

THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

Chapter 7: The Battle Begins

Key Question: What can we learn from Joshua's taking of the Promised Land that can help us conquer sin and fight spiritual battles?

Joshua's Call

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God called Joshua to lead the Israelites to inherit the Promised Land. They had already taken land west of the Jordan River from Amorites¹ who answered their request for passage with an attack. Now it was time to enter the land.

1. (a) What did God promise Joshua when he told him to lead the people to their inheritance from him (Joshua 1:5)? (b) If God was going to give him the victory, why did Joshua need to be strong and courageous to fulfill his calling (1:6)? (c) God calls us to overcome sin, fight spiritual battles, and minister to others. Why do we need to be strong and courageous to fulfill our calling? (d) If possible, describe a time you needed strength and courage to obey God.

2. (a) What did Joshua need to do to succeed in his calling (Joshua 1:7)? (b) What did he need to do to ensure he obeyed God (1:8a)? (c) What would result from doing this (1:8b)? (d) What can you learn from this that applies to what God calls you to do?

¹ The Amorites were one of the Canaanite people groups. Sometimes *Amorite* and *Canaanite* were used interchangeably.

3. (a) Why else should Joshua be strong and courageous (Joshua 1:9)? (b) What can you learn from this when obeying God seems scary, difficult, or even impossible?

Joshua told the people what God had commanded, and they agreed to obey everything. He sent two spies into Jericho. Jericho was a fortified city surrounded by protective walls atop a high mound² in the midst of the Jordan Valley. It guarded the major route into Canaan.³

The spies entered the house of a Canaanite prostitute named Rahab. When the king of Jericho learned of their presence, Rahab hid them.

4. (a) What did Rahab know (Joshua 2:9a)? (b) How did the Canaanites feel about the Israelites (2:9b)? (c) Why (2:10)? (d) What did Rahab say she knew about God (2:11)?

Rahab had heard about all the Israelites' God had done, and she concluded their God was God of both heaven and earth, so she acted on that faith.

Jericho

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After the spies returned, The Israelites prepared to cross the Jordan. God gave the Israelites a miraculous sign so they would know that Joshua was a true prophet accurately giving them God's commands: When the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the Jordan River, its flooded waters stopped

² Settlements built on top of old settlements eventually formed hills called *mounds* (or *tells*).

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, second edition (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 2008), 126–127.

flowing and piled into a heap so the people could cross on dry land.⁴ When the people finished crossing, the priests stepped out of the river's normal boundaries and the waters returned to their place.⁵

God did this so all the peoples of the earth would know his power.⁶ Indeed, the Canaanites along the river's coast quickly spread the terrifying word.

The Israelites encamped at Gilgal⁷ and paused to circumcise the men born during the desert wanderings and to celebrate Passover. The pause gave any Canaanites who interpreted the parting of the sea and the river in the same way as Rahab the opportunity to convert or flee. Some shut themselves up within Jericho's walls, trusting their local gods and their own strength to protect them.

Then the Lord told Joshua to march.

5. (a) What was strange about God's command on how to take the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:2–5)?
- (b) Why did obeying these instructions require faith?

Joshua told the people what God said to do, and they obeyed. Just as God promised, when the priests blew the trumpet and the people shouted on the seventh day, Jericho's walls collapsed.

The army took the city and destroyed everything except for Rahab and her family. Normally, armies took plunder from cities they captured. But God said they were to take no plunder from Jericho: everything was to be devoted to him and destroyed.⁸

The New Testament tells us Rahab is a hero of faith:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.⁹ *Hebrews 11:30–31*

⁴ Joshua 3:7–17; 4:14.

⁵ Joshua 4:18.

⁶ Joshua 4:24.

⁷ Joshua 5:10. There is no mention of resistance. Gilgal's occupants had heard about the parting of the sea in Egypt and had seen the taking of the Amorite cities across the Jordan. Did they simply flee upon seeing the parting of the Jordan River, knowing what was coming?

⁸ Joshua totally destroyed three cities: Jericho, Ai, and Hazor. Others he captured so the Israelites could settle in them (Merrill, 127).

⁹ The NIV's text note points out the word translated *disobedient* could also be translated *unbelieving*.

6. (a) From what you've read so far, in what ways did Rahab show her faith in God? (b) Rahab had been a Canaanite prostitute, but when her faith turned her to God, she married an Israelite and became part of the Israelite community.¹⁰ What does this teach us about God's willingness to embrace and redeem those who turn to him in faith no matter their background?
7. (a) What happened as a result of Jericho's miraculous fall (Joshua 6:27)? (b) What evidence about God did this give to the Israelites? (c) What evidence about God did this give to the Canaanites?

Ai, Shechem & Gibeon

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Ai

One man disobeyed God's command to take no spoils from Jericho: Achan had taken a beautiful Babylonian robe, gold, and silver and had hidden them in his tent.

When Joshua sent troops against the small city of Ai, Ai routed them. Joshua asked God why, and God told him Israel had sinned: "That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction" (Joshua 7:12).

God revealed that Achan was the thief, and when Joshua confronted him, he confessed. The entire community had sworn to obey God's commands through Joshua on pain of death. The community stoned Achan and destroyed the Canaanite treasures.

¹⁰ She played a significant part, as we will see in lessons 9 and 22, for she was an ancestress of Jesus.

8. (a) From the summary above, what do you think the Israelites learned about God from the fact that he knew Achan's secret sin? (b) What did they learn about taking for themselves that which God ordered destroyed? (c) What did they learn about their dependence on God during battles?

The Canaanites saw a small city easily rebuff the Israelites, and this emboldened them to fight, making the task of taking the land harder. It also discouraged Joshua's men.

9. (a) How did the Lord encourage Joshua after the defeat (Joshua 8:1)? (b) What was the army permitted to do at Ai that was forbidden at Jericho (8:2)? (c) If Achan had patiently waited for God to give him riches in a way God allowed, how would things have been different? (d) It was not all riches God forbade, but only those which were taken in a way he forbade; how can remembering this help us patiently wait when we're tempted to obtain something in a way God forbids?

Joshua set an ambush and captured Ai.

Shechem

Joshua took the Israelites to Shechem, a fortress city between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.¹¹ There both Abram and Jacob had built altars to God.¹² Moses had told Joshua to build an altar on Mount Ebal, and to have the people proclaim blessings from Mount Ebal and curses from Mount Gerizim.¹³

Joshua did all Moses commanded him. He gathered the people together to hear the Law read and to renew their covenant with the Lord.

¹¹ Joshua 8:33. "That Israel had access to Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, between which Shechem was located, implies either that Shechem was abandoned at the time or that it surrendered without a struggle." (Merrill, 130.)

¹² Genesis 12:6-7; 33:18-20.

¹³ Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:1-26.

10. Why do you think it was important that the people hear all the words of the law and renew their covenant agreement with God as they began taking possession of the Promised Land (Joshua 8:34)?

Gibeon

Back at the encampment in Gilgal, the people of Gibeon came to Joshua. They claimed to be from a distant land and asked for a peace treaty, offering themselves as slaves to the Israelites. Believing them, Joshua agreed to the treaty without consulting God. Only then did he learn Gibeon was nearby.

When Joshua asked them why they had deceived him, they replied, “Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this” (Joshua 9:24).

Joshua honored his treaty. But five alarmed Amorite kings set out to punish Gibeon for becoming an ally of the Israelites. The Gibeonites asked Joshua for help, and the Lord told Joshua to give it.

11. (a) In what ways did the Lord fight for Israel (Joshua 10:10–14)? (b) What sign did this give the remaining Canaanite people groups who had, like the Gibeonites, heard that the Lord God was giving the land to the Israelites?

Inheritance Received

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Northern Canaan

Joshua captured and killed the five kings, taking more land in the process. He finished his central and southern campaigns and returned to the camp at Gilgal.

The king of Hazor, the largest city of northern Canaan, heard of all Joshua had done, gathered an alliance with a great many kings, and advanced with a huge army. Joshua attacked and defeated them. Some fled north beyond the territory which the Lord had said to take.¹⁴ Those who didn't, the Israelites put to the sword. Joshua captured their cities.

12. What did Joshua do (Joshua 11:23)?

Inheritance Allotted

With the major fortified cities taken throughout the Promised Land, Joshua divided the territory into twelve parts so the people could begin settling the land. He gave two allotments to Joseph's descendants (the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh), none to Levi's descendants, and one to each of the other tribes named for the sons of Israel. The Levites received no allotment because they were set apart to serve God in cities within the boundaries of the other tribes, and their inheritance was to be the people's offerings to the Lord.¹⁵

There was still work to do: as the Israelites' numbers increased, they needed to continue to drive out the remaining Canaanites.

13. (a) What have you learned from Joshua that can help you battle sinful desires (1 Peter 2:11), thoughts that are against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3–5), and spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12)? (b) What have you learned from Joshua that can help you be on your guard, stand firm in faith, be courageous, and be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13)?

¹⁴ Joshua 11:8 describes the limits to which the Israelites pursued the armies. (Merrill, 135.)

¹⁵ Joshua 13:14.

Final Words

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When Joshua was old and knew his time to leave this earth approached, he again gathered the people at Shechem.

14. (a) What did Joshua tell the Israelites they knew (Joshua 23:14)? (b) How well did they know it? (c) What did Joshua warn them (23:15–16)?

The time had been long since Joshua led the people across the Jordan.¹⁶ The newest generation hadn't seen the early miracles. Joshua reminded them of all God did from the time of Abraham until then. He told them to make a choice.

15. (a) What did Joshua tell them to do based on all God had done for them (Joshua 24:14)? (b) What choices did he give them (24:15a)? (c) What choice did Joshua and his family make (24:15b)? (d) Imagine Joshua were speaking to you now. What choice would you make?

The people responded, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”¹⁷

Joshua led the Israelites in renewing their covenant with God again. He set up a stone as a witness to the renewal.

The Israelites were finally in the Promised Land. They were God's people and they vowed to serve and obey God. Next week we see how well they kept their vows.

¹⁶ Eugene H. Merrill calculates more than 30 years (Merrill, 157).

¹⁷ Joshua 24:24.