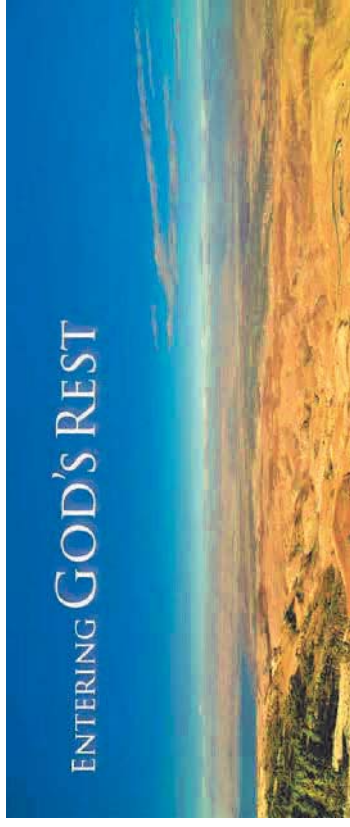


Entering God's Rest

Studies in Joshua

Gospel Community Church
September – November, 2016

ENTERING GOD'S REST



Introduction to Joshua and the Sermon Series

As the Torah concludes in the book of Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are perched by the Jordan River, waiting to enter the land of Canaan. After Moses' death, God commands Joshua to lead his people forward, to displace the nations and possess what God had prepared. The displacement of the Canaanite nations has nothing to do with Israel's goodness, but is entirely about two things. First, over four centuries earlier God had promised Abraham that this land would belong to his descendants, and now is the time for him to make good on that promise (Genesis 12-13). Second, the inhabitants of Canaan, a group of tribal peoples, has so degraded themselves and their land, that this act of aggression was for the purpose of judgment and cleansing (Genesis 15:16; 1 Kings 21:26).

The book of Joshua may be divided as follows.

Phase 1	Commission to Joshua (1)
Entrance into Canaan 1:1 – 5:12	Spies sent to Jericho (2) Crossing the Jordan (3:1 – 5:1) Circumcision and Passover (5:2-12)
Phase 2	Jericho (5:13 – 6:27)
Battles 5:12 – 12:24	Ai (7:1 – 8:29) Covenant renewal (8:30-35) Gibeonites (9) Amorite kings and southern Canaan (10) Northern Canaan (11) Summary of Moses' and Joshua's battles (12)
Phase 3	Introduction (13:1 – 14:5)
Apportioning the land 13:1 – 21:45	Caleb (14:6-15) Tribal allotments (15-19) Cities of refuge (20) Levites' allotments (21) Altar of witness (22)
Phase 4:	
Commitments 22-24	Joshua's exhortation (23) Covenant renewal (24:1-28) Joshua's death (24:29-33)

As Christians read this part of our Scripture, the question will most likely occur to us: Why did God not only tolerate violence and destruction against the Canaanite people but even commanded it? We ask this question, not because we post-moderns are a more evolved form of humanity, but because our "Joshua" (the equivalent to Jesus in Hebrew) commanded us to love our enemies and forbade any form of violence. How can we reconcile our Joshua, the Prince of Peace, with his Old Testament counterpart, the great warrior?

We begin with Jesus, the fullest revelation of God, the One who showed in the most complete way what the heavenly Father is like. Through the lens of Jesus, we are to understand Joshua – a forerunner of our Lord – and his battles. We will lay aside the question (until later

- List the historical events that are recounted in God's commitment to Israel? How long is this time period of his faithfulness? What specific things had he done for Israel?
- What are the aspects of God's person and character revealed through these historical acts?
- Why is history an important part of this covenant relationship? What similar point does Paul make in 1 Corinthians 15?
- What are the primary responsibilities of Israel in their part of the covenant commitment?
- What do you think Joshua meant when he said, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God"? Do you think he was addressing the current state of the Israelites or speaking prophetically about future generations?
- What/who are the witnesses to the covenant? How is it ratified?
- What does it mean to "deal falsely" with God?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- What does God's covenant mean to you?
- The word "incline" (verse 23) means "to bend in the direction of." How do you apply this in your own relationship with God?
- Joshua said that he and his house would serve the LORD: To what extent can a father make a commitment for his children?
- How do you personally respond to the words, "you are not able to serve the Lord?" (You might want to think about Paul's experience in Romans 7:14-25.)
- How do we apply the phrase "put away the foreign gods from among you"?
- How does Jesus fulfill this story?

Covenant

Joshua 24

Coincides with Sunday, November 20

It is because we know ourselves that we rely completely on the God who saves us. We began this study by noting that Jesus is the fulfillment of Joshua. While we gain some good lessons from this leader's example, ultimately we look to Jesus to open the way into the promised land and to give us rest. The final episode of the Joshua story is one of covenant renewal. Here the people are at once urged to pledge their undying commitment to their God, and at the same time reminded that they do not possess the power for obedience. Their hearts will ultimately lead them astray. So like Peter, trying to walk on water but then sinking in the waves, we end by looking to Jesus and saying, "Lord, save me."

Preliminary question

- What are some specific ways that God has shown you his faithfulness?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- This is a story of covenant renewal, and its structure follows a standard format, similar to other places in the Old Testament. Moreover, this format was also used when a stronger nation would enter into a pact with a weaker one. Read through the story keeping the following structure in mind.
 - Prologue (1)
 - Commitment of the King (2-13)
 - Commitment of the subjects (14-21)
 - Appeal to witnesses (22-24)
 - Ratification of the covenant and further witnesses (25-27)
 - Conclusion (28)
- What are the repeated words and ideas?

in the study) about the justice of such a violent incursion into other people's territory. For now, it must be said that the line from Joshua is drawn to Jesus, and not to any other leader or kingdom. For this reason, we will be careful to apply the lessons learned from these stories *only* to life in the kingdom of heaven, inaugurated and ruled over by the Lord Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews used the idea of "rest" to compare Joshua with Jesus. In Joshua 11:23, after a narration of the book's final battle, we read a concluding sentence: "And the land had rest from war." Even so, the author of Hebrews says, this rest was incomplete (and, indeed, just 2 chapters later in Joshua we see more war being prescribed). Joshua could not give the people and the land true and lasting rest because this cannot be obtained by human weapons, but only by "living and active word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12), the one instrument that put to death those internal enemies, the desires and attitudes that deprive us of rest. So we look to Jesus, who battled the enemies of God in heaven and on earth, including those in our own hearts, and through him enter God's rest.

The 12 studies in this booklet coincide with the GCC sermon series. The questions in each study are in the format of "taking in" (understanding the story) and "living out" (applying the story to life). You may choose to use the study in one of the following ways:

1. To study the passage prior to the coming Sunday's sermon. If used in this way, all the questions will be fresh and participants will be starting with a blank slate. You may choose to use as many (or few) of the questions in order to help the group truly *hear* God's word.
2. To discuss the passage following the Sunday's sermon. If used in this way, not all of the questions will apply so the leader will need to choose which to use. (Or the group may choose to discuss their own questions that occurred to them during the sermon.)

The Commission

Joshua 1

Coincides with Sunday, September 4

Prepare to study this chapter by first looking back to the last chapter of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy (and the Pentateuch) ended with the death of Moses after he had surveyed the land from the top of a mountain just east of the Jordan. He had led Israel for 40 years right up to this pivotal point, and now the reigns are being handed to Joshua.

Preliminary question

- We could say that our basic disposition in the Christian life is one of rest (Matthew 11:28-30, Revelation 6:11; 7:15-17; 22:1-5). What is this rest? Can you think of a time when you have felt it?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Who speaks and in what order?
- Who gives commands and what is the response to those commands?
- What does God command?
- What does God promise?
- How do you understand the verb tenses in in verse 3: “every place that the sole of your foot will tread” (future tense) “I have given you” (past tense)?
- Three times God tells Joshua to “be strong and courageous.” What is referred to in each exhortation? (Consider: Is courage more necessary for obedience than it is for battle? Or are those the same thing?)
- What is the meaning of having “success” (7-8)?
- What is the key to having success in everything?

and her God? (Note: David used the same word in Psalm 63:8 to describe his relationship with God.)

- Observe the four verbs used to describe the prohibitions to Israel regarding the gods of the Canaanites: mention them, swear by them, serve them or bow down to them (23:7). What are the shades of meaning in each of these prohibitions?
- In this context, discuss together the positive command in 23:11. What does it mean to love God?
- The threat is that the nations would become “thorns” to the Israelites. This word is used again in Judges 2:3 and 2 Corinthians 12:7. Does this shed any light for you on what Paul meant by his thorn in the flesh?
- See verse 14. On what is their obedience to be based?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Only the obedient believe.” What do you think about this statement?
- How does one cling to God on a daily basis?
- What did Jesus say was the biggest threat to our love for and allegiance to God?
- In light of Jesus’ teaching, how are we to continue to battle against those things that threaten our love for God?
- Joshua seems satisfied with his life (23:14). When it comes time for us to “go the way of all the earth,” what will be the reason for our satisfaction?
- How does Jesus fulfill this Scripture? (See especially Hebrews 2.)

Obedience

Joshua 23

Coincides with Sunday, November 13

As we get older and realize that we will not be in this world forever, we turn our attention to the next generation. Will they be able to carry the torch through their lives and then pass it on to those that follow them? In this story, Joshua is beginning to prepare the next generation for his departure. The key for their survival and success is the very (simple) one that was given to him in chapter one of this book: listen to and obey every word that God speaks.

Preliminary question

- What concerns do you have for the next generation in Hong Kong or in China?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- How do you understand these descriptions in 23:1:
 - “A long time afterward...” Why is this an important description? What had happened in the meantime?
 - “...the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies...” Compare this with Judges 1. How do you understand this?
- How does Joshua’s command to the leaders compare to the command God gave to him in chapter 1?
- For what reason do Israel’s leaders need to “be very strong” (23:6)?
- The word “cling” (23:8) is the Hebrew word *dabaq*, the same word used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the husband-wife relationship. The word means to join together inseparably. What are the things that will threaten this union between Israel

- What does it mean that the book of the law shall not depart from his mouth?
- What does it mean to meditate day and night on the law?
- Why do you think that Joshua specifically addressed the three tribes from east of the Jordan, the ones who already had their land (1:12-15)? (See chapter 22.) Remember: this is at the very beginning of the book and thus tells us something significant about the community.

LIVING OUT: Applying

- The key to Joshua’s success was being obedient to God’s command and listening daily to his word. In what specific ways can you better apply this to your life?
- Compare the commission of God to Joshua with that Jesus to his disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). In both there is a command to “go,” both are to enter foreign territories, and both are dependent on the teaching they have received. What do we learn from this comparison? (Consider especially the repeated idea of “success” in Joshua 1:7-8, and consider what exactly “successful missions” should entail.)
- The word of God is key for giving us rest (Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 11:28-30). How can you apply this to your life this week?
- In what ways might your idea of success differ from that of God?
- Consider: We are not to be students who know God’s Word as much as listeners who hear God’s Word. What do you think of this statement?

Grace

Joshua 2

Coincides with Sunday, September 11

The story of being sent on their mission to Jericho becomes the story of Rahab, the redeemed prostitute. In the re-telling of the Old Testament story through Christ, Rahab becomes an important figure. She is the second of two women mentioned in the New Testament (the first played the role of a prostitute while Rahab actually was one), and then is listed as one of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

Preliminary question

- Which position do you think people most generally assume: judges or grace-givers?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- What is the mission of the spies?
- Who is the main character in the story? (Hint: observe who speaks the most.)
- The LORD (capitals) is the English translation of Yahweh. Who speaks about Yahweh in this story? What is said about him?
- What is the promise that Rahab receives? Who will be included in her salvation?
- Compare the mission of these spies with those sent out 40 years earlier in Numbers 13:17-20? How are the two missions different? How do the conclusions differ? (See Joshua 2:24 and Numbers 13:31-33.)
- Observe the repeated phrase, “search out the land” (2:2-3). They didn’t really “search out the land” (in this story). What do you think they were really exploring? What did they discover?
- Why do you think the spies went to Rahab’s house?

- Why did the tribes on the west side of the Jordan gather to make war on the western tribes (22:12)? What do you learn from this about conflict? What do you think about the actions of both sides prior to the conflict?
- Observe the speech of the western tribes in verses 16-20. What presumptions and fears were they acting from?
- Observe the speech of the eastern tribes in 22-30. What were their motives for building the altar?
- No one really apologizes in this story? Why not?
- In the entire book, this is the only story from which Joshua is absent (after he blessed and sent home the eastern tribes). What do you think might be the reason for this?
- The altar was intended to be a witness for the coming generations that they all served the same God. Why would this be important?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- The Jordan became a potential barrier to relationship. What are some common barriers that tend to make people suspicious of one another?
- As you look at both sides in this story, how do you see this kind of conflict repeated in our world today? Consider especially the presumption and fear that led to the confrontation.
- Can you think of some examples when you have incorrectly judged the motive of another person? How much can we really know the motives of others (or of ourselves)? In this regard, Paul urged the Corinthian church to refrain from judging motives, saying that he would not even judge his own (1 Corinthians 4:1-4).
- What are the “altars of witness” that remind Christians today of our unity.
- How does Jesus fulfill this story? (See, for example, John 17 and Ephesians 2:11-17).

Unity

Joshua 22

Coincides with Sunday, November 6

Today's study is based on one of the few Old Testament stories that shows brothers dwelling together in unity. From the sibling rivalries of Genesis (Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, etc.) to the tribal disputes of Judges and Kings, God's people have never done well at simply getting along with one another. This story, therefore, stands out as a rare jewel in the larger narrative of conflict, and gives insight into fostering and maintaining good relationships.

Preliminary question

- From your own experience and/or observation, what are some of the main reasons for conflict?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Get your bearings for this story by looking at the map of the 12 tribes. The conflict will be taking place by the separation of the Jordan river. Why do you think that presence of this river would have made tribal unity more challenging?
- Why do you think Joshua needed to emphasize to the tribes east of the Jordan that they needed to be very careful to obey the law of Moses (22:5)?



- In Hebrews 11:31, Rahab is mentioned as someone with faith. How does she express her faith?
 - What do you think the scarlet cord represents?
 - Context: in the book of Joshua, this is the FIRST story about Israel's interaction with Canaanite people. As the first story, in what way do you think it is significant?
- LIVING OUT: Applying**
- This first story of Israel entering Canaan demonstrates the principle of "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). In what ways should this set a tone for Christian living and for church community?
 - Which comes easier to you: mercy or judgment?
 - What do you learn from Rahab?
 - In the first spy story (Numbers 13-14), the spies had unbelief because they saw the obstacles. In this one, they had faith because of what they heard from a prostitute. (Observe that their words to Joshua in verse 24 are similar to Rahab's words to them in verse 9.) What do you learn from these differing results?
 - Like Noah's ark, Rahab's "house" is a picture of the church, set apart in world subject to God's judgment. Share together as a group about how we can get more and more people into this "house."

Guidance

Joshua 3-4

Coincides with Sunday, September 18

For the second time in Israel's story, God reveals his power by miraculously opening a body of water and allowing them to cross on dry land. The previous generation, after personally experiencing deliverance from the Egyptians through the parting of the sea, would eventually be destroyed by their own unbelieving hearts. Now a new generation is given a second chance, as God opens the waters that separate them from the promised land.

Preliminary question

- What do you think it means to let God be your guide?

First read the story in parts according to this outline:

Outline of Joshua 3:1 – 5:1

Preparation for crossing the Jordan (3:1-6)

Part One (3:7-17) <i>Before</i>	Part Two (4:1-14) <i>During</i>	Part Three (4:15-5:1) <i>After</i>
Yahweh (3:7-8) Joshua (3:9-13) Narration (3:14-17)	Yahweh (4:1-3) Joshua (4:4-7) Narration (4:8-14)	Yahweh (4:15-16) Joshua (4:17; 21-14) Narration (4:18-20;5:1)

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Observe the commands and the responses?
- What is the role of the priests?
- What is the role of the ark?
- What are the purposes of this miracle? (Note: observe the phrase, “that you (they) may know...”) Observe the four times this phrase is used and then list the four purposes.

- What is the relationship between the cities of refuge and the Levites? What is significant about this relationship?
- What was the responsibility of the city elders? Discuss together some reasons that could eventually cause this system to break down?

Excursus: an interesting story: On the Big Island of Hawaii rest the ancient ruins of Pu'uhonua. In his “Letters from Hawaii,” Mark Twain described it as, “A vast enclosure whose stone walls were 20 feet thick at the base and 15 or 20 feet high; an oblong square, 1040 feet one way, and a fraction under 700 the other.” When a native of Hawaii broke a “kapu,” a sacred Hawaiian law, the offender was automatically sentenced to death unless he or she could flee to the City of Refuge where the “Big Kahuna,” or high priest, lived. Once inside the walls he or she was safe and protected from judgment. Later, the Big Kahuna would perform a rite of purification, declare forgiveness and innocence, and set the person free to begin a new life.

(<http://www.amazingfacts.org/news-and-features/inside-report/magazine/id/10701/t/city-of-refuge>)

- How does the above story illustrate the gospel?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- What is the responsibility of the asylum seeker? What is the responsibility of those seeking asylum? In your experience (or according to your knowledge) how well are individuals and states fulfilling their responsibilities?
- Hong Kong accepts many asylum seekers? How well do you think our city reflects the biblical values?
- Consider the statement, “All of us are refugees.” Do you agree?
- Read Psalm 46 together slowly and quietly in light of this chapter about refuge. Use this psalm to focus your thoughts that God is truly our refuge in all of life.
- How does Jesus fulfill the ideal of the city of refuge? (See, for example, Hebrews 13:13-14.)

Refuge Joshua 20

Coincides with Sunday, October 30

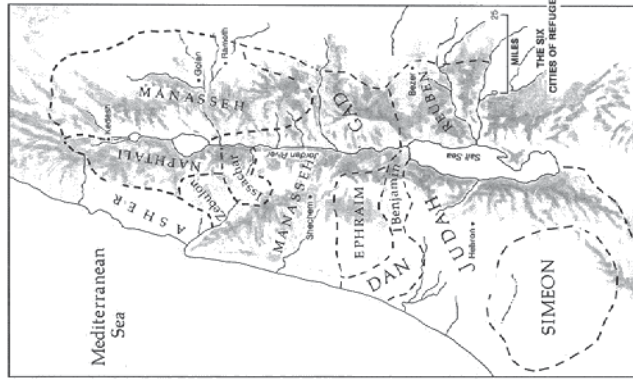
In every era and civilization, there are those who are forced to flee for their lives. In ancient Israel, even before the people had settled into the land of Canaan, the law of Moses prognosticated this need (Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:6, 11-14; Deut. 4:41-43, 19:2-9). Even in cases in which one person accidentally killed another, there would be a very real possibility of revenge. Six cities were set apart to which asylum seekers could flee and there await the judgment of the congregation.

Preliminary question

- For an opening discussion, consider together the plight of asylum seekers in Hong Kong. What are some of the issues they face?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Read all the preceding references to cities of refuge in Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. What stands out to you about these cities?
- Observe where the six cities on the map. What stands out to you about the location?



- Compare this miracle with the crossing of the sea experienced by the previous generation (Exodus 14:1-31). How do the circumstances differ?
- What does the ark represent? Why should the Israelites keep their distance from it?
- The first use of “that you may know” is in 3:4, where the Israelites are told that this miracle is for the purpose of showing them the way. The word “way” (Hebrew = derek) may be either literal or metaphorical, just like the English word. What do you think it means in this verse?
- Why was it important for Joshua to be exalted in the eyes of Israel (3:7; 4:14)?
- What is the meaning of the stones?
- What role do the Israelites play in the story? What do you learn from their role?
- This is the longest story in the book of Joshua, showing its relative significance. Why do you think it was so important?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- As you see how God guides his people in this story (the “way” in 3:7), what lessons can you apply to your life?
- As you see Joshua’s role in this story, in what ways does he prefigure Jesus?
- God demonstrates his power for certain purposes. Think about the four uses of “that you (they) may know.” Which one is most applicable to you today?
- In a way this was an “unnecessary” miracle (unlike the earlier crossing of the sea BUT like Jesus walking on water), for there were other ways that Israel could have crossed the Jordan. Do you feel that it is helpful or important to see signs of God’s power?
- What are some of the stones of remembrance in your life? (That is, in what are some of the main ways you have seen God demonstrate his power?)

Enemies

Joshua 5:13 – 6:27

Coincides with Sunday, September 25

As Eugene Peterson noted in his book *Answering God*, the fact that Jesus told us to love our enemies presupposes that they exist. Indeed, God's enemies appear in Scripture from beginning to end, opposing him as early as the third chapter of Genesis before being completely vanquished in the third to last chapter of Revelation. For weak and vulnerable human beings – people who are easily hurt and take the role of offended victim – it is important that we learn to define “the enemy” through God's eyes. As we will see in the story of Jericho, enemies are not our personal foes, but rather those who oppose the will and ways of their creator God.

Preliminary question

- Make a short list of well-known enemies in the world? What is it that causes people to assume adversarial relationships?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Observe the commands and the responses?
- Outside of Jericho, Joshua meets a man with a drawn sword (5:14). What question does he ask this man?
- How does the man respond? What is unusual about this response? What is the meaning?
- Like Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-5), Joshua removes his shoes. What does it mean that that place on which Joshua is standing is holy?
- What is the role of the people? Why do you think they were to remain silent?
- How many times did they circle the city? What is the significance of this?

- Consider the repeated phrase, “wholly followed the LORD my God” (14:8, 9). How would his circumstances have made this difficult for Caleb?
- Why does Caleb mention his age? What stands out to you about his age? To what do you attribute Caleb's unusual strength at the age of 85? Do you think in this regard he is an example to us of what we can be, or a special case?
- What does Caleb say about the LORD?
- Why do you think he says that the LORD “may” be with him so that he could drive them out? (The Hebrew word means “perhaps.”)
- Consider the concluding phrase, “and the land had rest from war.” What do you think this phrase means? (In light of the fact that war was ongoing in subsequent chapters and in the book of Judges.)

LIVING OUT: Applying

- Do you feel that Hong Kong culture places too great of a value on youth to the detriment of the elderly? How should the church respond?
- What does Caleb teach you about aging well?
- What does it mean to you to wholly follow the Lord?
- In light of this story, read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 to see Paul's experience. What is the difference and similarity between him and Caleb? Do you think most Christians are experiencing 2 Corinthians 4:16-18?
- What is the key to growing stronger internally even as our bodies fall apart with age?
- How does Jesus fulfill this story? (See especially Hebrews 12:1-2.)

Endurance

Joshua 14:6-15

Coincides with Sunday, October 23

Often elderly people can be made to feel irrelevant, especially in cultures that place a high value on youth. The story of Caleb feels like, in some ways, the battle cry of the aged. Due to his fellow Israelites' sin of unbelief, Caleb was forced to wander for 40 years in harsh wilderness conditions. Even after all that time, however, he had not given up, but remained focused on the promise God had given him. He teaches an important lesson about enduring to the end, equipped only with the promise of God.

Preliminary question

- In what ways do people generally improve or diminish with age?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Observe that in verse 6 the people of Judah come to Joshua, but then the focus is immediately on Caleb. In fact, in this section on inheritances (Joshua 13-19), Joshua and Caleb are the only two individuals who are given land. What is the significance of this?
- This is the middle of three Caleb stories. Read both the succeeding and preceding stories to get a fuller picture on this man and his character:
 - Numbers 13:30-33; 14:6-10, 24
 - Joshua 15:13-19 (repeated in Judges 1:11-15, and then followed by 3:7-11, a story about his son-in-law, Othniel.)
- Think about the phrase used to describe Caleb in Numbers 14:24: "a different spirit." What does this mean to you? How is Caleb different generally from the other Israelites?
- In the Joshua 14 story about Caleb, what stands out to you about him?

- God gave Jeremiah more information (6:2-5) than he gave the priests and the people (6:6-7). Why do you think this is the case?
- What is the role of the ark?
- What is meant by the phrase "devoted for destruction" (6:17, 21)? Why do you think that absolutely everything was to be destroyed?
- Consider those who were saved: "Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house." What is the significance of this? Who does this include?
- Why do you think there is a curse upon anyone who wants to rebuild Jericho?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- What/who are God's enemies today? Thinking about the two ideas of war and love, how are we to oppose these enemies?
- Joshua responded to the warrior by falling on his face in worship. Why is worship important as we face enemies?
- It is important that we find our primary role in this story, not as Joshua being led into battle or even as the Israelites marching around the city, but as the inhabitants of Jericho subject to God's wrath. Read Romans 5:5-11 in this light. How do you respond?
- What are those things in our lives that need to be "devoted to destruction"? (Hint: see Colossians 3:5-8.) How does this story motivate you?
- From this story, in what ways does Joshua prefigure Jesus, our Warrior-Leader?

Compromise

Joshua 7:1 – 8:29 (study only chapter 7)

Coincides with Sunday, October 2

The story of Ai is one of the two foundational battle stories to be recorded for future generations of God's people. After these two battles, all the people will gather to hear the Law being read, a sign that they were now present in the promised land and ready to do God's will there. Whereas the story of Jericho describes the successful first battle, their failure at Ai tells why Israel experienced defeat. Both stories offer foundational lessons for the Christian life from the contrasting perspectives of victory and failure.

Preliminary question

- What are some kinds of small compromises people often make?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Observe what each of the characters does and says:
 - Achan
 - Joshua
 - The LORD
- In Hebrew verse 1 is structured chiasmically:
 - The people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things...
 - Achan...took some of the devoted things
 - And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel.

What ideas are being communicated through this structure?

- What were the “devoted things”? (See the previous chapter.)
- Observe how the people are described after fleeing from Ai (7:5). Who else in Joshua has been described in this way?

- They did not ask counsel from the Lord (verse 14). Notice that God neither speaks nor acts in this story. What do you learn from this?
- Why did the congregation of Israel complain about their leaders? What do you think about their complaint? How do we see ourselves in them?
- A follow-up story occurs in 2 Samuel 21:1-9. Read that story and, as you connect it to the Joshua 9 event, think together about what principle we are to learn.
- The Gibeonite deception is set within the context of a description of Israel's bigger enemies (9:1-2 and 10:1-5). Whether or not you think the Israelites failed in regards to the Gibeonites, what do we ultimately learn about God's sovereignty?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- In regards to discernment, what do you learn from the Gibeonites?
- In regards to discernment, what do you learn from the Israelites?
- God is both absent and sovereign in and through this story. What does this mean to you?
- What do you learn from the people murmuring against their leaders?
- What are some situations that you personally need discernment at this time?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:30 in light of this story? How does Jesus become its fulfillment?

Discernment

Joshua 9-10 (only study chapter 9)

Coincides with Sunday, October 9

Many of life's circumstances are ambiguous, colored in shades of gray and requiring on-the-spot wisdom. The Gibeonites tricked Israel into making a covenant with them, and then became the catalyst for Israel's decisive battle victory over an alliance of Canaanite kings. In reading the Bible's stories, we are always looking for the evaluative viewpoint, trying to discern through the story if the characters are to be deemed good or evil. In this case, the evaluation is unclear. Were the Gibeonites deceitful and therefore punished? Or were they wise and therefore saved? Were they a hiccup in God's plan for Israel? Or were they an integral part of his plan? The story is as ambiguous as the circumstances in which we find ourselves, and thus portrays the ongoing need for applied wisdom.

Preliminary question

- What are some examples of ambiguity in your day-to-day life?

TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- How is the story introduced? (See 9:1-2.) How is this significant for what follows?
- How do you evaluate the Gibeonites actions? As you see how they ultimately responded to Joshua's decisions what do you think about them?
- How do you evaluate Israel's response?
- Compare this story to the previous one about Achan's sin. How does God's role differ in the two stories? What difference does this make in your interpretation of each story?

- From Joshua's prayer (6-9) what did he assume was the problem?
- This is the second time that Joshua fell on his face, the first being in 6:14. What is the difference between the two occasions? Why does God sort of rebuke him this time (7:10)?
- Compare the number of times "Israel" is used in this story to the number of times the name "Achan" is mentioned. What do you learn from this?
- What was wrong with Achan's actions? (See 7:15.)
- What were the effects of Achan's sin?
- This is one of several "sin" stories that feature at the beginning of new developments in Scripture. Others include the sins of Aaron's sons on the day the priests were ordained (Leviticus 11) and Ananias and Sapphira when the church first began (Acts 5). In each case the judgment was swift and strong. Why do you think this is the case?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- Is there such a thing as secret sin? (In thinking about this question, you might want to refer to Psalm 32.)
- This story shows how one person's sin affects the entire community. What are some ways that you have seen this principle at work?
- Do you feel that the judgment was overly harsh?
- Why do you think God acted so severely in this case but seems to overlook many other transgressions?
- How would apply (or want to apply) the lesson of this story to your life?
- How does Jesus fulfill this story? (Hint: pay attention to the repeated idea of God's anger that begins and ends the story.)

Listening

Joshua 8:30-35

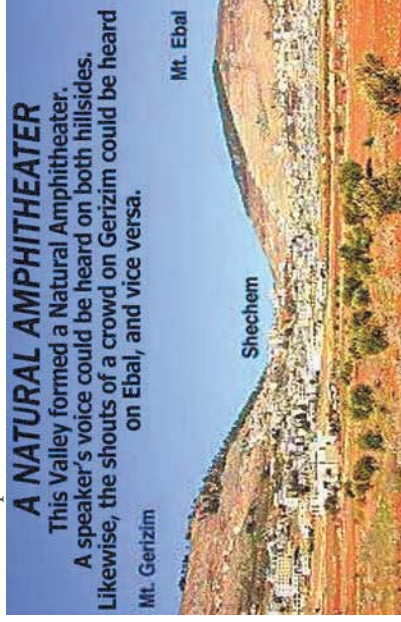
Coincides with Sunday, October 16

After the first two battle stories, Jericho and Ai, it is time for Israel to renew the covenant. None of the Canaan battles are described in any detail except for these first two, so we can assume that there are foundational lessons for us to learn from these two stories of success (Jericho) and failure (Ai). It is immediately after those battles that the people assemble to hear God's law being read.

Preliminary question

- Think of the all the things you listen to every day (people, television, music, radio, etc.). What are the things that most enter your brain through your ears?

The "natural amphitheater between the two mountains



TAKING IN: Understanding

- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- Read the original instructions for this ceremony in Deuteronomy 11:29 and 27:1-13. (You can also look at 27:14-15 to see how the Israelites were to participate in the reading.) Visualize the ceremony by looking at the photo on the

preceding page. (If it helps, the group could act it out by members positioning themselves in the roles of different characters.):

- Why do you think the altar was to be made of uncut stones?
- The burnt offering represents complete devotion and the peace offering represents (among other things) relationship with God. Why do you think these two types of offerings were given at the time?
- What did Joshua read?
- Which listeners are specially mentioned as part of the audience?
- Why do you think they are mentioned?
- What is the significance of the blessings and the curses?
- Notice that this ceremony takes place after the first two battle stories. What do you think is the significance of this? That is, why do you think it was important for Israel to do this ritual soon after entering Canaan?
- Think back on the preceding stories in Joshua and recall the episodes in which the act of listening to God's commands has been a significant idea. How would you characterize the importance of listening and obedience in this book?

LIVING OUT: Applying

- The blessings and curses listed in Deuteronomy 27-28 and then heard by the Israelites in Joshua would ultimately play a major role in Israel's story. What is the application of blessings and curses for us today?
- Closely connected to the previous question, how does Jesus fulfill this story? (See particularly, Galatians 3:10-14.)
- In some ways, this is like a dedication service. In that regard, what elements are most foundational in such a ceremony?
- Israel, including the sojourners, were to gather for the purpose of listening. Why is listening so important?
- In our church gatherings (including small groups) how well do you think we foster an atmosphere of listening?
- How well (often, deeply, reflectively) would you say that you listen to God compared to other voices? What changes can you make to listen more to God?