

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOSHUA

study guide

INTRODUCTION

God miraculously delivered Abraham's descendants from Pharaoh, schooled them in the desert for 40 years, and is now ready to take them to the land He promised them. God selects Joshua to succeed Moses and lead Israel against the mighty Canaanites. In addition to being a commanding general, he must also guide his people through the critical issues of faith, obedience, and sin, as they live out their relationship with God. Although we live on the other side of the cross, we deal with these same issues and Joshua will teach us a great deal about living as faithful children of our Heavenly Father.

Joshua was one of the twelve spies Moses sent into the Promised Land. This occurred early in Israel's time in the desert, so he was with Moses during the entire wilderness wandering. He apprenticed under Moses and led Israel against Amalek, Exodus 17:8-16, and was with Moses during some of his personal encounters with God, Exodus 24:9-13, 32:17-35 and 33:7-11.

The book of Joshua is divided into two main parts. The first section, in chapters 1-11, describes the warfare between Israel and the Canaanites. The phrase 'Be strong and courageous' is mentioned eight times in these chapters. We will spend most of our time in this section. The second part of the book gives a detailed description of each tribe's territory, even if they had not yet taken it from the Canaanites.

Week 1 – Joshua 1:1-18
God's Instructions to Joshua

Moses led the Israelites in the desert for 40 years and at the end of his life he brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. However, God did not allow him to enter it and He selected Joshua as Israel's next leader. "Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses." Deuteronomy 34:9.

Icebreaker:

Describe a memorable inspirational lecture, a retreat sermon, or a pregame talk given by your coach. How was it valuable to you?

Observe:

Read chapter 1 of Joshua. What do you think was the attitude of the Israelites about the upcoming battle?

Understand:

1. What was God's part in the battle for the Promised Land?
2. What were the requirements for Joshua to be successful in battle? (Include verse 3 in your response.)
3. Two and a half tribes were given land east of the Jordan and had already taken possession of it. What was their response to helping their brothers fight the Canaanites? What were their requests of Joshua

* Notice the punishment for those who do not obey Joshua. Capital punishment and warfare are mentioned frequently in Joshua and we will discuss them in a later chapter.

Find Meaning:

1. Joshua does not do or say anything to indicate he was afraid of fighting, so what was the purpose of God's instructions to him?
2. In what ways are we like the two and a half tribes in the mission Jesus gave the church in Matt 28:18-20?
3. How are we to be strong and courageous today?

Respond:

Although most of us are not involved in hand-to-hand combat, we do fight against the very real enemies of fear, shame, and temptation. How does this chapter help you in your struggle? What can you do this week to remind yourself of the tools God has given you to succeed against your foes?

Week 2 – Joshua 2:1-24

Rahab and the Spies

In chapter 1, God promised Joshua victory, but he still uses his military skills. In this chapter he sends two men to sneak into Jericho and learn about the city. They are saved by an unlikely ally, the town prostitute/inn keeper. She turns out to be a picture of our Savior and, in fact, the Messiah is one of her descendants.

Prostitution was a common profession for women who had lost a husband. They and their family had little respect in the community and they would likely feel little allegiance to their neighbors. Their house was also a place where travelers would spend the night. Townspeople would expect to see strange faces around their door.

Jericho was on the main road leading to the hill country to the west of the city. Once Israel had captured it, they had access to the hill country cities in the north of Canaan, like Jerusalem, and in the south, like Bethel. It also served to protect their supply line from the east.

Icebreaker:

Describe a time when you had to travel to a country where everything (e.g., language, culture, dress and food) was completely different from your home. If you have not been out of the country, share a time when you experienced a different culture here in the US.

Observe:

As you read chapter 2, put yourself in the position of the spies. What might have been their reaction to God's unusual means of protecting them?

Understand:

1. What was Rahab's motivation for protecting the spies?
2. What was her plan for their safe return?
3. What did this incident tell Joshua about Israel's future campaign against Jericho?

Find meaning:

1. Is it a sign of weak faith for Joshua to have sent spies into Jericho before he attacked it?
2. What did Rahab risk to protect the spies, and what did she hope to gain?
3. Rahab is listed as one the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:31. Describe her faith.
4. What does the story of Rahab tell us about God's Kingdom?

Respond:

Remember in chapter 1 God asked Joshua to be strong and courageous because He would always be with Joshua. Rahab is a beautiful example of strong and courageous faith in God. Describe what steps can you take to be more like her in trusting God?

Week 3 – Joshua 3:1-4:24
Crossing the Jordan and Building a Memorial to God

The Israelites are ready to cross the Jordan River, but it is early spring and the river is at flood stage. How are all the men, women, children and their belongings going to get across the raging waters? It looks like they need another miracle from God.

Icebreaker:

Tell us your most memorable story about your dad, mom or an important adult in your life.

Observe:

Before you read Joshua 3 and 4, briefly recount the history of the people who are about to confront the Canaanites. Consider what they may have been thinking as they crossed the river.

Understand:

1. Who (there are at least 5 audiences) and what was God teaching each group or person by stopping the water and drying up the riverbed?
2. Whose idea was the memorial?
3. Which tribes marched at the front? What might this mean?

Find meaning:

1. What is the significance of the priests carrying the Ark ahead of, and at least 1000 yards from, the people when they cross the Jordan?
2. The water receded only after the priests stepped into the river. What does this tell us about trusting God?

3. What was the purpose of the memorial stones? Why twelve stones, rather than just a single big one?
4. Do you find that great miracles from God precede great trials of faith in him? Explain.

Respond:

Describe a great thing God has done in your life. How can you set up a memorial that will inspire your family and others to ask you to recall the story?

Week 4 – Joshua 5:13-6:27
Obedience to God Brings Victory at Jericho

In the first part of chapter 5, God told Joshua to circumcise all the men because none had been circumcised during their 40 years in the desert. This reminded them of God's covenant with Abraham and their allegiance to Yahweh.

A few days after they crossed over to the plains of Jericho, they celebrated their first Passover in the Promised Land. They ate food from the land and the manna stopped. They had finally graduated from desert boot camp and they were ready to face a powerful enemy protected by a walled city.

This section marks the beginning of actual warfare in the book of Joshua. God's requirement that the Canaanites be completely destroyed can be quite troubling to us. This is not the type of warfare we are familiar with. Read the commentary at the end of this study for a perspective on this issue.

Icebreaker:

Recount to the group how God got you through a great trial.

Observe:

Read Joshua 5:13-6:27. Imagine yourself marching around the walls of Jericho in a huge crowd of completely silent people.

Understand:

1. Who does the divine soldier represent? What does this tell you about the event that follows?
2. What is the battle plan for defeating Jericho? What is God telling Israel and the Canaanites with this unusual plan?
3. What were God's instructions for the Israelites when they captured the city?

Find meaning:

1. Why do you think all of the precious metal in the city belonged to God? This will not be a requirement when the Israelites defeat other cities.

2. Discuss whether we tend to believe that 'God is on our side' or 'We are on God's side'.
3. This story is about being strong and courageous in God. What does it tell you about God and how we should act out our trust in Him?

Respond:

Many of us have Jerichos (overwhelming challenges) in our lives. Ask God to show your group how He wants to deal with the challenges group members are facing.

War, Death and Pain in Joshua's Time

The book of Joshua can be particularly troubling because God instructs Joshua to completely destroy some of the nations in Canaan. This is not how we wage war today. We forgive our enemies and even help them recover from the devastation of war. Why would God tell Joshua to obliterate some of the enemies of Israel?

Joshua lived somewhere around 1250 to 1400 BC in a culture that was very different from ours. Violent death was much more common in Joshua's time than it is today. For example, killing your neighbors was an accepted and expected way for families, tribes and cities to deal with perceived grievances. Actually, God restricted this in Israel by establishing cities of refuge as a means of dealing with indiscriminate vengeance killing. Also, capital punishment was prescribed for many more crimes than today, for example cursing parents, adultery, certain types of incest, and more. You will read in Joshua that the western tribes were ready to kill their eastern brothers over a disagreement about worship. Remember Joshua was written to people with this perspective on death.

As the Israelites moved from their desert wanderings to the Promised Land, they passed through areas that had been settled and were owned by others. God gave them specific instructions on how to deal with each group. For example, Israel asked permission to pass through Edom, but they were denied and they detoured around the area. For some tribes, like the Philistines (Sidonians, Avvites), Geshurites, Kenites and Midianites, the Israelites were instructed by God to offer them terms of surrender. However, six tribes (Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites) were to be completely destroyed, Deut. 20:10-18. The religious and moral practices of these nations were detestable, see Deut. 9:5, Lev. 18, Deut. 12:31 and 18:9-10. The incident with three visitors in Sodom (Gen 18) is a picture of the evil behavior of these tribes. In a perverse way, the Canaanites and Israel may have thought that God would tolerate the evil practices of the Canaanites if He had not required them to be killed.

People sometimes ask why God does not stop injustice? In this case, He did step in to end the suffering caused by the Canaanite culture. But remember, God's instructions were for specific groups of people, at a specific time in history.

Others ask, "If God can do anything, why can't He just stop the pain?" It is true that God is all-powerful, but He cannot act against His own nature, He cannot lie and He can only be truthful and merciful. And perhaps His mercy is constraining Him from eliminating pain caused by people. None of us are born into His kingdom. We must all accept His Gift of Grace and follow His son, Jesus. God gives us time to make that decision. He also gives us time to learn what our decision truly means. While we are deciding and learning, we have the option of ignoring God's instructions and causing suffering. Too many of us make wrong decisions, causing the pain and hurt we see. This idea is pictured in the mercy God showed Cain after he killed his brother in Genesis 4.

While the Bible does not tell us why God does not prevent pain, it is not because He is insensitive to our pain. We see this first in the description of the flood. "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." Genesis 6: 5-6 ESV. Ultimately, He sent His Son to endure the pain of scourging and the agony of the cross, to free us from the tyranny of sin, the root cause of pain. The path to ending our pain is through Him suffering it in our place.

Still the fact that God allows pain in our world is a profoundly difficult issue to understand.

Maranatha... come quickly Lord Jesus

Week 5 – Joshua 7:1-26
Achan's Disobedience

God had just given Israel complete victory over Jericho. Everybody must have been truly awestruck at the power of God and completely confident in their new leader who had just overseen a second great miracle. But the next story is one of defeat and tragedy.

Icebreaker:

Describe a situation where you confronted a friend about sin in their life. How did it turn out?

Observe:

Read Joshua chapter 7. What was it like to be an ordinary Israelite during this event?

Understand:

1. Why did the Israelites lose the battle with Ai? Did Joshua forget something?
2. Who did Joshua talk to in order to find out why his battle plan did not work?
3. What was his attitude when he came into the presence of God?

Find meaning:

1. Why did God take Achan's sin so seriously at this time in Israel's history? Later on, He will let Israel's sin go unpunished for decades before consigning them to captivity.
2. How does this story illustrate the principle that a family, clan, or nation is affected by the actions of just one of its members? (This seems unreasonable to us, but it is a very common view of reality. This principle is crucial to our access to eternal life through Jesus' sacrifice.)
3. Describe a situation where the sin of one family member or church member had painful effects on innocent bystanders?

4. Is it possible to hide sin and prevent its effects on family or church members?

Respond:

The clear message of this story is that sin has deadly consequences for the one who commits sin, as well as for his family and friends. We're all in this together. What can your group do to help each other steer clear of sin?

Week 6 – Joshua 8:1-35
The Defeat of Ai and the Covenant Renewed

God personally and immediately dealt with sin in Israel. With this tragedy behind it, Israel is again ready to confront the city of Ai.

The end of chapter 8 is a description of a huge ceremony. Moses prescribed the details of the event in Deuteronomy 27. Half of the tribes (Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh, and Benjamin) stood on Mount Gerizim and shouted the blessings for following God. The other half (Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali) stood on Mount Ebal and shouted the curses for not following the Law. The peaks are less than a mile apart and a person standing in the valley between them can be heard on both peaks. The area is a natural amphitheater. Archeologists have found a temple and animal bones on top of Mount Ebal.

Icebreaker:

Describe a challenging situation where you failed and had to face your failure again.

Observe:

As you read chapter 8 of Joshua, imagine yourself as an Israelite foot soldier, wondering what were the chances of defeating Ai this time?

Understand:

1. Describe the second battle against Ai. How did Joshua capitalize on the outcome of the first defeat?
2. Considering the initial report of the spies (Joshua 7:3), why did Joshua send ten times more soldiers and plan an elaborate strategy for the second attack on Ai?
3. What do you suppose was Joshua's motivation for the elaborate ceremony after the defeat of Ai? Who was the center of attention?

Find Meaning:

1. Do we have a ceremony(s) like the Covenant renewal at Mount Ebal? Explain.

1. Why is giving thanks, represented by the offerings in the ceremony, so important in our walk with God?
2. What can we do that is similar to what Joshua did at the end of the ceremony (8:34-35)?

Respond:

We all need second chances to deal with failure. All of us face chronic temptations like pornography, gossiping, substance abuse, anger, lack of forgiveness, laziness, etc. Describe how God is helping you overcome the temptations you face. Pray for each other's fight with sin.

Week 7 – Joshua 9:1 – 27
Israel Deceived by the Gibeonites

As Rahab told the spies, everyone in Canaan knew the power of the God of Israel. He had destroyed Pharaoh's army. The Amorite nations east of the Jordan had recently been defeated. Next, Israel sacked Jericho and defeated Ai and they were now in the hill country, ready to defeat the main Canaanite cities. Could anybody stop them?

Icebreaker:

Describe a situation where you bought something that was not what it seemed, like a counterfeit handbag, a car that needed repair, etc.

Observe:

Read Joshua chapter 9. Imagine what it was like to be a newcomer in Canaan.

Understand:

1. Why did the Gibeonites deceive the leaders of Israel?
2. Do you think the Gibeonites were sincere in their willingness to serve Israel?
3. Why was Israel susceptible to being deceived?
4. Did the leaders make the right decision about the Gibeonites after they learned the Gibeonites were actually neighbors?

Find meaning:

1. Gibeon eventually became a full part of the nation of Israel. Their city was assigned to Aaron, Josh. 21:7, the tabernacle was located at Gibeon in Solomon's time, 2 Chron. 1:3, 5, and the Gibeonites were in the list of those who had Jewish heritage after the captivity, Neh. 7:25. What does this say about God?
2. Do we sometimes come to God with self-interest in mind but end up understanding what it means to serve Him? How does God change our hearts?

3. Describe a time when you did not seek God's direction and made a disastrous decision based on other factors? How do you prevent this from reoccurring?

Respond:

Discuss how you determine God's direction for you. Is this process different for people who are married? How can your Community Group assist you in determining God's direction?

Week 8 – Joshua 22:1-34
Conflict Resolution

In chapters 10 through 12, we read about God giving victory to Joshua over the southern and northern kings in the hill country. Chapter 11 ends with, "Then the land had rest from war." Chapters 13 through 21 describe the land still to be taken and the allotment for each tribe.

In chapter 22, we read that after years of battle, fighting was finished for the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Joshua sent them home to their lands east of the Jordan River and back to their families. But the parting did not go smoothly.

Icebreaker:

How did your parents or guardians resolve conflicts between you and your siblings?

Observe:

Read Joshua 22. Feel the tension. Blood was nearly shed.

Understand:

1. What was Joshua's admonition for the tribes heading east?
2. What concerned the western tribes about their eastern brothers? Why were they ready to kill over the issue?
3. What concerned the eastern tribes about their brothers? What was their solution? Notice where the monument was built.
4. What were the real motivations of each group?

Find meaning:

1. List the key steps the tribes used to resolve the conflict.
2. What attitudes did each side display that prevented war?

Respond:

Is anyone in your group involved in a conflict? How can the principles of conflict resolution be applied in the situations you identified. Pray for the situation and particularly that God would be honored in the outcome.

Week 9 – Joshua 24:1-28
Joshua Reminds Israel about God's Covenant

Chapter 24 takes place at Shechem. It is in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, the two neighboring mountains mentioned in the covenant renewal in chapter 8. The venue is a huge amphitheater, bigger than any modern sports stadium.

Joshua is near the end of his life. In this great assembly, Joshua speaks God's message to Israel as a prophet. Later his comments are more like a father giving his family his last words. Joshua reveals his true heart and his true desire for his children. Read it carefully.

Icebreaker:

Describe a wedding or a funeral service that you have attended where the Gospel was preached.

Observe:

Read Joshua 24:1-28 and imagine you are in the huge assembly of the nation of Israel listening to your 110 year-old hero. The wind is calm and many thousands of people are silent, listening to Yahweh speak through Joshua.

Understand:

1. Briefly outline the key points of Joshua's speech to the Israelites.
2. Describe the people's response to his speech.
3. Was Joshua's response to the people's commitment to God (24:19-20) a prediction, a challenge, a threat, a warning....
4. What did Joshua do to remind the future generations of their commitment to God?

Find meaning:

1. Put verses 14-15 in words that relate to your own battles.

2. What could explain the fact that some Israelites still had images of foreign gods after their forty years of following God in the desert and their successful campaign against the Canaanites?
3. What gods are we tempted to serve in place of God?
4. Why do you suppose Israel was faithful to God during Joshua's lifetime and during the life of the elders who outlived him? (24:31)?

Respond:

Discuss the role of the Church (fellow believers) in helping maintain faithfulness to God. What can your group do?

