

Explore the Bible.®

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

Joshua; Judges; Ruth

Winter 2016-17 > HCSB

Tony Evans, General Editor

LifeWay | Adults

LIFE BY DESIGN

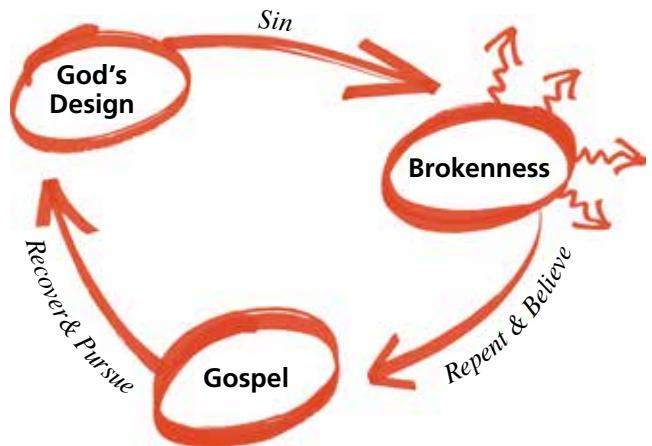
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16, Colossians 2:14, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

Excerpted from Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel.

CONTENTS

» FEATURES

Word Wise	6
Bible Reading Plan	7
Introduction to Joshua; Judges; Ruth	8
Thank God, God Will Tell Us the Truth	142
The Nazirite Vow	144
Coming Next Quarter	146

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because,⁸ to their own harm,
tying the Son of God and holding
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ion useful to those it is cultivated
s a blessing from God.⁹ But thistles
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unjust; He will not forget your
ec you showed for His name
the saints—and you continue
Now we want each of you
the same diligence for the

» SESSIONS

	Title	Page
Session 1:	Commissioned (Josh. 1:1-9)	11
Session 2:	Conquest (Josh. 6:12-25)	21
Session 3:	Commitment Kept (Josh. 10:6-14)	31
Session 4:	Savior Announced* (Luke 1:26-38)	41
Session 5:	Settled (Josh. 22:1-8)	51
Session 6:	Challenged (Josh. 24:14-28)	61
Session 7:	Value All** (Prov. 24:10-12; Mark 10:46-49)	71
Session 8:	Rebellion's Cycle (Judg. 2:11-19)	81
Session 9:	Willing Servants (Judg. 4:4-10,12-16)	91
Session 10:	Timid Warrior (Judg. 6:11-16,25-32)	101
Session 11:	Compromised Potential (Judg. 16:4-6,13-20)	111
Session 12:	Faith Through Trials (Ruth 1:6-18)	121
Session 13:	Redeemed and Secure (Ruth 3:8-13; 4:13-17)	131

* Christmas and evangelistic emphasis

** Sanctity of human life emphasis



» MEET THE WRITERS

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Explore the Bible: Adult Personal Study Guide HCSB (ISSN 2331-6713; Item 005573495) is published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234, Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2016, LifeWay Christian Resources.

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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. Read LifeWay's full doctrinal guideline online at lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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ADULT PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

WINTER 2016-17

VOLUME 3 • NUMBER 2

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EXPLORE THE BIBLE:
ADULT PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE
ONE LIFEWAY PLAZA
NASHVILLE, TN 37234-0175

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

Cover Photo and photos on 41, 131
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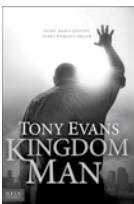
A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



God is moving. It is undeniable when we look into Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. Any thoughts that He is a disconnected deity floating aimlessly somewhere in the heavens is not what the Bible teaches. Instead, these books tell us that God is active and involved in the lives of His people.

In Joshua, God is leading His people into the promised land. Along the way, they face various trials and temptations. Through it all, the Lord is teaching them to be faithful. He is showing them how His ways are the right ways. Then, we move to Judges. God's chosen people have moved from new residents in the promised land to rebellious people in the promised land. But God is not done with them. As He sends judge after judge, the people go through cycles of rebellion and repentance. God sends as leaders unexpected characters who are faithful like Deborah, timid like Gideon, and brash like Samson. Then, we move to the story of Ruth. In it, we go from the large story of the entire Hebrew nation to one family struggling to survive. Ruth seems to be an insignificant foreigner who marries into a Hebrew family. But through her loss and redemption, God gives us a powerful picture of how He works.

As you study these sessions, your group will see that God has a plan and He fulfills His promises. You'll learn that God uses the most unexpected of people to do extraordinary feats of power and grace. We will be encouraged that God is still moving on our behalf. I'm praying that as you and your Bible study group study Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, God will show you how He is still moving today.



Dr. Tony Evans

Tony Evans is senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas. He is the author of Kingdom Man and numerous other books. For more information about the ministries of Dr. Tony Evans, please visit TonyEvans.org.



WORD WISE

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

Amorites [AM uh rights]—people who occupied part of the promised land and often fought against Israel

Ashtoreths [ASH tuh reths]—plural form of Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess of fertility

Baal/Baals [BAY uhl / BAY uhlz]—the supreme god (idol) of the Canaanite religion; worshiped as the god who provided fertility; the plural form, Baals, acknowledges the presence of many forms of Baalism

Barak [BAY rak]—Israelite warrior Deborah recruited to lead against Canaanite forces under the command of Sisera

Boaz [BOH az]—wealthy Israelite in Bethlehem area; married Ruth

Book of Jashar [JASH uhr]—ancient book quoted by biblical writers (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18); has never been discovered

Family redeemer—usually a blood relative who had certain family obligations, including marrying his brother's widow, raising up a child in the brother's name, and thus perpetuating the deceased's name and inheritance

Gilgal [GIL gal]—the place of Joshua's first camp after crossing the Jordan River into the promised land

Hittites [HIT tightz]—one of the pagan groups living in Canaan

Manasseh [muh NASS uh]—one of the twelve tribes of Israel; half the tribe settled on the east side of the Jordan River and half on the west

Nazirite [NAZ uh right]—person under a special vow of devotion to God; prohibited from consuming wine, cutting his hair, or touching any dead thing

Obed [OH bed]—child born to Ruth and Boaz; grandfather of King David

Orpah [AWR puh]—daughter-in-law of Naomi who returned to her people in Moab

Philistines [fih LISS teens]—the principal enemies of Israel during the time of the judges

Rahab [RAY hab]—prostitute in Jericho who hid Israelite scouts

Shechem [SHEK uhm]—major city and worship site in territory of Ephraim; place where Joshua led Israel to renew its covenant with God after the conquest of Canaan

BIBLE READING PLAN

MONTH 1

- 1. Joshua 1:1-9
 - 2. Joshua 1:10-18
 - 3. Joshua 2:1-7
 - 4. Joshua 2:8-24
 - 5. Joshua 3:1-17
 - 6. Joshua 4:1-13
 - 7. Joshua 4:14-24
 - 8. Joshua 5:1-15
 - 9. Joshua 6:1-14
 - 10. Joshua 6:15-27
 - 11. Joshua 7:1-15
 - 12. Joshua 7:16-26
 - 13. Joshua 8:1-19
 - 14. Joshua 8:20-35
 - 15. Joshua 9:1-15
 - 16. Joshua 9:16-27
 - 17. Joshua 10:1-15
 - 18. Joshua 10:16-27
 - 19. Joshua 10:28-43
 - 20. Joshua 11:1-15
 - 21. Joshua 11:16-23
 - 22. Joshua 12:1-24
 - 23. Joshua 13:1-14
 - 24. Joshua 13:15-33
 - 25. Joshua 14:1-15
 - 26. Joshua 15:1-12
 - 27. Joshua 15:13-19
 - 28. Joshua 15:20-63
 - 29. Joshua 16:1-10
 - 30. Joshua 17:1-13
 - 31. Joshua 17:14-18
- 1. Joshua 18:1-10
 - 2. Joshua 18:11-28
 - 3. Joshua 19:1-16
 - 4. Joshua 19:17-31
 - 5. Joshua 19:32-48
 - 6. Joshua 19:49–20:9
 - 7. Joshua 21:1-19
 - 8. Joshua 21:20-42
 - 9. Joshua 21:43–22:8
 - 10. Joshua 22:9-20
 - 11. Joshua 22:21-34
 - 12. Joshua 23:1-16
 - 13. Joshua 24:1-13
 - 14. Joshua 24:14-33
 - 15. Judges 1:1-15
 - 16. Judges 1:16-26
 - 17. Judges 1:27-36
 - 18. Judges 2:1-15
 - 19. Judges 2:16-23
 - 20. Judges 3:1-11
 - 21. Judges 3:12-31
 - 22. Judges 4:1-16
 - 23. Judges 4:17-24
 - 24. Judges 5:1-15
 - 25. Judges 5:16-31
 - 26. Judges 6:1-18
 - 27. Judges 6:19-32
 - 28. Judges 6:33–7:8
 - 29. Judges 7:9-14
 - 30. Judges 7:15-23
 - 31. Judges 7:24–8:12
- 1. Judges 8:13-21
 - 2. Judges 8:22-35
 - 3. Judges 9:1-21
 - 4. Judges 9:22-41
 - 5. Judges 9:42-57
 - 6. Judges 10:1-18
 - 7. Judges 11:1-17
 - 8. Judges 11:18-28
 - 9. Judges 11:29-40
 - 10. Judges 12:1-15
 - 11. Judges 13:1-16
 - 12. Judges 13:17-25
 - 13. Judges 14:1-20
 - 14. Judges 15:1-20
 - 15. Judges 16:1-20
 - 16. Judges 16:21-31
 - 17. Judges 17:1-13
 - 18. Judges 18:1-17
 - 19. Judges 18:18-31
 - 20. Judges 19:1-15
 - 21. Judges 19:16-30
 - 22. Judges 20:1-23
 - 23. Judges 20:24-48
 - 24. Judges 21:1-25
 - 25. Ruth 1:1-22
 - 26. Ruth 2:1-23
 - 27. Ruth 3:1-18
 - 28. Ruth 4:1-22



INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA; JUDGES; RUTH

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” While the famous opening line from Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* referred to London and Paris, the sentence equally applies to Israel during the time described in the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. The Israelites enjoyed the best of times in that they possessed the promised land—after 430 years in Egypt, 40 years wandering in the wilderness, and fierce fighting in which many of their family members and friends died. But this period can also be understood as Israel’s “Dark Age.” While Joshua and the Israelites controlled the promised land from north to south and east to west, ubiquitous enemies threatened their very existence. While the Israelites had room to live, they had little room to expand. While survival might require no additional effort, expansion would require a new heroic initiative.

The Book of Judges records numerous episodes of disloyalty and disobedience to God. Many of the Israelites “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight ... and abandoned the LORD” (Judg. 2:11-12). Rather than worship the Lord, many served and worshiped the pagan deities of the Canaanites. The closing chapters of Judges (19–21) record one of the most sordid events in Hebrew history. This event ultimately led to the near annihilation of fellow Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin. Among all of these challenges, the Book of Ruth records a famine so severe that Naomi’s husband moved his family out of the promised land in search of food. This period could indeed be interpreted as the worst of times.

»» OVERVIEW

Joshua—Joshua succeeded Moses and became Israel’s leader during tumultuous times. He led the Israelites out of Moab, across the Jordan River, and into the promised land. Joshua had a great military mind. With the conquering of the centrally located cities of Jericho and Ai, he divided the promised land into halves. He conquered the southern half (the cities around Jerusalem) before turning his attention to the north (the city of Hazor). Once the land was conquered, Joshua divided it among the twelve tribes. The Israelites remained faithful to the Lord throughout Joshua’s lifetime (Josh. 24:31).

Judges—This book records some of Israel’s most challenging experiences. The Israelites struggled for leadership after the death

of Joshua. The judges attempted to fill the void, albeit most of them woefully. Modern readers would be better equipped to understand the judges as military leaders as opposed to judicial leaders. Modern readers should also understand the judges as localized rather than national leaders. Spiritual decadence existed in abundance among the Israelites during the period of the judges.

Ruth—Naomi’s husband, Elimelech, moved his wife and two sons out of the promised land in an attempt to escape the throes of a devastating famine. While in Moab, Elimelech and his sons died, leaving Naomi with two daughters-in-law. While one daughter-in-law (Orpah) remained in Moab, the other (Ruth) insisted on going with Naomi back to the promised land. In Israel, Ruth eventually married one of Elimelech’s relatives (Boaz). This man redeemed Ruth and Naomi from a potential life of want.

» KEY MESSAGES/THEMES

Joshua—The Book of Joshua demonstrates that the Lord keeps His promises. To Abraham, God promised: “And to you and your future offspring I will give the land where you are residing” (Gen. 17:8). Centuries later, Joshua and the Israelites would once again live in the promised land. This book also illustrates that the Lord gives rest to His people. After over four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, the Israelites could enjoy God’s rest in the land of promise.

Judges—God revealed Himself as Savior in the Book of Judges. He used individuals such as Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, and Samson, but the victories they wrought couldn’t have been accomplished without the help of the Lord. This book also demonstrates that the judges had to trust the Lord. Many of the judges led the Israelites to herculean triumphs in what appeared to be hopeless situations. These conquests couldn’t have been realized without a vibrant trust in God.

Ruth—The Book of Ruth illustrates the provisions of the Lord. Left without a husband and sons, Naomi had few options as she attempted to care for herself and her daughter-in-law Ruth. Returning to the promised land, the Lord graciously met all of Naomi’s and Ruth’s needs. Ruth eventually gave birth to a son. The Lord used her as an instrument to provide for humankind’s greatest need. Jesus, our Redeemer, came through Ruth’s lineage (see Matt. 1:5).



OUTLINES OF JOSHUA; JUDGES; RUTH

JOSHUA

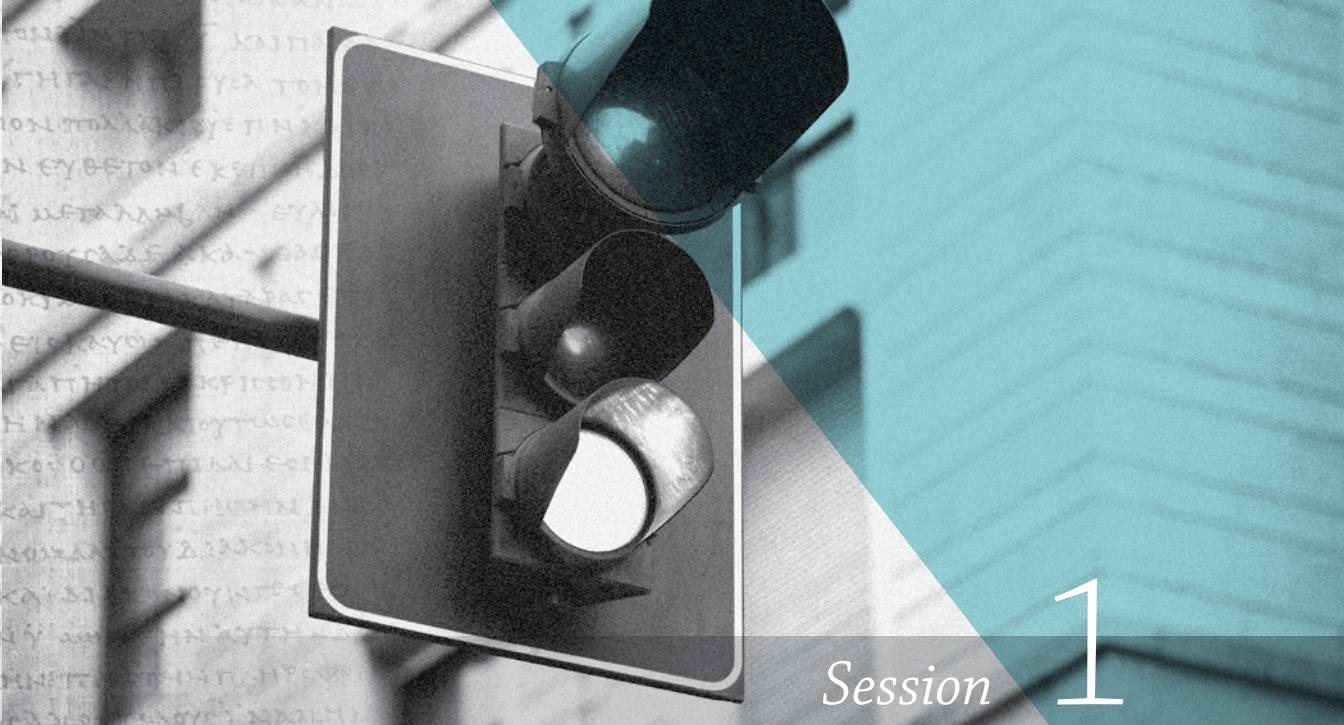
- I. Preparation for Possessing the Land (Josh. 1:1–5:12)
- II. Victories in the Land (Josh. 5:13–12:24)
- III. Allotment of the Land (Josh. 13:1–21:45)
- IV. Worship of God in the Land (Josh. 22:1–24:33)

JUDGES

- I. Prologue (Judg. 1:1–3:6)
- II. The Judges (Judg. 3:7–16:31)
 1. Othniel (Judg. 3:7-11)
 2. Ehud (Judg. 3:12-30)
 3. Shamgar (Judg. 3:31)
 4. Deborah and Barak (Judg. 4:1–5:31)
 5. Gideon (Judg. 6:1–9:57)
 6. Tola and Jair (Judg. 10:1-5)
 7. Jephthah (Judg. 10:6–12:7)
 8. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (Judg. 12:8-15)
 9. Samson (Judg. 13:1–16:31)
- III. Epilogue (Judg. 17:1–21:25)

RUTH

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



Session 1

COMMISSIONED

God's commission includes the promise of His presence and the expectation of obedience.

JOSHUA 1:1-9

¹ After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, who had served Moses: ² "Moses My servant is dead. Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan to the land I am giving the Israelites. ³ I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads, just as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I



swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance. ⁷ Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. ⁸ This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. ⁹ Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Highlight the instructions given to Joshua. What do God's instructions reveal about the importance of God's word in Joshua's life?

Notice any repeated words or phrases in God's instructions to Joshua. What do these repeated words indicate about God's expectations of Joshua?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Life is full of transitions and surprises that often force you to take on additional responsibilities. A job promotion usually carries more responsibility. A co-worker may need to take a leave of absence, and part of his work gets added to your job. The health of your parents may require you to handle their financial matters. You might find it stressful if you were called on to coach one of your children's basketball, soccer, or baseball teams.

Reflect on a time in your life when you had to assume a greater level of responsibility. What were your initial thoughts when you were first informed about this new responsibility?

The Bible again and again affirms that what God calls us to do, He equips us to do. His Spirit within us enables us to live the life God expects. As we lay hold of God's calling, we will find our fulfillment in doing His will. We also will become more like Jesus as we follow Him step-by-step.

This week's session focuses on Joshua, who became Israel's leader after Moses' death on Mount Nebo (Deut. 34:5-8). Moses had served God and Israel well, but now he was gone and Joshua had assumed leadership. The passage describes how God commissioned His new leader for a new task. God promised to be with Joshua, but He also expected Joshua's complete obedience.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 1:1-18

The first chapter of Joshua serves as a transition between this book and the preceding Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy concluded with the death and burial of Moses (34:5-6); the Book of Joshua begins: "After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua." Deuteronomy 34:10 states: "No prophet has arisen again in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." Consequently, the Israelites undoubtedly experienced some anxiety regarding Moses' successor. Who would now lead them? Could this person be as effective as Moses? The Lord prepared Joshua for such a task: "Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him" (Deut. 34:9). Joshua had been a constant companion to Moses. He had the opportunity to observe Moses' leadership style and decision-making approach, as well as his spiritual strengths and weaknesses. From an early period, the Lord readied Joshua for this particular time and need.

Joshua proved to be a gifted leader. He molded twelve loosely connected tribes into a respected, even feared, military. He led the Hebrews to victory after victory against superior numbers and fortified cities. We recognize Joshua's military prowess because his ambush at Ai (Josh. 8) is one of the earliest examples of the use of such a tactic in military history.

After conquering the land (Josh. 1-12), Joshua successfully divided it among the tribes (chaps. 13-19) and led them as they



began to transition to an agricultural, non-nomadic lifestyle. What greater acclaim might be attributed to any leader other than the fact that “Israel worshiped Yahweh throughout Joshua’s lifetime” (24:31)?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A NEW LEADER (JOSH. 1:1-5)

VERSE 1

¹ After the death of Moses the LORD’s servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, who had served Moses:

The death of Moses must have been a devastating event for the Hebrews. This man, who knew the Lord in such an unusual manner (“face to face,” Deut. 34:10), led the Israelites out of Egypt and out of a bondage for which they suffered for 430 years (Ex. 12:40). The Lord gave the Israelites the Law through Moses, as well as instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and the worship that was to take place in it. Moses led the Israelites through one of their most trying experiences, the 40-year wilderness wandering. He led them to the plains of Moab (east of the Jordan River), on the cusp of entering into the promised land. Doubtless, the Israelites joyfully anticipated crossing the Jordan River and entering the land that the Lord had promised (Deut. 34:4). The death of Moses must have suppressed much of this joy.

Verse 1 describes Moses as *the LORD’s servant*. While the Hebrew word can be translated “servant,” it can also be rendered as “slave.” Similarly, Paul used the Greek word for slave (*doulos*) to refer to himself (a “slave” of Christ Jesus; see Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1). The word *servant* demonstrates Moses’ humble submission to the Lord.

While Moses is described as *the LORD’s servant*, *Joshua* is described as one *who had served Moses*. This participle in the original text is a different word from the noun previously translated as “servant.” This word communicates the idea of a chief assistant. Joshua did not serve Moses as a slave but as an assistant.

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Read the following passages in your Bible: Exodus 17:8-16; 24:12-13; 32:17; 33:7-11; Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 31:23; 34:5-9. What lessons do you think Joshua learned under Moses’ leadership that prepared him to be Israel’s new leader?

VERSES 2-3

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

Notice the stark reality: **“Moses My servant is dead.”** With this announcement, God summoned His children to divert their attention away from the past. He alerted them to the present and pointed them to the future: **Now you and all the people prepare to cross over the Jordan.**

The Lord communicated His plan as though the victory had already been accomplished: **I have given you every place where the sole of your foot treads.** The Israelites had to fight for the land, but God had **promised** the land to Moses, leaving no doubt as to their victory. Biblical writers sometimes used the past tense to describe future events that are so certain in God’s purpose that we may speak of them as already accomplished. Paul said that God has “raised us up and seated us in the heavens” (Eph. 2:6). Our future resurrection is so certain that Paul speaks of it as a past event. The Hebrews’ possession of the promised land was as good as done—because God promised it.

VERSES 4-5

⁴ Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to the great Euphrates River—all the land of the Hittites—and west to the Mediterranean Sea. ⁵ No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you.

The expanse of the land must have been difficult for many of the Israelites to fathom. Fewer than 50 years earlier, the ancestors of these same Hebrews dwelled as slaves in Egypt. Now they were free. Their ancestors eked out a meager living in a foreign land. Now they would have their own land—a large land.

The Lord insisted: **No one will be able to stand against you.** What assurance did the Israelites have for success? The sovereign Lord promised, **I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you.** The commissioning of Joshua as Israel’s new leader provided assurance of God’s continuing presence. God’s presence promised the Israelites complete victory over their enemies



in possession of the promised land. As the Lord had been with Moses, He would be with Joshua. The writer of the New Testament Book of Hebrews applied this promise to believers today (Heb. 13:5).

The Hebrew name *Joshua* means “Yahweh is salvation.” The name *Jesus* is the Greek form of the name *Joshua* (see Matt. 1:21). As God gave the promised land to the Hebrews, He gave His Son to all humankind. Jesus, by His death, offers salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

How are God’s presence and His promises connected? Can you have His promises without His presence? Explain.

How can godly leaders be reminders of God’s presence?

A NEW TASK (JOSH. 1:6)

VERSE 6

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

The Lord promised Joshua complete victory. One day Joshua would ***distribute the land ... as an inheritance*** to the Israelites. But he knew before any distribution of land could occur, the land had to be conquered. He knew a formidable task awaited them. Some Israelites may have insisted on their inability to take the land. Perhaps someone again reiterated that they could not go up against the people because, in contrast to the current inhabitants of the promised land, they were but “grasshoppers” (see Num. 13:31-33). Any person, including Joshua, might have succumbed to fear and cowered at the difficult task ahead. But the Lord called Joshua to ***be strong and courageous***.

The Hebrew verb translated ***be strong*** communicates the idea of physical strength. Joshua needed to be physically strong for the grueling events of the immediate future. The second verb, translated ***be ... courageous***, can also be translated as “be bold” or “be assured.”

It communicates the idea of confidence. Joshua would soon face the fortified city of Jericho. The Lord instructed him to wage war not with sword and shield, but with ram's horns (6:13). Where would Joshua find the boldness to undertake this task in such an unexpected, even irrational, manner? He would find boldness in the fact that the Lord had commissioned him and promised to be with him.

Both of these verbs, *be strong and courageous*, are commands in the original Hebrew. The Lord did not merely ask Joshua to be strong and courageous; the Lord commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous.

After the crucifixion, the disciples (minus Thomas) “gathered together with the doors locked because of their fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). We do not need to be too harsh toward the disciples. They, after all, had witnessed Jesus die a cruel death. They feared the same people who had murdered Jesus might now desire to kill His followers.

Days later, Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and boldly proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14). Peter preached that lawless people nailed Jesus to a cross and killed Him (Acts 2:23). One can almost hear Peter's voice increase in volume as he proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24). Peter preached with boldness on the Day of Pentecost. What had happened to Peter? What happened from the time he recoiled with the other disciples behind locked doors to the time he stood boldly and preached the gospel? In a few words: the risen Christ appeared to them, commissioned them, and promised His presence.

Jesus commissions every believer: “Go ... make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus expects every believer to be a witness for Him. In order to be effective witnesses for Christ, we need both strength and courage. This is the source of our strength and courage: we go in His authority (Matt. 28:18), and we go with the promise of His presence and power (Matt. 28:20; Acts 1:8).

Why should we be strong and courageous as we pursue God's calling on our lives? What if God calls you to a task bigger than you could ever imagine?

KEY DOCTRINE: Scripture

The Scriptures are the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.

A NEW TRUST (JOSH. 1:7-9)

VERSE 7

⁷ Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go.

God demanded that Joshua be strong and courageous in his task of conquering the promised land. Using the same two verbs as in verse 6, the Lord also charged Joshua to ***be strong and very courageous*** in following His Law.

The phrase ***carefully observe*** translates two verbs in Hebrew. The first verb can be rendered as “keep” or “watch.” The second verb has the idea of “do.” God instructed Joshua to keep and do His whole instruction. Many believers will recognize the word *Torah*, here translated as ***instruction***. The word *Torah* can refer to a commandment, a word, a decree, a custom, or a prohibition. In Judaism, the word *Torah* refers to the first five books of the Old Testament. The word can be translated as “instruction” and “guidance.” With ***the whole instruction***, the Lord did not give Joshua the option of choosing to observe some of His laws while choosing to neglect other laws. Neither do we have the option of choosing to obey only the parts of the Bible that we find to be easy, convenient, or agreeable to us. God expects us to be fully obedient to His entire written revelation.

VERSES 8-9

⁸ This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. ⁹ Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua's reciting the ***book of instruction ... day and night*** would result naturally in his awareness of its content. God desires that we fill our mind with His Word (see Ps. 1:2). He wants His Word to impact all we do. When we view life through the lens of God's Word, we begin to see life as God does.

The importance of carefully observing this book of instruction cannot be overstated. ***For then you will prosper and succeed in***

whatever you do. The Lord told Joshua that his success would depend on obedience to God's word. The success of believers in serving the Lord hinges on our obedience to the word of the Lord.

Finally, the Lord told Joshua: **Do not be afraid or discouraged.** Joshua's fear and discouragement could be managed by recognizing that God promised to be with him in whatever he did.

Our calling and commission may not be the same as Joshua's, but we can still trust God and His Word in all areas of our lives. When we accept the Lord's commission, trust in His Word, and count on His presence, we will find courage to face whatever He calls us to do.

Why is it necessary for a leader to constantly be reminded of the truths found in God's Word? Should constantly being reminded of God's truths be any less important for those who are not the leaders? Explain.

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can trust God to keep all of His promises, with Jesus being the ultimate promise kept (see Isa. 53).
- When facing challenges, believers should draw strength and courage from God's presence.
- Believers do not have the option of obeying only a part of God's Word. God expects His people to obey His Word, all of it, in every area of life.

List your favorite promises of God. Identify how each promise you listed is tied to His presence. What distractions do you need to eliminate so you live more intentionally in the awareness of His presence?

Share with your Bible study group a challenging circumstance you faced when the presence and power of Jesus sustained you. How does hearing the stories of others encourage you?



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List things you are currently doing to discover and to be reminded of the truths found in God's Word. What actions do you need to take to more readily discover and be reminded of His truth?

MEMORY VERSE

No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you.
—Joshua 1:5



Session 2

CONQUEST

God gives His people victory when they trust Him and obey His commands.

JOSHUA 6:12-25

¹² Joshua got up early the next morning. The priests took the ark of the LORD, ¹³ and the seven priests carrying seven trumpets marched in front of the ark of the LORD. While the trumpets were blowing, the armed troops went in front of them, and the rear guard went behind the ark of the LORD. ¹⁴ On the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. ¹⁵ Early on the seventh day, they started at dawn and marched around the city seven times in the same way. That was the only day they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ After the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and



Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city.¹⁷ But the city and everything in it are set apart to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live, because she hid the men we sent.¹⁸ But keep yourselves from the things set apart, or you will be set apart for destruction. If you take any of those things, you will set apart the camp of Israel for destruction and bring disaster on it.¹⁹ For all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron, are dedicated to the LORD and must go into the LORD’s treasury.”²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets sounded. When they heard the blast of the trumpet, the people gave a great shout, and the wall collapsed. The people advanced into the city, each man straight ahead, and they captured the city.²¹ They completely destroyed everything in the city with the sword—every man and woman, both young and old, and every ox, sheep, and donkey.²² Joshua said to the two men who had scouted the land, “Go to the prostitute’s house and bring the woman out of there, and all who are with her, just as you promised her.”²³ So the young men who had scouted went in and brought out Rahab and her father, mother, brothers, and all who belonged to her. They brought out her whole family and settled them outside the camp of Israel.²⁴ They burned up the city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD’s house.²⁵ However, Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father’s household, and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho, and she lives in Israel to this day.

Take note of the details included in the story, paying particular attention to numbers and specifications. What do these details reveal about the nature of obedience?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Have you ever thought about what it really means to believe something or someone? Some might say belief is essentially mental assent. That is, we merely agree something is true, and that's belief. For example, we may believe giraffes are tall. We may believe Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world. We may choose to believe certain modern proverbs, such as "the early bird gets the worm." But what does it mean to truly believe?

Suppose your friend told you he really believes in his doctor. However, he never followed his doctor's counsel and never took any prescriptions the doctor prescribed. He did not have tests his doctor advised. You might wonder whether such a person really believes in his doctor.

How would you describe the relationship between faith and obedience? Can you have one without the other? Explain.

Biblical belief comprises more than mere mental assent; it includes trust. It includes a confidence to obey God. It means we are ready to act on a conviction, because we believe in the One who issued the command. If we truly believe in God, we will submit to His counsel and follow His commands. Anything less suggests we don't really believe in Him as much as we say.

Today's session focuses on Joshua's leading God's people against the city of Jericho. God's battle plan was unusual, but as Joshua and the people followed it, they saw God bring an astounding victory. The wall of Jericho fell, and the people took the city.

Israel's battle against Jericho should encourage believers today in the battles they face. God gives His people victory when they trust Him and obey His commands.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 2:1–6:27

Joshua "secretly sent two men as spies ... saying, 'Go and scout the land, especially Jericho'" (2:1). In Jericho, the spies took refuge in the home of a prostitute named Rahab. The king of Jericho, when told



of the presence of the spies, commanded Rahab to surrender them. Instead, she hid the men on her roof and deliberately misled the king by informing him that the two men had escaped. Grateful, the spies promised to protect Rahab and her family when Joshua and the Israelites destroyed Jericho. The men instructed her to identify the location of her house by tying a scarlet cord to her window.

The two spies returned to Joshua and reported: “The LORD has handed over the entire land to us” (2:24). Starting early the following morning, Joshua led the Israelites to the Jordan River. The Lord instructed Joshua to charge the priests to stand in the river with the ark of the covenant. When the priests obeyed, “the water flowing downstream stood still” (3:16), and the Israelites crossed on dry ground (3:17). What sheer euphoria the Hebrews must have experienced to actually be in the promised land!

The Lord instructed Joshua to march around Jericho with his army for six days. Seven priests, each carrying a ram’s horn trumpet, would accompany the men (6:3-4). On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. With one prolonged trumpet blast as a signal, the Hebrews were to shout. The Lord promised: “The city wall will collapse, and the people will advance” (6:5).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PATIENT OBEDIENCE (JOSH. 6:12-14)

VERSE 12

¹² Joshua got up early the next morning. The priests took the ark of the LORD,

Following God’s specific instructions (6:3-5), Joshua led the priests in marching around the city of Jericho, escorting ***the ark of the LORD***. Elsewhere, the writer referred to this same object as the “ark of the covenant” (3:3,6,8) and the “ark of the LORD’s covenant” (4:18). The ark of the covenant was a chest about four feet long, two and a half feet wide, and two and a half feet deep. It held the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. The ark was a visible reminder of God’s presence with His people.

On day one, the procession encircled the city of Jericho only once, as God commanded. The group returned to camp for the night (6:11).

The events of the second day are recounted in verses 12-13. Joshua **got up early the next morning**. This hints at eagerness. We read of no hesitation or reservation on Joshua's behalf. In obedience, he followed the leadership of the Lord.

VERSE 13

¹³ and the seven priests carrying seven trumpets marched in front of the ark of the LORD. While the trumpets were blowing, the armed troops went in front of them, and the rear guard went behind the ark of the LORD.

The seven priests each carried a trumpet, literally, a “shophar” (also spelled “shofar”). On other occasions, the Hebrews blew the shophars as a call to assemble. It also served to summon the Israelites in the event of war. Even now, shophars can be heard in Jerusalem on Friday afternoons, alerting Jews of the approaching Sabbath.

The number **seven** characterized perfection to the Hebrews (notice seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days, seven circuits of the wall). The **armed troops** (in front) and **rear guard** (behind) protected the priests.

VERSE 14

¹⁴ On the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

Verse 14 summarizes the events of day two. **They marched around the city once**, as God had commanded (v. 3), and then **returned to the camp** at Gilgal. The note **they did this for six days** stresses the people's patient obedience to what God commanded.

No doubt, Joshua and the people would have thought the plan for taking Jericho was unusual. Yet they patiently obeyed nonetheless. Certainly it challenged their faith to adopt this particular strategy. However, obedience to God does not require a total understanding of His commands; it requires trust in God even when His entire purpose cannot be seen.

What potential disasters await believers who refuse to wait for God's plan and timing?



Does obedience always require patience? Explain.

FINAL PREPARATIONS (JOSH. 6:15-19)

VERSES 15-16

¹⁵ Early on the seventh day, they started at dawn and marched around the city seven times in the same way. That was the only day they marched around the city seven times. ¹⁶ After the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and Joshua said to the people, “Shout! For the LORD has given you the city.

In these verses the conquest began. *Early on the seventh day* the Hebrews made final preparations for conquering Jericho. They *marched around the city seven times in the same way*, carefully obeying the instructions of the Lord (6:4). The words *that was the only day they marched around the city seven times* emphasizes the people’s complete obedience to every detail of God’s command.

After the seventh time, Joshua commanded the people: **“Shout!”** Prior to this final pass around Jericho, the people had been told to be silent. Joshua had instructed them: “Don’t let one word come out of your mouth until the time I say, ‘Shout!’ Then you are to shout” (6:10).

BIBLE SKILL: Study a Bible character.

Read these Bible passages: Joshua 2:8-11; 6:25; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25. What do the verses reveal about Rahab? What words would you use to describe her life?

VERSE 17

¹⁷ But the city and everything in it are set apart to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live, because she hid the men we sent.

Joshua gave additional instruction that everything in the city would be **set apart to the LORD for destruction**. This commandment was not a new one; God had given it to Moses years before. In Deuteronomy 7:4, the Lord commanded Moses to destroy the people living in the promised land for fear the inhabitants would “turn your sons away from Me to worship other gods.” (See also Deut. 20:16-18.)

The inhabitants of Canaan were unspeakably wicked, and God did not want His holy people contaminated by them. His people needed to be pure and separate from pagan religion.

Joshua gave special instructions concerning Rahab. **Only •Rahab the prostitute and everyone with her in the house will live**. As discussed in earlier (pp. 23-24), Rahab had shown kindness to the spies when she hid the men (Josh. 2:2-7). The spies promised to protect her and her family when the Israelites destroyed Jericho (2:14-21). Interestingly, Rahab would appear in the genealogies of both David and Jesus (Matt. 1:5,16). God not only spared Rahab’s life, He gave her a prominent place in the genealogy of Christ. No one’s life is beyond the touch of God’s grace if they are willing to repent and place their faith in Him.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Justification*

Justification is God’s gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ.

VERSES 18-19

¹⁸ But keep yourselves from the things set apart, or you will be set apart for destruction. If you take any of those things, you will set apart the camp of Israel for destruction and bring disaster on it.

¹⁹ For all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron, are dedicated to the LORD and must go into the LORD’s treasury.”

Joshua gave a final warning regarding the material things inside Jericho. Wandering in the wilderness for 40 years had left the Israelites a poor people. The **silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron** would be a temptation to such a destitute nation. With a play on words in the original Hebrew, Joshua informed the people to keep themselves from **the things set apart** lest they be **set apart for destruction**.



Disobedience to this command would **bring disaster** on the Israelites. The Hebrew word translated **bring disaster** occurs twice in Joshua 7:25 (“troubled,” “trouble”), where it describes Achan, a man who disobeyed this command, kept some of Jericho’s treasure, and paid for it with his own life and the lives of his family (Josh. 7:1,16-26). God desires complete obedience from His people.

How is a warning also a promise? Can a promise also be a warning? Explain.

OBEDIENCE REWARDED (JOSH. 6:20-25)

VERSES 20-21

²⁰ So the people shouted, and the trumpets sounded. When they heard the blast of the trumpet, the people gave a great shout, and the wall collapsed. The people advanced into the city, each man straight ahead, and they captured the city. ²¹ They completely destroyed everything in the city with the sword—every man and woman, both young and old, and every ox, sheep, and donkey.

In fulfillment of God’s command in 6:5, **the people shouted** as the priests blew their **trumpets**. The trumpet blast heralded the moment of God’s victory. We can only imagine the astonishment on the faces of the Hebrews as they watched the wall of Jericho, seemingly indestructible, collapse. If hesitation occurred at all, it evidently lasted only for a moment. **The people advanced into the city.** Israel’s conquest of Canaan had begun. Obeying the Lord’s command, the Hebrews **completely destroyed everything in the city.**

VERSES 22-23

²² Joshua said to the two men who had scouted the land, “Go to the prostitute’s house and bring the woman out of there, and all who are with her, just as you promised her.” ²³ So the young men who had scouted went in and brought out Rahab and her father, mother, brothers, and all who belonged to her. They brought out her whole family and settled them outside the camp of Israel.

One amazing fact should not be lost in Jericho’s rubble. Previously, the writer of the Book of Joshua revealed the fact that Rahab

lived in a house built in the wall of the city (2:15). How easily Rahab and family could have been crushed as the wall collapsed. Visualize once more the Israelites as they watched Jericho's wall disintegrate. Now visualize them as they observed one particular section of the wall remain intact. The Lord rewarded Rahab. As Rahab protected the two spies, the Lord protected Rahab and her family.

VERSES 24-25

²⁴ They burned up the city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD's house. ²⁵ However, Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father's household, and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho, and she lives in Israel to this day.

The Israelites *burned up the city and everything in it*. Unable to destroy the silver, gold, iron, and bronze, they put it in *the treasury of the LORD's house*. Once again, we are reminded that only Rahab and her family survived this initial battle in the promised land. And once again, her act of faithfulness was recorded—*she hid the men Joshua had sent to spy on Jericho*. Some commentators have taken notice of the fact that almost as many words describe Rahab's deliverance as describe the conquest of the city. (In 6:17-25, 86 Hebrews words are used to describe Rahab's salvation, and 102 words are used to describe Jericho's destruction.)

New Testament writers commended Rahab for her faithfulness: "By faith Rahab the prostitute received the spies in peace and didn't perish with those who disobeyed" (Heb. 11:31). "And in the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by a different route?" (Jas. 2:25). True faith is demonstrated by obedience, and God honors those who faithfully obey Him.

How does obedience demonstrate what we really believe? Can we have genuine belief or faith without obedience? Explain.

IN MY CONTEXT



- A believer demonstrates his or her obedience by trusting God.
- The Bible clearly reveals the fact that godly obedience will be rewarded while disobedience will be punished.
- God rewards obedience by providing those who obey Him a place of service in His kingdom.

Describe what God is specifically asking you to do with your life. What steps are you taking in preparation and out of obedience?

As a group, discuss potential shortcuts believers may be tempted to take when preparing to serve. Discuss how the group can help one another avoid these shortcuts.

Reflect on acts of obedience you have done that opened new opportunities of service for you. Thank God for those opportunities and for His faithfulness.

MEMORY VERSE

This is so that all the people of the earth may know that the LORD's hand is mighty, and so that you may always fear the LORD your God.
—Joshua 4:24



Session 3

COMMITMENT KEPT

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

JOSHUA 10:6-14

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.” ⁷ So Joshua and his whole military force, including all the fighting men, came from Gilgal. 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.” ⁹ So Joshua caught them by surprise, after marching all night from Gilgal. 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. 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. 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.” 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. 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.

Focus on how the Gibeonites framed their request for help. Identify words that point to their trust in Joshua’s integrity.

Highlight the different ways God intervened in this passage. What does His intervention reveal about God’s character?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 7:1-12:24

Joshua sent spies from Jericho to the city of Ai on a reconnaissance mission. The men returned and advised Joshua not to dispatch the entire Hebrew army to Ai. They believed two or three thousand Hebrew soldiers could conquer Ai. Following their advice, Joshua sent about three thousand men (7:4). The soldiers at Ai drove Joshua's army from the battlefield, killing about 36 of them (7:5). Naturally, Joshua asked the Lord why (7:7). By a process of elimination, Joshua determined the reason (7:14-15). Achan, a Hebrew soldier, violated the command recorded in 6:17-19 by taking goods from Ai. Achan and his family were stoned to death. With Achan's sin revealed and removed, Joshua attacked and conquered Ai. After conquering Jericho and Ai, Joshua and the Hebrews now controlled central Israel.

When the inhabitants of Gibeon [GIB ih uhn] heard what Joshua had done at Jericho and Ai, they devised a plan, based on deception, to enter into a treaty with the Israelites. When Joshua and the



Israelites discovered the deception, they determined to 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 sent word to Joshua, who came to their aid 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).

With central and southern Israel in his grasp, Joshua concentrated on the remaining territory: the north (chap. 11). Again, the enemy, "as numerous as the sand on the seashore" (11:4), united against the Hebrews. In the end, Joshua defeated all these kings (11:12). Chapter 12 records an extensive list of territories conquered by Joshua.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A COMMITMENT REMEMBERED (JOSH. 10:6)

VERSE 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."

Learning of Joshua's victories at Jericho and Ai, the inhabitants of Gibeon elected not to engage Joshua in war. The Gibeonites chose a different tactic—they would trick Joshua into making an alliance with them. Their plan was to convince the Israelites that they lived in a distant land and, therefore, posed no threat to Israel. The deception included not only worn-out clothing and shoes, but also cracked and mended wineskins and dry bread (Josh. 9:4-5). Approaching Joshua and the Israelites, they requested a treaty with them. Cautiously and suspiciously, the men of Israel stated: "Perhaps you live among us. How can we make a treaty with you?" (9:7). To substantiate their claims that they came from a far country and did not live locally, the Gibeonites produced the dry bread, insisting the bread had been fresh when they left for their journey. Additionally, they insisted their wineskins were new when they initially departed, but now were cracked and dry. Finally, they pointed to their worn-out clothing and sandals, insisting

that they, too, had been new when they set out. The Gibeonites methodically and carefully implemented their plan of deception.

Joshua would have been wise to investigate further. Rather than coming from a distant land, the Gibeonites lived a few miles north of Jerusalem—only a three-day journey from the Israelites' camp at Gilgal (9:17). The presence of the Gibeonites could have been a threat to Israel's survival. The inhabitants of this territory dominated the strategic routes to the coastal plains on the west and the Jordan Valley to the east. Gibeon's location also proved to be an important trade location to surrounding cities and peoples, especially Jerusalem. The ruse complete, "Joshua established peace with them and made a treaty to let them live" (9:15). In regards to the Gibeonite trickery, sadly, "the men of Israel ... did not seek the LORD's counsel" (9:14).

Three days later, Joshua learned where the Gibeonites actually lived. Joshua moved his army to Gibeon, but because the men of Israel had "sworn an oath to them by the LORD" (9:18), he did not attack them. The Gibeonites agreed to become Israel's servants (9:21).

In retaliation for the treaty with Joshua, a coalition of kings from southern Canaan planned to attack Gibeon. A Gibeonite treaty with Joshua meant the potential loss of a significant trade route for these kings. In addition, the southern kings knew they had little or no chance against Joshua's forces without Gibeon's help. Their attack was intended to bring Gibeon back onto their side against Israel.

One cannot miss the panic in the message when the Gibeonites informed Joshua, now back at Gilgal [GIL gal], that ***all the Amorite kings living in the hill country have joined forces against us***. The words ***come quickly and save us*** highlight the urgency of the matter. The people of Gibeon remembered the promises of protection Joshua had given them. They pleaded with Joshua not to abandon them but to rescue them from their attackers.

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?

What commitments does Jesus make to individuals when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior?



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

VERSES 7-8

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

Undoubtedly and probably painfully, Joshua remembered the commitment he made with Gibeon. Would he honor that commitment? Modern readers might argue that nothing bound Joshua to the treaty because the Gibeonites had acted in such a devious manner. Realizing the circumstances under which the Gibeonites operated, who could blame Joshua for ignoring his commitment? We might even argue that abandoning the commitment was not only acceptable but warranted. But Joshua did not think that way. He stayed true to his word. He moved his military force out of *•Gilgal* in route to aid the Gibeonites.

Joshua’s commitment demonstrates the importance of the spoken word in the Old Testament world. The Hebrews believed they could not retract a spoken word. Remember, for example, Isaac and his sons, Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27). As the firstborn, a double portion of the family’s wealth should have gone to Esau. But Rebekah and Jacob tricked Isaac into giving the blessing to Jacob. Contemporary believers might think the incident could have been resolved by simply retracting the commitment to Jacob and giving the double portion of the estate to Esau. But Isaac did not do that, because spoken words could not be retracted.

Not only did Joshua honor his word, the Lord honored His word as well. The Lord instructed Joshua not to be afraid of them. The words ***I have handed them over to you*** remind us of God’s assurance to Joshua regarding Jericho (Josh. 6:2). The victory over Jericho was so certain that God spoke 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: ***Not one of them will be able to stand against you.***

God’s words to Joshua encourage us to remember God’s past work in our lives. As we face new challenges, we remember His faithfulness

through earlier challenges. Doing so will help us trust God for present and future trials.

What kind of impact is made for the cause of Christ when believers keep their commitments? How can our keeping a promise impact another's person view of Christ?

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.

DIVINE INTERVENTION (JOSH. 10:9-14)

VERSES 9-10

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

Demonstrating military prowess (and the urgency of the mission), Joshua marched his army ***all night***. His maneuver proved successful: he ***caught*** the enemy ***by surprise***.

Verse 10 emphasizes the sovereignty of God in that ***the LORD threw them*** (Joshua's enemies) ***into confusion***. The writer of Exodus used the same word translated ***confusion*** to describe the state of the Egyptians trapped as the Red Sea engulfed them (Ex. 14:24).

Further, we see God's sovereignty in the phrases ***He defeated them in a great slaughter at Gibeon ... chased them ... and struck***



them down. The writer left no doubt that God gave the victory.

VERSE 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.

One can imagine Joshua's enemies sensing the possibility of at least escaping with their lives after fleeing the battlefield and putting some distance between themselves and Joshua's army. That glimmer of hope did not last long. Those who did not die at the hands of the Israelite army died when **the LORD threw large hailstones on them from the sky.** The Lord fought for His people. More enemy soldiers died from the hailstones than from the swords of Joshua's men.

VERSES 12-13

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."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.

What occurred next is one of the greatest miracles in the Bible. Joshua knew the battle had not been won, even with his enemies retreating quickly. He offered a simple prayer, requesting divine intervention: "**Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and moon, over the Valley of Aijalon**" [A juh lahn].

It might appear at first glance that Joshua was directly addressing the sun and moon (many people in the ancient world would have addressed the sun and moon as deities). However, notice that **Joshua spoke to the LORD**, who gave him the authority to command the sun and moon.

Various understandings exist for the sun and moon standing still. Some interpreters have understood the words of verse 13 symbolically—that Joshua's army, with God's help, accomplished two days' work in one day. But based on the biblical text, that interpretation is not an option. (The sun **stopped in the middle of the sky.**) A better option is that God slowed the earth's full rotation to 48 hours instead of 24 hours. This was a miraculous event; therefore, we

cannot presume to fully understand the nature of the miracle. We can and do affirm, however, that God miraculously caused the sun and moon to cease their normal courses.

With victory incomplete, Joshua knew that the next day might mean an entirely different battle. During the darkness of night, Joshua's enemies could rest, be refreshed by food and water, and potentially be reinforced. The prolonged day allowed Joshua and the Israelite army to pursue their enemies and finish what they started.

VERSE 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.

The writer of the Book of Joshua communicated his amazement at the miracle with the words: ***there has been no day like it before or since***. But the greater source of his amazement seems to be the fact that ***the LORD listened to the voice of a man***. Once again the text emphasizes that ***the LORD fought for Israel***. (See also v. 10.) Because God was on their side, no enemy could stand against them.

God intervenes on behalf of His people. His ultimate act of intervention was when He sent Jesus to die on the cross on our behalf. Christ died for our sin, was buried, and was raised on the third day. As a result, we are able to say: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Cor. 15:57).

How does God intervene in our world today? How does His intervention today compare with what Joshua witnessed?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

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



IN MY CONTEXT

- When believers face insurmountable odds, God often works through other people to provide strength and assistance.
- God expects His children to keep their commitments.
- God intervenes on behalf of His people, giving them victory.

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?

List commitments you carry today, including financial commitments. What actions are you taking to keep each commitment? What adjustments do you need to make to be true to your promises?

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.

MEMORY VERSE

Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go. —Joshua 1:7



Session 4

SAVIOR ANNOUNCED

God intervened in history, sending His Son to be the Savior.

LUKE 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came to her and said, "Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰ Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His



father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. ³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?” ³⁵ The angel replied to her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸ “I am the Lord’s slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

Notice the comparisons between the birth of Jesus and the birth of John. How are they similar? How are they different?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Historians love to debate what they consider to be defining moments. Certainly the invention of writing was a defining moment as people began to record events and thoughts on clay and on papyrus. Some would suggest the inventions of items such as the wheel or printing press constitute defining moments. For some, the Protestant Reformation was a defining moment, as Martin Luther and others stood up to a Roman Catholic church in serious need of reform.

Think of some defining moments in your own life. What makes them stand out from other important events you have experienced?

Your list may have included the day you met the person who would eventually become your spouse. The birth of a child may also be described as a defining moment. The death of a loved one may also be on your list. Changes in your work and new opportunities may show up on our lists as well. Hopefully, you included spiritual markers as well, especially your salvation experience.

This week's session focuses on a defining moment in world history. That defining moment came when God's Son took on a human nature and experienced birth in Bethlehem. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her she would give birth to God's Messiah, Mary humbly submitted to God's plan, knowing it would change her life forever. Her willing submission stands as a testimony to believers everywhere. Mary was ready for her defining moment as God intervened in history and sent His Son to be our Savior.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 1-2

Matthew and Luke both began their Gospels with birth narratives. The First Gospel presents the birth of Jesus from Joseph's perspective. Matthew recorded Joseph's consideration of divorcing the pregnant woman to whom he was betrothed (Matt. 1:19). Matthew recorded an angel's appearance to Joseph to explain Mary's miraculous conception (1:20-21). Matthew also recorded an angel's appearance to Joseph to tell him to flee to Egypt with his family to escape Herod's forthcoming attempt to murder the Child (2:13).

In contrast to Matthew, Luke wrote of issues that would have concerned Mary. We read of Mary's concern after an angel referred to her as a "favored woman" (1:28-29). Luke recorded Mary's response: she "was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them" (2:19). Luke recorded that Joseph took Mary and Jesus back to their hometown of Nazareth (2:39), where "the boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on Him" (2:40). Luke also recorded that Joseph took his family to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (2:41-50). Departing Jerusalem, neither Joseph nor Mary knew that Jesus, age 12, had stayed behind. One can visualize Joseph and Mary as they frantically sought and found Jesus in the temple complex, listening and asking questions to the teachers (2:46), astonishing "all those who heard Him" (2:47). Luke concluded his birth narrative with: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people" (2:52).

EXPLORE THE TEXT



A MESSAGE SENT (LUKE 1:26-29)

VERSE 26

²⁶ In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

Scholars recognize two parallels within Jesus' birth announcement. First, the Old Testament records similar birth announcements of Isaac (Gen. 17:15-22; 18:9-15) and Samuel (1 Sam. 1:9-20). The conceptions and births of Isaac and Samuel demonstrated God's great acts in the past. Second, Luke recorded the similarities and differences between the birth of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist. With the unique manner of Mary's conception, Luke confirmed Jesus' superiority over John.

In the sixth month refers not to the sixth month of the year but to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, as indicated by 1:36. In order to help his non-Palestinian readers understand location, Luke qualified the location of *Nazareth* as *a town in Galilee*. The same angel, *Gabriel*, also delivered to Zechariah the announcement regarding the birth of John (1:19).

VERSE 27

²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Luke described Mary as *a virgin engaged*. He provided additional support of Mary's virginity in verse 34: "How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?" The birth of Jesus to a virgin indicates Jesus' deity. His conception would come through supernatural means. The fact that Mary gave birth to Jesus underscores His humanity. The virgin birth unites the humanity of Jesus and the deity of Christ. Jesus is fully human and fully divine.

The word *engaged* referred to the first step of a two-step Jewish marriage process. The first step involved a formal agreement of marriage accompanied by a bridal gift. This engagement could not be broken in any manner other than divorce (see Matt. 1:19). The second step occurred approximately one year later with the actual marriage ceremony. The husband would then take his wife home and consummate the marriage.

VERSES 28-29

28 And the angel came to her and said, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” 29 But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.

God *favored* Mary in that He chose her to give birth to the Messiah. Mary did not possess a superior holiness that warranted this privilege. God chose Mary as He chose the Israelites: “The LORD ... chose you, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the LORD loved you” (Deut. 7:7-8).

Gabriel’s words confused and puzzled Mary. What prompted Mary to be *deeply troubled by this statement*? We can imagine that an angel’s speaking to her would create confusion and anxiety. In addition, Mary knew her pregnancy would create misunderstandings—even accusations—and this would have troubled her.

Why is the virgin birth of Jesus important to Christians? How would you explain the importance of Jesus’ being fully human and fully God?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

THE MESSAGE DELIVERED (LUKE 1:30-33)

VERSE 30

30 Then the angel told her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

The angel attempted to ease Mary’s anxiety by saying, *Do not be afraid, Mary*. Gabriel informed her that she had *found favor with God*. The concept of favor signified God’s choice of an individual through whom He would do an especially significant work.



God had bestowed His favor on Noah (Gen. 6:8), Moses (Ex. 33:17), and Hannah (1 Sam. 1:18). In the Old Testament, God sometimes extended His favor after someone made a request (see 1 Sam. 1:10-11). Here, God gave His favor freely, without any request.

VERSE 31

³¹ Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus.

The angel informed Mary that she would ***conceive and give birth to a son***. The angel also informed Mary of the baby's name: ***Jesus***. The Old Testament name "Joshua" and the New Testament name "Jesus" both mean "the Lord is salvation." Matthew provided additional insight into the meaning of Jesus' name: "You are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Mary's child would be nothing less than the Savior of the world.

We should not miss the parallels between Joshua and Jesus. God used Joshua to save His people from their nomadic, roaming lifestyle and to provide the promised land as their home. God gave Jesus to save us from our sins. Jesus gave His life to provide the way for our eternal home in heaven.

VERSES 32-33

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.

Gabriel verbalized several characteristics of Mary's child to let her know she would give birth to Israel's long-awaited Messiah. The angel described John earlier as "great in the sight of the Lord" (1:15). Here, the Christ child would be simply ***great*** (no qualifier). People would also call the Messiah ***the Son of the Most High***, underscoring Jesus' superiority over John, whom Gabriel described as a "prophet of the Most High" (1:76). Luke identified Jesus as the Son of God.

Furthermore, Gabriel said that the Lord God ***will give Him the throne of His father David***. Gabriel paraphrased 2 Samuel 7:12-13, where the writer prophesied that the Lord, after David's death, would "raise up after you your descendant [notice the singular] ... and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Jesus fulfilled God's

prophecy to David in that ***His kingdom will have no end.*** Mary's firstborn would usher in an eternal Kingdom.

How do the angel's descriptions of Jesus help you better understand His mission?

How does the idea of the afterlife ("His kingdom will have no end") shape your perspective of earthly living?

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Focus on Luke 1:31-33. Read the verses aloud several times. Each time you read, emphasize different words or phrases. For example, in one reading emphasize the words that describe God. Then read the verses again, emphasizing words that reveal Jesus' ministry. As you read the verses a third time, take note of your thoughts. How do the verses move you emotionally? What feelings are evoked when you consider that Gabriel's words to Mary and her subsequent receiving of God's plan for her life eternally impact you?

QUESTIONS ANSWERED (LUKE 1:34-37)

VERSES 34-35

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?" ³⁵ The angel replied to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God."



Understandably, Mary had questions. The Hebrews recognized Joseph and Mary as husband and wife, even though Joseph and Mary had not consummated their marriage (see Matt. 1:25). Given her virginity, she voiced her greatest puzzlement: **“How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?”** Though young, Mary understood human biology.

While Mary questioned the method, Luke records no evidence that she doubted the announcement. Contrast Mary’s lack of a request for a sign with Zechariah’s need for one. When told his aged wife would conceive, Zechariah asked, “How can I know this?” (1:18). Gabriel informed Zechariah that his son (John) would be “filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother’s womb” (1:15), but the angel informed Mary that her child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. Again, Luke demonstrated Jesus’ superiority over John.

Attempting to ease Mary’s anxiety, Gabriel told her **the power of the Most High will overshadow you**. In the Old Testament, the concept of overshadowing referred to God’s presence in protecting His people (see Ps. 91:4; 140:7). Gabriel insisted that God would protect Mary.

VERSES 36-37

³⁶ And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God.”

Although Mary did not request it, Gabriel sought to encourage her by giving a sign. In three months, Mary’s long-barren relative, Elizabeth, would give birth to **a son in her old age**. With this announcement, perhaps Mary began to understand Gabriel’s words: **nothing will be impossible with God**.

Mary and Elizabeth both conceived children in a miraculous manner. Both birthed a miraculous son. Elizabeth’s son would proclaim the good news. Mary’s son is the good news.

What events cause people to question the power and presence of the Lord? How can the Lord answer their concerns?

How can we ask for clarity without doubting? Where is the line between needing assurance and needing a sign?

WILLING SUBMISSION (LUKE 1:38)

VERSE 38

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s slave,” said Mary. “May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel left her.

Given the circumstances of an imminent pregnancy, who could have thought less of Mary had she requested a sign of God’s presence and power? Mary understood, in Jewish custom, the binding nature of her engagement to Joseph. She anticipated Joseph’s initial misunderstanding (see Matt. 1:19, where Joseph decided to divorce Mary secretly). Mary also expected the stigma of being looked upon as a sinful woman and the loss of her reputation among her neighbors. She also knew Jewish law dictated the stoning of an engaged woman exposed as having sexual relations with another man (Deut. 22:23-24). Jewish law ominously stipulated that offenders must be punished in order to “purge the evil from you” (Deut. 22:24).

Believers today should appreciate Mary’s faith in that she did not require a sign. She responded simply with, ***“I am the Lord’s slave.”*** Mary’s use of the word *slave* demonstrates her recognition of her position in life as well as God’s preeminence in all things. He was the Most High and the Lord God. She was His slave.

Mary communicated a humble commitment to God with her final words to Gabriel. As the slave of God, Mary submitted to following God’s plan and what He had asked her to do.

Why is submitting to God’s will essential for Christian wholeness and happiness?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers can trust God to keep all of His promises.
- Only Jesus meets the qualifications for providing salvation to humanity (see Acts 4:12).
- Believers can follow God’s plan and purpose with confidence, knowing God has the power to complete them.

List ways God has demonstrated His trustworthiness to you in the past two weeks. Identify how the things you listed strengthen your confidence in Him.

Share with the group how you first came to understand your need for a Savior. Challenge each other to find ways during the holidays of sharing how only Jesus fills our need for a Savior.

List directions God has given you. What actions are you taking in obedience to His directives?

MEMORY VERSE

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.
—Luke 1:32-33



Session 5

SETTLED

The rewards of faithfulness come with the expectation of continued obedience.

JOSHUA 22:1-8

¹ Joshua summoned the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh ² and told them, “You have done everything Moses the LORD’s servant commanded you and have obeyed me in everything I commanded you. ³ You have not deserted your brothers even once this whole time but have carried out the requirement of the command of the LORD your God. ⁴ Now that He has given your brothers rest, just as He promised them, return to your homes in your own land that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you across the Jordan. ⁵ Only carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you: to love



the LORD your God, walk in all His ways, keep His commands, remain faithful to Him, and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.”⁶ Joshua blessed them and sent them on their way, and they went to their homes.⁷ Moses had given territory to half the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, but Joshua had given territory to the other half, with their brothers, on the west side of the Jordan. When Joshua sent them to their homes and blessed them,⁸ he said, “Return to your homes with great wealth: a huge number of cattle, and silver, gold, bronze, iron, and a large quantity of clothing. Share the spoil of your enemies with your brothers.”

Identify words that give accommodation to the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. What do these words of praise reveal about these men?

Notice the directions given by Joshua. How do the directions point to a continued responsibility?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most of us grew up with the expectation that we were always to keep our word. Our parents or grandparents no doubt had some phrase they would repeat that reinforced that expectation. Most of us recognized that we were expected to tell the truth even when we were caught misbehaving. A sure way to increase the punishment we faced was to lie about what we had been caught doing. Integrity is built on honesty and trustworthiness.

Why is integrity so important today? What makes many people stop and take notice today when they see a person of integrity?

Most people would probably agree that a good reputation is built over a lifetime but can be ruined in an instant. The bond of trust between a husband and wife can be ruined when one spouse decides he or she will be dishonest or cheat on the other. Children need trustworthy parents. Employers look for dependable employees who will put in a good solid effort every day.

Prior to Joshua's conquest of the promised land, Moses gave land east of the Jordan River to the tribes of Reuben [RHOO ben], Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh [muh NASS uh]. But Moses charged these two and a half tribes to help conquer the land west of the Jordan. Having been faithful to Moses' charge, and with the conquest complete, Joshua blessed these two and a half tribes and released them to go home. He instructed these tribes to continue to be obedient to the Lord's commandments.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 13:1–22:24

The Book of Joshua can be divided into two sections. Chapters 1–12 record the conquest of the promised land. Some Bible scholars categorize Joshua's victories as the Central Campaign (Jericho and Ai, chaps. 6–8), the Southern Campaign (the cities in the Jerusalem area but not Jerusalem, chap. 10), and the Northern Campaign (the city of Hazor and regions east of the Jordan River, chaps. 11–12). Joshua 11:23 summarizes the first 12 chapters: "So Joshua took the entire land, in keeping with all that the LORD had told Moses."

Chapters 13–24 record the division of the promised land among the tribes. Joshua 11:23 transitions between the conquest and the division: "Joshua then gave it [the land] as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments."

Beginning with Joshua 13:8, the writer recorded the division of the land among the twelve tribes: Reuben (13:15), Gad (13:24), East Manasseh (13:29), Judah (15:1), Ephraim [EE fra ihm] (16:5), West Manasseh (17:1), Benjamin (18:11), Simeon (19:1), Zebulun [ZEB yoo luhn] (19:10), Issachar [ISS uh KAHHR] (19:17), Asher (19:24), Naphtali [NAF tuh ligh] (19:32), and Dan (19:40). Joshua 19:51 summarizes chapters 13–24: "So they finished dividing up the land." In chapter 22, Joshua released the "fighting men" (see 1:14) of the tribes



of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh in order for them to rejoin their wives and children east of the Jordan River. (See the map on the inside back cover.)

Compare the list of the tribes in the previous paragraph with the sons of Israel (Jacob) in Genesis 35:23-26. One immediately notices the names Levi and Joseph missing from tribal allotment. Because the Levites served as priests, the Lord gave them no land (Josh. 13:14; 14:3; also, see Deut. 10:9 and 18:1-2, where the Lord served as the inheritance of the Levites). Two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, filled the two vacancies. In reference to tribal allotment, what many refer to as the sons of Israel (Jacob) are actually sons (10) and grandsons (2) of Israel.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A PROMISE KEPT (JOSH. 22:1-3)

VERSES 1-2

¹ Joshua summoned the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh ² and told them, “You have done everything Moses the LORD’s servant commanded you and have obeyed me in everything I commanded you.

Under Moses’ leadership, the Israelites conquered what has become known as the Transjordan (the land immediately east of the Jordan River; see Deut. 3:8-17). Moses gave this territory to ***the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of •Manasseh*** (see Num. 32). Joshua’s army would have been weakened and the conquest jeopardized had these two and a half tribes chosen to remain in their allotted territories and not support the effort to take the promised land. To preempt this possibility, Moses charged the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to participate militarily in the conquest of the promised land. Moses allowed their wives and young children to remain in the Transjordan. He informed the members of the two and a half tribes they could then return to their homes after the conquest (Deut. 3:20).

Later, as Joshua and his army prepared to cross the Jordan River, he reminded the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh of Moses’ charge (Josh. 1:12-18). They responded, “Everything you have commanded us we will do, and everywhere you send us we will go” (1:16). One cannot miss the passion in their commitment as

they said, “Anyone who rebels against your order and does not obey your words ... will be put to death” (1:18).

With the conquest complete, **Joshua summoned** the soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These soldiers could take great pride in the fact that Joshua commended them for doing **everything** that Moses and he **commanded** them to do.

VERSE 3

³ You have not deserted your brothers even once this whole time but have carried out the requirement of the command of the LORD your God.

The Hebrew verb translated **deserted** means “to forsake” or “to abandon.” Doubtless these soldiers faced tremendous challenges during the duration of the conquest. But under duress, with even their lives at stake, the soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had not forsaken or abandoned their fellow soldiers or the cause. In fact, Joshua could not remember a single occurrence **this whole time** when a soldier from these two and a half tribes had disobeyed a **command of the LORD your God**.

God keeps His promises. The Lord had made a promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give this land to their descendants (see Deut. 34:4). He kept His promise when He “gave Israel all the land ... and they took possession of it and settled there” (Josh. 21:43). Not only did the Lord promise the land to the Hebrews, He also promised them rest within it (Deut. 12:10). Now the Lord had given them “rest on every side according to all He had sworn to their fathers” (Josh. 21:44). God also promised the Hebrews security from enemies (Deut. 12:10). The writer of Joshua wrote that none of the Hebrews’ enemies could stand against them (21:44). In fact, “none of the good promises the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed” (Josh. 21:45). None of the promises that Jesus makes to Christians will fail either.

Why was it important that these two and a half tribes keep their promise? Why is it important for believers to keep all of our promises?

AN ONGOING RESPONSIBILITY (JOSH. 22:4-5)



VERSE 4

⁴ Now that He has given your brothers rest, just as He promised them, return to your homes in your own land that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you across the Jordan.

With the conquest of the promised land essentially complete, Joshua sent the men from Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh home to their allotted territories east of the Jordan. No doubt the two and a half tribes rejoiced when Joshua released them from military service. One can imagine these soldiers as they began their journey home, knowing their wives and children were waiting for their return.

We wonder what the men thought as they began their journey home. Did they have sense of pride in what they had accomplished? Did they have a sense of gratitude recognizing God’s assistance? Did they have a sense of gravity when considering their ongoing responsibility? As Christians, we have ongoing responsibilities. Jesus demands that we be forever faithful in our Christian responsibilities. Let the prayer of every believer be that the Lord might help us be forever responsible in our love, worship, work, and witness for Him.

BIBLE SKILL: *Develop a paraphrase.*

Read Joshua 22:5 in various Bible translations. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences stating how the verse can help you to face a tough decision or a difficult situation. How does Joshua 22:5 provide help for your walk with the Lord? List areas where you need to apply the truth of this verse in your life this week.

VERSE 5

⁵ Only carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you: to love the LORD your God, walk in all His

ways, keep His commands, remain faithful to Him, and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.”

Prior to their release, Joshua gave one final charge to the soldiers of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Joshua charged them to be responsible to ***carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you.*** This phrase contains two commands in Hebrew: keep and do. Regarding the commandments and instruction of the Lord, Joshua issued a succinct, unambiguous command: “Keep them!” and “Do them!” Joshua’s release from military responsibilities did not release them from their responsibility to the Lord.

Joshua provided clarification to his commands when he instructed them ***to love the LORD, walk in all His ways, be faithful to Him, and serve Him.*** The word translated *walk* can also be translated “live.” Joshua instructed these men to live according to the ways of the Lord. The verb rendered ***remain faithful*** literally means to “cleave” or “keep close.” In the Book of Genesis, the same verb is used in instructing the man to leave his father and his mother and “cleave” to his wife (Gen. 2:24). The noun that relates to this verb can be translated “slave.” This is similar to apostle Paul insisting he was a slave of Jesus (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). Joshua left no room for irresponsibility; he instructed these men to serve the Lord with all their ***heart*** and all their ***soul***. The words ***heart*** and ***soul*** underscore the need for the Israelites to be “all in” in terms of their commitment to the Lord. Nothing other than total commitment would suffice.

God expects no less of every believer today. Jesus said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command” (Matt. 22:37-38).

Why does obedience prove to be a better indication of genuine faith than mere words of affirmation? Would you say that genuine faith normally should lead to action? Why or why not?

A WELCOMED BLESSING (JOSH. 22:6-8)

VERSE 6

⁶ Joshua blessed them and sent them on their way, and they went



to their homes.

Joshua blessed the soldiers from Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh and sent them on their way. They returned **to their homes** as Joshua had commanded them (see v. 4). These men, in all probability, could not remember a time when they had had a permanent home. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, every male 20 years old and up had died during the wilderness wanderings (see Num. 14:29-30). These soldiers had been children and teenagers (less than 20 years old) when Joshua sent the spies to scout the promised land. They had grown up in the wilderness. They had little, if any, concept of a permanent home. How welcome the words of Joshua must have been.

Verse 6 comprises a brief summary of what follows. Verses 7-8 provide further details regarding Joshua's blessing.

VERSES 7-8

⁷ Moses had given territory to half the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, but Joshua had given territory to the other half, with their brothers, on the west side of the Jordan. When Joshua sent them to their homes and blessed them, ⁸ he said, "Return to your homes with great wealth: a huge number of cattle, and silver, gold, bronze, iron, and a large quantity of clothing. Share the spoil of your enemies with your brothers."

Verse 7 clarifies that the large tribe of Manasseh received an allotment of land on both sides of the Jordan River. When Moses allotted territory to the nine and a half tribes on the west side of the Jordan River, he gave land **to half the tribe of Manasseh** (along with Reuben and Gad) in the territory of **Bashan** [BAY shan]. Bashan was located almost directly east of the Sea of Galilee, with Gad located to the south of Bashan (now the half-tribe of Manasseh), and Reuben located to the south of Gad.

Evidently, the initial prohibition against taking material things from conquered land had been lifted (see Deut. 20:16-18). Perhaps initially, the Lord didn't want the Hebrews to be motivated by the possibility of material gain. Joshua sent the soldiers from Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh home **with great wealth**. The writer further defined this wealth as **a huge number of cattle, and silver, gold, bronze, iron, and a large quantity of clothing**.

Joshua previously had warned the Hebrews not to keep goods from Jericho (Josh. 6:19). Achan and his family died for disobeying

this command at Ai (7:24-25). With this prohibition, Joshua's military would not have anticipated receiving anything materially. What a welcome blessing for Joshua's army to be sent home with wealth in tow. Joshua gave one final command. He instructed them to **share the spoil** with their relatives.

When God blesses us, it is important that we faithfully exercise our stewardship to bless others. We are to remember that everything we have is a gift from God (1 Cor. 4:7). The Lord wants us to use what He gives us as a channel of blessing to others as well.

Agree or disagree: God always provides a blessing so that you can provide for the needs of others. Explain your response.

Prior to crossing the Jordan River (to the east side), the soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built "a large, impressive altar" (Josh. 22:10). The nine and a half tribes on the west side of the Jordan River interpreted this altar as a competitor to the true altar of Lord God. They assembled to wage war against the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The soldiers from the two and a half tribes explained their altar. They didn't build it as a place of sacrifice. Instead, they built the altar as a memorial, signifying unity between the tribes on the west side of the Jordan with the tribes on the east side (22:21-29).

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship

Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions

IN MY CONTEXT

- Honor comes to believers who keep their commitments.
- God expects His people to be faithful to Him regardless of life's circumstances.



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- God expects His people to be good stewards and to use their blessings to bless others.

Review commitments you have left unfulfilled or have not kept. What actions do you need to take to make things right with the person or group to whom you fell short? How can you use that past failure to bring honor to Christ?

List key markers or milestones in your life. Note how each marker has impacted your faith in Christ. Ask God to help you grow in your Christian faith as you face future challenges.

Discuss as a group the blessings God has given to this group. How can your Bible study group use your blessings to bless others?

MEMORY VERSE

Only carefully obey the command and instruction that Moses the LORD's servant gave you: to love the LORD your God, walk in all His ways, keep His commands, remain faithful to Him, and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul. —Joshua 22:5



Session 6

CHALLENGED

Faithfulness grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment to God.

JOSHUA 24:14-28

¹⁴ “Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh. ¹⁵ But if it doesn’t please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.” ¹⁶ The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods! ¹⁷ For the LORD our God brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, and performed these



great signs before our eyes. He also protected us all along the way we went and among all the peoples whose lands we traveled through.¹⁸ The LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will worship the LORD, because He is our God.”¹⁹ But Joshua told the people, “You will not be able to worship Yahweh, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins.”²⁰ If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after He has been good to you.”²¹ “No!” the people answered Joshua. “We will worship the LORD.”²² Joshua then told the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh.” “We are witnesses,” they said.²³ “Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and offer your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”²⁴ So the people said to Joshua, “We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him.”²⁵ On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them.²⁶ Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD.²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, “You see this stone—it will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD said to us, and it will be a witness against you, so that you will not deny your God.”²⁸ Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

Notice the challenges issued by Joshua. How did these statements reflect his personal commitment to God?

Highlight promises and warnings given by Joshua. Notice how these are connected to each other.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Several colleges and universities provide a last lecture series. This is an ongoing series of lectures where professors and other academics are asked to present a lecture as if it is their final “talk.” The intent is for them to think deeply about what wisdom they would impart if they knew that the presentation they were about to make would be their last.

If you were asked to present such a lecture to a school or at work, what key points would you want to make?

At the end of the Book of Joshua, we find Joshua making his last public address to the Israelites. Joshua would soon die, and he challenged the Israelites to follow the Lord faithfully into the days ahead. Having personally witnessed many occurrences, he knew the Hebrews could be unfaithful to the Lord. He remembered many of them dying in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness (see Num. 14:26-34). Joshua undoubtedly knew that faithfulness grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment to God.

Faithful living can help us become the people God wants us to be. Joshua challenged the people to move ahead in a dynamic relationship with God in light of all He had done for them. Today, God still uses the faithfulness of His committed followers to challenge and influence others. He expects His followers to be fully devoted to Him, with no divided allegiances.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOSHUA 23:1–24:33

Joshua 23 records Joshua’s farewell address, while chapter 24 records a renewal, led by Joshua, of the covenant between Israel and God. Joshua had lived for many years in the promised land (23:1). But the aging Joshua probably knew he would soon die. He “summoned all Israel” (23:2) and said to them, “I am now going the way of all the earth” (23:14), an indication that he recognized his death was near.



Joshua addressed more than his impending death. He reminded the Israelites of the miracle of the conquest. With each victory, they had witnessed the presence, activity, and blessings of God. Joshua told the Hebrews that, because of the presence of the Lord, a single Hebrew soldier routed a thousand enemy soldiers (23:10).

Joshua offered more than a history lesson; he encouraged the Israelites to continue to be strong and to obey the Lord's commands. He directed them not to deviate ("to the right or left," 23:6) from God's Law. He also called the Israelites to faithfulness in their worship of the Lord.

Joshua offered more than an inspiring oration; he offered a word of warning. If the Israelites proved to be unfaithful to the Lord, God's anger would burn against them. The gains of the conquest could quickly disappear. In disobedience, the Hebrews could no longer expect the Lord to bless and protect them.

In his final act (recorded in chap. 24), Joshua gathered the Israelites at Shechem [SHEK uhm] and renewed the covenant between them and the Lord. His farewell speech and covenant renewal complete, Joshua died at the age of 110. No greater accomplishment can be attributed to a follower of the Lord than "Israel worshiped Yahweh throughout Joshua's lifetime" (24:31).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE EXAMPLE SET (JOSH. 24:14-15)

VERSES 14-15

¹⁴ "Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh. ¹⁵ But if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh."

Joshua summoned the Israelites to assemble at Shechem, a central location. He reminded them of their history. He reminded them that their ancestors once lived *beyond the Euphrates* [yoo FRAY tee] **River** and once worshiped gods other than the Lord (v. 2). But God had called Abraham and led him to the promised land (v. 3).

Abraham’s descendants eventually moved to Egypt, where the Lord delivered them through plagues (v. 4). Joshua reminded the Hebrews of God’s miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea (vv. 6-7). He reminded them of the time spent in the wilderness (vv. 8-10). He also reminded them of the conquest of the promised land, where God “gave you a land you did not labor for ... you are eating from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant” (v. 13).

The **therefore** of verse 14 connects this verse with the previous 13 verses. Because the Lord had been faithful to His people, Joshua challenged them to be faithful to God. He challenged Israel to **fear** and **worship** the Lord.

The Hebrew word for **fear** can be interpreted as deep reverence and awe. The verb rendered as **worship** can be translated as “serve.” Joshua challenged the Israelites to do more than simply respect, revere, and fear the Lord. He called on them to serve the Lord as well.

Joshua called on the Israelites to make a choice. They didn’t have the option of not choosing. To not choose would indeed be to make a choice. They could worship and serve other gods, or they could choose to worship and serve the Lord God.

Joshua set the example, saying: **As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.** He knew the effect that an example could have and gave an example of an individual and a family dedicated to the Lord.

Joshua’s faithfulness served as an example to others. How can one person’s faithfulness challenge and influence others for the cause of Christ?

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

Write Joshua 24:15 in your preferred Bible translation on one side of a card. On the other side, write the verse in your own words. Use the card to memorize and reflect on the verse. How does sharing the affirmation of Joshua 24:15 with your household provide a foundation for that household? How can you use that testimony to witness to others?



THE PEOPLE'S REFLECTION (JOSH. 24:16-18)

VERSES 16-18

¹⁶ The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods! ¹⁷ For the LORD our God brought us and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, and performed these great signs before our eyes. He also protected us all along the way we went and among all the peoples whose lands we traveled through. ¹⁸ The LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will worship the LORD, because He is our God.”

The people confirmed their commitment to the Lord. They recalled the account of the exodus as told by Joshua and Caleb. They remembered that their ancestors had once been slaves in *the land of Egypt*, but that the Lord delivered them through many *great signs* as demonstrations of His power.

The Israelites also recalled that the Lord *protected* them *all along the way*. Part of that protection included His provision of food and water. He fed them with manna (Ex. 16:11-18) and sustained them through many difficult circumstances.

The Lord also gave the Israelites favor among all the peoples whose land they traveled through. The people recalled that *the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites* [AM uh rights]. The term *Amorites* seems to be a general term to designate the Canaanite population.

The people were grateful for God's provision and protection along their 40-year journey. The examples they remembered demonstrated God's faithfulness to them. Their reflection on His provision and protection motivated them to remain faithful to Him: *We too will worship the LORD*. Their further affirmation, *He is our God*, reflected their total allegiance to the Lord. They would fully commit themselves to the One who had delivered them from Egypt, provided for them in the wilderness, and given them the promised land.

How has God revealed His faithfulness along your spiritual journey? How does God's past provision serve as motivation to remain faithful to Him?

A SOMBER WARNING (JOSH. 24:19-20)

VERSES 19-20

¹⁹ But Joshua told the people, “You will not be able to worship Yahweh, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins. ²⁰ If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after He has been good to you.”

After the people pledged to worship and serve the Lord alone, Joshua’s reply probably shocked them: **“You will not be able to worship Yahweh.”** Joshua’s words urged the people to sober reflection. He knew the Israelites had a history of making commitments they failed to keep. He reminded the people that the Lord **is a holy God**. *Holy* means set apart. God’s people are to be holy because of God’s holy nature: “Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

God is also **a jealous God**. He does not share His children’s allegiance with any other god. The temptation to worship and serve other gods would be strong for the Israelites, because those false gods made no demands on or had any expectations of the people.

With the words **He will not remove your transgressions and sins**, Joshua was not communicating that the Lord would never forgive Israel’s sins. God had described Himself as the One who forgives sin (see Ex. 34:7; 2 Chron. 7:14). Joshua was warning the Israelites to take their walk with God seriously.

God’s expectations have not changed. Jesus said to the crowds that followed Him: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:27-28). Jesus stressed that individuals must understand the commitment—the cost—required to be His follower.

What costs might a believer incur for remaining faithful to Jesus? What are the dangers of approaching our spiritual commitments lightly or with little thought?



A PUBLIC DECLARATION (JOSH. 24:21-28)

VERSES 21-22

²¹ **“No!”** the people answered Joshua. **“We will worship the LORD.”** ²² Joshua then told the people, **“You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh.”** **“We are witnesses,”** they said.

Again, the people voiced their intentions to be faithful to the Lord, insisting that they would not abandon the Lord. They reaffirmed their commitment: **“We will worship the LORD.”** Joshua pointed out that everyone heard their public commitment; therefore, they served as witnesses against one another. The people accepted this responsibility by saying, **“We are witnesses.”**

VERSES 23-24

²³ **“Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and offer your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”** ²⁴ So the people said to Joshua, **“We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him.”**

Joshua’s tone may have changed abruptly. He told them: **“Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you.”** Unfortunately, the disloyalty and unfaithfulness had already begun. From the time of the completed conquest to the present, some of the Israelites had already begun to worship and serve false gods. The Israelites themselves provided witness to the difficulty of being faithful to God (see v. 19).

Joshua instructed them: **offer your hearts to the LORD.** For the third and final time, the people committed themselves to the Lord and said, **“We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him.”**

VERSES 25-28

²⁵ **On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them.** ²⁶ Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, **“You see this stone—it will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD said to us, and it will be a witness against you, so that you will not deny your God.”** ²⁸ Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

Based on the commitments of the Hebrews, **Joshua made a covenant** between them and God. God had established a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 28:13). The Lord had further ratified that covenant at Mount Sinai with His people after He led them out of Egypt (Ex. 24:1-8). Now, **at •Shechem**, this covenant solidified the relationship between God and Israel.

We can substitute the word *relationship* for the word *covenant* and get near the meaning. This covenant served as a reminder of the relationship between the people and the Lord. As the Lord had promised to be their God (see Lev. 26:12), the Hebrews had to promise to be faithful to Him.

In addition to recording the covenant in a **book**, Joshua marked the momentous occasion with a **large stone**. This stone served as a witness to this generation as well as to future generations of the commitment the Hebrews made. While the Hebrews might change, the stone would not. The stone served both as a memorial of the covenant as well as a witness to remind the people of the consequences of breaking it.

All the events of Joshua 23–24 happened publicly. Joshua had summoned all Israel for his farewell address (chap. 23). He had gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem for the covenant renewal (chap. 24). The Hebrews had made a public declaration, and Joshua commemorated the occasion with a public marker.

Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow Him. Taking up the Christian cross, as well as attempting to be salt and light, cannot be done in a clandestine manner. Jesus taught His disciples: “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him” (Luke 9:26).

Why is a public declaration of our faith so important?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.



IN MY CONTEXT

- God uses the faithfulness of Christians to challenge and influence others, both Christians and non-Christians alike.
- God will not tolerate divided allegiance but expects His people to be completely devoted to Him.
- Believers can and should hold one another accountable for being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Evaluate your scope of influence and how you use that influence. Identify ways you can more readily influence others for the cause of Christ. What actions will you take to be a greater Christian influence in your family, your neighborhood, and your workplace?

Identify things that could divide our allegiance to God. What safeguards can you put in place to protect your allegiance to Him?

Discuss what your Bible study group can do to hold one another accountable in faithfulness to Jesus. Record actions the group agrees to take in light of the discussion.

MEMORY VERSE

But if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.
—Joshua 24:15



Session 7

VALUE ALL

Jesus values all people.

PROVERBS 24:10-12; MARK 10:46-49

Proverbs 24:10 If you do nothing in a difficult time, your strength is limited. ¹¹ Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter. ¹² If you say, “But we didn’t know about this,” won’t He who weighs hearts consider it? Won’t He who protects your life know? Won’t He repay a person according to his work?

Mark 10:46 They came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it



was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!”⁴⁸ Many people told him to keep quiet, but he was crying out all the more, “Have mercy on me, Son of David!”⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man and said to him, “Have courage! Get up; He’s calling for you.”

As you read both passages, look for reactions and attitudes expressed toward people needing help. What do those reactions and attitudes reveal about the person expressing them?

FIRST THOUGHTS

During the war-torn days of World War II, Winston Churchill cited a quote allegedly coming from the Irish statesman Edmund Burke. Churchill, following Burke, said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Though Burke had died in 1797, this quote seemed to express a powerful maxim particularly suitable for the situation of embattled Europe in the early years of Nazi aggression. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed a similar sentiment. When speaking of the near silence of the noble people in America during the often dangerous struggles of the civil rights movement, King indicated the greatest tragedy of that time would be “the appalling silence of the good people.”

These references have in common the basic observation that evil people triumph through the silence or inactivity of good people in not opposing them. This silence and inactivity in turn begs the questions: Why do good people not intervene in wrongful situations in order to establish what is right? Why is evil allowed to proceed and to intensify due to the silence and lack of opposition from good people?

What factors could contribute to good people remaining silent, indifferent, and inactive in the face of social, military, or political upheaval?

In our world, we have many people or groups of people who

face great challenges. Many live in homelessness, while others face extreme poverty. Some people arrive at retirement only to find they have little money or health to enjoy in their so-called “golden years.” Abortion on demand in the United States has claimed the lives of 58 million unborn children. God values all these people.

Today’s session challenges us to be advocates on behalf of others who face great challenges. Believers must promote social justice, knowing that all people reflect God’s image and that God values every person regardless of any physical limitation. As you study this session, prayerfully consider how you, your Bible study group, or church might take action in one of these vital areas.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

PROVERBS 24; MARK 10

The Book of Proverbs, along with Ecclesiastes and Job, is a part of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. The writer of Ecclesiastes approached the question of the purpose of life from a philosophical or intellectual perspective. He determined to ascertain how happiness might be found, concluding with, “When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is: fear God and keep His commands, because this is for all humanity” (12:13). In contrast, the Book of Proverbs offers a more practical approach to everyday life. It teaches the believer how to live. The principles found in Proverbs combine common sense and reverence for God, resulting in true wisdom. The key verse is 1:7: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” In other words, God is the starting point in the search for true wisdom.

Chapter 24 is a collection of individual sayings and proverbs on various topics related to life. We are not to envy or join with evildoers whose hearts plan violence (vv. 1-2). While evil men plan violence, the wise take up the cause of justice (vv. 3-4). Verses 10-12 challenge us to rescue those who have been wrongly condemned to death. God will hold accountable those who have it within their power to rescue the innocent but instead do nothing (v. 12).

The wicked are reminded of the futility of their malicious actions toward the righteous (vv. 15-16). We are told not to gloat when our enemies fall (vv. 17-18) nor be agitated by evildoers, for we know they



have no future. We are to fear God and the king (vv. 21-22); the king is God’s agent to bring destruction to evildoers. We are not to show partiality in judgment (vv. 23-25) but to be honest in all our dealings (vv. 26,28-29). The chapter closes with the account of a slacker whose field came to ruin because of his laziness (vv. 30-34).

Mark 10 records that Jesus traveled to Judea. He was on His way to Jerusalem and the cross. While in Judea, crowds converged on Him and, as usual, He began to teach them (v. 1). When some Pharisees tried to trap Jesus with a question about divorce, Jesus affirmed God’s design for lifelong marriage (vv. 2-12). He affirmed the value of children by taking them in His arms and blessing them (vv. 13-16). Jesus then challenged a rich young ruler to give all he had to the poor and to come follow Him—a price the young man was unwilling to pay (vv. 17-22). Jesus warned it would be hard for rich people to inherit the kingdom of God (vv. 23-27). He assured His disciples God would bless their faithfulness (vv. 28-31). For a third time, Jesus predicted His death (vv. 32-34; see also 8:31; 9:31). When James and John asked Jesus if they might sit at His right and left hand in His coming kingdom (10:35-41), Jesus responded by clarifying the true nature of leadership (vv. 42-45). True leaders serve those they lead.

As Jesus and His disciples journeyed through Jericho, He met Bartimaeus [BAHR tih MEE uhs], a blind beggar, who implored Jesus to have mercy on him (vv. 47-48). The crowd rebuked him, but Jesus called to him and gave him sight (vv. 49-52).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A CALL TO PROTECT LIFE (PROV. 24:11)

VERSE 11

11 Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter.

Solomon issued a strong command to protect human life: **Rescue those being taken off to death.** The verb *rescue* can also mean “snatch away.” It is an imperative in the original Hebrew. Solomon was not offering a suggestion; he was issuing a command. The expression *those being taken off to death* describes people in danger of being put to death; the context suggests those wrongly condemned. The wise

king knew the Hebrew law dictated that certain crimes be punished by death. Solomon, therefore, was not instructing his people to rescue the guilty. Perhaps to add a qualifier would help us understand Solomon's intent: "Rescue those innocently being taken off to death." God expects us to advocate for those facing wrongful death, including the unborn. He likewise expects us to defend and care for society's most vulnerable—the poor, oppressed, displaced, orphans, and widows:

- "Do not deny justice to a foreigner or fatherless child, and do not take a widow's garment as security" (Deut. 24:17).
- "When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you must not glean what is left. What remains will be for the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut. 24:21).
- "Provide justice for the needy and the fatherless; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute" (Ps. 82:3).
- "Speak up for those who have no voice, for the justice of all who are dispossessed. Speak up, judge righteously, and defend the cause of the oppressed and needy" (Prov. 31:8-9).
- "Learn to do what is good. Seek justice. Correct the oppressor. Defend the rights of the fatherless. Plead the widow's cause" (Isa. 1:17).

Solomon continued: ***and save those stumbling toward slaughter.***

The word *slaughter* is a strong word that often denotes the literal taking of human life (Isa. 30:25; Ezek. 26:15). The word can also describe circumstances in which people do not realize they are heading for ruin and it is within our power to rescue them. The concept can apply anytime we see a person in danger and certainly may also describe people whose lives are headed toward spiritual ruin.

We are reminded that people without Jesus face an eternity of punishment. When we share the gospel with them, we provide them a means of escape. We may also need to take loving, corrective action in order to help other believers who are caught in sin (Gal. 6:1).

How would you summarize Solomon's command? How does keeping this command strengthen a society?

A WARNING AGAINST INACTION (PROV. 24:10,12)



VERSES 10,12

10 If you do nothing in a difficult time, your strength is limited.

12 If you say, “But we didn’t know about this,” won’t He who weighs hearts consider it? Won’t He who protects your life know? Won’t He repay a person according to his work?

While innocent individuals were being “taken off to death” (v. 11), some chose to **do nothing** in such **a difficult time**. The king had heard some of his people offer the common excuse of claiming to be uninformed. How cruelly the excuse rolled off the tongues of those who had failed to protect the innocent: **“But we didn’t know about this.”**

This excuse can be understood in different ways. Perhaps the people knew nothing about situations in which the innocent died. After all, news did not travel as fast in ancient days. The Hebrew word translated **know** communicates personal, intimate knowledge. Therefore, perhaps the people had some awareness of such situations but didn’t know the particulars or specifics.

Or, more likely, the people simply didn’t tell the truth when claiming ignorance. Perhaps the people knew exactly what happened and chose, for whatever reason, not to get involved. Perhaps the people had both the knowledge and the power to intercede and chose not to do so.

Solomon asked three penetrating questions, all of which had to be answered with a responding “yes!” Yes, God, **who weighs hearts**, would **consider** the inactivity of His people as they failed to protect the innocent. Yes, God, **who protects your life**, knew that His people had failed those individuals innocently condemned. And, yes, God would **repay a person according to his work** or, in this instance, his or her lack of work (lack of intervention on behalf of the innocent). Here, Solomon used the same Hebrew word for **know** twice. The people claimed not to know about those unfairly condemned. Solomon communicated that God did know about their inactivity and would punish their idleness. Solomon made it clear: inaction was an unacceptable option.

Every society has people who have no one to advocate for them. God calls His people to do so. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord announced His displeasure at Israel’s neglect and mistreatment of orphans and widows: “They do not defend the rights of the fatherless,

and the widow’s case never comes before them” (Isa. 1:23). In Jeremiah, God warned against inaction: “They have not taken up cases, such as the case of the fatherless, so they might prosper, and they have not defended the rights of the needy. Should I not punish them for these things?” (Jer. 5:28-29). The Lord’s words were aimed at those who had the power to help the vulnerable but chose not to do so. James, the half-brother of Jesus, challenged his readers to take action on behalf of others when it lay within their power to do so. He declared that if they did not, their faith was worthless (see Jas. 2:15-17).

What excuses might a person use to justify ignoring people in dire need or in peril?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Social Justice*

We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick.

AN EXAMPLE SET (MARK 10:46-49)

VERSE 46

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting by the road.

As Jesus and His disciples were *leaving Jericho* (north of the Dead Sea and on the western side of the Jordan River, 17 miles from Jerusalem), *a blind beggar* named *Bartimaeus* was *sitting by the road*. Mark explains that Bartimaeus literally means *son of Timaeus*.

Luke records Jesus’ encounter with another citizen of Jericho—Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10). Zacchaeus and Bartimaeus were opposites in one sense—one was very rich (Luke 19:2) while the other was very poor. But the two were the same in that they both experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus as He passed



through Jericho.

The blind in those days had little opportunity to support themselves. They often had to resort to begging. Thus, a blind man begging on the side of a busy road would have been a common sight. The large crowd on their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast likely would have failed to take notice of him.

VERSE 47

47 When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!”

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, he cried out: **“Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!”** *Son of David* was a messianic title based on the promises God had made to David in 2 Samuel 7:11-14. Bartimaeus believed Jesus to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

The blind man made a general request that Jesus might simply have mercy on him. Later, when asked by Jesus what he wanted, he made the specific request for his eyesight (v. 51).

VERSE 48

48 Many people told him to keep quiet, but he was crying out all the more, “Have mercy on me, Son of David!”

The crying out of Bartimaeus annoyed the crowd; they ***told him to keep quiet***. Perhaps the crowds believed he meant to ask Jesus for alms. But Bartimaeus did not intend to ask Jesus for money. He knew Jesus was his only hope to gain sight and to be relieved from his life of begging. Undeterred, and with so much at stake, Bartimaeus cried out ***all the more, “Have mercy on me, Son of David!”***

VERSE 49

49 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man and said to him, “Have courage! Get up; He’s calling for you.”

The persistent voice of Bartimaeus came to the attention of Jesus. The cry of a blind beggar ***stopped*** the Son of God in His tracks. He instructed His disciples to ***“Call him.”***

Mark gives no indication that anyone aided Bartimaeus as he came to Jesus. We can imagine Bartimaeus in his excitement, hands

extended, rushing to find Jesus.

When Bartimaeus arrived, Jesus asked him what he wanted. Bartimaeus said, “I want to see!” (v. 51). We get the impression that Bartimaeus said, “More than anything in this life, I want to see!” Jesus then healed him of his blindness.

Matthew and Luke both provide an account of Jesus’ dialogue with Bartimaeus (Matt. 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43). Interestingly, only Mark records the man’s name. (Matthew tells us there were two beggars.) What if we didn’t know Bartimaeus’s name? Would it matter? Not at all. What does matter is the fact that Jesus valued a blind beggar (that we just happen to know by the name Bartimaeus). He valued a person who, no doubt, had been neglected on a daily basis by multitudes of other people. Not only did Jesus value Bartimaeus, He focused His attention on him, and rescued him.

Bartimaeus “immediately ... could see and began to follow Him on the road” (v. 52). In the Gospel of Mark, the healing of Bartimaeus is Jesus’ last recorded miracle before His entrance into Jerusalem on the way to Calvary. The value Jesus had for Bartimaeus brings into focus the value Jesus has for every person, which would soon be demonstrated most dramatically by His death on the cross.

Why is it important for Christians to set the example in regard to the valuing of human beings?

BIBLE SKILL: Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

Review and compare these stories with Mark 10:46-49; Matthew 9:10-13; Mark 5:24-34; Luke 19:1-10; John 8:3-11. Look for similarities and differences. Seek to create a summary statement that synthesizes the similarities found in these passages. What abiding principles can be seen in all five events?



IN MY CONTEXT

- God expects Christians to advocate for those facing unjust death, including the unborn.
- Believers must promote social justice, knowing God will hold them accountable for being light in the world.
- Believers are to value every person, regardless of physical, emotional, or mental limitations. All lives matter.

Reflect on how Christians are readily equipped to advocate for those facing unjust death. What actions are you taking to rescue and protect innocent people facing death?

List excuses you have used in the past for ignoring the needs of others, noting how each excuse falls short. Confess your past excuses to God, committing to take action in the future.

Discuss as a group what you can do to protect the innocent. Identify individuals or groups who need your group to stand with and for them. What will your group do in the next week to address these needs?

MEMORY VERSE

If you do nothing in a difficult time, your strength is limited.
—Proverbs 24:10



Session 8

REBELLION'S CYCLE

God brings righteous judgment on His rebellious people, with the goal of their repentance.

JUDGES 2:11-19

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals ¹² and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD, ¹³ for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths. ¹⁴ The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies. ¹⁵ Whenever the Israelites went out, the LORD was against them and brought disaster on them, just



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

Highlight the verbs used to describe the sin of the Hebrews. What do these verbs reveal about the nature of sin?

FIRST THOUGHTS

One reason we study history is to learn from it. We can discover what to do and what to avoid. We can identify actions to emulate, follies to avoid, and warnings to heed. In many cases, we see ourselves repeating the same noble acts or going down the same destructive paths. Unfortunately, in many cases, we are more likely to identify with historical figures than we are to learn from them.

In what ways have you seen history repeat itself? Do you think we can learn from history and stop repeating the same mistakes? Explain.

The Israelites knew their history yet repeated a destructive cycle of rebellion. This cycle began with their sin against God, took them to the depths of despair, and then brought them back to life by God's grace.

God brought righteous judgment on His rebellious people, with the goal of repentance. Unfortunately, after a short time passed, the people would start the cycle all over again, returning to their sins.

Christians are susceptible to the same kind of choices. We don't always choose to honor God. Jesus empowers us to escape this destructive cycle and embrace fellowship with Him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 1:1–3:6

Once the land was in the Israelites' possession, Joshua divided it among the twelve tribes. Israel remained faithful to God throughout Joshua's lifetime (Josh. 24:31), but matters changed not long after his death. Though the Israelites possessed and lived in the promised land, enemies lived among them, as recorded in Judges 1. The Israelites couldn't remove them because they had iron chariots (Judg. 1:19). They never drove the Canaanites out completely from the land (1:28).

The "Angel of the LORD" (2:1) reminded the Israelites of God's command not to make a covenant with the peoples living in the promised land. The Israelites disobeyed. Not only did they endear themselves to their pagan neighbors, they "took their daughters as wives for themselves" and "gave their own daughters to their sons" (3:6). Additionally, the Lord instructed His people to destroy pagan altars. Instead, the Israelites "worshiped their gods" (3:6). Because of their rebellion against the Lord's commands, the Israelites "suffered greatly" (2:15). In this environment, the Lord "raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders" (2:16).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

ABANDONMENT (JUDG. 2:11-13)

VERSE 11

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the Baals

How did the Israelites go from being conquerors to being prisoners in their own land? God answered that question for the Israelites: they *did what was evil in the LORD's sight.*



Almost unimaginably, they **worshiped the •Baals**. Baal was the supreme god of the Canaanite religion. The Canaanites (and obviously, some Israelites) believed that Baal insured productivity. Male and female prostitutes worked at temples of Baal; worshipers had sexual relations with prostitutes at the temple. This act was believed to encourage the sexual union between Baal and his cohort, Ashtoreth [ASH tuh reth]. Worshipers of Baal believed that this union between Baal and Asherah, in turn, insured the fertility of the land, animals, and humans.

VERSES 12-13

12 and abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD, 13 for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the Ashtoreths.

The Israelites **abandoned the LORD**. The verb translated *abandoned* can also be translated “leave” or “forsake.” In the Book of Genesis, this same word is used to instruct the man to leave his mother and father and bond with his wife (2:24). The idea of abandonment also can be seen in 1 Chronicles 10. After the death of King Saul, the Israelites, in fear, abandoned their cities and fled (v. 7).

The writer of the Book of Judges wanted no mistake regarding God’s identity. The Hebrews shouldn’t compare Him to any of the pagan gods, for **the LORD** was the One **who had brought them out of Egypt**. But instead of worshiping the One who had delivered them, they **went after other gods from the surrounding peoples and bowed down to them**. The word *bow* in Hebrew can also be translated “to worship” or “to adore.” While the Israelites should have worshiped and adored the Lord, they instead worshiped and adored pagan deities.

Taking into consideration the fact that the Hebrews **abandoned the Lord and worshiped Baal and the •Ashtoreths** (Ashtoreths refers to the female consorts of Baal), we should not be surprised to read that **they infuriated the LORD**. Such abandonment would provoke anyone to anger, but especially the Lord.

In what ways is sin abandoning God? Is it a declaration of allegiance to something other than God? Explain.

What is the connection between sin and worshiping God? How does one impact doing the other?

OPPRESSION (JUDG. 2:14-15)

VERSE 14

¹⁴ The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies.

With ***the LORD's anger*** burning against Israel, ***He handed them over to marauders who raided them.*** The God who had protected and provided for His people now removed His protection and allowed their enemies to prevail. This Hebrew army had once marched around Jericho and witnessed Jericho's wall collapse. Israel had won multiple victories. At Hazor [HAY zawr], the Israelites defeated an enemy "as numerous as the sand on the seashore—along with a vast number of horses and chariots" (Josh. 11:4). This mighty army once "took all this land ... He [Joshua] captured all their kings and struck them down" (Josh. 11:16-17). But sadly, Israel's once mighty army ***could no longer resist their enemies.***

VERSE 15

¹⁵ Whenever the Israelites went out, the LORD was against them and brought disaster on them, just as He had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly.

The Lord not only withdrew His protective hand, He also worked ***against them and brought disaster on them.*** God's action should not have been a surprise. Previously, He had promised and sworn to do this. Joshua warned them: "Be very diligent to love the LORD your God for your own well-being" or else "the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out before you" (Josh. 23:11-13). Ominously and candidly, Joshua warned, "If you break the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and worship



other gods, and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly disappear from this good land He has given you" (23:16).

Notice in Judges 2:14 that God's people "could no longer resist their enemies." Also notice in verse 15 that God actually worked against His people as they went out to meet their enemies. These two verses demonstrate God's passive and active wrath.

Every believer understands God's active wrath. God destroyed "every creature under heaven" with the flood (Gen. 6:17). He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with "burning sulfur" (Gen. 19:24).

God's passive wrath may be more challenging for believers to understand. The Lord's passive wrath is His decision to not intervene in the life of a person or a situation. King Saul made a series of poor decisions, including making a sacrifice in Samuel's absence (1 Sam. 13:8-13) and failing to kill Agag, king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:8). A desperate Saul then "inquired of the LORD" (1 Sam. 28:6). But in that situation, "the LORD did not answer him" (1 Sam. 28:6). The Lord simply allowed the decisions of Saul to have their natural outcome.

The apostle Paul attempted to help Christians in the church at Rome understand God's active and passive wrath. Of God's active wrath, Paul wrote: "God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18). But sometimes God's wrath is passive in that He delivers individuals "over in the cravings of their hearts" and "degrading passions" (1:24-26). In God's passive wrath, He simply allows normal consequences to occur. In the Book of Judges, the Israelites disobeyed God, and God then allowed their enemies to oppress them.

Does God use the same means to discipline His people today as He did to discipline the Israelites? Explain.

REPENTANCE (JUDG. 2:16-19)

VERSE 16

¹⁶ The LORD raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders,

This verse completes a cycle often found in the Book of Judges: rebellion, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. In these verses, the cycle is incomplete, but notice: “The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD’s sight” (rebellion, v. 11); “He handed them over to marauders” (oppression, v. 14); and then **the LORD raised up judges** (deliverance, v. 16).

The complete cycle can be seen in chapter 4: “The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (rebellion, 4:1); “the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan” (oppression, 4:2); “the Israelites cried out to the LORD” (repentance, 4:3); and finally, “Deborah ... was judging Israel at that time” (deliverance, 4:4). The cycle can be seen additionally in 3:7-15 and 6:1-14. The Israelites made the same mistake again and again.

God provided judges to offer leadership during these dark times. We should not understand the judges simply in terms of a judicial role. While some judges tried cases and administered justice (see 4:5), the judges of the book by the same name served as military deliverers. The exploits of Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson often involved armed conflict. Ehud and Samson more or less acted alone, but the others led armies into battle.

VERSE 17

17 but they did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their fathers, who had walked in obedience to the LORD’s commands. They did not do as their fathers did.

Considering the trying times in which the Israelites lived, we might conclude they would have welcomed the leadership of God-appointed and God-anointed judges. Instead, **they did not listen to their judges** but **prostituted themselves with other gods**. The phrase *did not listen* means the people did not obey God’s instructions through the judges.

While Joshua and the elders had been faithful to the Lord (Josh. 24:31) and walked in obedience to the Lord’s commands, the Israelites of the Book of Judges **quickly turned from the way of their fathers**. The term *quickly* speaks to the rapidity with which God’s people returned to their idolatry.

VERSE 18



18 Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for the Israelites, the LORD was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies while the judge was still alive. The LORD was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them.

God's faithfulness in verse 18 is contrasted with Israel's unfaithfulness as described in the previous verse. Compassionately, ***the LORD raised up*** judges and, through them, ***saved the people***. He was ***moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them***. The same word for *groaned* was used in Exodus 2:23-25: "The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out; and their cry for help ascended to God because of the difficult labor. So God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the Israelites, and He took notice." When His people groaned because of their bondage in Egypt, God heard, remembered, saw, and took notice. During the time of the judges, when God's people groaned because of their oppression, ***the LORD was moved to pity***. The Hebrew word translated ***moved to pity*** reflects God's compassion for His people.

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

Memorize Judges 2:18 in your preferred Bible translation. Write the verse in your own words. Reflect on the truths revealed in the verse. What does this verse say about God's feelings for His people and about His power to benefit them? Record a summary of your reflections and how the verse can comfort you during difficult times in your life.

VERSE 19

19 Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more

corruptly than their fathers, going after other gods to worship and bow down to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.

As long as the judge lived and provided leadership, the Israelites remained faithful to the Lord. But ***whenever the judge died***, so died the faithfulness of the Israelites. In fact, their disloyalty to the Lord only worsened: ***the Israelites would act even more corruptly***. They depended on human judges to deliver them; unfortunately, the judges died. We depend on the eternal Christ as our faithful Deliverer.

As we saw in a previous session, godly commitments can be difficult to keep (Josh. 24:19). The cycle of rebellion continues for every Christian today. As believers' sins continue, so does the discipline of God. As a loving parent disciplines a child, God lovingly disciplines His children. The writer of the Book of Hebrews reminded readers: "Do not take the Lord's discipline lightly or faint when you are reprov'd by Him, for the Lord disciplines the one He loves" (12:5-6). When disciplining His children, the Lord always has love as His motive and repentance as His goal.

What should a believer do when he or she incurs the discipline of the Lord? Repent. Repentance expresses a feeling of regret for one's sin. But repentance is more than a feeling. True repentance also demands the changing of one's mind and a turning from sin back to Jesus.

Why is repentance important in the life of an unbeliever? Why is repentance important in the life of a believer?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Repentance*

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God.

IN MY CONTEXT



- God alone is worthy of worship.
- Believers who turn their back on God can expect to receive His discipline—either overtly or through passive wrath.
- God provides relief from His discipline when wayward individuals repent and turn to Him.

Spend time in private worship. Reflect on Jesus' being our only hope for salvation and God's offer to forgive our sin through faith in His Son. Record your thoughts as a part of your private worship time.

Share with the group ways God has disciplined you or someone you know in the past. Be sure to include the lessons learned. Discuss with the group how the lessons learned can encourage others in the group to live a Christlike life.

Review the information on the inside front cover, paying particular attention to words and phrases that point to repentance. If you have not made this initial step, contact your Bible study leader to visit about this important decision. If you have made this initial step, find one person with whom you can share about the need for repentance, and share the information on the inside front cover with him or her.

MEMORY VERSE

Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for the Israelites, the LORD was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies while the judge was still alive. The LORD was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them.
—Judges 2:18



Session 9

WILLING SERVANTS

God restores His people to freedom using faithful and willing servants.

JUDGES 4:4-10,12-16

⁴ Deborah, a woman who was a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ It was her custom to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment. ⁶ She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Hasn’t the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you: ‘Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you 10,000 men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites?’ ⁷ Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin’s forces, his chariots, and his army at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.”



8 Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.” 9 “I will go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera into a woman’s hand.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. 10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; 10,000 men followed him, and Deborah also went with him. [...] 12 It was reported to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor. 13 Sisera summoned all his 900 iron chariots and all the people who were with him from Harosheth of the Nations to the Wadi Kishon. 14 Then Deborah said to Barak, “Move on, for this is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn’t the LORD gone before you?” So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. 15 The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into confusion with the sword before Barak. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot. 16 Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth of the Nations, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left.

Notice words and phrases that point to a partnership between Barak and Deborah. How did they strengthen each other to accomplish the task?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Running a marathon or half-marathon is a daunting challenge. The thought of pushing our bodies to endure the training is enough to keep most from giving it a second thought. It will hurt. You will need to train in nasty weather. If the weather is nasty the day of the run, you will not wait until the next perfect day. You will be sore the day after the event. You will wonder why you are doing it while running up the steepest hill in the race. Experts remind us that training with a group makes a difference. Knowing that someone else is willing to endure with you somehow lessens the pain. You are able to draw encouragement from one another because everyone is facing the same challenge.

Why does another person’s willingness to serve motivate us to act? How

does knowing someone else will work alongside us give us courage?

In the Book of Judges, we find a soldier needing some encouragement. Deborah was a faithful and willing servant of God. She was the only female judge in the Book of Judges. Barak [BAY rak], the military leader, had been given orders to do battle with King Jabin [JAY bin], but he failed to act. Deborah's willingness to accompany Barak gave him the courage to face a formidable foe and allowed both of them to be a part of God's plan to deliver Israel.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Social Order*

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 3:7–5:31

Judges 3:7-11 records the victory of Othniel [AHTH nih el], the first judge in the book. After Othniel's victory, the Israelites enjoyed 40 years of peace before the pattern of rebellion continued, as "the Israelites again did what was evil in the LORD's sight" (3:12). (See p. 87 for a discussion of the cycle of rebellion.) The Lord allowed Eglon, King of Moab, to oppress the Hebrews. When the Israelites repented (3:15), the Lord gave Ehud, a left-handed Benjaminite, as Israel's second judge. Ehud delivered his people from the Moabites when Eglon's attendants failed to recognize the fact that he, being left-handed, carried his sword on his right thigh. Eglon's attendants failed to inspect Ehud's right thigh, allowing him to enter into the king's presence with a concealed, 18-inch sword. Ehud promptly drew the sword and killed Eglon. The Hebrews enjoyed peace for 80 years after Ehud's exploits (3:30).

Eighty years later, the cycle of rebellion began again, and the Israelites needed another deliverer to save them from the Philistines. The Lord gave Shamgar [SHAM gahr], Israel's next judge (3:31). In the days of Shamgar, the Israelites deserted the main highways and "kept



to the side roads” (5:6) due to fear of the Philistines. Additionally, entire “villages were deserted” (5:7). Shamgar delivered his people with the use of an oxgoad, killing 600 Philistines. Farmers made oxgoads from small trees or tree limbs, approximately six feet in length, peeled of bark for preservation. Honing one end to a dull point, farmers used the tool to goad a stubborn ox, as the name indicates.

Next in the line of leadership was Deborah. In Deborah’s day, Israel suffered under the oppression of Jabin [JAY bin] of Hazor and his military commander, Sisera [SIS ur ruh]. The Israelites cried to God for help, and the Lord responded to their cry by using Deborah to lead them to victory over their oppressors.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

AN UPDATE REQUESTED (JUDG. 4:4-7)

VERSES 4-5

⁴ Deborah, a woman who was a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ It was her custom to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment.

After the brief description of the judge Shamgar and his success (3:31), the Israelites again rebelled against the Lord (4:1). The Lord allowed His people to be oppressed for 20 years by Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin, his army equipped with 900 iron chariots, treated the Hebrews harshly (4:3). The Hebrews repented, and the Lord gave them the judge Deborah.

Deborah is identified as ***a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth*** [LAP ih dahth], and a judge. As a prophetess, she was God’s spokesperson to deliver His messages to the Israelites. Other Old Testament prophetesses were Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isa. 8:3), and Anna (Luke 2:36). Like the male prophets, the prophetesses were spokespersons for God. Nothing is known about Deborah’s husband, Lappidoth. This is the only mention of him in Scripture. Nothing is said about children. Later, she is called “a mother in Israel” (5:7), but this probably refers to her mother-like role over Israel.

In addition to prophesying, Deborah **was judging Israel**. The word *judging* can refer to the kind of judging that hears cases and renders decisions. It can also refer to leading or governing. Leaders in ancient times sometimes served as judges in rendering verdicts and settling disputes (as did Moses, for example; see Ex. 18:16). **It was her custom to sit under the palm tree of Deborah**. Some see this as a place to which people brought their disputes.

Israel's judges served as judicial, religious, and military leaders. As we will see in the next verse, Deborah served as God's spiritual spokesperson to Barak [BAY rak], who was Israel's military leader.

VERSES 6-7

⁶ She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "Hasn't the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you: 'Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you 10,000 men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites?' ⁷ Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin's forces, his chariots, and his army at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you."

Deborah **summoned •Barak** and reminded him that the Lord had **commanded** him to **deploy the troops on Mount Tabor**. The word *summoned* implies authority that came from Deborah's calling as a prophetess for God. She delivered to Barak God's message, not her own ideas: **Hasn't the LORD ... commanded you?**

She reminded Barak of the Lord's promise to **lure Sisera**, the commander of Jabin's forces, along with his army, to **the Wadi Kishon** [KIGH shahn]. The word *wadi* describes a watercourse that is dry except in the rainy season. There, the Lord would hand Sisera over into Barak's hands (v. 13). Even though the Lord had promised to defeat Israel's enemy, Barak hesitated for reasons unrecorded.

Why is willingness to serve essential in the life of a faithful believer?

A DEAL STRUCK (JUDG. 4:8-10)

VERSE 8



⁸ Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.”

Further hesitation can be read in Barak’s reply. He would go fight only if Deborah agreed to go with him. What prompted Barak’s hesitation? Was it cowardice? Was it failure to believe Deborah’s (and the Lord’s) assurance? We are not told. Regardless of the reason, Barak recognized Deborah’s status. We should read Barak’s reply not only as a plea for Deborah’s presence, but also as a plea for the presence of the Lord. Barak knew he needed God’s leadership and presence that he saw in Deborah. He had to muster an army against Sisera, who had 900 chariots. Barak’s army only had swords and spears to go against horses and chariots (v. 13).

VERSES 9-10

⁹ “I will go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera into a woman’s hand.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; 10,000 men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.

Deborah agreed to go with Barak. Her courage in going was essential to Barak’s willingness to undertake the task. Deborah is an example of how one person’s courage in taking a stand for God gives courage to others in similar situations.

Barak summoned the **10,000 men** from the tribes of **Zebulun and Naphtali**. (Judg. 5:14-15 indicates that additional soldiers came from the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir [Manasseh], and Issachar.) Deborah also went with him. Her faith was strong; there was no hesitancy on her part in acting on the Lord’s command.

Due to Barak’s timid response to the Lord’s command, Deborah informed him that he would not be honored for the victory God would soon provide. Instead, the Lord would sell Sisera **into a woman’s hand**. Though Barak was the military commander, people would speak of Sisera’s defeat at the hands of a woman. At this point in the narrative, we might assume that Deborah was that woman, but we would be wrong. Judges 4:17-24 shows that a woman named Jael [JAY uhl] was responsible for killing Sisera.

God will not honor faithlessness. Nor will the Lord honor an unwillingness to serve Him. Faithfulness and willingness to serve are related in that our faithfulness moves us to service.

As Christians, we often face fearful situations and experience fear when God leads us to do something beyond our abilities. We can be assured that when God tells us to go, He goes with us. We are armed with the promise of God to be with us and to win the ultimate victory. Rather than place conditions on our obedience, we are to trust and obey.

In what kinds of situations do you need courage to take a stand for God? How does your fear or courage influence others?

What blessings might one forfeit due to unfaithfulness and unwillingness to serve God?

THE ORDERS ISSUED (JUDG. 4:12-14)

VERSES 12-14

¹² It was reported to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor. ¹³ Sisera summoned all his 900 iron chariots and all the people who were with him from Harosheth of the Nations to the Wadi Kishon. ¹⁴ Then Deborah said to Barak, “Move on, for this is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn’t the LORD gone before you?” So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.

Scouts ***reported to Sisera***, Jabin’s military leader, and informed him that Barak ***had gone up Mount Tabor***. Earlier, the Lord had promised Deborah and Barak that He would lure Sisera and his army to this exact location, promising to “hand him over to you” (v. 7). Located in the northeast section of the Jezreel Valley, Mount Tabor played a significant role in Israel’s history. It served as a boundary point between the tribes of Naphtali, Issachar, and Zebulun (Josh. 19:22). The Israelites, early in their history, probably worshiped there (Deut. 33:18-19). Although uncertain, Christian tradition identifies Mount Tabor as the place for the



transfiguration of Jesus.

Sisera commanded **his 900 iron chariots** and supporting army to move toward the Wadi Kishon and meet Deborah and Barak's forces. While archaeological evidence indicates that the people of Mesopotamia developed the chariot before 3000 B.C., the Egyptians had revolutionized chariotry. Under the capable scrutiny of Egyptian engineers, the chariot developed into an effective military machine greatly feared by opposing forces. For the Israelite army to attack iron chariots would be like sending infantry armed with outdated weapons against an army of tanks and supporting troops armed with the latest technology.

Deborah voiced no fear of Sisera's chariots. Issuing Barak a command, she told him to **"Move on, for this is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you."** So sure of victory, Deborah insisted that the Lord had gone before him. The Lord not only goes with us but also goes before us. Too often we decide what we will do and then ask God to bless our efforts. Instead, we should find out where God is going and go with Him. Genuine faith involves following God where He leads. Bolstered by Deborah's faith and presence, and to his credit, Barak advanced on Mount Tabor with 10,000 men.

How did Deborah's assurance of God's presence bolster Barak's willingness? How does the assurance of God's presence give a believer confidence?

THE VICTORY WON (JUDG. 4:15-16)

VERSES 15-16

¹⁵ The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into confusion with the sword before Barak. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶ Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth of the Nations, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left.

The details of the battle reveal the victory as being won by the Lord. He determined the battle site. Notice who **threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into confusion**. It was **the LORD**. The human instruments were Barak and the Israelites, but it was the Lord

who gave the victory.

Why would Sisera abandon his chariot and flee on foot? Because the Lord sent rain to flood the wadi, rendering the chariots useless in deep mud. The river Kishon is mentioned twice in chapter 4 (vv. 7,13). In Judges 5:4 we are told “the clouds poured water,” and in Judges 5:21, “the river Kishon swept them away.” This incident reminds us of Pharaoh’s chariots at the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:25). Sisera’s chariots of iron were powerful weapons under ideal conditions, but they were helpless when trapped in a sea of mud.

Barak witnessed the presence and the power of the Lord. With Sisera and his army in full retreat, Barak pursued them ***as far as Harosheth*** [huh ROH sheth] ***of the Nations***. At Harosheth, Barak defeated Sisera’s whole army so thoroughly that not a single soldier survived.

Sisera alone escaped the battlefield. He made his way to the tent of Jael (the wife of Heber the Kenite, an ally of Sisera). Jael pretended to be a friend, invited Sisera into the tent, and gave him some milk to drink. When Sisera fell asleep, Jael used a hammer to drive a tent peg into his head (4:17-24).

How would you describe God’s role in this battle? How do you differentiate between fighting for a cause and fighting alongside God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar passages to gain a clearer understanding.*

Read these passages in your Bible: Exodus 14:1-31; Judges 7:1-25; 2 Kings 18:13–19:37. Noting the similarities of the above passages, read Revelation 19:17-21 and 20:1-15. What central themes do you see present in each passage, if any? What do these passages teach about God’s victory?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Godly leaders are expected to follow God’s commands and directives.
- Despite our doubts, God will remain true to His promises.
- Believers can have confidence in knowing that God’s purposes will be completed.

How can you encourage leaders to follow God’s commands? What actions can you take to encourage them in a Christ-honoring way?

Discuss ways the Bible study group can provide evidence of being faithful and willing servants to Jesus. What can the group do to foster faithfulness and willingness?

Evaluate your level of willingness to serve on a scale of one to ten with one being not willing and ten being actively serving now. What evidence can you point to in support of your evaluation? What needs to change for you to increase your level of willingness?

MEMORY VERSE

Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. —Judges 5:3



Session 10

TIMID WARRIOR

God molds His people into mature believers through acts of service to Him.

JUDGES 6:11-16,25-32

¹¹ The Angel of the LORD came, and He sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites. ¹² Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” ¹³ Gideon said to Him, “Please Sir, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, ‘Hasn’t the LORD brought us out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian.” ¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and deliver



Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not sending you?" ¹⁵ He said to Him, "Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." ¹⁶ "But I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man." [...] ²⁵ On that very night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then tear down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Build a well-constructed altar to the LORD your God on the top of this rock. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down." ²⁷ So Gideon took 10 of his male servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father's household and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night. ²⁸ When the men of the city got up in the morning, they found Baal's altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it cut down, and the second bull offered up on the altar that had been built. ²⁹ They said to each other, "Who did this?" After they made a thorough investigation, they said, "Gideon son of Joash did it." ³⁰ Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he tore down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it." ³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead Baal's case for him? Would you save him? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead his own case because someone tore down his altar." ³² That day, Gideon's father called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead his case with him," because he tore down his altar.

Look for features in this passage that reveal Gideon's view of himself. Compare and contrast Gideon's view of himself with God's expressed view of Gideon. What does this comparison reveal about how God views humanity?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Most of us like the underdog, as long as we are not the one being surprised or beaten by them. When the favored team wins, the story line is not nearly as interesting as when the underdog pulls off the upset. On most teams, there is that favorite player who may not be the fastest, strongest, or most talented, but he or she is the one you want to meet, the one who has overcome the greatest obstacles to be on that team.

Most of us have been the underdog more than we have been the favored one. We can relate to underdogs; they are like us. A win by the underdog gives us hope that maybe we will be the next underdog to pull off the upset.

Why do you think people are drawn to the underdog? What makes the underdog so appealing?

In today's study, we find a judge who even viewed himself as the underdog. The people of Israel needed to be delivered from the oppression of the Midianites. However, God's chosen deliverer, Gideon, was not up to the task. He was timid and afraid. God molded Gideon into a capable leader through his service.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Sanctification*

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 6:1–12:15

For a period of 40 years after the ministry of Deborah, God's people enjoyed rest from their enemies (Judg. 5:31). Then, once again,



“the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (6:1; see also 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1). As a consequence, God’s judgment fell upon the Israelites. He “handed them over to Midian seven years” (6:1). The Midianites were nomads from the region east and southeast of the Dead Sea. They roamed the country, seeking grazing land for their animals. Finding Israel too weak to defend themselves, the Midianites plundered Israel.

The Midianites were probably too small in numbers to plunder Israel alone, so they joined with the Amalekites and other eastern peoples and rode their camels all across Israel. The Midianites grazed their own livestock and stole sheep, oxen, and donkeys from the Israelites. They also plundered homes. The Book of Judges describes the Midianites as a swarm of locusts (v. 5). Consequently, the Israelites fled to the hills and hid in the many caves that dotted the limestone hillsides (v. 2).

Having become poverty-stricken because of the Midianites, the Israelites remembered God and cried out to Him (v. 6). The Lord then empowered an unlikely young man named Gideon to deliver His people and to call them back to Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

UNSURE AND UNTESTED (JUDG. 6:11-16)

VERSES 11-12

¹¹ The Angel of the LORD came, and He sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash, the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites. ¹² Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

Gideon was a mixture of fear and courage, doubt and faith. When we think of him, we generally picture him at his moment of greatest courage and faith—leading 300 men against multitudes of Midianites (chap. 7), but we may forget his initial response to God’s call. At first introduction he was ***threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites***. Farmers usually threshed wheat in an area exposed to the wind, like a hilltop, for example. After beating the cut wheat stalks with a rod or stick, they tossed the mixture of grain and chaff into the air with a willowing fork. The wind blew away the lighter

chaff, allowing the farmer to gather the heavier kernels from the ground. Done correctly, the threshing of wheat could be seen from great distances. But fear of being seen by the Midianites forced Gideon to thresh his wheat in a concealed location.

The Angel of the LORD, apparently clothed as a traveler, came by and stopped under an oak tree. The oak tree provided shade and shelter for the wine press. One can visualize Gideon, fearfully preoccupied with his efforts, suddenly realizing the presence of another. Gideon may have been puzzled by the Angel's referring to him as a **mighty warrior**. One can also imagine Gideon surveying the surrounding area for someone else before asking, "Are you talking to me?" The Angel of the Lord was probably speaking prophetically when he called Gideon a mighty warrior, which he would become when the Holy Spirit empowered him as a deliverer. The Angel of the Lord declared to Gideon: **"The LORD is with you."**

VERSE 13

¹³ Gideon said to Him, "Please Sir, if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened? And where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about? They said, 'Hasn't the LORD brought us out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and handed us over to Midian."

Gideon gave voice to what many Hebrews thought. He asked: **why has all this happened?** Gideon had heard his forefathers speak of God's wonders, even their deliverance out of Egypt. Gideon must have questioned the power of God to deliver. He did not understand why the Lord handed them over to Midian. Because of spiritual disobedience, the Lord had withdrawn His protection and withheld His blessings, allowing the Midianites to conquer.

VERSES 14-16

¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. Am I not sending you?" ¹⁵ He said to Him, "Please, Lord, how can I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." ¹⁶ "But I will be with you," the LORD said to him. "You will strike Midian down as if it were one man."

Presumably the Angel of the Lord was still the one speaking here, but the text simply reads **the LORD ... said**. The Angel of the Lord did



not answer Gideon's question. He simply commanded Gideon to go and deliver Israel from the Midianites. Perhaps anticipating Gideon's hesitation, the Angel of the Lord encouraged him by asking his own question: ***Am I not sending you?***

We can see Gideon's feelings of insecurity. When told to deliver Israel, he asked: ***how can I deliver Israel?*** Gideon admitted: ***my family is the weakest in Manasseh*** [muh NASS uh]. Gideon's recognition of being ***the youngest*** in his family only caused more insecurity.

Again, the Lord guaranteed His presence with Gideon (see also v. 12). Because of the Lord's presence, victory was assured. The idea of mighty Midian having no more power than one man was the Lord's way of reassuring Gideon he could successfully fulfill God's calling on his life. God was molding Gideon into a mature believer.

In what ways do our uncertainties or lack of experience lead us to doubt the very presence of God in our lives?

BIBLE SKILL: *Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Focus on Judges 6:16. Paraphrase the verse as if God were guaranteeing your victory over your biggest problem. Put yourself and your challenges in the verse. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by putting yourself in the verse? How does this verse speak to your biggest problem?

A FIRST STEP (JUDG. 6:25-27)

VERSES 25-26

²⁵ On that very night the LORD said to him, "Take your father's young bull and a second bull seven years old. Then tear down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. ²⁶ Build a well-constructed altar to the LORD your

God on the top of this rock. Take the second bull and offer it as a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down.”

In verses 17-24, Gideon requested a sign from the Angel of the Lord as an indication of God’s favor. He gave the Angel a gift of meat from a young goat and unleavened bread. The Angel of the Lord touched the gift with his staff, fire consumed the meat and bread, and then he vanished from Gideon’s sight (v. 21). Realizing that this visitor was an angel, Gideon built an altar and worshiped the Lord (v. 24).

On that very night, the Lord instructed Gideon to **tear down the altar of Baal** that stood at his father’s house. The existence of a family altar shows how pervasive the worship of Baal had become. Before Gideon could defeat the Midianites, he had to confront the paganism within his own family.

Gideon was to **cut down the Asherah** [uh SHEE ruh] **pole**. Asherah poles, first recorded in Exodus 34:13, were associated with pagan worship. According to ancient mythology, Asherah was the wife of El, and her most famous son was Baal.

After God told Gideon to destroy the objects of pagan worship, the Lord instructed him to build an **altar to the LORD** on the site. Gideon was to use the wood from the Asherah pole as fuel for the burnt offering. He would transform a place to worship Baal into a place to worship the Lord.

VERSE 27

27 So Gideon took 10 of his male servants and did as the LORD had told him. But because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it in the daytime, he did it at night.

Perhaps the fact that Gideon took 10 of his male servants indicates his timidity. Or, perhaps, the sheer size of the pagan altar and Asherah pole required assistance. We might give Gideon the benefit of the doubt as to why he recruited 10 servants to help him, but this verse clearly communicates timidity in that Gideon was too afraid to do it in the daytime, so **he did it at night**.

We can criticize Gideon’s continued timid approach to the Lord’s plan. Or we can celebrate the fact that Gideon did what God instructed him to do, in spite of his apprehension. In this, we can find encouragement in recognizing that Gideon overcame some of his anxiety. His accomplishments should be interpreted as progress



toward the goal of spiritual maturity.

What are the first steps you would recommend to help a person move toward the goal of spiritual maturity?

A FATHER'S DEFENSE (JUDG. 6:28-32)

VERSES 28-30

²⁸ When the men of the city got up in the morning, they found Baal's altar torn down, the Asherah pole beside it cut down, and the second bull offered up on the altar that had been built. ²⁹ They said to each other, "Who did this?" After they made a thorough investigation, they said, "Gideon son of Joash did it." ³⁰ Then the men of the city said to Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he tore down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."

Gideon's fears of the men of the city were justified. When they awoke the next morning, they discovered their pagan worship site destroyed. They were angry and inquired among themselves who did it. Their investigation identified Gideon as the guilty person.

With Gideon identified, the men of the city demanded that Joash, Gideon's father, surrender his son to them. They intended to kill Gideon.

VERSES 31-32

³¹ But Joash said to all who stood against him, "Would you plead Baal's case for him? Would you save him? Whoever pleads his case will be put to death by morning! If he is a god, let him plead his own case because someone tore down his altar." ³² That day, Gideon's father called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead his case with him," because he tore down his altar.

Joash staunchly defended the actions of his son. He began to question the men, wanting to know if their intent was to plead Baal's case for him.

Joash warned that anyone who pleaded for Baal would be put to death. He probably aimed this warning at anyone who tried to harm his son or who tried to turn his property back into a place to worship Baal. He then added, ***If he [Baal] is a god, let him plead his own case.*** God had declared to the Israelites that vengeance was His, and He would repay. Baal himself should deal with the one who tore down his altar.

What might the writer have been attempting to communicate regarding Joash? Recall that the pagan altar of Baal and the Asherah pole belonged to him (v. 25). Yet here, Joash defended Gideon and his actions. Could Gideon's spiritual development have inspired Joash? Did Joash, encouraged by the courageous action of his son, renounce his own worship of pagan deities and return to the true worship of God? Perhaps Gideon's service of the Lord motivated Joash to do likewise.

How has God drawn you closer to Himself by working in the lives of those around you?

To commemorate the event, Joash gave his son a new name: ***Jerubbaal*** [JER uhb-BAY uhl]. The name means "let Baal contend." Perhaps in a mocking manner, Gideon's new name challenged Baal to defend himself. Obviously, Baal did nothing since Baal was only an idol. The name would serve as a reminder of Baal's impotence.

In chapters 7 and 8, God continued to mold Gideon into a mature leader and to work through him to secure victories for His people. Outnumbered 135,000 (8:10) to 32,000 (7:3), the Lord instructed Gideon to reduce his soldiers lest, when experiencing victory, Israel might boast, saying: "I did it myself" (7:2). Gideon dismissed 22,000 soldiers (7:3). Of the 10,000 remaining, Gideon, again at the Lord's instruction, reduced them to 300 (7:6-7). The Lord told Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men" (7:7).

Gideon armed his soldiers not with swords and shields but with trumpets and torches (concealed inside a pitcher). During a momentary lull in the security of the Midianite camp (7:19), Gideon and his 300 soldiers blew the trumpets and shattered the pitchers to expose their torches. The confused and frightened Midian army broke ranks and fled. "So Midian was subdued before the Israelites, and they were no longer a threat" (8:28). The writer of Judges also recorded: "The land was peaceful 40 years during the days of Gideon" (8:28). The Lord utilized a timid servant to bring about complete victory for His people.

IN MY CONTEXT



- God often uses weak and imperfect people to bring about His purposes, knowing they will have a greater dependence on Him.
- Christians grow spiritually by obeying God.
- God is more than capable of defending Himself and His followers.

As a Bible study group, list sources of insecurity a person may have. Discuss as a group how God can work through the insecurities listed. Record insights gained about the sources of insecurity that give you the greatest difficulty.

Identify actions you can take to strengthen your faith. What plans do you have for taking the actions you have identified?

Identify ways Christ defends Himself in our world. What is your role in pointing others to Jesus? Whom do you need to challenge to consider the truth of the gospel, and how will you do so?

MEMORY VERSE

“But I will be with you,” the LORD said to him. “You will strike Midian down as if it were one man.” —Judges 6:16



Session 11

COMPROMISED POTENTIAL

God keeps both His promises and His warnings.

JUDGES 16:4-6,13-20

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley. ⁵ The Philistine leaders went to her and said, “Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver.” ⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, “Please tell me, where does your great strength come from? How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?” [...] ¹³ Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have mocked me all along and told me lies! Tell me how you can be tied up.” He told her, “If you weave the seven braids on my head with the web



of a loom—”¹⁴ She fastened the braids with a pin and called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” He awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin, with the loom and the web.¹⁵ “How can you say, ‘I love you,’” she told him, “when your heart is not with me? This is the third time you have mocked me and not told me what makes your strength so great!”¹⁶ Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out,¹⁷ he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.”¹⁸ When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: “Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth.” The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the money with them.¹⁹ Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. In this way, she made him helpless, and his strength left him.²⁰ Then she cried, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” When he awoke from his sleep, he said, “I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

Identify the steps taken by Samson that moved him closer to compromise. Note how each step was related to the previous and led to the next.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Every human life is full of potential. Alert parents will help their children develop their potential to get the most out of their lives. By responding to the nurturing care of their parents, many children will develop exceptional athletic prowess, academic acuity, or excellence in the fine and performing arts. Some children will become giants of the faith because their parents trained them in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6).

However, other people short-circuit their lives. Some with

exceptional athletic ability fail to fine-tune their skills. Others with academic acumen never really apply themselves. Still others forego the rigorous demands of rehearsal required of first-class musicians. Frequently, these people compromise their potential by making unwise choices or allowing distractions to dominate their lives.

What are some things that keep a person from reaching his or her full potential? What role does spiritual compromise play in failing to reach one's full potential?

Samson epitomizes the process of compromise. He frequently compromised his devotion to the God of Israel by associating with the idolatrous Philistines. He found himself in constant turmoil and dispute with his oppressive neighbors. He relied on his physical prowess rather than humbling himself before the Lord. As a consequence, Samson was not as effective as he could have been. He compromised his potential for becoming a great servant of the Lord.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 13:1–21:29

Samson's story is recorded in Judges 13–16. The statement “the Israelites again did what was evil in the LORD's sight” (13:1) makes one final appearance in the book and is the prelude to Samson's story (see also 2:11; 3:7,12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6). Because the Israelites once again slid into an evil lifestyle, the Lord allowed them to be oppressed by the Philistines. The Angel of the Lord announced to a childless family from the tribe of Dan that they would have a son (13:2-3). This boy, Samson, would be dedicated to God from birth (13:4-5).

The Angel of the Lord consecrated Samson as “a Nazirite ... from birth” (13:5). Two kinds of Nazirites are found in the Bible. Some took a Nazirite vow only for a specific period. Others were Nazirites based on a lifelong vow. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul is an example of the former (Acts 18:18; 21:22-26). Samson and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15-17) are examples of lifelong Nazirites. According



to Numbers 6:1-21, Nazirites were prohibited from drinking wine (vv. 3-4), cutting their hair (v. 5), or touching any dead thing (vv. 6-7).

The Nazirite vow is a key aspect for understanding Samson's life. He violated the prohibition against touching any dead thing when he scooped honey from the carcass of a lion he had killed (Judg. 14:5-9). We are never told he drank wine, but we can assume he did as part of the wedding feast he hosted, since such occasions were characterized by merrymaking with wine (14:10-12; John 2:1-11). The word for "feast" in Judges 14:10 comes from the Hebrew word meaning "to drink." Before his interaction with Delilah (the focus of this session), Samson the Nazirite already had violated all but the prohibition against cutting his hair.

BIBLE SKILL: *Examine a related passage to gain a clearer view of a passage.*

Read Psalm 1, focusing on the verbs in verse 1. Reflect on what the verbs reveal to us about spiritual compromise. Read the verse in various translations. Write a summary of what you discover. What does Psalm 1:1 teach about a process of compromise? In what ways does Samson's life serve as an illustration of the truths found in Psalm 1?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PLEASE TELL ME (JUDG. 16:4-6)

VERSE 4

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley.

Some time later refers to the events recorded in verses 1-3. In these verses Samson slept with a prostitute in Gaza (Philistine territory). Desiring to kill him, the men of Gaza waited for the strong man to emerge. But Samson escaped Gaza at midnight. Then *some time*

later he **fell in love** with a woman from **the Sorek Valley**. The Sorek Valley ran from the hill country of Judah and Dan westward to the Mediterranean coast. For the first time in Samson's womanizing, the writer provides a name: **Delilah**. Scholars debate the exact meaning of her name. Many maintain the name means "of the night." Regardless of the meaning of her name, she certainly brought darkness on Samson.

VERSE 5

⁵ The Philistine leaders went to her and said, "Persuade him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can overpower him, tie him up, and make him helpless. Each of us will then give you 1,100 pieces of silver."

In chapter 14 the Philistines employed a threat against Samson's wife in a plot against him (v. 15). In chapter 15 the Philistines attempted to subdue Samson physically before he killed one thousand of them with the jawbone of a donkey (vv. 14-15). In 16:5, the Philistines thought better of a frontal attack. They devised a different strategy. They tried bribery, each promising Delilah **1,100 pieces of silver** if she could discover and reveal to them the secret of Samson's strength.

These leaders probably came from the major Philistine towns: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (see 1 Sam. 6:17). Combined, the Philistine leaders offered Delilah 5,500 pieces of silver—an exorbitant sum! The value of silver fluctuated in the Old Testament world, but a comparison of other silver transactions illustrates Delilah's compensation. For example, Jeremiah purchased a field for 17 pieces of silver (Jer. 32:9), and 30 pieces of silver could purchase a slave (Ex. 21:32). The amount of the bribe reveals the fear that the Philistines had of Samson.

VERSE 6

⁶ So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me, where does your great strength come from? How could someone tie you up and make you helpless?"

Initially, Delilah simply asked Samson, **Where does your great strength come from?** In all probability Delilah waited for the perfect opportunity and injected her request into a current conversation. One can almost hear Delilah casually say, "Oh, by the way, you are a strong guy, Samson. Where does your strength come from?" This and



the following six verses record two attempts Delilah made to discover Samson's secret. Samson offered Delilah an absurd reply in the first attempt, saying that if he were bound with bow stings (cords made from animal intestines) that had not been dried he would become as weak as any other man. The Philistines supplied Delilah with the stings and waited in an adjacent room to determine if Samson spoke truthfully. Delilah bound Samson with the strings. When alerted to the potential presence of Philistines, Samson snapped the strings. On her second attempt, Samson told Delilah that if he were bound with new ropes he would become as weak as any other man. Again, the Philistines supplied Delilah with new ropes and waited as Delilah bound Samson. But again Samson thwarted her efforts by snapping the new ropes "like a thread" (v. 12).

What does Delilah's persistence communicate about Satan's desire to destroy our potential? How do we see this persistence today?

IF YOU LOVE ME (JUDG. 16:13-15)

VERSE 13

13 Then Delilah said to Samson, "You have mocked me all along and told me lies! Tell me how you can be tied up." He told her, "If you weave the seven braids on my head with the web of a loom—"

Verse 13 records Delilah's third attempt to discover the secret of Samson's strength. After Samson did not answer her direct question (v. 6), Delilah acted in a cunning, calculating, and manipulative manner. As in the second attempt (vv. 10-12), Delilah again accused Samson of mocking her. One senses tension between Samson and Delilah as Delilah accused Samson of lying to her.

Delilah asked for the third time, ***Tell me how you can be tied up.*** As previously (16:7,11), Samson offered an absurd reply. He told Delilah if she would integrate his hair with the fabric being woven on a spinning wheel, he would become as weak as any man. Samson courted disaster with this tease in that his hair was truly the key to his strength.

VERSE 14

14 She fastened the braids with a pin and called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” He awoke from his sleep and pulled out the pin, with the loom and the web.

Evidently Samson lay down beside the loom. Bordering on the comical, he allowed Delilah to weave his long hair into the fabric and tighten it with a weaver’s pin. One can visualize Samson, a giant of a man who once killed a lion empty-handed, a man feared by the Philistines, with his hair woven into a spinning wheel as though he was a child whose hair had been accidentally caught in the apparatus.

The process of having his hair woven into the wheel didn’t seem to concern or disturb Samson, because he fell asleep. As previously (vv. 9,12), Delilah jostled him from his slumber with the announcement **the •Philistines are here!** This attempt proved fruitless as well.

VERSE 15

15 “How can you say, ‘I love you,’” she told him, “when your heart is not with me? This is the third time you have mocked me and not told me what makes your strength so great!”

All three initial attempts got Delilah no closer to Samson’s secret. In this verse, Delilah appealed to the fact that Samson loved her. Unfortunately for Samson, he failed to recognize the fact that Delilah did not reciprocate his love.

We might ask: *How could Samson have been so unperceptive? How did he not see the real Delilah and her intentions?* In two words: misguided love. For the first and only time in the Samson narrative (chaps. 13–16), the writer informed readers that Samson “fell in love” (16:4). In previous chapters Samson “saw a young Philistine woman” (14:1) and “saw a prostitute” (16:1). But Judges 16:4 reveals that he fell in love. He allowed his feelings for Delilah to cloud his judgment to the extent that he made poor decisions and compromised his potential.

We recognize the beauty of the love between a man and a woman. God inaugurated marriage as He instructed a man to leave his father and mother in order to bond with his wife (Gen. 2:24). Such bonding cannot be accomplished without love. The issue with Samson was not his love for a woman but rather the kind of woman he loved.



In what ways might unbelievers and wayward Christians manipulate a believer so as to nullify, even destroy, Christian potential?

THE PHILISTINES ARE HERE (JUDG. 16:16-20)

VERSES 16-18

¹⁶ Because she nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out, ¹⁷ he told her the whole truth and said to her, “My hair has never been cut, because I am a Nazirite to God from birth. If I am shaved, my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man.” ¹⁸ When Delilah realized that he had told her the whole truth, she sent this message to the Philistine leaders: “Come one more time, for he has told me the whole truth.” The Philistine leaders came to her and brought the money with them.

Delilah’s persistence ultimately overwhelmed Samson’s resolve: ***he told her the whole truth***. Of the three requirements of the Nazirite commitment—abstaining from wine, not touching any dead thing, and not cutting one’s hair (Num. 6:1-8; Judg. 13:5)—Samson had kept only the last one. When describing himself as ***a •Nazirite to God from birth***, Samson used a generic word for God instead of the covenant name for the Lord. This suggests a lack of intimacy with God. He showed an amazingly foolish spiritual blind spot by revealing: ***If I am shaved, my strength will leave me***.

VERSE 19

¹⁹ Then she let him fall asleep on her lap and called a man to shave off the seven braids on his head. In this way, she made him helpless, and his strength left him.

Oblivious to the situation, Samson fell ***asleep on*** Delilah’s ***lap***. He would ultimately be destroyed in the very place where he felt the most secure.

Samson was willing to break his Nazirite vow to God and compromise his standing with the Lord for the love of a woman. The real tragedy in Samson’s life occurred not when the Philistines subdued him but when he compromised his potential by trusting a pagan woman rather than the Lord.

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

VERSE 20

²⁰ Then she cried, “Samson, the Philistines are here!” When he awoke from his sleep, he said, “I will escape as I did before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

Delilah woke Samson with *the Philistines are here!* He awoke, saying, *“I will escape as I did before.”* He *did not know that the LORD had left him.* The Lord was the source of Samson’s strength. When he lost the presence of the Lord, he lost his strength. But Samson did not even realize it. It seems that his heart was so far from God that, apart from his lack of strength, he never would have noticed God’s absence from his life.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit empowered individuals for specific tasks (see 14:6). Since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christians receive the indwelling Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation, and He remains in us permanently, providing eternal security (see John 10:27-29; 14:16-17). Nevertheless, by our disobedience we grieve the Holy Spirit and can hinder His work in us and through us.

The end of Samson’s story is told in the remainder of chapter 16. When he was brought into a pagan temple to be mocked, Samson prayed to God for strength to take revenge on his Philistine enemies. He then pushed over two support columns, causing the temple to collapse and kill many Philistines. Samson also died in the disaster.

Samson was an imperfect instrument. He compromised his devotion to the Lord, yet God still used him to deliver His people from their enemies. The lesson here is not that Samson is a model for Christians to follow; the lesson is the danger of spiritual compromise.



IN MY CONTEXT

- Partnering with people who hold non-Christian beliefs and values can lead to spiritual compromise.
- How we treat temptation demonstrates our true love, either for God or for ourselves.
- God may remove His hand of protection from those who betray His trust.

What criteria do you use for determining if you should or should not associate with a person, group, or institution? How do these criteria reflect biblical values?

Discuss with your group actions a believer can take to fend off temptations to compromise Christian beliefs. What can your Bible study group do to encourage one another not to succumb to spiritual compromise? Record insights gained.

Reflect on the truth that believers possess the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit to equip them to ward off spiritual compromise. How does that truth help you as you face temptation? What are you doing to put yourself in a position to more readily listen to the Holy Spirit?

MEMORY VERSE

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted. —Judges 17:6



Session 12

FAITH THROUGH TRIALS

God can use life's tragedies to bring about His purposes.

RUTH 1:6-18

⁶ She and her daughters-in-law prepared to leave the land of Moab, because she had heard in Moab that the LORD had paid attention to His people's need by providing them food. ⁷ She left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and traveled along the road leading back to the land of Judah. ⁸ She said to them, "Each of you go back to your mother's home. May the LORD show faithful love to you as you have shown to the dead and to me. ⁹ May the LORD enable each of you to find security in the house of your new husband." She kissed them, and they wept loudly. ¹⁰ "No," they said to her. "We will go with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi



replied, “Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands?”¹² Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons,¹³ would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me.”¹⁴ Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.¹⁵ Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god. Follow your sister-in-law.”¹⁶ But Ruth replied: Do not persuade me to leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May Yahweh punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped trying to persuade her.

Highlight the counsel given by Naomi to her daughters-in-law. Pay particular attention to any clues about Naomi’s emotional state at the time. Circle key words in Ruth’s commitment statement. What do these key words reveal about her values and beliefs?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Life is filled with tragedies. People receive bad news from their doctors. A midnight call brings unwelcome news of loved ones killed in auto accidents. A woman cries bitterly before her parents because her marriage has failed. A husband comes home dejected because he has lost his job. Children lay in cancer treatment medical centers across the country. Nightly news announces another disaster with multiple fatalities. Tragedies abound.

Many people believe life is only supposed to be filled with joy, success, happiness, and unencumbered progress. Tragedy knocks them off their feet. They often become depressed, disillusioned, and despondent. God can use the greatest tragedies of life to bring them to a much deeper level of dependency on Him.

What events in life cause the greatest distress or desperation? How do these things move us forward in our spiritual growth?

In this week's session we are studying the triple tragedy experienced by Naomi in losing her husband and both of her sons. To make matters worse, she lost them on foreign soil away from Bethlehem, her hometown. She had fled to Moab with her husband and two sons to escape a ravenous famine. The promise of a better life became a nightmare of grief as Naomi became a widow and the mother-in-law of two widows. Yet, in the midst of this horrible devastation, God used the tragedies of Naomi's life to bring about His purposes.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

RUTH 1:1-22

The story of Ruth is set “during the time of the judges” (Ruth 1:1). The faith displayed in the Book of Ruth contrasts sharply with the accounts of faithlessness in the Book of Judges. The events in Ruth are precipitated by “a famine in the land” (v. 1). While famine may be challenging for most Americans to understand, the Hebrews knew famine all too well. There was famine during the days of Abraham (Gen. 12:10), Joseph (Gen. 41:54-57), David (2 Sam. 21:1), Elijah (1 Kings 18:2), Elisha (2 Kings 4:38), Haggai (Hag. 1:10-11), and Nehemiah (Neh. 5:3).

We are not told the cause of the famine during the time of Ruth. Drought was the most common cause of famines in the Old Testament, but famines sometimes were attributed to God's judgment. In Deuteronomy 28, the curses for disobedience to the covenant included famine. If God's people went after other gods, He would send enemies to destroy their crops and occupy their land. This happened



during the time of the judges, as we saw in session 10. Midianite armies trampled Judah's wheat fields like a swarm of locusts (Judg. 6:5), leaving devastation behind them.

To escape the effects of famine, an Israelite named Elimelech [ih LIM uh lek] moved with his wife, Naomi, and two sons from Bethlehem in Judah to the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1). Though the Moabites were perennial enemies of Judah, Elimelech was forced to move his family there in search of food.

After a short time, Elimelech died (v. 3). His two sons then married Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah). Ten years later the sons died as well (vv. 4-5). Naomi was left in a foreign land without the support of a husband or sons. Deciding to return to Judah, she instructed her daughters-in-law to return to their families in Moab. Ruth insisted on going with Naomi. Together, Naomi and Ruth returned to Naomi's home in Bethlehem.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A DESPERATE RETURN (RUTH 1:6-10)

VERSES 6-7

⁶ She and her daughters-in-law prepared to leave the land of Moab, because she had heard in Moab that the LORD had paid attention to His people's need by providing them food. ⁷ She left the place where she had been living, accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and traveled along the road leading back to the land of Judah.

Leaving Moab must have been a difficult decision for Naomi. Having lived in Moab for over 10 years, she had some comfort and security there. The travel home would be difficult—a 7- to 10-day journey of approximately 50 or 60 miles. She would have to cross the Jordan River and climb approximately 2,000 feet in elevation. Added to the arduous journey was the fact that she would be traveling alone or with two other women—neither possibility was prudent in the Old Testament world.

No doubt, Naomi would have been encouraged by hearing news of the relief from the famine back home. She might not thrive in Bethlehem, but at least she would not starve. That ***the LORD had paid attention to His people's needs by providing them food*** suggested divine approval and blessings once more. Naomi must have found

strength in that. Still grieving, Naomi left Moab *accompanied by her two daughters-in-law* and began her journey *back to the land of Judah*.

VERSES 8-10

⁸ She said to them, “Each of you go back to your mother’s home. May the LORD show faithful love to you as you have shown to the dead and to me. ⁹ May the LORD enable each of you to find security in the house of your new husband.” She kissed them, and they wept loudly. ¹⁰ “No,” they said to her. “We will go with you to your people.”

Naomi attempted to persuade Ruth and Orpah not to go to Bethlehem with her. The phrase *go back* translates two imperatives in Hebrew. Naomi commanded her daughters-in-law, literally, “to walk, return” to their mothers’ homes. She offered them her blessing with *may the LORD show faithful love to you*. The Hebrew word translated *faithful love* is the word for God’s covenant loyalty (*chesed*). Naomi was asking the Lord to treat Ruth and Orpah as members of the covenant, though both were Moabites. The fact that the Lord would bestow His faithful love on the non-Hebrew women should not be lost on modern readers. God loves all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, social standing, or gender.

The Old Testament world offered little to no support for widows. (By contrast, the Old Testament records numerous passages of God’s concern and care for widows; see Deut. 14:28-29; 27:19; Pss. 68:5; 146:9.) Naomi knew it was in Ruth and Orpah’s best interest to return to their homeland and remarry. Thus, she offered an additional blessing to encourage them to *find security in the house of a new husband*. With her two-part blessing, Naomi was releasing her daughters-in-law from any sense of further obligation. She was willing to put their best interests above her personal preferences.

One cannot miss the love that Naomi had for Ruth and Orpah as *she kissed them, and they wept loudly*. She had lost her husband and her two sons. Now she was willing to give up her two daughters-in-law.

Ruth and Orpah’s reply and determination may have surprised Naomi. Both daughters-in-law repeated their desire to return with Naomi. They insisted: *“We will go with you to your people.”* It is a testimony to Naomi’s good character that the women did not want to leave her.



Should a believer be ashamed for feeling desperate or distraught? Explain.

A BITTER PLEA (RUTH 1:11-14)

VERSE 11

¹¹ But Naomi replied, “Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands?”

Again, Naomi insisted the women return to their homeland. The word *return* translates an imperative in the original Hebrew. Naomi’s two questions—***Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands?***—reflect the cultural expectations of a levirate marriage. Deuteronomy 25:5 established this ancient principle: “When brothers live on the same property and one of them dies without a son, the wife of the dead man may not marry a stranger outside the family. Her brother-in-law is to take her as his wife.” Levirate marriage served at least three purposes. First, it provided for the widow. Levirate marriage offered widows some sense of security. Second, levirate marriage preserved the family estate. Finally, levirate marriage preserved the family name, an important concept in the Old Testament. Levirate marriage unambiguously communicates God’s concern for widows.

When Naomi’s sons, Mahlon [MA lahn] and Chilion [KIL ih ahn], died, the levirate marriage law meant that the widows Ruth and Orpah could not look outside Naomi’s family for new husbands as long as they were attached to Naomi. They could marry only close relatives of Naomi who could stand in the place of Elimelech’s deceased sons. Naomi was releasing them from this obligation.

VERSES 12-13

¹² Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, ¹³ would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me.”

For the third time, Naomi told her daughters-in-law to **return home**. The concept of levirate marriage can be seen again in Naomi's reference to the hypothetical situation of her giving birth to more sons to marry Ruth and Orpah. Even if she remarried that very night and conceived a child, Naomi asked Ruth and Orpah: **would you be willing to wait for them to grow up?** Naomi answered her own question with a **no**.

Naomi wanted a better life for Ruth and Orpah, insisting her own life was **much too bitter ... to share**. She knew Ruth and Orpah's prospects for finding new husbands were far better if they returned to their fathers. Then they could marry anyone acceptable to their families and to themselves. Naomi was forcing them to see the harsh truth that their future was bleak if they remained with her. Holding on to them would have been an act of selfishness on Naomi's part—in her best interest, but not theirs. So she did the painful, unselfish, and compassionate thing: she told them to return home.

VERSE 14

¹⁴ Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Again we read of the women weeping together. •**Orpah kissed her mother-in-law**, evidently as a gesture of farewell. It is easy for us to consider Ruth the “good” daughter-in-law and Orpah as the “bad” one. In reality, Orpah didn't do anything wrong. She too loved Naomi, wept over her, and kissed her when they parted company. Rather than seeing Orpah as bad, we should see Ruth as extraordinarily loyal and loving.

Ruth clung to Naomi. The Hebrew word translated **clung** can be translated as “bonded.” Ruth had bonded with Naomi to the point that she refused to leave. The Book of Genesis uses the same word to describe the intimacy of the marriage relationship in that “a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife” (2:24).

What steps could we take toward trusting God if life turns bitter for us?

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Family*

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

A LIFELONG PROMISE (RUTH 1:15-18)

VERSES 15-18

¹⁵ Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god. Follow your sister-in-law.” ¹⁶ But Ruth replied: Do not persuade me to leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May Yahweh punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped trying to persuade her.

For the fourth time (vv. 8,11,12), Naomi pleaded with Ruth to stay in Moab. The word **follow** translates a command in Hebrew and indicates Naomi’s determination to convince Ruth to stay.

Ruth replied, **Do not persuade me to leave you.** The Hebrew word translated *persuade* indicates that Naomi had begged Ruth to return to her native land. The verb translated *leave* can also be rendered “forsake” and “abandon.” Did Ruth consider leaving Naomi to be abandonment?

Ruth gave reasons why it was pointless for Naomi to keep trying to persuade her to leave. In her words we find an example of what it means to love. Love means commitment. Ruth made a lifelong promise to Naomi, insisting she would follow Naomi and live wherever Naomi lived. Remember that Ruth was a Moabite, unlike Naomi the Hebrew. Nevertheless, Ruth vowed that Naomi’s people would become her people. Not only did Ruth commit herself to Naomi in life, she committed herself to Naomi in death: **Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.** The relationship between the two of them could come to an end by one means only—death.

Ruth also declared her allegiance to Naomi’s God: **your God will be my God.** In verse 17, Ruth used the personal name of God—**Yahweh.** Ruth would worship the one true God—the One who created and sustains the universe and who set the Israelites free from the bonds of Egyptian slavery.

Ruth was willing to set aside her Moabite identity to join herself to Naomi. Following Naomi and the Lord would involve a renunciation of her past life. In declaring her commitment to Naomi and to the

Lord God, she was willing to give up everything.

Naomi resigned herself to the fact that she could not change Ruth's mind, so she stopped trying to persuade her. Literally, it says that Naomi "stopped talking to her."

Both Naomi and Ruth exemplified a living and vibrant faith, developed through trials. Ruth's declaration of allegiance to Naomi reminds us that faith involves more than just a point of decision; it is a changed way of living that begins with a point of decision.

What does a person's response to life's difficulties reveal about what he or she values? How do the difficulties of life sharpen our faith in God?

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

On one side of a vertical line, identify words and phrases that describe Ruth's pledge to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). On the other side, note words and phrases that describe Peter's pledge to Jesus on the night of his betrayal (Matt. 26:33-34,74-75; Mark 14:29-30,68-72; Luke 22:33-34,60-61; John 13:37-38; 18:27). How are the pledges similar? How do these pledges compare to your pledge to follow Christ?

RUTH'S PLEDGE TO NAOMI

PETER'S PLEDGE TO JESUS

IN MY CONTEXT

- God's plans sometimes involve enduring trials and having to make difficult decisions.
- During times of trials, believers can find comfort and support



through people God has placed in their lives.

- Believers can remain confident that God is worthy of our trust even when we are facing difficulties in life.

Reflect on trials and difficulties you have faced in your life. What did you learn about yourself and God? How have you built on these lessons learned? With whom do you need to share these lessons?

How can your Bible study group interact with those experiencing trials to let them know of your love, concern, and support? Share ideas with each other.

Define a trial or difficulty you are presently facing. What actions can you take that will demonstrate faith in Jesus? Ask God to strengthen your faith in Him through this experience.

MEMORY VERSE

But Ruth replied: Do not persuade me to leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.
—Ruth 1:16



Session 13

REDEEMED AND SECURE

God can surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His purposes.

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

^{3:8} At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! ⁹ So he asked, “Who are you?” “I am Ruth, your slave,” she replied. “Spread your cloak over me, for you are a family redeemer.” ¹⁰ Then he said, “May the LORD bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ Now don’t be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. ¹³ Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you,



that's good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn't want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie down until morning." [...] ^{4:13} Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he was intimate with her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Praise the LORD, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel. ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." ¹⁶ Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and took care of him. ¹⁷ The neighbor women said, "A son has been born to Naomi," and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Notice the promises made by Boaz. How would these promises offer Ruth hope and security?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Sometimes, life situations make us feel helpless and hopeless. Abandoned children often become victims in systems that fail to meet their needs. Widows spend long hours alone facing uncertain futures. Sudden illness interrupts an otherwise seemingly normal life. Financial and family problems force students to drop out of school. Spouses often suffer great emotional stress as they watch their marriage crumble.

Each of these scenarios plays out every day around the world. Even the most faithful followers of the Lord can be shaken, becoming disoriented in their spiritual walk and filled with despair. If left to themselves, they often make bad choices in an effort to cover the pain. These bad choices further complicate the problems.

The surprise twists of life can make us wonder if unexpected crises and catastrophes derail God's plans and purposes for our lives. If we search, we find that God can restore us and bless us again. In the process, He can surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His purposes.

Looking back over the hard times of your life, how did God use an unlikely person to advance His purposes through your difficulties?

In this week's session we see how God used Boaz, a "family redeemer," to bring help and hope to Naomi and Ruth. When Ruth vowed to stay with Naomi (1:16-17), she had no idea what would become of the two of them. Naomi described her life as having been made bitter by the Lord (1:13,20). Like Naomi, Ruth was a widow with no visible prospects of support. Yet, Ruth put Naomi's welfare above her own, a sacrificial act of love that would factor into God's plan (2:10-12).

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

RUTH 2:1–4:22

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (1:22). Ruth took the initiative to help provide for Naomi by going to the nearby grainfields and trailing the harvesters to gather left-behind grain (2:2). Boaz, "a prominent man of noble character" (2:1) and one of Naomi's relatives, noticed and befriended Ruth. He immediately took action to provide for the two widows.

In last week's session we looked at the custom of levirate marriage. Levirate marriage required that when a married man died childless, his brother or next of kin had to marry the widow and father a son who would carry on the family name (Deut. 25:5-10). Naomi knew that Boaz, as a relative of her husband Elimelech [ih LIM uh lek], could be a suitable husband in a levirate marriage. She helped Ruth understand how to approach Boaz. Ruth followed her advice and asked for Boaz's help as a family redeemer (3:12). A family redeemer had responsibilities in addition to fulfilling the levirate marriage. One was to seek vengeance if a wrong was committed against a family member. (This role does not play a factor in the story of Ruth.) Another responsibility of the redeemer was to assure a deceased man's estate stayed in the family.

Eventually, Ruth married Boaz and became pregnant. They named their son Obed. Obed had a son named Jesse and a grandson named David. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus informs readers: "Boaz



fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered King David” (1:5-6). God chose a non-Israelite woman to be included in the lineage of Jesus, our Redeemer.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INQUIRY (RUTH 3:8-9)

VERSES 8-9

⁸ At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman! ⁹ So he asked, “Who are you?” “I am Ruth, your slave,” she replied. “Spread your cloak over me, for you are a family redeemer.”

Ruth worked in the fields until the end of the barley and wheat seasons, staying close to Boaz’s female servants (2:23). The fact that Ruth still had no husband pained Naomi (3:1). Realizing the potential of Boaz as a husband for Ruth, Naomi presented a plan.

At night, harvesters protected their grains from thieves and animals by sleeping in the threshing area. On this particular night the responsibility fell to Boaz. Following Naomi’s directions, Ruth went to the Boaz’s threshing floor. As Boaz slept, she positioned herself at Boaz’s feet.

Imagine Boaz’s alarm and puzzlement to wake up at midnight and discover Ruth **lying at his feet**. It is important we emphasize that both Boaz and Ruth were people of the highest moral and spiritual integrity. Ruth is called “a woman of noble character” in 3:11. Boaz was described earlier as a “man of noble character” (2:1).

Boaz inquired of Ruth: **“Who are you?”** Notice the lack of any pretense from Ruth. After giving her name, she referred to herself as Boaz’s **slave**.

No doubt Naomi believed that Boaz would initiate the conversation regarding Ruth’s intentions. When Boaz hesitated, Ruth took the initiative. With **spread your cloak over me**, Ruth made her objectives clear. This was a request for protection. The phrase was especially associated with marriage. In essence, Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz.

When Boaz first encountered Ruth, he invoked a divine blessing on her that God might reward her since she sought refuge under the Lord’s “wings” (see 2:12). The Hebrew word for “wings” translates here as **cloak**.

Ruth was requesting that Boaz be instrumental in his previous blessing. Whereas Boaz had recognized that Ruth sought refuge under the wings of the Lord, Ruth now wanted Boaz to know that God intended to protect her (and Naomi) under Boaz's cloak.

Ruth told Boaz: ***you are a family redeemer***. The Hebrew word translated *family redeemer* delineated the responsibilities of the next-of-kin in crisis situations such as that of Naomi and Ruth. In the case of the death of a husband without a son, the redeemer concept became operative. The law (see Deut. 25:5-10) stipulated that the next-of-kin (eventually Boaz) would marry the widow (Ruth) in order to provide a male descendant for the deceased (Mahlon and, by extension, Elimelech). This insured the perpetuation of the family name and inheritance. Family redeemers were obligated to buy back land if the family had had to sell it or to redeem family members from debt-related slavery. We can easily parallel Boaz's redemption of Ruth (and Naomi) with Christ's redemption of sinners. Boaz's role as family redeemer was fulfilled in greater measure by Christ, our Redeemer.

How would you characterize Ruth's approach to Boaz? How does her approach to Boaz compare to how we should approach Jesus, our Redeemer?

BIBLE SKILL: *Review additional passages to gain a clearer understanding.*

Review the following passages: Exodus 6:6-8; Leviticus 25:24-28; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Job 19:25; Psalms 19:14; 69:18; Isaiah 43:1; Acts 7:35; Revelation 5:1-5. How would you describe a family redeemer based on these passages? How does this give you a greater understanding of the role Jesus plays as our Redeemer?



INTEREST (RUTH 3:10-13)

VERSE 10

10 Then he said, “May the LORD bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor.”

These verses clearly indicate that Boaz did not misconstrue Ruth’s intentions. Boaz voiced his willingness to marry Ruth, thus redeeming Elimelech’s name and family. **You have shown more kindness now than before** referred to Ruth’s initial kindness to Naomi. Initially, Ruth committed herself to Naomi (see 1:16-17). Now Ruth committed herself to Boaz as a potential wife. Boaz responded positively and immediately. He voiced his elation that Ruth had chosen him. He knew that Ruth could have **pursued younger men, whether rich or poor**. The phrase *rich or poor* speaks volumes to Ruth’s character. In essence, Boaz knew Ruth could have had practically any man of her picking.

VERSE 11

11 Now don’t be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character.

Even after Boaz communicated his willingness to marry her, Ruth undoubtedly experienced fear and hesitation. Perhaps Boaz sensed her anxieties and attempted to ease those feelings with **don’t be afraid, my daughter**. Consider for a moment all Ruth had experienced: the death of her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband; separation from her sister-in-law; childlessness; living in a foreign land with only her mother-in-law and foraging for food. Boaz attempted to reassure her.

VERSES 12-13

12 Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. 13 Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, that’s good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn’t want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie down until morning.”

While willing to assume his redeemer responsibility, Boaz informed Ruth of the existence of another potential redeemer **closer than I am**. Ruth

and Naomi appear to have been unaware of this person. Although the Bible does not say, Boaz could have been a second cousin to Elimelech, while this unnamed redeemer was a first cousin. We do not know the specifics.

Boaz's words must have been discouraging to Ruth. She knew Boaz's character. He had treated her kindly and honorably. He had demonstrated his generosity to her. Ruth must have thought: What might be the character of this nearer relative? Kind? Caring? Abusive? Neglectful? Aloof?

Boaz had no option. He knew the closer redeemer had the initial responsibility to redeem Ruth. Boaz told her: ***if he wants to redeem you, that's good.*** Was he trying to encourage her? Boaz and Ruth both knew that her redemption by someone else might not be *good*. Boaz offered a supportive word with ***but if he doesn't want to redeem you ... I will.*** Regardless of the outcome, Boaz promised to tend to the issue in the morning.

Boaz gave Ruth one final gift of "six measures of barley" (3:15). Ruth returned to Naomi and "told her everything the man had done for her" (3:16).

What feelings have you experienced as you began to realize the Lord was working things out in a positive way for you?

INHERITANCE (RUTH 4:13-17)

VERSE 13

¹³ Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he was intimate with her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

Ruth 4:1-12 records Boaz's meeting with the closest redeemer. Boaz gathered 10 men of the city to serve as witnesses to whatever decision the closer redeemer made. Boaz made the man aware of the availability of property that belonged to their relative, Elimelech. He reminded him that, as the family redeemer, he had the opportunity to purchase the property. The man said, "I want to redeem it" (v. 4). Boaz then informed him that when he bought the property he also acquired



Ruth, the wife of the deceased man. The phrase “to perpetuate the man’s name” (v. 5) is a reference to levirate marriage. (See p. 133.)

At the mention of Ruth, the closer redeemer insisted he could not serve as the kinsman-redeemer lest he “ruin” his own inheritance (v. 6). The Bible provides no explanation as to why a marriage to Ruth would jeopardize the closer redeemer’s own inheritance. Regardless, the closer redeemer forfeited his right to Elimelech’s property and relinquished his right to redeem Ruth. This provided Boaz the opportunity to take on the role of Ruth’s redeemer. He **took Ruth and she became his wife**. God caused Ruth **to conceive, and she gave birth to a son**.

As Boaz willingly became Ruth’s redeemer, Jesus willingly took on the role of our Redeemer when He took our place on the cross.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Humanity*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God.

VERSE 14

14 Then the women said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel.

Naomi’s friends celebrated with an enthusiastic **“Praise the LORD.”** The entire community had reason to rejoice. The women delighted in the fact that the Lord did not leave Naomi (and Ruth) **without a family redeemer**. Boaz’s action redeemed Elimelech’s family, perpetuated the family name, and saved Naomi and Ruth from potential lives of adversity. The women voiced a prayer that the name of Ruth’s child might **become well known in Israel**. Boaz indeed perpetuated Elimelech’s family name in that we know this child as the grandfather of King David.

VERSES 15-16

15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” **16 Naomi took the child, placed**

him on her lap, and took care of him.

The jubilation of Naomi's friends continued with the fact that this child would **renew** Naomi's life and **sustain** her as she aged. No one could deny the love that Ruth had for Naomi: she **is better to you than seven sons**. One can visualize the proud grandmother Naomi as she **took the child, placed him on her lap, and took care of him**.

VERSE 17

¹⁷ The neighbor women said, "A son has been born to Naomi," and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

When the women of the community stated that "**a son has been born to Naomi**," they recognized the importance of the child in redeeming Naomi's life. Boaz and Ruth named the child **•Obed**, meaning "servant of the Lord." Perhaps Boaz and Ruth chose the name as their prayer that this baby might grow to become a servant of Yahweh. Obed met and exceeded all expectations as he, in the lineage of Jesus, served all humankind.

Take a moment to scan the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1. Many readers will recognize the names of prominent individuals, such as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Other prominent names include the kings David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah. The fact that God used these men in such a way comes as no surprise. Other names in Jesus' genealogy might be surprising. For example, other than the fact that we read their names in Jesus' genealogy, what do we know about Shealtiel [shih AL tih el], Abiud [uh BIGH uhd], and Azor (Matt. 1:12-14)? The answer: practically nothing. A closer reading of the genealogy reveals the names of four women, including Ruth. The record of these women, as well as the record of the relatively unknown men, demonstrates the fact that God can surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His purposes.

What does the inclusion of Ruth in His redemptive plan reveal to us about God? What are the implications of Ruth being included?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Living with integrity leads to finding favor with God and others.
- Believers can face trials and challenges with confidence, knowing that God can use these for His honor and glory.
- God is always at work, making His redemptive plan known.

Discuss as a group the value of integrity in relation to our witness. What actions can the group take to foster integrity?

What opportunities is God placing in front of you that come out of trials and challenges you have faced? How can God use those trials and challenges for His honor? Ask Him to help you honor Him in the trials and challenges.

What role do you play in revealing God's redemptive plan to others? How can you use the information on the inside front cover to reveal that plan to others?

MEMORY VERSE

Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, who has not forsaken his kindness to the living or the dead.” Naomi continued, “The man is a close relative. He is one of our family redeemers.” —Ruth 2:20



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THANK GOD, GOD WILL TELL US **THE TRUTH**

By Michael Kelley



➤ Truth is hard to come by right now.

Because information is prevalent, because sources are so pervasive, because opinions are so pronounced, who's to say what's really true and what's not? There's this version by so-and-so and that version by what's-his-name and in the end we are all just clamoring for someone to tell us what's really, actually, genuinely, truly true.

We can't trust the culture to tell us the truth because that version of the truth is colored with the latest trends.

We can't trust others to tell us the truth because they are too worried they'll hurt our feelings or that we won't like them any more.

We can't even trust ourselves to tell us the truth because we know the minute we start telling ourselves the truth it will begin to cost us something.

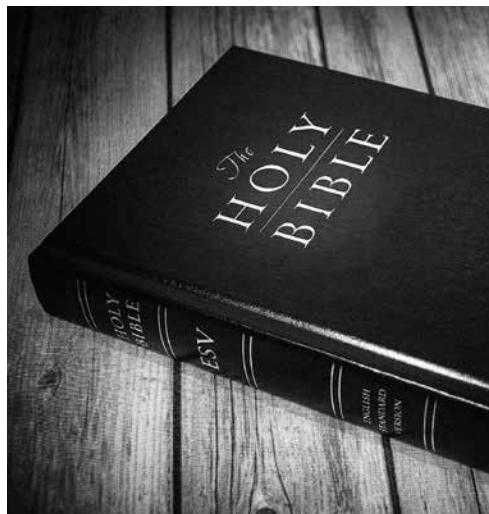
My kingdom for something actually, completely true.

Says King Jesus: “Sanctify them by the truth; Your Word is truth” (John 17:17).

We can trust God to tell us the truth, and that is a truly wonderful thing. In a world of half-truths, mostly-truths, and non-truths, we have a Word of truth at our fingertips. We have a God who loves us too much not to be honest with us.

Though wonderful, this is also a belief we must fight for, and I don’t mean in this case fighting in the public square. I mean fighting in our own hearts. We must each approach the Bible, on a daily basis, asking the question of whether or not we truly believe God is telling us the truth. The answer to that question is really the answer to the question of what comes next in our response.

Of course, this also has implications for the way we do ministry in our Bible study groups. We must be committed to telling one another the truth, even when that truth is difficult to speak and even more difficult to hear. We must do this because we love each other, and we love each other in the same truthful kind of way God loves us.



Will we read and speak and obey, even if it’s a costly obedience? We will do exactly that if indeed we believe God is telling us the truth. That means, uncomfortably, that our standard of obedience is reflective of something more than our willpower; it’s reflective of whether we believe our God to be honest or a liar.

This article originally appeared on the LifeWay Groups Ministry blog (lifeway.com/groupministry). Michael Kelley serves as Director of Groups Ministry for Lifeway Christian Resources.



THE NAZIRITE VOW

By Byron Longino

➤➤ Samson, a mighty man of the Bible known for his great strength, fearsome fighting skills, and long hair, should also be known for a lifelong vow and the price he paid for breaking it. An angel of the Lord called Samson to a life as a “Nazirite,” an individual uniquely devoted to God.

PARAMETERS

The word “Nazirite” comes from the Hebrew term *nazir* and refers to someone who demonstrates consecration and devotion. Numbers 6:1-21 is the only biblical passage that details the requirements of the Nazirite vow. The Hebrew phrase translated “makes a special vow” in Numbers 6:2 emphasizes the commitment of someone strongly devoted to God. The vow marked the point at which the individual entered a state of total separation “to” the Lord and “from” certain normally permissible community practices and traditions.

Two types of Nazirite vows existed—lifelong and limited. In the first, a parent made the vow or accepted the calling for a yet-to-be-conceived child to be a Nazirite. In the second, the individual made the vow for a limited period of time. This second type was the more common practice.

The Lord commanded Nazirites to abstain from three actions: (1) consuming wine and other grape-related products; (2) cutting their hair; and (3) touching the dead. The Nazirite regulations required the one under the vow to go beyond the dietary requirements of the Israelite culture in general. The uncut hair provided the visible sign of the Nazirite’s state of consecration. All Israelites were to avoid contact with the dead unless the burial of a family member required contact. The person under a Nazirite vow could not even come into contact with a dead loved one (Num. 6:7).

PARTICIPANTS

The New Testament portrays John the Baptist as having some Nazirite characteristics. Additionally, Paul appears to have taken a Nazirite vow for a designated period of time, which he completed, as indicated by his cutting his hair (Acts 18:18).

Samson, an Old Testament judge, is the only individual the Bible specifically designates as being a Nazirite. An angel announced to Samson's mother that she would conceive and have a son who would be consecrated to God as a Nazirite. Samson acknowledged his commission (Judg. 16:17) and lived as a lifelong Nazirite.

The Bible does not portray Samson in a positive manner. He was disrespectful to his parents and craved the pleasures of the pagan Philistine culture. Seeing a young Philistine woman, he demanded that his parents arrange for him to marry her (Judg. 14:1-8), an act contrary to God's law. More than once, Samson violated the prohibition not to touch a dead body (14:8-9; 15:15; 16:7-9).

In spite of being a Nazirite, Samson reflected a self-centered personality rather than a God-centered concern for his people. This attitude led to Samson's

downfall and ultimate demise. The Philistines captured him, gouged out his eyes, and put him on display in their temple to their primary god Dagon. From there Samson prayed for strength to pull down the temple upon the Philistines who were glorifying Dagon for their victory over the Israelites and their God. Samson asked God for strength so he could enact revenge upon the Philistines for gouging out his eyes. God gave him strength. Samson pushed the pillars, causing the temple to collapse and killing all who were inside—including himself.

Although Samson's interest even at the end of his life lay in revenge rather than glorifying God, the Lord used him to strip the glory from the Philistines' false god since Samson's God was the one left standing. Perhaps this is why Samson is listed among those of whom God approved because of their faith and who "gained strength after being weak" (Heb. 11:32-34).

This article is condensed from the original, which appeared in the Summer 2012 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Byron Longino is an adjunct professor of Old Testament and archaeology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana, and is pastor of Bethsaida Baptist Church, Ida, Louisiana.



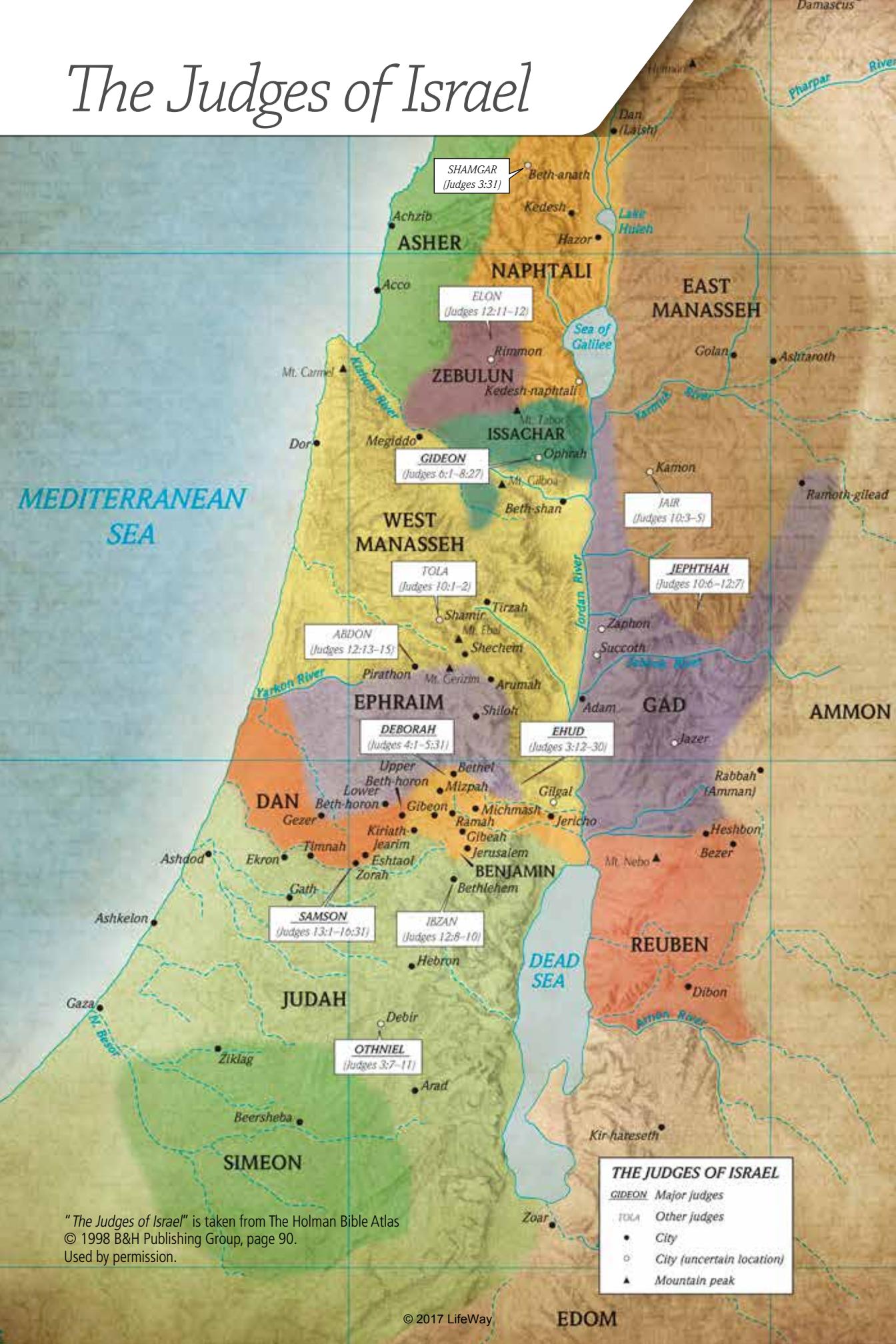
COMING NEXT QUARTER

MATTHEW 14–28

- Session 1** Who is Jesus? > *Matthew 16:13-28*
- Session 2** Is Jesus Fully God? > *Matthew 17:1-13*
- Session 3** What is Required? > *Matthew 19:16-26*
- Session 4** More Than a Prophet? > *Matthew 21:1-11*
- Session 5** If I Reject Jesus? > *Matthew 21:33-45*
- Session 6** Offered to All? > *Matthew 22:1-14*
- Session 7** Where is Jesus?* > *Matthew 28:1-15*
- Session 8** What About the Future? > *Matthew 24:36-51*
- Session 9** How Do We Remember? > *Matthew 26:17-30*
- Session 10** Do I Have the Strength? > *Matthew 26:36-46*
- Session 11** Loyal? > *Matthew 26:63-75*
- Session 12** Crucified > *Matthew 27:41-52*
- Session 13** What Do We Do Now? > *Matthew 28:16-20*

*Easter evangelistic emphasis

The Judges of Israel



THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL

GIDEON Major judges

TOLA Other judges

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ▲ Mountain peak

"The Judges of Israel" is taken from The Holman Bible Atlas
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Joshua; Judges; Ruth

God is moving. It is undeniable when we look into the Old Testament books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. Any thoughts that God is a disconnected deity floating aimlessly somewhere in the heavens is simply not what the Bible teaches. Instead, these books of the Bible tell us that God is active. He is involved in the lives of His people. In this study, you will see that God has a plan and He fulfills His promises. You will learn that God uses the most unexpected of people to do extraordinary feats of power and grace. You will be encouraged that even in your darkest hour, God is moving on your behalf. You will be inspired to follow Him in faith.



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