

CHAPTER 7, THE BATTLE BEGINS

TIMELESS TRUTH: FAITH IS THE VICTORY.

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

Israel had spent the last 40 years on a road to nowhere. A lot can change in 40 years. All of the people who were slaves in Egypt had died, except for two, Joshua and Caleb. Moses had died too. Joshua had been his right-hand man and he was Israel's new leader. The wilderness of disobedience and defeat was behind them now and a new generation camped at Canaan's edge.

A lot had changed during the wilderness years, but God had not. The promise He'd made to Abraham over 600 years before was about to turn into reality. The LORD spoke to Joshua saying, "*Be strong and courageous, for I am with you. Be careful to obey my law*" (p. 89). Joshua listened well. He had spied out the land as a young man and trusted God to give it to them as He'd promised. Now he sent two spies into Jericho to appraise the land. They were hidden in the house of Rahab, a prostitute who protected them from the king of Jericho. She boldly confessed her faith in the LORD as the one true God who had given the land to Israel. The spies responded to her faith by agreeing to save her whole family when they attacked Jericho.

This new generation of Israelites had heard the stories about crossing the Red Sea on dry land; now, their first steps into the Promised Land were taken across another patch of dry land when God parted the Jordan River – another highway leading into God's promise.

When they reached Jericho, the military strategy was unorthodox. The priests marched the Ark of the Covenant around Jericho's walls each day for six days. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. Their parade concluded with the sound of trumpets and shouts as they completed a seventh circle around the city. Amazingly, the walls of Jericho collapsed! Jericho was destroyed and Rahab and her family were saved.

The land of Canaan was a place of conquest and victory for Israel. When Israel obeyed, God faithfully delivered her enemies into her hands. When they failed to trust Him, they missed out on the fulfillment of those promises. Even the temporary defeat at Ai caused by disobedience was later turned to victory when the people followed God's command. In the annihilation of entire cities, we see God's holy intolerance of sin. In the account of Gibeon, we see God's mercy extended to a people who were willing to follow the true God. After taking the entire region by force, Joshua divided up the land by tribe as Israel's inheritance.

The chapter closes with Joshua's final words as he recounts the stories of God's faithfulness and deliverance. God will keep His promises. He will also let us choose whether or not we will participate in the blessings of His promises. These stories of God's people are our stories too and, like Joshua, we must "*choose this day whom [we] will serve.*" Joshua stated he and his "*household [would] serve the LORD*" (p. 101). What will you choose?

ICEBREAKER QUESTION: As a young person, who did you look up to as a hero, either fictional or real? What about them made them your hero?

1. In the original languages both “Joshua” and “Jesus” mean “Jehovah saves.” How is Joshua’s relationship to Israel similar to Jesus’ relationship to the Church?
2. What basis did Joshua have for being “*strong and courageous*” (p. 89)? Which assurances that God gives Joshua most strengthen and encourage you?
3. What concerns might Joshua have had as he accepted the reigns of leadership from Moses? What can we learn from the people’s response to Joshua that can apply to changes of leadership at our church?
4. Rahab told the two spies: “*I know that the Lord has given you this land*” (p.90). Upon what was her declaration of faith based? How could she be a prostitute, so easily tell lies, and not be a part of God’s chosen people, yet be attributed with great faith?
5. Rahab hid the spies and then lied to the authorities when they came looking for them (p. 90). When, if ever, is it okay to lie? How do you know?
6. Review the main points of the covenant that God made with Abraham. (See the summary for Chapter 2, also p. 13.) What examples can you find in this chapter that show God’s faithfulness to its fulfillment?
7. How does God’s command to annihilate entire cities fit into the Upper Story of the Bible? In what way do these battle stories fit into God’s Upper Story? (Hint: review p. 86, especially the first full paragraph.)
8. Some people doubt the Bible because of miracles like Joshua’s “long day” (p. 97). But some people, like Rahab, come to believe in God because of His miraculous works. Discuss how you might respond to the skeptic who discounts the miraculous as myth.
9. What character traits of Joshua most impress you? Which of those would you like to be known for?
10. Joshua is known for his statement “*As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD*” (p.101). How can you lead your household to serve the Lord?

In the time remaining ask your group members to share any of their personal reflection insights from their journal entries.

CLOSING PRAYER

CHAPTER 8, A FEW GOOD MEN AND WOMEN

Journal your answers to these questions as you read through the chapter this week. You may wish to read one day and journal the next, or spread the questions over the whole week.

DAY 1

1. God used Israel's enemies to turn them back to himself. Have you ever had a painful or dangerous experience that led you back to God?
2. Deborah's military leader was named Barak, which means "lightning" or "flashing sword." Did he live up to his name? Describe a time when fear held you back from living up to the name "Christian."
3. In the evil days after Joshua, "every man did what was right in his eyes." In a pluralistic society, why is it dangerous when everyone gets to pick their own definition of right and wrong?

DAY 2

1. What are some characteristics of Deborah that make her a good role model for young women?
2. The angel of the Lord greeted Gideon as a mighty warrior though he was from the weakest clan and of the least in his family (p. 108). Do you tend to define yourself by your weaknesses or by the potential God sees in you because He is with you?
3. Samson's strength did not make up for his moral weaknesses. When has a strength of yours been insufficient to overcome your conditions?

DAY 3

1. In examining Samson's marriages, what takeaways would strengthen yours?
2. Think of some of the prayers in this chapter, such as Gideon's or Samson's. What does this teach us about prayer?