

Explore the Bible®

Winter 2016-17 > Tony Evans, General Editor

Joshua; Judges; Ruth

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LIFE BY DESIGN

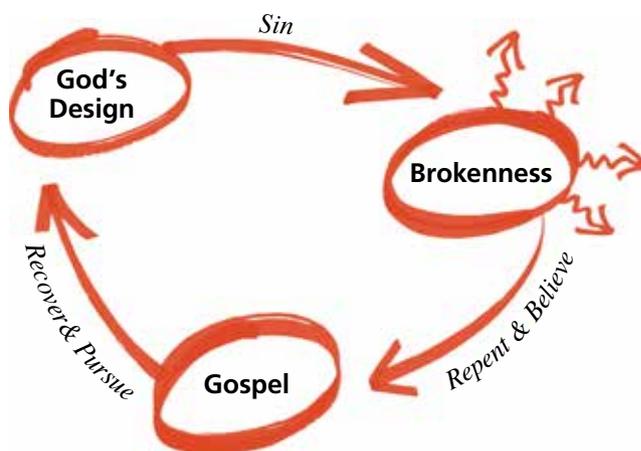
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

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*.

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* Christmas and evangelistic emphasis

** Sanctity of human life emphasis

» WRITERS

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A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR

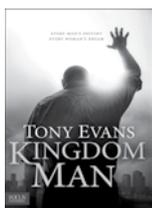


God is moving. It is undeniable when we look into Joshua, Judges, and Ruth. Any thoughts that He is a disconnected deity floating aimlessly somewhere in the heavens is not what the Bible teaches. Instead, these books tell us that God is active and involved in the lives of His people.

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



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TWO WAYS TO USE QUICKSOURCE

➤ AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE LEADER GUIDE

1. After completing your study using the commentary provided in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, consult the Exploring Key Words section and the Talking Points page for additional insight or as a review.
2. After creating your initial plans for guiding the group time using the suggestions included in the Leader Guide, supplement and refine your plan using the ideas found in QuickSource. You will also want to consult the Explore the Bible blog (LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible) or Explore the Bible MinistryGrid page (MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

➤ AS YOUR PRIMARY RESOURCE FOR PREPARING TO LEAD A SMALL BIBLE STUDY GROUP

1. Read and study the core passage.

Use Exploring Key Words on the first page of the session content to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible like the HCSB Study Bible (also available online at myWSB.com) and a Bible commentary like the Explore the Bible Adult Commentary (available at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage.

2. Review the outline provided on the Talking Points page (page 2 of each session).

Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study time. Note: You may want to make a photocopy of the Talking Points page so you can use *QuickSource* again in the future.

3. Review the questions on the Discussion Plan page (page 3 of each session).

Identify the questions you believe would work best with the group you are leading. Reword the selected questions to reflect your personality and the personality of the group. Record the reworded questions on the Talking Points page (or the photocopy you made of the page) next to the point related to the question. Remember to arrange the questions so that you are leading the group to a conclusion or action.

4. Consider ways of using the Object Lesson idea (page 4 of each session).

Brainstorm other ideas sparked by the object lesson suggestion.

5. Read the Dig Deeper feature (page 4 of each session).

Add insights gained from this page to the Talking Points page.

6. Use the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG).

Scan a copy of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG), looking for additional questions and the Bible skill feature. Consider ways of incorporating the Bible skill into the session, recording your ideas on the Talking Points page. Record additional questions from the PSG on the Talking Points page as well.

7. Review and refine.

Consult the Explore the Bible blog (Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras) or Explore the Bible Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploreTheBible) for additional ideas.

8. Arrive early.

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person so you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time.

9. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Carry the Talking Points page into the class, using this page as your guide for leading the group.



INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA; JUDGES; RUTH

The Books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth recount Israel's conquest of the promised land and the challenges the people faced in the generations that followed. The books highlight the blessing that comes through faithful obedience and the disaster that follows unbelief and disobedience. The stories they tell continue to inspire followers of Jesus to faithful living.

» JOSHUA

Overview—As the Book of Joshua begins, Moses has died and Joshua has assumed leadership. Perhaps many in Israel wondered whether Joshua would prove as successful as his predecessor. However, through the miracles God worked and the victories God won, God's people saw that the same God who empowered Moses now empowered Joshua.

Chapters 1–12 recall Israel's conquest of the promised land. The people conducted three major campaigns—central, southern, and northern—and through them, achieved effective control of the land.

Chapters 13–21 record Israel's division of the land of Canaan and the Transjordan into tribal territories. Tribes received their portions, and Joshua instructed them to clear out the remaining peoples of the land. The people also established cities of refuge and levitical cities throughout the land.

Chapters 22–24 document Israel's final days under Joshua's leadership. A potential spiritual compromise by Israel's eastern tribes (Reuben, Gad, Manasseh) was clarified, and the book closes with Joshua's final speeches to Israel and the covenant he made with them.

Writer—The Book of Joshua does not name its writer; some have suggested at least major portions came from Joshua or someone close to Joshua. Much of the book reads as if someone who had witnessed the events or heard of them firsthand recorded them.

Date of Writing—The common occurrence of the phrase “to this day” (for example, see Josh. 4:9; 5:9; 6:25; 7:26) suggests some time had passed since the original events. When we look at all the evidence, it seems reasonable to conclude the inspired writer completed the work by Solomon's time (c. 970 B.C.).

Purpose—The Book of Joshua links the accounts of Israel's time in the wilderness (Numbers–Deuteronomy) with the turbulent period of the judges (Judges). It highlights Israel's conquest, division, and settlement of the land God had promised to their ancestors centuries earlier. God's promises to His people all came true (Josh. 21:43–45).

» JUDGES

Overview—The Book of Judges follows immediately after the Book of Joshua and describes a period where “everyone did whatever he wanted” because Israel had no king (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). The generation after Joshua forgot the Lord and began to adopt the pagan practices of the Canaanite peoples they were supposed to eradicate. This led to a four-stage cycle that repeats itself in the book:

1. Sin: The people forsook the Lord and worshiped other gods.
2. Suffering: The Lord sent suffering, usually in the form of an oppressor, to turn His people back to him.
3. Supplication: The people cried out to God and repented of their idolatry.
4. Salvation: God raised up a judge to save the people and lead them for a time.

Ultimately, the book reveals that the people could not govern themselves. They needed God to lead them.

Writer—The Book of Judges is anonymous but, like the Book of Joshua, appears to reflect the original testimony of people close to the events themselves, even if someone else recorded their accounts at a later time under God’s leading.

Date of Writing—The reference to Israel’s anarchy apart from having a king (Judg. 17:6; 21:25) suggests the book comes from a time when Israel had a king. Judges 18:30 mentions the northern kingdom’s fall, which occurred in 722 B.C., so the book would not have been completed prior to this, but it is impossible to date the book with precision.

Purpose—The book chronicles the downward spiritual spiral that the nation of Israel encountered as it forsook the God who had established His covenant with them. The people needed solid leadership from someone who would set a good spiritual example. The book also profoundly highlights God’s grace to His wayward people again and again.

➤➤ RUTH

Overview—The key events of the Book of Ruth occur during the turbulent period of the judges, when “everyone did whatever he wanted” (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). An Israelite family journeyed to Moab, where the sons married Moabite women. When hard times led to the death of the men in the family, Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth returned to Bethlehem, Naomi’s hometown. There, Ruth cared for Naomi, and in the providence of God, secured another husband—Boaz—with whom she had a son and continued her family line. At the end of the book, we discover Ruth became part of the ancestry of King David.

Writer—The writer of the book is unknown but was someone familiar with the ancestry of King David who saw fit to document the heartwarming story of Ruth and Naomi so later generations could see God’s sovereign hand in history.

Date of Writing—The end of the book (Ruth 4:17-22) reveals the primary occasion for its writing—to recount the ancestry of David. This places its composition sometime during David’s reign (1011–971 B.C.).

Purpose—The Book of Ruth ultimately chronicles David’s ancestry. At the same time, it provides insight into God’s sovereign purpose and His ability to take Ruth’s faithful life and bless her in ways she could not have imagined.

➤➤ KEY THEMES

- *God’s providence.* God works through people and events to advance His kingdom purpose throughout history. That kingdom purpose includes the covenant He has established with His people.
- *Repentance and restoration.* God responds again and again to his people’s heartfelt repentance. He desires them to experience restoration and blessing rather than judgment.
- *Personal responsibility.* People are responsible to God for the choices they make. Some choices lead to God’s blessing; others lead to sad consequences.
- *God’s grace.* God consistently shows His undeserved favor to His children. He invites them to experience an abundant life they cannot know without Him.

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

JOSHUA 1:1-9

¹ After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to **Joshua son of Nun**,^a who had **served Moses**.^b

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**.^c ³ I have given you **every place where the sole of your foot treads**,^d just as I promised Moses. ⁴ Your territory will be from the wilderness and Lebanon to **the great Euphrates River**^e—all the land of the **Hittites**^f—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**.^g I will not leave you or forsake you.

⁶ "**Be strong and courageous**,^h for you will **distribute**ⁱ 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**^j 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**^k 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."

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Just as the Judges who would come later, Joshua was a military/charismatic/political leader, not primarily a spiritual one.
- b** "Moses' aide" (NIV). God showed that Joshua fully stepped into the role vacated by Moses and earned the title "the LORD's servant" by the end of the book (Josh. 24:29).
- c** The land promised by God to the Israelites to be delivered by God (Gen. 12:1-2; Num. 10:29; Heb. 11:9)
- d** This promise of God to the Israelites was predicated on their obedience. Later their obedience was incomplete, thus, the promise was partially fulfilled.
- e** The Israelites never reached this northeastern boundary in the conquest (though they were close during King Solomon's time), possibly because of failures in obedience. They never fully drove the Canaanites out either.
- f** The Bible often uses the term Hittite synonymously with the term Canaanite, though the Canaanites included many other people groups.
- g** God anointed and comforted Joshua.
- h** Almost like a parent to an inattentive or scared child, God says this phrase three times in this passage (vv. 6-7,9). God will not allow us to sit idly by while He does the work, as each of us has our role to play. Joshua is encouraged to act according to God's promise—and with confidence.
- i** God was already giving Joshua the task of dividing the land before they entered it. Joshua was to be careful to divide it according to the ancient promises.
- j** The Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible, were already in some written form.
- k** Success in God's kingdom always comes from obedience.

NOTES

»» A NEW LEADER (Josh. 1:1-5)

- After the death of Moses, God commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelites into the promised land. Within that commission, God promised success to Joshua and always to be with Joshua, just as he had been with Moses.
- Compare the giving of the land to God giving His Son and salvation.

»» A NEW TASK (Josh. 1:6)

- God charged Joshua to be strong and courageous in taking on the task of distributing the land the Israelites were about to possess.

»» A NEW TRUST (Josh. 1:7-9)

- God also charged Joshua to be strong and courageous in following God's law as Israel's new leader. God reminded Joshua that he would find success through obedience.
- Note: Emphasize that Joshua's military success depended upon his obedience to God's law.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God can be trusted to keep His promises.
- God's presence is a source of strength and courage when facing life's challenges.
- Believers are to trust God and His Word in all areas of their lives.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Think back to your first day of high school or college. What were your expectations? How did you feel going into these new situations?

- Many times when we venture into a new situation or stage of life, we can feel a mixture of stress, fear, and anxiety—as well as excitement. What lays before us is something we haven't experienced, and so for us, it's truly the unknown.
- Today we're going to study Joshua, as he prepared to venture into the unknown. For the first time Joshua would lead Israel without Moses, as he had passed away. God addressed Joshua directly, as He commissioned him to lead the people into the promised land.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JOSHUA 1:1-5

In verse 1, what specific information are we given about Joshua?

- That he is the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, and most importantly, the Lord chose to speak to him after Moses' death.

What made God's instruction to Joshua regarding the Jordan River so essential?

- Explain the importance of God's call on Joshua's life. Since it was God who directly commissioned Joshua, Joshua could have confidence in his calling to lead God's people.

What promises did God make to Joshua in verses 3-5? What do these verses teach us about God?

- God makes four specific promises to Joshua: (1) He would give Joshua every place he walks (v. 3). (2) No one would be able to stand before him (v. 5). (3) God would be with Joshua like He was with Moses (v. 5). (4) God would never leave or forsake Joshua (v. 5).
- These verses show us that God is a sovereign God who will do what He says. Point the group to the specific nature of how God would fulfill verse 3 as shown in verse 4.

JOSHUA 1:6

Facing this monumentally important task in Israel's history, how did God encourage Joshua?

- God specifically told Joshua to be strong and courageous.
- Point the group to the second part of the verse, and explain that God revealed why Joshua could be strong and courageous; God would make sure Joshua succeeded.

What do we learn from this verse that we can apply to our own monumental tasks that we face?

- God is unchanging (Deut. 33:27; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). As such, we can have confidence in Him and His promises when we are facing a task God has called us to accomplish.

JOSHUA 1:7-9

In verse 7, God called Joshua to courage again. What was the significance of repeating this call?

- Joshua was called to "be strong and courageous" spiritually.
- As Israel's new leader, it was vital that Joshua walked with God through obedience to the law, as he was becoming the example for all God's people to follow.

How did Joshua's spiritual faithfulness impact his role as leader of Israel?

- God told Joshua that he would find success only through obedience to Him.
- This success extended to military success as well.
- Joshua would understand the weightiness of the matter as the reality of military conflict approached.
- Joshua's spiritual life would have a direct impact on the lives of the men and women under his charge.

God was clear to Joshua about the importance of obedience. How can we faithfully pursue the blessings of obedience in our lives? Of what dangers should we be aware as we pursue obedience?

- When we are in the Word and are walking with God in obedience, our spiritual lives are healthier and we are more aware of God's will for our lives.
- As we are obedient, we must avoid the dangers of legalism, or any type of works-based righteousness.
- Here Joshua was practicing a righteousness that would directly flow out of his relationship with God. It is the same for us today.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What does God's call of Joshua teach us about the nature of God? How does this encourage us in our personal lives and in the life of our church?

- We see that God is a God who keeps His promises and who won't leave His people
- As believers, we have God's presence with us always through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- As a church, we should courageously follow God's call for our ministries and mission work.
- **Personal Challenge:** In this text we learn how we can trust God to be with us in all that He calls us to do. This week, think about a church member or friend who needs to hear this valuable truth, and take the time to encourage them with it.

A WORLD MAP

Secure a copy of a world map. (Search the Internet for “World Map Image.”) Prior to the session, enlist someone to identify countries or areas where your church or a member of your church has been on mission. If possible, be ready to explain about upcoming mission opportunities in the community and around the world.

To conclude the session, point out the map you’ve displayed. Explain: *In this session, we have seen how God commissioned Joshua to lead His people, and how Joshua had to trust and follow God’s call for him. This call to follow God in what He has called us to is not just for Bible heroes but for all Christians. Each year dozens of missionaries are commissioned by churches and mission organizations to take the gospel to the ends of the earth and to unreached areas of our country; yet all Christians are commissioned and equipped by God to go, and He promises to be there for us if we trust Him.*

Allow time for those you’ve enlisted to discuss missionary experiences and/or future opportunities.



Then close by explaining: *God has commissioned us, the church, to take His gospel to all the world (Matt. 28:18-20). Each Christian has a part to play in that mission. The only question is, will we trust what God is calling us to do?*

DIG DEEPER

GOD IS WITH YOU

At this point in Scripture, Moses was gone. He was likely a crutch for some and an inspiration for others. Joshua, the new leader of this great nation needed fortitude and guidance. Furthermore, there could not have been a worse time for these changes to happen. The children of God had faced enormous challenges, but nothing quite like taking over an entire land with its people. These nonmilitary types now would need to be warlike and united.

In Joshua 1:9, God said, “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 needed this encouragement, as did the people under his leadership. When shaky times come, it is good to know we are standing on solid ground.

This was the case with Lina Sandell, who was called the Swedish “Fanny Crosby” for her prolific hymnody. Lina wrote approximately 650 hymns, which were helpful during the Scandinavian revivals that broke out in the late 1800s.

When she was 26, Lina experienced a life-changing tragedy. She was with her father on a ship while crossing Lake Vattern toward Gothenburg, Sweden, when “the ship gave a sudden lurch and Lina’s father, a devout Lutheran minister, fell overboard and drowned before the eyes of his devoted daughter.”¹

Lina had written many hymns before this day, but her sadness drove her to write the words for “Day by Day,” one of our most memorable hymns today:

“Day by day and with each passing moment,
strength I find to meet my trials here;
trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
gives unto each day what He deems best—
lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
mingling toil with peace and rest.”²

Deep emotional upheaval, fearful challenges, zigs and zags—all these can cause us to reevaluate our foundation. But just as with Joshua and also Lina Sandell, God is with us, ready to make a positive impact when our lives lurch.

1. Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990), 20. 2. *Ibid.*

SESSION 2

CONQUEST

JOSHUA 6:12-25

¹² Joshua got up early **the next morning**.^a The **priests**^b took the ark of the LORD,¹³ and the **seven**^c 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**.^d

¹⁵ Early on **the seventh day**,^e 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**,^f 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**^g 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**.^h 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**.ⁱ”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.**^j²⁴ 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.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** This passage begins on the second day of Joshua leading the priests to march around the city.
- b** Sanctified men were to carry the ark, and even they were under command not to touch it. The ark carried the presence of God, which was something not to take lightly.
- c** Seven is possibly the most sacred number in the Bible, showing completion.
- d** The people circumnavigated the city once each day for six days. The text tells us the people were silent each time (v. 10), while the priests were continually blowing the trumpets (vv. 8-9).
- e** The day the walls fell. On this day, the people walked around the city seven times.
- f** This instrument here called “the trumpet” was literally the *shophar*, or ram’s horn. It could sound only a few notes and was primarily for making noise, not music. The priests blew these on all seven days; everything else was silent.
- g** Rahab worked in a wicked trade before seeing the coming of the Lord (Josh. 2:8-11), but at some point she had a conversion, or she wouldn’t have been accepted into the family of Israel. She is listed in the “Hall of Faith” as a believer (Heb. 11:31), a witness to how far God can take a repentant person.
- h** Everything in Jericho (and anyone who took anything from Jericho) would be part of that destruction along with their family, except for those items God commanded them to set aside for His use (see v. 19).
- i** There was no temple at this time, but items taken from the ruined city were likely kept in the Tabernacle or nearby.
- j** Though Rahab had a place of honor, she and her family would need to be cleansed from their ceremonial uncleanness, past idolatries, and customs. This was only temporary (v. 25).

»» PATIENT OBEDIENCE (Josh. 6:12-14)

- Following God’s directives, Joshua led the priests in marching around the city of Jericho, escorting the ark of the Lord. They did this for six consecutive days.

»» FINAL PREPARATIONS (Josh. 6:15-19)

- On the seventh day, Joshua lead the processional around the city seven times. After the seventh march, Joshua called on the people to shout and warned them of the fate that would fall on any who took items from the city for themselves. He also called on them to protect Rahab and her family from any harm.
- Note: Emphasize that the residence of Rahab was on the wall and that God protected her in His *chesed* love, not allowing that portion of the wall to crumble.

»» OBEDIENCE REWARDED (Josh. 6:20-25)

- The people shouted and trumpets were blown; then God caused the walls of Jericho to fall. The inhabitants of the city were defeated and spoils were taken. Rahab and her family were the lone survivors.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- A believer’s obedience is a demonstration of trust in God.
- God’s directives clearly specify the results of obedience and disobedience.
- God honors those who obey Him by providing them a place of service in His kingdom.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Last summer, thousands of athletes from around the world gathered in Brazil for the 2016 Olympics. What are your favorite games to watch? What makes watching these athletes so compelling?

- People have devoted their lives to be excellent at a specific sport or event, and when we watch, we see the greatest competitors in the world in one place. We know victory for these athletes comes from years of training, competing, and healthy living.
- In our text today, we see a victory that comes most unexpectedly. The conquest of Jericho is not so much in the victory of Israel, but in how God brought victory to Israel.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JOSHUA 6:12-14

What does verse 12 tell us Joshua did? Why might this be included in the text?

- Joshua rose early in the morning to prepare to lead the priests in marching around Jericho.
- This indicates the leadership of Joshua, as he was up early to undertake his divine responsibilities. As one Old Testament scholar notes, the language here demonstrates “Joshua exercising leadership over the entire process” (see also Josh. 3:1).¹

Invite the group to look back at verses 1-5. What did God tell Joshua? What strikes you about this?

- Joshua was promised victory (v. 2).
- God gave Joshua instructions on how to have the victory He had prepared. Encourage the group to break down the specific instructions for marching around the city.
- Both the guarantee of victory and the method in which it would come are extraordinary.

In verses 13-14, we see Joshua, the priests, and the people following God’s command. How would you describe Joshua and the people in this passage? How might we apply this to our lives as Christians today?

- Point out the patience and obedience of God’s people. They couldn’t necessarily see how this would work, yet they remained faithful.
- We, too, may face situations where we don’t fully understand what God is doing, but we are also called to be obedient and patient as we trust God and His good will.

JOSHUA 6:15-19

As the people prepared to take the city on the seventh day, Joshua gave them an explicit instruction regarding Rahab. What were these instructions and why was she singled out?

- Rahab and all in her house were not to be harmed.
- This was due to Rahab risking her life to aid God’s people.

What did Joshua direct the people to do with the items in the city? What were the consequences for disobedience?

- The items set aside were to be destroyed.
- God warned them of the fate that would fall on any who took items from the city for themselves.
- The silver, gold, and vessels of bronze and iron were to be “dedicated to the LORD” and put into “the LORD’s treasury” (v. 19).

JOSHUA 6:20-25

How did God respond when the people shouted? What does this reveal to us about Him?

- God caused the walls of Jericho to fall.
- This work of God reveals to us that God is not just powerful, but that He is true to His word. When God tells us to do something, we can trust that He will be there, and He will be true to His promises and character.

Who did God reward for their trust in Him?

- Joshua and the people were rewarded with a military victory.
- God rewarded Rahab and her family by protecting them and keeping them safe during battle.

How did God reward Rahab and her family for their trust in Him?

- Not only did Joshua protect them, but also the future King David came through her lineage. Yet, not just David, but Jesus Christ Himself would descend from Rahab (see Matt. 1:5-6,16).

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

In this text, we see God honor His followers’ obedience and trust. What steps can we take to strengthen our trust in God plans?

- Have the group come up with a couple of practical ideas. Examples could include regularly praying for each other; accountability partners that spur each other to greater trust in God; and taking steps of faith in areas such as missions, tithing, or ministry within the local church.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week, take one of your quiet times and pray that God would reveal an area in your life where you need to exercise more trust in Him (ministry, missions, finances, evangelism, etc.). Then pray each day that God would strengthen your trust and begin to exercise that trust in real, tangible ways (such as witnessing to a friend, tithing, volunteering for the church mission trip, beginning to repair a broken relationship).

1. David Howard, “Joshua,” *New American Commentary*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 172.



OBJECT LESSON

A BLINDFOLD

Bring a blindfold to the group session. Blindfold one member of the group. Then create a small maze with chairs. (This can also be done with tape on the floor.) Once the group member is blindfolded, have another person call out walking directions so that he or she can get through the maze. You can also incentivize the activity by offering coffee or a special snack if the blindfolded person is able to get through the maze in a specific amount of time.

After the activity, ask: *What did the blindfolded person have to exercise to get out of the maze?*

Point out that he or she had to trust the person giving directions. Ask: *Why was it important to trust the one giving directions? That person could see where he or she was going, and the blindfolded person couldn't.*

Explain: *This, in a small way, is how we relate to God at times. He can see where we need to be, and we need to learn to trust His directions. Just as Joshua and the priest trusted God's directions and as a result the walls of Jericho fell, we can attain the best outcome He has for us when we also trust in Him.*



Call for volunteers to tell of a time when trusting God's direction proved that God's timing is best. Close in prayer that the group would be sensitive to opportunities to obey God's guidance and tell others what they have experienced.



DIG DEEPER

A TIME FOR WAR

You probably have not heard of "The War of the Whiskers" or "The War of the Oaken Bucket." Consider what must have been a serious conflict, "The War of Jenkins' Ear." All of these wars broke out between nations and are in the history books.¹ Humans are warlike, as conflict seems inevitable.

War is an uneasy choice for those who follow the God of grace. However, it has sometimes been the right choice in Scripture and in history. The Book of Joshua is probably the biblical epicenter for passages focused on war. Other biblical wars were those God directly commanded, like in Exodus 17:16; Numbers 31:1-3; and 1 Samuel 15:1-3. And some wars were because of God's judgment on sin, as in Habakkuk 1:5-11 and Jeremiah 21:3-7.

We cannot help but notice that the battles in the Book of Joshua, including Jericho, contradicted what we call "Just War Theory." Some of the tenets violated in the conquest are to invade in order to take the enemy's resources and land and to destroy every living thing. However, when God commands something, it is holy. In this case, the evil in the land had increased to such an extent that total destruction was needed to remove the threat of this wickedness

(Gen. 18–19), as well as to set the stage to open God's redemptive plan for all people.

While surveying the destruction after World War II, Winston Churchill said it was a war that could have been easily prevented. Thomas Sowell wrote, "At one time, according to Churchill, a memorandum could have stopped Hitler, given the balance of military power against him early on."²

When God commanded the Israelites to go and leave nothing alive in Deuteronomy 20:16, He intended them to obey His instructions immediately. The lesson for us today is that if God's people would follow His commands without turning back, we would save ourselves much grief in the future.

There is no indication in the Scripture that commands like this will ever come from God again. The total destruction of nations does not seem to be in His plan except by His own hand at the end of the age. However, God has already given us many very difficult commands that increasingly set us in opposition with our culture. We should follow them exactly and fearlessly, remembering that the long-term effect will be His righteous work.

1. For example, see Warren Wiersbe's *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 2, Ch. 9, James 4:1-12, paragraph 1, Logos Bible Software. 2. Thomas Sowell, "When War Is Necessary," WND online, published Sept. 22, 2014.

COMMITMENT KEPT

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

JOSHUA 10:6-14

⁶ Then **the men of Gibeon**^a sent word to Joshua in the camp at **Gilgal**.^b “Don’t abandon **your servants**.^c Come quickly and save us! Help us, for all the **Amorite kings**^d 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**.^e Not one of them will be able to stand against you.” ⁹ So Joshua caught them by surprise, after marching **all night**^f 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**,^g and struck them down as far as Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹ As they fled before Israel, **the LORD threw large hailstones**^h 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**:ⁱ “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**.^j 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

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** The Gibeonites had tricked the Israelites into thinking they lived far away, and so they were spared the death God had commanded to all Canaanites.
- b** This camp was the established headquarters of the Israelites at the beginning of the conquest. It is where Joshua set up the twelve stones to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan and where all of the Israelite men born in the wilderness were circumcised before the conquest. Its location is possibly a few miles northeast of Jericho.
- c** Used by the Gibeonites repeatedly, this phrase may have been used originally in flattery to throw off suspicion (Josh. 9:8,9,11,24). Now, they truly were servants and needed protection only God’s people could provide.
- d** The Gibeonites were a mighty people with a large city, so the king of Jerusalem gathered the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, to see if they could defeat Gibeon before they faced Israel.
- e** God told Joshua He had completed the work; Joshua just needed to follow through.
- f** They marched overnight a distance of more than 17 miles through very rugged terrain, climbing well over 3,000 feet, surprising the enemy forces.
- g** Literally, the house of caves—not a good place to dodge hailstones
- h** Through God’s sovereign use of the elements of nature, this furious hailstorm took more Amorite lives than the sword. God gave a warning to those who stood against His people. It is no wonder we hear often that the Canaanites lost heart (2:11), panicked (2:24), feared (4:24), and their courage failed (5:1).
- i** Joshua is speaking to the Israelites in this passage, and fear appears to be used to mean respect here.

(continued on next page)

before or since, when the LORD **listened to the voice of a man**,^k because the LORD fought for Israel.

j This speaks of the loyalty of God's people, for these were enemies of Gibeon first—and also Israel's. The Amorites hastened their destruction by attacking Israel's ally.

k There seems to be more awe in the account over God responding to Joshua's request for the sun to stand still than for the miracle itself.

“” TALKING POINTS

»» A COMMITMENT REMEMBERED

(Josh. 10:6)

- When the Gibeonites were attacked, they remembered the promises of protection made to them by Joshua and the Israelites. They called on Joshua to rescue them and not abandon them to their attackers.

»» STAYING TRUE TO HIS WORD

(Josh. 10:7-8)

- Joshua gathered his forces and led them toward the besieged Gibeonites. God assured Joshua of victory, alleviating any fear Joshua may have experienced.
- Note: Characterize Joshua and God as both staying true to their word in this passage.

»» DIVINE INTERVENTION (Josh. 10:9-14)

- God caused confusion among the armies of the five kings, and their armies fled. Joshua and his troops gave chase until God intervened through a hailstorm, prolonging the day. Joshua won a total victory.
- Note: Highlight the specific nature of Joshua's prayer. Be aware that various interpretations exist for the sun and moon standing still. Affirm that God miraculously caused the sun and moon to cease on their regular course.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- When God's people face insurmountable odds, God often works through others to give His people strength and assistance.
- God expects His followers to keep their commitments. God intervenes on behalf of His people, giving them victory.

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

In one American survey about lying, it was found that “over half of respondents said lying was never justified. Yet in the same poll, up to two-thirds said it was OK to lie in certain situations, such as protecting someone’s feelings.”¹ How would you explain our culture’s view of honesty? What could explain the disconnect?

- No one likes to be lied to, and many people don’t want to be dishonest. However, as many of us have realized, at times it is hard to keep your word or commitments.
- Thankfully, God always keeps His word. He will not lie to us, and we can always count on Him (Num. 23:19; Prov. 30:5; Titus 1:2).
- Today, we look at an instance when God called His people to reflect His nature and keep their word and commitment, as He would do for them.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

JOSHUA 10:6

In verse 6, the men of Gibeon approached Joshua. What relationship did the Gibeonites have to Israel?

- Have the group go back and skim chapter 9 for context.
- Point out that they made a peace covenant with Israel (Josh. 9:15) to be their servants (9:8,27).

What specific request did the men of Gideon make? Why did they need to make this request?

- They desired for Israel to “come quickly and save us” (10:6).
- This was because the kings of the Amorites were going to attack due to the Gibeonites’ covenant with Joshua (10:4).

JOSHUA 10:7-8

Joshua gathered his forces to aid the Gibeonites. How was Joshua’s leadership on display here?

- Joshua was a man of his word, and people could count on him.
- He also took the lead in the battle; he wasn’t avoiding it.

In verse 8, God made what promise to Joshua? How might this have impacted Joshua and Israel?

- God promised Joshua total victory.
- It encouraged Joshua to know God would keep His word and do as He had said (1 Thess. 5:24).
- By fully trusting God, Joshua was able to be more obedient, and Israel (as well as the Gibeonites) benefited. Joshua’s faithfulness blessed those around him.

How can Christians model Joshua during times of uncertainty and worry?

- We honor God by being people of integrity.
- Joshua listened to God. When God spoke to Joshua, Joshua paid attention.

- Encourage the group to be spiritually healthy so that when difficulty strikes they can listen for God’s guidance.

JOSHUA 10:9-14

As the Israelites went to battle, how did God help them in verses 10-11?

- God helped the Israelites by throwing the armies of the five kings into panic and by sending a hail storm.
- God did more for the victory than the sons of Israel.

How does Joshua’s prayer demonstrate trust in God as Creator?

- God miraculously caused the sun and moon to cease on their regular course (vv. 12-13).
- There was no other day like this when God answered a request in this way (v. 14).

In verse 12, we notice Joshua’s bold, public prayer. What does this tell us about his leadership? How can we apply this to our participation in leadership or society?

- Joshua saw his leadership not just in a military or political capacity but also a spiritual one.
- Joshua knew his faith was vital to his role as the leader of Israel; he didn’t leave the “religious stuff” to only the priests.
- As Christians today, we also must not compartmentalize our faith from our vocations. Our faith in Christ should influence, inform, and shape how we work and live in the world outside the church building.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

In a challenging situation, God showed up in a big way for Joshua and His people. How can Joshua 10 help encourage you to lean on God the next time you face what seems like insurmountable odds?

- This text demonstrates the importance of trustworthiness, spiritual leadership, faithfulness in difficult circumstances, and reliance on God above all else.
- All of these lessons help us to cultivate healthier spiritual lives, so practicing them now will equip us later when challenging situations strike.
- **Personal Challenge:** Think of a time when God stepped into a difficult situation and brought about an amazing result. Write it down with these verses in Joshua as a Scripture reference. Then, place that card where you will remember it—a journal, a desk drawer, the back of your Bible, and so forth. The next time you face a difficult situation, refer to the last time God worked in your life, and let that lead you into a deeper trust in Him.

1. “It’s the truth: Americans conflicted about lying,” Associated Press. 7/11/2006. Available at www.nbcnews.com.

TEAM AWARDS VS. INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Before the session, gain access to a computer or smartphone that will allow you to show an online video. Check the connection before the group time by going to www.youtube.com and searching for Tony Evans's video "Satan Is Under Your Feet." Also bring trophies or other symbols of team awards vs. individual awards.

When the group time begins, explain: *Sometimes life is quite difficult and it seems as though victory is an abstract and far-reaching thought. But as God shows us in Joshua 10, He is always there for us. Let's look at a video by Tony Evans on this passage of Scripture.*

Show the video of Tony Evans.

Ask: *As you watched this video, what is the reason Dr. Evans gives for us not being able to see God's authority more often in our lives? (We keep jumping kingdoms.)*

Lead the group to compare and contrast common team awards and individual awards. Emphasize how team awards depend on a group of people working together and often require everyone following the direction of a coach.



Ask: *What practical steps might we take right now, to make sure we are seeking His kingdoms values and not our own? Here are a few suggestions to help the group list some items: (1) Dive deeper into the Scriptures every day (2 Tim. 3:15-16); (2) Focus on God's ways (Rom. 12:1-2); (3) Lean on the Holy Spirit (Ps. 143:10). After brainstorming more ideas, close in prayer.*

DIG DEEPER

HIS WORD IS TRUTH

In the Bible, a word given from one person to another or from one entity to another (like a nation) was considered binding. A word was the bond; they did not need further proof.

When the Israelites made a commitment to be at peace with the Gibeonites, even the discovery of deceit was not enough to dissolve the union. We might ask which was more binding: God's command not to make a treaty with anyone in Canaan, or the Israelites' word once spoken. In the case before us, we have the answer: Israel felt it was necessary to follow through—for they had spoken in certainty and failed God's command in error.

A few biblical examples and commands show the importance of verbal bonds:

- In Genesis 27, Isaac would not revoke his blessing on Jacob even though he discovered he had been deceived, to Esau's great grief (vv. 33-38). In Genesis 29, Jacob worked another seven years for Rachel, even though he had been deceived, because he considered this his commitment (vv. 27-28).
- In Ruth 4, when the kinsman redeemer passed the land and right to Ruth back to Boaz, he simply gave him his sandal, which was all that was necessary as a legal contract (vv. 7-8).

- As for commands, in Psalm 15, the psalmist said, "LORD, who can dwell in Your tent? Who can live on Your holy mountain? The one who lives honestly, practices righteousness, and acknowledges the truth in his heart ... who keeps his word whatever the cost" (vv.1-2,4).
- Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says, "When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it."
- Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12 both teach the same point: Do not swear, it is not necessary. "Yes" or "no" is enough.

We should be concerned today when we take our words of commitment lightly. It may be too easy to adjust what we *do* when it becomes difficult to do what we *said*. We should recall that the Israelites took up their weapons and battled furiously on this "longest day," which began with an overnight march and lasted through an extended exhausting day—all because they had made a verbal commitment.

SESSION 4

SAVIOR ANNOUNCED

For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide or Adult
Commentary, available for purchase
at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

LUKE 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month,^a the angel Gabriel^b was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,^c²⁷ to a virgin^d engaged^e to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.^f

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^g and give birth to a son, and you will call His name Jesus.^h³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High,ⁱ and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.^j

³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob^k 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.^l Therefore, the holy One^m 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,"ⁿ said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a Of Elizabeth's pregnancy

b Though the name *angel* means messenger in Greek, this seemed to be Gabriel's primary job: making announcements (Dan. 8–9; Luke 1).

c A small town southwest of the Sea of Galilee, it was in a "basin" surrounded by impressive hills that fulfilled the Nazarene prophecy (Matt. 2:23).

d One chosen and favored by God; She was obviously deserving and the right person from the line of David.

e A binding contract, engagement lasted up to a year and could be broken only by divorce.

f Jesus was in the kingly line of David, but He was free from its inherent sin.

g The child Jesus was to be an inhabitant of earth starting at that moment, just as every other child when conceived is precious. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit—a necessary part of being both God and man.

h From the Hebrew *Yeshua*, the same name as *Joshua*, which reminds us of God's favor in leading the people of God into a land of promise.

i Here "Most High" refers to God the Father.

j Jesus takes this spiritual throne forever according to prophecy (2 Sam. 7:13-16; Isa. 9:7).

k A reference not just to Israel but to all spiritual descendants (Rom. 9:6-8)

l The conception is a mystery, but it's clear that Jesus was conceived by God. Since Jesus was fully God and fully man, this is a necessary doctrine.

m Jesus would be holy in the womb, untouched by the sinful nature of humanity.

n Mary must have been as overcome with joy as with awe (see vv. 36-46).

»» A MESSAGE SENT (Luke 1:26-29)

- Gabriel was sent to deliver a message to Mary, who was engaged to Joseph. Gabriel declared Mary to be favored by God, startling her.

»» THE MESSAGE DELIVERED (Luke 1:30-33)

- Gabriel announced that Mary would give birth to a son who would be the promised Messiah.
- Note: Explain that the name Jesus pointed back to Joshua, whom God used to give Israel the promised land as a permanent home.

»» QUESTIONS ANSWERED (Luke 1:34-37)

- Mary responded to Gabriel's announcement with a question about how she could give birth since she was a virgin.
- Gabriel explained that Mary would have a supernatural conception through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Using Elizabeth as an example, Gabriel reminded Mary that nothing was impossible for God to accomplish.

»» WILLING SUBMISSION (Luke 1:38)

- Mary placed herself under God's authority as a slave, elaborating on her willingness to follow God's plan.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God can be trusted to keep His promises.
- Only Jesus meets the qualifications for providing salvation to humanity.
- Believers can confidently follow God's directions and rely on His power to complete those directions.



FOCUS ATTENTION

What are some of the best gifts you've received by mail during Christmas?

- Receiving a gift from a loved one is a joy, especially when it's unexpected.
- This week, we're going to see how Mary reacted to her unexpected gift from God—that she would give birth to Jesus.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE LUKE 1:26-29

How do verses 26-27 show the intentionality of God?

- Gabriel "was sent by God" (v. 26). God was the mover of this miracle.
- Gabriel was also sent specifically to Nazareth and to a virgin named Mary who was betrothed to Joseph.

Why is the intentionality of God important at the onset of the Christmas account?

- It demonstrates God's loving grace in His saving of mankind
- The Christmas story is primarily about God giving the world the gift of His Son.

LUKE 1:30-33

What do we learn about Mary in this text? How can people find favor with God today?

- Luke tells us that Mary had "found favor with God" (v. 30).
- Mary, like many people from the Bible, was used by God to do great things for His kingdom because of her faith and character.
- When we live by faith, we're open to God doing great things in and through us.

According to Gabriel, how did God plan on using Mary?

- God was going to cause her to bear a son, whom she would name Jesus.
- *Jesus* is a Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, meaning "Yahweh saves" (see Matt. 1:21 for further explanation).

What did Gabriel reveal to Mary that would be unique about Jesus? What would He do that would be so important?

- Jesus is the Son of the Most High. In other words, He is the eternal Son of God.
- Jesus will have the throne of David and will reign over His kingdom forever, thus fulfilling God's promise of a coming Messiah.
- As Joshua brought the people into the promised land after the Exodus, Jesus will bring all His people into a kingdom that will have no end. Unlike the previous kingdom of Israel, the Messiah's kingdom is eternal.

LUKE 1:34-37

How did Mary respond to Gabriel's announcement about the role she would play? How did Gabriel respond to her question?

- Mary was puzzled and asked how this could happen, as she was a virgin.
- Gabriel explained that the Holy Spirit would make her conceive. He then used her question to further explain the nature of Jesus, that He would be the Son of God.

In what ways could this statement have served as a source of encouragement to Mary?

- God is able to do what we consider impossible (see v. 36).
- Too often we find ourselves short-changing God's capabilities.
- God's ability to do the impossible should give Christians dispositions of joy and hopefulness, not defeatism and fear.

LUKE 1:38

How was Mary's faith in God reflected in her answer?

- Mary trusted that God could do such a thing as cause her to have a child.
- Mary was willing to endure the emotional difficulty she would face by being pregnant out of wedlock.
- She put her relationship with Joseph in God's hands as well.
- In calling herself "the Lord's slave," Mary recognized God's authority over her life, and she had faith that He could be trusted in all things.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

As we reflect on the announcement of the birth of Christ, what can we do as a local church to make sure we're emphasizing the right things during the Christmas season?

- Focus on God's love for us in accomplishing the Christmas miracle.
- Realize the necessity of both Good Friday and Easter for the fulfillment of Luke 1:32-33.
- Trust that the God who did the seemingly impossible at the virgin birth is capable of doing the impossible in our lives.
- Be His servant, willing to bring about kingdom purposes.
- **Personal Challenge:** As you move through this week and reflect upon the holiday season, make a renewed commitment to be a willing servant of the Lord. Write down new ways you can serve God this coming year, and then take steps to follow through. God can use you to do much for His glory.



OBJECT LESSON

A BOX OF DONUTS

Bring to the group session a box of donuts, any size, but make sure there is enough for everyone. (You can also use other snacks if you want, but make sure they are in a box). Before the group arrives, wrap the box in wrapping paper so there are no outward markers as to what's inside the box.

Set the box on a table or chair. Make special care not to reference the box or what's in the box for a few moments. You may even want to leave it there as you take prayer requests or begin the study.

Ask: *What should we do with the box?*

They may respond with puzzled stares or questions as to the content. Without giving away what's inside, ask: *Who wants to open it?*

Finally, clue them in by revealing the contents of the box:

Then explain: *God didn't have to reveal any of His plan to Mary, but He chose to. In fact, He could have chosen someone else for the task, but He chose Mary.*



God never has to reveal anything to us. But out of His love for us, He has spoken to us through His written Word. And as we see, it is helpful to know our Bible so we know how best to respond to what life brings our way. Mary responded to what Gabriel shared with her. How will we respond in obedience to what God shares with us? Now, who wants to share some of the donuts?



DIG DEEPER

WAITING ON THE MESSIAH

One of the lesser known verses of a famous hymn harks back to this message in Luke:

O come, Thou Key of David, come and open wide our heav'nly home where all Thy saints with Thee shall dwell—O come, O come, Emmanuel!

The hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" was a Latin hymn written in the 12th century. The modern-day hymn we commonly sing was translated into English by John Mason Neale.

It is plaintive in words and tune, because it was written as a longing cry for "lonely" people as they waited for the Messiah. The hymn used many of the medieval interpretations of Old Testament titles concerning the Messiah and wove them into music, like: "Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14), Wisdom (Prov. 1–9), Rod of Jesse (Isa. 11:1), and of course, Key of David (Isa. 9:7).

This hymn was used to prepare people in singing during the Advent, or the four Sundays before Christmas. Originally, it was likely used the week before Christmas as a part of the vespers

services in preparation for the Christmas message.¹ The idea is that the hope builds throughout the singing of the verses, as those who waited in darkness anticipated a great Light! Then, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel . . . shall come to thee, O Israel!"

We need not wait any longer for the Messiah, for He is here. So, hymns (not always sung) were used by Luke to express this glad news. When Mary spoke to Elizabeth of Gabriel's visit she broke out in praise (Luke 1:46-55). Zachariah, upon speaking the name "John," prophesied in a hymn (1:68-79). The angelic host used a hymn in reporting to the shepherds (2:14). Simeon used a hymn to express his joy (2:29-32), and Anna likely prophesied in hymn form (2:38).

1. K. W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 361.

SESSION 5

SETTLED

JOSHUA 22:1-8

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

³ You have **not deserted**^c 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**,^d 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**^e the command and instruction that Moses the LORD’s servant gave you: to love the LORD your God, **walk in all His ways**,^f keep His commands, remain faithful to Him, and **serve Him**^g with **all your heart and all your soul.**”^{h 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**,ⁱ 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**;^j 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.”

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a These three tribes were often named together in Joshua because these were those given territory east of the Jordan as promised by Moses.

b These tribes had selected their territory before entering the promised land, but Moses told them they would need to help the other tribes settle the land (Num. 32:20-23). This seemed something these tribes were eager to do (vv. 17-19).

c We are reminded of God’s promise to Joshua initially, “I will not leave you or forsake you” (Josh. 1:5), and Jesus’ promises: “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Heb. 13:5), “anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame” (Rom. 10:11, NIV). These tribes were faithful like their God.

d In addition to a cessation of physical conflict—as when one lays down his weapons—*rest* also has spiritual ramifications, as when the Spirit of the Lord “rests” on the coming Messiah (Isa. 11:2).

e Obeying God should be the careful work of our lives.

f The apostle Paul said a person is to be worthy in their daily walk (Eph. 4:1).

g “Service” here means intense labor that results in slavery without drudgery.

h It is prophesied in Deuteronomy 4:29 that the Israelites would need this same quality later when exiled from the land they possessed on this day.

i Originally ruled by a king named Og, he was defeated by Israel under Moses’ command (Num. 21:33-35). This area was Manasseh’s territory on the east side of the Jordan and Sea of Galilee.

j The Israelites left Egypt with great wealth and now entered their promised land with great wealth. God provided through those who oppose His people (Ex. 3:22; Ps. 37:9; Prov. 13:22; Ecc. 2:26; and Matt. 5:5).

»» **A PROMISE KEPT** (Josh. 22:1-3)

- The Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh were commended for keeping their promise to help the rest of the Israelites secure their allotted portions of the promised land.
- Note: To set the context, refer to the promises made by the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh as recorded in Joshua 1:12-18.

»» **AN ONGOING RESPONSIBILITY** (Josh. 22:4-5)

- Joshua dismissed the Reubenites, Gadites, and half tribe of Manasseh so they could return to their families on the east side of the Jordan. He charged them to continue in their faithfulness to God with all their heart and soul.

»» **A WELCOMED BLESSING** (Josh. 22:6-8)

- The Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh returned to their portions of the promised land with great wealth to share and celebrate with their relatives.

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- Honor comes to those who are faithful to their commitments.
- Believers are to remain faithful to God regardless of their stations in life.
- God's blessings include a stewardship of blessing others.



FOCUS ATTENTION

The experience of moving is fraught with many joys and challenges. What are things we must consider when we relocate? How can we make it less burdensome?

- Help the group to consider things like mortgage costs, school zones, distance from work, taxes, and so forth.
- Having trusted guides or friends can help you make the process less difficult and burdensome.
- Today, we're going to look at the settling of the tribes east of the Jordan into the promised land, how they helped each other settle in, and their rewards for doing such.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JOSHUA 22:1-3

What did Joshua tell the tribes in verses 2-3?

- Joshua publicly celebrated the tribes' faithfulness to obeying God, Moses, and himself.
- Joshua recognized their loyalty to one another in conquering the promised land.

Look back at Joshua 1:12-18. How do these verses explain what Joshua addressed in Joshua 22:1-3?

- In these verses, the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh had been given land by Moses on the east side of the Jordan River.
- However, they were commanded by Joshua to bring their "fighting men" with the rest of Israel to fight (1:13). They publicly agreed to follow Joshua and fight with their brothers.
- This explains Joshua's address here, as the tribes kept their promise to God, Joshua, and the rest of Israel.

JOSHUA 22:4-5

After fulfilling their obligations in battle, Joshua released them to return home with what instruction?

- They were to follow God's Word, given through Moses.
- Specifically, they were "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" (v. 5).

Where else did the people of God receive a similar command to verse 5? How might we understand these repeated instructions?

- Encourage the group to note the comparisons between Joshua 22:4-5 to Deuteronomy 6:5-6.
- This demonstrates the lasting nature and value of God's Word.
- As Christians, we need to be instructed continually in God's Word, just as the tribes of Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh were.

JOSHUA 22:6-8

When Joshua sent the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh back to their lands, what did he send with them?

- Great wealth was a result of their spoils of war, including cattle, silver, gold, bronze, iron, and much clothing.
- He also sends them back with a blessing (v. 6), and a command to share their wealth (v. 8).

What importance is there in having the warriors of the eastern tribes share their new wealth?

- In sharing their wealth with their relatives, they were actively following the example God gave to Moses in Numbers 31.
- This sharing is important as it was a demonstration of love for their brothers and a clear understanding of grace. As God had given this to the warriors, so would the warriors give freely to those in their tribes.
- In sharing the goods, it showed that all the people were united and loyal—a part of one nation.

How does sharing blessings fit into the Christian witness and lifestyle?

- Christians understand that all we have is a result of God's grace, including our salvation.
- Sharing what we have as a result of what God has done is a part of loving our neighbor (see Acts 2:42-45).

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

As we see the Israelites share God's blessings with their fellow members of the covenant community of God, how might our group be spurred to greater love and generosity among our fellow Christians? How might this look locally and globally?

- Guide the group through local church areas, such as benevolence funds, helping a needy group or church member with groceries, or donating furniture, and so on.
- Global possibilities include partnering with Baptist Global Response, WorldVision, or Samaritan's Purse.
- **Personal Challenge:** Examine how well you and your family are stewarding the blessings God has given you. Is there a blind spot where you are not sharing with God's gifting of time, talent, or treasure? This week, have a serious talk with your family or accountability partners about how you can grow in your stewardship so other believers can be blessed.



OBJECT LESSON

A TOOLBOX

Bring to the group a toolbox (or bag) with the following: a hammer, a screwdriver (Phillips or flat head), a pair of pliers, and a tape measure. Also, bring a board with a nail started but not finished.

During the session, distribute the screwdriver, pliers, and tape measure to different people. Ask the group members what the tools are and what purposes they serve.

Bring out the board with the nail started. Ask the group how, with the tool each person is holding, can they complete the task of nailing the nail through the board. After some creative discussion of how each of their tools might be used, ask: *What tool might make this task easier?*

Upon the reply of "hammer," provide the hammer and let them finish nailing the nail into the board. Say: *As you can see, having the right tool is very important for the task. However, what if I had the right tool but left it in the car or didn't want to give it out, would that hurt the group's ability to finish the task?*

Explain: *It's similar with Christians. As Paul tells us, God has given us all different gifts to serve the church and fulfill the Great*



Commission (1 Cor. 12:12-26). Just as Joshua had the tribes help and share with one another so all were blessed, we too are to help and share with one another. But if God has gifted you and you don't show up with your tool to help God's people, you are not helping to complete the mission and fulfill your duty of love for God and one another.



DIG DEEPER

THIS WORLD IS NOT MY HOME

Years ago, Albert E. Brumley wrote how the world isn't our home. I have hummed that tune many times, sometimes with a sense of sadness as I faced some obstacle or as I viewed the world and its obvious brokenness.

The Bible has a great deal to say to us about an "unsettled peace" for the people of God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were on the move for most of their lives. Moses got his start floating on the Nile and never found a home after that. Jesus, the pinnacle of stability, said He had "no place to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20), and His disciples lived a transient life.

By the time of Joshua 22, the Israelites had been looking for a home for some time. They were captive in Egypt for 400 years, then wanderers in the wilderness for another 40. It was time to settle down. The two-and-a-half tribes mentioned in these verses were the first to go settle in the land God gave them. What songs they must have sung as they made their way home!

Sad to say, this new feeling of satisfaction would not last for long, as they began to worship the pagan gods of the Canaanites not many years hence and start the unsettled cycle over again.

As Mr. Brumley wrote, we may feel that we're passing through because this is not our final home. And sometimes—just when we begin to settle in—it is time to move. What we can remember that the Israelites forgot is that our home is in the ever-stable commands and fellowship of God, which go a-wanderin' with us.

SESSION 6

CHALLENGED

JOSHUA 24:14-28

¹⁴ “Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. **Get rid of the gods^a** 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^b** 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.**”^c 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.”^d 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.**”^e 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^f** that you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh.” “**We are witnesses,**” they said.^g 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^h** and established a statute and ordinance for them. ²⁶ Joshua recorded these things in **the book of the law of Godⁱ**; he also took a **large stone^j** 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^k** 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.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a Remarkably, some must have had false gods in their possession after ridding the land of everyone else’s.

b Choosing God has never been forced by God. However, the results of refusing to worship our Creator are catastrophic.

c Joshua spoke confidently as the head of his family, with the implied certainty that he also represented the Israelite family.

d An interesting statement in light of the fact that their “fathers” had died in the wilderness, and the ones speaking were less than 20 years of age at the start of the Exodus.

e While a startling statement, it certainly means the grace they yearned to follow was not cheap.

f The Bible indicates our words are our own witness: “your own lips testify against you” (Job 15:6), and “I will judge you by what you have said” (Luke 19:22).

g The Israelites ratified their commitment before God on their own merit.

h This was an important city even before Canaan, which at the time of this writing served as the main base for the tabernacle, was conquered by the Israelites.

i Referring to a book known to the people at this time but not to us

j Much like the stone Samuel named “Ebenezer” (1 Sam. 7:12), these large stones were memorials to help the people remember great events and their covenants.

k A cold stone would “remember” the Israelites’ commitment, and if needed, be a witness for their prosecution.

NOTES

»» THE EXAMPLE SET (Josh. 24:14-15)

- Joshua challenged the Israelites to remain faithful to God, worshiping only Him. Joshua declared that regardless of the choice made by the Israelites, his family would serve God alone.

»» THE PEOPLE'S REFLECTION

(Josh. 24:16-18)

- The Israelites recalled God's deliverance from Egypt, His provisions on the journey, and His giving them the promised land as motivation for remaining faithful to God.

»» A SOMBER WARNING

(Josh. 24:19-20)

- Joshua warned the people that remaining faithful to God would be difficult.
- Note: Emphasize that the decision to follow God requires serious evaluation and should not be taken lightly. Interpret Joshua's challenge in terms of his reminding the people to count the cost of worshiping and serving God.

»» A PUBLIC DECLARATION

(Josh. 24:21-28)

- After the people declared their intention of following God wholeheartedly, Joshua directed them to rid themselves of all idols. The people committed to worship God alone, and Joshua created a marker as a testimony of their covenant to do so.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God uses the faithfulness of His committed followers to challenge and influence others.
- God expects His followers to be fully devoted to Him with no divided allegiances.
- Believers can hold one another accountable for remaining faithful to God.



FOCUS ATTENTION

Many of us have had great teachers in our lives, be it in grade school, college, or church. Who was your favorite teacher? What are some characteristics of a good teacher?

- We might describe good teachers as caring, engaging, or encouraging, yet they also challenge us so we can best learn and grow. When people challenge us to live up to our potential, we can thrive.
- As we'll see today, Joshua challenged God's people to remain faithful to God so they could thrive in the promised land.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JOSHUA 24:14-15

How did Joshua begin his challenge to Israel? How did that frame what he had to say?

- Joshua began with two exhortations: "fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth" (v. 14).
- Joshua's call to fear the Lord helped orient the people toward the proper view of Him.
- As He is God, they would need to approach Him with awe, reverence, and faithfulness, which would lead to having served Him well.

What descriptors should define service to God? How do these terms help shape our view of service to God?

- Service should be sincere and faithful with the motivation to serve God stemming from a genuine love for Him and absent of hypocrisy or double-mindedness.

What choice did Joshua challenge the people to immediately make, and what was the reason for the immediacy?

- They were to choose either to worship the false gods of the Egyptians and Amorites or to worship and serve God alone.
- Joshua forced them to choose "today" (v. 15), because he didn't want them to settle into the promised land as idolaters but as people committed to God alone.

JOSHUA 24:16-18

How did the people respond to Joshua's declaration of allegiance to God? What did this reveal about his leadership?

- The people asserted their own committed worship of God.
- Joshua's refusal to leave God modeled for the people their own ability to do the same.

How did reflecting on past events move the people to conclude to serve God alone?

- The Israelites recalled God's deliverance from their Egyptian slavery, God's mighty signs and preservation of them while they were in the wilderness, and that God brought them into the promised land.

JOSHUA 24:19-20

In verse 19, what did Joshua say about their ability to follow through? What did he likely mean by this?

- They wouldn't be able to serve God.
- Joshua framed this statement with an understanding of the holiness of God; if they didn't abandon their idols and pledge loyalty to God alone, they would fail.

What did Joshua warn would be the consequences of not remaining faithful to God?

- If they didn't serve God, then He would punish them.
- Joshua explained that their punishment would be quite severe—as God had shown them much good, they would be abusing His grace.
- The decision to serve God is a serious one, and the Israelites had to count the cost fully—just as we must do today.

JOSHUA 24:21-28

Divide into two teams. Direct each team to find actions taken after Israel declared to follow God (v. 21). Then take turns letting the groups share what they found.

- They agreed to be witnesses to what they promised.
- Joshua directed them to rid themselves of all idols.
- The people committed to worship God alone, and Joshua "recorded these things in the book of the law of God" (v. 26).
- Joshua created a marker using a large memorial stone as a testimony of their covenant to do so.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How does verse 15 inspire you and your family in today's cultural circumstances?

- Even though others in our culture may abandon Christianity, we must be like Joshua and stay firmly committed to God.
- We have seen God work in our lives and the lives of our families. This should lead us to greater faithfulness.
- We are able to stand strong by having a fear of God and a sincere, genuine faith in Him.
- We should remain thankful that through Jesus we have forgiveness for when we fail and assurance of faithfulness through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- **Personal Challenge:** We have an opportunity to influence others as we stay faithful to Christ. Likely there has been someone in your life who has influenced you in the same way. This week, reach out to that person and thank them with a note, email, or phone call. And if that person has gone to be with the Lord, reach out to their family and let them know how thankful you are and for the spiritual legacy he or she left behind.



OBJECT LESSON

PENNIES

Display the pennies. Ask the group: *If you had to choose right now, would you rather have a thousand dollars per day for 31 days or the sum of a penny doubled every day for 31 days?* (Allow the group a couple seconds to think—and no calculators!)

After their answers, show them this video: “A Penny Doubled Every Day for 30 Days = \$10.7M” from *bloomberg.com*. If you can’t show the video, the answer is that the sum of a penny doubled every day is more than \$10 million.

Explain: *Many times, we make decisions without really looking at all the angles. In his challenge to Israel, Joshua challenged the people to reflect upon their commitment and make sure they were ready to follow God wholeheartedly. The necessity to count the cost of both obedience and disobedience is vitally important.*

Emphasize that it’s the same today.

Say: *We must count the cost of giving up sin and self to follow Christ. But we must also understand the even greater eternal cost if we don’t.*



DIG DEEPER

REMAINING FAITHFUL

We can see the future in regard to the Israelites. The full record in the Bible shows us they abandoned their God and followed other gods, contrary to their promises of fidelity (Josh. 24:16,21,22,24).

Ezekiel 16 is one of many chapters in the Bible where God uses strong figurative language to show that He had brought Israel (represented by Jerusalem) out of obscurity. She was born from the “Canaanites” (v. 3), a reference to the conquest and her subsequent immorality. She was in poverty and distress when God found her, and He dressed her in fine embroidered linen, gold, and silver; anointed her; and made her His wife (vv. 8,13).

However, Israel trusted in the very beauty that God gave her as a gift, and stopped trusting in Him. She became a “prostitute” and sold her beauty to anyone (v. 15). Her degradations were such that she offered her children to fire (v. 21), a reference to burning her children alive to the gods Molech and Baal (Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

Ezekiel warned Israel in Ezekiel 16:35 and following that their punishment would be destruction and bondage, levied by the very ones with whom Israel had cavorted.

How could people who saw God’s kindness and great works grow so distant? Or more importantly, how can a nation or an

individual sincerely make commitments that they are not able to keep?

Their example reminds us that we, too, can fall if we are too confident in our steadfastness. Solomon wrote, “Pride comes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). When we are focused on our beauty—personal gifts, accomplishments, education, income, and so forth—we are in danger. Whatever physical or spiritual abundance we have is a gift, and when we forget this we stray from the Lord.

We should learn and practice the words of David, “LORD, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty ... Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself ... Israel, put your hope in the LORD, both now and forever” (Ps. 131).

SESSION 7

VALUE ALL

PROVERBS 24:10-12

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

MARK 10:46-49

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,^g** was sitting by the road. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to **cry out,^h** **“Son of David, Jesus,ⁱ have mercy on me!”** ⁴⁸ Many people told him to **keep quiet,^j** 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!^k Get up; He’s calling for you.”^l**

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** This refers to those being led unjustly to their deaths, including the innocent child to be aborted, the criminal falsely accused, or those in spiritual darkness.
- b** The passive nature of the condemned is obvious, as they are led away. They did not plan their demises themselves.
- c If we are guilty, there will be a lonely and hollow echo when we stand before a righteous and just God who knows all things.**
- d** God protects us, and we’re to protect innocent life.
- e** Reciprocity is a clear concept in the Bible (see Ecc. 11:1; Luke 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:6).
- f** “as their actions deserve” (NLT)
- g** In that day, there was no other way for such people to subsist except through the generosity of passersby.
- h** Having found out Jesus was passing, Bartimaeus called out as an act of faith and desperation.
- i** Bartimaeus’ use of this title for the Messiah shows his awareness of Jesus’ right to the Davidic throne (see Isa. 9:7; Luke 1:32).
- j** These words indicated the people’s disdain for such people as beggars or possibly a desire to protect their teacher from interruption.
- k** The crowd that was corrective before then became encouraging. Our examples of compassion might lead to changed hearts of those around us.
- l** We should be aware of the people who need to come to Jesus, and like this crowd, work to see that they can. We should hope to teach others to “leave the children alone, and don’t try to keep them from coming to Me” (Matt. 19:14).

NOTES

»» **A CALL TO PROTECT LIFE** (Prov. 24:11)

- Solomon challenged his readers to rescue people wrongly condemned to death.

»» **A WARNING AGAINST INACTION** (Prov. 24:10,12)

- Solomon issued a warning against failing to act and addressed the excuses of ignorance and pious avoidance.

»» **AN EXAMPLE SET** (Mark 10:46-49)

- Jesus was leaving Jericho and had drawn a large crowd. Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, called out to Jesus but the crowd attempted to silence him. Jesus directed them to summon Bartimaeus, giving him His attention.

»» **SUMMARY STATEMENTS**

- God expects us to be advocates on behalf of others facing wrongful death, including cases of abortion.
- 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 their physical limitations.
- The Lord values life from the womb to the tomb.
- God’s standards call for a balanced kingdom agenda, as we commit to protecting the born and the living.



FOCUS ATTENTION

In February 2015, the art world witnessed a record-breaking purchase. Reportedly, an 1892 painting by French Post-Impressionist Paul Gauguin sold to the Qatar Museum for \$300 million dollars, making it the most expensive painting ever bought. What at one time was a piece of blank canvas and paint now has a value of hundreds of millions of dollars. What other things might carry high value?

- Lead the group to think of heirlooms or other memorabilia.
- Explain that today we are going to consider what God places great value on: human beings. Specifically, we are going to look at the sanctity of human life.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE PROVERBS 24:11

What would you say is the overarching theme of verse 11?

- Words and phrases like “rescue” and “taken off to death” reveal the overarching theme is protecting people from wrongful, immoral deaths.

What differences in emphasis are presented in the first and second parts of this verse?

- The first part, “Rescue those being taken off to death,” is focused on acting for those who have no say in the matter and are victims of another person’s choices.
- The second part, “save those stumbling toward slaughter,” is focused on acting for those who, in either blindness or ignorance, are about to make a decision that will lead to harm and death.

PROVERBS 24:10,12

How can verse 10 be a measure of our spiritual health?

- Solomon is clear that if we fail to act in difficult situations, then our strength is much smaller than we might have thought.
- When we are presented with an opportunity to live and speak as our faith demands, and we instead wilt, then our spiritual health may be lacking.

How does verse 12 connect the themes of verses 10-11?

- Show the group that the set of questions in verse 12 demonstrates there are consequences to ignoring verses 10-11.
- Verse 12 helps us to see the seriousness of God’s demands in verses 10-11.
- We will have to answer to God for ignoring the innocent and needy.

What does verse 12 teach us about the character of God and how He relates to humanity?

- Verse 12 demonstrates for us the justice of God, in that He has the right and responsibility to judge sin and the deeds of humanity.

- Verse 12 shows us that God does this not by outward appearances but by weighing our hearts. In other words, God sees not just our actions but our intentions and innermost thoughts.
- Nothing we do or think can be hidden from God.

MARK 10:46-49

In this example from Mark, what did Jesus do that was different from the crowd around Him?

- Jesus took mercy on the man while the crowd rebuked him. The crowd tried to silence Bartimeus, but Jesus called out to him.
- Jesus saw this man as created in the image of God, while the crowd saw him as nothing but a nuisance.

How was Jesus modeling for us the Proverbs 24 principle from above? How should disciples of Jesus (like us), respond to what Jesus does here?

- Jesus understood that this blind man was suffering, vulnerable, and that He was able to help him. So Jesus called out to him and helped him (Mark 10:52).
- We, too, need to be aware of the vulnerable people among us and act to help them.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

Following Jesus’ example and Solomon’s proverbs, what specific sanctity of life issues should this group be concerned about in your city or town?

- Issues should/could include abortion, care for the elderly and the disabled, or help for the mentally ill, homeless, and addicts. Upholding the image of God in all people, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, social status, and so forth.
- God will hold believers accountable for how we live and respond to our world. We’re required to act for righteousness and justice for all people—from the womb to the tomb.
- **Personal Challenge:** It can be easy to tune out the problems of the world, especially if they don’t relate specifically to us. One way to make sure that we aren’t living with blinders on is to widen our circle of friends so that we gain different perspectives. Make it a priority this week to engage someone different from yourself. Learn about that person’s experiences and struggles. This will help you be a better Christian and better know how to pray and fight for what is right.



OBJECT LESSON

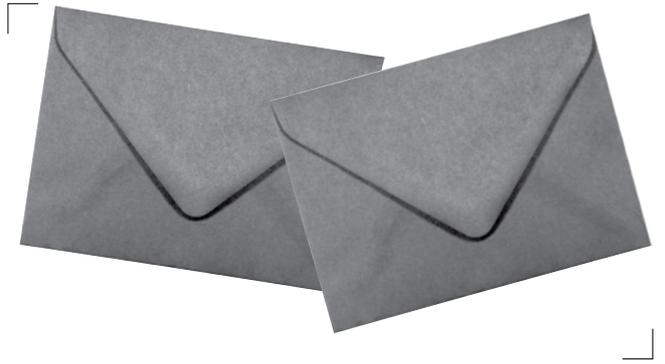
TWO ENVELOPES CONTAINING ANYTHING OF EQUAL VALUE (TICKETS, MONEY, A PHOTO OF A MANSION, ETC.)

For this object lesson, collect two items of equal value. Place the items inside each of the two envelopes.

During the session, hand the envelopes to two different volunteers. Let them know their job is to persuade the group that their envelope is the best (don't let them know what is inside). After they have given their pitch, lead the rest of the group to vote on which envelope is the better envelope.

Say: *While we may put a preference on a particular envelope, I can tell you that each of these are equally valuable. Why? Because their contents are worth the same amount of money. While we might put an artificial value on the envelope—inside, where it counts, they were equal.*

It's like that with us and God. While we far too often pick sides and put people down or elevate other groups, to God we are equally valuable because we are all created in His Image.



As we all share in the image of God, we should seek good for all people. What's more, we should seek to take the good news to all people, as they too should know the love of God displayed through Jesus Christ.



DIG DEEPER

EVERY LIFE COUNTS

God values life, which is not surprising since He created it. He also expects humankind to value life.

It is important to remember that God places more value in people's spiritual lives than in their physical lives. Jesus revealed this when He said, "Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matt. 6:25). Jesus added the summary statement at the end of this chapter, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (v. 33).

Since the spiritual aspects of people are of the highest value, it follows that weak physical bodies—malformed, aged, undeveloped child in the womb, and so forth—are of the same value in God's eyes as strong, shapely, fully grown humans. Since all lives are valuable to God, when societies choose to destroy them for any reason they are in direct defiance to Him.

There are Scriptures that we often quote when confronted with beginning of life issues like, "For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise You because I have been remarkably and wonderfully

made" (Ps. 139:13-14). However, an even more compelling verse might be God's word to Jeremiah: "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). God's purposes for everyone are different, but He is familiar with each one even outside of their physical lives. Ending lives prematurely interrupts God's purposes.

In the same way, this applies to end of life issues: Life is more than just its physical properties. Life is primarily spiritual. This principle considers all lives sacred and suggests, "that extreme measures to prolong life artificially encroach upon the prerogative of God to control life and death. For the same reason, any and all forms of euthanasia are contrary to the teaching of Scripture."¹

All people answer to God, whether or not they know it, and God defends all human life. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of His children to do everything in their power to protect those whom others would seek to destroy.

1. *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 1039.

REBELLION'S CYCLE

For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide or Adult
Commentary, available for purchase
at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

JUDGES 2:11-19

¹¹ The Israelites did what was evil in the LORD's sight. They worshiped the **Baals**^a ¹² and **abandoned**^b the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They went after other gods from **the surrounding peoples**^c and bowed down to them. They infuriated the LORD, ¹³ for they abandoned Him and worshiped Baal and the **Ashtoreths**.^d

¹⁴ The LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He handed them over to **marauders**^e who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, and **they could no longer resist their enemies**.^f 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**,^g 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**^h 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**.ⁱ The LORD was moved to **pity**^j whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing and afflicting them. ¹⁹ Whenever the judge

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Referring to a group of false gods worshiped by the Canaanites, *Baal* means "lord, owner" but specifically refers to a weather and fertility god.
- b** The Israelites did exactly what they said they would not do in Joshua 24:16.
- c** These were the remaining Canaanites, who should have been removed in the conquest (Num. 33:55-56). Furthermore, the Israelites were not to make treaties with any who remained. The Canaanites misled the Israelites as God said they would, and judgment followed.
- d** Another set of Canaanite false gods, these were female associated with fertility rites and debauchery (Judg. 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3-4; 12:10).
- e** "plunderers" (NASB); "raiders" (NIV); How sad it would be to be delivered over to a people even more wicked than you.
- f** God gives us the ability and will to fight.
- g** These 12-15 leaders were political and charismatic, not those who decide in a court of law. Their purpose was to lead the people to seek God's leadership and "fix" their problems.
- h** The history of the Israelites shows that they often ran back to sin. We see this propensity to failure throughout the Book of Judges, the histories of the kings, and the entire biblical record.
- i** The judges led the people back by political/military success. However, these victories only lasted as long as the judge lived, and soon they did evil again.
- j** The Lord's pity was shown throughout Judges (3:9; 4:3; 6:6-7; 10:10). Each time the people cried out God answered in His grace.

(continued on next page)

died, the Israelites would act even **more corruptly**^k than their fathers, going after other gods to worship and bow down to them. They did not **turn**^l from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.

k Each cycle of sin, oppression, request, and salvation was followed by greater spiritual decay.

l This word (*naphal*) in Hebrew means to fall prostrate. This word points to repentance, which can include an emotional hatred of sin. The people during the period of the judges seemed to be unmoved.

“” TALKING POINTS

»» ABANDONMENT (Judg. 2:11-13)

- Following Joshua’s death, the Israelites began a spiraling pattern by abandoning their worship of God alone and instead participating in idol worship.

»» OPPRESSION (Judg. 2:14-15)

- God removed His protection from the rebellious Israelites, allowing them to suffer at the hands of unconquered pagan groups. God frustrated the efforts of the Israelites to fight for themselves.
- Note: Interpret the Lord’s removal of His hand as an act of God’s loving discipline of His people. Comment on God’s passive wrath.

»» REPENTANCE (Judg. 2:16-19)

- God raised up judges who rescued the oppressed Israelites and led the people to reform. However, once the judge died, the Israelites returned to their sinful pattern and were oppressed once again.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God alone is worthy of worship.
- Believers who turn their back on God should prepare themselves for His discipline—either overt or through passive wrath, turning them over to the consequences of their actions.
- God provides relief from His discipline through repentance and a return to Him.

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

Traveling is easier when following GPS directions. However, there are times when, even with this great technology, we still get lost. Describe a time when you got lost (with or without a GPS). What was that experience like?

- In order for the GPS to work, one thing we can do is actually follow its directions (when the GPS is accurate).
- Today, our study takes us to the time of the judges, when God's people ignored His perfect directions and faced the consequences of such actions.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JUDGES 2:11-13

What was the explicit evil that the people did in the sight of the Lord (v. 11)?

- They served other gods besides Yahweh, which was expressly forbidden in the first commandment (Ex. 20:3).
- It was also what Joshua had warned them about in Joshua 24:14-15.

What is striking about how these verses discuss the Israelites' sin? How does this depiction serve as a warning today?

- The honesty in which the Israelites' sin is described is significant. The author was blatant about their abandonment of monotheism and worship of God alone.
- These verses should encourage us to be just as honest with our own sin and to call it out as an affront to God.

The Israelites abandoned the Lord to worship which false gods? Where did they find such gods?

- The false gods were "Baal and the Ashtoreths" (v. 13). (Note: See keywords **a** and **d** on page 39 for more information on these false gods.)
- These gods were also worshiped by the people around the Israelites, including the Canaanites (3:5).

JUDGES 2:14-15

What was God's response to Israel's disobedience?

- God's anger was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over to their enemies. In other words, they lost in the battles they attempted to fight.

Notice the word choice in verse 14: "He sold them to the enemies around them, and they could no longer resist their enemies." What images could this syntax produce?

- It connotes images of slavery, when Israel was owned and controlled by the Egyptians.
- Just as God had delivered them earlier, He could easily send them back (Deut. 29:28).

In this passage, who is to blame for the struggles of Israel? Who would you consider to be the real enemy?

- Israel's real enemy was themselves and their own sin. They alone were to blame for their struggles and for God removing His protection from them.
- This is an act of God's loving discipline. Have someone look up Proverbs 3:11-12 and apply that to Israel's situation in this text.

JUDGES 2:16-19

Who was the primary actor for the good of the Israelites? How was this good accomplished?

- God is the one who acted for the good of Israel.
- He brought about this good by raising up judges who led the people to reform their ways.

Describe the cycle of disobedience we see in these verses. As Christians, what can we learn from this so that we don't fall into a similar cycle of rebellion?

- The people would be saved by God through the judges. Once delivered, the people would fall back into disobedience, which caused the need for the judges in the first place (vv. 16-17,19).
- As Christians, we often go to God when times are difficult and weep over our sin, yet too often we do not listen to the Word nor the Spirit, and we fall back into disobedience.
- Instead of plunging into this pattern, we should focus on listening to God speak to us in His Word and through our pastors and teachers. We also need disciplined accountability within the local church to encourage us to walk as we have been taught by Christ.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What should we take away from this text about God's attitude toward His people, including us?

- We see God's amazing patience with His people.
- Because of His love and faithfulness, God stays with us, even when we don't deserve it.
- This should drive us to a deeper appreciation for God's grace and toward seeking more holiness in our lives.
- **Personal Challenge:** This week, incorporate into your personal prayer time an emphasis on thankfulness for God's loving discipline in your life. If there is an area of your life where God is disciplining you at this moment, repent and be faithful to Him.

A DOG COLLAR

Inquire who has an invisible dog fence. For those who haven't heard of one, explain: *Many dog owners have invisible fence systems. These systems, if you are not familiar with them, consist of electronic boundaries placed in yards and, when coupled with special dog collars, help keep dogs from leaving their boundary areas.*

The purpose of such systems is to prevent dogs from getting lost or harmed in traffic or to allow them the ability to go outside in an area where their owners can't or choose not to build a traditional fence.

Every time the dogs get close to the electronic boundaries, their collars will beep to warn them they are getting too close, as they get closer, the beeping gets louder and more frequent. As they cross the boundary, they each receive an electric jolt from their collars. This lets them know to turn around and go back into their yards where they are safe.

In our own lives, we too have been given boundaries by God in how we are to live our lives. Through the Word, God shows us what He expects from us, and what is best for us. Yet, as with the



invisible fence, if we wander outside of God's boundaries, He will lovingly remind us, through discipline, that we need to return to where He has placed us.

Share a time when this was true in your own life and what the results were. Close in prayer, thanking God that He allows us boundaries to protect us and to better serve Him.

DIG DEEPER

REBELLION'S CYCLE

The story of the Israelites was often sordid. I remember reading through 1 and 2 Kings when I was a young man and setting up a cheer when the narrative came to Hezekiah. Up until him, all the kings either did evil or insufficient good. He was the reformer king who actually "removed the high places" (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chron. 31:2), shrines to pagan gods set in the hills. I was wondering when someone would pull down those pesky high places! Hezekiah was my man.

Oh, then Hezekiah's son Manasseh rebuilt them. But not to worry! Josiah followed Manasseh and demolished them again!

This is how the entire Old Testament history of the Israelites reads: one failure after another and some occasional bright lights. The Book of Judges is certainly this way. We just finished the story of Joshua, and with a few notable exceptions, the Israelites did very well. Now this introductory section of Judges is preparing us for a rebellious cycle. The people alive during the Judges did not do well at all.

Though today we are similar to the Israelites during this period, we should not be like them. We all tend toward rebellion, but as Christians with the indwelling Holy Spirit, our old nature is no excuse for our behavior today. Everything has changed.

We should recall a great passage of Scripture where the understanding of the Old Testament meets the New Covenant. In John 3, Nicodemus, a representative of Yahweh's people of the Old Testament met with the Lord Jesus. Jesus told him many interesting things, but not the least was the idea of being born again (John 3:3-8).

Jesus made it clear that this spiritual event happens when people meet and confess Jesus, and it is nothing short of miraculous. We publicize our decision with our baptism: what was old has passed away—buried with Christ—and what is now is new, free to walk in new life.

This story of the Judges, not to mention the entire Old Testament, helps us realize we need a Savior. But now that Jesus has come, and He has invited us into life of a different nature with Him, we do not have to be like those who are trapped in rebellion. It is truly possible for us to please the Lord.

WILLING SERVANTS

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

JUDGES 4:4-10,12-16

⁴ Deborah, a woman who was a **prophetess**^a and the wife of Lappidoth, **was judging Israel at that time.**^b ⁵ It was her custom **to sit under the palm tree of Deborah**^c **between Ramah and Bethel**^d 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**^e commander of **Jabin’s forces**,^f his chariots, and his army at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will **hand him over**^g 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.**”^h ⁹ “I will go with you,” she said, “**but you will receive no honor**ⁱ 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?**”^k So Barak came

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Like the prophet, the prophetess had a special connection to God. They spoke words of warning, comfort, and prediction. Deborah’s prophecy was also used in her “song” of victory (Judg. 5).
- b** Deborah is the only female judge. What tremendous honor God showed her in this patriarchal society! However, it may also be indicative of the weakness of male leadership in this time of decline.
- c** Possibly named after Deborah’s namesake, Rebekah’s nurse (Gen. 35:8), or after Deborah herself. Sitting under this tree points to her judging duties.
- d** This location is significant, as she was not in Shiloh where the Tabernacle was, but in the hills in a central location, accessible to the people.
- e** The commander of the Canaanite forces was located in Hazor.
- f** Jabin was the king of Hazor and Sisera’s superior. This is not the same Jabin who ruled Hazor when it was destroyed earlier by Joshua (Josh. 11:1-5).
- g** “deliver him” (KJV); “give you victory” (NLT). God’s control of the battle was evident, as not only would He hand Sisera over, He would lure him out in the first place (v. 7a).
- h** Barak seemed reluctant. Deborah’s choice in the matter was Barak’s choice.
- i** Because of Barak’s cowardice, lack of trust in God, or simply because it was God’s choice.
- j** At this time in their history the Israelites were largely foot soldiers. For an enemy army to have this many chariots was daunting.
- k** Deborah reminded Barak of God’s promise.

(continued on next page)

down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.¹⁵ The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army **into confusion**¹ with the sword before Barak. Sisera **left his chariot**^m 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.**ⁿ

l This confusion was “with the sword,” so the Lord got involved during the battle.

m Sisera’s chariot was possibly more ornate and would identify him as commander. He thought his best chance was to flee on foot. Just a little later, the rest of the army was caught in a storm, and many drowned.

n No one was left of Sisera’s army, and he was soon dispatched.

“” TALKING POINTS

»» AN UPDATED REQUEST (Judg. 4:4-7)

- Judge Deborah summoned Barak for an update as to why he had not obeyed God’s command to mobilize the Israelite forces at Mount Tabor since God had promised victory.

»» A DEAL STRUCK (Judg. 4:8-10)

- Barak explained that he would deploy if Deborah accompanied him. Deborah agreed, reminding Barak that he would not be honored as the victor because of his timid response.
- Deborah accompanied Barak and the army to Mount Tabor.

»» THE ORDERS ISSUED (Judg. 4:12-14)

- Sisera was informed of Barak’s troops assembling, so he summoned his iron chariots to face Barak.
- Deborah reminded Barak of God’s promise and then directed him to engage with Sisera’s army.
- Barak led the army down Mount Tabor.

»» THE VICTORY WON (Judg. 4:15-16)

- God caused Sisera’s army to become confused, and the warriors abandoned their chariots.
- Barak and his troops pursued Sisera’s army until Sisera’s army was utterly defeated.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- 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.

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

Tom Landry, the original coach of the Dallas Cowboys, once said, “The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don’t want to do, in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to be.”¹ Have you experienced the challenge of getting a group to buy into a vision? What could be possible reasons for hesitation in following the leader’s strategy?

- Some hesitation may be caused by doubts in the strategy or leadership, a selfish attitude, or even a lack of self-confidence.
- However, when those on a team follow a true leader, they in turn can achieve great things.
- In God, we have the perfect leader, and if we are willing to trust Him, He can do great things in and through us.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JUDGES 4:4-7

What made Deborah unique as the judge of Israel?

- Deborah, the prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was the only female judge of Israel.

When Barak was summoned to Deborah, what did she want to know?

- Deborah called Barak before her to explain why he hadn’t listened to God’s command, specifically, why he hadn’t “deploy[ed] the troops on Mount Tabor, and take[n] ... 10,000 men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites” (v. 6).

For what reasons does Scripture tell us God called Barak to assemble this army?

- Take the group back to Judges 4:1-3. Direct someone to read this text to set the background for the current conflict and God’s calling of Barak.
- God called Barak to rescue God’s people and to defeat Sisera’s army.
- His victory, according to verse 7, was guaranteed by God.

JUDGES 4:8-10

What was Barak’s response to Deborah (v. 8)?

- He conditionalized his obedience to God. That is, Barak would only obey God if Deborah went with him as the judge of Israel.
- Once she agreed, verse 10 shows us he gathered the army of 10,000 and began to march to battle.

What did Deborah tell him was the result of the deal he struck with her (v. 9)?

- Because Barak’s faith was weak and he was timid in his obedience to God, Barak would not receive glory for the victory.
- Point the group to Judges 4:17-22 to see who would get the honor for the victory (Jael, “the wife of Heber the Kenite”).

JUDGES 4:12-14

When Sisera, the enemy of Israel found out about Barak’s troop movement, what did he do? What was Deborah’s response?

- Sisera gathered his army, which included 900 chariots of iron and many men. They gathered and began to march to cut off Barak at the Kishon River.
- Deborah responded by having Barak get up and go fight because God was going out before Him (v. 14).

JUDGES 4:15-16

During the battle, who was credited with causing the victory? How did the victory come?

- Have the group look at who routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army—it was the Lord.
- The Lord also used Barak and his army to carry out God’s victory.
- After the fight “not a single man was left” of the enemy army (v. 16).

Given Barak’s concerns, how is this victory an important lesson for the church today?

- For the church, we can see that God is true to His Word. What God promises, He brings to completion.
- Our responses should be ones of trust and obedience.
- We should not be timid when it comes to serving God through the Great Commission and obeying His commandments.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

God will use those who are willing to serve. Brainstorm with your group several ways you can become more fully involved in your church community, and commit to doing a few.

- Join the church on a mission trip (or organize one), or serve in evangelism outreach or the children’s ministry.
- Accountability can come by serving as a team, that way we won’t grow timid in our abilities but can have the support of one another as we trust God as willing servants.
- **Personal Challenge:** With which of God’s promises do you struggle to have full confidence? This week, write down that promise you’re most hesitant to believe, and pray God would give you confidence to trust in His purposes and in His Word. Then look up that promise in the Bible and allow God’s Word to speak to you and give assurance to your soul.

1. Ivan Huff, *Cause Or Effect: Are Tragedies God-caused Or an Effect of the World?* (Mustang, OK: Tate Publishing, 2009), 112.

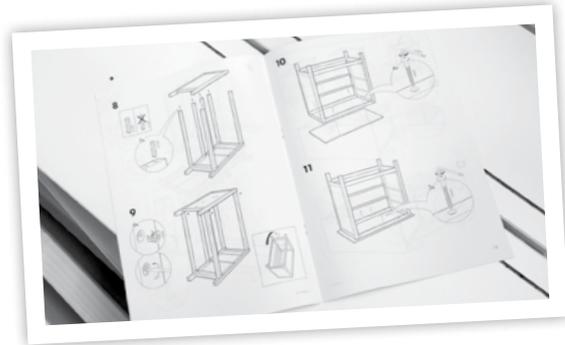
OBJECT LESSON

ASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

Anyone who has bought furniture from the global low-cost home furnishing giant has had to come face to face with the most daunting task—the assembly. Bring some instructions to the group session.

Explain: *The furniture assembly process is notoriously tedious and complicated, with many small screws and parts that are easily lost. Some instructions feature only photos or illustrations, making the process more challenging than it should be. However tempting it may be to avoid trying to decipher the instructions, they are in fact, extremely valuable. How valuable? That's what researchers at the University of Tromsø in Norway sought to find out.*

They had dozens of people complete the assembly of pieces of furniture. Some groups had the instructions and some didn't. And what they found was that the group that used the instructions had little to no trouble completing the task and did it more quickly and efficiently than those who didn't use the instructions. Also, by using the instructions everyone was able to complete the task, while of those who didn't have instructions, several people didn't complete the project.¹



When we are willing servants for God, we can trust that He will give us what we need to accomplish what He has put before us. By trusting in what God has provided us (the Word, His indwelling Spirit, other Christians), we can walk forward with Him in confidence for all He has called us to do.

DIG DEEPER

RESPONDING IN FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

In Judges 4, Deborah was a willing servant, while Barak seemed less so, and there were even a few biblical characters who did not participate at all! Following the victory, Deborah penned a song of praise, found in Judges 5.

If you read Judges 5:1-5, you would have to look hard to find any hero but God. This is true as an introduction, but also as a subliminal theme throughout the rest of the song. Remember that when God praises people, it is always because they responded in faith and obedience to God. All of Scripture's attention is on God, and all worship is His. Only when someone comes into this picture with reliance on God's deliverance does he or she have worth that should be mentioned.

This is one of the strong points of the Book of Job. If the book makes you mad due to Job's "mistreatment," you may be reading it wrong. Job was a very good man, but not good enough to be praised when he was not being faithful to God. When he questioned God, God began the *Where were you when ...?* and *Tell me, how did you ...?* response. No matter how good we think we might be—and most of us cannot hold a candle to Job—we are good only because we rely on God.

Back to the song. In verses 12-18, there is a list of some of those who participated and some who did not, which leaves us to assume not everyone sang Deborah's song. Verses 16-18 particularly sound like a rebuke. The Transjordan tribes did not participate, and also Dan, Asher, and Reuben were chided for not helping in the fray. However, heroes like Naphtali and Zebulun are listed, who risked "their lives ... on the heights of the battlefield" (v. 18).

We are all unwilling sometimes. We need to ask for God's grace that when a song is written in heaven, we will not be in the verses as those who "sit among the sheepfolds listening to the playing of pipes for the flocks" (v. 16).

1. Jeff Guo, "Men, women and Ikea: It's complicated," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 2015. Available at www.washingtonpost.com.

SESSION 10

TIMID WARRIOR

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**^a was **threshing wheat in the wine vat in order to hide it from the Midianites**.^b ¹² Then the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said: “The LORD is with you, **mighty warrior**.”^c 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**^d and handed us over to Midian.” ¹⁴ The LORD turned to him and said, “**Go in the strength you have**^e and deliver Israel from the power of Midian. **Am I not sending you?**”^f ¹⁵ He said to Him, “Please, LORD, how can I deliver Israel? Look, **my family is the weakest in Manasseh**,^g and I am the youngest in my father’s house.” ¹⁶ “**But I will be with you**,”^h 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**ⁱ and **cut down the Asherah pole**^j 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**.^k 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

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** Gideon seemed timid, but he obviously had inner reserves of humility, a hallmark of excellent leaders. Some think Gideon was showing cowardice and insolence, but it seems this passage shows a man who was honestly unimpressed with himself.
- b** Wheat is not normally threshed in a wine vat. Threshing floors were often high and exposed to breezes, which would also make them highly visible. Gideon was hiding as the Midianites raided and took everything on occasion (vv. 3-4).
- c** God called Gideon a “valiant warrior” (NASB), as he was hiding and afraid to go! God’s perspective is very different from ours.
- d** Actually, Israel had abandoned God (Judg. 2:12), and Gideon should have known better.
- e** Sometimes God sees strength in us of which we are unaware, and He may select us according to His own strength and gracious choice.
- f** What heady words: to be asked to go and free your beloved nation!
- g** His family was militarily weak in Manasseh, and he was the youngest—usually not the first choice.
- h** A person of faith should need no more than God’s promise of help.
- i** Gideon’s father, Joash, appears to have been a priest of Baal and the caretaker of the altar to this vile pagan deity—another indication of how far the Israelites had fallen.
- j** A female deity often associated with Baal; the “pole” or “tree” was like a totem for worship.
- k** It seems Gideon used the cover of night to hide his deeds.

(continued on next page)

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.**"³¹

³² That day, Gideon's father called him Jerubbaal, saying, "Let Baal plead his case with him," because he tore down his altar.

Joash, referring to Baal here, seems to have indicated his belief that Baal was impotent. He might have been an unbelieving priest just going through the motions.

“” TALKING POINTS

»» UNSURE AND UNTESTED

(Judg. 6:11-16)

- God called an insecure Gideon to be His great warrior judge. Gideon's initial response was filled with questions of God's power and ability to use him to defeat the Midianites. God promised His presence and assured Gideon of victory.

»» A FIRST STEP (Judg. 6:25-27)

- God directed Gideon to tear down the altar to Baal and offer a sacrifice to Him in the same location. Gideon took 10 men with him at night and did as God had directed him.

»» A FATHER'S DEFENSE (Judg. 6:28-32)

- Having discovered the destruction of the Baal idol, the men of the city initiated an investigation and discovered Gideon had destroyed it.
- They asked for Gideon's father, Joash, to hand Gideon over to them for execution.
- Joash mockingly challenged the men, calling on Baal to defend his altar if he was really worthy.
- Joash changed Gideon's name to Jerubbaal to mark the destruction of the altar of Baal.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God often uses weak and imperfect people to bring about His purposes, knowing they will have a greater dependence upon Him.
- Believers grow in their faith by being obedient to God.
- God is more than capable of defending Himself and His followers.

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

We've all faced challenges that caused us to fear or doubt. Describe a time in your life when you faced a task that seemed quite difficult.

- Guide the group toward ideas such as raising children, the first days of school, or perhaps military boot camp.
- Gideon faced a similar experience when God called him to be a judge for Israel. Through this experience, God would show Gideon that when the Lord is present, His followers need not fear.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JUDGES 6:11-16

What is interesting about the announcement of verse 12 given the setting of verse 11?

- Gideon being called a "mighty warrior" (v. 12) doesn't initially fit with his act of hiding wheat from the Midianites (v. 11).

How does Gideon respond to the angel's announcement?

- With an accusatory and skeptical response, Gideon challenged "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened?" (v. 13).
- He then wanted to know why God wasn't acting in the Israelites' current situation as He did in the days of their fathers.

After Gideon's questions, what is significant about the grammatical shift of verse 14?

- The grammar shifts from third person (v. 12) to first person (v. 14), showing that God Himself was speaking directly to Gideon—and could have been the whole time (Gen. 18).¹
- God had no intention of letting Gideon off the hook nor of allowing him to face this task alone (v. 16).

JUDGES 6:25-27

What was God's first task for Gideon? How did God help him accomplish that task?

- The first task was for Gideon to tear down the altar to Baal and put an altar to God in its place. Then Gideon was to offer a sacrifice to God.
- God gave him step-by-step instructions.
- Notice also that God knew how old Gideon's father's bulls were. There is nothing beyond our all-knowing God.

How did fear affect Gideon's behavior in verse 27?

How does God help us move past our fears?

- Gideon feared his family and the men of the town, so he completed the task at night when he was less likely to be discovered.
- Gideon's faith was greater than his fear, as he followed through with God's command, even in a difficult situation.
- As Christians, even though we may be afraid, we can find the strength from God to do the things He has called us to do.

JUDGES 6:28-32

What was the reaction of the townsmen (vv. 29-30)?

- Gideon's fear makes a lot of sense once we see their response.
- The men found out that it was Gideon who had destroyed the altar of Baal and set up an altar to God in its place. They desired to kill him for his actions, demanding his father, Joash, bring out his son so that they could execute him.

How does Joash's reaction to the men strike you?

- Verse 25 tells us Joash was involved in putting up the altar of Baal. Yet not only did Joash mock the men and Baal, he defended his son and even renamed him Jerubbaal to mark his destruction of Baal's altar.

What does Joash's reaction help us to understand about our own fears?

- Joash's support of Gideon helps us to understand that not all of our fears are founded.
- We may be surprised at who supports what God has called us to do.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

God's selection of Gideon came at an unexpected time. Gideon had assumed that God didn't care about their situation, but he was clearly wrong. What does God's interaction with Gideon teach us about God? How does it help us in our own relationship with God?

- In spite of what Gideon or others thought, God knew what was going on and cared deeply about His people. God didn't forget them, but His love for them led Him to deliver them.
- God's love for us is shown in His Son's willingness to die for our sins. God's power is also shown in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- Both God's love for us and His power to help us are fully on display in Jesus. When we have faith in Christ, we can have trust that God's love will never leave us, and He is more than capable of helping us whenever we need it.
- **Personal Challenge:** As Christians, there are several spiritual disciplines God has called us to do out of our love for Him and as a means of growing in Christlikeness (for example, Scripture reading, prayer, worship, evangelism, tithing, serving others, acts of mercy and charity). Which of these do you have the most fear of doing? This week, try to engage in that discipline. Then trust that He will show up to help you as you serve Him.

1. Gary Phillips, "Judges, Ruth," *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 97.



OBJECT LESSON

LEMON JUICE, LEMONADE, AND TWO OPAQUE CUPS WITH LIDS FOR A TASTE TEST

Put water in one cup and lemon juice in the other cup (not lemonade—you want it to taste terrible if they drink it). Call for someone to participate in a taste test. Place before them on a table two cups of liquid.

Explain to the volunteer: *There are two cups before you; one cup has a normal beverage and the other has something edible but less appealing. Without drinking one, and without anyone helping, which cup would you choose—the one on the right or the one on the left?* (Note: Don't allow sniffing the cup, etc.).

Explain: *Now, I am going to ask you to drink from one of these cups, but before I do so I will give you an option. You can either just drink the one you think is a normal drink, or you can ask me for advice on which cup you should drink. This is a simple choice: you can either go it alone, or you can get help from the one who made the drinks and knows what is in each cup. Allow the volunteer to choose with or without your help.*



Lead the group to debrief. Emphasize: *When God calls us into situations where we feel inadequate with the information at hand or unsure of what to do, we can have confidence that God will guide us as we follow His good wisdom.*



DIG DEEPER

VICTORIOUS THROUGH CHRIST

Gideon is a great example of how God can use even the most reluctant of servants. It is heartening to know that our strength is not what we feel or see but what God has placed within us. Gideon learned that God calls weak people who, when given the opportunity to be faithful, can follow and find Him more faithful still.

You and I have an advantage that Gideon did not, and that is the testimony of the apostle Paul. He found that what was weakness for him—even what he wanted removed—left him strong in God. God said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

In the same vein, Paul coined one of my favorite words. In the Greek transliteration, the verb *hypernikaō* translates, “more than conquerors” or “super conquerors.” Paul said that we, in Christ, “are more than victorious through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

There are days I do not feel like a conqueror. Sometimes, I feel as if I am under direct attack. However, the word of the Lord comes to us in times of such weakness with the resounding and faithful statement: our weakness only highlights God’s strength, and we are more than conquerors if we will only stay faithful.

The classic hymn “How Firm a Foundation” quotes several Scriptures that remind us that God’s Word has already revealed all we need to know:

Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand (Isa. 41:10).

I will be with you when you pass through the waters, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. You will not be scorched when you walk through the fire, and the flame will not burn you (Isa. 43:2).

Your life should be free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5).

Gideon learned this lesson through trial and error. In light of Jesus’ sacrifice and Paul’s subsequent testimony, we should go forward immediately, relying on His words in faith.

COMPROMISED POTENTIAL

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

JUDGES 16:4-6,13-20

⁴ Some time later, he fell in love with a woman named **Delilah**,^a who lived in the Sorek Valley. ⁵ The Philistine leaders went to her and said, “**Persuade**^b him to tell you where his great strength comes from, so we can **overpower**^c him, tie him up, and make him helpless. **Each of us**^d 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**.”^e 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**^f 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**,”^g she told him, “when your **heart**^h 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**,ⁱ because I am a **Nazirite**^j 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**.”^k The Philistine leaders came to her and **brought the money**^l with them.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** A name always to be associated with feminine wiles and betrayal, her name comes from a root word meaning, “to be brought down/low.”
- b** “Entice” (NASB); “seduce” (ESV); “lure” (NIV)
- c** While Samson made many mistakes in judgment, he was dead-on when grappling. Overpowering him was the only way to take Samson captive.
- d** Possibly five, as that is how many governors Philistia had at the time (Josh. 13:3; Judg. 3:3)
- e** Delilah made another ridiculous request of Samson, who was in constant danger (similar to when she asked him how she could make him helpless). Samson was aware of the danger but was arrogant when he should have been suspicious.
- f** These people were a constant challenge to the Israelites, but they were the result of the incomplete conquest of the land (Josh. 13:2). God had promised trouble if they were not completely destroyed (Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13; Judg. 2:3).
- g** Delilah used the highest human emotion to continue her deception; she accused Samson of not loving her while hoping to get information to destroy him.
- h** This word is often used in the Bible to mean the emotional and volitional center (Gen. 6:6; Deut. 6:5; Josh. 22:5).
- i** His hair was not the source of his strength but the Holy Spirit, according to the vow of the Nazirite.
- j** The Nazirite could not drink wine (or eat grapes or raisins), cut their hair, or touch a dead body. These were signs of consecration. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist are identified as Nazirites.
- k** Possibly the Philistine leaders needed to be convinced that this, the fourth time, would not be another false start.

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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.**”^m But he did not know that **the LORD had left him.**ⁿ

I Delilah and the leaders all seemed convinced that they could capture Samson this time.

m Samson was obviously aware of his vow and his consecration. Like many of us, he presumed upon God’s grace.

n In the Old Testament the Lord gave the Holy Spirit selectively to leaders, craftsman, warriors, and so forth (Dan. 5:11; Ex. 35:31; Judg. 3:10, 14:6; 1 Sam. 10:6, et al). When the Holy Spirit left this now unconsecrated man, he was vulnerable.

“” TALKING POINTS

»» PLEASE TELL ME (Judg. 16:4-6)

- Samson’s love interest, Delilah, made a business deal with the Philistine leaders to discover Samson’s source of strength.
- Delilah began her quest to discover Samson’s secret.

»» IF YOU LOVE ME (Judg. 16:13-15)

- Samson misled Delilah, giving her false information and then escaping when his lie was discovered.
- Having been duped by Samson three times, Delilah questioned his love for her.

»» THE PHILISTINES ARE HERE (Judg. 16:16-20)

- Samson was worn down by Delilah and revealed to her the secret of his strength—his uncut hair.
- While asleep in Delilah’s lap, Samson’s head was shaved. He awoke as the Philistine leaders arrived. He thought he would escape as in the past, but he did not yet realize that God had departed from him.
- Emphasize the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation for believers since the coming of Christ (John 10:27-29). Affirm the eternal security of believers.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

Why might athletes be tempted to compromise their integrity and cheat?

- From peer-pressure to fear of failure, there are times when compromising our integrity seems like the easier way forward, but as we have learned from history, that isn't the case.
- In this study, we are going to study Samson and how he compromised his potential in his service to God.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE JUDGES 16:4-6

Who was Samson's love interest, and why might her place of residence matter?

- The woman's name was Delilah. She was from the Valley of Sorek. Sorek was in northern Philistia, where the enemies of God's people (the Philistines) lived.
- Thus, Samson had fallen in love with a Philistine instead of a fellow Israelite as God desired (Deut. 7:3-4).

After Samson fell in love with Delilah, how did she respond?

- She made a deal with the Philistine leaders. They would pay her silver in exchange for information on how to defeat Samson.
- Delilah then began a journey to discover Samson's secret (v. 6).

JUDGES 16:13-15

In verse 13, we catch up with Samson and Delilah after a couple of Delilah's failed attempts to figure out his secret. What's her response to him?

- She complained that he was mocking and lying to her.
- She then demanded that he tell her how he might be bound.

After a third time of Samson misleading Delilah, how did Delilah sharpen her attack on Samson?

- She accused him of not loving her.
- If Samson had guarded his heart and followed Scripture in his relationship choice, he could have avoided this situation.

JUDGES 16:16-20

Delilah didn't relent in her quest to discover Samson's secret. How does verse 16 describe the events?

- Delilah "nagged him day after day and pleaded with him until she wore him out."
- In other words, she wore him down to the point that he gave up and gave in.

What was the secret to Samson's strength? What did Delilah do with that information?

- Samson explained that he had lived by a Nazirite vow. Direct a volunteer to read Judges 13:2-5 for background on Samson's explanation.

- After Samson shared the truth with Delilah, she betrayed him by having someone shave Samson's hair while he slept.

What happened once Samson's head was shaved? How can modern-day Christians understand this?

- The Philistines came at Samson like the previous times, but this time he couldn't defend himself because the Lord had left him.
- As Christians, the Holy Spirit interacts with us differently than in the Old Testament.
- During the period of the judges, the Holy Spirit came upon individuals for specific tasks, but today, the Holy Spirit permanently indwells each believer at the moment of salvation (John 10:27-29).
- Thus, the Holy Spirit won't leave Christians as He did Samson. We have assurance of eternal security through Christ, and we can trust Him to remain with us (Phil. 1:6).

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

How can Samson's experience instruct us as we weigh the relationships we form with people?

- We should be aware of those with whom we create close relationships with as the temptation to fall into spiritual compromise is great.
- This doesn't mean we don't evangelize or build friendships for the purpose of sharing the gospel or loving our neighbor, but our closest relationships should be with those who are like-minded in faith and practice.
- This is why our involvement within church and small groups is important, so we have relationships rooted in the common foundation of Christ.
- **Personal Challenge:** With whom are your closest, deepest relationships? Are they believers or not? If they are not believers, then are they leading you to spiritual compromise and a weakening faith? Are you encouraging the faith of those whom you are closest to, from your spouse to your children and your best friends? Use these questions of self-examination to reflect upon your Christian witness, and seek to make the commitment to build closer relationships with those who follow Christ.

TWO LOAVES OF BREAD

Gather two loaves of bread several days prior to the study. Store one loaf normally. With the second loaf, undo the bag tie so air can get into the loaf, causing it to go stale. Bring both to the group time.

Explain that in 1928, consumers were wowed with the “greatest thing since wrapped bread.”¹ This revolution was sliced bread. Sliced bread was introduced, as *Time* reports, in “a bakery in Chillicothe, Mo.” which “was the first to sell pre-cut bread using Otto Frederick Rohwedder’s invention: the automatic bread-slicing machine.”

Say: *For the first time, people could have the convenience of buying bread pre-sliced. Today, it is hard to imagine life without the convenience of pre-sliced bread. But however convenient the bread is, it has one major drawback to traditional loafed bread, which is how quickly it can go stale, especially if we leave the bag unsealed.*

At this point display the two loaves of bread. Show how the two loaves are the same, but one was left unsealed and has quickly gone stale. Explain how a little compromise in storage caused the whole loaf to go stale.



Wrap up by explaining that the loaves of bread are similar to our lives as Christians: when we compromise on what seem like small matters it has disastrous consequences. It’s best to avoid spiritual compromise—that way we are better equipped for the tasks God calls us to do.

DIG DEEPER

DESPERATELY SEEKING SOUND JUDGMENT

Ah, Samson, Samson! What potential and what an embarrassment. Forgetting the lilies at home, you went chasing after salty foreign girls—each one a worse choice. You can tear lions apart, but you cannot tame the one in your breast.

Of all the characters in the Bible, there may not be anyone more reckless than Samson. Even putting aside all the things we want to say about a stereotypical dumb brute, there is enough illustrative material to write a comedy: *Hey Dad, there’s this good looking woman: “Get her for me, because I want her.”* (Judg. 14:3). Then Samson maybe thinks, *I’ll kill people in order to pay off those who won a bad parlor game, burn their grain fields when they don’t want me around, and won’t expect anyone to retaliate* (15:6). *I know! I’ll keep telling this girl things about where my strength lies, so she’ll know how to tie me up and make me helpless* (16:16-17).

Sadly, we may be able to call to mind someone like this. I am already thinking of someone who has not even left high school and has already been in trouble with the law several times. He is not a bad person, but he repeatedly makes bad choices that usually end poorly. *What was he thinking?* we ask ourselves after each mistake.

We are like Samson or this young man sometimes. We stumble around in our own strength reaching for what we want. The *Holman Bible Handbook* says, “The Book of Judges illustrates the kind of moral decay that occurred when there was an absence of godly leadership. There was a decline in the spiritual condition of the judges themselves as each cycle describes the judge and his era. Samson, the last judge of the book, was the embodiment of the immorality of the period.”²

What is wrong with Samson?

To the question from Delilah, “Please tell me, where does your great strength come from?” (v. 16). Samson could have had a better answer. When we consider Christian ministry of any kind, we should learn the answer to Delilah’s question that Samson missed: “First and foremost, it comes from God!”³ As Paul said to Timothy, his “child” in the faith, “For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and *sound judgment*” (2 Tim. 1:7, emphasis added).

1. Jennifer Latson, “How Sliced Bread Became the ‘Greatest Thing’” *Time*, July 7, 2015. Available at <http://time.com>.

2. “Judges,” *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992) 209.

3. G. Curtis Jones, *1,000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 166.

FAITH THROUGH TRIALS

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

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**^a 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**.^b ⁸ She said to them, "Each of you **go back to your mother's home**.^c 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**."^d 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**,^e 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**."^f ¹⁴ Again they wept loudly, and **Orpah kissed her mother-in-law**,^g but **Ruth clung to her**.^h 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

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

a Naomi had originally migrated to Moab because of famine in Israel (v. 1). Now word had come that things were better there, and God had blessed His people with food.

b Naomi returned home after losing all the men in her family (vv. 3-5). They were from Bethlehem in Judah.

c Naomi showed concern for her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, suggesting their responsibility to her had ended with the circumstances, and they now were free to find shelter with their blood relations. Specifically, Naomi mentioned their mothers, as they would know best how to comfort their bereaved daughters.

d "Security," "new home" (MSG). A single woman was unprotected in this society when alone.

e By not using the word for "womb" and speaking frankly about waiting around for new sons to grow up, Naomi was indicating—with emphasis and maybe a little sarcasm—that Ruth and Orpah would be better off in Moab.

f Events suggest that God is not helping Naomi, and as she said, may be "against her." Little did she know God was working out a plan to bless her through Ruth and leave her in the best condition of her life. She was not the first nor the last to feel abandoned when God was working out salvation (for example, Gen. 42:36; Job 19:21,30:20-21; Ps. 39:10).

g A kiss of farewell

h An act that displayed her committed love

(continued on next page)

leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, **I will go**,ⁱ and wherever you live, **I will live**;^j your people will be **my people**,^k and your God will be my God.¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May **Yahweh**^l punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was **determined**^m to go with her, she stopped trying to persuade her.

i Ruth was ready to go wherever Naomi did and face dangers and uncertainty with her.

j Ruth offered much more than a short-term commitment. She was throwing in her lot with Naomi.

k The Israelites were, with all their failures, a blessed people. This might have been the easiest choice for Ruth, as her ties had been broken with the Moabites by her marriage to an Israelite.

l Ruth addressed God by His redemptive name, which indicated her knowledge of Him at this point.

m Naomi truly had been trying to convince Ruth to return to Moab, but this determination in Ruth's words left Naomi speechless.

TALKING POINTS

»» A DESPERATE RETURN (Ruth 1:6-10)

- Bereft of her husband and two sons, who had died, Naomi decided to leave Moab and return to her homeland, Judah. Her daughters-in-law accompanied Naomi as she began her journey. Naomi encouraged them to return to their homeland where they could remarry. The daughters-in-law continued to journey with Naomi.

»» A BITTER PLEA (Ruth 1:11-14)

- Naomi pled with her daughters-in-law to return to their parents households. She reminded them that she would not be able to provide for them. Orpah tearfully heeded Naomi's plea, but Ruth remained committed to going with Naomi.

»» A LIFELONG PROMISE (Ruth 1:15-18)

- Naomi challenged Ruth's decision to remain with her.
- Ruth declared her allegiance to Naomi and Naomi's God—Yahweh.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- God's plans sometimes involve enduring difficulties and making hard decisions.
- Believers can find comfort in difficulties through the relationships God places in their lives.
- Believers can remain confident that God is worthy of our trust even when we are facing difficulties in life.

NOTES



FOCUS ATTENTION

What's the best advice you've been given (or have given out) for keeping a marriage or relationship healthy?

- Some of the best advice tells us how to persevere through difficulties and keep our relationships strong when times are tough.
- Today, we're going to look at the Book of Ruth. From the beginning of the story, each of the characters encounter trials, and we'll see how they respond to these difficulties.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

RUTH 1:6-10

The Book of Ruth opens in a sad manner, as we're introduced to three grieving widows. Who are these widows? Where and when does this take place?

- The widows are Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah.
- The story begins in the country of Moab during the time of the judges. They were in Moab because of a famine in Israel.

What was Naomi's plan? Why did she decide this plan?

- Naomi decided that she would return to "the land of Judah" (v. 7), her homeland, "because she had heard in Moab that the LORD had paid attention to His people's need by providing them food" (v. 6).

What did Naomi encourage her daughters-in-law to do? Why?

- Naomi told them that they should return to their families.
- She prayed that God would give them rest and that they would find new husbands.
- She did not want them to venture to a place and people they didn't know where she couldn't promise them a family (husbands). This was a sign of kindness from Naomi.

RUTH 1:11-14

What motivated Naomi to encourage Ruth and Orpah to return to their people?

- Ruth and Orpah refused Naomi's wish for them to return home.
- This leads to Naomi's response in verse 11, which centers on the cultural expectations of a levirate marriage. Traditionally, if a husband died without leaving a child, then a brother or close relative of the husband married the widow, providing a means of continuing the family line and security for the widow.

After Naomi's speech, how did the two daughters-in-law react?

- Orpah wept and tearfully agreed to do as Naomi asked.
- Ruth, however, "clung" to Naomi, remaining steadfast in her commitment to go with her (v. 14).

RUTH 1:15-18

Form two teams. Direct one team to identify the specifics of what Naomi told Ruth in verse 15 and the other team to identify the specifics of how Ruth responded. Guide the teams to compare their findings. What similarities did you find between the two?

- Naomi urged Ruth to do as Orpah did and return to "her people and to her god" (v. 15).
- Ruth responded that Naomi's people were now her people and Naomi's God her God.

How did Naomi respond to Ruth's commitment?

- Point the group to verse 18. When Naomi saw how deep Ruth's commitment was, she protested no more and allowed her to continue with her on the trip to Israel.

What do Ruth's statements in verses 16-17 reveal about her faith?

- Ruth announced publicly that she would leave behind her pagan nation and gods, and she would follow only Yahweh.
- Her statement of Naomi's people being her people demonstrated that she was joining the covenant community of God.
- She expressed her faith publicly by both declaration and action.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

What does Ruth's response to Naomi teach us about the value of community and relationships? What similar promise can you make to God today?

- Ruth's bond to Naomi helped her in this time of difficulty.
- It also led her to want to worship the same God Naomi worshiped no matter what hardships she had been through.
- For the church today, we should understand that community and relationships help others find faith in times of trials and hardship.
- **Personal Challenge:** Using Ruth's commitment to God in the face of difficult circumstances, during your quiet time this week pray that God would give you the strength to be publicly bold for Him, and ask God to use you to influence others to keep their faith strong during hardships they may face as well.



OBJECT LESSON

A BALLOON TO SHOW STATIC CLING

Bring an unfilled balloon to the group time.

Explain: *Many of us are familiar with the feeling of static cling—when our pants stick to our legs and we seem to be magnets to dog hair and lint.*

Take the balloon and fill it with air. Find someone in the group who is willing to rub the balloon on his or her head for several seconds to create static cling.

Say: *One of the reasons this balloon sticks to our hair is because of the transfer of electrons that reside within our hair. This creates static electricity that causes the hair to bond to the balloon.*

Transition: *When it comes to keeping our faith in difficult times, we can't simply cling to God on our own. Just as the balloon needs the hair, we need God to hold us and provide the resources to keep us close to Him.*

As the first chapter of Ruth shows, we also need one another. By their relationship, Ruth trusted that she could cling to Naomi through this difficulty and be sustained.



DIG DEEPER

DELILAH VS. RUTH

When reading through the Book of Judges, we notice quite a bit of difference between Delilah and Ruth. Delilah was a foreigner who acted just as expected. Ruth was also foreign, and yet she showed more godliness than the typical Israelite during this period of the judges.

The Moabites had a love/hate relationship with the people of God. Usually there was warfare between them, and the typical Israelite thought very little of Moabites. Dr. Robert Bergen asks, "So why was one of the books of the Old Testament named after a Moabite woman? ... Perhaps God gave us the Book of Ruth because Ruth behaved in such an 'un-Moabite' way."¹

Dr. Bergen goes on to contrast other well-known Moabites with Ruth: Orpah went back to Moab, but Ruth stayed with Naomi and chose God and His people. Eglon the Moabite king oppressed Israel for 18 years (Judg. 3), whereas Ruth worked hard to provide for Naomi. In the 8th century, the Moabite King Mesha murdered his son and burned him as an offering postmortem (2 Kings 3:27). In contrast, Ruth gave birth to a son who was in direct lineage to the Savior (Ruth 4:17).

Ruth's character ran deep in the passage we're studying this week. While Naomi seemed taken with her own grief (having lost her

husband 10 years before), Ruth (having recently lost her husband) directed her energy to Naomi.

What causes one person to be Delilah, infamous for betrayal and selfishness, and another Ruth, heroic in kindness and blessed by the Lord?

God's presence in a life must be noted. God taught His people throughout history to be kind and compassionate; their truthfulness and fair dealing were only reflective of the Lord who called them. There were exceptions in Israel, but not with people who consecrated themselves to God. Ruth must have developed an ongoing relationship with God.

There is something else here, which comes from Ruth's own choice. When a person chooses to consider the needs of others, the result is always good. Ruth dethroned herself, showed us how to care, and attracted God's favor.

Delilah manipulated for herself, pushed God away, and ended up destroying herself and many other people. God used selfless Ruth to bring light to a very dark time in Israel's history, and ultimately to have part in preparing the way for the One who would bring light to everyone.

1. Robert Bergen, "Moab," *Biblical Illustrator*, Vol. 32, Number 2 (Nashville: LifeWay, Spring 2006), 57.

REDEEMED AND SECURE

For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide or Adult
Commentary, available for purchase
at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.

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

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**,”^a she replied. “**Spread your cloak over me**,^b for you are a **family redeemer**.”^c ¹⁰ Then he said, “May the LORD bless you, **my daughter**.^d You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not **pursued younger men, whether rich or poor**.^e ¹¹ Now **don’t be afraid**,^f 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**,^g 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.” ... 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**.^h 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**ⁱ of him. ¹⁷ The neighbor women said, “**A son has been born to Naomi**,”^j and they named him **Obed**.^k He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

- a** “maid” (NASB); “servant” (NIV)
- b** Not a sexual overture, this indicates the protection of one person in power over one without. It was also a common way of showing betrothal and still has this meaning today in parts of the East.
- c** This adds meaning to Ruth’s request for Boaz to spread his cloak. She was asking him to redeem her as his wife. He was not Ruth’s brother-in-law or living on the same property (Deut. 25:5), but he could help a close relative in need.
- d** This word indicates Boaz’s affection for Ruth and also his more advanced age.
- e** Some people would leave all wise counsel and pursue an attractive charmer. Ruth was not that kind of woman.
- f** Ruth’s actions carried risk because her intentions could have been misunderstood by Boaz. She was vulnerable and a foreigner.
- g** Ruth was there late, and could not safely go home by herself.
- h** Having a son was considered a special blessing since he would be able to carry on the family line.
- i** The word for “took care,” sometimes translated as “nurse,” means literally to “support,” and refers to Naomi actively helping raise her grandchild rather than acting as a wet-nurse.
- j** Much like today, grandparents played a large role in their grandchildren’s lives, often to the relief of the parents, and it is likely that Naomi lived with the family as she was now a part of this redemption.
- k** Obed would become King David’s grandfather, part of the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

NOTES

»» INQUIRY (Ruth 3:8-9)

- At midnight, Boaz woke up and was startled to find Ruth lying at his feet. She identified herself and clarified her purpose of inquiring about Boaz's willingness to fulfill the role of kinsman redeemer.
- Note: Carefully present Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz as persons of integrity.

»» INTEREST (Ruth 3:10-13)

- Boaz stated his willingness to take Ruth as his wife, commending her for her integrity. He noted that another potential kinsman redeemer existed who would need to be addressed first. Boaz promised to tend to that issue as soon as the morning arrived.

»» INHERITANCE (Ruth 4:13-17)

- Boaz took Ruth as his wife and they had a son, whom they named Obed. Naomi was encouraged by the future this son represented. Obed would be the grandfather of David, Israel's most beloved king.

»» SUMMARY STATEMENTS

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



FOCUS ATTENTION

Describe a situation in your life that seemed hopeless but it turned around for good. How did you see God working through that experience?

- In today's continuing study of the story of Ruth and Naomi, we'll see that their lives were struck with tragedy. However, in His providence, God was moving to give them a secure and blessed future.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE RUTH 3:8-9

What did Naomi instruct Ruth to do? Why did she have her do this?

- Naomi told Ruth to wash and anoint herself, put on her cloak, and go to the threshing floor (where Boaz would be). Once he laid down, she was to uncover his feet and lie down as well.
- Naomi instructed Ruth in this manner because she wanted to "find security" for Ruth (Ruth 1:9). By this Naomi meant she wanted Boaz to take Ruth as his wife.

When Ruth followed Naomi's instruction, what was Boaz's reaction, and how did Ruth respond to him?

- In verse 8, we find that he was "startled" and asked, "Who are you?" Ruth told him she was there for him to redeem her.
- There was no immorality in this situation; all the characters were people of high integrity (v. 11).

What connection did "spreading your garment" have with Boaz's role as a kinsman redeemer?

- "Spreading your garment" was an invitation to Boaz that she wanted him to marry her.
- In mentioning his role as a redeemer, Ruth gave the theological basis for seeking Boaz in marriage.
- The kinsman redeemer's responsibilities were varied, but included continuing the family line (Deut. 25:5). As Gary Phillips notes: "The practice formally applied to brothers, but apparently was extended in the time of the judges to the nearest kinsman down the family line."¹

RUTH 3:10-13

How did Boaz respond to Ruth's request?

- Guide the group to name the various ways he responds, including asking God to bless her, thanking her for her kindness to him, and agreeing to do all she asked beginning the next morning.
- Boaz also mentioned that there was another redeemer nearer than himself, and he would resolve the matter in the morning.
- Also take note of Boaz's emphasis on Ruth's character (v. 11).

What lessons can we take from the emphasis on Ruth's character?

- Ruth did as she was told because of her high moral character.
- Our moral character is vital to our Christian witness and our ability to be open to answering God's call at any time.

RUTH 4:13-17

Boaz married Ruth and God blessed them with a son, Obed. How, in-turn, was Naomi blessed?

- Naomi was blessed because her family had been redeemed. When it seemed hopeless because her husband and sons had died, God provided an heir, a grandson, by His good grace.
- Naomi was able to spend time with Obed as his nurse, so daily she saw God's blessing and goodness.

God's blessing was not confined to this family. How was Israel as a whole blessed? How are we all blessed through this kinsman redeemer?

- Obed was the grandfather of David, Israel's most beloved king.
- Have the group turn to Matthew 1:5-16. The world is blessed as Jesus Christ was born from the lineage of Obed.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

As we look at the story of God's role in the life of Ruth and Naomi, what picture does this give us of how God provided for our redemption in Christ?

- Just as God was providentially over Ruth and Naomi's situation, He also worked to bring about salvation through Jesus and His death and resurrection (Acts 2:23; 3:18).
- Just as God brought Ruth into His family and the lineage of Jesus Christ, we're also brought into God's family. By faith in Christ we're a part of His covenant people and are also a part of Christ's family as adopted sons and daughters (Gal. 3:26-29; 2 Cor. 6:18).
- **Personal Challenge:** Ruth's life of integrity was a blessing and an asset for her. By God's grace, we have forgiveness in Christ, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't strive to improve our character (1 Pet. 1:15-16). This week, pray that God would show you an area of your life where your character is weaker than it should be. Once He reveals that to you, repent and seek His strength to shore up that area of your life through Scripture reading and the biblical counseling of a trusted Christian friend or pastor.

1. Gary Phillips, "Judges, Ruth" in *Holman Old Testament Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 325.



OBJECT LESSON

PICTURES OF A BELOVED PET

Bring pictures of a pet you have owned or enlist some volunteers to bring their own pictures to the group time.

Ask the group if anyone has ever adopted a pet. *What happens once you bring that puppy home?*

Lead the group to create a list of everything they need when adopting a puppy. Items may include a pen or crate, food, food and water dishes, toys, leashes, a collar, medicine, and so forth.

Ask: *Why do we get these kinds of things once we bring a puppy home?*

Explain: *Because we need them to take care of this animal. You can't bring home a puppy and expect not to do anything for it. Once you are a puppy owner, you have a responsibility to care for it. There is a change of status that happens once that puppy comes home. He or she has gone from a strange dog to your own dog, from an outsider's puppy to your family's puppy.*

Transition: *Our redemption in Christ is similar to this experience. We were once outside of God's people, but after we believe the gospel and place our trust in Christ, we become a part of His*



family. We are no longer outsiders after putting our faith in Christ. Now we belong to a Master who cares for us deeply and will make sure we are eternally secure and provided for.



DIG DEEPER

BIBLICAL HOSPITALITY

Hospitality was very important to the Israelites. The period in which the story of Ruth and Boaz takes place was a wicked time in Israel, but there was still a palpable sense of welcoming protection. Today, the warm inviting atmosphere in Christian churches and homes derives from this heritage.

Ruth wondered at the kindness she was shown by Boaz, especially because she was "a foreigner" (Ruth 2:10). This word in Hebrew is translated "stranger" or "alien." In the Mosaic law, it was prohibited for the people not to "exploit a foreign resident or oppress him, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:21).

Another reason that the Israelites were kind to strangers is the fear that they could be entertaining angels. The Jews "... believed that angels in disguise were sent to determine whether people were obeying the law of hospitality"¹ Possibly the most Jewish of New Testament books, Hebrews stated, "Don't neglect to show hospitality, for by doing this some have welcomed angels as guests without knowing it" (Heb. 13:2).

However, to think that God's people were kind to strangers only in response to the law or angels is to do them an injustice. They were

kind because they wanted to be. The presence of God in our lives transforms us into kind people, for God Himself is kind.

This helps us answer an important question: How could Ruth be included in the lineage of Jesus, since the Moabites were not worshipers of Yahweh? The only answer is that God is kind and gracious: "The Law that forbade Ruth to be part of God's people came through Moses. But the grace of God that was expressed by the prophet (Isa. 56:3-7) and that came through Christ (John 1:17) breaks through the Law's limits to include all like Ruth who seek refuge under the wings of the One True God (Ruth 2:12)."²

How wonderful it must have been for Ruth to find a welcoming new home! As Christians who have the complete revelation of God's kindness through Jesus Christ, we can see hospitality not as the actions of an exceptional few but as the regular practice of those changed by grace.

1. Hal Lane, "Stranger: A Word Study," *Biblical Illustrator*, Vol. 34, Number 1 (Fall 2007): 69.

2. John Traylor, "Moab: Its History and People," *Biblical Illustrator*, Vol. 38, Number 4 (Summer 2012), 35.



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5 STEPS FOR STUDYING SCRIPTURE

by Jesse Campbell



The perfect day would end with the perfect roast. I had all the ingredients—the veggies, the olive oil, the roaster, and the roast itself. My out-of-town wife was coming home and I wanted to impress her with how smoothly everything was running in her absence. I only made one mistake. Although I had turned the oven to 350 degrees, I forgot to stick the roast in the oven before heading back to work. It remained in the refrigerator. When I returned home expecting the aroma of a slow-cooked masterpiece I realized that one forgotten step had derailed supper. You don't just throw a roast in the microwave for 10 minutes.

Likewise, expositing Scripture takes time. Here are five steps in studying Scripture that I'd challenge you to remember and utilize.

STEP 1: PRAY.

All Scripture reading, studying and application must begin with prayer. Ask God for fresh eyes and relevant insight and that God would transform you through the process of preparation. Bible study is meaningless if it doesn't change us. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge puffs up (1 Cor. 8:1). Knowledge plus transformation and love builds up.

STEP 2: READ THE SCRIPTURE WITH FRESH EYES.

Every time you read the Bible it breathes new insight into your life. So even in passages that you've read scores of times, approach the reading with expectancy. Keep a pen handy to record your insights.

STEP 3: ASK THE BASIC QUESTIONS: WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHY? HOW?

The Book of Acts is the perfect example for this. If we have no idea of who Paul was, in what culture he existed, or how he changed, we will have a limited scope, and the narrative will seem one-dimensional.

STEP 4: EXPLORE.

We have more tools to study Scripture than we have ever had in the history of the church. Be sure to read the ETB commentary, but you can also take advantage of commentaries, websites, blogs, dictionaries, translations and versions, videos and a plethora of other sources. Warning: With a multitude of sources available these days, you are sure to run into a vast amount of rubbish! Vet them first.

STEP 5: JOURNAL AND APPLY.

Whether you use an empty book, a notebook, a private blog, or a word document, journal the process and its implications for your life and community. What is God teaching you through the study of His Word? This is the rewarding aspect of Bible study: through it comes epiphany, growth, insight, and change. You'll want to journal it. Celebrate it. And when the opportunity appears, share it.

These five steps aren't rocket science but rather a touchstone and reminder of the basic steps you'll want to practice. Remember to start with prayer, or you'll have the same feeling I had when I stared at that plastic wrapped roast in the meat drawer of my refrigerator.

Jesse Campbell is an author and the brand manager of Explore the Bible. He and his wife live in Nashville, TN, with their boys, where he also serves as a teaching pastor at Hermitage Hills Baptist Church. Jesse received his Master of Divinity degree from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and is beginning doctoral work. Like everyone else in Nashville, he is also a professional musician. His next book is titled Praying for Aiden. Find more at www.jessethecampbell.com.

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



SHAMGAR
(Judges 3:31)

ELON
(Judges 12:11-12)

GIDEON
(Judges 6:1-8:27)

TOLA
(Judges 10:1-2)

ABDON
(Judges 12:13-15)

DEBORAH
(Judges 4:1-5:31)

SAMSON
(Judges 13:1-16:31)

IRZAN
(Judges 12:8-10)

OTHNIEL
(Judges 3:7-11)

JAIR
(Judges 10:3-5)

JEPHTHAH
(Judges 10:6-12:7)

EHUD
(Judges 3:12-30)

THE JUDGES OF ISRAEL

GIDEON Major judges

TOLA Other judges

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

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