of tragedy?**

In Joshua 9, God's people entered into a covenant with the Gibeonites [GIB ih uh nights]. The Gibeonites acted deceitfully and fooled the Israelites into making a covenant with them. Nonetheless, God's people determined they would honor their commitment. When a coalition of Canaan's southern kings attacked the Gibeonites, Joshua and his armies intervened on the Gibeonites' behalf, and God provided a great victory (Josh. 10:9-15).

God's people often face seemingly insurmountable odds and challenges as they go through life. As they do, God often works through others to strengthen and encourage His people. He also expects His followers to keep their commitments, though many in the world are often quick to break their commitments. God is always in control and uses all situations to bring about His purposes.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Aijalon Valley" in the Winter 2016-17 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 7:1–12:24

The Israelites' victory over Jericho was marred by failure. Achan, one of Israel's soldiers, kept some of Jericho's treasures for himself (Josh. 7:1). Joshua had warned the people to stay away from these items, lest wrath come on all Israel (6:17-19). Consequently, Israel's next battle against Ai, which should have proven an easy victory, resulted in defeat (7:2-5). Joshua prayed to the Lord, and the Lord replied that Israel had sinned (7:6-15). The next morning, the Lord revealed Achan as the guilty party (7:16-18). Achan confessed his sin, and he and his family perished (7:20-26).

Joshua then redirected his attention to Ai (8:1-2). He mobilized the army and established an ambush group behind the city (8:3-9). When the

king of Ai saw the Israelites the next morning, he led his forces into battle, leaving the city undefended and unaware the ambush group was waiting to attack (8:14-17). Joshua then ordered the ambush group to attack the city, and the people defeated Ai (8:18-29). Following their victory, the people journeyed northward to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, where they renewed the covenant as Moses had directed (8:30-35; Deut. 27:11-26).

The inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had accomplished at Jericho and Ai. They devised a plan to convince the Israelites they lived in a distant country (Josh. 9:1-6). Their delegation approached the Israelites at Gilgal and convinced them of this deception; Joshua and the people made a treaty with them (9:6-15). Three days later, the Israelites realized the Gibeonites were their neighbors and found themselves caught in the deception. They determined they would enslave the Gibeonites rather than kill them (9:16-27).

A coalition of southern kings joined together to attack Gibeon when they discovered the Gibeonites had made peace with Israel (10:1-5). The Gibeonites immediately sent word to Joshua, who rallied Israel's armies to assist them and defeated the southern coalition (10:6-27). During this battle Joshua called to the sun to stand still, and the Lord honored his request (10:12-14). Joshua then led his army in a conquest of Canaan's southern cities (10:28-43).

A coalition of northern kings led by Jabin, king of Hazor, amassed an army to fight Joshua (11:1-5). The Lord again brought victory (11:6-11). Joshua conquered the remaining northern cities (11:12-15), and Israel thereby achieved control of Canaan (11:16-23). Chapter 12 provides a summary statement regarding the 31 kings the Israelite army conquered (12:1-24).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A COMMITMENT REMEMBERED (JOSH. 10:6)

VERSE 6

When *the men of Gibeon* realized they faced an attack from the southern coalition of kings, they knew the situation was desperate. They *sent word to Joshua in the camp at •Gilgal* approximately 15 miles to the east down in the Jordan Valley. Their plea, *don't abandon your servants*, had a serious urgency to it. The word translated *abandon* literally means "relax your hand from" or "let your hand go from." It is the same word that appeared in Joshua 1:5 ("leave"). The Lord had promised He would never let go of Joshua, and now the Gibeonites called on Israel not to let go of them in their time of need. The words *come quickly and save us* further stress the urgency of the matter. The *•Amorite kings living in the hill country* to the south did not have far to come to attack Gibeon. In fact, Jerusalem (10:1) lay only a few miles south and slightly east of Gibeon. The five southern leaders who had *joined forces* represented an intimidating challenge for the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites remembered the promises of protection Joshua and the Israelites had given them. They called on Joshua to rescue them and not abandon them to their attackers.

BIBLE SKILL

Memorize and reflect on a verse.

Memorize Joshua 1:7 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. What words are most significant to you in this verse? To what situations in your life does this verse speak? How can applying God's Word to your circumstances help you with a tough decision or a difficult situation? Commit yourself to trusting in God's promise in this area of your life.

JOSHUA 10:6

⁶ Then the men of Gibeon sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: "Don't abandon your servants. Come quickly and save us! Help us, for all the Amorite kings living in the hill country have joined forces against us."

(In PSG, p. 35) **Name three or four large commitments many people make. What role does faith play in keeping commitments? What kind of impact can it have on others when they see God's people keeping commitments—even small ones?**

JOSHUA 10:7

⁷ So Joshua and his whole military force, including all the fighting men, came from Gilgal.

JOSHUA 10:8

⁸ The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for I have handed them over to you. Not one of them will be able to stand against you."

STAYING TRUE TO HIS WORD (JOSH. 10:7-8)

VERSE 7

Joshua and his whole military force moved quickly. The term *fighting men* literally means "warriors of valor" and probably designates the most valiant and brave of Joshua's troops. The word *came* literally means "went up or came up." Gilgal, the site of Israel's camp, lay approximately 700 feet below sea level. Gibeon, 15 miles westward on the plateau, stood at an elevation of 2,400 feet. Thus, as Joshua's army traveled westward to the edge of the plateau, the soldiers would have had to climb over 3,000 feet in elevation. The march indeed would have been challenging, but Joshua was determined to stay true to his word. He also knew he could not delay, as the Amorite coalition was moving against Gibeon.

VERSE 8

Perhaps Joshua remembered the defeat at Ai just off the edge of the plateau a few miles away (7:2-5). God's command *Do not be afraid of them* hints that a bit of uncertainty lingered in Joshua's mind. But the Lord assured His leader that He had the situation in control. The words *I have handed them over to you* remind us of God's instruction to Joshua regarding Jericho (6:2). The victory over Jericho was so certain that God could speak of it as a past event. Likewise, in God's mind, Israel's battle against the southern kings had an outcome that was not in doubt, for God was in control. The apostle Paul used similar language when he described our heavenly destiny. He could speak of it as a past event because of its absolute certainty in God's plan (Eph. 2:6).

God assured Joshua that the Israelites would participate in an incredible victory. The words *not one of them will be able to stand against you* are similar to God's words of encouragement in Joshua 1:5 and emphasize the overwhelming victory Joshua was about to win over the southern coalition. Such words must have encouraged Joshua, who had already seen God do great things on Israel's behalf. As Joshua stayed true to his word to the Gibeonites, he could be sure God would stay true to His word to Joshua and the Israelites.

God's words to Joshua remind us not to forget God's past work in our lives. As we face new challenges, we must remember His faithfulness through earlier challenges (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Doing so will help us trust God for present and future trials. People who see our confidence may gain encouragement to place their faith in God as well.

How can staying true to our word and our commitments encourage others? What does it say about our level of commitment when we honor our commitments even in difficult circumstances?

DIVINE INTERVENTION (JOSH. 10:9-14)

VERSE 9

Joshua caught the Amorite coalition *by surprise* (literally “came upon them suddenly”). The Gibeonites’ enemies underestimated how quickly Israel’s army would respond to the coalition’s advance against Gibeon. *Marching all night from Gilgal* highlights the urgency and the determination of Joshua’s mission; Israel had to act quickly. It was risky to march all night before a battle at dawn. The soldiers marched 15 miles up a steep incline and would have been weary. However, God equipped them for the task at hand, for He was on their side. He empowered them for the long, uphill march and still enabled them to win the victory as they caught their enemies by surprise.

The description of the battle also contains a hidden fact—hidden, perhaps, because the men who wrote the Bible assumed its readers lived in the land and knew the topography. When Joshua and the army charged over the ridge onto the plateau to fight the battle at dawn, the sun was at their back and in their enemies’ eyes. The coalition army was caught by surprise and found itself staring into the morning sun. This fact adds a deeper meaning to the miracle of verses 12-13.

VERSE 10

Not only did Israel’s enemies face a blinding sun and an inspired army, but the Lord threw them into confusion before Israel. They were not ready to deal with Joshua’s forces. The language recalls the victory against Egypt at the time of the exodus when the Lord confounded the Egyptian army (Ex. 14:24). Panic set in as God defeated them in a great slaughter at Gibeon. Joshua’s men were fighting, to be sure, but the text leaves no doubt that the Lord ultimately brought the victory.

Joshua’s army chased their enemies through the ascent of Beth-horon, a major access route for armies between the plateau of Gibeon and Canaan’s coastal plain along the Mediterranean Sea. As the enemies fled to the west, they would reach Azekah, along the edge of the Valley of Elah where David later would fight Goliath (1 Sam. 17:1-2,41-51). The city of Makkedah lay farther to the south, near Hebron, Lachish, and Eglon. Joshua chased his foes back in the direction of their homeland. The enemies were trying to escape, but they were cornered and had nowhere else to go. Their territories soon would fall to Joshua’s army.

JOSHUA 10:9

⁹ So Joshua caught them by surprise, after marching all night from Gilgal.

JOSHUA 10:10

¹⁰ The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel. He defeated them in a great slaughter at Gibeon, chased them through the ascent of Beth-horon, and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah.

JOSHUA 10:11

¹¹ As they fled before Israel, the LORD threw large hailstones on them from the sky along the descent of Beth-horon all the way to Azekah, and they died. More of them died from the hail than the Israelites killed with the sword.

JOSHUA 10:12

¹² On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke to the LORD in the presence of Israel: “Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.”

VERSE 11

The words *they fled before Israel* signify the enemies’ defeat. The mention of fleeing before a foe is a common biblical expression to denote an army’s defeat (1 Sam. 4:17; 31:1). In addition, more divine intervention came as *the LORD threw large hailstones on them from the sky*. Israel’s enemies had no chance at victory. Joshua had attacked them at dawn, and they had to fight with the sun in their eyes. They had suffered a massive defeat and fled for their lives from the plateau toward the coast. Now Israel’s God bombarded them from the heavens, cutting off their attempted escape. The route *along the descent of Beth-horon all the way to Azekah* is a distance of approximately 20 miles and signifies the magnitude of God’s judgment. Joshua and his men fought valiantly that day, but the text further emphasizes that in terms of enemy casualties, *more of them died from the hail than the Israelites killed with the sword*. Once again, as Israel kept its word to the Gibeonites, God kept His word and fought for Israel.

VERSE 12

The text provides another detail regarding *the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to the Israelites*. The text has already emphasized how the Lord was the ultimate provider of victory. He had given the army the strength to march all night and to fight the next day (10:9). He had rained hailstones down on the enemies as they tried to flee from Joshua (10:11). The Lord then brought one more miraculous event that sealed Israel’s victory.

Joshua called for the sun to *stand still over Gibeon*, while the morning *moon* would linger *over the Valley of Aijalon*. Notice the specific nature of Joshua’s prayer. If the sun remained along the eastern horizon while the moon remained in the western sky, the Amorite armies would be facing the sun as they fought Joshua. As they fled and looked over their shoulders, they again would look back into the sun. This phenomenon not only put them at a tremendous disadvantage, but it certainly created more panic as they realized Israel’s God was fighting against them as well. Furthermore, the sun stopping in the sky gave Joshua a longer day to defeat his enemies completely.

Some interpreters have suggested that Joshua was addressing the sun and moon as deities, as many peoples in the ancient world would have done. However, the text does not suggest this in any way. Rather, Joshua addressed the Lord, who gave him the authority to command the sun and moon. A careful reading of the account affirms that God miraculously caused the sun and moon to cease on their regular course. Once again the text emphasizes that “the LORD fought for Israel” (10:14). Israel’s victory was certain because God was on their side; no enemy could stand against them.

VERSE 13

Verse 13 records the amazing fulfillment of Joshua’s request to the Lord—*the sun stood still and the moon stopped* (literally “stood”) in the sky. One wonders how long it took for the Amorite coalition to realize the sun and moon were not moving. The extra daylight was exactly what Israel needed, and as a result, *the nation took vengeance on its enemies*.

•**The Book of Jashar** is also mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:18. It recorded the account of Joshua's victory and also the occasion of David's lament for Saul and Jonathan after Saul and Jonathan died in battle with the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:1-6). The expression also could be translated "book of the just." Other than these two biblical references, we have no knowledge of this ancient source.

The statement **the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed its setting almost a full day** again stresses the Lord's sovereign leading of all the battle's events. He gave His people strength and assistance for the task before them, and He directed the forces of nature for His people and against His enemies.

VERSE 14

The statement **there has been no day like it before or since** emphasizes the unique nature of this day. Abraham was a great man of faith; so was Joseph, and so was Moses. Yet in their days nothing like this had ever happened. On the day Joshua faced the Amorite coalition, **the LORD listened to the voice of a man**—Joshua—in a manner He never had before.

The verse closes with a statement that by now in the reading of the text is quite obvious—**the LORD fought for Israel**. He intervened on behalf of His people, providing them a crushing victory. The Israelites saw God's work and were amazed; God's enemies saw His work and feared for their lives. In the end, they lost their lives. To the Gibeonites and perhaps to Joshua, the situation at the beginning of chapter 10 seemed somewhat out of control. Nonetheless, God used this situation to bring about His purposes. Perhaps many of the Gibeonites came to believe in Israel's God when they saw His power on display in the battle.

Today, God's people still face challenges that, while different, seem just as insurmountable. When we do, we need to remember that the same God who led Joshua also leads us, and He remains in control of the world. He is more than able to accomplish His purposes and answer our prayers (Eph. 3:20). He will keep His commitments to us (2 Cor. 1:20), just as He expects us to keep our commitment to Him. As God works His purposes in and through us, perhaps others who do not know the Lord will see our commitment and yield themselves to Him as well. We never know how God may use our faithfulness to inspire others to commitment and action.

**What is the greatest way you have seen God intervene in your life?
How does seeing God do great things in the midst of challenging
circumstances help us to face future challenges?**

JOSHUA 10:13

¹³ And the sun stood still and the moon stopped until the nation took vengeance on its enemies. Isn't this written in the Book of Jashar? So the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed its setting almost a full day.

JOSHUA 10:14

¹⁴ There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man, because the LORD fought for Israel.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, invite them to share stories about challenges they have endured. Highlight stories that include others coming to help. After most have arrived, present a summary of the paragraph under First Thoughts (p. 34; PSG, pp. 32-33).

ASK: *What are some ways you have seen God use extremely difficult situations to bring about His purposes? How can God bring good out of tragedy?* (PSG, p. 33)

EXPLAIN: *God can bring good out of our difficulties.*

TRANSITION: *Today we look at a story where God used an unwise action to bring about His purposes. Challenge the group to look for the value of honoring commitments and how God works through our faithfulness to our commitments.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Joshua 10:6, as the group notes the requests made of Joshua.

EXPLAIN: *The Gibeonites heard of the power of God that went with the children of Israel in the battles of Jericho and Ai (Josh. 9:3). Rather than trying to fight the Israelites, the Gibeonites decided to trick Joshua and the Israelites to enter into a treaty by misleading them (Josh. 9:3-6,9-13). When the Israelites realized that they had been tricked after making a treaty, they desired to attack, but they remembered their oath and did not retaliate (Josh. 9:18-21).*

DISCUSS: Lead the group to name significant commitments people make.

ASK: *What role does faith play in keeping commitments? What kind of impact can it have on others when they see God's people keeping commitments—even small ones?* (PSG, p. 35)

EXPLAIN: *The treaty with the Gibeonites reminds us that keeping commitments will come at a cost. The Lord calls for us to have compassion and care with prayerful discernment.*

ASK: *What commitments does Jesus make to individuals when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior?* (PSG, p. 36) *How can we share the gospel with compassion?*

TRANSITION: *Joshua's desire to keep his promises and the Israelites' integrity to maintain their commitments became a means for God to bless the Israelites.*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read Joshua 10:7-8, while the others listen for Joshua's response.

DISCUSS: Guide the group to give potential reasons or excuses for not going into battle with the Gibeonites. Ask: *How would most people respond to protecting people who had tricked them? How could it have been frustrating as a leader to hear this call?*

LIST: Lead the group to list the ways God had already encouraged Joshua (see Josh. 1:6; 8:1; 10:8). Use **Pack Item 11** (Poster: Joshua 1:7) to reinforce the discussion of God's support of Joshua.

EXPLAIN: *God again gave encouragement and assurance to Joshua before a battle. Not only did Joshua honor his word, but the Lord honored His word as well. Joshua had been a man of his commitments, and he desired not to retract his oaths.*

DISCUSS: Invite someone to read Matthew 5:37. Ask: *What kind of impact is made for the cause of Christ when believers keep their commitments? How can our keeping a promise impact another person's view of Christ?* (PSG, p. 37)

READ: Call for a volunteer to read Joshua 10:9-14. Emphasize Joshua's responding in faith to God's promise.

EXPLAIN: *Because of God's promise of victory, Joshua acted by leading the men in an all-night march.*

ASK: *What evidence did the Israelites experience that showed God was helping them to win the battle? How is the sun's remaining still a call for believers to pray and trust in God's provision? Refer to **Pack Item 10** (Poster: *Mighty Acts of God in Early Israel*) to emphasize how the sun's standing still is one of many things that only God could do.*

EXPLAIN: *God demonstrated that victory came only by His miraculous power. Many have tried to scientifically explain this miracle, but for the believer, the focus should be on God's showing His ability to do anything, even stop the sun in its natural course, to give the victory to His children.*

DISCUSS: *How does God intervene in our world today? How does His intervention today compare with what Joshua witnessed?* (PSG, p. 39) *How does Joshua's example encourage you to pray at all times?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

STATE: *God can work through the challenges that we face in life, either from external pressures or internal struggles. In life's situations, God will provide the victory, and with this promise comes our need to respond and act in obedience. In the midst of this, it is important to recognize how God miraculously works His plan and purpose for His pleasure and our good (Rom. 8:28).*

CHALLENGE: Call attention to the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 40): *Prepare to share with the group challenging times when the Lord provided you with strength and assistance. How can the group encourage each other by sharing their stories?* Lead the group to respond to the questions.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help the group follow through with the actions identified during the discussion of the In My Context questions.



PRACTICE

- To prepare the group for the session, email the group and encourage them to investigate times when an attack on one of our allies was the condition for America to enter into a battle or war.
- Spend time journaling about the third question set from In My Context (PSG, p. 40): *Reflect on ways God has intervened in your life. Begin by considering Him sending His Son to die for your sins. Take time to thank God for action on your behalf.* Share what God reveals to you with someone in your group or a mentor.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Show **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Judges of Israel*). Discuss each place where the Israelites were camped, where the Gibeonites came from, and where the battle would occur.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the teaching of Joshua 10:6, pre-enlist a volunteer to role-play a messenger delivering the summons to Joshua. Encourage him or her to share background information to explain the relationships between the Gibeonites and the Israelites.
- To supplement the teaching on Joshua 10:7-8, lead the group to propose various ways Joshua could have responded to the Gibeonites. Direct them to list the pros and cons of each potential response. Identify Joshua's response, pointing to Joshua 10:7-8.
- To further guide the teaching on the miracle of the sun's standing still, read Luke 1:26-38 to see the miracle proclaimed of the birth of Jesus Christ, and connect it to how man views things as impossible and yet with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Guide the group to form smaller teams of two or three and pray for one another this week for specific battles team members are facing in life. Lead the groups to thank God in advance for His answer and to commit to following God's direction as He reveals it.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, read the lyrics to the song "More than Amazing," by Lincoln Brewster.