

The Book of Joshua

Listed Scriptures

Joshua; Deuteronomy 4, 19

Lesson Aim

- 1) That the students understand the key events of the Israelite conquest of Canaan under the leadership of God through Joshua
- 2) That they may understand the important teachings behind the events and the actions of the Israelites
- 3) That they may know obedience in God leads to success and blessings

Memory Verse

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.” (Josh 1:8)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Joshua; Deuteronomy 4, 19

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



“Therefore understand today that the Lord your God is He who goes over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and bring them down before you; so you shall drive them out and destroy them quickly, as the Lord has said to you. Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness, the Lord has brought me in to possess this land; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you’” (Deut 9:3, 4).

A possible question that the students may pose is why God would be so hard-hearted against the various nations that inhabited the land of Canaan. It is important to understand that these were very evil people. Some of them had very inhumane religious rites, including sacrificing their own young children. God is an impartial

God, and this never has changed – He was, He is and He will remain so.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD, ‘for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isa 55:8, 9). We must believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). His righteousness and His love are surely far greater than ours. This is the faith that we ought to have in Him.

W A R M U P



So far, we have followed the early history of the Israelites up to the point of entry to Canaan by the River Jordan. Today we will take a look at the actual conquest of the territories in Canaan. This can be seen as the closure to the chapter of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from the land of bondage (Egypt) into the promised land flowing with milk and honey.

B I B L E S T U D Y



Part 1

The Structure of the Book of Joshua

Following the Pentateuch, the book of Joshua records the succession of Joshua. It is the first of the history books in the Bible (Joshua to Esther, twelve books in all). The historical books cover the history of the ancient Israelite nation from the end of the exodus out of Egypt, through the period of the kings, all the way to the time of captivity and the return to rebuild the temple and city walls.

The book of Joshua chronicles the entry to Canaan, the destruction of the Canaanite tribes, the division of the land and the establishment of an Israelite society. The title is obviously derived from the name of its protagonist. It is also possible that Joshua had some form of participation in the penning of the book. The contents of the book may be outlined as follows:

- a. Conquest of Canaan (1–12)
 - Prologue and account of God’s designation of Joshua as Moses’ successor (1)
 - Spies in Jericho (2)

- Crossing of the Jordan and camping at Gilgal (3–5)
- Fall of Jericho (6)
- Achan’s sin and conquest of Ai (7–8:29)
- Covenant on Mt. Ebal (8:30–8:35)
- Treaty with the Gibeonites (9)
- Conflict with the Amorite kings and the southern campaign (10)
- The northern campaign (11:1–5)
- Summary of the occupation (11:16–12:24)

- b. Division of the land (13–21)
 - Prologue and account of the unconquered lands, as well as a summary of the territory on the other side of the Jordan (13)
 - Allotments of Judah, Ephraim and (Western) Manasseh (14–17)
 - Allotments of Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Dan (18–19)
 - Cities of refuge and Levitical cities (20–21)
- c. Final words of encouragement (22–24)
 - Dismissal of the 2 1/2 tribes east of the Jordan (22)
 - Covenant at Shechem (24:1–28)
 - Graves of Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar (24:29–33)

Teaching Tips

To simply go through the structure of the narrative in the book may be a rather boring task. One way to get around this may be to assign the book as a reading assignment at least one or two weeks before the actual class and have the students attempt an outline at home. When they come to class on the Sabbath, the teacher can then divide the class into discussion groups and have them piece together whatever work they have done at home. Each group can then give a brief report or make a poster that can be displayed on the classroom notice board.



Part 2

Victory at Jericho, Defeat at Ai

Jericho

The city of Jericho was a well-fortified city. Yet, God destroyed it without even the need for a battle. All that the people of Israel needed to do was to go around the

city according to the number of times designated by God for each of the seven days. After the collapse of the city walls, the Israelites attacked the city, leaving nothing except for Rahab and her family. Rahab was not born an Israelite. But, she had the spiritual insight to know the power of God, and to choose the right thing to do so as to receive spiritual blessings for herself and her family. She even became part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Ai

As the case was with Jericho, Joshua sent spies into Ai to check out the place before deciding on the military strategy. The report was that Ai was a much more easy target than Jericho, and they needed only to send two or three thousand men, for the people of Ai were few. Most unexpectedly, the Israelites suffered heavy casualties at Ai. It was the disobedience of one man, one family, that drove God to withdraw His help.

A Comparative Study

In many ways, the battles at Jericho and Ai can be compared and contrasted. For this exercise, read Joshua 6 and 7, and then answer the questions that follow.

- a.
 - i. Outline the instructions given by God regarding the daily marches around Jericho. What were some of the difficulties that might have made complete obedience to these instructions difficult? (Prompt students, if needed, with answers such as instructions were illogical and apparently had nothing to do with military offense, the Israelite army had a large number of men and not everyone might be willing to obey, etc.)
 - ii. Compared to the instructions given for the battle of Jericho, what was God's requirement for the Israelites at the battle of Ai?
- b.
 - i. Rahab and Achan can be contrasted. In what ways was Rahab a wise woman? In what ways was Achan a foolish man?
 - ii. What happened to each of these two people?
- c. What parallels can we see today in our lives compared with those of Rahab and Achan when they were faced with a choice to obey or disobey God?

Note for the teacher:

A possible question that may be raised is why the family of Achan was implicated. It is important to explain the reasons to the students should such a question actually arise. It is essential for all the family members to know that everyone is responsible for encouraging and correcting one another with love and humility, to ensure

that everyone observes God's commandments. The head of the family (i.e., the parents) must especially guide their children in the Lord (Eph 6:4). Furthermore, this is one of the requirements for one to be anointed as a deacon or an elder (1 Tim 3:4, 5, 12).

Rahab's family members were saved because of her. In a similar way, Achan's whole family was implicated because of his folly. At first glance, it may appear that God was too harsh. However, we should think deeper. Was it possible for Rahab's decision to have succeeded if the family had not agreed to support her? Similarly, from Joshua 7:16–18, we know that Achan was found out after many levels of investigation and screening, first by tribe, followed by clan, and then by family, before going to the individual level. Throughout the whole process of inquiry, no one stood up to confess or point Achan out. So, in the same way, we can infer that the family does play an important part where Rahab and Achan's deeds were concerned.



Part 3

Further Conquests and the Allocation of Land

A. Further Conquests (Josh 9–12)

The defeat of the cities of Jericho and Ai cast a great blanket of fear over the rest of the Canaanite tribes. They sought out different ways and means to cope with this formidable people who surely had the presence of God with them, granting them inexplicable power to conquer. One of the tribes, the Gibeonites, even resorted to deceit to force the Israelites into a peace treaty with them. The Israelites did not inquire of God and fell into their trick (9:14). Another attempt was the allied attack by the five kings. Joshua sincerely prayed and God caused the sun and the moon to stop, and the sun did not go down for one whole day (10:13). So, the Israelites won another victory. Thereafter, as a result of the Israelites' obedience to completely annihilate the various tribes, God was with them in their battles. Chapters 9 & 10 chronicle the southern conquests, and chapters 11 & 12 give us the details about the conquests of the northern tribes (see map of conquest). The pattern of God's abidance remained unchanged through all the generations. When they obeyed and trusted in God, they had success. When they chose their own ways according to their own will and understanding, they failed. It is still the same with our lives as God's children today. We should therefore always have faith that God watches over us as long as we walk by His ways.

Teaching Tips

Maps of (a) the path of conquests led by Joshua, (b) the various settlements of the tribes and (c) the cities of refuge are useful aids for this section of the Bible Study. It is important that the students get to have a visual depiction of the many locations as we discuss the places – it is not only a good mnemonic aid for them but also a good framework for the teacher to structure the lesson.

B. Division of Land (Josh 13–19, 22)

The land conquered was allocated as follows:

- a. Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh received the lands east of the Jordan (13:8–13:32).
- b. The Levites were a specially chosen tribe that served the Lord and were not allocated any area specifically. Instead, the other tribes had to offer a tenth of what they had for the livelihood of the Levites. Parts of the cities and regions inherited by the various tribes were allocated to the Levites for occupation (14:4, 21).
- c. The rest of the tribes received the lands west of the Jordan. The two tribes that came forth of Joseph were counted as two and each got a portion of the inheritance (16, 17).

C. Cities of Refuge

Cities of refuge can be seen as an expression of God's love and righteousness. They were built for those who had killed another accidentally or unintentionally. These cities provided refuge for them from the avengers who sought their lives. They could dwell there until they were brought before a trial or until the death of the high priest, after which they were cleared of their guilt (Josh 20). There were three cities of refuge on each side of the River Jordan:

East of the Jordan (Josh 20:8; Deut 4:41–43)

- a. Bezer (where Reuben's inheritance was)
- b. Ramoth (where Gad's inheritance was)
- c. Golan (where Manasseh's inheritance was)

West of the Jordan (Josh 20:6, 7)

- a. Kedesh (where Naphtali's inheritance was)

- b. Shechem (where Ephraim's inheritance was)
- c. Kirjath Arba (where Judah's inheritance was, also known as Hebron)

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



- 1** Which books in the Bible are conventionally classified as history books? What are their main contents?
- 2** Recapitulate the main contents of the book of Joshua.
- 3** What were the human factors that contributed to the success of the conquest of Jericho?
- 4** What was the main reason why the Gibeonites succeeded in deceiving the Israelites into establishing a treaty with them? What can we learn from this historical incident?
- 5** How can we gain spiritual wisdom?
- 6** Where were the six cities of refuge located? What was the purpose of these cities?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



People of Faith

To be part of the chosen people of God is a great blessing. The Lord Jesus says, "You did not choose Me but I chose you" (Jn 15:16). That part of our salvation is true and God has fulfilled His part. The rest is up to us. We have to understand that following the Lord Jesus till the very end involves an active choice on our part. Joshua's famous words can serve as a reminder for all of us. "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh 24:15).

Besides Joshua, the Bible records many great men of faith who chose God over

their lives, over their own enjoyment and comfort. Here are a few examples. Can you think of more?

1. When Joseph was serving Potiphar in his household, Potiphar's wife approached him and attempted to seduce him. As a lonely foreigner, Joseph was in a very vulnerable position. Nevertheless, the fear of God never departed from his heart. He made a great statement of faith and reverence to God: "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9). So, although the mistress continued her advances, Joseph was not moved in his resolution to stay holy.
2. When faced with the choice between worshiping another god, i.e., the golden image built by King Nebuchadnezzar, and worshiping the one true God, Daniel's three friends stated their choice most clearly. They left for us a classic example of true commitment to the Lord, no matter what the circumstances are: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us . . . but if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Dan 3:17, 18).
3. When God sent Jeremiah the prophet to preach about the imminent fall of Judah, the people, especially the nobility, were greatly annoyed by his prophecies. They even attempted to harm him. Jeremiah did not flinch but continued to preach, even though it meant risking his life. He said to them, "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city with all the words you have heard. Now, therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God . . . as for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you" (Jer 26:12–14).

Today, we may not necessarily face situations as drastic as those faced by the believers in the past. Nevertheless, there are many choices in our lives that stand in opposition to our worship and devotion to God. One of the many choices we face every day is to actually make time for God. Here's an excerpt from Manna (Issue 35), where one sister shares how she sets time aside for God.

Many times, we feel that there isn't enough time in the day to get everything done. Time – it is something we all treasure, something we wish we had more of, but it just seems to slip so quickly through our fingers.

As students, we are often burdened with so much work that we tend to let go of things that are vital to our well-being: God and our faith. How many times have we pushed God away because of our busy schedules? How many times

have we rushed off to school without first giving thanks to God for another day to live and just mumbled a few words of thanks seconds before jumping into bed?

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Eccl 3:1). According to the words of Solomon, there is a time for everything: a time to study, a time to play, a time to learn worldly knowledge and a time to gain spiritual wisdom. But, it is up to us to set out that time, to use our time wisely and devote part of it to God.

Question: How to schedule God in our lives?

Answer: Make an appointment with God and offer the best time in your day

A good way to put God in our lives is to make an appointment with Him each day. We should examine our lives and determine when the best time is for us to communicate with Him and to meditate on His words. We need to choose a time when we're not too tired and when our mind is clear to offer our best to Him.

I finally managed to figure out the best routine for myself by my second year of university. Although I prayed morning and evening, they were usually short prayers. I felt I needed to find a better time when I could really pray in-depth and meditate on the words of God.

I discovered that the best time for me was around 8 p.m. I studied and ate dinner and then it was time for God. Even if I were working on a paper, I would drop everything and give an hour to God. During that time, I would sing hymns, read the Bible, and then end with a prayer. It was time well spent and I truly treasured it.

Once we place God first, we will experience an immense difference in our lives. I noticed that when I made time for God by scheduling a period of time with Him each evening, I always completed my work within a shorter amount of time. I would often receive inspiration from Him when I was stuck on a paper.

Moreover, the time that I set out for God also became a stress reliever for me. For that hour, I would forget about my studies and concentrate on the Lord. Amazingly, during the most stressful days, the lyrics of a hymn or a Bible verse would always touch me and lift my burdens. I truly felt immense peace and joy in my heart during those times. During my final year of university, whenever I was completely overwhelmed with work, God provided me with the sanity I needed.

I encourage you to give it a try, even if you can only afford to give up twenty minutes. Use that time to meditate on His words and to tell Him what a stressful day you've had. You'll definitely feel the difference in your life. As long as we

truly put God first in our lives, we truly don't have to worry about anything – everything will fall nicely into place.

The Bible says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt 6:33). We have read how the sister makes time for God and experiences God's blessings. Other than setting aside a daily session for God, there are other choices in our lives that we have to make. As the saying goes, “Faithfulness in little things is a great thing.” There are often many little choices that we have to make for God, and for the sake of maintaining our faith. The following is but a conservative list of possible choices standing between you and God:

- a part-time job (in school or outside of school) or a class in school that requires hours on a Saturday, making it hard for you to get to church on time, or worse still, totally conflicts with service times (Read Ex 20:8-11; Heb 10:25).
- computer games or social activities on the Internet, such as emailing and aimless on-line chatting, that seem to develop a stronger hold on you as you spend your time on them (Read Ps 119:37).
- social activities that more often than not, fall on Saturdays (Read Isa 58:13, 14).
- certain activities which will cause God to turn His face away from you (Read Ps 119:11, 101).

Discussion:

Together with your classmates, discuss what other things may stand between you and God. Then, discuss what the difficulties are in overcoming them. After that, generate and share among yourselves Bible verses that apply to those situations cited and discuss how you may overcome them, so as to choose God over these things. Recall also the choices you have made in your life, how you chose God over other things that distracted you. Share with your classmates what the choices were, how you went through the decision-making process and what the results were.



“Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word. Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Ps 119:17, 18). These are beautiful verses. To live and keep the word of God is not a chore, for as the Lord Jesus says, His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Mt 11:30). We ask that God open our eyes, so that we may understand the wonderful things in His law, so that we will choose to follow His ways, for therein lies wonderful things that we will experience as a result of obeying. This is faith in Him – substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1)!