THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The King Who Brings Us Home

Joshua, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Brings Us Home: The Book of Joshua, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” You probably know a song about Joshua and the battle of Jericho, where the walls came tumbling down. Maybe you colored a picture of it in Sunday school. That’s where most people’s knowledge of Joshua stops.

But the book of Joshua is far more than one battle. It’s the story of a new leader stepping into the biggest shoes in Israel’s history. It’s about a woman with a bad reputation who risked everything to trust God, a river that stopped flowing, a soldier who stole and lied and brought disaster on everyone, a clever trick that worked, a promise kept even when it hurt, a day when the sun stood still, and an eighty-five-year-old man who asked for the hardest mountain in the land. It ends with one of the most famous challenges ever spoken: choose today whom you will serve.

Joshua also contains some of the hardest passages in the Bible, accounts of war and destruction that trouble thoughtful readers, and should. We won’t skip them. We’ll look at them honestly, with the main ways Christians have understood them.

After forty years in the wilderness, Israel is finally going home. Grab your sandals. It’s time to cross the Jordan.

How This Book Works

This book walks through Joshua in nine chapters: Joshua’s commission (Joshua 1), Rahab and the spies (2), crossing the Jordan

(3–5), Jericho (6), Achan and Ai (7–8), the Gibeonites (9), the day the sun stood still and the southern and northern campaigns (10–12), the dividing of the land (13–22), and Joshua's farewell (23–24). The long lists of boundaries and towns are summarized briefly.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book Joshua is, where it fits, and the world it came from. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as when the conquest happened, what archaeology shows, how to understand the commands to destroy the Canaanites, and what happened when the sun stood still, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes Joshua in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the sixth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Joshua raises questions teens will ask. I've presented the main views fairly on the date of the conquest (early, around 1400 BC, and late, in the 1200s BC), on the archaeology of Jericho and Ai, on the main scholarly models of how Israel came to live in Canaan (military conquest, gradual settlement, and internal emergence), on the long day of Joshua 10 (a literal miracle, an extended darkness or eclipse, or poetic language), and on Rahab's lie. I'd encourage you to share your own church's view with your teen, and to explain why other Christians see it differently.

Joshua describes war, including the destruction of whole cities under the command known as herem. These passages are handled carefully and age-appropriately, without graphic detail. A hard-passage box presents the main Christian readings fairly and states clearly that these accounts are never a model for violence, prejudice, or hatred toward any people today. Real Talk boxes address courage, integrity, keeping promises, and fear, and point

readers to trusted adults and, where relevant, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament connects Joshua with Jesus, who bears the same name (Yehoshua, the LORD saves), and with the rest God promises His people in Hebrews 4, while acknowledging that Jewish readers read Joshua in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will meet in Joshua a God who keeps every promise and calls them to serve Him with courage.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

A Name Worth Knowing

Joshua's original name was Hoshea, which means salvation. Moses renamed him Joshua (Numbers 13:16), in Hebrew Yehoshua, which means the LORD saves. Later, the name was shortened to Yeshua. When it was written in Greek, it became Iesous, which comes into English as Jesus. So Joshua and Jesus have the same name. That's not an accident the New Testament ignores. The angel told Joseph to name Mary's son Jesus, "for it is he who shall save his people from their sins."

Who Was Joshua?

Joshua first appears in Exodus 17, leading Israel's army against the Amalekites while Moses prayed on a hill. He was Moses' assistant for forty years. He went partway up Mount Sinai with him, guarded the tent of meeting, and was one of the twelve spies, one of only two who trusted God. By the time the book of Joshua begins, he's probably around eighty years old, and he's been preparing for this moment his whole life.

Where It Fits

Joshua is the first of the books that Jewish tradition calls the Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Christians often call them the Historical Books. They tell Israel's story from entering the land to being exiled from it, and they measure that story by the covenant in Deuteronomy. Joshua picks up right where

Deuteronomy ends, with Moses dead and Israel camped across the Jordan from Jericho.

Who Wrote Joshua?

The book doesn't name its author. Jewish tradition says Joshua wrote most of it, with the account of his death added by others. The book mentions that Joshua wrote words in the book of the law (Joshua 24:26). The phrase to this day appears often, suggesting some time had passed between the events and the writing. Many scholars think Joshua was compiled and edited much later, as part of a larger history running from Deuteronomy through Kings. Christians with different views agree that Joshua is God's Word.

When Did It Happen?

Christians and scholars disagree about the date. The early date, based on 1 Kings 6:1, places the exodus around 1446 BC and the conquest around 1406 BC. The late date places the exodus in the 1200s BC and the conquest a generation later, around 1230–1200 BC. An Egyptian inscription from about 1208 BC, the Merneptah Stele, mentions Israel as a people already living in Canaan. We'll look at what archaeology says in chapter 4.

The World of Canaan

Canaan in this era wasn't a single nation. It was a patchwork of small city-states, each with its own king and walled town, often fighting one another and loosely under Egyptian control. Letters found at Amarna in Egypt, from the 1300s BC, show Canaanite kings begging Pharaoh for help against each other and against raiders called the Habiru. Canaanite religion worshiped gods like Baal, the

storm god, and included practices the Bible condemns, including child sacrifice.

Hard Passages

Joshua describes war, and some of it is hard to read. Including an event in the Bible doesn't make it a model for us, and Christians read every part of the Old Testament through Jesus. We'll face the hardest passages honestly in chapter 4. If anything you read brings up fear or pain, especially if you've experienced violence, talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, pastor, or school counselor.

The Map

Chapter 1 (Joshua 1): Be strong and courageous.

Chapter 2 (Joshua 2): Rahab and the spies.

Chapter 3 (Joshua 3–5): Crossing the Jordan.

Chapter 4 (Joshua 6): The walls of Jericho.

Chapter 5 (Joshua 7–8): Achan and Ai.

Chapter 6 (Joshua 9): The Gibeonite trick.

Chapter 7 (Joshua 10–12): The day the sun stood still.

Chapter 8 (Joshua 13–22): Dividing the land.

Chapter 9 (Joshua 23–24): Choose today.

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CHAPTER 1

Be Strong and Courageous

Joshua 1

"Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant." That's how the book begins, with a funeral and a handoff. For forty years, Moses had been the only leader most Israelites had ever known. He had faced down Pharaoh, split the sea, met God on the mountain, and carried the people through the desert. Now he's gone. And God's first words to Joshua are blunt. "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go across this Jordan."

Imagine being Joshua. You've been the assistant your whole adult life. You've watched the greatest prophet in history up close. Now everyone is looking at you. The people are camped on the east bank of the Jordan River, which is flooding. Across the river are walled cities, trained armies, and the giants your generation was terrified of forty years ago. And God says, go.

> **REAL TALK** **Following a Legend**
>
> Maybe you know what it's like to follow someone impressive: an older sibling who was a star athlete, a parent everyone admires, a team captain who just graduated, a friend who seems to do everything right. People compare you. You compare yourself. Notice that God never asked Joshua to become Moses. He asked Joshua to trust Him. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you."

> Your job isn't to be someone else. It's to be faithful with what God gives you, and to know He's with you too.

God gives Joshua three promises. First, the land. "I have given you every place that the sole of your foot will tread on, as I told Moses." God describes its borders, from the desert in the south to Lebanon in the north, from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. Second, victory. "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life." Third, and most important, His presence. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor forsake you."

Then God says the same thing three times in four verses. "Be strong and courageous." And then, "Only be strong and very courageous." And finally, "Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Why say it three times? Maybe because Joshua needed to hear it three times. Courage isn't something you feel once and then have forever. It's something you have to choose again and again. And notice where the courage comes from. Not from Joshua's experience, his army, or his own strength. It comes from God's presence. Joshua can be brave because God is with him wherever he goes.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Strong and Courageous**
>
> The phrase be strong and courageous appears again and again around Joshua. Moses said it to him in front of all Israel (Deuteronomy 31:7). God says it here, three times. The people say it back to him at the end of this chapter. Joshua later says it to his own officers (Joshua 10:25). Then, centuries later, King David says it to his son Solomon before he builds the temple (1

> Chronicles 22:13). It's what leaders in Israel said when they passed the baton. Courage was meant to be handed on.

There's one more part of God's charge, and it's easy to skip. Joshua's courage is connected to God's word. "Be careful to observe to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you. Don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left." And, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night." To meditate in Hebrew means to murmur or mutter, like someone reading out loud under their breath. Joshua was to keep God's word so close that it was always on his lips.

> **REAL TALK** **What Courage Looks Like**
>
> Courage isn't the same as not being scared. If Joshua wasn't scared, God wouldn't have had to keep telling him not to be. Courage is doing the right thing even when you're afraid. For you, it might look like standing up for a kid who's being bullied, telling the truth when lying would be easier, saying no when your friends are pressuring you, talking to your parents about something hard, or telling someone you're a Christian. It might look like getting help for anxiety or depression, which takes real courage. You don't have to feel brave. You just have to take the next step, knowing God goes with you.

It's worth noticing what God doesn't promise Joshua. He doesn't promise that it will be easy, or that there won't be battles, setbacks, or losses. There will be all of those. He promises His presence in the middle of them. That's often how God works. He doesn't always remove the hard thing in front of you. He goes into it with you. The same promise, I will not fail you nor forsake you, shows up again in Hebrews 13:5, spoken to ordinary Christians facing ordinary struggles. It was never just for generals.

Joshua acts immediately. He tells the officers to get the people ready, because in three days they'll cross the Jordan. Then he turns to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, who had already received land east of the river. He reminds them of their promise to Moses: their fighting men would cross over and fight alongside their brothers until everyone had their land.

Their answer is the best thing a new leader could hear. "All that you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go." They promise to follow Joshua as they followed Moses. And then they say the words God has been saying all chapter long: "Only be strong and courageous." The people encourage their leader. That's what healthy communities do.

REAL TALK **Encourage Your Leaders**

The tribes didn't just say they'd follow Joshua. They encouraged him. Leaders need that. Your pastor, youth leader, coach, teacher, and parents carry more than you might realize, and they rarely hear thank you. When was the last time you encouraged one of them? A short note, a text, or a few words after practice or church can mean more than you'd guess. The courage God gives is often passed along through people.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Meditate Day and Night**

Joshua 1:8 sounds a lot like Psalm 1, which describes the blessed person whose delight is in God's law and who meditates on it day and night, like a tree planted by streams of water. In both places, success isn't about wealth or fame. It's about a life rooted in God's word, which produces good fruit. If you've never had a regular habit of reading Scripture, Joshua 1 is a good place to start. Try reading one short passage each day, and carry one phrase with you, repeating it under your breath like Joshua did.

KEY VERSE

Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. Don't be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God told Joshua to be strong and courageous three times?
2. Have you ever had to follow someone impressive? How did it feel?
3. Where do you need courage right now? What would it look like to take the next step?
4. How is courage connected to knowing God's word?

TRY THIS *Memorize Joshua 1:9. Write it on a card and put it where you'll see it before something scary this week, like a test, a game, or a hard conversation. Say it out loud before you go in.*

CHAPTER 2

Rahab and the Spies

Joshua 2

Before crossing the river, Joshua sends two spies to scout out the land, especially the city of Jericho. Jericho sat just west of the Jordan, near the Dead Sea, guarding the main route into the hill country. It was an oasis city, full of palm trees and springs, with strong walls. If Israel was going to enter Canaan, Jericho was the front door.

The spies end up at the house of a woman named Rahab. The Bible is blunt about her: she's a prostitute. Her house is built into the city wall. Some think the spies went there because it was a place where strangers could come and go without raising suspicion. But someone spots them anyway, and the king of Jericho sends soldiers to Rahab's door, demanding that she hand them over.

Rahab makes a decision that changes her life. She hides the spies on her roof under stalks of flax drying in the sun. Then she tells the soldiers that, yes, the men had come, but she didn't know where they were from, and they'd left at dusk, when the city gate was shut. Hurry, she says, you might still catch them. The soldiers race off toward the Jordan, and the gate is shut behind them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Rahab's House in the Wall**

Many ancient cities had houses built into or on top of their walls. At Jericho, archaeologists have found evidence of a mudbrick wall standing on top of a stone retaining wall, with houses built against it. That fits the description of Rahab's house being part of the wall. Whether these remains date to Joshua's time is debated, as we'll see in chapter 4. Flax was a plant used to make linen. After harvesting, the stalks were laid out on flat roofs to dry, making a perfect hiding place.

Then Rahab goes up to the roof and tells the spies something astonishing. "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us." The whole city has heard what God did. "For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, when you came out of Egypt." They've heard about the defeat of Sihon and Og. "As soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, and there wasn't any more spirit in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath."

Do you see what's happening? Forty years earlier, Israel's spies came back terrified of the Canaanites. Now it turns out the Canaanites were terrified of Israel the whole time. And Rahab, a pagan woman with a bad reputation, makes one of the clearest statements of faith in the Old Testament. She uses almost the same words Moses used in Deuteronomy 4:39. The LORD is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

REAL TALK **Nobody Is Too Far Gone**

Rahab was a Canaanite, an enemy of Israel. She was a prostitute, someone most people in her city probably looked down on, and most religious people would have written off. And she's the one who believed. God didn't wait for her to clean up her life before He welcomed her. She trusted Him first, and He changed everything. If you think you've done too much, or that your past or

your family's reputation disqualifies you from God's love, Rahab's story is for you. And if you've ever written someone else off as too far gone, Rahab's story is for you too.

Rahab asks the spies for a promise. "Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a true sign." She asks them to save her parents, her brothers and sisters, and all their families. The spies agree, as long as she doesn't betray them. She lets them down through her window with a rope. They tell her to tie a scarlet cord in that same window, and to gather her whole family inside her house when Israel attacks. Anyone inside would be safe. "She said, 'Let it be as you have said.' She sent them away, and they departed. Then she tied the scarlet line in the window."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Scarlet Cord**

Many Christian writers, going back to the early church, have seen the scarlet cord in Rahab's window as a picture of something bigger. On the first Passover, the blood of a lamb on the doorframe protected everyone inside the house from death. Here, a red cord in the window protects everyone inside Rahab's house. Both point to the safety found in the blood of Jesus. Whether or not the writer of Joshua meant that connection, it's a powerful picture: everyone who gathered under that sign was saved, no matter who they were.

Think about how much courage this took. If the king had found out, Rahab would have been executed as a traitor. She was betting her life, and her family's lives, on a God she had only heard about, and on the word of two foreign spies. She had no Bible, no church, no Christian friends. All she had was a report of what God had done, and she decided to trust it. Faith often starts like that: hearing about what God has done for others, and deciding to stake your own life on it.

The spies hide in the hills for three days, then return to Joshua with a very different report from the one their parents' generation brought. "Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands. Moreover, all the inhabitants of the land melt away before us."

REAL TALK **Was Rahab Wrong to Lie?**

Rahab lied to the soldiers to save the spies' lives. Was that wrong? Christians have disagreed about this for centuries. Some, like Augustine, said lying is always wrong, and that God blessed Rahab's faith and kindness despite her lie, not because of it. Others say that protecting innocent lives from people who want to kill them is a different situation, like the Hebrew midwives who misled Pharaoh to save babies (Exodus 1), or people who hid Jewish families from the Nazis during World War II and lied to the soldiers at the door. Many Christians think that kind of deception, to protect life from murderers, isn't the same as ordinary lying. Notice that the New Testament praises Rahab's faith and her actions in hiding the spies (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25), but never specifically praises the lie. What every view agrees on is this: Rahab's story is not permission to lie whenever it's convenient. If you're ever in a situation where someone is in danger, the right move is to get help from a trusted adult or call 911.

There's another lesson in this chapter, and it's about fear. Forty years earlier, Israel's spies came back saying, we were like grasshoppers in their sight. They were sure the Canaanites saw them as tiny and weak. Rahab reveals that the opposite was true: the Canaanites had been terrified of Israel the whole time. Fear lies. It tells you that everyone else is stronger, more confident, more put together than you are. It tells you that people are judging you, laughing at you, or looking down on you. Often, the people you're afraid of are just as scared as you are. The question isn't how big your problems look. It's how big your God is.

Rahab's story doesn't end here. When Jericho falls, the spies bring out Rahab and her whole family. "But Rahab the prostitute, her father's household, and all that she had, Joshua saved alive. She lives in the middle of Israel to this day." She married an Israelite named Salmon. Their son was Boaz, who married Ruth. Their great-grandson was King David. And fourteen hundred years later, when Matthew wrote out the family tree of Jesus, he included her by name. "Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab." A Canaanite prostitute who trusted God became an ancestor of the Messiah.

The New Testament remembers her twice more. Hebrews lists her in its hall of faith, right alongside Abraham and Moses. "By faith Rahab the prostitute didn't perish with those who were disobedient, having received the spies in peace." And James uses her as an example of faith that acts. "Wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" Her faith wasn't just words. She risked her life for it.

KEY VERSE

As soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, and there wasn't any more spirit in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.

Joshua 2:11 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God chose to save Rahab, of all the people in Jericho?
2. How do you think about Rahab's lie? Which view makes the most sense to you?
3. Have you ever written someone off as too far gone? What does Rahab's story say about that?
4. Rahab's faith led her to act. What's one way your faith could lead to action this week?

TRY THIS *Read Matthew 1:1–16. Find the four women named in Jesus' family tree besides Mary. Look up one of their stories, and write down what it tells you about the kind of people God welcomes.*

CHAPTER 3

Stones by the River

Joshua 3–5

Early in the morning, Israel moves to the edge of the Jordan River and camps there for three days. It's harvest time, in the spring, and the river is flooding over its banks with snowmelt from Mount Hermon far to the north. Crossing would be dangerous for a few strong men, let alone a whole nation with children, elderly people, and flocks of animals.

Joshua gives the instructions. When the people see the priests carrying the ark of the covenant, they're to follow it, keeping a distance of about two thousand cubits, about half a mile, so everyone can see it. Then he says, "Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

Here's the hard part. The priests have to go first, carrying the ark, and step right into the flooded river. The water won't stop until their feet are in it. God says that when the priests' feet "rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan will be cut off." Faith has to get its feet wet.

> REAL TALK **Getting Your Feet Wet**
>
> Sometimes God asks you to take a step before you see how it's going to work. The priests had to walk into a flooding river before the water stopped. You might face something similar: apologizing first, before you know how the other person will react; signing up to serve before you feel ready; telling the

truth about something you've hidden; reaching out for help before you know what will happen. Trusting God often means stepping in before the water parts. It doesn't mean doing reckless or dangerous things and expecting Him to bail you out. It means obeying what He's clearly asked, even when you can't see the outcome yet.

And it happens. The moment the priests' feet touch the water, the river stops flowing. The water piles up far upstream, at a town called Adam, and the part flowing down toward the Dead Sea is completely cut off. The priests stand on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed while the whole nation crosses over. It's the Red Sea all over again, for a new generation who were too young to remember the first time.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Jordan Stops**

The town of Adam is usually identified with Tell ed-Damiyeh, about twenty miles upstream from Jericho, where the Jordan runs between high clay banks. There are historical records of landslides there blocking the river. In 1267, an Arab historian recorded that the banks collapsed and dammed the Jordan for several hours, and in 1927 an earthquake caused another collapse that stopped the river for about twenty-one hours. Some Christians think God may have used a natural event like this, timed perfectly. Others think the crossing was a miracle with no natural cause. Both agree that the timing, the moment the priests stepped in, was God's doing.

When everyone has crossed, God tells Joshua to choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Each one is to pick up a stone from the middle of the riverbed, right where the priests are standing, and carry it to the camp. Joshua sets up the twelve stones at Gilgal as a memorial. Then he explains why. Someday, "when your children ask in the future, saying, 'What do you mean by these stones?'" the answer will be, "Israel came over this Jordan on dry land." The stones are for the next generation. "That all the peoples of the earth may know

that the LORD's hand is mighty, and that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

Once the priests carry the ark up out of the riverbed, the Jordan comes rushing back, overflowing its banks again. The news spreads, and the kings of Canaan lose their nerve.

> **REAL TALK** **Your Memorial Stones**
>
> Israel built a pile of stones so they'd never forget what God had done. What are your memorial stones? They might be a journal where you write down answered prayers, a photo from a mission trip or camp where God became real to you, a Bible with notes in the margins, or a rock you keep on your desk from a day that mattered. Faith grows when you remember. And memorials aren't just for you. They give you a chance to tell your story when someone asks, what's that? Somebody younger than you might need to hear it.

Chapter 5 records two important moments at Gilgal, before any battles. First, God tells Joshua to circumcise all the men who were born in the wilderness, because that sign of the covenant hadn't been practiced during the forty years. It's a strange thing to do right next to enemy territory; the men would be in pain and unable to fight for several days. But God's people needed to belong to Him before they fought for Him. Afterward, God says, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." The name Gilgal sounds like the Hebrew word for rolling.

Second, they celebrate Passover, the first one in the promised land. The next day, they eat food grown in Canaan, roasted grain and unleavened bread. And something ends. "The manna ceased on the next day, after they had eaten of the produce of the land." For forty years, bread had fallen from heaven every morning. Now it stops. God's way of providing has changed. Instead of miracle bread, they'll eat from fields and vineyards. It's a sign they've arrived.

REAL TALK **When Things Change**

The manna stopped. That might have felt scary. It was all the younger Israelites had ever known. Sometimes God's provision changes too. A season of your life ends: you move, a friend group drifts apart, you graduate, a parent changes jobs, a youth leader moves away. The things that carried you before aren't there anymore. That's hard, and it's okay to grieve it. But it doesn't mean God has stopped caring for you. It might mean He's leading you into something new. If a big change is overwhelming you, talk about it with someone you trust.

The chapter ends with one of the most mysterious encounters in the Bible. Joshua is near Jericho, maybe scouting it out, when he sees a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword. Joshua walks up and asks the obvious question. "Are you for us, or for our enemies?" The answer is surprising. "No; but I have come now as commander of the LORD's army." Joshua falls on his face and worships. And the commander says, "Take off your sandals, for the place on which you stand is holy." It's exactly what God said to Moses at the burning bush.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Commander of the Army**

Who was this commander? Some interpreters think he was an angel, perhaps Michael, who is described as a leader of God's armies (Daniel 10:13; Revelation 12:7). Many Christians, going back to the early church, think he was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God, partly because Joshua worships him and isn't corrected, unlike angels elsewhere who refuse worship (Revelation 22:8–9). Either way, his answer is the point. Joshua asked whether God was on Israel's side. The commander said, in effect, that's the wrong question. The real question is whether Joshua is on God's side.

KEY VERSE

that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD's hand is mighty, and that you may fear the LORD your God forever.

Joshua 4:24 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God made the priests step into the river before it stopped?
2. What are some memorial stones in your life or your family's story?
3. The manna stopped when Israel entered the land. What changes are you facing, and how can you trust God in them?
4. Why do you think the commander answered Joshua's question with No?

TRY THIS *Find a small stone and write on it, or on a piece of paper under it, one thing God has done for you. Keep it somewhere visible. When someone asks about it, tell them the story.*

CHAPTER 4

The Walls of Jericho

Joshua 6

Jericho is shut up tight. Nobody goes in or out. And God gives Joshua the strangest battle plan in military history. "Behold, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the mighty men of valor." Notice the tense: I have given. It's already done. All Israel has to do is obey.

Here's the plan. For six days, the army is to march around the city once a day, in silence. In the middle of the procession, seven priests carry seven ram's horn trumpets, blowing them as they walk, with the ark of the covenant behind them. On the seventh day, they're to march around the city seven times. Then the priests will give a long blast on the horns, the people will shout, and "the city wall will fall down flat."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Seven?**
>
> The number seven appears all over this chapter: seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days, seven times around the city on the seventh day. In the Bible, seven is the number of completeness, connected with the seven days of creation and the Sabbath. The ram's horn, called a shofar, was blown on holy days and at the Jubilee, the year of liberty. The march around Jericho was less like a military operation and more like a worship service. The ark, the symbol of God's presence, was at the center. The message was clear: this victory belongs to God.

Imagine being one of the soldiers. Day after day you march around the walls in silence, while the people of Jericho stare down at you, maybe laughing, maybe terrified. No siege ramps. No battering rams. Just walking and trumpets. It must have felt ridiculous. But they obey.

On the seventh day, they march around seven times. At the seventh time, Joshua tells the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city!" Then it happens. "So the people shouted and the priests blew the trumpets. When the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight in front of him, and they took the city." Hebrews puts it simply: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days."

> **REAL TALK** **When Obedience Looks Silly**
>
> Marching around a city and shouting isn't how anyone wins a war. The Israelites must have felt foolish. Sometimes following God can feel that way too. Praying before a meal at the school cafeteria, saying no to a party everyone's going to, waiting for marriage when your friends think it's ridiculous, forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it, or giving money away when you could spend it on yourself. These things might not make sense to people around you. But God's ways often look foolish before they look wise (1 Corinthians 1:25). Obedience is trusting that He knows something you don't.

Then comes the hard part of the story. The Israelites devote the city to the LORD, the herem we talked about in Deuteronomy. "They utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, both young and old, and ox, sheep, and donkey, with the edge of the sword." Only Rahab and her family are spared, brought out by the two spies. The silver, gold, bronze, and iron go into the LORD's

treasury. Everything else is burned, and Joshua pronounces a curse on anyone who rebuilds the city.

REAL TALK **The Hardest Passages**

Reading that whole cities were destroyed, including women and children, is deeply troubling, and it should be. Christians have wrestled with these passages for centuries, and you should know the main ways they've been understood. First, the judgment view: God, who gives all life, has the right to judge, and He did so here against Canaanite societies that had become deeply corrupt, practicing things like child sacrifice; He had waited four hundred years (Genesis 15:16), and He later judged Israel just as severely for the same sins. Second, the hyperbole view: many scholars point out that ancient war reports from Egypt, Assyria, and Moab routinely used sweeping, exaggerated language about total destruction; the book of Joshua itself says Joshua destroyed all the people in certain areas, and then later says many of the same peoples were still there (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1). On this view, the language describes decisive victory, mainly against fortified military towns, rather than literally killing everyone. Third, some Christians say honestly that they don't fully understand these passages, that they hold them in tension with what they know of God in Jesus, and that it's okay to lament and ask hard questions about them, as many psalms and prophets did. Whatever view you take, every Christian tradition agrees on this: these commands were for one unique moment in history, they were never a general command to anyone else, and they can never be used to justify violence, war, racism, or hatred toward any people today. Jesus taught His followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:44). If these passages trouble you, keep asking. Talk with a pastor or youth leader. And if you've experienced violence or war in your own life, or feel frightened by what you read, please talk to a trusted adult.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jericho and Archaeology**

What does archaeology say about Jericho? It's complicated, and scholars disagree. In the 1930s, archaeologist John Garstang excavated the site and found collapsed walls and a burned city, which he dated to about 1400 BC,

fitting the early date of the conquest. In the 1950s, Kathleen Kenyon re-dated the destruction to about 1550 BC, much too early for either biblical date, and concluded the city was mostly abandoned in Joshua's time. In the 1990s, Bryant Wood re-examined the pottery and argued for Garstang's date again, about 1400 BC; most archaeologists did not accept his conclusions, and an Italian-Palestinian team later supported Kenyon's dating. Supporters of the late date say erosion may have washed away the remains of the city from the 1200s BC. So Christians hold different views: some think the evidence fits the early date, some think the later city has been lost to erosion, and some think the account is told with a theological purpose more than as a detailed military report. The finds include something striking either way: a fallen mudbrick wall, and storage jars full of burned grain, suggesting a short siege and a city that wasn't looted for food, just as Joshua 6 describes.

Notice too what the people of Jericho had. They had heard the same reports Rahab heard: the Red Sea, Sihon and Og, the Jordan drying up. Their hearts melted with fear. But only Rahab and her family turned to Israel's God. Everyone else shut the gates and hoped the walls would hold. The same news led to very different responses. That's still true. Two people can hear the same message about Jesus, and one shuts the gate while the other ties a scarlet cord in the window. God's mercy was available to anyone in Jericho who turned to Him. Rahab is proof.

REAL TALK **Walls in Your Life**

Jericho's walls looked unbeatable. Maybe you're facing something that feels the same way: a habit you can't break, a family situation that never seems to change, a relationship that's broken, anxiety or depression that won't lift, a subject at school that feels impossible. God doesn't always knock down walls overnight. Sometimes He asks you to keep walking around them, day after day, in faithful obedience, before anything changes. And sometimes He uses people, counselors, doctors, teachers, pastors, and friends, as part of the way

> He brings walls down. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Asking is part of the march.

The chapter ends with a simple summary. "So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was in all the land." God had kept His promise to be with Joshua as He was with Moses. And centuries later, the curse came true: when a man named Hiel rebuilt Jericho in the days of King Ahab, he lost his oldest and youngest sons (1 Kings 16:34).

KEY VERSE

So the people shouted and the priests blew the trumpets. When the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people shouted with a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight in front of him, and they took the city.

Joshua 6:20 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God gave such an unusual battle plan for Jericho?
2. When has obeying God felt silly or uncomfortable to you?
3. Which way of understanding the destruction of Jericho makes the most sense to you? What questions do you still have?
4. What does Rahab's rescue, in the middle of Jericho's destruction, tell you about God?

TRY THIS *Write down your hardest question about the book of Joshua. Take it to a pastor, youth leader, or parent this week and ask them what they think. Listen to their answer, and keep thinking about it.*

CHAPTER 5

Achan and Ai

Joshua 7–8

After Jericho, Israel is riding high. The next target is Ai, a small town in the hills west of Jericho. The scouts come back confident. Don't send the whole army, they say. Two or three thousand men can take it. So Joshua sends about three thousand. And they get routed. The men of Ai chase them down the hill and kill about thirty-six of them. "The hearts of the people melted," the book says, the same phrase used for the Canaanites in chapter 2.

Joshua is devastated. He tears his clothes and falls on his face before the ark until evening, along with the elders, putting dust on their heads. He prays one of the most honest prayers in the Bible: why did You ever bring us across the Jordan, just to hand us over to the Amorites? If only we'd stayed on the other side! What will happen to Your great name?

God's answer is direct. Get up. "Israel has sinned. Yes, they have even transgressed my covenant which I commanded them. Yes, they have even taken some of the devoted things, and have also stolen, and also deceived. They have even put it among their own stuff." At Jericho, everything was devoted to God. Someone took some of it and hid it. The book had already told us, at the start of chapter 7: "Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things."

REAL TALK **Hidden Sin**

Achan probably thought nobody would ever know. He took a few things, buried them under his tent, and went on with life. But hidden sin doesn't stay hidden, and it never stays small. It affected the whole community: men died in battle because of what he did in secret. Sin works like that today too. A secret habit, like stealing, lying, cheating, porn, or self-harm, might feel private, but it affects your relationships, your peace, and the people around you. The good news is that confession brings freedom. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If you're carrying something hidden, tell God. Then tell a trusted adult. If it's something that's hurting you, like self-harm, please reach out today; you can call or text 988 any time.

The next morning, the tribes come forward one by one, probably by casting lots. Judah is chosen. Then the clan of Zerah. Then Zabdi's family. Then Achan. Joshua speaks to him gently. "My son, please give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make confession to him. Tell me now what you have done! Don't hide it from me!"

Achan confesses. "I have truly sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I have done. When I saw among the plunder a beautiful Babylonian robe, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, then I coveted them and took them. Behold, they are hidden in the ground in the middle of my tent." Notice the pattern: I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid. It's the same pattern as Eve in the garden, who saw the fruit, desired it, took it, and then hid from God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Punishment of Achan**

Achan and his family were stoned and burned in the Valley of Achor, which means trouble. It's a hard ending, and readers have asked why his family died too. Some interpreters think his family must have known about the stolen goods, since they were buried in the middle of the family tent. Others note

that in the ancient world, the family was often treated as a single unit. Elsewhere, Deuteronomy 24:16 says children are not to be put to death for their parents' sins. Christians don't carry out punishments like this today, and the New Testament gives the church a very different approach: confession, forgiveness, and restoration. The prophet Hosea later promised that God would make the Valley of Achor a door of hope (Hosea 2:15). Even the valley of trouble wasn't the end of the story.

REAL TALK **See, Want, Take, Hide**

Achan's sin followed four steps: he saw, he wanted, he took, he hid. Temptation often works the same way for you. You see something, whether it's on a screen, in a store, or in someone else's life. You start wanting it. You take it, or do it. Then you hide it. The best place to stop is early, at the seeing and wanting stage. That might mean unfollowing accounts that make you jealous, not going places you know will tempt you, or telling a friend what you're struggling with so they can help. And if you've already reached the hiding stage, the way out is the same as it was for Achan: bring it into the light.

Notice how Joshua treated Achan, even in that terrible moment. He called him my son. He urged him to give glory to God by telling the truth. Confession, in the Bible, isn't just admitting you were caught. It's agreeing with God about what's true, and that honors Him. Achan's sin had consequences that couldn't be undone. But his confession was still the right thing to do. Telling the truth won't always make the consequences go away. It does bring you back into the light, where healing can begin.

With the sin dealt with, God speaks to Joshua with the same words He used at the start. "Don't be afraid, and don't be dismayed. Take all the warriors with you, and arise, go up to Ai." This time Joshua uses strategy. He sets an ambush behind the city, then leads the main army in a fake retreat, just like the first defeat. The men of Ai

chase them out, leaving the city empty. Joshua raises his javelin toward Ai, the ambush rushes in and sets the city on fire, and the men of Ai are trapped between the two Israelite forces.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Where Was Ai?**
>
> The name Ai means the ruin, and its location is debated. Archaeologists long identified it with a site called et-Tell, but excavations there found that it was abandoned from about 2400 BC until after 1200 BC, so there would have been no city for Joshua to conquer. Some scholars conclude that the story explains how an ancient ruin got its name. Others argue that et-Tell is the wrong site; excavations at a nearby site called Khirbet el-Maqatir have found a small fortress from around 1400 BC, which some believe fits the early date. Still others suggest Ai was a small military outpost near the ancient ruin. This is one of the big puzzles of biblical archaeology, and Christians hold different views.

After the victory at Ai, Joshua does something surprising. Instead of pushing on to the next battle, he leads the whole nation north to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, near Shechem, just as Moses had commanded. He builds an altar, writes a copy of the law on stones, and reads the whole thing aloud. “There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua didn’t read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the foreigners who were among them.” In the middle of a war, God’s people stop to listen to God’s word. Everybody, including children and foreigners, gets to hear it.

KEY VERSE

The LORD said to Joshua, "Don't be afraid, and don't be dismayed. Take all the warriors with you, and arise, go up to Ai. Behold, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, with his people, his city, and his land.

Joshua 8:1 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Israelites were overconfident at Ai?
2. How does one person's hidden sin affect a whole community? Can you think of an example?
3. Where do you see the pattern of see, want, take, hide in your own life?
4. Why do you think Joshua stopped to read the law to everyone right after the victory?

TRY THIS *Read Psalm 32, a psalm about the relief of confession. If there's something you've been hiding, write a prayer of confession to God, and then talk to a trusted adult about it.*

CHAPTER 6

The Gibeonite Trick

Joshua 9

After Jericho and Ai, the kings of Canaan band together to fight Israel. But one group of people tries something different. The Gibeonites lived in a group of towns in the hills north of Jerusalem, not far from Ai. They know they're next, and they know they can't win a fight. So they come up with a plan.

"They also resorted to a ruse." They load their donkeys with worn-out sacks and old, cracked wineskins. They put on patched sandals and old clothes. They pack dry, moldy bread. Then they walk into the Israelite camp at Gilgal and say, "We have come from a far country. Now therefore make a covenant with us." They explain that they've heard about the LORD and all He did in Egypt and to Sihon and Og, and they want to be Israel's servants.

The Israelites are suspicious. Maybe you live near us, they say. But the Gibeonites point to their bread, which was warm when they left home, and now look at it. And their wineskins were new, and look at them now. The Israelite leaders check out the evidence. "The men sampled their provisions, and didn't ask counsel from the LORD's mouth." That's the key mistake. They trusted what they could see and didn't ask God. "Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them, to let them live. The princes of the congregation swore to them."

REAL TALK **Ask Before You Decide**

The Israelites made a big decision based on how things looked, without praying about it. It's an easy mistake. You see a deal online that looks great, a new friend who seems perfect, an opportunity that seems too good to pass up, and you jump in. Some things really are what they seem. Others are moldy bread in disguise. Before making big decisions, take time to pray, think, and ask wise people you trust. And be especially careful online, where people can pretend to be anyone. If someone you've met online is pressuring you to meet, send photos, or keep secrets, that's a warning sign. Tell a trusted adult.

Three days later, the truth comes out. The Gibeonites live just a few miles away. The Israelites march to their towns, and the whole congregation grumbles against the leaders. But the leaders refuse to break their promise. "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Now therefore we may not touch them." They had made an oath in God's name, and they would keep it, even though they'd been tricked.

REAL TALK **Keeping Promises**

Here's what's amazing about this story: the promise was made under false pretenses, and Israel kept it anyway. They had every excuse to back out. But they had sworn by God's name, and God's people keep their word. Psalm 15 describes the kind of person who can dwell with God as someone "who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and doesn't change." Jesus said, "let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.'" How seriously do you take your promises? To show up, to keep a secret that's safe to keep, to finish a project, to be loyal to a friend? Integrity means your word means something. One important exception: if you've promised to keep a secret about someone being hurt or in danger, that's a promise you should break, and tell a trusted adult right away.

Think about how this story connects to the rest of Joshua. Rahab was a Canaanite who was spared because she trusted Israel's God.

The Gibeonites were Canaanites who were spared because they feared Israel's God and asked for mercy, even if they went about it the wrong way. Both times, people from the nations Israel was supposed to destroy ended up living among God's people. The book that contains the hardest war passages in the Bible also keeps showing that God's mercy was available to anyone who turned to Him.

Joshua calls the Gibeonites in and asks why they deceived Israel. Their answer is honest at last: we were afraid for our lives, because we heard that God had commanded you to destroy everyone in the land. We're in your hands. Do what seems right to you. Joshua spares them, and makes them woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD.

That could sound like a punishment, and in a way it was. But think about where it put them: serving at God's altar, near His presence, for generations. Like Rahab, the Gibeonites were Canaanites who recognized that Israel's God was the true God, and they ended up living among His people. Centuries later, after the exile, people from Gibeon helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:7).

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Promise That Lasted**

The promise to the Gibeonites lasted for centuries. In 2 Samuel 21, during the reign of King David, Israel suffered a three-year famine. When David asked God why, the answer was that Saul had killed Gibeonites, breaking the oath Joshua's generation had made. "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." God took that promise seriously for four hundred years. When God's people make a promise in His name, it matters to Him, long after everyone else has forgotten.

REAL TALK **Fear and Honesty**

The Gibeonites lied because they were afraid. Fear can push people to do things they normally wouldn't: lie to parents about where they were, cheat on a test because they're terrified of failing, hide a mistake because they're scared of getting in trouble. But the Gibeonites' story shows something hopeful too. When they finally told the truth, they were spared. Honesty usually turns out better than we expect, even when it's hard. If you're afraid to tell the truth about something, especially because you're scared of how someone will react, think about who you could talk to first: a parent, school counselor, youth leader, or another trusted adult. And if you're afraid of someone at home, that's something to tell a trusted adult about right away.

KEY VERSE

But all the princes said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Now therefore we may not touch them.

Joshua 9:19 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the Israelites didn't ask God before making a covenant with the Gibeonites?
2. What's a decision you're facing that you should pray about before you decide?
3. Is it ever right to break a promise? When?
4. What does the story of the Gibeonites say about God's mercy to outsiders?

TRY THIS *Make a list of promises you've made recently, big or small. Is there one you haven't kept? Go keep it this week, or if you can't, apologize and make it right.*

CHAPTER 7

The Day the Sun Stood Still

Joshua 10–12

When the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek, hears that Gibeon has made peace with Israel, he panics. Gibeon was a large, important city with strong warriors. So he gathers four other Amorite kings, from Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, and their armies surround Gibeon to punish it. The Gibeonites send an urgent message to Joshua at Gilgal: don't abandon your servants! Come quickly and save us!

Here's where Israel's promise gets tested. They had been tricked into the treaty. They could have let the Amorites do the dirty work. Instead, Joshua marches his army all night, uphill, about twenty miles, to defend the people who had deceived him. God tells him, "Don't fear them, for I have delivered them into your hands. Not a man of them will stand before you." Israel attacks at dawn, catching the Amorites by surprise. As the enemy flees down the pass toward Beth Horon, God sends a storm of huge hailstones, and the book says more died from the hail than from the sword.

Then comes one of the most famous and debated moments in the Bible. "Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel. He said in the sight of Israel, 'Sun, stand still on Gibeon! You, moon, stop in the valley of Aijalon!'" And it happened. "The sun stood still, and the

moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. Isn't this written in the book of Jashar? The sun stayed in the middle of the sky, and didn't hurry to go down about a whole day."

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Book of Jashar**

Joshua 10:13 quotes from the book of Jashar, which means the book of the upright one. It was apparently a collection of ancient poems or songs about Israel's heroes. It's mentioned again in 2 Samuel 1:18, where David's lament for Saul and Jonathan is said to be written in it. The book itself has been lost. Its mention here is interesting for two reasons: it shows that the writer of Joshua used older sources, and it suggests that Joshua's words, Sun, stand still, may come from a poem.

What actually happened? Christians have understood it in several ways. Some take it literally: God miraculously stopped or slowed the earth's rotation, or made the light of the sun linger, giving Israel extra daylight to finish the battle. God created the universe, they reason, so He can certainly do this. Others think the Hebrew word translated stand still can also mean be silent or stop, and suggest Joshua was asking for the sun's heat to stop, through cloud cover from the hailstorm, so his exhausted army could keep fighting; or that a rare event like an eclipse was involved. Still others note that the words come from a poem in the book of Jashar, and read them as poetic language for an astonishing victory, the way Deborah's song says the stars fought from heaven (Judges 5:20), or Habakkuk says, "The sun and moon stood still in the sky at the light of your arrows." Faithful Christians hold each of these views.

Whatever happened in the sky, the writer wants us to notice something even more amazing. "There was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD

fought for Israel." The miracle isn't just about the sun. It's that God listened to a human being's prayer.

> **REAL TALK** **Bold Prayers**
>
> Joshua prayed one of the boldest prayers in the Bible. He didn't ask for a little help. He asked God to stop the sun. You might feel like your prayers should be small and polite, or that God is too busy to care about your problems. But the Bible shows people bringing big requests to God again and again. Jesus told His followers to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7). That doesn't mean God gives us whatever we want, like a vending machine. But it does mean He listens. What's the boldest thing you could ask God for? Bring it to Him, and trust Him with the answer.

The five kings flee and hide in a cave at Makkedah. Joshua has the cave sealed with large stones while the army chases down the rest of the enemy. Afterward, he brings the kings out and has his commanders put their feet on the kings' necks, a common ancient sign of total victory. Then he says to them, "Don't be afraid, nor be dismayed. Be strong and courageous, for the LORD will do this to all your enemies against whom you fight." The words God spoke to Joshua in chapter 1, Joshua now passes on to his officers.

The rest of chapter 10 summarizes a campaign through the southern part of Canaan, taking cities like Lachish, Hebron, and Debir. Chapter 11 describes a campaign in the north, where Jabin, king of the powerful city of Hazor, gathers a huge army with horses and chariots by the waters of Merom. God again tells Joshua not to be afraid, and Israel wins. Joshua burns Hazor, the biggest city in Canaan. Chapter 12 lists thirty-one kings defeated by Israel.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **How Did Israel Come to Canaan?**
>
> Scholars have proposed several models for how Israel came to live in Canaan. The conquest model, closest to a straightforward reading of Joshua, says

Israel entered from outside and won a series of military campaigns. Supporters point to destruction layers at sites like Hazor, which was burned in the 1200s BC, possibly by Israel. The settlement model says Israel's tribes moved into the hill country gradually and mostly peacefully over a long time, with occasional conflict. The emergence model says Israel developed mostly from within Canaanite society, perhaps as people who left the cities and settled in hundreds of small new villages in the hills around 1200 BC. Archaeologists have found exactly those villages, with a distinctive style of four-room houses and, notably, no pig bones, which fits Israelite food laws. Many evangelical scholars think the reality was a combination: a real entrance from outside and key battles, as Joshua describes, followed by a long, gradual process of settlement, as Judges describes. The book of Joshua itself says that "there remains yet very much land to be possessed."

REAL TALK **War and Violence Today**

Reading chapter after chapter of battles can be hard, especially if you've seen war on the news, or if violence is part of your own life or your family's story. Here's what's important to remember. Israel's wars in Joshua were a one-time chapter in history, not a pattern for today. The New Testament never calls Christians to fight for God with weapons, and Jesus told Peter to put away his sword. The Bible looks forward to a day when nations will beat their swords into plowshares and won't learn war anymore (Isaiah 2:4). If you're struggling with fear about war, violence in your neighborhood, or something that's happened to you, please talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, school counselor, or pastor. If you or someone else is in danger, call 911.

The section ends with a summary that sounds final. "So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD spoke to Moses." But even here, the book is honest that it took a long time. Joshua made war against these kings for many years, and there was still land left to take. The victories were real. So was the unfinished work.

KEY VERSE

There was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.

Joshua 10:14 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Joshua defended the Gibeonites even though they had tricked him?
2. Which view of the sun standing still makes the most sense to you, and why?
3. What's a bold prayer you could bring to God?
4. How should Christians think about the wars in Joshua today?

TRY THIS *Write down one bold prayer request in a journal, with today's date. Pray about it every day for a month. At the end of the month, write down what happened, and what you learned.*

CHAPTER 8

Dividing the Land

Joshua 13–22

The second half of Joshua is mostly about real estate. Chapters 13–21 describe how the land was divided among the twelve tribes, with long lists of borders and towns. It might be tempting to skip them. But for Israel, these lists were like the deed to a house. Every family could point to a town and say: that's ours. God promised it, and God gave it.

The section opens with Joshua getting old. "Now Joshua was old and well advanced in years. The LORD said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed.'" Then God has Joshua divide the land anyway, by lot, trusting that God would finish what He started.

Right at the start comes one of the best stories in the book. Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, comes to Joshua. Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies who trusted God forty-five years earlier. Now Caleb reminds Joshua of that day. "I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land. I brought him word again as it was in my heart. Nevertheless, my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; but I wholly followed the LORD my God."

Then he says something incredible. “Now, behold, I am eighty-five years old, today. As yet I am as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me.” And what does he want? A nice, quiet retirement spot? No. He wants the hardest piece of land in Canaan. “Now therefore give me this hill country, of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and great and fortified cities.” Caleb asks for the very mountain where the giants lived, the ones who had terrified the other spies. “It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out, as the LORD said.”

Joshua blesses him and gives him Hebron. “Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel wholeheartedly.”

REAL TALK **Faith That Lasts**

Caleb was faithful at forty, and he was still faithful at eighty-five. He spent forty-five years watching other people’s unbelief cost him, wandering in a desert because of a decision he voted against. He could have gotten bitter. Instead, he got bolder. That kind of faith doesn’t happen overnight. It’s built over a lifetime, one decision at a time. The choices you’re making now, about what you believe, who you follow, and what kind of person you’re becoming, are shaping who you’ll be at eighty-five. What kind of faith do you want to have then? Start building it now.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Caleb the Kenizzite**

Here’s a detail that’s easy to miss. Caleb is called a Kenizzite. The Kenizzites were a non-Israelite people listed among the nations living in Canaan in Abraham’s day (Genesis 15:19). Many scholars think Caleb’s family was originally from outside Israel and was adopted into the tribe of Judah. If so, then one of the greatest heroes of faith in the Old Testament, the man who

wholly followed the LORD, was an outsider who became an insider, like Rahab. God's people were never meant to be defined by bloodline alone, but by faith.

The tribes receive their land one by one. Judah gets a large area in the south. Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, get the center. The daughters of Zelophehad, whose courage we saw in Numbers, come to Joshua and remind him of Moses' command, and they receive their inheritance. The remaining seven tribes are slow to claim their land, and Joshua scolds them. "How long will you neglect to go in to possess the land?" He sends men to survey it, and divides the rest by lot at Shiloh, where the tabernacle is set up. Joshua himself is the last to receive a town, Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim. The leader takes his share last.

REAL TALK **Don't Neglect What God Gives**

Seven tribes were slow to take what God had already given them. It's a strange problem: having a gift and not using it. You might do the same thing with your own gifts: a talent you never develop, an opportunity you never take, a calling you keep putting off, or even a relationship with God you never really pursue. Joshua's question is a good one to ask yourself. How long will you wait? What has God given you that you haven't stepped into yet?

Chapter 20 sets up the cities of refuge that Moses commanded, six towns spread across the land, three on each side of the Jordan. God tells Joshua, "Assign the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you by Moses, that the man slayer who kills any person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there." Anyone who caused a death by accident could run there for protection from a family member seeking revenge, until a fair trial could be held. The cities were for everyone, "for all the children of Israel, and for the alien who lives among them." In a world where revenge was common, God built in a place for mercy and justice.

Chapter 21 gives forty-eight towns to the Levites, scattered among all the tribes, so that the teachers of God's law would live everywhere. Then comes one of the most beautiful summaries in the Bible. "So the LORD gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers. They possessed it, and lived in it. The LORD gave them rest all around." And then: "Nothing failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass."

Chapter 22 tells a tense story. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh have kept their promise, fighting alongside the others for years. Joshua sends them home across the Jordan with a blessing. But on the way, they build a huge altar by the river. The other tribes are horrified; they think it's a rival altar for worshiping other gods, and they nearly go to war. A delegation led by Phinehas the priest goes to confront them. It turns out the eastern tribes built it as a witness, so that their children would always remember they belonged to the LORD too, even though they lived across the river. Civil war is avoided because people talked before they fought.

> **REAL TALK** **Talk Before You Fight**
>
> The western tribes almost went to war over a misunderstanding. They saw the altar and assumed the worst. Thankfully, they sent people to ask questions first. How often do you assume the worst about someone? A text that seems rude, a friend who didn't invite you, a parent who seems unfair. Before you react, ask. You might find out there's a completely different story. Assuming the worst breaks friendships, families, and churches. Asking questions can save them.

KEY VERSE

Nothing failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Joshua 21:45 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What do you admire most about Caleb at eighty-five?
2. What kind of faith do you want to have when you're old? What could you do now to build it?
3. What has God given you that you haven't stepped into yet?
4. When have you assumed the worst about someone and been wrong?

TRY THIS *Interview an older Christian you respect, someone over sixty if possible. Ask them how they've stayed faithful, what their hardest moments were, and what advice they'd give you. Write down what they say.*

CHAPTER 9

Choose Today

Joshua 23–24

Joshua is now about 110 years old. Like Moses before him, he gathers the people for a farewell. In chapter 23, he speaks to the leaders. He reminds them of everything God has done, and tells them to stay faithful. "Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses." Notice the word courageous again. The courage Joshua needed to fight battles, they now need to stay faithful. "But hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day." And, "Take good heed therefore to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God."

He's honest about the danger. Canaanites still live in the land. If Israel intermarries with them and starts worshiping their gods, those nations will become a trap for them, like a whip on their backs and thorns in their eyes. Then he says something that echoes the closing summary of chapter 21. "Behold, today I am going the way of all the earth. You know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you."

> **REAL TALK** **Finishing Well**
>
> Joshua had been faithful for more than a century, and he finished well. Not everyone does. The Bible is full of people who started strong and ended badly, like Saul, Solomon, and Samson. It's easy to think faith is only about

> the beginning: the moment you first trust Jesus, or the big decision at camp. But following God is a long race (Hebrews 12:1). What will help you keep going when the excitement fades? Friends who share your faith, a regular habit of prayer and Scripture, a church community, people older than you who can mentor you, and honesty about your struggles. Faith that finishes well is built a day at a time.

In chapter 24, Joshua gathers all the tribes at Shechem for a covenant renewal ceremony. Shechem is where God first promised the land to Abraham (Genesis 12:6–7). Joshua speaks for God and retells Israel's whole story, starting at the very beginning. "Your fathers lived of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor. They served other gods." Israel's own ancestors were idol-worshipers when God called them. Then God led Abraham to Canaan, gave him Isaac, then Jacob and Esau. He sent Moses and Aaron, struck Egypt, brought Israel through the sea, fed them in the wilderness, defeated the Amorites, turned Balaam's curse into a blessing, and brought them across the Jordan. Then God says, "I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you didn't build, and you live in them. You eat of vineyards and olive groves which you didn't plant."

Then Joshua makes his challenge. "Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth. Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, in Egypt; and serve the LORD. If it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond 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."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Covenant at Shechem**

Joshua 24 follows the same treaty pattern we saw in Deuteronomy. It names the great King, recounts His history with the people, states the requirements, calls witnesses, and writes everything down. Joshua even sets up a large stone under an oak tree as a witness. Archaeologists at Shechem have found a large temple and standing stones from this era, though whether any is connected to Joshua 24 is debated. Shechem was in the center of the land, near Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, and it became an important gathering place for the tribes.

Notice what Joshua is asking. He's not saying, choose between serving God and serving nobody. He assumes everybody serves something. The choice is who or what. The gods of their ancestors, the gods of their neighbors, or the LORD. And Joshua doesn't wait to see what the crowd does before making his own choice. As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

REAL TALK **Whom Will You Serve?**

Everyone serves something. It might not be a statue of Baal, but it could be popularity, money, success, a relationship, your appearance, your phone, your own comfort, or what other people think of you. Whatever you live for, whatever you'd sacrifice anything to get or keep, that's what you serve. Joshua's challenge is as real for you today as it was for Israel. You can't choose for your parents, your friends, or your youth group. But you can choose for yourself. What would it look like to say, as for me, I will serve the LORD? And what would you need to put away to say it honestly?

The people answer quickly. "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods." But Joshua surprises them. "You can't serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God." He's not trying to discourage them. He's making sure they understand what they're promising. This isn't a casual commitment. When they insist, he tells them that they're witnesses against

themselves, and to throw away their foreign gods. Three times they say it. Finally, "We will serve the LORD our God, and we will listen to his voice." Joshua writes down the covenant and sets up the stone as a witness.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Joshua's Warning**

Why did Joshua tell the people they couldn't serve the LORD? Some think he was testing their sincerity, like a coach asking whether you really want to be on the team. Others think he was being honest about human weakness: on their own, without new hearts, they would fail, as the book of Judges goes on to show. Moses had said the same thing in Deuteronomy 31. Either way, the warning points forward. Israel needed more than good intentions. They needed God to change their hearts, which the prophets later promised and the New Testament says happens through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

It's worth noticing that Joshua's challenge is about his house, not just himself. He takes responsibility for his family's faith. If you're a teenager, you're not in charge of your house yet. But you're part of it, and you have more influence than you think. Your younger siblings watch what you do. Your parents notice how you talk about God. Your friends see whether your faith is real. And someday you may have a house of your own. The choices you make now are already shaping the kind of home you'll build.

Then the book ends with three burials. "After these things, Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred ten years old." He's buried in his own land at Timnath Serah. Joseph's bones, which Israel had carried all the way from Egypt, are finally buried at Shechem, fulfilling a promise from Genesis 50. And Eleazar, Aaron's son, the high priest, is buried in the hill country of Ephraim.

Joseph's bones are a quiet but powerful detail. Four hundred years earlier, Joseph had made his family promise to carry his bones out of Egypt when God brought them home (Genesis 50:25). Moses took them when Israel left Egypt (Exodus 13:19). For forty years they traveled through the wilderness. Now, finally, they're laid to rest in the land. Genesis ended with a coffin in Egypt and a promise. Joshua ends with that promise kept. God's promises sometimes take centuries, but they don't fail.

The book gives Joshua the title that was given to Moses: the servant of the LORD. And it gives one last summary of his life. "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua." His faith shaped a whole generation. But the next book, Judges, opens with a generation that didn't know the LORD. Faith has to be chosen again by every generation. Including yours.

KEY VERSE

If it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond 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.

Joshua 24:15 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What gods do people serve today? Which ones pull at you most?
2. Why do you think Joshua told the people they couldn't serve the LORD?
3. What would it mean for you to say, as for me, I will serve the LORD?
4. How can you help make sure your faith lasts beyond your teen years?

TRY THIS *Write your own covenant with God: what you're choosing, what you're putting away, and who will help you keep it. Sign and date it, and show it to someone you trust. Then put it somewhere you'll see it, like Joshua's stone.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

Joshua ends with Israel in the land, and a beautiful summary: not one of God's good promises had failed. But the book also hints that the story isn't over. Canaanites still live in the land. The people promise to serve God, but Joshua warns that they won't be able to keep it up on their own. The next book, Judges, shows how right he was. Joshua gave Israel a home, but not lasting rest.

Jewish readers treasure Joshua as the story of God's faithfulness in bringing Israel into the land He promised Abraham. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, saw in Joshua a preview of someone greater. The letter to the Hebrews says, "For if Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterward of another day. There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God." A second Joshua, with the very same name, came to bring that rest. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He keeps every promise He makes. Like Rahab, you're not too far outside to be brought in.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all chosen other gods.

Joshua told Israel to put away their idols. The Bible says all of us have turned from God to serve other things.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. Achan's hidden sin brought disaster. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus saves.

That's what His name means. Jesus, the greater Joshua, died on the cross for our sins and rose again, to bring us into God's rest.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Israel received a land they didn't build. Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Choose today.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

God, I've served other things instead of You, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You for keeping every promise. Thank You that Jesus, whose name means the LORD saves, died for me and rose again. I'm turning to You. Forgive me, and bring me into Your rest. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King. Today I choose You. As for me, I will serve the LORD. Give me courage to follow You wherever You lead. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read Joshua 1, 2, and 24, then read Hebrews 3–4 and 11, and watch how the story of Joshua points to Jesus.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Set up a stone. Israel built a memorial so they'd never forget what God did. Write down the date and what you've decided today, and keep it where you'll see it.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Joshua was written so that God's people would remember that He keeps His promises. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Joshua is right, the choice is still in front of you, and the God who brought Israel home wants to bring you home too.

Nothing failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Joshua 21:45 (WEB)