

Adult
Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide
Oct | Nov | Dec 2025

Lessons of Faith from JOSHUA



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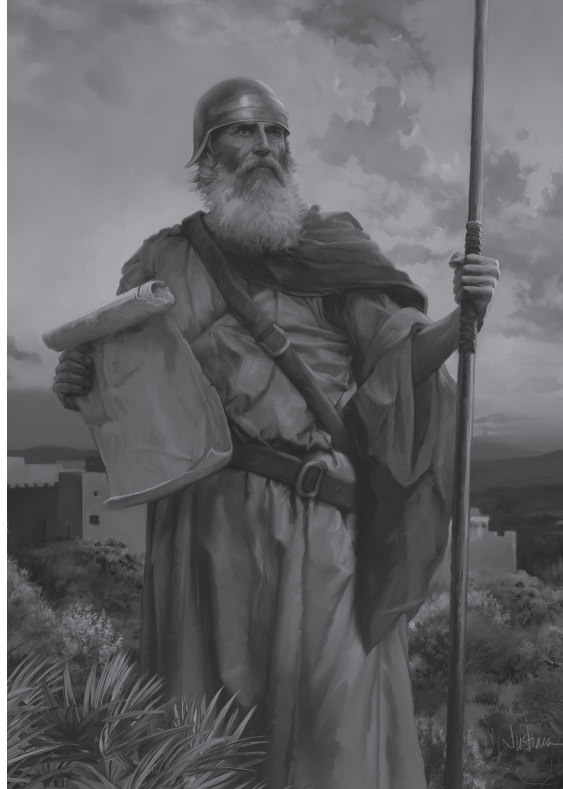
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Second Chances: The Book of Joshua



The book of Joshua marks the transition from the leadership of Moses to that of Joshua. It begins with the story of the Israelites entering the Promised Land and ends with them settled in that land.

Joshua, indeed, had a tough act to follow. That is, to pick up where Moses had left off. But that challenge was only the beginning. Joshua was to do what Moses never did: take the nation, after 40 years in the desert, across the Jordan and into Canaan, according to the promise that God had made to the fathers years before.

“ ‘Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel’ ” (*Josh. 1:2, NKJV*).

The key to the whole story is found here, in the Lord’s words to Joshua: they are going to enter “ ‘the land which I [YHVH] am giving to them.’ ”

Yes, Joshua is not going to do it alone, but only through the power and guidance of the Lord, who would have brought the people into the land a generation earlier had they obeyed their end of the covenant. Unfortunately, they didn’t, and thus, they met the consequences of their actions.

During the preceding 40 years, Israel had faced the negative side of the covenant. Because of the people’s rebellion against God, the entire adult generation who had experienced the wonders and marvels of the Exodus, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, perished in the desert. Four of the five books of Moses deal with what

happened to them as they wandered in the desert all that time. Now, under the leadership of Joshua, the second generation was ready to undertake the challenges of possessing the land.

“Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, ‘Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed’ ” (Deut. 31:7, 8, NKJV).

The promises of God given to the patriarchs and to Moses are about to be fulfilled. There is an air of expectation and excitement, a new beginning for the people, long homeless and dispossessed. God has been faithful in delivering them from slavery, and He can certainly be trusted to fulfill His promises concerning the land.

“The primary purpose of the book of Joshua is to describe Israel’s entry into the land of promise, the conquest of the land, and its division among the tribes. This purpose underlies the message of the book, namely, the faithfulness of God in fulfilling the promise of land made to Abraham. The book emphasizes God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises (Josh. 21:43–45).”—*Andrews Bible Commentary* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2020), p. 365.

We will discover together that, although the book of Joshua was written more than three millennia ago, the world in which we live today is not so different from that of Joshua’s in its spiritual challenges. We might face challenges of a different nature, but nonetheless there are challenges, especially spiritual ones, that threaten our security, our faith, and the fulfillment of the mission God has entrusted to His people. The example of Joshua will certainly inspire us to claim God’s promises concerning our time and to succeed through His power, as he did.

Though the book of Joshua was written more than three millennia ago, the world in which we live today is not so different from that of Joshua’s in its spiritual challenges.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

“The true teacher is not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power, that awakens and inspires his [class].”

—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 103.

To be a Sabbath School teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility. A privilege because it offers the teacher the unique opportunity to lead and guide in the study and discussion of the week’s lesson so as to enable the class to have both a personal appreciation for God’s Word and a collective experience of spiritual fellowship with class members. When the class concludes, members should leave with a sense of having tasted the goodness of God’s Word and having been strengthened by its enduring power. The responsibility of teaching demands that the teacher is fully aware of the Scripture to be studied, the flow of the lesson through the week, the interlinking of the lessons to the theme of the quarter, and the lesson’s application to life and witness.

This guide is to help teachers to fulfill their responsibility adequately. It has three segments:

- 1. Overview** introduces the lesson topic, key texts, links with the previous lesson, and the lesson’s theme. This segment deals with such questions as Why is this lesson important? What does the Bible say about this subject? What are some major themes covered in the lesson? How does this subject affect my personal life?
- 2. Commentary** is the chief segment in the Teachers Edition. It may have two or more sections, each one dealing with the theme introduced in the Overview segment. The Commentary may include several in-depth discussions that enlarge the themes outlined in the Overview. The Commentary provides an in-depth study of the themes and offers scriptural, exegetic, illustrative discussion material that leads to a better understanding of the themes. The Commentary also may have scriptural word study or exegesis appropriate to the lesson. On a participatory mode, the Commentary segment may have discussion leads, illustrations appropriate to the study, and thought questions.
- 3. Life Application** is the final segment of the Teachers Edition for each lesson. This section leads the class to discuss what was presented in the Commentary segment as it impacts Christian life. The application may involve discussion, further probing of what the lesson under study is all about, or perhaps personal testimony on how one may feel the impact of the lesson on one’s life.

Final thought: What is mentioned above is only suggestive of the many possibilities available for presenting the lesson and is not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive in its scope. Teaching should not become monotonous, repetitious, or speculative. Good Sabbath School teaching should be Bible-based, Christ-centered, faith-strengthening, and fellowship-building.

Recipe for Success



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 18:15–22; Joshua 1; Heb. 6:17, 18; Eph. 6:10–18; Ps. 1:1–3; Rom. 3:31.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go’ ” (*Joshua 1:7, NKJV*).

Benjamin Zander, musical director of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, taught a music interpretation class. He observed the students' anxiety as they faced the evaluation of their performance. In order to put the students at ease and to open them up to their full potential, he announced on the first day of the class that everybody would get an “A.” This “A” was not an expectation to live up to “but a possibility to live into.” The only requirement was for the students to write a letter within the first two weeks of the semester but dated at the end of the class. The letter explained why they deserved the high grade.

The book of Joshua is about new possibilities. Moses, who had dominated 40 years of Israel's history, belonged in the past. The Exodus from Egypt and the wanderings in the wilderness, tragically marked by rebellion and stubbornness, had ended. A new generation, willing to obey God, was ready to enter the Promised Land, not as an expectation to live up to but as a possibility to live into.

Let's study the way God opened up a new chapter in Israel's life and how He can do the same in ours, as well.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 4.*

A New Moses

Read Deuteronomy 18:15–22 and Joshua 1:1–9. Why is it significant that the book of Joshua starts by echoing a promise related to what would happen after the death of Moses?

Though Moses had died and a new leader, Joshua, had been appointed by God, there are parallels between them. Both men had been told by God that they would lead their people into the land promised to their fathers. As the Lord said to Joshua: “ ‘Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses’ ” (*Josh. 1:3, NKJV*). Joshua would finish the work that had originally been given to Moses. He was, really, a new Moses.

Read Exodus 33:11; Numbers 14:6, 30, 38; Numbers 27:18; Numbers 32:12; Deuteronomy 1:38; Deuteronomy 31:23; and Deuteronomy 34:9. What do these texts tell us about Joshua?

At this stage, the promise that God would “raise up” a prophet similar to Moses (*Deut. 18:15*) is only a possibility rather than an accomplished reality. The opening words of the book of Joshua remind the reader of this promise and, at the same time, create an expectation to see it fulfilled.

Though dead, Moses still dominates the first chapter. His name is mentioned ten times, Joshua’s only four. Moses is called “the servant of the LORD” while Joshua is referred to as “Moses’ assistant” (*Josh. 1:1, NKJV*). It will take a lifetime of faithful service and obedience for Joshua to receive the title “servant of the LORD” (*Josh. 24:29, NKJV*).

Even if the first chapter of Joshua captures a transition between two great leaders of Israel, the most important character is the Lord Himself, whose words open the book and whose guidance dominates it. There are no questions as to who is the real leader of Israel.

Throughout the ages, God has called men and women to lead His people. Why is it crucial to remember who the true, invisible leader of the church is?

Cross! Take! Divide! Serve!

Read Joshua 1. What can we learn about the structure of the book from this opening chapter?

The first chapter of Joshua serves as an introduction to the whole book. It comprises four speeches that correspond to the four main sections of the book: crossing (*Josh. 1:2–9*); conquering (*Josh. 1:10, 11*); dividing the land (*Josh. 1:12–15*); and serving by obedience to the law (*Josh. 1:16–18*).

The book of Joshua can be seen as a series of divine initiatives. In each initiative, God gives a specific task to Joshua related to the conquest of Canaan, and each one is acknowledged later in the book after its successful completion.

In the end, the promises of God concerning the occupation of the land would be fulfilled. From then on, the responsibility of keeping the land lay in the hands of the Israelites and could be accomplished only by true faith and by the obedience that such faith always engenders.

God's initiatives, expressed by the three verbs—"cross," "take," and "divide"—receive a proper answer in the people's obedience, which derives from the final initiative: service.

Again, the book of Joshua has four major sections, each characterized by a specific concept expressed through the dominating presence of a Hebrew word:

1. Cross (*Josh. 1:1–5:12*)
2. Take (*Josh. 5:13–12:24*)
3. Divide (*Josh. 13:1–21:45*)
4. Service (*Josh. 22:1–24:33*)

Thus, the structure of the book itself conveys its main message: God's initiatives are not accomplished automatically. Instead, they require the faithful response of His people. That is, with all that God has done for us—including all that He has done for us that we cannot do for ourselves—we are then called to do what we can do for ourselves, which is to obey what God commands us to do. This is how it has always been in all of sacred history, and it remains so today. For example, the depiction of God's end-time people in Revelation 14:12 conveys the same idea: faith in what God has done for us, which leads to obedience.

Think about some of the promises of God's Word that are most precious to you. What kind of response do they require on your part in order for them to become reality?

Heirs of Promises

In Joshua 1:2, 3, the Lord tells Joshua that He is giving the land to them. On the other hand, He said that He has already given it. What does that mean?

The land was a gift from the Lord, who was the real Owner. In Joshua 1:2, 3, two different forms of the verb “to give” are used, reflecting two significant aspects of inheriting the land. The first form expresses the process of giving the land. Only the Transjordan territories had been occupied by Israel. Most of the Promised Land had yet to be taken.

In Joshua 1:3 the verb is used in its perfect form, giving the impression that the land had already been given to them. When God is the subject of such actions, the form is called “the prophetic perfect.” And that’s because what He promises in His Word is an assured fact that can be trusted as present reality.

The pronouns in verse 3, “you” and “your,” are plurals, so the promise is given not only to Joshua but to the entire people of Israel. The reference to the promise given to Moses conveys the continuity of God’s cause.

Also, the word *kol*, “all,” “every,” is repeated numerous times in the first chapter. The pervasive presence of this noun expresses the totality and integrity that is crucial to attaining the objective set before Joshua. There has to be a perfect alignment between God, Joshua, and the people of Israel in order to assure success in the forthcoming conquest of the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 1:4–6 and Hebrews 6:17, 18. At that moment, the Promised Land was exactly that, a promise. Yet, God calls it an inheritance. What does it mean to be the heirs of God’s promises?

There is nothing magical about the promises of God. They don’t have the power in and of themselves to secure their own fulfillment. The guarantee that they will come true lies in the presence of God, who says: “ ‘I will be with you.’ ” Indeed, the presence of the Lord was crucial for the survival of the Israelites. Without it, they would be only one among many nations, with no special call, identity, or mission (*Exod. 33:12–16*). The presence of the Lord was everything Joshua needed to succeed.

Nothing today has changed, which is why we have the promise of Jesus found in Matthew 28:20.

Be Strong!

Read Joshua 1:7–9. Why did the Lord need to emphasize twice to Joshua that he had to be strong and courageous?

The task set before Joshua seemed to involve overwhelming challenges. The walls of the Canaanite cities appeared unassailable, and the population of the land was trained for battle. In contrast, the Israelites, simple nomads, did not possess even the most primitive war machines to take on the fortified walls. History tells us that not even Egypt, the superpower of those times, was able to gain a steady foothold in Canaan.

Yet, the summons to be strong and courageous is not related here only to battle morale or to war strategies. Courage and strength are needed to stay faithful to the Torah and its specific requirements, which defined Israel's covenant with Yahweh.

Read Ephesians 6:10–18. Although we are not required today to participate in military combat, how can we apply the words of encouragement given to Joshua in our daily spiritual struggles?

Today, in fulfilling the mission entrusted to them by Christ, Christians face similar challenges to those of Joshua; that is, they are required to wage war against their own sinful tendencies, against the principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this age, and against the hosts of wickedness. Like Joshua, they also have the assuring promise of Christ's presence: " 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age' " (*Matt. 28:20, NKJV*). As the supporting presence of the Lord was enough to expel the fears of Joshua, so it should be sufficient to banish our doubts and anxieties today.

The challenge for us is to know the Lord well enough to trust in Him and His promises to us. And that is why, more than anything else, we need that personal relationship with Him.

The crucial question for us today is not different from that faced by Joshua. How can we stay true to what the Word of God says, even when it is unpopular or inconvenient to do so?

Prosperous and Successful

Read Joshua 1:7–9 together with Genesis 24:40, Isaiah 53:10, and Psalm 1:1–3. Based on these texts, what does it mean to be prosperous and successful?

The Hebrew term *tsalakh*, “prosperous” (*Josh. 1:8*), implies the satisfactory accomplishment of what was planned, or a state of favorable circumstances.

The term *sakal*, “to be wise” (*Josh. 1:8*), can be translated as “prosper” or “be successful.” But it also can mean “to be prudent,” or “to act wisely.” It occurs frequently in Job, Proverbs, and Psalms, where the notion of success is closely tied to acting wisely by fearing God and obeying His Word.

According to this insight, success is not necessarily defined as material prosperity, though it does not exclude it. Success has to be seen as a state of harmony with the spiritual values and principles that lie at the foundation of God’s created world and that are expressed in His law.

Indeed, trust in God’s promises, especially the promise of salvation by faith alone and obedience to His law, are not opposed to each other. They represent two sides of the same coin.

Read Romans 3:31. What does this text say about the relationship between law and faith?

To pit faith in the atoning and sacrificial death of Jesus in our behalf against obedience to God’s law is to set up a false and dangerous dichotomy. Law and grace always go together. Only a superficial understanding of the role of the law can lead to perceiving “law” and “grace” as opposites.

The writers of the Old Testament had a high regard for the law and considered it a source of delight (*Ps. 1:2; Ps. 119:70, 77, 174*). Rightly regarded and used, the law will lead to a deeper understanding of one’s own sinfulness (*Rom. 7:7*) and the need for Christ’s righteousness (*Gal. 3:24*).

However much by God’s grace you seek to keep His law, how has your own experience shown you your need for Christ’s covering righteousness?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pp. 481, 482, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “Entering the Promised Land,” p. 175, in *The Story of Redemption*.

“In His promises and warnings, Jesus means me. God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that I by believing in Him, might not perish, but have everlasting life. The experiences related in God’s word are to be my experiences. Prayer and promise, precept and warning, are mine. . . . As faith thus receives and assimilates the principles of truth, they become a part of the being and the motive power of the life. The word of God, received into the soul, molds the thoughts, and enters into the development of character.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 390, 391.

“There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 19.

Discussion Questions:

- ① However different the circumstances of Joshua’s life and experiences are from ours, what spiritual principles can we take away from his life that we can apply to our own? Why, though, must we always keep context in mind when seeking to draw analogies?
- ② Discuss the relationship between God’s promises and our obedience to Him. How do they complement one another? What are the dangers of overemphasizing one at the expense of the other? That is, what danger comes from pushing the law at the expense of eclipsing grace? Or of pushing grace at the expense of eclipsing the law?
- ③ Based on this week’s lesson, how would you define success from a biblical perspective? What place does prosperity have in a Christian definition of success?
- ④ Imagine how Joshua might have felt, following Moses. What promise did God give to him that surely sustained him (see *Josh. 1:5*) in his great responsibilities?

Worshipping a Tree

Sudhakar immediately noticed the tree when he arrived on the Bangkok Noi campus to work as a Global Mission pioneer in Thailand. Colorful ribbons were tied to the tree. Small images of stone and wood encircled it. Bananas, apples, and burning incense sticks were placed in its trunk. Sudhakar learned that townspeople believed that an ancestral spirit lived in the tree. So, they worshiped the tree according to their traditions.

Sudhakar was confused because the spirit tree stood on land that a kind-hearted woman had donated to a Seventh-day Adventist mission hospital. He asked the pastor why the community people came onto the campus to worship the spirit tree. The pastor explained that townspeople had been worshipping the spirit tree long before the land was donated to the church.

Sudhakar understood the cultural sensitivities, and he thought, "If the ribbons and other objects suddenly disappeared, townspeople might overreact."

But he was determined to do something. With much prayer to the God of heaven, he befriended the community leader and other townspeople. He invited them to cooking courses, English classes, and worship services in a new center of influence that he was organizing in a building near the spirit tree. Then, slowly, he started cleaning up the tree, removing the ribbons, the images, the bananas, the apples, and the incense sticks. It took about a week.

No one in the community said a word to him about the spirit tree.

Then one day, Sudhakar had an unexpected encounter. As he passed by the tree after a class in the center of influence, a voice called out to him by name. The voice offered wealth if Sudhakar would only obey.

But Sudhakar was not tempted. He didn't want anything from the spirit. He wanted the spirit to go. "I command you in Jesus' name to leave this campus and never come back," he said.

Three days later, Sudhakar noticed that the tree was dying. All of its leaves fell to the ground. Four weeks later, only a dry, dead tree remained. Sudhakar took an ax and chopped it down.

Townspeople were astounded as word spread around town about what had happened. Large numbers flocked to the center of influence. Sudhakar

taught the townspeople to pray to the only true God. Seven people began to attend Sabbath worship services in the center of influence and later were baptized.



Pray for Global Mission pioneers who, like Sudhakar, have accepted the challenge of proclaiming the gospel to unreached people groups around the world. Learn more about Global Mission pioneers: bit.ly/GMPioneers

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Joshua 1:7*

Study Focus: *Deut. 18:15–22; Joshua 1; Heb. 6:17, 18; Eph. 6:10–18; Ps. 1:1–3; Rom. 3:31.*

Even though Moses has passed away, the influence of his leadership still lingers as a new era dawns. In the opening of the book that bears his name, Joshua is encouraged by God to trust Him. God urges the new leader to follow in Moses' footsteps. Times are new, but the commandments and promises remain the same: cross, take, divide, and serve! The condition is the same: obedience as a response to God's merciful acts of deliverance in the past, based on a trustful relationship with Him. The only difference is the individuals: another generation has arisen. In a certain sense, the book of Joshua offers a fresh opportunity for God's people today, as they stand on the shores of the Promised Land.

At the beginning of the book, the main questions are: Will Israel seize this new opportunity? Will they follow the recipe for success that the previous generation did not?

History repeats itself today. The church, under the leadership of Christ, the new Joshua, is summoned to advance toward the fulfillment of God's promises. The pattern of the covenant remains unaltered: God gives us what we cannot obtain for ourselves, and He waits for our obedience, which expresses our confidence in His love, wisdom, and power. The question remains: Will our generation trust in the ability of the Divine to bring His plan "to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (*Phil. 1:6, NIV*)? As the present generation stands at the border of the heavenly Canaan, the divine appeal still resounds powerfully: "Only be strong and very courageous" (*Josh. 1:7, NKJV*).

Part II: Commentary

Spiritual Leadership

The commissioning of Joshua as Moses' substitute occurs immediately after the painful memory of Moses' failure in the desert of Sin, which prevented the great leader from entering Canaan (*Num. 20:9–12*). In the larger context, this event is closely connected to the request of the daughters of Zelophehad (*Num. 27:1–12*). As part of the first generation, Zelophehad was doomed to die in the desert because of unbelief and rebellion. With Aaron already deceased and Moses nearing his end, the aged leader prays for a successor. His prayer, and God's response, define Joshua's future leadership role. His

role would be predominantly military, as implied in the expression “ ‘go out before us’ ” (1 Sam. 8:20). Indeed, his military prowess is already evident in Exodus 17:9–14, wherein he leads the Israelites against the forces of Amalek. This campaign demonstrates how Joshua was being prepared by the Lord, long before his actual commission.

In God’s response to Moses, Joshua is described as a man filled with the Spirit (*ruah*) (Num. 27:18). Such an evaluation from the One who knows the heart is significant. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *ruah* can denote an impersonal wind, human breath, disposition, or mind, among other things. It can also refer to the divine Agent who has been actively involved in worldly affairs since Creation (Gen. 1:2). The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Pentateuch is revealed through three manifestations: wisdom, prophecy, and leadership. Joseph is the first person identified as having the Spirit of God (Gen. 41:38). All three aspects are evident in his life: as a prophet, he receives dreams; as a wise man, he interprets Pharaoh’s dream; and as a leader, he devises a plan to save not only his people but also other nations affected by the famine.

In Joshua’s ministry, wisdom, prophecy, and leadership also will converge. He is filled with “the spirit of wisdom” (*ruah hokhmah*) (Deut. 34:9). Moreover, he is among the 70 elders who receive the Spirit to prophesy (Num. 11:16–30). Finally, in Numbers 27:18, he is appointed by God as a leader in whom the Spirit dwells.

Despite the notable abilities Joshua developed throughout the years serving Moses, his leadership is defined in spiritual terms. Only spiritual leadership makes sense in the context of spiritual warfare. Ultimately, the battles Joshua was called to wage belonged to God, not to him or to Israel.

The Pattern of the Covenant: Blessing, Promise, and Obedience

From the first dialogue of God with humanity, the pattern of the covenant is evident: God blesses before giving commands (Gen. 1:28). In various subsequent covenants, divine blessing is manifested through God’s promises of deliverance, offspring, and land. For example, when God called Noah to build the ark, it showcased His commitment to providing a means of salvation to humanity. Noah received more specific commandments only after the great deliverance of those in the ark. Similarly, Abraham obeyed God’s instruction to leave his homeland only after hearing God’s promised blessings (Gen. 12:1–3). The Mosaic covenant follows a similar pattern, as God reminded the people of what He had done for Israel before giving the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Finally, in David’s desire to build a house for the Lord in Jerusalem, God promised to build a house for David instead (2 Sam. 7:27). In the new covenant, God places His law in the hearts of His people so that they can freely obey Him (Jer. 31:33).

Thus, any legalistic view of the law of God is not aligned with the

biblical view of obedience. Obedience is always a human response to the divine initiative to bless the people of God. Salvation was never, and is not, reliant on human accomplishments, nor will it ever rely on human accomplishments. Such a legalistic view of the Old Testament law distorts its true purpose. Roy Gane aptly affirms: “If we overcome our neglect of biblical law, won’t this lead to legalism? Not if we understand the purpose of God’s law. It is a standard of acting and thinking in harmony with God’s character of love. It is not, cannot be, and never was intended to be a means to salvation. Doing right can never redeem us from our mortality or past sins. Only God’s grace through Christ’s sacrifice, received by faith, can do that. God’s commandments are for people who are already delivered.” —Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), p. 310.

Law and Wisdom

The wisdom literature in the Old Testament, which comprises the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, plus some psalms, explores two prominent themes: Creation and law. These books demonstrate how Creation and law should impact the way that believers relate to God and to one another. There is, in fact, a close relationship between law and wisdom. This relationship is already apparent in Deuteronomy 4:6: “ ‘Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” ’ ” (NKJV). The greatness of Israel would not be found in wealth and military power but in wisdom resulting from the faithful observance of God’s commandments. Naturally, success and prosperity would follow. Such success and prosperity can be seen in the results of Solomon’s request for wisdom (*1 Kings 3:13*).

Wisdom, which is God-directed knowledge, imparts to us the ability to live well in the context of the fear of Yahweh by being obedient to His will and by living in harmony with fellow human beings and nature. The fool, in rebellion against God’s created order, disobeys Him, while the wise reject chaos and embrace God’s will in a life of obedience. The results of this choice are spelled out throughout the wisdom literature of the Bible, which also deals with the exceptions and the absurdities that frequently mark our existence under the sun (see Job and Ecclesiastes).

The same principle is found in Joshua 1, in which the leader, who embodies the whole nation, is called to obey the entire law diligently. Israel can choose the way of wisdom and experience its benefits. However, to do that, Joshua and the Israelites should “be strong and

very courageous” (*Josh. 1:7, NKJV*). The same pair of imperatives had already been used by Moses to encourage both the Israelites and his successor (*Deut. 31:6, 7*). Later, Joshua would address the people with the same words (*Josh. 10:25*). But why? Obedience requires trust, and in the context of our human nature, trust often demands strength and courage. Again, obedience is not a transaction in which we gain or lose, based on what we offer. Obedience is an expression of human trust in God’s way. It is rooted in a relationship with the living God. It involves denying self, taking up the cross, and following Jesus’ sacrificial steps (*Luke 9:23*). This commitment is not for the faint of heart.

Part III: Life Application

Leadership

1. **There are several leadership models, such as the charismatic model, the transformational model, and the servant-leader model, among others. All these leadership profiles may be found in the Bible. However, the distinct mark of successful leaders in biblical terms is their spiritual competence. Starting with Joshua, discuss the qualities of a spiritual leader in the life of the following characters:**

A. Joshua _____

B. Abraham _____

C. Deborah _____

D. David _____

E. Esther _____

F. Peter _____

G. Paul _____

2. How would you characterize a spiritual leader today?

3. The leaders listed in question 1 of this section also exercised responsibility outside the religious realm. Is it possible to be a spiritual leader as a “secular” administrator? Why or why not? If yes, how?

Resting in God’s Promises

The Seventh-day Adventist Church emerged as a movement based on the promise of Jesus’ second coming, as indicated by its denominational name. The divine rest promised to Israel in the book of Joshua was achieved only in Solomon’s time, centuries after the initial conquest. However, even this rest was temporary. In Hebrews 11:13, we read that the examples of the faithful did not receive what was promised. Despite questions about the apparent delay of Jesus, the experience of God’s people throughout history has been one of an ongoing march toward the promises.

Consider This: How can the examples of faith found in Hebrews 11 encourage you as you continue moving toward the consummation of the blessed hope?

Called to Be Strong and Courageous

Discuss in your class how, as Seventh-day Adventists, we are required to be strong and courageous in the different environments in which we are called to live our faith today:

A. Family_____

B. Neighborhood_____

C. School _____

D. Work_____

Surprised *by* Grace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Josh. 2:1–21, Num. 14:1–12, Heb. 11:31, Exod. 12:13, Joshua 9, Neh. 7:25.*

Memory Text: “By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace” (*Hebrews 11:31, NKJV*).

Why did I do this again?” Perhaps we all have uttered these words. After all, not only history repeats itself but so does humanity in general and we ourselves in particular. How often we repeat the same mistakes!

Israel has a second chance of entering the Promised Land, and Joshua takes this mission seriously. The first step is to have a clear understanding of what Joshua and the Israelites face. Joshua sends out two spies to bring him valuable information about the land: its defense system, military preparedness, water supplies, and the attitude of the population in the face of an invading force.

One would think that God's promise of giving the land to the Israelites did not require any effort from them. Yet, the assurance of divine support does not override human responsibility. Israel stands at the border of Canaan for a second time. Expectations run high, but the last time Israel was at the border and had the same task, it resulted in an abysmal failure.

This week, we will explore two of the most fascinating stories of the book of Joshua and discover their relevance to our faith today. God's grace has infinite possibilities to surprise us.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.*

Second Chance

Read Joshua 2:1, along with Numbers 13:1, 2, 25–28, 33; and Numbers 14:1–12. Why would Joshua start the mission of conquering the Promised Land by sending out spies?

The place from which the two spies are sent out, Acacia Grove (*Josh. 2:1, NKJV*), is called Shittim in the Hebrew text, and it reminds us of two negative episodes of Israel's history.

The first is another spy story (*see Numbers 13*) featuring the same essential elements: the commissioning of the spies, the secret incursion of the spies into enemy territory, the return of the spies, the report of the spies on their findings, and the decision to act based on the report.

The other incident at Shittim represents one of the most defiant, idolatrous violations of the covenant by the Israelites, when, at the instigation of Balaam, they committed a debauchery with the Moabite women and worshiped their gods (*Num. 25:1–3, Num. 31:16*). In this context, the name Shittim creates an extraordinary tension as to the outcome of the whole story. Will it be another failure on the border of the Promised Land? Or will it lead to the long-awaited fulfillment of the ancient promise?

Read John 18:16–18, 25–27, and John 21:15–19. What parallels do you discover between the second chance given to Israel as a nation and to Peter as a person?

God is a God of second chances (and more!). The Bible calls the second chance (and more!) “grace.” Grace is simply receiving what we don’t deserve. The teaching of the Bible is replete with the concept of grace (*compare with Rom. 5:2, Eph. 2:8, Rom. 11:6*). God graciously offers everyone the possibility of a fresh start (*Titus 2:11–14*). Peter himself experienced this grace and urged the church to grow in grace (*2 Pet. 3:18*). And the news gets even better: we get much more than a second chance, don’t we? (Where would we be if we didn’t?)

Think about the experience of the Israelites when they were given a second chance to enter Canaan and about the grace extended to Peter after he denied his Lord. What should these incidents teach us about how we should extend grace to those who need it?

Value in Unexpected Places

Read Joshua 2:2–11, Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:25. What do these texts tell us about Rahab?

Central to Rahab’s story is the lie told to protect the spies. In considering her lie, we have to realize that she was embedded in a society that was extremely sinful, which finally led to God’s decision to judge that society (*Gen. 15:16, Deut. 9:5, Lev. 18:25–28*). While it is true that the New Testament commends her faith, a careful analysis of the New Testament references to Rahab’s act reveals that none endorse everything about her, and none validate her lie.

Hebrews 11:31 confirms her faith in casting her lot with the spies instead of choosing to hold on to a corrupt culture. James 2:25 commends her offer of lodging to the two Israelite spies and for giving them directions on how to return by a safe route. In the middle of a decadent, corrupt culture and Rahab’s own sinful lifestyle, God, in His grace, saw a spark of faith through which He could save her. God used what was good in Rahab—which was manifest faith in Him and in her choice to belong to His people—but never commended everything she did. God valued Rahab for her exceptional courage, for her brave faith, for being an agent of salvation, and for choosing Israel’s God.

After seeing what was happening, she declared, “ ‘For the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath’ ” (*Josh. 2:11, NKJV*). It’s significant to hear a Canaanite woman acknowledging that Yahweh is the only God, especially on a roof where, in her pagan religion, prayers were usually offered to what they believed were celestial deities.

The expression of Rahab is previously found only in the context of God’s exclusive right to receive worship (*Exod. 20:4, Deut. 4:39, Deut. 5:8*). Her words bear witness to a premeditated, conscientious choice to acknowledge that the God of the Israelites is the only true deity. Her confession demonstrates her understanding of the close relationship between God’s sovereignty and the judgment under which Jericho is doomed.

Her moral choice recognizes that, in light of Yahweh’s judgment, there were only two possibilities: to continue in rebellion against Him and be annihilated, or to choose to surrender in faith. By choosing the God of the Israelites, Rahab became an example of what could have been the destiny of all the inhabitants of Jericho had they turned to Israel’s God for mercy.

What does this story teach us about how God must have our ultimate allegiance?

New Allegiance

Read Joshua 2:12–21 and Exodus 12:13, 22, 23. How do the texts in Exodus help you understand the agreement between the spies and Rahab?

Rahab's deal is very clear: life for life and kindness for kindness. The word *chesed* (Josh. 2:12), "loving-kindness," has a richness of meaning that is difficult to express in one word in other languages. It refers primarily to covenantal loyalty, but it also carries the notion of faithfulness, mercy, benevolence, and kindness.

The words of Rahab also are reminiscent of Deuteronomy 7:12, where Yahweh Himself swore to keep His *chesed* toward Israel. "Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy [*chesed*] which He swore to your fathers'" (Deut. 7:12, NKJV).

Interestingly enough, the same chapter (Deuteronomy 7) prescribes the ban (*cherem*) on the Canaanites. Here is Rahab, a Canaanite who is under the ban, and yet she claims, by her emerging faith, the promises that were given to the Israelites. As a result, she is saved.

The first image that inevitably comes to mind related to the conversation of the spies with Rahab is the Passover at the Exodus. There, in order for the Israelites to be protected, they had to stay inside their homes and mark the doorposts and lintels of their houses with the blood of the sacrificial lamb.

" 'Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt'" (Exod. 12:13, NKJV; see also Exod. 12:22, 23).

"By obedience the people were to give evidence of their faith. So all who hope to be saved by the merits of the blood of Christ should realize that they themselves have something to do in securing their salvation. While it is Christ only that can redeem us from the penalty of transgression, we are to turn from sin to obedience. Man is to be saved by faith, not by works; yet his faith must be shown by his works."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 279.

In that case, the blood was a sign that saved them from the destroying angel of God. As God spared the lives of the Israelites during the last plague in Egypt, the Israelites were to save Rahab and her family when destruction reached Jericho.

**What powerful gospel message can we find in these two stories?
What gospel lessons can we take from them?**

Conflicting Values

Read Joshua 9:1–20. What are the similarities and differences between the story of Rahab and that of the Gibeonites? Why are they meaningful?

This chapter of Joshua starts by informing us that the Canaanite kings who usually ruled over small city-states decided to create a coalition against the Israelites. By contrast, the inhabitants of Gibeon decided to establish a covenant with Israel.

In order to trick the Israelites into making a covenant with them, the Gibeonites resort to the scheme of being ambassadors from a foreign country. According to Deuteronomy 20:10–18, God made a distinction between the Canaanites and people who lived outside the Promised Land.

The word translated as “craftily” or “cunningly” can be used with a positive meaning, denoting prudence and wisdom (*Prov. 1:4; Prov. 8:5, 12*), or negatively, implying criminal intent (*Exod. 21:14, 1 Sam. 23:22, Ps. 83:3*). In the case of the Gibeonites, behind their treacherous action lies a less-destructive intent of self-preservation.

The speech of the Gibeonites is strikingly similar to that of Rahab. Both acknowledge the power of Israel’s God, and both acknowledge that Israel’s success is not simply a human feat. In contrast to other Canaanites, they do not rebel against Yahweh’s plan to grant the land to the Israelites, and they admit that the Lord Himself is driving these nations out before Israel. The news of the deliverance from Egypt, and the victories over Sihon and Og, prompt both Rahab and the Gibeonites to seek an alliance with the Israelites. However, instead of fully acknowledging their willingness to surrender to the God of Israel, as Rahab does, the Gibeonites resort to a subterfuge.

The law of Moses made provisions for learning the will of God in such cases as this (*Num. 27:16–21*). Joshua should have inquired for the will of the Lord and avoided the deception of the Gibeonites.

The fundamental duty of a theocratic leader, and of any Christian leader, is to seek God’s will (*1 Chron. 28:9, 2 Chron. 15:2, 2 Chron. 18:4, 2 Chron. 20:4*). By neglecting it, the Israelites were compelled either to violate the fundamental conditions of conquering the land or to break an oath made in the name of the Lord, which was equally binding.

How often have you found yourself struggling between what appears to be two conflicting biblical values?

Surprising Grace

Read Joshua 9:21–27. How did Joshua’s solution combine justice with grace?

Even if the people of Israel had wanted to attack the Gibeonites, they would not have been allowed to pursue it because of the oath sworn by the rulers of the congregation. The Israelite leaders acted according to the principle that an oath, as long as it does not involve wrongdoing or criminal intent (*Judg. 11:29–40*), is binding, even if it leads to one’s personal hurt.

In the Old Testament, being prudent before making an oath and the keeping of one’s oath are seen as virtues of the pious (*Ps. 15:4; Ps. 24:4; Eccl. 5:2, 6*). Because the oath was made in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, the leaders could not change it.

With the solemn oath taken by the leaders of Israel, the destiny of Israel was indissolubly linked to that of the Gibeonites. In fact, through their designation as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of God (*Josh. 9:23*), the Gibeonites became part and parcel of Israel’s worshipping community. Joshua’s answer, in contrast to the verdict of the rulers of Israel, which decreed servitude for “all the congregation” (*Josh. 9:21, NKJV*), transformed the curse into a potential blessing for the Gibeonites (*compare with 2 Sam. 6:11*).

The subsequent history of Gibeon testifies to the high religious privileges the city enjoyed, as well as to their loyalty to God’s people. The vow taken by Israel remained in place down through generations, so that when the Israelites returned from the Babylonian captivity, the Gibeonites were among those who helped rebuild Jerusalem (*Neh. 7:25*). Their actions will have eternally positive consequences but only because of God’s grace.

What might have happened had the Gibeonites disclosed their identity and requested mercy as Rahab did? We don’t know, but we cannot rule out the possibility that even a consultation of God’s will could have resulted in an exemption of the Gibeonites from destruction. God’s ultimate purpose is not to punish sinners but to see them repent and to grant them His mercy (*compare with Ezek. 18:23 and Ezek. 33:11*). The subterfuge of the Gibeonites has to be perceived as an appeal to God’s mercy, to His kind and just character. It was the Canaanites’ refusal to repent and their defiance of God’s purposes that led to the decision for their annihilation (*Gen. 15:16*). God honored the recognition of His supremacy by the Gibeonites, as well as their desire for peace rather than rebellion, and their willingness to give up idolatry and to worship the only true God.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pp. 482, 483, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

After this story of Rahab and the spies, the rest of the Old Testament is silent about her until she emerges again in the genealogy of Jesus. It is stated that she became the wife of Salmon (from the tribe of Judah), the mother of Boaz, and the mother-in-law of another remarkable woman mentioned in the same genealogy: Ruth (*Matt. 1:5; compare with Ruth 4:13, 21*). Through her faith in God, the prostitute of Jericho, condemned to total destruction, becomes a significant link in the royal line of David and a progenitor of the Messiah. This is what God is able to accomplish through faith, even if it might be only the size of a mustard seed (*Matt. 17:20, Luke 17:6*).

“And her [Rahab’s] conversion was not an isolated case of God’s mercy toward idolaters who acknowledged His divine authority. In the midst of the land a numerous people—the Gibeonites—renounced their heathenism and united with Israel, sharing in the blessings of the covenant.

“No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 369, 370.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the whole question of “second chances” (and more) and how we are to extend them to others. At the same time, how can we also be careful not to abuse this concept? Think, for example, about a woman in an abusive relationship, in which she is counseled to keep going back (“grace”), only in some cases for the abuse to continue? How do we find the right balance here?
- ❷ Discuss Rahab as a model of faith. How can we appreciate the openness of people to God, even if their lifestyle is far from the biblical ideal? How is it possible to appreciate their faith while not condoning some of their practices?
- ❸ Joshua managed to combine justice and grace in a practical way in order to solve the predicament caused by the deceit of the Gibeonites and through his own negligence in not consulting the Lord. Think of a situation in your life that requires both justice and grace. What are some practical ways of merging the two?

“Don’t Worry. God Will Help”

A woman spewed hatred when Inácio Manoel knocked on her door to offer Seventh-day Adventist books in Brazil. “I hate Christians!” she yelled.

Inácio was surprised. It was his first house on his first day of work as a literature evangelist offering books and Bible studies.

He and a friend went to the next house. A big dog barked ferociously from the yard. His friend mumbled something about the first house having an angry woman and the second house having an angry dog.

“Don’t worry,” Inácio said. “God is with us.”

A woman came out of the house and led the dog away. Then she invited Inácio and his friend to come in. The three had a heart-to-heart conversation, and the woman told of her struggles since her husband had been sent to prison. The next Sabbath, the woman came to church with her three young children. Inácio was amazed. He told God that he wanted to lead people to Him for the rest of his life.

Inácio’s biggest surprise, however, came from the third house that he and his friend visited on that first day of work. The woman who lived there, Edileuza, agreed to Bible studies on Saturday afternoons. As they read week after week, they came to the Bible truth about the seventh-day Sabbath. Edileuza worked as a manicurist and a housekeeper, and she didn’t see any possibility of resting on Saturdays.

“I make the most money that day of the week,” she said. “What can I do?”

“Don’t worry,” Inácio said. “God will help. He has something better.”

At the next Bible study, Edileuza said she had met a stranger on the street who had asked if she knew a good housekeeper. The job didn’t require any work during the Sabbath hours of sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

Edileuza beamed as she shared the story with Inácio. “Now my salary is three times more than I earned as a manicurist and a housekeeper,” she said.

Edileuza was baptized. Later, the rest of her family followed suit.

Inácio, now 68, has led four to 11 people to baptism every year for the past 36 years. Everywhere he goes, he carries Bible lessons with him. His

nightly prayer is: “Lord, put someone in my path, so I can share Your love.”

“I can live without anything in the world, but not without Bible studies,” he said.



One of the Thirteenth Sabbath mission projects for this quarter is a church at Pernambucano Adventist Academy in Brazil’s state of Pernambuco, where Inácio Manoel lives. Thank you for planning a generous offering. Watch a short YouTube video of Inácio at: bit.ly/Inacio-Brazil.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 11:31*

Study Focus: *Josh. 2:1–21, Num. 14:1–12, Heb. 11:31, Exod. 12:13, Joshua 9, Neh. 7:25.*

For many readers, the book of Joshua is often associated with war, destruction, and death. While these elements are present in the book, they do not depict the whole story. The destruction of the Canaanites occurred only after a long period of grace (*Gen. 15:16*). The events of the Exodus served as a significant testimony to God's sovereignty and can be seen as a final call for the inhabitants of Canaan. The stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites demonstrate that most Canaanites were aware of what God had done, but only a few responded appropriately. Instead of surrendering, they chose to resist, echoing the failure of Pharaoh 40 years prior.

Indeed, Joshua is a book of grace and mercy. This week we see how God's grace was manifested in the lives of the Israelites and Canaanites. Again, Israel is ready to enter the Promised Land. God is giving them a second chance. The threat posed by the capabilities of the Canaanite military has not changed. What has changed is the faith of this second generation of Israelites. As for the Canaanites, the stories of Rahab and the Gibeonites demonstrate that not everything is lost in the doomed land. At the same time, their faith is far from perfect. The faith of the chosen people of God, however, is far from perfect too. We can learn important lessons for our spiritual journey as we compare the faith of Israel, Rahab, and the Gibeonites. The most crucial lesson, as we shall see, is that we all need God's amazing grace.

Part II: Commentary

The Faith of the Second Generation

In Joshua 2:1, the second desert generation of Israel faces the same dilemma as the first one. The subsequent deployment of the spies reminds Israel that the land that God is giving them must be conquered first. This irony was the reason behind the first desert generation's frustration in Kadesh Barnea (*Numbers 13, 14*); namely, that the land is a gift, but there is a cost to acquiring it. How can these seemingly opposing ideas of bestowal and conquest be reconciled? That is, how can a gift—which, by definition, is free—also cost its recipient something? Put another way, if the land is a gift, then why must Israel acquire it through conquest?

Faith, which is better understood as trust, is really at the heart of the issue here. In the relationship with His creatures, God always leaves room for trust. In a certain sense, trust has been the pivotal issue since the Fall in the Garden of Eden. Is it not the same in the human sphere? There can be no genuine relationship without trust. If the Israelites had trusted in God, they would have expelled the Canaanites by supernatural means (*Exod. 23:28*). The lack of trust demonstrated by the previous generation is explicitly indicated by God as the reason for their failure when He asks Moses: “ ‘How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?’ ” (*Num. 14:11, NKJV*).

Forty years have passed, and a new generation emerges. For the youngest among them, the recent military victory against Og and Sihon and the miraculous preservation of their lives during the desert wanderings are merely memories of a relatively distant past. At this point, Israel finds itself at a junction again, facing the same issue: no trust, no land.

In the story, two spies are sent instead of 12. There seems to be no specific reason for this change, but it could be related to the episode of Kadesh Barnea, in which two spies had to confront the unbelieving ten. Although there are some similarities between the two accounts of spies, the differences are even more striking. First, the two spies do not bring any proof that the land is good this time. Second, there is no mention of a widespread search of the land. Third, they spend more time hiding than spying. Finally, there is no report about the land regarding its general characteristics or the challenges in subduing it. The spies simply state: “ ‘Truly the LORD has delivered all the land into our hands’ ” (*Josh. 2:24, NKJV*). What gives them such confidence? The only thing they have is Rahab's assurance. The spies essentially repeat to Joshua what Rahab told them: “ ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are faint-hearted because of you’ ” (*Josh. 2:9, NKJV*). Rahab's words, in turn, echo the words of Joshua and Caleb in Numbers 14:8: “ ‘He will . . . give it to us’ ” (*NKJV*).

The first generation did not trust, despite what they had seen. However, this new generation trusts based on what they heard from a harlot. “The key figure in their escape and their knowledge of the land and its inhabitants is the harlot Rahab. . . . She is both savior and oracle.”—Phyllis A. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989), p. 127. This dynamic indicates that 40 years in the desert taught the Israelites the most potent ability they could develop: trust in Yahweh. This ability would make them invincible before their most formidable enemies.

The Faith of Rahab and the Gibeonites

Faith Elements	Rahab	Gibeonites
Basis	Hearing	Hearing
Means	Lie	Lie
Goal	To be spared	To be spared
Immediate Results	Deliverance	Deliverance
Long-Term Results	Full citizenship	Servitude

As the chart above indicates, the first parallel between Rahab and the Gibeonites is that their faith is based on what they have heard. Hearing about the past acts of God on behalf of His people is enough to produce in them a positive response of surrender, while most of their fellow countrymen prefer to resist. At this point, their faith is commendable, in line with what Jesus says in John 20:29: “ ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ ” (*NKJV*). Rahab and the Gibeonites’ attitudes are remarkably different from those of the first desert generation, which did not believe, despite what they saw. As a result of their hearing, their “hearts melted” (*Josh. 2:11, NIV*). This expression, which is an idiom for “losing heart” or “being frightened,” refers proleptically to the Canaanites in the song of Moses (*Exod. 15:15*), to the Israelites under the influence of the ten spies (*Deut. 1:28*), to the inhabitants of the land (*Josh. 2:9*) and its kings (*Josh. 5:1*), and to the Israelites in disobedience (*Josh. 7:5*). Furthermore, Rahab’s wording shows that she understands the religious nature of the war (*Josh. 2:10*). The verb *haram* (“to destroy utterly”), which appears in Rahab’s speech, designates an object or person devoted to destruction by God. The concept is known outside Israel, as its use in extrabiblical texts demonstrates.

The second parallel is about how Rahab and the Gibeonites showed their faith through unconventional means. While Rahab lies to protect the spies, the Gibeonites lie to save their lives. Regardless, what motivates their actions is the certainty that God will fulfill His promises to Israel. Although we cannot expect much from these Canaanites in moral terms, the ruse of the Gibeonites is viewed differently. According to the narrator, they acted cunningly (*armah*), similar to the Hebrew term used to describe the serpent in Genesis 3. Unlike Rahab’s reactionary lie, their plan is calculated and well-orchestrated.

The third parallel concerns their motivation. In both cases, they seek to be spared from the coming destruction. In these first steps, their faith is self-centered, looking for transitory solutions for their problem. At this stage, their faith cannot see beyond the horizon. It

is based on fear and not love (*Josh. 2:9, Josh. 9:24*). Here, faith is somehow a bargain. The pragmatic aspect of this faith as the bargain is evident by their use of the word *hesed*. In its secular sense, it often refers to a kind of transaction in which “the one who receives an act of *hesed* responds with a similar act of *hesed*, or at least that the one who demonstrates *hesed* is justified in expecting an equivalent act in return.”—Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “חֶסֶד,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 18.

The fourth and fifth parallels involve the outcome of their decisions. Rahab receives the guarantee that she and her household will be spared. Similar to the Israelites in the last plague, there is a sign to be fixed: a scarlet cord hanging from a window, probably where Rahab lowered the spies via a rope. However, her deliverance is ultimately a divine act. If the walls of Jericho fell flat, God must have preserved the section where her house stood. On the other hand, the Gibeonites are untouchable from now on. They succeed in obtaining the protection they sought, as a coalition of Canaanite kings advances against Gibeon in Joshua 10. The defense of Gibeon triggers a major military campaign in which many cities are destroyed. In the end, the deceitful plan of the Gibeonites is used to advance God’s purpose in the conquest of the land. However, the long-term outcomes are pretty distinct. Rahab became an ancestor to the Messiah and assimilated into Israel. The Gibeonites also assimilated but as servants. They have enduring protection (*compare with 2 Samuel 21*), but the consequence of their scheme remains. “They had adopted the garb of poverty for the purpose of deception, and it was fastened upon them as a badge of perpetual servitude.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 507.

Part III: Life Application

The Amazing Grace in Our Lives

The story of Rahab and the Gibeonites reminds us that the Israelites and Canaanites are more than just ethnic groups; they also represent spiritual conditions. God’s Israel, whatever one’s ethnicity, is primarily a spiritual community. All people are invited to be part of this community. No one is beyond God’s reach. In this sense, the Pauline call to break down all the barriers is not a mere gospel novelty (*Gal. 3:28*).

Thought question: Consider places where you can find people apparently

beyond grace's reach today. What could you and your local church do to reach the unreachable?

Discerning God's Will

Israel's failure to discern the true identity of the Gibeonites reminds us of the danger of being led by appearances. The leaders of Israel tasted the aged bread with their mouths instead of asking "the mouth of the LORD" (literal translation of Joshua 9:14). Israel's error is grave because its failure to consult the Lord undermines its call to mediate God's will to the world.

Invite your students to consider the following questions:

- 1. How can we avoid falling into the same trap today as the Israelites did with the Gibeonites?**

- 2. In what way did Israel repeat Eve's failure before the serpent in the Garden of Eden?**

- 3. How do we discern God's will today? What role should the Scriptures play here?**

- 4. Try to remember the last time you decided to follow a particular direction without consulting God's will. What were the consequences?**

Memorials of Grace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Joshua 3, Num. 14:44, Luke 18:18–27, Joshua 4, John 14:26, Heb. 4:8–11.*

Memory Text: “‘For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever’” (*Joshua 4:23, 24, ESV*).

The police officer signaled. John had to pull over. The officer asked for his driver's license, and, at that moment, it dawned on John that he had left his wallet, with his driver's license, in the office. John explained what happened, and the officer asked about his job. John responded that he was a professor. As the officer gave John a ticket, he told him not to think of it as a fine.

“It's tuition,” he said. “When people want to learn something, they pay tuition. This is your tuition to learn not to forget your license when driving. Have a good day, professor!”

As human beings, we are prone to forget things that are not constantly in our sight. We forget to return phone calls, respond to emails, water the plants, send birthday wishes, and so forth. The list could go on. Forgetting about our spiritual needs, however, could have more severe consequences than simply receiving a fine, especially because we are dealing with what is, literally, our eternal destiny.

Let's study the crossing of the Jordan by the Hebrews and see what we can learn from their experiences.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.

Crossing the Jordan

Read Joshua 3:1–5 and Numbers 14:41–44. Why did God ask the Israelites to specially prepare for what was about to happen?

This is the first time the ark of the covenant is mentioned in the book of Joshua. Until this point in the Old Testament narrative, the ark has appeared in the context of the sanctuary (*Exod. 40:21*) in Israel's journey from Sinai (*Num. 10:33–36*), and at the unsuccessful attempt to begin the conquest of Canaan (*Num. 14:44*). It was the most sacred object in the Israelite sanctuary, and it held three objects, each expressing Israel's special relationship with God: (1) the tablets containing the Ten Commandments; (2) the rod of Aaron, the high priest; and (3) a jar of manna (*Exod. 16:33, Heb. 9:4*).

The ark and the preparations to cross the Jordan reminded the Israelites that they were not entering Canaan in their own manner and time. The conquest would be successful only if they followed God's way and timing. God—who is described as enthroned above the cherubim that were covering the ark of the covenant (*Exod. 25:22, Num. 7:89*) and whose movements are identified with the ark's movements—enters Canaan in front of the Israelites as the One leading the conquest.

The term translated “sanctify” (*Josh 3:5*) or “consecrate” (*ESV*) refers to a purification process similar to what the priests followed before beginning their service in the sanctuary (*Exod. 28:41, Exod. 29:1*) and what the people of Israel carried out prior to God's revelation at Sinai (*Exod. 19:10, 14*). This consecration involved the laying aside of sin and the removal of all ritual impurities. The same command appears in Numbers 11:18, relating to an impending miracle of God. Such a preparation also was required before battles were fought in a war (*Deut. 23:14*). Before God can fight for Israel in battle, they must show their allegiance to Him and trust in Him as their Commander.

The miracle of crossing the Jordan was going to prove to the Israelites that the Lord's promise to drive out these people in the land could be trusted. He who could secure a dry passage through the Jordan also could grant them the gift of the land.

God does not always part the Jordan. His interventions are not always so obvious. How do you think we can develop the spiritual preparedness to experience and discern God's interventions on our behalf?

The Living God of Wonders

Read Joshua 3:6–17. What does the miraculous crossing of the Jordan tell us about the nature of the God whom we serve?

The crossing of the Jordan River is described in Joshua 3:5 by the Hebrew word *niphla'ot*, “miracles, wonders,” which usually refers to the mighty, supernatural acts of God that demonstrate His uniqueness (*Ps. 72:18, Ps. 86:10*). Later, the Israelites meditated on these acts and, as a result, praised the Lord (*Ps. 9:1*) and proclaimed Him among the nations (*Ps. 96:3*). The plagues in Egypt (*Exod. 3:20, Mic. 7:15*), the crossing of the Red Sea, and God’s guidance in the wilderness (*Ps. 78:12–16*) were recounted as such wonders.

The authors of the Bible knew and testified to the fact that the God who created the world was never limited or constrained by His creation. Nothing is impossible (Heb. “too wonderful”) for Him to accomplish (*Jer. 32:17*). His name and His nature are wonderful (*Judg. 13:18*), and He is beyond our comprehension.

In contrast with the gods of the other nations, who cannot save (*Ps. 96:5, Isa. 44:8*), the God of the Bible is a “living God,” active and alive, whose followers can trust Him in anticipation of His interventions on their behalf.

The prophet Zechariah used the same term (from the same root as *niphla'ot*) as he envisioned a future for Israel after the Babylonian exile. He saw that Jerusalem would be fully rebuilt with old people sitting in the streets of the city and boys and girls playing there. To the seemingly incredulous inhabitants of the capital still displaying the signs of its destruction, Zechariah declared: “ ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts? Thus says the LORD of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem’ ” (*Zech. 8:6–8, ESV*).

Read Luke 18:18–27. How does Jesus’ answer to His disciples encourage you to trust God with what seems impossible?

Remember

Read Joshua 4. Why did God ask the Israelites to build a memorial?

The purpose of these stones is to become a “sign.” The Hebrew term *’ot* is often associated with the word “wonder” and can refer to miraculous acts done by God (see yesterday’s study), such as the plagues on Egypt (*Exod. 7:3, Deut. 4:34*). It also can carry the meaning of “symbol” or “token,” as an outward sign of a deeper or transcendent reality. For example, the rainbow is a “sign” of the covenant (*Gen. 9:12, 13*); the blood on the doorposts and lintels of the Israelite houses also is called a “sign” (*Exod. 12:13*); and most significantly, the Sabbath is a “sign” of Creation and of God’s sanctifying presence (*Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12*).

Here, the sign functions as a memorial, reminding each subsequent generation of the miracle of the crossing. The term “memorial” (*zik-karon*) comes from the word *zakar*, “to remember,” which denotes more than a passive act of recalling something. It implies a remembering followed by a proper action (*Deut. 5:15, Deut. 8:2*). The setting up of stone memorials (*Gen. 28:18–22*) and rituals that triggered questions (*Exod. 12:26, 27; Deut. 6:20–25*) was common in the Old Testament. Instead of repeating the miracles again and again, God establishes monuments that evoke the memory of His great acts and prompt meaningful answers. Therefore, the sign is to be there “forever,” implying the need to keep this miracle of the Lord in the collective memory of His people perpetually.

The potential question of future generations is significant because it is formulated in a personal way: “What are these stones to you?” Each new generation must internalize and understand the meaning of these stones for themselves personally. The faith in a miracle-making God can be kept alive only if each generation rediscovers the significance of the mighty acts of Yahweh for themselves. Such a faith will make a major difference between living out faithfully Bible-based *traditions* and *traditionalism*, the dead religion, deprived of its original value and fervor, of the living generation. In the end, we need to make our Bible-based faith our own. No one, especially our ancestors, can believe for us.

What are some of the memorials, personal memorials, from your own walk with the Lord that help you remember what He has done for you?

Forgetfulness

Read Joshua 4:20–24 in the light of the following verses: *Judg.* 3:7; *Judg.* 8:34; *Ps.* 78:11; *Deut.* 8:2, 18; *Ps.* 45:17. Why was it so important to remember the mighty deeds of the Lord?

Notice the change in person in Joshua 4:23. The waters of the Jordan are referred to as having been dried up before “you,” that is, before all the Israelites who have just crossed the Jordan. In contrast, the Red Sea is said to had been dried up before “us,” those who were still present from the first generation and who experienced the Exodus. The two events experienced by two different generations were similar in significance, which enabled the second generation, through the testimony of their parents, to rediscover the same meaning of the Jordan crossing for themselves.

Generally, we perceive forgetfulness as a normal trait of all human beings. However, forgetfulness in the spiritual sense can lead to serious consequences.

Even today, if we want to maintain our identity as a people with a peculiar calling and mission, we will have to create occasions for refreshing both our individual and corporate spiritual memory in order to keep in focus where we are coming from, who we are, and what we are here for.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:24, 25 and John 14:26. Why must we always remember what Christ did for us? What else really matters without it?

Ellen G. White clearly understood that without constantly guiding ourselves in the light of God’s past acts and revelation, we will surely lose the motivation to carry out our mission in the future: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

Though it is important to remember the past and how the Lord has worked in your life, why must you day by day have an experience with Him and the reality of His love and presence now?

Beyond the Jordan

**“He turned the sea into dry land;
They went through the river on foot.
There we will rejoice in Him” (Ps. 66:6, NKJV).**

Both the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan are markers of a new era in biblical history, and both carry symbolic significance (see Ps. 66:6, Ps. 114:1–7, and 2 Kings 2:6–15). Already in the Old Testament, there are texts that link the two crossing events and recognize a meaning, which points beyond the original settings. In Psalm 66, the psalmist celebrated God’s redemptive act in his life (Ps. 66:16–19) by referring to the historical examples of the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan.

Psalm 114 also ties the two events together, not because the author did not see a chronological difference between them but because of the theological significance that the two crossings share. Thus, both events are seen as contributing to a change in Israel’s status, once from slavery to freedom, then from nomadic landlessness to nationhood. In these psalms, the examples of the two crossings illustrate the change in status of the author from oppression, poverty, helplessness, and humiliation to safety, well-being, salvation, and dignity.

It is also by the Jordan that Elijah’s translation takes place in the context of a similar miracle to the one recorded in Joshua. For Elijah, the crossing brought the most significant status change in his life: he was taken to heaven. For Elisha, the change is also important: the prophet’s assistant (1 Kings 19:21) becomes the prophet of the nation (2 Kings 2:22).

Read Matthew 3:16, 17 and Mark 1:9. How do these writers of the New Testament imply a symbolic, spiritual meaning of the Jordan River?

The earthly ministry of Jesus, as the Representative of Israel, follows the pattern of the history of ancient Israel. Jesus undergoes the “Red Sea” and “Jordan” experiences. He is called out of Egypt after a death decree (Matt. 2:14–16); spends 40 days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:2), similar to ancient Israel’s 40 years; and, as a transition from His private life to His public ministry, He is baptized in the Jordan (Matt. 3:16, 17; Mark 1:9).

Later, Hebrews 3–4 recognizes the symbolic significance of the crossing of the Jordan and presents the entrance into Canaan as foreshadowing the “rest of grace” that Christians enter through faith.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pp. 483, 484, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Study carefully the experiences of Israel in their travels to Canaan. Study the third and fourth chapters of Joshua, recording their preparation for and passage over the Jordan into the promised land. We need to keep the heart and mind in training, by refreshing the memory with the lessons that the Lord taught His ancient people. Then to us, as He designed it should be to them, the teachings of His Word will ever be interesting and impressive.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 994.

“Modern Israel are in greater danger of forgetting God and being led into idolatry than were His ancient people. Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbathkeepers. God especially charged His ancient people to guard against idolatry, for if they should be led away from serving the living God, His curse would rest upon them, while if they would love Him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might, He would abundantly bless them in basket and in store, and would remove sickness from the midst of them.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 609.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss in your class the miraculous crossing of the Jordan. How would you define miracles? Why does it seem that God is not performing similar miracles today?
- ❷ What practical ways can you suggest in your class for preventing spiritual forgetfulness, both as individuals or as a church? While it is important that we have an ongoing dynamic relationship with God and that we don't build our whole Christian experience on powerful past experiences, how can we still use our past experiences as reminders of how God has worked in our lives?
- ❸ How do you think the Sabbath can, on the one hand, help us remember God's interventions in our lives and, on the other, give us a foretaste of the promised rest in His kingdom? How does the Sabbath point not only to what we are supposed to remember but to what we can hope for in the future?

Trail of Tears and Sweatshirts

Tsitsi Zondo couldn't believe her eyes. It was a dark night in Zimbabwe, but she could see her precious cargo of sweatshirts strewn across the highway and the dim figures of people scurrying to take them away.

Tears filled her eyes. She had borrowed money to buy the sweatshirts in South Africa and now wouldn't be able to repay the loan. She had nothing. How would she provide for her children?

She prayed, "Lord, You know that I've been struggling to make my business successful, and now this has happened. Out of all the bags, my bag is the only one that opened."

Tsitsi had packed 60 sweatshirts into a large bag and stowed it on the roof of a minibus for the trip from Zimbabwe's border with South Africa to her hometown, Bulawayo. But halfway into the journey, a passenger had gotten off the minibus and, in looking for her bag, the driver had opened and closed several bags on the minibus' roof. Somehow, Tsitsi's bag hadn't been closed.

The minibus had resumed its journey and, after traveling some distance, stopped at the flashing of car lights. The car's driver said the minibus had been dropping sweatshirts ever since the passenger had gotten off.

Tsitsi saw to her horror that only 10 sweatshirts remained in her bag.

The minibus driver knew that he was responsible but raised his hands helplessly. "I'm sorry," he told Tsitsi. "I just don't have the money."

After praying, Tsitsi wiped away her tears. She had always been faithful in returning tithe and giving offerings on the wares that she imported from South Africa, and she was sure that God would care for her.

In Bulawayo, friends heard about Tsitsi's situation and came over to pray. One offered her a loan to return to South Africa and buy more sweatshirts.

Tsitsi accepted the money as an answer to prayer and returned to South Africa. With the new sweatshirts, she was able to deliver on all of the original sweatshirt orders. It took a total of four trips to South Africa to repay the two loans. But during that time, Tsitsi always had enough money for food and family expenses. She also kept returning tithe and giving offerings.



Tsitsi doesn't understand how God works, but she has no doubt that He always provides.

"Even when I lost everything, my family and I never went hungry. We always had food on the table," she said. "If you are faithful and you give to the Lord in tithe and offerings, the Lord always comes through for you."

Watch a short YouTube video of Tsitsi Zondo at: bit.ly/Tsitsi.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Joshua 4:23, 24*

Study Focus: *Joshua 3, Num. 14:44, Luke 18:18–27, Joshua 4, John 14:26, Heb. 4:8–11.*

With the return of the spies, Israel is ready to enter the Promised Land. There is still an insurmountable barrier, at least from a human perspective: the Jordan River during the flood season. However, nothing can stop the living God of Israel. Again, He is about to show His sovereignty as the Lord of all the earth (and waters). Since Israel left Egypt, the issue has never been God's power to work wonders; it has been His people's preparedness, which once more will be tested as they are called to sanctify themselves. Like their ancestors walking toward the shores of the Red Sea, the Israelites pack up and leave the camp one last time, before finally entering Canaan.

More than four hundred years after the initial promise to Abraham, they walk again toward the edge of the impossible. From their crossing of the Red Sea to the crossing of the Jordan River, God has summoned His people to face the impossible to prove that with Him nothing is impossible. The ark of the covenant goes in front of them to show that the passage on dry land is not a coincidence or a human-engineered plan but an act of God. The crossing of the Jordan River marks history as a singular day. The passage also is marked geographically with the two groups of 12 stones. The question is whether this event will mark the memory of future generations or not. Unfortunately, as time passes, the spiritual significance of these stones would be forgotten. This tragic forgetfulness led Israel not only to idolatry but also back to Egypt.

Part II: Commentary

Watery Theology

Several parallels exist between the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River. Among them are the use of three significant Hebrew terms: (1) the Hebrew verb *pl'* ("wonder"), to designate both of the miraculous crossings (*Exod. 15:11, Josh. 3:5*); (2) the word *ned*, to refer to the piling up of the water as a "heap" (*Exod. 15:8, Josh. 3:16*); and (3) the rare word *harabah*, which means "dry land" (*Exod. 14:21, Josh. 3:17*). Additionally, God Himself traces a parallel between Moses and Joshua in Joshua 3:7, explicitly connecting the two episodes. The psalmist sees the two events as only one (*for example, Ps. 114:1, 3, 5*).

But what is the theological meaning of the Jordan crossing? This week, the author already has guided us through the typological meaning of the event in light of Jesus and the church. Thus, we can explore here the theological meaning of the crossing to its original audience.

Today, if you visit the Jordan River, it's hard to imagine the challenge its crossing presented to Israel millennia ago. First, irrigation for agricultural purposes and human consumption, along the riverbed's 223 miles (360 kilometers), has considerably diminished its size and flow rate. Second, the celebration of the Passover, right after the crossing, indicates that the Jordan River crossing took place in springtime, when the river could be up to a mile wide in some areas, a result of the melting snow in the highlands. This data means that crossing this large body of water with strong currents or even debris was not a lesser miracle than crossing the Red Sea.

In the minds of ancient Near Eastern people, such as the Canaanites, the sea had mythological nuances. It was the place their deities came from when the forces of chaos were subdued by more powerful gods.

According to the Canaanite myth, Baal, who was the patron god of land, became the supreme god of the storm when he defeated Yam (the word for "sea" in Hebrew), the god of the sea. Thus, "in ancient polytheistic thinking, nations won battles on the earth because their patron gods won battles in the cosmos. If Yahweh, God of Israel, could defeat and bend so easily to His purposes the power of the river-god in full flood, what would He do to Baal? What, then, would Yahweh's people do to Canaan?"—Joseph Coleson, "Joshua," in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), p. 56. With this historical background in mind, the crossing of the Jordan expresses a threefold theological dimension that is not readily apparent to modern readers.

First, God's status as "the Lord of all the earth" (*Josh. 3:11, 13*) highlights an essential difference between the Canaanite deities and Yahweh. His dominion is not restricted to any territory. All the earth belongs to Him and is under His jurisdiction. He is the true Owner and Lord of the world, and, in this sense, Baal, which also means "owner" or "lord," is an impostor. God's power over the water serves as proof of His supremacy.

Second, God is victorious. Both in Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies, Marduk and Baal become chief gods as they crush powerful, watery forces. Both in poetic and prophetic passages, Yahweh is praised for conquering cosmic enemies, described as a sea dragon or a serpent, also called Rahab or Leviathan (*compare with Job 41:1, Ps. 74:13, Isa. 30:7*). As Yahweh overcomes the watery forces of chaos, His victory is supreme. However, the crucial difference between

Yahweh and these gods is that He is a living God (*Josh. 3:10*), acting in real time. Yahweh is not a god of mythology; He is the God of history.

Finally, Yahweh is a holy God. The ark of the covenant appears at least twenty times in Joshua 3 and 4, highlighting its significance in the story as a physical representation of the One who goes literally before them (*Josh. 3:11*). The glory of Yahweh, which rested on the ark inside the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, was a visible manifestation of the Divine presence. However, such a token of His presence was visible only to the high priest once a year, and only under restricted ritualistic conditions. During the crossing of the Jordan, the ark would go about six-tenths of a mile (1 kilometer) ahead of the people, remaining in their sight only during the actual crossing in the middle of the riverbed. Unlike the idols of Canaan, which were created in the image of their human “makers,” God was forming a new nation in His likeness, as expressed in the commandment: “ ‘Be holy, for I am holy’ ” (*1 Pet. 1:16, NKJV*; see also *Lev. 19:2*).

These three theological aspects—God’s dominion, victory, and holiness—should have been in the Israelites’ minds as they entered the idolatrous land of Canaan. The memory of this spectacular day should have served as an antidote against idolatry, an antidote that, unfortunately, Israel did not take.

The Memory Problem

The concept of memory in the Bible is dynamic because it encompasses more than just the cognitive process of recalling information. This concept is shown when, on several occasions, God “remembers” His people (*for example, Exod. 2:24*). When God remembers, He acts favorably toward His people. Therefore, God’s call to His people to remember is also a call for them to take action.

Memory should be enacted in time and space through various means, such as passing down tradition from parents to children, building monuments like that of Joshua 4, and, most important, through ritual and celebration during the great festivals in the religious calendar. It is meaningful that these festivals had a threefold character. First, they commemorated God’s acts in the present life of Israel, as they passed the seasons of sowing and harvest. Second, these festivals commemorated God’s acts in the past, particularly those related to the Exodus and the conquest. And finally, they also pointed typologically to God’s acts in the future in the eschatological era, inaugurated by Jesus. Thus, the biblical dynamic of memory not only embraces the past but also enables us to live in the present with gratitude and to look toward the future with hope.

Unfortunately, Israel did not heed the divine counsel to remember. The book of Judges starts with a somber note about the spiritual amnesia of the generation after Joshua's death: they "did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel" (*Judg. 2:10, NKJV*). Later, the narrator explicitly states: "Thus the children of Israel did not remember the LORD their God, who had delivered them from the hands of all their enemies on every side" (*Judg. 8:34, NKJV*).

The result was apostasy in the form of idolatry, which persisted throughout the history of Israel from Solomon to Zedekiah, the last Judean king before the captivity. Idolatry is the natural outcome of spiritual forgetfulness. This outcome is pointedly evident in the story of Gomer, who, as a representation of Israel, forgot that it had been God, not Baal, who had given " 'her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—which they prepared for Baal' " (*Hos. 2:8, NKJV*). In this sense, idolatry is ingratitude, based on a catastrophic spiritual amnesia. Israel's radical forgetfulness led to an almost complete loss of its identity before the Babylonian exile, except for a remnant. Many who remained in the land during the exile chose to return to Egypt. The history of the kings of Israel and Judah ends with the Exodus in reverse—with all the people left alive in Jerusalem having returned to Egypt (*Jer. 43:7*). This exile is the appalling result of spiritual forgetfulness.

Part III: Life Application

Evangelistic Opportunities

In the original context of the Old Testament, the miracles of the Red Sea and the Jordan River emphasize God's divine power to overcome the forces of evil and His superiority over all other deities. These public displays aimed to be not only demonstrations of divine strength per se but also evangelistic opportunities, so that other nations could know the truth about the God of Israel.

How can you use every experience with God in your life as an opportunity to show others the true nature of the God you worship?

Remembering the Past

One of the most pleasant moments we have as a family is the moment we sit down to look through old photos. These pictures are frozen moments in time, filled with emotions. In a way, remembering is like reliving those memories.

Consider your life as a large photo album and try to identify the moments in which you can see God's powerful presence in your own life.

In one sermon entitled "When God Remembers," Hans K. LaRondelle said that remembering "the past means to renew our hope for the future." In the same vein, speaking about how God was conducting the Seventh-day Adventist movement, Ellen G. White memorably says: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us."—*Life Sketches*, p. 196.

Share with your class how the memory of God's past acts in your life has encouraged you in difficult times.

The Conflict Behind All Conflicts



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Josh. 5:13–15; Isa. 37:16; Rev. 12:7–9; Deut. 32:17; Exod. 14:13, 14; Josh. 6:15–20.*

Memory Text: “There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel” (*Joshua 10:14, ESV*).

Reading the pages of Joshua, we are confronted with the aggressive military campaigns carried out at the command of God, in the name of God, and with the help of God. The idea that God was behind the conquest of Canaan pervades the book of Joshua, and it is expressed in the assertions of the narrator (*Josh. 10:10, 11*), in God's own words (*Josh. 6:2, Josh. 8:1*), in Joshua's addresses (*Josh. 4:23, 24; Josh. 8:7*), by Rahab (*Josh. 2:10*), by the spies (*Josh. 2:24*), and by the people (*Josh. 24:18*). God claims to be the initiator of these violent conflicts.

This reality raises unavoidable questions. How can we understand that God's chosen people carried out such practices in Old Testament times? How is it possible to reconcile the image of a “warlike” God with His character of love (*for example, Exod. 34:6, Ps. 86:15, Ps. 103:8, Ps. 108:4*) without diluting the credibility, authority, and historicity of the Old Testament?

This week and next, we are going to explore the difficult question of divinely commanded wars in the book of Joshua and elsewhere.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.

Commander of the Army of the Lord

Read Joshua 5:13–15. What does this text say about the background of Canaan’s conquest?

The Israelites have just crossed the Jordan and stepped onto the enemy’s ground. The fortress of Jericho lies in front of them, its gates firmly shut (*Josh. 6:1*). At this point, the people are unaware of any battle strategy. What is even more concerning is that Israel has only slings, spears, and arrows to take on a city fortified to withstand a long siege.

Joshua’s questions regarding the identity of the strange visitor receive a rather obscure answer: “No.” The visitor’s answer reveals that He is unwilling to step into the categories defined by Joshua. In other words, the ultimate question is not whether He is on Joshua’s side; rather, is Joshua on His side?

Compare Joshua 5:14, 15 with 2 Kings 6:8–17, Nehemiah 9:6, and Isaiah 37:16. What do you learn about the identity of the commander of the Lord’s army?

While the expression “commander of the army of the LORD” is unique in the Hebrew Bible, the combination of the terms “commander” and “hosts” always refers to a military leader. The word “host” in Scripture can refer to military troops, to the angels, or to celestial bodies.

The pre-incarnate Christ appears to Joshua not merely as an ally nor even as the true Commander of Israel’s army but as the Commander of the unseen yet real army of angels involved in a far greater conflict than that of Joshua with the Canaanites. Joshua’s answer clearly indicates his understanding of the Commander’s identity. He is equal to God, and Joshua falls prostrate in front of Him as a sign of profound respect and worship (*Josh. 5:14, Gen. 17:3, 2 Sam. 9:6, 2 Chron. 20:18*). Joshua is ready to receive the battle strategy for a military campaign that is an intrinsic part of a far greater conflict in which the God of hosts Himself is involved.

What comfort can, and should, we draw, from knowing that the “Commander of the army of the LORD” is at work in defense of His people?

War in Heaven

Joshua understood that the battle was part of a larger conflict. What do we know about the conflict in which God Himself was involved?

Read Rev. 12:7–9, Isa. 14:12–14, Ezek. 28:11–19, and Dan. 10:12–14.

God populated the universe with responsible creatures to whom He gave free will, a prerequisite for them being able to love. They can choose to act in accordance with, or against, God's will. The most powerful of angels, Lucifer, rebelled against God, and took a lot of angels with him.

Isaiah and Ezekiel refer to the conflict, although some commentators try to restrict the meaning of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 to the king of Babylon and to a ruler in Tyre. However, there are clear indicators in the biblical text that point to a transcendent reality. The king of Babylon is presented to have been in heaven at the throne of God (*Isa. 14:12, 13*), and the king of Tyre is said to have resided in Eden as a protective cherub on God's holy mountain (*Ezek. 28:12–15*). None of this is true about the kings of Babylon and Tyre.

Neither can it be said about the earthly kings that they were blameless and the “signet ring of perfection.” Consequently, these characters point beyond the literal kingdoms of Babylon and Tyre.

Isaiah presents a “parable” (Heb. *mashal*) that conveys a meaning beyond the immediate historical context. In this case, the king of Babylon becomes a paradigm of rebellion, self-sufficiency, and pride. Similarly, Ezekiel makes a distinction between the prince of Tyre (*Ezek. 28:2*) and the king of Tyre (*Ezek. 28:11, 12*), where the prince, being active in the earthly realm, becomes the symbol of a king who acts in the heavenly one.

According to Daniel 10:12–14, these rebellious heavenly beings obstruct the fulfillment of God's purposes on earth. It is in light of this connection between heaven and earth that we have to understand the divinely sanctioned wars of Israel. We need to recognize them as earthly manifestations of the great conflict between God and Satan, and between good and evil—all ultimately with the purpose of restoring God's justice and love in a fallen world.

What are ways we see, in the world around us and in our own lives, the reality of this cosmic battle between good and evil?

The Lord Is a Warrior

Read Exodus 2:23–25; Exodus 12:12, 13; and Exodus 15:3–11. What does it mean that God is a warrior?

During their long sojourn in Egypt, the Israelites have forgotten the true God of their ancestors. As many episodes of their travels through the wilderness demonstrated, their knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob faded, and they had mixed pagan elements into their religious practices (*compare with Exod. 32:1–4*). Under the oppression of the Egyptians, they cried to the Lord (*Exod. 2:23–25*), and at the right time, the Lord intervened on their behalf.

However, the conflict described in the first 12 chapters of Exodus was greater than a simple power struggle between Moses and the pharaoh. According to ancient Near Eastern war ideology, conflicts between peoples were ultimately considered as being conflicts between the respective gods. Exodus 12:12 declares that the Lord inflicted judgment, not only on the pharaoh but also on the gods of Egypt, those powerful demons (*Lev. 17:7, Deut. 32:17*) that stood behind the oppressive power and unjust social system of Egypt.

Ultimately, God is at war with sin and will not tolerate this conflict forever (*Ps. 24:8; Rev. 19:11; Rev. 20:1–4, 14*). All the fallen angels, as well as the human beings who have definitely and irrecoverably identified themselves with sin, will be destroyed. In light of this, the battles against the inhabitants of the land have to be perceived as an earlier stage of this conflict, which will reach its apex on the cross and its consummation at the final judgment, when God's justice and character of love will be vindicated.

The concept of the total destruction of the Canaanites must be understood on the basis of the biblical worldview, in which God is involved in a cosmic conflict with the exponents of evil in the universe. Ultimately, God's reputation and His character are at stake (*Rom. 3:4, Rev. 15:3*).

Since sin has entered human existence, nobody can stand on neutral ground. One must be either on God's side or on the side of evil. Hence, with this background in mind, the eradication of the Canaanites should be viewed as a preview of the final judgment.

The reality of the great controversy allows for only one of two sides. How do you know which side you are really on?

The Lord Will Fight for You

According to Exodus 14:13, 14, 25, what was God’s original and ideal plan concerning the involvement of the Israelites in warfare?

In that moment of crisis, when the people of Israel were forced into a physical impasse, “Moses answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still’ ” (*Exod. 14:13, 14, NIV*). According to the biblical narrative, even the Egyptians themselves understood that reality: “ ‘Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians’ ” (*Exod. 14:25, NKJV*).

God’s miraculous intervention for the helpless Israelites, untrained in military skills, becomes the pattern. The Exodus constituted the model, the paradigm, for God’s intervention on behalf of Israel. Here, not only is the battle fought by Yahweh, but Israel is required not to fight (*Exod. 14:14*). God is the warrior; the initiative belongs to Him. He establishes the strategy, defines the means, and conducts the campaign. If Yahweh does not fight for Israel, they have no possibility of success.

Ellen G. White interprets this as an expression of the fact that God “did not design that they should gain the land of promise by warfare, but through submission and unqualified obedience to his commands.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, September 2, 1880. As in their deliverance from Egypt, God would fight their battles for them. All they had to do was stand still and witness His mighty intervention.

History demonstrates that whenever Israel had sufficient trust in God, they did not need to fight (*see 2 Kings 19, 2 Chronicles 32, Isaiah 37*).

In God’s ideal plan, the Israelites never needed to fight for themselves. It was a consequence of their unbelief, expressed after the Exodus, that God permitted them to have a part in the war conducted against the Canaanites. In the same way, they did not need to raise a single sword against the Egyptians during the Exodus; it would have never been necessary for them to fight in conquering Canaan (*Deut. 7:17–19*).

“If the children of Israel had not murmured against the Lord, He would not have suffered their enemies to make war with them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, p. 134. How might murmurs impact our lives today?

The Second-Best Option

Read Exodus 17:7–13 and Joshua 6:15–20. What similarities do you find between these two war narratives? How do they differ?

The first time Israel fought after the Exodus is recorded in Exodus 17, where the Israelites defended themselves against the Amalekites. Israel had witnessed God's almighty power in both afflicting the Egyptians and leading the Israelites to freedom. We have seen that God's initial plan for Israel did not include fighting against other people (*Exod. 23:28, Exod. 33:2*). But shortly after their deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites started to murmur on the way (*Exod. 17:3*), even questioning God's presence in their midst. It was at this moment that Amalek came to fight against Israel. This was not by chance. God allowed the Amalekites to attack Israel so that the Israelites might learn to trust Him again.

Without compromising His principles, God comes down to the level where His people are, continually calling them back to the ideal plan: complete and unreserved trust in divine intervention. In fact, the law of warfare (*Deuteronomy 20*) was given only after the 40 years of wilderness experience, which was also caused by Israel's unbelief. New circumstances demanded new strategies, and it was only then that God required Israel to completely annihilate the Canaanites (*Deut. 20:16–18*).

Besides the reality that war became a necessity for the children of Israel, it also turned out to be a test of their allegiance to Yahweh. God did not give up on them but allowed them to witness His power by experiencing total dependence on Him.

The participation of the Israelites in the conquest is evident from the conclusion drawn by Joshua at the end of the book. Here the Canaanites are said to have been fighting against the Israelites (*Josh. 24:11*). While the collapse of the walls of Jericho was the result of a divine miracle, the people of Israel had to be actively involved in the battle and face the stubborn resistance of the city's inhabitants.

Israel's participation in armed conflict became a way to develop unconditional trust in Yahweh's help. Yet, the people were always reminded (*Josh. 7:12, 13; Josh. 10:8*) that the outcome of each battle ultimately lay in the Lord's hands, and the only way they could influence the outcome of a military conflict was through their attitude of faith, or unbelief, toward the promises of the Lord. The choice was their own.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Jericho,” pp. 487–493, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

When rebellion against God’s authority arose in the universe, either God was going to cease to be what He essentially, immutably, and eternally is and give away the leadership of the whole universe to one of His rebellious creatures, or He was going to be the holy, righteous, loving, and merciful Father of all that exists. The Bible presents the second picture, and in this case, the clash between the forces of evil and His power is inevitable.

When political or sociohistorical powers associated with chaotic and rebellious cosmic forces manifested the same defiant attitude against Yahweh, He, as the Sovereign Lord of the universe, intervened. The motif of Yahweh as a warrior becomes a prefiguration of that ultimate victory, which will finally put an end to the ongoing cosmic conflict between good and evil (*Rev. 20:8–10*). Moreover, Israel’s divine wars not only reflect a glimpse of the cosmic conflict as in a mirror but are part and parcel of the same controversy, anticipating God’s end-time judgment in the sphere of present history.

“God had made it their privilege and their duty to enter the land at the time of His appointment, but through their willful neglect that permission had been withdrawn. . . . It was not His purpose that they should gain the land by warfare, but by strict obedience to His commands.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 392.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does the cosmic conflict background help you better understand the Lord’s commanding Israel to go to war?
- ❷ In class, discuss your answers to Monday’s question regarding the reality of the great controversy and how it plays out in the world around us. What is our role in this controversy, and how do we seek to fulfill it?
- ❸ How can we apply the principle of standing still and waiting for the Lord to fight for us in our spiritual life?
- ❹ Many times, in our discussions and occasional disagreements in the church, we want to see who is on our side. How should we change our attitude in light of Joshua 5:13–15?

“What Do You Want?”

By LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN

A missionary and his local partner were selling Christian books in a non-Christian neighborhood in a large city in southern Asia. They could see residents' religious devotion by their clothing. Women wore scarves; men had long beards. Some people even had dark spots on their foreheads from bowing their faces to the floor for long prayers.

At one house, a man with an angry face came to the front gate. “What do you want?” he asked gruffly, without opening the gate.

“We are working on a project in your community and selling books,” said the missionary, David. “Would you be willing to take a few minutes to look at these books?”

“I’ll be back in just a minute,” the man said harshly and left.

The missionary’s local partner, Maria, was afraid. “Let’s pray,” she said. “He looks scary. I think he’s a fanatic, a radical member of his faith.”

“Maybe he’s just hungry,” David said. It was the time of the year when devout religious men fasted for a month during the daytime.

Then the man returned. “Why don’t you come in?” he said.

Inside the house, he spoke abruptly. “What do you want?” he said.

David pulled several health books from his bag.

The man looked intrigued. “My wife will be interested in these because she’s a nutritionist,” he said, and called her to come and look at the books.

As he and his wife thumbed through the books, he commented with enthusiasm, “Wow, this is really good,” and “This looks really helpful.”

Then he asked bluntly, “Who are you working for?”

“We are Seventh-day Adventists,” David replied.

Abruptly, the man stood up and walked away. Then he returned and sat down. He stared at the visitors. The silence grew uncomfortable.

His wife broke the silence. “You know, I have Adventist clients,” she said. “They are very good people. But I really don’t know much about them.”

The man started to pace. He seemed agitated. Then he sat down again.

“What are those other books that you have?” his wife asked.

David opened his bag and pulled out *The Great Controversy*. “This book is all about true love, true forgiveness, and true peace,” he said.

She looked through it excitedly. David also showed her *Steps to Christ* and *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*. The man stood up, stared at the visitors, and sat down. His wife asked, “What do you believe?”

The man stood up again and walked over. He seemed determined to hear every word. Pulling out his cell phone, he started to record the conversation.

Pray for missionaries as they seek to proclaim the gospel around the world. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that supports missionaries. Read the rest of this mission story next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Joshua 10:14*

Study Focus: *Josh. 5:13–15; Isa. 37:16; Rev. 12:7–9; Deut. 32:17; Exod. 14:13, 14; Josh. 6:15–20*

There is no doubt that the book of Joshua is also a book of war. However, God’s direct involvement in the conquest of Canaan drastically affects the nature of this war, which some have called a “holy war.” For those touched by the sting of war, however, the combination of “war” and “holy” may be especially troubling. For many Christians, though, even more vexing is God’s characterization as a warrior who not only commands the Israelites to advance against the Canaanites and other peoples but also fights for them. This week, we will attempt to tackle this sensitive and fraught topic.

Our study of this topic involves a two-part approach. The first part relates to worldview, which provides the lens through which we interpret biblical data. The second part involves a good analysis of the biblical data itself, including a proper understanding of the biblical language, its literary aspects, and its historical context. This week’s lesson focuses on the first part of the approach. The great conflict between good and evil, which started with the rebellion of Lucifer in heaven, is an indispensable aspect of the proper worldview to deal with this complicated matter. God’s involvement in Joshua’s wars can be correctly understood only in light of His participation in this broader conflict. The correct understanding of this great conflict impacts all biblical doctrines. It is not an exaggeration to affirm that the great conflict is the most appropriate Adventist lens through which to interpret this issue and Scripture as a whole. Indeed, the Bible encourages us to employ this lens from the very beginning.

Part II: Commentary

The Great Conflict as the Theological Framework of Scripture and Adventism

An inadequate appreciation of the metanarrative of the cosmic conflict will inevitably curtail the ability of the biblical interpreter to understand not only the concept of Joshua’s holy war but also the big picture of Scripture. A deficient perception of this worldview affects nearly every biblical doctrine. In fact, only “an understanding of the cosmic conflict provides the Christian with a worldview of history that is both rational and coherent.”—Frank Holbrook, “The Great Controversy” in *Handbook*

of *Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 995.

The significance of this worldview is evident in how the great conflict shapes the belief system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As we shall see, the church's 28 beliefs may be categorized into six doctrines. Here, we will provide a brief summary of how the great controversy worldview influences these beliefs.

God

When dealing with evil, God is not only addressing the human predicament but also working to show His justice to all the vast creation in the worlds not touched by sin (*1 Cor. 4:9*). At the center of the great conflict is the "theodicy." In a self-inflicted, temporary limitation, God allows evil to develop to a certain point to show its true character, so that His creation may see it in its true light. This way, they can realize God's love and justice when addressing a given crisis within the great controversy. Any reading of Scripture without this perception will eventually produce a distorted view of God's character, whether concerning His ability, or willingness, to end evil. For this reason, the divine announcement regarding the destruction of the Canaanites, 400 years before Joshua, must be seen against this backdrop (*Gen. 15:13–15*). God allowed the evil in the land to develop up to a determined limit. In this context, God is not simply giving the land to Israel but judging the persistent sin of those nations by expelling them from the land (*Lev. 18:24, 25*).

Man

God created humans in His image and likeness. Immortality was conditioned to their loyalty, based on their free will to adhere to their role as coregents of the Creator (*Gen. 1:27, Gen. 2:15–17*). The rebellion initiated in heaven was transferred to this earth when the first couple chose to ally themselves with Satan by disobeying a clear and direct commandment of God (*Genesis 3*). As a result, death, decay, and suffering entered the once-perfect environment of this world. From that moment on, humans were born with the propensity for evil (*Rom. 3:23*), which, without God's intervention, would bring this world to a state of chaos (*Rom. 8:22*). Because of God's holy and loving nature, He cannot be indifferent to sin and human propensity for evil (*Hab. 1:13*). That is why, as a righteous Judge, He steps in to break the destructive spiral of sin (*Rev. 20:14*). The conquest of Canaan and the destruction of those who decided to cling to this vicious cycle reflect the divine desire to eradicate evil.

Salvation

The rise of the cosmic conflict did not catch God unprepared. A rescue

plan already had been drawn up in the trinitarian eternal communion (*1 Pet. 1:20*). At the center of this plan was the atoning death of Jesus and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (*Heb. 9:11–28*). In Jesus, humanity has a new opportunity and, by His power, can overcome sin (*Col. 2:13*). On the cross, He paid the price by dying in our place; in His heavenly ministry, He makes His merits available to all people. In light of what Jesus did, no one is beyond God's ability to restore, even in the heart of Canaan, as the story of Rahab and the Gibeonites reveals.

The Church

By virtue of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and His subsequent ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, a new creation emerges. This new community of believers is encouraged to gather under the leadership of the resurrected Savior in the church (*ekklesia*), also known as the body of Christ (*1 Cor. 12:27*). The church has the mission to preach the everlasting gospel (*Rev. 14:6*) in the context of the whole counsel of God (*Acts 20:27*) and bring people from all the nations to its fellowship (*Matt. 28:18–20*). In the eschatological windup of the great controversy on the earth, the church has a crucial role in God's plan. For this reason, it has been fiercely attacked by Satan. However, God has always preserved a faithful remnant that in the end will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the last invitation of grace for humankind. As militant Israel was victorious in the past, so the militant church, under the leadership of the new Joshua—Jesus—will be triumphant in the end.

Daily Living

The cosmic conflict is the narrative that shapes our lives, impacting every aspect, such as how we handle finances, interact with others, and make personal decisions. As members of the body of Christ, we are urged to emulate Jesus through lives of faithful discipleship, characterized by radical surrender and obedience to God (*Rev. 14:12*). While salvation is not earned through obedience to God's law, aligning ourselves with the moral principles of His law serves as evidence of our new experience of salvation in Christ. Obedience to divine commandments, especially the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath, as an act of worship, will be at the center of the controversy during the closing moments of this cosmic war on earth (*Revelation 12; 13*). Similarly, in the Promised Land, the Israelites were called to live in holiness before the Lord, experiencing the positive outcomes of obedience as a nation of priests.

Last-day Events

Finally, the impact of the great-conflict worldview is even more substantial

on the doctrine of last-day events. The time of the end starts after the end of the 2,300-day prophetic period and paves the way for the divine judgment in three phases.

The first phase, also known as the pre-Advent judgment, started on October 22, 1844, when the restoration/purification of the heavenly sanctuary began (*Dan. 8:14*). It extends until the second coming of Jesus, which opens the second judicial phase, also known as evidentiary judgment, wherein the redeemed will participate during their stay of 1,000 years in heaven (*Rev. 20:4–6*). At the end of this period, the executive judgment closes the cosmic conflict with the destruction of Satan, his angels, and all impenitent sinners (*Matt. 25:41, Rev. 20:9–14*).

What is expected in each phase? The theodicy. The theodicy is God's concern in showing His love and justice in eradicating evil from the universe. In the pre-Advent judgment, He reveals His justice and love to the unfallen worlds by saving His people and condemning the little horn and its followers. In the evidentiary judgment, God reveals the same to the redeemed when they learn from the heavenly records why some people were saved and others lost. Finally, in the executive judgment, at the end of the millennium, even Satan, the fallen angels, and the lost will kneel in recognition that God is just (*Rom. 14:11*). This group includes all those Canaanites who, like the other lost, refused to accept God's grace.

Part III: Life Application

The Spiritual Battle Today

In many situations, the spiritual nature of Israel's battles becomes apparent because of God's direct involvement. Meditate carefully on the following incidents and ponder how they can teach Christians today about the nature of spiritual warfare and the ways in which we may become victorious. Pay attention to the interaction between human and divine agencies.

Judges 7. Gideon overcomes the Midianites with only 300 men after dispensing with 32,000 troops. The remaining army defeated the large army of the Midianites by breaking jars and blowing trumpets.

2 Kings 6:24–7:20. While the starving inhabitants within the city walls of Samaria are completely unaware that events have suddenly turned in their favor, four lepers explore the empty camp of the massive Aramean army, which abandoned its position in a hurry and left everything behind in confusion.

Isaiah 36–38. Under overwhelming pressure, King Hezekiah seeks the Lord and the prophet Isaiah for help. The 185,000-man army of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, is the biggest threat Jerusalem has ever faced. In this existential crisis, God miraculously intervenes to save the helpless city.

- 1. Now, compare these accounts with the description of the last battle in human history, which John writes about in Revelation. What do they have in common?**

- 2. How do the battles of Israel best strengthen your faith regarding the outcome of the cosmic conflict in Revelation?**

Read Revelation 20:7–15. In a final confrontation, Satan raises a large army to launch his last attack against God and the redeemed inside the New Jerusalem.

How does this last battle end the war behind all wars?

God Fights *for* You



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24–30; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Exod. 23:28–30; Deut. 20:10, 15–18; Isa. 9:6.*

Memory Text: “And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel” (*Joshua 10:42, ESV*).

The book of Joshua contains some disturbing scenes. Serious questions are raised by the concept of a *divine or holy war* portraying a group of people with a God-given mandate to destroy another group.

The issue of divine war in the Old Testament is challenging. God appears in the Old Testament as the sovereign Lord of the universe; therefore, everything that happens must, somehow, be related to His direct or indirect will. So, the question “How can God allow such things?” becomes inevitable. Last week, we saw that God Himself is involved in a conflict that is far greater than any war or battle fought in human history, a battle that permeates every aspect of our lives. We saw, too, that the events of both biblical and secular history can be fully understood only in light of this conflict.

This week, we continue to explore the complexity of divinely sanctioned wars, the limitations and conditions of divine war, the final vision of peace offered by the Old Testament prophets, and the spiritual implications of such wars.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 1.

The Canaanites' Iniquity

Read Genesis 15:16, Leviticus 18:24–30, Deuteronomy 18:9–14, and Ezra 9:11. What are these texts telling us about God's larger plan in offering the land of Canaan to the Israelites?

We need to look beyond the book of Joshua to completely understand what was meant by the iniquity of the nations inhabiting Canaan. These nations' abhorrent practices of child sacrifice, divination, sorcery, witchcraft, necromancy, and spiritualism give us a hint (*Deut. 18:9–12*).

The discovery of the ancient Ugaritic texts (from Ras Shamra) provides more insight into the Canaanite religion and society, and they demonstrate that condemnation of this culture was not only understandable but—according to Old Testament moral standards—also justified.

The Canaanite religion was based on the belief that natural phenomena, which assured fertility, were controlled by the sexual relationships between gods and goddesses. Thus, they envisioned the sexual activity of the deities in terms of their own sexual behavior and engaged in ritual sexual practices in order to incite the gods and goddesses to do likewise. This concept resulted in the institution of “sacred” prostitution, involving both male and female prostitutes engaging in orgiastic rites, again all as part of their own religious practices!

A nation cannot rise to a moral ground that is higher than that of the gods its people worship. As a result of such an understanding of their deities, it is no wonder the Canaanites' religious practices included child sacrifice, which the Bible warned specifically against.

Archaeological evidence confirms that the inhabitants of Canaan regularly sacrificed their firstborn children to the gods, really demons, whom they worshiped. Little skeletons found crushed into large jars with votive inscriptions testify to their degrading religion and what it meant for many of their children.

The eradication of the Canaanites, then, was not an afterthought, something that emerged in the wake of God's decision to give the land of Canaan to the Israelites. The inhabitants of Canaan were granted a time of probation, a time of additional mercy during which they had the opportunity to discover God and His character through the witness of the patriarchs living among them. They had the chance, but obviously they squandered it and continued in their horrific practices until the Lord finally had to put a stop to them.

The Supreme Judge

Read Genesis 18:25; Psalm 7:11; Psalm 50:6; Psalm 82:1; Psalm 96:10; and 2 Timothy 4:1, 8. What are these verses saying about God's moral character? How does the role of God as the Judge of the universe help us understand the question of divine war?

The holiness of God's character means that He cannot tolerate sin. He is patient. However, sin must reap its final consequence, which is death (*Rom. 6:23*). Yahweh declared war against sin, regardless of where it was found, whether in Israel or among the Canaanites. Israel was not sanctified through participating in holy wars any more than other nations were (*Deut. 9:4, 5; Deut. 12:29, 30*), even when they became the means of Yahweh's judgment against His chosen nation. Different from other ancient Near Eastern people, the Israelites experienced the reversal of holy war when God did not fight for them but against them, allowing their enemies to oppress them (*compare with Joshua 7*).

The whole concept of holy war can be understood only if it is seen in the light of God's activity as judge. When seen this way, Israel's wars of conquest take on a completely different character. In contrast to the imperialistic wars of self-aggrandizement, so common in the ancient world (and ours today), Israel's wars were not meant to accomplish glory for themselves but to establish God's justice and peace in the land. Therefore, at the heart of understanding the concept of holy war stands the concept of God's rule and sovereignty, which are at stake in the imagery of God as warrior, just as they are in the imagery of God as king or as judge.

Yahweh as warrior is the One who, as a judge, is committed to implementing, stabilizing, and maintaining the rule of the law, which is the reflection of His character. The image of God as warrior, similar to that of judge and king, asserts that Yahweh will not tolerate rebellion against His established order forever. Therefore, one can affirm that the goal of Yahweh's activity is never war itself, or victory itself, but the reestablishment of justice and peace. Ultimately, to judge and to wage war, or to deliver justice, are the same thing if God is the subject of the action.

Reflect on God as a righteous judge who cannot be bribed nor influenced by partiality. How is a God who will not endlessly tolerate sin, oppression, the suffering of the innocent, and the exploitation of the oppressed part and parcel of the gospel?

Dispossession or Annihilation?

Compare Exodus 23:28–30; Exodus 33:2; Exodus 34:11; Numbers 33:52; and Deuteronomy 7:20 with Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 7:5; Deuteronomy 9:3; Deuteronomy 12:2, 3; and Deuteronomy 31:3, 4. What do these texts reveal about the purpose of the conquest and the extent of the destruction?

God's original purpose for the Canaanites was not annihilation but, instead, dispossession. An examination of the passages that describe the way Israel had to be involved in the battles of the conquest used terms that speak about the dispossession, ejection, and dissipation carried out against the inhabitants of the Promised Land. The second group of terms that express destruction and have Israel as the subject of the action refer mostly to inanimate objects, such as articles of pagan worship and objects devoted to destruction. Evidently, the places of pagan worship and the altars constituted the main centers of the Canaanite religion.

Holy war is mainly oriented toward Canaan's corrupt culture and society. In order to avoid contamination, Israel had to destroy all the elements that were propagating corruption. However, all the inhabitants of Canaan, and those who, on an individual basis, recognized God's sovereignty prior to the conquest, or even during the conquest, were able to escape through immigration (*Josh. 2:9–14; compare with Judg. 1:24–26*). The only part of the Canaanite population doomed to destruction were those who withdrew into the fortified cities, obstinately continued to rebel against God's plan for the Israelites, and hardened their hearts (*Josh. 11:19, 20*).

However, this does raise a question: If the initial purpose of conquering Canaan was to drive out the inhabitants of the land and not to annihilate them, why did the Israelites have to kill so many people?

Analysis of the biblical texts related to the conquest of Canaan revealed that the original intent of the conquest implied the dissipation of the Canaanite population. However, the majority of the Canaanites, like the pharaoh of Egypt, hardened their hearts and, as such, became one with the culture to such an extent that the destruction of their culture meant they had to be destroyed, as well.

What elements in your own character and habits must be uprooted and annihilated?

Free Choice

Read Deuteronomy 20:10, 15–18; Deuteronomy 13:12–18; and Joshua 10:40. How does the law of warfare and the procedure against an idolatrous town in Israel, expressed in Deuteronomy, help us understand the limitations of total destruction in the war that the Israelites were engaged in?

The Hebrew text uses a unique term to describe the destruction of people in war: *cherem*. This term refers to what is “banned,” “damned,” or “dedicated to annihilation.” Most of the time, it designates complete and irrevocable placement of people, animals, or inanimate objects in God’s exclusive domain, which in warfare involved, in most cases, their destruction. The concept and practice of *cherem* as a total eradication of a people in war needs to be understood in the light of Yahweh’s conflict with the cosmic forces of evil, where His character and reputation are at stake.

Again, since the emergence of sin in the world, there is no neutrality: one is either on God’s side or against Him. One side leads to life, eternal life, and the other to death, eternal death.

The practice of total destruction describes God’s righteous judgment against sin and evil. God uniquely delegated the execution of part of His judgment to His chosen nation, ancient Israel. The devotion to destruction was under His tight theocratic control, limited to a certain period of history, the conquest, and to a well-defined geographical area, ancient Canaan. As we saw in yesterday’s study, those who came under the ban of destruction consistently rebelled against God’s purposes and defied them, never repenting either. Therefore, God’s decision to destroy them was neither arbitrary nor nationalistic.

Moreover, Israel would expect the same treatment if they decided to adopt the same lifestyle as the Canaanites (*compare with Deuteronomy 13*). Even if it seems as though the groups situated on either side of the divine war are pre-defined (the Israelites are to inherit the land and the Canaanites are to be destroyed), there is the possibility to move from one side to the other, as we will see in the cases of Rahab, Achan, and the Gibeonites.

People were not arbitrarily given protection or placed under a ban. Those who benefited from a relationship with Yahweh could lose their privileged status through rebellion, and those under the ban could submit to the authority of Yahweh and live.

What are the spiritual implications of the Canaanites’ defiance of God for our context today? That is, what are the consequences of our free choices for us personally?

The Prince of Peace

How do the following texts describe the future that God had envisioned for His people? *Isa. 9:6, Isa. 11:1–5, Isa. 60:17, Hos. 2:18, Mic. 4:3.*

Although the main focus of this week’s lesson has constituted the divinely commanded and assisted wars of the Old Testament, we need to mention the presence of another equally significant theme of the Old Testament’s prophetic writings: the future vision of the peaceful Messianic era. The Messiah is depicted as the “Prince of Peace” (*Isa. 9:6*). He will usher in a kingdom dominated by peace, where the lion and the lamb will graze together (*Isa. 11:1–8*), in which there will be no destruction or hurt (*Isa. 11:9*), and where peace will rule (*Isa. 60:17*) and flow like a river (*Isa. 66:12*).

Read 2 Kings 6:16–23. What insights does this story provide into the deeper purposes of God for His people and humanity?

Consider the story of the feeding of the Syrian army at the initiative of Elisha. Instead of massacring them (*2 Kings 6:22*), he showcased to them the supreme ideal, peace, which has always been God’s desire for His people. It is interesting to observe that Elisha fully is aware of the superiority of the invisible army that surrounds the enemy (*2 Kings 6:17*). As much as God is involved in a cosmic conflict that also has affected our planet, the final goal of redemption is not a perpetual conflict or even an eternal subjugation of the enemy in a state of slavery but, instead, everlasting peace. As violence breeds violence (*Matt. 26:52*), peace engenders peace. The story concludes by stating that the “Syrians did not come again on raids into the land of Israel” (*2 Kings 6:23, ESV*).

Think about all the ways we can, by seeking to emulate Jesus, be agents of peace. What about your own life right now? In what ways, in whatever conflict you might be facing, could you be an agent of peace instead of conflict?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Jericho,” pp. 491–493, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

As with everything in the Bible, knowing the context and the background is crucial. As we have seen, the cosmic conflict and the motif of God as judge are crucial in understanding these wars against the Canaanites.

“God is slow to anger. He gave the wicked nations a time of probation that they might become acquainted with Him and His character. According to the light given was their condemnation for refusing to receive the light and choosing their own ways rather than God’s ways. God gave the reason why He did not at once dispossess the Canaanites. The iniquity of the Amorites was not full. Through their iniquity they were gradually bringing themselves to the point where God’s forbearance could no longer be exercised and they would be exterminated. Until the point was reached and their iniquity was full, the vengeance of God would be delayed. All nations had a period of probation. Those who made void God’s law would advance from one degree of wickedness to another. Children would inherit the rebellious spirit of their parents and do worse than their fathers before them until God’s wrath would fall upon them. The punishment was not less because deferred.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1005.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the implications of God's being our judge as well as the Supreme Judge of the universe. Why do you think the fact that God is the Judge is foundational to the gospel and to our salvation?
- ❷ How does the case of the Canaanites offer us a window into God’s patience and justice? How could we reflect God’s character in the way we deal with our fellow human beings?
- ❸ Think about the fundamental nature of free will. Why do you think God respects our freedom of choice? How are love and freedom of choice related to each another?
- ❹ The Old Testament contains many stories of war and conflict, but ultimately, it forecasts a vision of peace. What role should Christians play in establishing peace in their environment?

“This Was Not an Accident”

By LAURIE DENSKI-SNYMAN

Maria glanced nervously at David as the man approached them in his home in a large city in southern Asia. The man's cellphone was recording as he waited for them to answer his wife's question about their religious beliefs.

“As I already said, we are Seventh-day Adventists,” David said.

“Does this mean you are Christians?” the man said.

David prayed silently. He knew that many people in the country were not open to Christianity because they were troubled by the reality that many Christians drank alcohol and ate unclean food, which their religion forbade.

“Let me explain,” David said. “We believe what the Torah says, including passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is one!’ We believe there is one God. This verse tells us that.”

“Interesting,” the man said.

“We also believe the mandate in the Torah that says we should worship the Lord on His Sabbath, which begins Friday at sunset and lasts until Saturday at sunset,” David said.

Then he spoke about the Lord condemning pork in Isaiah 66:17.

The man continued recording the conversation, but his terse scowl slowly melted into a smile.

David continued, “We believe our bodies are the temple of God and they are lent to us. While we are here on earth, we are to take care of them.”

The man smiled widely.

“We do not believe in hurting our bodies by smoking or drinking alcohol.”

The man said, “I believe our meeting was divinely ordained.” He got up and left. Returning with food, he placed it on the table and insisted that the visitors eat. “This was not an accidental appointment,” he said repeatedly. “It was set up from above.”

Then he offered a prayer of gratitude for the unexpected meeting and a blessing on the food. After that, he brought in his adult son from a back room, saying, “I want you to meet these people.” Turning to David and Maria, he said, “I want to share my family with you.” He apologized that he and his family could not eat because they were observing a fast.

As the visitors ate, he plied them with questions about *The Great Controversy*. He appeared appreciative of their replies. Then he said, “We are happy that you came today, and we know that you were sent here. This was not an accident. We will be tolerant toward you, and peace be with you.”

As the visitors got ready to leave, he blessed them, saying, “May you have peace and blessings, especially as you go through our neighborhoods.”

Pray for missionaries as they seek to proclaim the gospel around the world. Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offering that supports missionaries.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Joshua 10:42*

Study Focus: *Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:24–30; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8; Exod. 23:28–30; Deut. 20:10, 15–18; Isa. 9:6.*

As mentioned last week, the issue of divine war in the Old Testament is perplexing. Dealing with this issue involves understanding the cosmic-conflict worldview and analyzing biblical data properly. The interpreter should consider at least four aspects when reviewing the biblical record.

First, modern readers often impose their contemporary view of war on Scripture. Religious war in the Old Testament theocracy is unique and must be interpreted accordingly.

Second, it also is necessary to understand the historical context of Canaan and its religion to grasp why its inhabitants were being expelled from the land.

Third, it never was God's intention to obliterate the inhabitants of the land; He had better plans for them. However, because of their persistence in continuing the route of destruction, God exerted His role as Judge. His loving nature cannot allow evil to go unchecked.

Finally, when reading any problematic part of the Old Testament, it is imperative to note the trajectory of God's intentions for His people and humanity.

War, with all its terrifying sequels, never was part of God's plan for this world. He is working to restore everlasting peace in our world and in the universe. Yet, to do that, He needs to eliminate evil once and for all, not only in a powerful way but also in a wise way.

Part II: Commentary

The Biblical Concept of Holy War

In his commentary on Exodus, Douglas K. Stuart offers an insightful characterization of divine war in the biblical sense. This kind of war, usually expressed by the Hebrew verb *haram*, or the noun *herem*, involves destroying human life on a large scale and sometimes property and animal life. Because of its pertinence, Stuart's list is reproduced here with some adjustments (adapted from Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: The New American Commentary* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006], vol. 2, pp. 395–397).

1. In the unique landscape of ancient Israel, no professional army was permitted. The battles were fought by amateurs and volunteers, a stark contrast with the professionalized military structures in antiquity and those we are familiar with today.
2. Soldiers were not paid. They obeyed God's commands in the covenant context and were not to fight for personal gain. In many cases, this meant they were prohibited from taking spoil or plunder.
3. Divine or holy war could be fought only for the conquest or defense of the Promised Land in that particular historical conjunction. After the conquest, any war of aggression was strictly prohibited. Israel was called to fight for the Promised Land in a specific geographic and historical context. Once they had conquered the land and consolidated their territory, the Israelites were not supposed to expand the borders of the Promised Land through war. God had not called His people to become an expansionist military empire.
4. The initiation of holy war, considered a divine act, was solely in God's hands, carried out through His chosen prophets, such as Moses and Joshua. This underscores that war should never be a human initiative but rather a sacred duty.
5. God's involvement in holy war required spiritual preparation, which included fasting, abstinence from sex, or other forms of self-denial. The ceremony of circumcision (*Josh. 5:1–9*) and the celebration of the Passover (*Josh. 5:10–12*), in the context of the covenant renewal, were part of this preparation.
6. An Israelite who violated any of these rules of holy war would become an enemy. As the violation was punishable by death, the defiant person would become a *herem*, namely, devoted to destruction.
7. Finally, God's direct involvement led to decisive and rapid victories in the context of faithful holy war. Examples of this include many battles during the conquest (*Josh. 6:16–21, Josh. 10:1–15*) and occasions when Israel or Judah was defending its territory, with God's help, from powerful invading forces (*2 Sam. 5:22–25*). Conversely, there are negative examples in which God's lack of involvement resulted in defeat (*1 Sam. 31:1–7*), such as when the Israelites faced the Amalekites without divine permission and were defeated near Hormah (*Num. 14:39–45*) or when they were defeated by the insignificant army of Ai (*Josh. 7:2–4*).

With the end of the theocratic nation, the application of these rules was no longer feasible, and for this reason holy war became obsolete. Unfortunately, religious discourse has been used to justify wars even

today. However, in light of Scripture, such a use represents a distortion of the biblical text, a fact that should make us all the more critical, and discerning, of the rhetoric used to justify wars nowadays.

The present rules demonstrate the unique character of divine war in the Bible. The practice of war by Israel reflects a divine accommodation of the human condition. However, in a culture in which war, brutality, and violence were the norm, we learn through these rules three essential aspects of holy war that should be kept in mind when modern readers deal with these perplexing biblical passages: (1) war was limited to specific situations; (2) righteous wars were defined by God, who alone knows the human heart and the future; and (3) war, ultimately, represented a deviation from God's trajectory of peace.

The Good News About God's Wrath

Divine war is a concrete manifestation of God's wrath, not only toward the Canaanites and other nations but also toward His own people in biblical times. The observations above may explain the nature of divine war, but they do not explain how to harmonize these apparent contradictory dimensions of God's personality: love and anger. In fact, God's wrath is not a popular topic today. The famous Protestant theologian C. H. Dodd considered the wrath of God to be "an archaic phrase."—Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: The Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1932), p. 20. Despite being a less popular topic today, God's wrath cannot be overlooked, as it is mentioned 580 times in the Old Testament and 100 times in the New Testament. Divine wrath is rooted in four immutable aspects of God's character.

First, God is holy. Israel is called to be holy because the Lord is holy (*Lev. 11:44*). Throughout the book of Isaiah, God is referred to as the "Holy One of Israel" 27 times (see *Isa. 1:4, Isa. 60:14*). The angels declare "Holy, holy, holy" (*Rev. 4:8, Isa. 6:3*) in God's presence. His holiness sets Him apart from sinful human beings, who cannot even endure a glimpse of His physical presence without falling as if dead on the ground (*Dan. 10:8, 9; Rev. 1:17*). God's holiness is incompatible with evil, which is why He abhors sin, based on this intrinsic aspect of His nature. In his dialogue with God, the prophet Habakkuk exclaims: "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (*Hab. 1:13, NKJV*).

Second, God is righteous. David affirms: "For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright" (*Ps. 11:7, NKJV*). Even in the human sphere, we hope justice is served. It is interesting to see how people rightly demand justice when faced

with injustice at the human level, but struggle with the idea of God, as the ultimate Judge, administering justice by condemning evil and those who embrace it. In the vivid image of the souls of the martyrs under the altar, they cry out, “ ‘How long, holy and true Lord, will you not judge and avenge our blood from those who live on the earth?’ ” (*Rev. 6:10, LEB*). They expect justice, for God is just.

Third, God creates beings with free will. God did not program His creatures to love and obey Him. Precisely for this reason, they can make bad choices that go against His holy will and trigger bad consequences. This prerogative is evident in the concept of the covenant, which implies an agreement between two parts. Reflecting on this aspect of the covenant, Joshua testifies to Israel, “ ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:15, NKJV*).

Finally, God is love. Some may find it puzzling how God’s wrath can reveal His love. In essence, God is also love (*1 John 4:8*). He declares His love to Israel in compassionate terms: “ ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love’ ” (*Jer. 31:3, NKJV*). Indifference, not wrath, is the opposite of love. Thus, an indifferent God can be worthy of fear but never devotion. He is anything but apathetic. In human terms, parents hate, and react accordingly to, what makes their children suffer. Why would we expect less from God?

Of course, a perfect God does not experience wrath as we do. In a mysterious sense, His wrath is perfect and holy. Such a mystery is present at the cross of Jesus, where love and anger, mercy and judgment, and life and death are powerfully intertwined. The outpouring of the Divine wrath is genuine and concrete. Still, for those who trust in Christ, humbly surrendering all self-confidence and pride at the foot of His cross, there is no reason for fear because “perfect love casts out fear” (*1 John 4:18, NKJV*). Furthermore, Jesus experienced God’s wrath in our place.

Part III: Life Application

Holy War Today?

Consider how religious discourse has been used to justify and advance war since antiquity. In the Christian context, the Crusades are a good example. In this military campaign, sanctioned by the Roman Church, the Crusaders believed they were on a spiritual mission to free the Holy Land from the Islamic invaders.

Although most of us agree that any nation has the right to defend itself against aggressors, why should the religious rhetoric of the holy war not be

used today? (In the formulation of your answer, remember the biblical concept of holy war.)

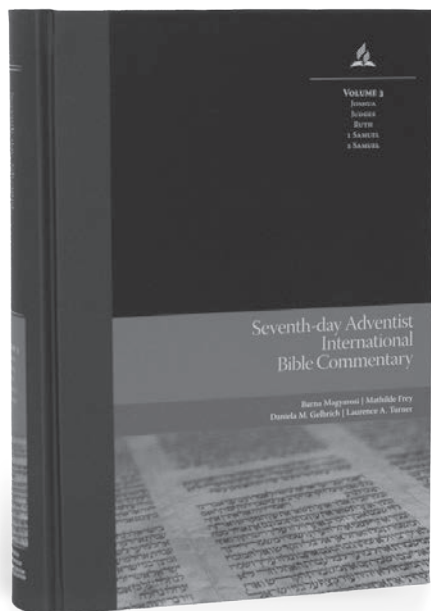
Victory by Love

Jesus won the war between good and evil in an unexpected and unconventional way. Reflect with your class on the following thought:

“So rather than fight and ‘win,’ Jesus chose to ‘lose.’ Or better, he chose to lose by kingdom-of-the-world standards so that he might win by kingdom-of-God standards. His trust was not in the power of the sword but in the power of radical, self-sacrificial love, and so he let himself be crucified. Three days later, God vindicated his trust in the power of sacrificial love. He had carried out God’s will and, by his sacrifice, defeated death and the forces of evil that hold this world in bondage (Col. 2:13–15).”—Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 39.

How can you apply the example of sacrificial love, set by Jesus, as you fight spiritual warfare today?

Notes



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GLOBAL MISSION

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The Enemy Within



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Pet. 1:4, Joshua 7, Ps. 139:1–16, Ezra 10:11, Luke 12:15, Josh. 8:1–29.*

Memory Text: “‘I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds’” (*Jeremiah 17:10, ESV*).

Joshua 7 is the first instance where, through a tragic experience, the people of Israel learned the far-reaching consequences of the covenant and its deep meaning. While obedience to the stipulations of the covenant secured victory, disregarding the terms of the covenant brought defeat. Israel's military success depended not on their numbers, battle strategy, or clever tactics but on the presence of the Divine Warrior with them.

During the appropriation of the Promised Land, the Israelites had to learn the difficult lesson that their most dangerous enemy was not outside their camp but within their own rank and file. The greatest challenge that stood before them was neither the fortified walls of the Canaanite cities nor their advanced military technology but the obstinate will of individuals within their own camp to ignore the instructions of the Lord.

Waiting for our heavenly inheritance (*1 Pet. 1:4, Col. 3:24*), we face similar challenges. While we are on the border of the Promised Land, our faithfulness is tested, and we can be victorious only through surrender to Jesus Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 8.

Breach of the Covenant

Read Joshua 7. What were the two major causes of Israel's defeat by the inhabitants of Ai?

It is interesting to observe that the reader knows, from the outset, the reason for Yahweh's anger as well as the name of the offender. Thus, the suspense of the story of uncovering the trespass of Achan is provided by the tension between the perspective of the reader and that of Joshua and the Israelites. Like many other chapters of the Old Testament, Joshua 7 has a chiasmic structure. The central, climactic segment within it answers the question of why the Israelites were not able to conquer Ai on their first attempt.

There were two main reasons for Israel's defeat by the inhabitants of Ai: Achan's sin and the Israelites' overconfidence in their own strength. The latter resulted in their neglecting to consult the will of the Lord before the attack against Ai and their underestimating the force of the enemy.

Based on Joshua 7:1, 11–13, we can see that, although Achan is responsible for the treacherous act of breaking the ban, the whole nation is held responsible and suffers for what he did. God describes the sin of Achan by gradually showing its gravity through the cumulative use, in verse 11, of the adverb “even,” or “also” (Heb. *gam*). First, the most common term for sin is used: “*kḥata*.” Then the act of transgression is described by five more specific sins introduced by the adverb *gam*: (1) ‘*abar*, also “to cross over, to transgress,” (2) even taking (*laqakh*) from the things devoted to destruction (*kherem*), (3) also stealing (*ganab*), (4) also deceiving (*kakhash*), and (5) even putting (*sim*) the stolen *kherem* among their possessions.

The covenant between Yahweh and Israel involved the people at both individual and corporate levels. In the light of the covenant, Israel is treated as an indivisible unity of the chosen nation of God; therefore, the sin of one, or even some, of its members incurs guilt upon the whole covenantal community. As the Lord said, “ ‘Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them’ ” (*Josh. 7:11, NKJV*).

What are ways whole communities can suffer, and have suffered, from the bad acts of individuals within the community? What examples can you think of, and how was the community impacted?

The Sin of Achan

Read Joshua 7:16–19. What does the entire procedure tell us about both God and Achan?

Instead of unveiling the identity of the transgressor, God sets up a procedure that reveals both His justice and grace. After explaining the reason for Israel's defeat and calling for the sanctification of the people (*Josh. 7:13*), He allows a time span between the announcement of the procedure and its application, which gives Achan time to think, repent, and confess his sin. Similarly, his family (if they knew what had happened) has the opportunity to decide whether they want to be involved in the cover-up or refuse to be accomplices, like the sons of Korah, who avoided destruction by refusing to side with their father (*compare with Num. 16:23–33, Num. 26:11*).

The solution to the predicament follows the opposite direction to how it entered and plagued Israel: corporate guilt is eliminated and narrowed down from Israel to one tribe; from tribe to family; from family to household; and from household to individuals. Besides revealing the offender, the investigative process also cleared the innocent. This was an equally important aspect of the meticulous juridical procedure, where God Himself acts as witness to the unseen acts of Achan.

The reader almost can feel the tension as God zeroes in on Achan. Who cannot wonder at the man's obstinacy in hoping that he could go undetected? Nothing is concealed from the penetrating eyes of the Lord (*Ps. 139:1–16, 2 Chron. 16:9*), who knows what is hidden in the heart of a man (*1 Sam. 16:7, Jer. 17:10, Prov. 5:21*).

It is important to notice the way Joshua addressed Achan: "My son." This expression shows not only the age and leadership role of Joshua but also reveals the spirit in which this great warrior approached justice. His heart was full of compassion for Achan, even though he was called to execute judgment on the offender. Through his attitude, Joshua was again foreshadowing the sensitivity, kindness, and love of the One who "was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. . . . He [Jesus] fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

How does the realization that God knows all that you do, even your hidden things, impact how you live? How should it impact how you live?

Fateful Choices

Read Joshua 7:19–21. What is Joshua asking Achan to do? What is the significance of such a request? How do we understand his confession?

Joshua asks Achan to do two things: First, to give glory to God and honor Him. Second, to confess what he had done without concealing it. Achan was supposed to give glory to God by admitting what he had done. The term used here (*todah*) can refer to thanksgiving (*Ps. 26:7, Isa. 51:3, Jer. 17:26*) but also to the confession of sin (*Ezra 10:11*).

Unfortunately, the biblical text gives no indication that Achan showed any sign of real repentance. He hoped until the end to remain hidden. His defiant attitude qualified him to be regarded as a high-handed offender, for whom there was no atonement according to the law of Moses (*compare with Num. 15:27–31*).

The words of Achan in Joshua 7:21 are reminiscent of the fall of Adam and Eve. Eve saw (*ra'ah*) that the tree was desirable (*khamad*) and finally took (*laqakh*) from its fruit (*Gen. 3:6*). In his confession, Achan admits that he saw (*ra'ah*) in the plunder a beautiful mantle of Shinar, 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold. He then coveted (*khamad*) and took (*laqakh*) them. Just as in the case of Adam and Eve, the choice of Achan reveals that the sin of covetousness is the sin of unbelief. It suspects God of not wanting the best for His creatures and of hiding some exquisite pleasures from them, which belong to the realm of divinity only.

Besides the allusion to the primordial human fall, the text highlights a stark contrast between the attitudes of Rahab (*compare with Josh. 2:1–13*) and that of Achan. The one took the spies to the roof and hid them from the soldiers; the other took forbidden things and hid them from Joshua. The one showed kindness to the Israelite spies and helped them secure victory; the other brought trouble on Israel by his greed and secured defeat. The one made a covenant with the Israelites; the other broke the covenant with Yahweh. Rahab saved herself and her family, and they became respected citizens in Israel; Achan doomed himself and his family to death and became an example of ignominy.

Think about the sin of covetousness. How can we avoid succumbing to it, no matter how much we have or don't have?
(*Compare with Luke 12:15.*)

The Door of Hope

Read Joshua 8:1–29. What does this story tell us about how God can transform our most abysmal failures into opportunities?

The strategy of Yahweh converts Israel's initial defeat into a tactical advantage, thus transforming the Valley of Achor (Hebrew word for "trouble") into a door of hope (*compare with Hos. 2:15*). Having gained too much self-confidence by their first victory over the Israelites, the citizens of Ai repeat their strategy in attacking the Israelites, who feign retreat and defeat. Once the inhabitants of Ai are lured out of their stronghold, the 30,000 Israelites, positioned not too far behind the city (*Josh. 8:4*), will capture the empty city by setting it on fire. Joshua 8:7 makes it clear that it is not the strategy that brings victory, but it is the Lord Himself who will grant the victory and hand the city of Ai over to the Israelites. Even in a chapter in which the military aspects dominate the narrative more than in any other chapter of the book, the text highlights the underlying truth that victory is the gift of Yahweh.

The decisive moment of the battle occurs when the men of Ai leave the city and start pursuing the Israelites. This is the second time that God speaks in the whole chapter after He gave the strategy in Joshua 8:2, signaling that He oversees the battle. Until this moment, we don't know the outcome of the battle. From this point onward, it becomes clear that the Israelite army is victorious.

The weapon in the hand of Joshua was a sickle sword, or scimitar, rather than a sword or javelin. In the time of Joshua, it may not have been used as an actual weapon, but it had become a symbol of sovereignty. And, besides giving the signal for attack, it expresses God's sovereignty in the defeat of Ai. By stretching out the sickle sword until the full victory is won, Joshua is shown to have fully assumed the leadership role Moses exercised at the crossing of the Red Sea (*Exod. 14:16*) and in the war against the Amalekites (*Exod. 17:11–13*), where Joshua personally led the combat.

This time there is no visible, miraculous intervention of God, yet the victory over Ai is no less divinely assisted than that over the Egyptians in the first generation or in the recent victory over Jericho. The key to success is in Joshua's faith in the word of the Lord and his unwavering obedience to it. The principle seen in this story remains valid for God's people today, wherever they live and whatever their challenges.

A Witness to God's Power

As we have learned, God had given the pagan nations an opportunity to know about Him and to turn from their evil ways (see Lesson 5). They, however, had refused and were ultimately facing the judgment of God.

Read Joshua 7:6–9, which deals with Joshua's initial reaction to the calamity that befell them. Focus especially on Joshua 7:9. What important theological principle is found in his words?

At first, Joshua sounds like the children of Israel in the midst of their hardships after leaving Egypt: “ ‘Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger’ ” (*Exod. 16:3, NKJV*).

And here's Joshua: “ ‘Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all—to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan!’ ” (*Josh. 7:7, NKJV*).

Soon after, however, he shows his great concern for the damage that the name and reputation of God will take from this defeat. “ ‘For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear it, and surround us, and cut off our name from the earth. Then what will You do for Your great name?’ ” (*Josh. 7:9, NKJV*).

This reveals a theme and principle that was central to God's purposes with Israel. Though He wanted the pagan nations around them to see what great things God would do for His people who obeyed Him, they could also, as Rahab did, learn about Israel's God by the power of His people's conquests. On the other hand, were things to go badly, as they did here, the nations would deem Israel's God weak and ineffective (*see Num. 14:16, Deut. 9:28*), which could embolden Canaanite resistance.

In other words, even in the context of the Hebrews' taking the land, great issues and principles were involved, which included bringing honor and glory to God, who was also the only hope for the pagans, as well as for Israel.

Read Deuteronomy 4:5–9. In what ways can we see a parallel here between Israel and their witness to the world and our witness as Seventh-day Adventists today?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Fall of Jericho,” pp. 493–498, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The deadly sin that led to Achan’s ruin had its root in covetousness, of all sins one of the most common and the most lightly regarded. . . .

“Achan acknowledged his guilt, but when it was too late for the confession to benefit himself. He had seen the armies of Israel return from Ai defeated and disheartened; yet he did not come forward and confess his sin. He had seen Joshua and the elders of Israel bowed to the earth in grief too great for words. Had he then made confession, he would have given some proof of true penitence; but he still kept silence. He had listened to the proclamation that a great crime had been committed, and had even heard its character definitely stated. But his lips were sealed. Then came the solemn investigation. How his soul thrilled with terror as he saw his tribe pointed out, then his family and his household! But still he uttered no confession, until the finger of God was placed upon him. Then, when his sin could no longer be concealed, he admitted the truth. How often are similar confessions made. There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they have been proved and confessing sins known only to ourselves and to God. Achan would not have confessed had he not hoped by so doing to avert the consequences of his crime. But his confession only served to show that his punishment was just. There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no change of purpose, no abhorrence of evil.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 496–498.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the implications of the tenth commandment (*Exod. 20:17*) in a world dominated by advertisements and consumerism. How can we practically distinguish between a want and a need, and why is that distinction important?
- ❷ Read Daniel’s prayer in Daniel 9:4–19. Why is it significant that Daniel, in confessing Israel’s sins, kept on saying “we” did all these bad things, even though we have no record of Daniel himself ever doing evil?
- ❸ Think about the question at the end of Thursday’s study. Why was the Israelites’ obedience to all the “statutes and judgments” so important to their witness? How does this same principle apply to our church today? That is, how much more effective would our witness be if we actually followed all that we have been given by God?

Returning God's Things: Part 1

Frank Mukube ran short on money after moving to a new town in Namibia and furnishing his rented home with many things bought on credit: a bed, a couch, a stove, a radio, a television, a rug, and even kitchen pots.

That hadn't been the plan. Frank had a new job as an accounting teacher, and he had calculated his monthly budget carefully. At first, he faced no trouble giving tithe and offerings and making loan repayments. But then unexpected expenses crept up. There didn't seem to be enough money for everything, and he stopped giving tithe and offerings. Frank felt terrible. He prayed, "What should I do?" It would take two years to repay the debt. But Malachi 3:8, 9 said, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithe and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me" (*NKJV*).

Two years passed. Frank felt a heavy burden until the day he repaid the loans. But instead of joy, he felt more miserable. He decided to return everything bought on credit. The first person to learn of his plan was his boss at the state institution where he taught. He asked for permission to leave campus for a few hours. "I need to return my belongings to the store," he said.

"Haven't you paid for them?" his boss asked.

"I've paid fully, but I want to return them," Frank said.

"Why?"

"They're standing between me and my God because I failed to return what belongs to God."

Mocking laughter filled the room. "You can't do such a thing," his boss said. "Are you crazy?" But he allowed Frank to leave campus.

Frank went to his rented home and announced his decision to his brother, who had moved in. His brother also questioned Frank's sanity.

"It's good not to sleep with things that are cursed," Frank replied. "I used God's money to pay for these things."

Then Frank went to the store and spoke with the manager, who looked up the purchases on the computer and saw that everything had been paid for.

"Are you out of your mind?" he asked.

Frank assured him that he was fine.

"But we can't buy them back from you," the manager said.

Frank didn't mind.

The manager printed out a document. "Sign here," he said. "It says you've paid for everything but are returning them without compensation."



Read the rest of the mission story next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Jeremiah 17:10*

Study Focus: *1 Pet. 1:4, Joshua 7, Ps. 139:1–16, Ezra 10:11, Luke 12:15, Josh. 8:1–29.*

After a decisive victory over Jericho, Israel suffered a humiliating defeat from the seemingly weak army of Ai. As Joshua seeks an explanation from God, he realizes that the debacle is a result of more than just his failure to consult God before marching against Ai. Nor can the failure be blamed solely on a lack of proper military preparedness or strategy. Rather, there is an enemy within.

No, the enemy is not a spy who is feeding the adversary crucial intelligence. The malefactor is one of Israel's own. By taking booty from Jericho, Achan had broken the rules of divine war. Israel's ensuing defeat served as a vital reminder for Israel, especially Joshua, of the spiritual aspect of these battles. Additionally, it warned Israel that God would not tolerate the sins of His people, just as He did not tolerate the sins of the Canaanites, especially considering the amount of light that Israel had.

In and of itself, the transgression of Achan is foolish enough, but what is more striking is the impenitent and persistent nature of his sin. Achan's flippant obstinacy prompts God to deal expeditiously, and drastically, with his disobedience. This sad episode, right at the beginning of the conquest, exemplifies the insane nature of sin. This week, the story of Achan invites us to revisit the awful nature of sin.

Part II: Commentary

The Bible contains various words and images of sin. The most common words for sin in the Old Testament are *hattaah*, usually translated as “sin,” *’awon* (traditionally translated as “iniquity”), and *pasha* (usually translated as “transgression”). The use of these terms throughout the Old Testament shows that the meaning of sin ranges from an intentional or unintentional deviation of a standard, as in the case of the violation of God's law, coming short or failing to reach a target, and a conscious and open rebellion against God. In this last category, sins are not expiable. In Numbers 15:30, these sins are described in the following terms: “But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people” (*ESV*). The

image of a person doing something “with a high hand” (literal rendering of the Hebrew “*beyad ramah*”) portrays the voluntary and conscious act of disobeying the Lord.

There is no sacrificial remedy for this sin because no repentance is involved. There is no substitution for the sinner who does not recognize any need for it. In Joshua 7, Achan acts with a high hand, and because he refuses to feel any remorse for his sin, nothing else can be done for him. Every opportunity of grace during the whole process hardens his heart.

The absurdity of Achan’s stubborn attitude, despite the visible manifestation of God’s splitting the Jordan River into two and the miraculous knocking down of the impenetrable walls of Jericho, invites the reader to reflect on the nature of sin. Insightfully, George Knight points out the difference between “SIN” in capital letters and “sin” in lowercase. While the former is the source, the latter is the flowing; the former is the disease, the latter is the symptom. Very often people deal only with the latter, which is manifested in their behavior, without realizing that conduct is a mere reflection of what happens in the heart. (See George Knight, *Sin and Salvation: God’s Work for and in Us* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009], pp. 28–51.) This notion of sin as a disease explains the emphasis of Jesus on the “heart,” as opposed to external acts of devotion and obedience in His dialogues with the religious leaders of Judah. No doubt, in dealing with any disease, one needs to address the symptoms, but the treatment cannot stop there if healing is the actual goal.

In this context, “SIN,” in capital letters, is the underlying condition of sinners, and consequently, it is the attitude that defines them as such. Such a mindset is evident in Lucifer’s attempt to take God’s place, and it is also seen in the human effort to be like God in the Garden of Eden. The root attitude of sinners is the vain attempt to take the Creator’s place. As Herbert Douglass put it so well: “Sin is a created being’s clenched fist in the face of his Creator; sin is the creature distrusting God, deposing Him as the Lord of his life.”—Herbert Douglass, *Why Jesus Waits* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), p. 18.

Interestingly, the word “sin” does not appear in Genesis 2 and 3, but the narrative indicates Eve’s attempt to take God’s place. In Genesis 1, each day of Creation usually ends with God’s evaluation of what He had just created. The sequence “God saw” (*r’h*) that what He had made was “good” (*towv*) occurs six times. The exact sequence appears when Eve sees (*r’h*) the fruit of the tree and declares it good (*towv*). This careful use of words indicates that the original sin is the human attempt to take God’s place in saying and evaluating what is good. The same sequence will reappear in Genesis 6 when the children of God see (*r’h*) the daughters of men and consider them “beautiful,” which is the same Hebrew word for

“good” (*towv*), in Genesis 1 and 3 (*compare with Gen. 6:1, 2*). Once again, humanity is trying to be God, with disastrous consequences.

Achan’s open rebellion against an explicit commandment of God is reminiscent of Lucifer’s original attempt to take God’s place. In their blindness, they could not realize the foolishness of such an endeavor. In the end, they were condemned, not for God’s inability or unwillingness to forgive them but for their insane persistence in thinking that they could be God or be the owners of their destiny, independent of the Source of life.

Although some could point to the severity of Achan’s punishment as evidence of the contrast between the God of the Old Testament and the God, as revealed by Jesus, in the New Testament, the story of Achan finds a parallel in Acts 5, in which Luke tells how God visited the sin of Ananias and Sapphira at once.

There are several similarities between these two incidents. First, both actions are described by the same verbal root. In the Septuagint, the oldest Greek translation of the Old Testament, Achan is described as appropriating (*nosphizomai*) for himself from things devoted to the Lord. The same verb describes Ananias and Sapphira’s keeping back (*nosphizo*) for themselves what they have publicly dedicated to the Lord. Second, in both cases, they take from things devoted to God. Once Ananias and Sapphira dedicated all the proceeds from selling the land to God, all the proceeds belonged to God. For this reason, their sins, as Achan’s, involved lying and theft. Third, both incidents happened at a crucial time for God’s people: the beginning of the conquest and the beginning of the church.

Perhaps, for this reason, their offense met with swift retribution. Commenting on the judgment against Ananias and Sapphira, Ellen G. White says: “Infinite Wisdom saw that this signal manifestation of the wrath of God was necessary to guard the young church from becoming demoralized. Their numbers were rapidly increasing. The church would have been endangered if, in the rapid increase of converts, men and women had been added who, while professing to serve God, were worshipping mammon.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 73. The same could be said about Achan’s punishment.

The idea that there is a different standard regarding God’s dealing with sin in the Old and New Testaments is just wrong. In fact, “Satan deceives many with the plausible theory that God’s love for His people is so great that He will excuse sin in them; he represents that while the threatenings of God’s word are to serve a certain purpose in His moral government, they are never to be literally fulfilled. But in all His dealings with His creatures God has maintained the principles of righteousness by revealing sin in its true character—by demonstrating that its sure result is misery and death.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 522.

The story of Achan serves as a warning about the grim nature of sin, but it also demonstrates God's grace. Centuries later, God promises through the prophet Hosea to transform the valley of Achor (trouble), the place where Achan and his family were stoned and buried, into a door of hope (*Hos. 2:15*). Indeed, He is the God of reversals.

Part III: Life Application

Sin and Salvation

In the same book mentioned earlier in this lesson, George Knight argues that sin and salvation are defined by the same word: *love*. In his view, sin is directing love toward the wrong object, specifically, the self. Conversely, salvation is also love, but it is love directed to the proper object, namely, God.

1. Do you agree with this assessment? Explain.

2. If yes, provide a practical example of how this concept applies in real life.

The Severity of Sin

“A flippant youth asked a preacher, ‘You say that unsaved people carry a weight of sin. I feel nothing. How heavy is sin? Is it ten pounds? Eighty pounds?’ The preacher replied by asking the youth, ‘If you laid a 400-pound weight on a corpse, would it feel the load?’ The youth replied, ‘It would feel nothing, because it is dead.’ The preacher concluded, ‘That spirit, too, is indeed dead which feels no load of sin or is indifferent to its burden and flippant about its presence.’ The youth was silenced.”—Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), pp. 334, 335.

1. How does the habit of spending “a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ . . . especially the closing [scenes],” as proposed by Ellen G. White, help us to grasp the real nature of sin? (See *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.)

2. How is Satan engaged today to cause people to lightly regard sin? How can we avoid this trap?

Ultimate Loyalty: Worship *in a* War Zone



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Josh. 5:1–7; Exod. 12:6; 1 Cor. 5:7; Josh. 8:30–35; Deut. 8:11, 14; Heb. 9:11, 12.*

Memory Text: “‘But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you’” (*Matthew 6:33, ESV*).

This week we are going to look at some key moments during Israel's presence in the Promised Land, when the people rededicated themselves to the Lord, sometimes in the face of impending danger. Joshua made the seemingly irrational decision to circumcise the Israelites on enemy territory (*Josh. 5:1–9*); to celebrate the Passover in the face of imminent danger (*Josh. 5:10–12*); to build an altar and worship the Lord while the conquest was in full swing (*Josh. 8:30–35*); and to set up the tabernacle of the Lord when seven tribes in Israel had not yet received their inheritance (*Josh. 18:1, 2*).

In our busy lives, we tend to give attention to the urgencies that life throws at us. Very often we neglect to carve out quality time to renew our commitment to God and to pause and express our thankfulness for what He has done and daily continues to do for us. Morning and evening worship, as well as the family altar, seem to be so out of context in our overcharged, convenience-driven, and achievement-oriented life. Yet, deep in our hearts, we all know that the occasions spent together with God and our loved ones are the best investment of our limited time.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.

Covenant First

Read Joshua 5:1–7. Why did the Lord command Joshua to circumcise the second generation of Israelites at this particular time of the conquest?

After the exploration of the country, the encouraging report of the spies, and the miraculous crossing over the Jordan, we would expect an immediate engagement with the enemy. However, there is something more important than the military conquest: Israel's covenant with God.

Before the new generation could engage in taking the land, they needed to be fully aware of their special relationship with the Owner of the land. The renewal of the covenant sign comes as a response to God's gracious and miraculous act of bringing Israel safely across the Jordan.

Our covenant with God should always be an answer of gratitude for what He has already accomplished for us, never an act of trying to obtain some benefit by legalistic conformity to His requirements. (This same concept, no doubt, was crucial to Paul's struggles with those who insisted that Gentile male converts be circumcised, as seen most clearly in his letter to the Galatians.)

Israel was on the verge of the greatest military campaign of its history, and we would expect the whole camp to be busy with war preparations. It was, but not in the conventional sense. Instead of harnessing the horses and sharpening the swords, they engaged in a ritual that left most of the fighting force vulnerable for at least three days.

They did this in order to celebrate their relationship with their God, who delivered them from Egypt. Why? Because they recognized that the battle belongs to the Lord. He is the One who grants them victory and success. Jesus formulated the same principle in slightly different words: " 'But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you' " (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). Most of the time, everyday life seems to pressure us with the urgency of so many important things that we forget to give priority to the most important thing in our life: the daily renewal of our commitment to Christ.

Think about the times you have neglected time with God because of more "important" matters. Why is this so easy to do, and how can we fight against it?

Passover

Why is it significant that Joshua chose to celebrate Passover despite the pressing and immense task of taking the Promised Land? Read *Josh. 5:10; Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16; Deut. 16:4, 6.*

The second important activity that precedes the conquest is the celebration of Passover. This takes place in the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, in careful compliance with the instructions given by God. The symbolic significance of the Passover observance receives special emphasis: the events in Joshua mirror those of the Exodus. Passover evokes the night of the tenth plague (*Exodus 12*), when the angel of the Lord killed all the firstborn in Egypt and spared the Israelites. This is followed by the Exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the journey through the wilderness.

In contrast, the story of the second generation starts in the wilderness, continues with the crossing of the Jordan, involves circumcision and the celebration of Passover, and leads to the crucial moment when another miraculous intervention of the Lord is to be expected against the enemies of Israel, the inhabitants of Canaan. Together with all the preceding acts, the celebration of Passover marks the beginning of a new era in Israel's history.

Also, through the symbol of the sacrificial lamb, the Feast of Passover pointed back to the redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. But it also pointed forward to its antitypical fulfillment in the Lamb of God (*John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19*), who ransomed us from the bondage of sin. At the Lord's Supper, before offering Himself as the Ultimate Sacrifice, Jesus transformed Passover into a memorial of His death (*Matt. 26:26–29, 1 Cor. 11:23–26*).

However, Passover and the Lord's Supper signal an even more glorious reality: that of the redeemed multitude passing into the heavenly Canaan. John the revelator portrays this antitypical "crossing" event as the 144,000 walking on the sea of crystal, the antitypical Red Sea and river Jordan, before the throne of God (*Rev. 4:6; Rev. 7:9, 10*) and celebrating the antitypical Passover and Lord's Supper at the marriage supper of the Lamb (*Matt. 26:29, Rev. 19:9*).

What are ways that we can keep the reality of the Cross always before us, even when we are not celebrating the Lord's Supper?

Altars of Renewal

What was Joshua's motivation for building an altar to the Lord? Read Josh. 8:30, 31; compare with Deut. 11:26–30, Deut. 27:2–10.

In the time of the patriarchs, altars marked the path of their pilgrimage and became tangible representations of their claim to the land, which had been promised by God. Now, by erecting an altar, the Israelites bore witness to the fulfillment of the promises given to their forefathers. In this case, the erection of the altar is the direct fulfillment of the instructions given by Moses (*Deut. 11:26–30, Deut. 27:2–10*).

Joshua 8:30–35 plays a significant role in shaping the whole theological message of the book. By linking one of the most gruesome, violent stories (war) to something totally different—a scene of covenant reaffirmation (worship)—Joshua takes us back to one of the most important theological themes launched in the book at the outset: Joshua has the mandate of leading Israel to a life of covenantal obedience (*Josh. 1:7*). This is also the picture of Joshua at the end of the book (*Joshua 24*).

Notwithstanding the importance of warfare and the conquest, there is something even more vital: loyalty to the requirements of God's law. The conquest is only one step in the fulfillment of God's plan for Israel and the restoration of all humanity. Faithfulness to the precepts of the Torah constitutes the ultimate question in the destiny of humanity. Joshua writes the copy of the law on large, whitewashed stones, different from the stones of the altar (*compare with Deut. 27:2–8*). Thus, the stones, which probably contained the Ten Commandments, formed a separate monument in the vicinity of the altar, constantly reminding the Israelites of the privileges and duties implied in the covenant.

Joshua foreshadows the New Testament Jehoshua (Jesus), whose mission was, among other things, to lead humanity back to obedience to God. In order to accomplish this goal, He had to undertake a conflict with the powers of evil. His ultimate goal was to fulfill the covenant requirements on our behalf: "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (*2 Cor. 1:20, NKJV*).

What are some spiritual practices we can do now that can have the same functions as building an altar had in ancient times?

Written on Stones

Read Joshua 8:32–35. What is the meaning of the act described in these verses, and what should it say to us today?

Mount Ebal is mentioned only in Deuteronomy (*Deut. 11:29; Deut. 27:4, 13*) and in the book of Joshua (*Josh. 8:30, 33*). Along with Gerizim, it was the site where the blessings and curses of the covenant were to be recited. More specifically, according to Deuteronomy 11:29 and Deuteronomy 27:4, 13, it had to be the site of the curses. Here the Israelites were to stand on either side of the ark in the presence of the priests (*Josh. 8:33*). One group stood in front of Mount Ebal, the other in front of Mount Gerizim. Here they symbolically enacted the two possible ways of relating to the covenant. The sacrifices that were brought there pointed to Jesus, who took upon Himself all the curses of the covenant so that all who believe in Him might enjoy its blessings (*Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21*).

Why was it necessary to write a copy of the covenant on a monument, visible to all? (See *Deut. 4:31; Deut. 6:12; Deut. 8:11, 14; 2 Kings 17:38; Ps. 78:7*.)

We humans tend to be forgetful. We crowd the increasingly bewildering demands of everyday life into shorter and shorter segments of time. We inevitably forget things that do not recur with the same frequency or intensity. At every Communion service, we have a special occasion to rededicate ourselves to the Lord and to renew our covenantal commitment. It would be good to perceive these opportunities not only as chances for individual reconsecration but also as occasions of corporate renewal of our allegiance to God. In an increasingly individualistic society, we must rediscover the power of belonging to a community that shares the same worldview, the same values and beliefs, and the same mission.

How easy do you find it, in the rush and hubbub of life, to forget the Lord and seek to do things in your own strength and power? Why is this so easy to do, especially when things are going well for you?

Longing for His Presence

Read Joshua 18:1, 2. What was the activity for which Joshua interrupted the process of allotting the land?

After the description of the territories allotted to the two greatest tribes on the west side of the Jordan and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, this passage portrays an assembly of the congregation at Shiloh, where the land is apportioned to the remaining seven smaller tribes.

The establishment of the sanctuary, “My Tabernacle,” represents the fulfillment of God’s promise to live among His people (*Exod. 25:8; Lev. 26:11, 12*) and reveals the central theme of the book: God’s presence in the middle of Israel has made possible the possession of the land and is going to be a continual source of blessing for Israel and, through it, to all the earth (*Gen. 12:3*). The worship of God takes center stage and preeminence, even over conquest and allotment of the land! The presence of the sanctuary, and later the temple, should have always helped the people realize the presence of God among them and their obligations to follow the covenant.

Read Hebrews 6:19, 20; Hebrews 9:11, 12; and Hebrews 10:19–23. What can we as Christians, who do not have an earthly sanctuary enshrining the physical presence of God among us, learn from Joshua?

The appearance of the sanctuary should not come as a sudden surprise, because the theme of the sanctuary has been present in the Joshua narrative through the ark of the covenant. This was the central piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place, and it marked the first two sections of the book: the crossing and the conquest. Now, by placing the erection of the tabernacle in the focal point of the land distribution, Joshua shows that all the life of Israel revolved around the sanctuary, the earthly headquarters of Yahweh.

It is even more important for us, as Christians living in the antitypical Day of Atonement, to focus our eyes on the heavenly sanctuary as we continue our struggle with the modern (or postmodern) giants that challenge our faith, hope, and spiritual inheritance. As we constantly rely on the work that Christ accomplished on the cross and in the heavenly sanctuary, we can look forward in faith to the time when God once again will dwell among His people, but this time it will be forever. (*Compare with Rev. 21:3.*)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Blessings and the Curses,” pp. 499–503, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“According to the directions given by Moses, a monument of great stones was erected upon Mount Ebal. Upon these stones, previously prepared by a covering of plaster, the law was inscribed—not only the ten precepts spoken from Sinai and engraved on the tables of stone, but the laws communicated to Moses, and by him written in a book. Beside this monument was built an altar of unhewn stone, upon which sacrifices were offered unto the Lord. The fact that the altar was set up on Mount Ebal, the mountain upon which the curse was put, was significant, denoting that because of their transgressions of God’s law, Israel had justly incurred His wrath, and that it would be at once visited, but for the atonement of Christ, represented by the altar of sacrifice.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 500.

“But the Communion service was not to be a season of sorrowing. This was not its purpose. As the Lord’s disciples gather about His table, they are not to remember and lament their shortcomings. They are not to dwell upon their past religious experience, whether that experience has been elevating or depressing. They are not to recall the differences between them and their brethren. The preparatory service has embraced all this. The self-examination, the confession of sin, the reconciling of differences, has all been done. Now they come to meet with Christ. They are not to stand in the shadow of the cross, but in its saving light. They are to open the soul to the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 659.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What does it mean to you to seek first the kingdom of God? How does that principle shape your daily life?
- ❷ Look at your answer to Wednesday’s final question about how easy it is to forget the Lord amid the daily rush of life. In class, discuss why it is so easy to do. What are some solutions?
- ❸ As Adventists, we believe that Jesus is ministering on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary. How can this conviction be a constant source of hope and strength? Why should the knowledge that it is Jesus who is up there making “intercession” (*Heb. 7:25*) for us help us realize just what good news His work in the heavenly sanctuary is, especially now in the antitypical Day of Atonement?

Returning God's Things: Part 2

The store sent a delivery truck to collect the household items that Frank Mukube had bought on credit and wanted to return, even though he had paid for them. Frank, who had signed a paper that he didn't seek compensation, rode in the truck to his rented house in Namibia.

As the truck backed up to the house, Frank's landlord, who lived nearby, rushed over. "Why are you moving out without telling me?" she asked.

"I'm not moving," Frank said. "I'm returning these things that are not fully mine even though they have been fully paid for. I want to give tithe and offerings again."

"What are you saying about tithe and offerings?" she demanded.

Frank explained that the Bible teaches that people should give tithe and offerings and that he had not given either for two years in order to make monthly payments on everything that he had bought on credit.

The landlord laughed at Frank.

When the delivery truck and Frank returned to the store, the store manager watched as a bed, couch, stove, radio, television, rug, and even kitchen pots were unloaded. "What are you really trying to do here?" he asked.

"These things have been standing between me and my God because they were bought with my tithe and offerings," Frank said. "Now I feel relieved."

Frank did feel relieved. He knew that without a bed he would have to sleep on the floor. Without a stove, he would have to look for firewood and pots to cook supper on an open fire. But he was happy. He had felt "cursed with a curse" because he had robbed God (*Mal. 3:8, 9*). But with everything back in the store, he felt peace and right with God.

That night, Frank didn't need to sleep on the floor or look for firewood and pots for supper. A friend's heart was moved when he heard about Frank's decision, and he brought over a bed and an old stove with two pots.

"God provided a bed. God provided a stove," Frank said. "That made me believe that what God has promised is indeed the truth."

God promises to those who give tithe and offerings, " 'And try Me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it' " (*Mal. 3:10, NKJV*).



Since that day, Frank has been faithful with his tithe and offerings. Today, he serves as director of stewardship for the Adventist Church in southern Namibia. He said God is always faithful: "God says, 'If you take care of My business, I'll take care of Yours. When you return your tithe, I'll take care of your life.'"

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Matthew 6:33*

Study Focus: *Josh. 5:1–7; Exod. 12:6; 1 Cor. 5:7; Josh. 8:30–35; Deut. 8:11, 14; Heb. 9:11, 12.*

After 40 years of wandering through the desert, the Israelites finally set foot in the Promised Land. For sure, this was an exciting time as they crossed the Jordan River and saw the promise materializing in real life. However, they were in enemy territory from henceforth, and enormous challenges lay ahead in this war zone—far beyond their ability to overcome themselves. Therefore, it was time for preparation. Instead of focusing on weapons, strategies, and manpower, they needed to prepare their hearts through ceremonies that would sharpen their spiritual perception and calibrate their loyalty to the Lord. As the conquest progressed, these rituals of covenant renewal were again performed as an ongoing reminder of their need for spiritual preparedness.

This week, we review important events during the conquest when Joshua led the Israelites to recommit themselves to the Lord. These events are centered on rituals, which are a powerful way to convey tradition and values, create meaning, and express emotions. In the biblical ritual, another crucial element is the prophetic one, which points to Christ and the realities brought about by Him. Below, we delve deeper into the rituals of circumcision and Passover, performed by Israel right after the crossing of the Jordan River, and the building of altars in the context of the renewal of the covenant in the book of Joshua. As we review these ceremonies, we can reflect on their significance in the past and their relevance to those living on the brink of the heavenly Canaan.

Part II: Commentary

The Power of Rituals

Rituals play a significant role in marking important life events, even in modern times. They are present throughout a person's life, spanning family, school, work, and religious contexts. It is not a coincidence that God used the power of ritual to convey the essential aspects of His plan to humanity. These Old Testament rites, which often involved blood, sweat, and tears, engraved eternal truths in people's minds regarding God's character, human decay, and the divine plan to bridge the gap caused by sin.

Circumcision

In the context of Joshua, the circumcision ritual serves as a reminder to Israel of its true identity within the covenant community. The removal of the foreskin pointed in a graphic way to the removal of Israel's old status as slaves of Pharaoh ("the disgrace of Egypt"). Now, the Israelites have the choice to serve Yahweh, who calls them to a total commitment. Male circumcision, which involves the surgical removal of the foreskin, has been practiced since at least the third millennium by various societies. In these societies, the rite would mark an important transition, such as the beginning of adulthood or marriage, without a religious meaning per se. However, in God's covenant with Abraham, circumcision is designated as a sign of commitment and identity. Even non-Israelites could undergo circumcision to signal their new status as part of the seed of Abraham (*Gen. 34:15–24, Exod. 12:48*).

From the New Testament perspective, circumcision is a mark of separation linked to Jewish identity that is no longer binding for Christians in the new creation inaugurated by Jesus (*Gal. 6:15, Col. 2:11–13, Acts 15*). However, Paul's calling to circumcise the heart is not a Christian innovation. Already in the original context, the physical sign of circumcision should be only an external indication of an inner disposition (*Deut. 30:6*). This view also is reiterated by the prophets, such as Jeremiah, who appealed to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts" (*Jer. 4:4, ESV; compare with Jer. 9:25, 26*). Thus, the Old Testament already envisioned the metaphorical and ethical dimensions of the ritual. When disassociated from the right attitude, the idea that "circumcision is nothing" (*1 Cor. 7:19*) is already true in the Old Testament.

Today, Seventh-day Adventists, like other Christians, "understand baptism as a symbol of (figuratively) partaking in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and also a symbol of belonging to God's New Covenant people *instead of circumcision* (*Col. 2:11–12*)."—John C. Peckham, *God With Us: An Introduction to Adventist Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, Biblical Research Institute, 2023), pp. 595, 596. However, one could question the reason for the change. The practice of circumcision was closely related to the coming of the promised Messiah, who would appear from the Seed of Abraham.

Passover

The ritual of Passover was instituted on the night Israel left Egypt. The blood of the lamb, killed before sunset, was used to mark the Israelites' doorposts to prevent the death of the firstborn (*Exod. 12:12, 13*). Thus, the Passover was inherently connected to the historical deliverance of

Israel from slavery. It also was connected to the agricultural celebration marking the beginning of the harvest season when people would bring the first fruits to the sanctuary (*Exod. 34:18–27*). Passover was not just a celebration of ordinary life but a celebration of new life to be lived abundantly and freely with the Lord. At the heart of the ritual was the sacrifice of the lamb.

This sacrifice was a symbolic act in two senses. First, it symbolized the deliverance of the firstborn. The lamb was slaughtered instead of the Israelite firstborn, serving as a substitutionary sacrifice. Second, the entire ritual was meant to recall the Exodus experience, the time when the Israelites were set free from slavery. Every detail in the ceremony pointed to the rush to get ready to leave: the meat was roasted instead of boiled, herbs were eaten instead of vegetables (*Exod. 12:8–10*), the clothes were worn in preparation to go at any moment, and the meal was eaten in haste (*Exod. 12:11*). Therefore, for the original participants, the first Passover was a declaration of faith in the miraculous deliverance that God was about to perform that very night.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during His last Passover on earth. The Lord's Supper replaced the Passover after His death. As such, the rite of the Lord's Supper also has a twofold, temporal dimension. While it calls our attention to what God has done for us in the past, it points to what God will accomplish in the future. In Joshua 5, God's people were in this same temporal juncture, between past and future, between deliverance and rest.

Altars

The altar is a crucial part of the ritual system in the Old Testament and played a significant role in worship life during patriarchal times. Although the first mention of an altar appears only in Genesis 8:20, the first sacrifice is implicit in the provision of skins for Adam and Eve (*Gen. 3:21*). Like circumcision, sacrifice is a practice not restricted to Israel. Indeed, sacrifice is the norm in ancient world religions. However, in Israel, sacrifice is not intended to feed, please, or appease an angry deity; rather, it is seen as God's merciful provision to humanity to atone for sin and bring His creation back to Him.

Alongside the expiratory aspect of sacrifices, altars played an important role in the religious experience of God's people in the past. As an act of worship, altars were built to mark new beginnings (*Gen. 8:20*) and places of pilgrimage (*Gen. 12:7, Gen. 13:18*). They also were used for intercessory prayer (*Job 1:5*) and thanksgiving (*Ps. 26:6, 7*). In addition to that, altars could become memorials of God's graceful acts. In Joshua, even an altar without sacrifice becomes a memorial of the religious identity of the tribes beyond the Jordan

River (*Josh. 22:26–28*). In Joshua 8:30–35, the altar built on Mount Ebal ratifies the covenant, renewing the people’s commitment to the Lord. All these aspects found in the patriarchal cult around altars were incorporated into the temple service, where the Israelites would come to worship, pray, make vows, remember God’s graceful acts, confess their sins, and seek forgiveness through their sacrifices, which were centralized in the sanctuary.

Calvary is the ultimate altar whereon the Lamb of God was offered once and for all (*Heb. 10:10*). As in the ritual system, His sacrifice is the pivotal point, bringing completion to the plan of salvation. Now He presents the blood as the new covenant before God, interceding on behalf of the penitent sinner (*Heb. 7:25*). Following Christ’s example, we are called to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, pleasing to the Lord (*Rom. 12:1*). In Christ, the altar of death becomes the doorway to life.

Part III: Life Application

Church Rites Today

Rites continue to be an integral part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church community. Here is a brief list of some of the most significant ceremonies that are observed in your local church. Reflect on how each of these practices has personally influenced your spiritual journey.

1. Child Dedication _____
2. Baptism _____
3. Communion _____
4. Weddings _____
5. Funerals _____

Between Already and Not Yet

The religious experiences behind the rites studied this week point to a tension usually called “already and not yet,” which in Joshua is manifested in the hiatus between deliverance and rest. Israel’s salvation was a current, and undeniable,

reality, but the people were still looking ahead to its final consummation when they could finally enjoy God's rest. In the New Testament, this tension between the kingdom of God as a present and future reality is evident. In Ellen G. White's view, "the kingdom of God (i.e., the kingdom of grace) has already been established. Yet there remains an eschatological manifestation of the kingdom (i.e., the kingdom of glory), which 'is not to be set up until the second advent of Christ' (GC 347)."—Kwabena Donkor, "Kingdom of God," *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), p. 919.

1. How have you experienced the tension between the already and the not yet in your spiritual journey with God?

2. How can the fact that the Old Testament believers have already lived with this tension help you to understand your Christian experience as a continuous pilgrimage?

Giants of Faith: Joshua *and* Caleb



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Num. 13:6, 30–32; Josh. 14:6–14; Luke 18:1–5; Josh. 19:49–51; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2.*

Memory Text: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (*Hebrews 13:7, ESV*).

Every parent knows that their children learn by example, don't they? How many parents have fretted over seeing their children follow their bad traits instead of their good ones? Whatever our age, we find it easier to do wrong than to do right. It's just part of what it means to be fallen beings. “For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (*Rom. 7:15, NKJV*). Who can't relate?

From birth, humans are shaped by the power of example. We learn to do the most basic things in life—such as walking, talking, and expressing our emotions—by imitating those closest to us. As adults, we still need role models, and even if they are not perfect, we can admire and emulate those spiritual traits that made them giants of faith.

This week, we will take a deeper look into the personal examples of two giants of faith in the book of Joshua: Caleb and Joshua. What is it that made them stand out in their generation and play a key role in the life of God's people during one of the most crucial periods of Israel's history?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 22.

Faithfulness

Read Numbers 13:6, 30–32 and Joshua 14:6, 14. Who was Caleb? What was his place among the people of Israel?

The name of Caleb comes from the Hebrew word *keleb*, “dog,” which occurs in the Old Testament, always in a negative context. However, *keleb* is used in extra-biblical letters and hymns to express a servant’s courage, tenacity, and faithfulness to his or her master. In this respect, Caleb was faithful to his name, demonstrating throughout his life unwavering loyalty to his Lord.

What does it say about Caleb that he was willing to speak his mind even though the majority of the spies had a completely different opinion, and the people of Israel threatened him with death? See Num. 14:6–10, 21–25; Num. 26:65; Num. 32:12.

Consider these important Israelite leaders, contemporaries of Joshua and Caleb: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, and Geuel. Do these names sound familiar?

Probably not.

Why? Because they are the names of the other ten spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan. They are forgotten because their names were not worthy of being remembered. The report that they brought portrayed the Promised Land as impossible to conquer. They saw themselves as grasshoppers compared to the giants who inhabited some areas of the land, and their hearts melted with fear at the “impregnable” walls of the fortified cities in Canaan.

Caleb, as the older of the two spies who brought a positive report, takes the lead in presenting another possibility: the attitude of faith. He was willing to speak up for what he knew was right, despite the opposition, even in the face of potential death: “And all the congregation said to stone them with stones” (Num. 14:10, NKJV).

What do you do when most people around you seem to have a different opinion, one that goes contrary to your deepest convictions?

Give Me This Hill Country

Read Joshua 14:6–14, Numbers 14:24, Numbers 32:12, Deuteronomy 1:36, and Luke 6:45. How would you describe Caleb and Joshua’s attitude? What does it mean to follow the Lord fully?

Caleb never forgot the promise the Lord had given him through Moses: that he would enter the land where his feet had trodden (*Num. 14:24*). Forty years later, he refers to his own report on the land as a word “as it was in my heart” (*Josh. 14:7, NKJV*). His report was based on his conviction that, with God’s guidance and help, Israel would be able to conquer the land.

In contrast to the report of the other ten spies, who inspired fear among the Israelites, Caleb manifested a wholehearted trust and commitment to the promise of the Lord. The Hebrew phrase, which literally means “I was full after the LORD” (*Josh. 14:8*), is probably a short form of a longer idiom: “My heart was fully following the LORD,” or “I filled my heart to walk behind/after the LORD.” In contrast with others who walked after foreign gods and who did not follow the Lord fully, Caleb’s heart was wholly dedicated to the Lord.

The same expression later is repeated twice, emphasizing Caleb’s faithfulness (*Josh. 14:9, 14*). His own characterization is in harmony with what the Lord Himself called a “different spirit” (*Num. 14:24, NKJV*) that distinguished Caleb from the other ten spies. Even at the age of 85, he continued to be an example of what the Lord can achieve through people whose hearts are fully dedicated to Him and His cause.

Caleb understood that the territory each tribe would eventually possess was directly proportionate to the extent to which they dared to claim the promises of the Lord and how much land they were willing to tread upon by faith. God’s promises are not self-fulfilling, in the sense that they come true irrespective of our will. Rather, they require faith accompanied by resolute action. The Hebrew term *’ulay*, “maybe” (*Josh. 14:12*), can express fear and doubt, but it usually denotes hope and the anticipation that something positive will take place (*Gen. 16:2; Num. 22:6, 11; Num. 23:3*).

What compromises, “small” compromises, are the kinds of things that can keep us from fully following the Lord?

The Power of Example

Read Joshua 15:16–19, Judges 1:13, and Judges 3:7–11. What does this story tell you about the power of example? How is Caleb’s attitude being reproduced in the younger generation?

In this passage, Caleb offers his daughter, Achsah, in marriage to the one who conquers Debir. Othniel captures the city and wins the hand of Achsah. This story is important because, once again, it reveals Caleb’s courage, faith, and readiness to take on challenges.

It also shows that the next generation of Israelites followed the example of these giants of faith, Caleb and Joshua. As the older generation closes their ministry, there is a new generation ready to face the challenges and continue to fulfill God’s plan for Israel.

In a way that is not unlike Caleb’s request to Joshua, “Give me this hill country,” Achsah, encouraged by her husband, displays the same faith and resolution that her father demonstrated. Through her determination and boldness, Achsah continues the line of Caleb’s example of the fulfillment of the promise to possess the land.

Indeed, the land is a gift from Yahweh to Israel, but Israel must appropriate it by claiming the promises of the Lord with faith and courage. Achsah’s determination foreshadows the perseverance of those women in the Gospels who would not be turned away by the crowd or the disciples and would not give up until they received Jesus’ blessing for themselves and their families.

Read Luke 18:1–5. What lesson is here for us?

Passing on the torch of faith to the next generation is crucial to the fulfillment of the mission God has entrusted to us. Think about the challenges of passing on faith to the next generation, on the one hand, and about the opportunities for young people to assume more responsibility in the work of God, on the other. What can we do to facilitate and train youth to assume godly leadership? How crucial is our example in this process?

Humble Hero

The long lists of place names, which constituted landmarks on the borders of the territories assigned to the tribes of Israel, are bookended by the report of land allocation to the two heroes, Caleb and Joshua, of the first reconnoiter. Caleb received his inheritance first, while Joshua received his last. Up to this point, Joshua allocated the land to the tribes of Israel; now it is time for the people of Israel to give Joshua his inheritance.

Read Joshua 19:49–51. What are the implications of the fact that the great leader of Israel who apportioned the land receives his inheritance last?

The city that Joshua receives is Timnath-serah, a name composed of two words. The first, Timnath, derives from a verb (*manah*) whose meaning is to count or to assign, and it means portion or territory. The second word can be derived from a Hebrew verb (*serach*), and it means excess or leftover (*compare with Exod. 26:12*). The name of Joshua's city can be translated as the leftover portion or the remaining territory.

The name of the city that Joshua has chosen from what was left testifies to the noble character of Israel's second leader. First of all, he waited until all the people received their portion. Then, Joshua did not choose one of the densely populated territories of the land or the most impressive cities as his inheritance but a modest city, or perhaps the ruins of it, in order to rebuild it with arduous work (*compare with Josh. 19:50*).

Moreover, Timnath-serah was located near Shiloh, in the vicinity of the sanctuary, which shows where Joshua's priorities lay and where his heart was bound. Certainly, after the newly born nation of Israel had been led into the Promised Land, and, with God's help, secured the inheritance of each tribe and family, it would not have objected to Joshua's demand for a more impressive inheritance. Yet, Joshua was content to live a simple life with a focus on what is most important, thus embodying the prayer expressed later by David: "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple" (*Ps. 27:4, NKJV*).

What lessons can you draw for yourself regarding Joshua's attitude? How might you apply it to yourself now?

Changed by Contemplation

Contemplating the life example of great heroes of faith is essential for our spiritual growth. At the same time, our ultimate example is Jesus Christ—His life and teachings. How does focusing on the life of Jesus change us? See *Heb. 12:1, 2; 2 Cor. 3:18*.

Marco Iacoboni, a neuroscientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, researched the function of mirror neurons. These small cell circuits are activated both when we perform a certain action—such as laughing or embracing someone—and when we observe someone else performing the same action. The activity of these neurons reduces the distinction between seeing and doing.

Ellen G. White speaks about the importance of beholding the character of Jesus: “Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. More and more we enter into fellowship with the heavenly world, and we have continually increasing power to receive the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of eternity.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 355.

Read Romans 12:1, 2. What two processes work for conflicting purposes in our lives? How can we be sure that we give room to the right one?

In the summary chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul speaks about two antagonistic forces trying to shape our lives. On the one hand, the surrounding world, with its various influences, tries to force us daily into its own mold, effecting a conformation in us that works from the outside in.

To counteract this impact, the Holy Spirit is able to transform us inside out in a manner similar to the way a caterpillar metamorphoses into a beautiful butterfly. But for that process to happen, we need to consecrate ourselves to God and ask Him to continue the good work that He has started in us (*Phil. 1:6*). In the end, we have to make the conscious choice, moment by moment, to walk in the Spirit.

Further Thought: “Caleb’s faith now was just what it was when his testimony had contradicted the evil report of the spies. He had believed God’s promise that He would put His people in possession of Canaan, and in this he had followed the Lord fully. He had endured with his people the long wandering in the wilderness, thus sharing the disappointments and burdens of the guilty; yet he made no complaint of this, but exalted the mercy of God that had preserved him in the wilderness when his brethren were cut off. Amid all the hardships, perils, and plagues of the desert wanderings, and during the years of warfare since entering Canaan, the Lord had preserved him; and now at upwards of fourscore his vigor was unabated. He did not ask for himself a land already conquered, but the place which above all others the spies had thought it impossible to subdue. By the help of God he would wrest his stronghold from the very giants whose power had staggered the faith of Israel. It was no desire for honor or aggrandizement that prompted Caleb’s request. The brave old warrior was desirous of giving to the people an example that would honor God, and encourage the tribes fully to subdue the land which their fathers had deemed unconquerable.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 512, 513.

“It was Caleb’s faith in God that gave him courage, that kept him from the fear of man, and enabled him to stand boldly and unflinchingly in the defense of the right. Through reliance on the same power, the mighty General of the armies of heaven, every true soldier of the cross may receive strength and courage to overcome the obstacles that seem insurmountable.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 30, 1912.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the power of peer pressure and the courage it takes to speak up when others do not. What is the role of courage in practicing our faith? How can we avoid being rude while standing for what we believe is right?
- ❷ Share in your class some examples of faith from your church or community that shaped your life and character. What are the traits of these people that are worth following?
- ❸ Think about and discuss the influence media has on our lives. How can we avoid its negative effect while harnessing its potential for good purposes?
- ❹ Reflect more on the humility of Joshua as a leader and his desire to live close to the sanctuary. In what ways does his example speak to you?

Accidental Missionary

Kim Sun couldn't believe that the man slammed the door in his face.

The 19-year-old student from South Korea was going door-to-door to invite people to evangelistic meetings in the Philippines. Many people responded kindly when he and his friends knocked. But at this particular house, the 25-year-old man reacted rudely to the visitors. He didn't reply when one asked if they could enter to visit. He just slammed the door shut.

Sun felt embarrassed and upset. The other students, however, weren't bothered. Sun couldn't understand why. He suggested that they return the next day. It was Monday, and the evangelistic meetings ran through Sabbath.

On Tuesday, the students knocked on the door again. The same man came to the door and immediately recognized the visitors. He looked ashamed and invited them in. "I'm sorry that I closed the door yesterday," he said.

The students spoke about the love of Jesus and invited him to the meetings. They met with him again on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. On Saturday, the man decided to give his heart to Jesus in baptism.

"I love Jesus Christ," he said. "I want to live a new life."

Sun was amazed. As he watched the baptism, he thought, *This man has changed so much. He is a completely different person compared to Monday. Is it possible for someone to change so much?*

Sun was an accidental missionary. He didn't come to the Philippines to seek baptisms. He had been living his own life in South Korea when his parents had intervened. They sent him to the Philippines to learn English and to become a nurse, and then they wanted him to work in the United States.

Arriving at his parents' chosen school, the Adventist University of the Philippines, Sun was surprised to see that his classmates went to church on Saturday. He had thought that all Christians worshiped on Sunday. But he was required to go to church, so he attended a Korean-speaking church on campus. Young people from the church organized evangelistic meetings with the 1000 Missionary Movement, an organization that is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Sun didn't

speaking much English, and he didn't know much about the Bible. But he joined the students in going door-to-door to invite people to the meetings. In seeking after the man who had slammed the door, he became an accidental missionary.



Kim Sun is associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 13:7*

Study Focus: *Num. 13:6, 30–32; Josh. 14:6–14; Luke 18:1–5; Josh. 19:49–51; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2.*

Joshua and Caleb had quite intense lives. They spent their early years as slaves in Egypt. At the beginning of adulthood, they witnessed the mighty acts of God in the Exodus. During middle age, they roamed in the wilderness with the doomed generation who tried to kill them when they stood up against their unbelief. Finally, in their senior years, they crossed the Jordan River to take possession of the land. Their lives encompassed the events narrated in the entire Pentateuch, except for Genesis. These experiences and events shaped the characters of these exceptional men of God. They underwent slavery and freedom, disillusion and hope, delay and fulfillment.

This week, we have the opportunity to reflect on the spiritual success of Joshua and Caleb. Two decisive moments characterize their faith and commitment. The first is found in the return of the 12 spies when Joshua and Caleb try to encourage the first generation to go ahead and possess the land, despite the threats posed by the Canaanites (*Num. 13:30–33, Num. 14:5–10*). Forty years later, in the second episode, Joshua and Caleb choose land for their inheritance. The unusual aspect of their choice (*Josh. 14:6–15*) shows why they are marked in the biblical story as examples of faith, courage, commitment, and perseverance. Their legacy remains today, and it can inspire the present generation to trust in God in the most daring situations.

Part II: Commentary

The Perspective of Faith (Num. 13:25–14:10)

In Numbers 13:25–14:10, all the 12 spies agreed on the pure facts of their report. The land was highly fertile. The fruit they brought back was proof that the land was “flowing with milk and honey,” a stock phrase in the ancient Near East describing an abundance of food (*see Num. 13:27*). This wording is not a coincidence, as the same expression appears in God’s speech about Canaan to Moses and the people (*Exod. 3:8, Lev. 20:24*). Indeed, the land was extraordinary. God was right. They all also agreed on the military capability of the Canaanites, characterizing them as strong and living in huge, fortified cities (*Num. 13:28*). Up to this point, Joshua and Caleb were silent, as they could not deny what they had seen.

Disagreement started in the interpretation of these facts. The majority concluded: “ ‘We are not able to go up to the people because they are stronger than us. . . . The land that we went through to explore is a land that eats its inhabitants. . . . We were like grasshoppers in our own sight’ ” (*Num. 13:31–33, LEB*). In their pessimistic assessment, the ten spies also distorted the facts by affirming that the land “ ‘eats its inhabitants.’ ” Thus, they contradicted themselves and the reality that the land was indeed vomiting out its nations (*Lev. 18:26–29*), not eating them. The interpretation of the minority (Caleb and Joshua) was completely different.

Ellen G. White vividly describes the effect of the ten-spy report over the congregation: “Their unbelief cast a gloomy shadow over the congregation, and the mighty power of God, so often manifested in behalf of the chosen nation, was forgotten. The people did not wait to reflect; they did not reason that He who had brought them thus far would certainly give them the land; they did not call to mind how wonderfully God had delivered them from their oppressors, cutting a path through the sea and destroying the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh. They left God out of the question, and acted as though they must depend solely on the power of arms.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 388.

In contrast to the cowardice and faithlessness of the ten spies, Caleb insisted: “ ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it’ ” (*Num. 13:30, NKJV*). In concert with this positive exhortation, Joshua, tearing his clothes in dismay, reaffirmed that they had no reason to fear if the Lord was on their side (*Num. 14:8–10*). Directly contradicting the unbelieving report about the land, Joshua affirmed that its inhabitants would be food for Israel, not vice versa (*Num. 14:9*).

Right Choices

If life is made of choices, choices also reveal character and define our future and legacy. At the end of Joshua and Caleb’s lives, they made unusual decisions regarding their retirement places. These choices show that time had not changed their total commitment to God’s plan and that they lived to glorify God, not themselves.

Mount Hebron

Caleb asked Joshua for permission to inherit Mount Hebron (*Josh. 14:12*). But why Hebron? True, the place had historical significance. The place was also known as Kiriath-Arba and was one of the oldest inhabited regions mentioned in the Bible (*Gen. 23:1, 2*). Furthermore, Abraham himself had dwelt there and was buried with Isaac in the region (*Gen. 25:9, 10; Gen. 35:27–29*). However, this was not the reason for Caleb’s choice. Because Caleb was 85, he could have been looking for a place with

easy access. But access was not the reason either, because he was asking for a mountain, after all. Nothing makes the reader believe that Mount Hebron was a good retirement state, with agricultural opportunities, excellent infrastructure, or decent security.

Caleb himself explicitly declared the reason for his choice: “ ‘For you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified’ ” (*Josh. 14:12, NKJV*). He wanted the giants’ refuge! One well-known Anakite was Goliath from Gath, the only place in the land where these people were still left (*Josh. 11:22*). Goliath was 9.5 feet (2.9 meters) tall. Caleb wanted to conquer one of the most challenging spots in the land. But why would Caleb, at 85, desire to overthrow such a place? All those years since Kadesh Barnea hadn’t erased his faith or his way of seeing facts from the perspective of faith. Likely, his request had three objectives: to inspire faith in this new generation, to prove that his generation was wrong, and to exalt God’s name. An old man who trusted in God’s power could overcome what terrified an entire nation.

Joshua’s Inheritance

Likewise, Joshua’s choice was not driven by personal gain. Both Joshua and Caleb exemplify the true essence of leadership: to serve others rather than oneself. Although little is mentioned about Caleb, Joshua’s trajectory—from being Moses’ assistant (*Josh. 1:1, NKJV*) to becoming a servant of Yahweh (*Josh. 24:29*)—is relatively straightforward. How, though, did Joshua develop his character as a leader?

First, Joshua learned under the shadow of a great leader. Throughout Joshua’s appearances in the Pentateuch, he was under Moses’ authority. For example, in Exodus 17:8–13, Joshua’s victory on the battlefield relied on Moses’ holding his staff high. In Exodus 32:17, 18, Joshua was seen following Moses on the top of the mountain. As a clear sign of authority over Joshua, Moses changed his name (*Num. 13:16*).

Still very young (*naar*), Joshua was selected to follow Moses (*Exod. 33:11*), and, during all his adult life, he was closely connected to him. Second, despite his initial lack of experience, he was chosen by God because he was a spiritual man (*Num. 27:18*). Consequently, his life was not driven by any earthly ambition for self-aggrandizement or personal satisfaction. Seeing things from a spiritual perspective, Joshua lived for God’s glory, prioritizing what was truly important. Finally, Joshua learned from his own mistakes. After Moses’ death, Joshua was still a leader in training. This idea is evident in the episode of Ai (*Joshua 7*) and the incident with the Gibeonites (*Joshua 9*). In fact, learning leadership is a lifelong journey of training, growth, and transformation.

The life of these two spiritual giants, Joshua and Caleb, teaches us at least

five valuable lessons. First, the facts of life matter less than how you perceive them. In a fallen world, facts are often harsh, but the divine revelation provides the right glasses to see them in their actual, and temporary, perspective. Second, faith does not ignore facts; it simply offers a different angle of understanding. Third, instead of complaining, we are called to trust and submit ourselves to God's plans, which are always better than ours. Fourth, blessings come to those who wholly abide in the Lord. In the spiritual realm, many people find their faith dwindling over time, as they lose their "first love" (*Rev. 2:4*). However, such a loss of love and faith was not the case with Joshua and Caleb, who maintained their faith and total commitment to God's plan throughout their lives. Finally, life in all its dimensions should be lived according to the plans established by God, not motivated by greedy and selfish ambition. The lives of Joshua and Caleb exemplify the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Therefore, whether you eat or you drink or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God" (*LEB*).

Part III: Life Application

What Is Your Perspective?

When people have the chance to fly on an airplane or climb a high mountain to see a city from above, they realize how small the buildings appear from a distance. However, when they walk through the same town, they realize how small they are in comparison to these structures. What changed? Only the perspective, the point of view from which they were seeing things.

When faced with life's challenges, we can view them from the perspective of doubt or faith. As someone once said: "Doubt sees the obstacles. Faith sees the way! Doubt sees the darkest night, Faith sees the day! Doubt dreads to take a step. Faith soars on high! Doubt questions, 'Who believes?' Faith answers, 'I!'" —Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, 1996), p. 404.

Consider the following stories and think about the role of doubt and faith in them:

- 1. Abraham, at 100, trusts in God's promise of numerous offspring**
(*Gen. 15:1–6, Gen. 17:1–7, Gen. 21:1–7*).

2. Elisha prays to have his servant's eyes opened to see God's army around them (*2 Kings 6:17*).

3. Jesus explains to His disciples that, through the blind man, the works of God would be revealed (*John 9:1-7*).

4. Paul, the prisoner, appeals to King Agrippa and his court to become like him (*Acts 26:28, 29*).

5. Reflect on the painful, and challenging, realities in the narrative of your own life. How can viewing these things from the perspective of faith give you encouragement and resolution to face them?

Heirs of Promises, Prisoners of Hope



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:17–24; Deut. 6:3; Josh. 13:1–7; Heb. 12:28; Lev. 25:1–5, 8–13; Ezek. 37:14, 25.*

Memory Text: “Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double” (*Zechariah 9:12, ESV*).

Joshua 13–21 contains long lists of geographical boundary markers that delineate portions of land allocated to the tribes of Israel. For the modern reader, these lists might seem irrelevant, but they are based on a theological understanding of the Promised Land that is significant for us today. Through these concrete lists, God wanted to teach the Israelites that the land was not a dream. It was promised to them in a very tangible, measurable way. But they had to make that promise a reality by acting on it.

That is, yes, God was going to give land to them as an inheritance; it was going to be a gift, made in fulfillment of what He promised their fathers. “ ‘ “See, I have set the land before you; go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—to give to them and their descendants after them” ’ ” (*Deut. 1:8, NKJV*). But yes, they too had their part to play.

This week we will look at some theological concepts related to the Promised Land and their spiritual implications for those who claim all the promises found in Jesus.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 29.

Eden and Canaan

Read Genesis 2:15 and Genesis 3:17–24. What were the consequences of the Fall, as far as the living space of the first human couple was concerned?

At Creation, God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect environment that embodied abundance and beauty. The first human couple met their Creator in the setting of a lovely living space that could provide for all their physical needs. In addition to the spoken word of God, the Garden of Eden served as a learning center where Adam and Eve gained significant insight into God's character and the life He intended for them. Therefore, when they broke the trusting relationship with their Creator, their relationship with the Garden of Eden changed as well, and as a sign of the broken relationship, they had to leave the garden. They lost the territory that God had given to them. Thus, the Garden of Eden became the symbol of abundant life, and we will rediscover its motifs in the theme of the Promised Land.

How did the patriarchs perceive the promise of the land? (See Gen. 13:14, 15; Gen. 26:3, 24; Gen. 28:13.) What do you think it means to us, as Adventists, to live as heirs of the promises (Heb. 6:11–15)?

As Abraham entered the land God had shown him, by faith that land became the Land of Promise to him and his descendants. It remained the Land of Promise for 400 years. The patriarchs did not really own the land; it was not theirs in such a way that they were able to give it to their children as an inheritance. Rather, it belonged to God, as the Garden of Eden had belonged to Him. As Adam and Eve did not do anything that entitled them to the Garden of Eden, Israel had not contributed anything to deserve the land either. The Promised Land was a gift of God based on His initiative. Israel had no inherent right or claim to own the land (*Deut.* 9:4–6); it was only by God's grace that the Israelites could possess it.

The patriarchs were heirs of the promises until they were fulfilled. We, as Christ's followers, have inherited even better promises (*Heb.* 8:6) that will be fulfilled if we become "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (*Heb.* 6:12, *RSV*).

The Land as a Gift

Read Exodus 3:8; Leviticus 20:22; Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 13:27; Deuteronomy 4:1, 25, 26; Deuteronomy 6:3; and Psalm 24:1. What was the special relationship between God, Israel, and the Promised Land?

At a very basic level, land offers physical identity to a nation. By locating the nation, it also determines the occupation and lifestyle of the nation. Slaves were rootless and belonged nowhere; someone else enjoyed the results of their work. Having land meant freedom. The identity of the chosen people was linked strongly to their dwelling in the land.

There was a special relationship among God, Israel, and the land. Israel received the land from God as a gift, not as an inalienable right. The chosen people could own the land as long as they were in a covenantal relationship with Yahweh and respected the precepts of the covenant. In other words, they could not have the land and its blessings without the blessing of God.

At the same time, it is true that the land provided a lens through which the Israelites could better understand God. Living in the land would always remind them of a faithful, promise-keeping, and trustworthy God. Neither the land nor Israel would have existed without the initiative of God, who was the Source and foundation of their existence. While the Israelites were in Egypt, the Nile and the irrigation system, coupled with hard work, provided the crops that they needed for subsistence. Canaan was different. They depended on rain for the abundance of their harvests, and it was only God who could control the weather. Thus, the land reminded the people of their constant dependence on God.

Even if Israel received the land as a gift from Yahweh, in the ultimate sense, God Himself remained the owner. As the true owner of the whole earth (*Ps. 24:1*), Yahweh has the right to assign the land to Israel or to take it away. If God is the owner of the land, the Israelites and, by extension, all humans are strangers and sojourners, or in modern terminology, we are all God's long-term guests on His land/earth.

In the light of 1 Peter 2:11 and Hebrews 11:9–13, what does it mean to you personally to live as a stranger and sojourner looking forward to the city whose designer and builder is God Himself?

The Challenge of the Land

Read Joshua 13:1–7. Even though the land of Canaan was a gift from God, what were some of the challenges that came with possessing it?

Given that for centuries the Israelites had been living as slaves, their military skills were inadequate to conquer the land. Not even their slave masters, the Egyptians, with their skilled and well-equipped armies, were able to occupy it permanently. The Egyptians never conquered Canaan completely because of the impregnability of the walled cities. Now a nation of former slaves is told to conquer a land that their former masters were unable to subdue. If they are ever to possess the land, it will be through God's grace alone, not through their own effort.

Joshua 13 through 21 deals with the division of the land to the various tribes of Israel. This allotment tells the Israelites not only what has been apportioned to them but also what still must be occupied within that territory. The Israelites can securely live in the land that God has given to them as an inheritance. They are the rightful and legitimate tenants of the land under God's ownership. Yet, God's initiative must be matched by human response. The first half of the book shows how God gave the land by dispossessing the Canaanites; the second half reports on how Israel took the land by settling it.

This complexity of the conquest illustrates the dynamics of our salvation. Similar to Israel, we cannot do anything to earn our salvation (*Eph. 2:8, 9*). It is a gift, just as the land was God's gift to the Israelites based on their covenantal relationship with Him. It certainly wasn't based on their merits (*see Deut. 9:5*).

However, for the Israelites to enjoy God's gift, they had to assume all the responsibilities that came with living in the land, just as we have to go through the process of our sanctification in loving obedience to the requirements of being citizens of God's kingdom. Though not the same thing, the parallel between their being given the land by grace and our being given salvation by grace are close enough. We have been given a wonderful gift, but it is something that we can forfeit if we are not careful.

How do Christians today encounter similar challenges to those related to occupying the Promised Land? *See Phil. 2:12, Heb. 12:28.*

The Jubilee

The land was so central to the existence of Israel as God's people that it could not be apportioned as a whole. It had to be divided by tribes, clans, and families (*Num. 34:13–18*) in order to prevent it from becoming the possession of a few leading elites.

Read Leviticus 25:1–5, 8–13. What was the purpose of the sabbatical year and of the year of jubilee?

By contrast with Egypt, where citizens regularly lost their land and became Pharaoh's serfs, the purpose of God for the Israelites was that they would never become indefinitely disenfranchised. Nobody, outside the clan and family to whom it had been originally allotted, could own the land. In fact, according to God's plan, the land could literally never be sold; it could only be leased according to its value established by the number of years left until the next jubilee. Therefore, the relatives of a person who was obliged to "sell" his ancestral land had the duty to redeem it even before the jubilee (*Lev. 25:25*).

The allotment of the land becomes a window into God's heart. As our heavenly Father, He wants His children to be generous with those who are less fortunate and to allow their lands to feed them every seventh year. The sabbatical year applied the principle of the Sabbath commandment on a larger scale. Besides valuing and encouraging hard work, ownership of the land also calls for respect and kindness to those facing financial challenges.

Land ownership legislation provided every Israelite with the opportunity to be freed from inherited or self-induced oppressive circumstances and to have a fresh start in life.

In essence, this is the main purpose of the gospel: to erase the distinction between rich and poor, employer and employee, privileged and underprivileged, putting us all on equal footing by recognizing our complete need of God's grace.

Unfortunately, Israel neglected to keep the standard set by God and, after centuries, the warnings of dispossession were fulfilled (*2 Chron. 36:20, 21*).

How can the principles of the Israelite land allotment and the Sabbath remind us that, in God's eyes, we are all equal? How can the Sabbath help us say "no" to the exploitative, vicious cycles of consumerism that plague many societies?

The Land Restored

Read Jeremiah 24:6; Jeremiah 31:16; Ezekiel 11:17; Ezekiel 28:25; and Ezekiel 37:14, 25. What was the promise of God concerning the return of Israel to the Promised Land, and how was it fulfilled?

During the Babylonian exile, the Israelites experienced not only the sad reality of being rootless but also the promise that their relationship with God, though made concrete through the promise of the land, was not conditioned on, and limited to, possessing the land. When the Israelites confessed their sins, repented, and looked for the Lord with all their hearts, God fulfilled His promise again, and He brought them back to their land as a sign of their restoration. That is, He was still their God, even while they were not in the land.

However, as the promise that Israel would possess the land forever was conditional (*Deut. 28:63, 64; Josh. 23:13, 15; 1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:23; Jer. 12:10–12*), so was the promise to resettle and make Israel prosper in the land after the exile. At the same time, prophets of the Old Testament pointed to a restoration that a future Davidic king would bring (*Isa. 9:6, 7; Zech. 9:9, 16*). This promise was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises to ancient Israel would have their fulfillment.

In the New Testament, the Promised Land is not mentioned directly, but we are told that the promises of God have been fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ (*2 Cor. 1:20, Rom. 15:8*). Thus, in the light of Christ, the land is reinterpreted, and it becomes the symbol of the spiritual blessings that God plans to give to His faithful people here and now (*Eph. 2:6*) and in the hereafter.

The ultimate fulfillment of the divine promise of rest, abundance, and well-being in the land will take place on the new earth, liberated from sin and its consequences. In that sense, as Christians, our hope is based on Christ's promise that He will return and, after a 1,000-year period in heaven, establish His eternal kingdom on the earth made new. This will be the ultimate fulfillment of all the promises about the land.

Read John 14:1–3, Titus 2:13, and Revelation 21:1–3. What ultimate hope is found for us here in these verses, and why does the death of Jesus guarantee us the fulfillment of this hope?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Controversy Ended,” pp. 672–678, in *The Great Controversy*.

“We shall be saved eternally when we enter in through the gates into the city. Then we may rejoice that we are saved, eternally saved. But until then we need to heed the injunction of the apostle, and to ‘fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem to come short of it’ [Hebrews 4:1]. Having a knowledge of Canaan, singing the songs of Canaan, rejoicing in the prospect of entering into Canaan, did not bring the children of Israel into the vineyards and olive-groves of the promised land. They could make it theirs in truth only by occupation, by complying with the conditions, by exercising living faith in God, by appropriating his promises to themselves.” —Ellen G. White, *Youth’s Instructor*, February 17, 1898.

“In the Bible the inheritance of the saved is called ‘a country.’ Hebrews 11:14–16. There the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.” —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 675.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Think about the Promised Land as a symbol of the abundant life that Christ promised to His followers in John 10:10. How do the benefits of living in an abundant land portray the blessings of salvation?
- ❷ What is the relationship between being citizens of a land and living a certain lifestyle? How does one affect the other? What are some of the implications of being citizens of God’s kingdom?
- ❸ As humans, we are constantly disappointed by the promises of others and sometimes by promises we make to ourselves. Why can you trust God’s promises?
- ❹ How can we make the promise of the new earth part of our future in a real and concrete way, even now?

Not Winsome Witnessing

Kim Sun, a South Korean teen studying at the Adventist University of the Philippines, wondered if he could make a career out of going door-to-door after a man whom he had invited to evangelistic meetings got baptized. He wasn't Adventist, and it had been his first time going door-to-door.

"What's this that we were doing?" he asked a pastor who had accompanied the students going door-to-door. "Is it called community service?"

The pastor smiled. "No," he said. "It's called mission."

"Is there a full-time job like this?" Sun said.

"Yes," the pastor said. "It's called being a missionary."

"Can I have this job, too?"

"Yes. The income isn't so much, but you can do it."

"How can I do it?"

"You'll have to change your studies from nursing to theology."

"Oh. I'll need to ask my mom."

Sun was studying in the Philippines because his parents had wanted him to make something of his life. Before, he had been living for himself.

When Sun spoke to his mother, he asked if he could change his major.

Mother was confused. "What is theology?" she said.

"Theology is serving the church," he said, adding that the pay may be low.

Mother said he could take theology if he also finished his nursing studies.

"But nursing isn't meaningful to me," Sun said.

Then Mother had an idea. Her goal wasn't for him to be rich but to be a good person. "If you take theology, can you drink or smoke?" she said.

When he said no, she exclaimed, "Then please change your studies!"

Sun loved theology. He learned the biblical basis for the seventh-day Sabbath. He read the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. He got baptized.

When he returned home for vacations, he tried to persuade his parents to accept his new beliefs. "Mom and Dad, sit down and let me talk to you," he said. "Sunday is not the Sabbath day. Saturday is the Sabbath. Do you know Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream?"

He couldn't understand why his parents weren't open-minded. He was dismayed when Mother finally asked him to stop, saying, "You take your God, and I'll take my God," she said.

"But they're the same God!" he said. "We have to follow God's Word."



Kim Sun is associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Zechariah 9:12*

Study Focus: *Gen. 3:17–24; Deut. 6:3; Josh. 13:1–7; Heb. 12:28; Lev. 25:1–5, 8–13; Ezek. 37:14, 25.*

The Scriptures emphasize the connection between God’s people and the land, from the beginning to the end. The land is an important topic in the study of first things (protology) and in the study of last things (eschatology) in the Bible. In this week’s lesson, the theological dimension of the land was examined from the perspective of the conquest. In the central part of the book of Joshua, after describing the initial takeover of the land, the author deals with the division of the land among the 12 tribes. While some readers may find the geographical details tedious, they are crucial in conveying the book’s message, demonstrating how God is keeping the promise made to Israel’s forefathers.

In this context, the land is a literal and physical entity, a place where Israel could write a new chapter. However, as the story of redemption unfolds, the typological character of the land becomes more apparent. After hundreds of years, Israel itself faces exile, and the hope of a return is kindled during the Babylonian captivity. Judah does return to the land but does not find permanent rest. Such a rest can be found only in the Messiah’s accomplishments. In Jesus, the present reality of spiritual rest does not annul the future literal homecoming, when God’s people will possess the land again. In Jesus, the current reality of spiritual rest does not negate the future literal return to the land. In the meantime, we live as refugees exiled from our true home, journeying toward our actual land that is defined, not by geographical confines, but by God’s dwelling among His people.

Part II: Commentary

The Theology of Land: Between Creation and New Creation

The following chart summarizes the biblical theology of the land from Genesis to Revelation:

Redemption History Phase	Movement Status	Relation to the Land	Biblical References
Original plan—Eden	Sedentary	Possession	Genesis 1, 2
Judgment	Nomadic (out)	Exile	Genesis 3–11
Promise	Nomadic (in)	Pilgrimage	Genesis 12– Deuteronomy 34
Restoration	Sedentary	Possession (precarious)	Joshua 1, 2; 2 Kings 24
Judgment	Nomadic (out)	Exile	2 Kings 25; Jeremiah; Ezekiel
Promise	Nomadic (in)	Pilgrimage	Isaiah 40–65; Haggai; Zechariah
Restoration	Sedentary	Possession (precarious)	Ezra; Nehemiah
Messianic Restoration	Sedentary Nomadic (in)	Possession (already) Pilgrimage (not-yet)	New Testament
Original plan—New Eden	Sedentary	Possession	Revelation 21, 22

In God's original plan, humanity was designed to subdue the earth (*Gen. 1:28*) and dwell in a place of eternal pleasure called the Garden of Eden (*Gen. 2:8*), where Adam and Eve could enjoy direct contact with Him (*Gen. 3:8*). In this sedentary state, they would enjoy eternal life, conditional upon their loyalty to the Creator. However, sin disrupted this original plan, leading to the first displacement in human history. Under judgment, Adam and Eve experienced exile, moving out from the Garden (*Gen. 3:23, 24*). From a theological point of view, movement from the place designed by God marked the consequence of disobedience. In this sense, the first family became also the first spiritual refugees, living as nomads, waiting to return.

The first sign of a possible return appeared in Abraham's call, in which God commanded him: " 'Go out from your land . . . to the land that I will show you' " (*Gen. 12:1, LEB*). In salvation history, the importance of Abraham's call can be appreciated only when one realizes that it marked a transition from judgment to promise. Although Abraham's family remained nomadic for several centuries, his obedience set in motion a journey toward the Promised Land. Along the way, Abraham experienced periods of exile,

temporarily leaving the land and returning later (*Gen. 12:10–20, Gen. 20:1–17*). Similarly, his descendants also went through cycles of leaving and returning, such as when they became refugees in Egypt, and later slaves, until God intervened on their behalf (*Exod. 6:5*). Jacques Doukhan properly encapsulates the theological meaning of these nomadic journeys: “Through these nomadic journeys of the seed-family, never arriving, never satisfied, always longing for home, the book of Genesis vibrates with the pulsation of hope. Although they tasted of the divine blessings, signs of God’s faithful fulfillment of His promise, Adam, Noah, and the patriarchs continued to wait for the ultimate divine victory over evil and death. For only this would bring them, and us, the entire creation, back to the Garden of Eden.” —Doukhan, *The SDA International Bible Commentary: Genesis* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), p. 37.

The 400-year pilgrimage of Abraham’s children finished with the 40-year journey in the wilderness, where Moses’ final speech, in Deuteronomy, prepared Israel to transition from promise to restoration, from a nomadic to a sedentary state. Theologically, Joshua led Israel in returning to God’s land. This return does not signify that Canaan is the actual location of the Garden of Eden. God’s land is not defined by geographical boundaries but rather by His presence in its midst (*Exod. 25:8, Exod. 33:14*).

Thus, the book of Joshua also marks an important transition in salvation history when God’s people were to subdue the land and enjoy rest. Unfortunately, within just one generation, Israel started living in disobedience, and their hold on the land became tenuous (*Judg. 2:10–13*). From the time of Judges to 2 Kings, Israel struggled most of the time to maintain control over the land. Toward the end of this period, God sent prophets to warn His people about the impending judgment because of breaking the covenant, but they did not listen (*Jer. 7:23–27*). Under judgment, Israel and Judah were exiled from the place God had designed for them (*2 Kings 17:7–40, 2 Kings 25:1–26*). During the exile, they became nomadic once again, leaving the land and going in the opposite direction of Abraham (*Psalms 137*).

However, the exile was not meant to last more than 70 years (*Jer. 25:11, 12*). In the prophetic books, the promise of a return was closely linked to the unchangeable message of judgment. This return is equivalent to a new creation (*Isa. 65:17*), with Edenic overtones (*Isa. 51:3, Ezek. 36:35*). The two Mosaic figures of Ezra and Nehemiah led God’s people back to Canaan again, with the promise that God would bless their efforts to restore Jerusalem. From Babylon, now a Persian province, God’s people made a pilgrimage toward the land (*Ezra 1, Nehemiah 2*). Despite encountering strong opposition (*Ezra 4*), the people ultimately succeeded in reconstructing Jerusalem (*Nehemiah 11, 12*). However, throughout the whole process, Ezra and Nehemiah needed to fight against the apostasy

that plagued the backsliding people of Israel (*Ezra 10, Nehemiah 13*). Despite early revival and spiritual reform, the possession of the land became uncertain once more, and the returning Jews faced difficult times under foreign oppression during the intertestamental period.

With the coming of the Messiah, light shone again. The first verse of the New Testament already showed that Jesus represented a new beginning for humanity (*Matt. 1:1*). Jesus came to overcome where Adam had been defeated. Christ's rejection of the devil's offer to give Him all the kingdoms of the earth does not mean that Jesus would not conquer these kingdoms: it simply shows that He would conquer them in God's way (*Matt. 4:8–10*). As a new Adam, He became the ruler of all nations whose kingdom will not pass (*1 Cor. 15:22–26*). This universalization of the land is evident in the concept of the kingdom of God, which Jesus inaugurated. This idea is neither a spiritualization nor a reinterpretation of the Old Testament concept of land. In fact, it is attuned to the universal aspect of the Abrahamic covenant already evident in the original context (*Gen. 12:3; Gen. 17:6, 16*). What the New Testament does is spell out when and how the promises would be fulfilled.

The inauguration of the kingdom of God in Jesus introduces a tension that was not always evident in the Old Testament. Although Christ brought final restoration, His people were still on a pilgrimage. In one sense, His people were already part of His kingdom because God “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (*Eph. 2:6, NKJV*). Yet, His disciples were still nomads in a world to which they did not belong (*John 17:11–19*), waiting for the fulfillment of the promise in its consummated fashion.

The nomadic experience of God's people toward their definite resting place comes to an end in the New Jerusalem, which is clearly described not only as a return to the Promised Land, modeled according to the Exodus story, but also as a return to Eden. The river of life flows through the middle of the city, watering the tree of life, which is accessible to all nations. As in Eden, there is no room for the curse of sin and death, and God once again resides with His people (*Rev. 22:1–5*). Here, the redemptive story circles back to where it started. At the center of it all stands the cross, where the Messiah secured the return ticket with His blood. The new Adam is the One who will bring His refugee children back home. Oh, what a glorious day that will be!

Part III: Life Application

Land and Hope

In the biblical context, land and hope are intrinsically connected. This connection is evident in Zechariah 9:12, in which God invites the “prisoners of

hope” to return. These individuals had been waiting for this call during the long years of exile, and the time had finally come for them to return to Jerusalem.

1. What does the image “prisoner of hope” convey to you personally?

2. What parallels do you find between the experience of the exiles in Babylon and your spiritual experience, particularly in the context of the imminent second coming of Jesus?

Hope, Love, and Faith

Augustine of Hippo said: “There is no love without hope, no hope without love, and neither love nor hope without faith.”—Augustine of Hippo, *The Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love* (Washington, DC: Gateway, 1996), p. 9. These three elements also appear together in the song written by Benjamin Gaither, Jeff Silvey, and Kim Williams:

I’m a prisoner of hope, bound by my faith
 Chained to Your love, locked up in grace
 I’m free to leave but I’ll never go
 I’m wonderfully, willingly,
 Freely a prisoner of hope.
 —Gaither Vocal Band, “Prisoner of Hope,” 2008.

In what ways do you see the relationship between hope, love, and faith in your spiritual journey?

Living as a Refugee

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, there are approximately 44 million refugees worldwide. Most of them have been forced to flee from their countries because of violence, political instability, and war. In the Old Testament law, the experience of Israel as an alien in Egypt should impact how the Israelites were supposed to treat the sojourners among them (*Exod. 23:9*).

How should your own experience as a spiritual sojourner impact the way you deal with refugees today?

The True Joshua



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 10:1–13; Matt. 2:15; Josh. 1:1–3; Acts 3:22–26; Heb. 3:7–4:11; 2 Cor. 10:3–5.*

Memory Text: “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (*1 Corinthians 10:11, ESV*).

In the book of Joshua, there is a sense that the life of its main character points beyond itself to a reality that is much greater than the man himself. We see this principle all through the Bible, such as with the land of Canaan, a symbol of our eternal hope in a new earth. And, of course, the earthly sanctuary service pointed to a greater reality: “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation” (*Heb. 9:11, NKJV*).

But the question arises: In what way does Joshua point to a future fulfillment? How can we be sure that such an interpretation of the book is legitimate? What are the biblical principles that control the application of the book of Joshua to New Testament realities and to end-time events?

This week, we will look at principles of biblical interpretation concerning typology. We will study how the Bible itself contains indicators of typology and how the life of Joshua foreshadows the ministry of the Messiah and points to symbolism fulfilled in the church as well as in the consummation of human history.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 6.

Biblical Typology

Study the following Scriptures that refer to types and try to define what biblical typology is: Rom. 5:14, 1 Cor. 10:1–13, Heb. 8:5, and Heb. 9:23.

These biblical passages use the term “type” (Greek *typos*) or “antitype” (Greek *antitypos*) to refer to the way the New Testament writer defined the relationship between an Old Testament text or event and its meaning in his own time or in the future.

Typology is a specific interpretation of persons, events, or institutions that prefigure Jesus or other realities contained in the gospel. The type corresponds to the antitype as a mold or a hollow form that reflects the original form, even if the latter, the antitype, more fully fulfills the purpose of the type. Thus, the biblical type was shaped according to a divine design that had existed concretely, or conceptually, in the mind of God, and it serves to shape future copies (antitypes).

It is crucial to understand that the writers of the New Testament did not randomly attribute a typological meaning to some Old Testament texts in order to make a point. An Old Testament type is always validated in the prophetic writings before it acquires an antitypical fulfillment in the New Testament.

Look at how David appears in the Old Testament and then how he is prefigured in the New. What lessons can we learn about how typology works from this example?

a. David (*Ps. 22:1, 14–18*): _____

b. The new David (*Jer. 23:5; Isa. 9:5, 6; Isa. 11:1–5*): _____

c. The antitypical David (*John 19:24*): _____

By looking at these texts, we discover that the Old Testament itself provides the key for identifying and applying types in the Scriptures. That is, New Testament writers, whose Scripture was the Old Testament, were inspired by the Holy Spirit to use the Old Testament types to reveal “present truth” (*2 Pet. 1:12*), especially about Jesus and His ministry.

Type and Antitype

Interpreters of the Bible cannot arbitrarily decide on what constitutes a biblical type or how that particular type is fulfilled in the New Testament and beyond. The Bible itself provides some controls and principles as to the application of biblical typology.

Similarly, the New Testament unfolds the antitypical fulfillment of a type in three distinct phases: (1) in the life of Christ (the Christological fulfillment), (2) in the experience of the church (the ecclesiological fulfillment), and (3) at the end of time (the eschatological fulfillment).

We can find these types and antitypes all through the Bible, and they are very helpful in showing readers how to understand the Bible and what truths the Word of God is teaching about Jesus, salvation, and the ultimate hope that we have.

Look at the following Old Testament types: Israel, the Exodus, and the sanctuary. How is each fulfilled in the three antitypical phases: the Christological, the ecclesiological, and the eschatological?

1. Israel

- a. Christological phase (*Matt. 2:15*)
- b. Ecclesiological phase (*Gal. 6:16*)
- c. Eschatological phase (*Rev. 7:4–8, 14*)

2. The Exodus

- a. Christological phase (*Matt. 2:19–21*)
- b. Ecclesiological phase (*2 Cor. 6:17*)
- c. Eschatological phase (*Rev. 18:4*)

3. The Sanctuary

- a. Christological phase (*John 1:14, John 2:21, Matt. 26:61*)
- b. Ecclesiological phase (*1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 2 Cor. 6:16*)
- c. Eschatological phase (*Rev. 3:12, Rev. 11:19, Rev. 21:3, Rev. 21:22*)

“Since Scripture has a single divine Author, the various parts of Scripture are consistent with each other. . . . All the doctrines of the Bible will cohere with each other; interpretations of individual passages will harmonize with the totality of what Scripture teaches on a given subject.”—Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), p. 65.

What do you do when, at times, you find it hard to understand the meaning of certain passages?

Joshua, the Type

In the light of biblical typology, what is the significance of the multiple parallelism between the lives of Moses and Joshua? See *Exod. 3:1, 2; Josh. 1:1–3; Num. 13:1, 2; Josh. 2:1; Exod. 3:5; Josh. 5:15.*

As we discovered in the first week, Joshua was presented as a new Moses who, in the life of the second generation, repeated the most significant steps of the Exodus from Egypt. Just as Moses was, Joshua was commissioned by a personal encounter with the Lord. Under the leadership of both Moses and Joshua, Israel's fame among the nations inspired fear. Moses led Israel in crossing the Red Sea, and Joshua led Israel in a miraculous crossing of the Jordan. Both leaders were reminded of the necessity of circumcision and the importance of the Passover. Manna began to fall in the time of Moses, and it ended with Joshua. Both were commanded to take off their sandals. The outstretched hand of both signaled victory for Israel. Moses gave instructions for the division of the land and the institution of cities of refuge. Joshua fulfilled the instructions. Both gave a farewell address to the nation and renewed the covenant for the people at the end of their ministry.

Study Deuteronomy 18:15–19, Deuteronomy 34:10–12, John 1:21, Acts 3:22–26, and Acts 7:37. Who fulfills the prophecy of Moses about a prophet like himself? How does Joshua fit into the picture?

Joshua's life was a partial fulfillment of the prophecy made by Moses (*Deut. 18:15, 18*). However, the prophecy made by Moses was not fulfilled in its ultimate sense. In its ultimate sense, the prophecy could be accomplished (or fulfilled) only by the Messiah. The Messiah knew the Father intimately (*John 1:14, 18*); He was true and revealed God truthfully (*Luke 10:22, John 14:6, Matt. 22:16*). God indeed put His words in His mouth (*John 14:24*). So, both the life of Moses and that of Joshua become types of the coming Messiah, Jesus.

How central is Jesus to your own walk with the Lord? Why must Jesus, and what He has done for you, be the foundation of your whole Christian experience?

The True Joshua, the Antitype

The story of Joshua must be seen through the prism of typology. The wars Joshua conducted are historical events, constituting an essential segment of Israel's history. The goal of these wars is to settle the Israelites in the Promised Land, where they can enjoy their allotted inheritance in peace and establish a new society based on the principles of God's law.

Later, Old Testament authors, such as Isaiah, present the work of the Messiah as also consisting of allotting the “desolate inheritances [to His people]” (*Isa. 49:8, NIV*), using the same terminology that is so frequent in the book of Joshua. As the task of Joshua had been to apportion the land to the Israelites, so the Messiah, portrayed as the new Joshua, assigns the spiritual inheritance to a new Israel.

Read Hebrews 3:7–4:11. How does the New Testament confirm that Joshua, the new Moses, is himself a type of Jesus Christ?

The authors of the New Testament presented many aspects of the ministry of Jesus Christ in terms of Joshua's work. As Joshua stepped into Canaan after 40 years in the wilderness, so the “antitypical Joshua,” Jesus, entered His earthly ministry after 40 days in the wilderness (*Matt. 4:1–11, Luke 4:1–13*) and His heavenly ministry after 40 days in the wilderness of this earth (*Acts 1:3, 9–11; Heb. 1:2*).

After Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan (His “crossing of the Jordan” [*Matt. 3:13–17, Mark 1:9–11*]), the gospel writers quote from Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, from a Messianic psalm and from a song about the Suffering Servant of Yahweh (*Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22*). Consequently, through His baptism, Jesus is presented as the Divine Warrior who will—through a life of faithful obedience, even unto death—wage the wars of Yahweh against the evil forces. His life and death on the cross brought about the casting out of Satan, led the conquest over our spiritual enemies, offered spiritual rest to His people, and allotted an inheritance for the redeemed (*Eph. 4:8, Heb. 1:4, Heb. 9:15*).

What does it mean to be able to “rest” in what Christ has done for us? That is, how can we have assurance that Jesus has defeated Satan in our behalf?

Joshua and Us

Joshua, as a type, points beyond the ministry of Jesus Christ to a fulfillment in the life of the church, Christ's body. In what sense do the wars Israel fought under Joshua foreshadow the spiritual struggles of the church? How are they different? See *1 Tim. 1:18*, *2 Tim. 4:7*, *Eph. 6:10–12*, *2 Cor. 10:3–5*, and *Acts 20:32*.

The writers of the New Testament recognize the ecclesiological (church) fulfillment of the Joshua typology. The members of Christ's body, the church, are involved in a spiritual warfare against evil forces; nevertheless, they enjoy the rest of God's grace (*Heb. 4:9–11*) and the blessings of their spiritual inheritance.

What do these texts say about the ultimate fulfillment of the Joshua typology? *1 Pet. 1:4*, *Col. 3:24*, *Rev. 20:9*, *Rev. 21:3*.

The final and complete fulfillment of the Joshua typology will be accomplished at the second coming of Jesus Christ (apocalyptic/eschatological aspect).

Joshua's life reflected so much of God's character that certain aspects of his life took on a prophetic character foreshadowing the activity and person of the Messiah.

For us, today, the Messiah has already come. His ministry does not need to be prefigured, but we still have the privilege of reflecting His character—the glory that Christ longed to share with His disciples (*John 17:22*) and that can become ours by contemplating the character of Christ (*2 Cor. 3:18*). The more we contemplate Jesus, the more we reflect the beauty of His character. This is so foundational to what our daily walk with Christ should lead to. This is why time in the Word, every day, is so important. This is why, too, we should also spend time dwelling on the life and character and teachings of Jesus. By beholding, yes, we do become changed.

Joshua, the type, asked the Israelites: “ ‘How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you?’ ” (*Josh. 18:3, NKJV*). How would Jesus, the antitype of Joshua, phrase that question today?

Further Thought: “Christ’s mission was not understood by the people of His time. . . . The traditions, maxims, and enactments of men hid from them the lessons which God intended to convey. These maxims and traditions became an obstacle to their understanding and practice of true religion. And when the Reality came, in the person of Christ, they did not recognize in Him the fulfillment of all their types, the substance of all their shadows. They rejected the antitype, and clung to their types and useless ceremonies. The Son of God had come, but they continued to ask for a sign. The message, ‘Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,’ they answered by demands for a miracle. . . . The gospel of Christ was a stumbling block to them because they demanded signs instead of a Saviour. They expected the Messiah to prove His claims by mighty deeds of conquest, to establish His empire on the ruins of earthly kingdoms. This expectation Christ answered in the parable of the sower. Not by force of arms, not by violent interpositions, was the kingdom of God to prevail, but by the implanting of a new principle in the hearts of men.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 34, 35.

“The church needs faithful Calebs and Joshuas, who are ready to accept eternal life on God’s simple condition of obedience. Our churches are suffering for laborers. The world is our field. Missionaries are wanted in cities and villages that are more certainly bound by idolatry than are the pagans of the East, who have never seen the light of truth. The true missionary spirit has deserted the churches that make so exalted a profession; their hearts are no longer aglow with love for souls and a desire to lead them into the fold of Christ. We want earnest workers. Are there none to respond to the cry that goes up from every quarter: ‘Come over . . . and help us?’”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 156.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How does biblical typology help you better understand the ministry of Jesus Christ on your behalf?
- ❷ In what respect is our spiritual warfare like the conquest of Canaan, and how is it different?
- ❸ Contemplate on the ultimate fulfillment of the Joshua typology. How does the picture of a world without pain, suffering, and death give us real hope in the daily struggles of life?
- ❹ Joshua reflected the character of God to the extent that he foreshadowed the ministry of Christ. What are some practical ways that you can allow Jesus to reflect His character in you more completely?

Trusting in God's Timing

For four years, Kim Sun argued with his parents about the Bible every time he came home to South Korea on vacation from his theology studies at the Adventist University of the Philippines. After graduating, he kept touting Adventist doctrines as he studied for a master's degree in theology in South Korea. The arguments grew so intense that his parents' church organized a prayer vigil for his parents, who served as a church deacon and deaconess. About 100 people prayed that the parents wouldn't be swayed into leaving their church. Finally, Mother asked Sun to stop discussing the Bible.

Sun was dismayed until he heard a preacher say that God has an individual plan for each person. He realized that his plan for his parents might not be God's plan. He decided to pray and trust God's timing. He didn't talk to his parents about the Bible for two years.

In the meanwhile, Sun completed his master's and got a job with the church. He dreamed of becoming a pastor, but he didn't receive a job offer.

As time passed, Mother began to wonder if her own beliefs were blocking her son's dreams. She overheard someone ask Sun if his parents were Adventist, and he replied that they belonged to another denomination. She asked Sun directly, "Would it be helpful to you if we joined your church?"

Sun understood that his parents were worried about his future, but he didn't want them to become Adventists for his sake. "It wouldn't be helpful," he said. "You need to study the Bible for yourselves and then decide."

Sun introduced his parents to a pastor in their area, and they started Bible studies. None of Sun's Bible arguments had convinced them over five years. But as they studied the Bible, they saw Jesus' love in truths that they hadn't noticed previously. After two months, they joined the Adventist Church.

Sun was so happy! He was the first Adventist in his family, and now his parents had joined him. He remembered the joy that he had experienced several years earlier when a man's life was changed after he introduced him to Jesus in the Philippines. He remembered his desire at the time to become a full-time missionary.



Sun decided to return to the Philippines as a missionary with the 1000 Missionary Movement, an organization that is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

Kim Sun is associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *1 Corinthians 10:11*

Study Focus: *1 Cor. 10:1–13, Matt. 2:15, Josh. 1:1–3, Acts 3:22–26, Heb. 3:7–4:11, 2 Cor. 10:3–5.*

Typology is one of the main ways the New Testament authors use the Old Testament. It is rooted in history and theology. In the Old Testament, types are like historical previews that anticipate the realities brought about by Jesus. In this sense, typology is a form of prophecy, through events, rather than through words. Typology also is grounded in theology because God guides events, selects specific individuals, and establishes institutions that prophetically foreshadow the redemptive realities triggered by Jesus. Like prophecy, typology points to God’s sovereignty over history.

Despite the importance of typological interpretation of Scripture, many Christians are not familiar with the topic. The study of Joshua offers an excellent opportunity to learn about biblical typology and to consider the criteria for identifying types in the Old Testament, their fulfillment in the New Testament, and the practical relevance of typology in the present-day Adventist journey.

Through typology, which highlights God’s patterns throughout Scripture, people can grasp His sovereignty over history and His enduring mercy toward humanity, despite the persistent sinfulness of His children. History is the platform upon which God unveils His love for humanity. This revelation unfolds through various stages, intricately tied to the unique expressions of the eternal covenant between God and His creation. These expressions form the backbone of typology. The patterns found in Joshua’s typology highlight God’s desire to save His people so that they may enjoy His presence and rest, without fear, in His incredible love.

Part II: Commentary

Definition

It is not an exaggeration to affirm that “historically, Seventh-day Adventism is not only a prophetic movement; it is also a typological movement.” Since the beginning of Adventism, “typology was a method used to evaluate, experience, and understand Adventism identity, role, and message in salvation history.”—Erick Mendieta, “Typology and Adventist Eschatological Identity: Friend or Foe?” *Andrews University Seminary*

Student Journal, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015), pp. 45, 46. There are two kinds of typology: vertical and horizontal. Vertical typology concerns the relationship between the heavenly and earthly sanctuary. It is the most widely known and studied within Adventism. Horizontal typology involves the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and it is one of the primary ways to discern Jesus within the writings of “Moses and all the prophets” (*Luke 24:27*). This typology is the focus of our lesson for this week.

The traditional understanding of typology can be summarized in the following definition: “the study of persons, events, or institutions (the types) that God has divinely designed to prefigure their end-time fulfillments (the antitypes) in Christ and in the gospel realities brought about by Him.”—Richard M. Davidson, *In the Footsteps of Joshua* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995), p. 26. Such a definition is not arbitrarily imposed on Scripture but rather it emerges from the survey of the passages wherein the Greek term *typos* (type) occurs in the New Testament (*1 Cor. 10:1–13; Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Pet. 3:18–22; Hebrews 8, 9*), as shown in the seminal work of Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

Identifying Joshua Typology

According to Davidson’s definition, there are four criteria for identifying types and antitypes: historicity, correspondence, prefiguration, and escalation. First, types are historical realities documented by the Old Testament. When the New Testament author looks back at the Old Testament to find types, he seeks events, persons, or institutions rooted in history. For instance, there is no typological import in parables (*compare with Josh. 9:7–15, 2 Sam. 12:1–4*). In typology, God is acting in history, creating patterns of prophetic import to be later recognized by His people and prophets. From the New Testament perspective, there is no doubt that Joshua is a historical character. In his final speech, Stephen recounts Joshua’s role as Israel’s leader during the conquest, during which time the tabernacle of testimony was brought to Canaan (*see Acts 7:44, 45, NASB*). Joshua also is mentioned in Hebrews 4:7, 8 as the one who brought temporary rest to Israel.

Another fundamental step in identifying typological relationships between the Old and New Testaments is the presence of legitimate correspondences. These correspondences must be historically valid, genuine, and not simply coincidental or imaginative. In addition to the correspondences mentioned in Wednesday’s study, Joshua and Jesus share the same name, which is differentiated in Hebrew and Greek, as in English. This does not appear to

be incidental for two reasons. Primarily, this appellation is the first in the biblical canon with a theophoric element, specifically, a particle referring to God's name. Joshua's name is the combination of the Hebrew verb *ysh'* (to save) and the particle *yo* (jo), which is an abbreviation of Yahweh (usually translated as "the LORD"). Second, Joshua is not his original name. Moses, probably under divine influence, changed his name from Hoshea (salvation) to Joshua (Yahweh is salvation) (*Num. 13:16*).

The third element to be considered is prefiguration. God prophetically designs legitimate types that could be recognizable even before their fulfillment, at least in their basic contours. This element reinforces the notion that the New Testament authors are not creatively inventing connections between the Testaments. The prophetic element of the Old Testament type has already been inscriptured in the biblical text. For this reason, the original audience could have grasped this predictive import through clues left by the inspired authors. Once most of the clues were found, as the readers compared one previous revelation with a more recent one, it is only natural that the types would become more evident as the canon grew.

Two important points need to be emphasized again here. First, only the Christ event could reveal the Messianic import of the Old Testament in full force. Second, in the history of interpretation, some types were recognized only in retrospect. Yet, these facts do not preclude the existence of prophetic import in the original context and the possibility of recognition of this import by the original audience. Identifying these textual warrants serves as an interpretative control, preventing the reader from imposing on the text something that is not there. Without such controls, typology easily degenerates into allegory. Allegory was the predominant method of biblical interpretation during the Middle Ages. Unlike typology, allegory finds spiritual meanings in the Old Testament that are foreign to the author's intention and the original context.

An additional textual warrant, validating the Joshua typology in the Old Testament, may be mentioned here: the unique character of Joshua's connection with the mission of the Angel of the Lord, the preexistent Christ in the Pentateuch. Davidson suggests that "the descriptions of Joshua's mission and that of the Angel of the Lord contain numerous parallel expressions, using exactly the same Hebrew words. Both Joshua and the Angel of the Lord were to 'cross over before' and 'go before' Israel and 'bring them into the land' and 'cause them to inherit' it (cf. Ex. 23:23; Num. 27:17, 21; Deut. 3:28; 31:3, 23)." Davidson also underscores the direct connection between Joshua (the postexilic priest) and the Messiah in Zechariah 6:12, in which "the prophet equates the name of Joshua with the Messiah": "Then speak to him [Joshua], saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying "Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!" ' "—Davidson, *In the Footsteps of Joshua*, pp. 29, 30.

The final criterion for identifying typology that is to be mentioned here is escalation. The concept of escalation is well illustrated by the metaphor of “shadow,” used by the author of Hebrews to explain the relationship between the Levitical system of offerings and sacrifices, including festivals and rituals, which pointed to the Jesus event. Escalation involves an elevation or intensification from type to antitype: a crescendo from local to universal, from provisory to definitive, from temporal to eternal, and the human to the divine sphere.

This progression is evident in the Joshua typology. Just as Joshua led the conquest of Canaan and provided temporary rest for Israel, the new Joshua commands the heavenly army in the cosmic battle against “principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). His victory is definitive and gives eternal rest to God’s people.

Scriptural typology is a fascinating area of biblical study and should not be restricted to scholars. In his dialogue on the road to Emmaus, Jesus tenderly rebuked the two men for failing to read the Scriptures typologically: “ ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (*Luke 24:25–27, NKJV*). May Seventh-day Adventists avoid making the same mistake today.

Part III: Life Application

God’s Consistence Today

The different types are grounded in historical patterns that have been influenced by divine interventions, as a result of God’s promises. They demonstrate God’s faithfulness in His interactions with humanity and His supreme authority over history. Typology is not just a method for interpreting the Old Testament in relation to Jesus; it is also a way to interpret history.

How do you think God’s consistency and control over history can help you to deal with the uncertainties of human existence?

Types Today

On the one hand, the study of typology helps us understand who Jesus is and what God is doing through Him. It shows how such individuals as Moses, Aaron, and David foreshadow the roles of the Messiah as priest, prophet, and king. Similarly, institutional types, such as the sacrifices and religious festivals like Passover, reveal the substitutionary nature of His mission.

Typological events also point to the things Jesus will accomplish on behalf of His people. On the other hand, typology reveals God's expectations regarding His children.

Considering these two aspects of typology, what do the following types reveal about Jesus, and how can you use their examples to model your life according to God's will?

- 1. Isaac lying down on the altar in submission** (*Genesis 22; compare with Heb. 11:17–19*)

- 2. Joseph as the deliverer of his family in his interaction with his brothers** (*Genesis 44–45*)

- 3. Moses as the deliverer and intercessor of Israel** (*Exod. 32:30–34*)

- 4. David as the chosen (messiah) king in his interaction with Saul** (*1 Samuel 24, 26*)

Living in the Land



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Joshua 22; Eph. 6:7; John 7:24; Numbers 25; Prov. 15:1; 1 Pet. 3:8, 9.*

Memory Text: “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (*Proverbs 15:1, NIV*).

Living in a community can, at times, lead to disputes and tension. This is especially true in a community, such as the church, where people from different backgrounds and social strata—and who are sometimes brought up in completely different cultures—live and work together for a common purpose.

This week we will study Joshua 22 and a challenge that arose from a great misunderstanding among the people. At the beginning of the book, Joshua commanded some tribes to cross the Jordan and participate in the conquest, along with the tribes on the west side of the Jordan (*Josh. 1:12–18*). Now that the task is accomplished, they are free to return. However, at the east side of the Jordan, they build an altar that raises concern among the West Jordan tribes.

Why is it dangerous to jump to a rash conclusion about the behavior of others? How can we foster unity in the church? Why is it important to keep in mind the larger scope of our calling and not to get caught up in distractions? These are some of the questions we are going to deal with this week.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 13.

Commitment

Read Joshua 22:1–8. What do these verses tell us about the commitment of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh?

Joshua affirms that the tribes from the other side of the Jordan have fully satisfied the obligations set out by Moses and himself, which meant a significant dedication to, and sacrifice on behalf of, Israel's common cause. They fought alongside their brothers for "many days," which in reality meant about six to seven years (*compare with Josh. 11:18, Josh. 14:10, Deut. 2:14*). Their wives and children were left at home, on the east side of Jordan, yet they decided to fight loyally along with their brothers, facing the threat of injury and death in war.

These verses indirectly underline the importance of the unity of the nation and that of the land. They also prepare the way for the ensuing story, which is ultimately about unity. Will the Israelite tribes stay united, despite the strong natural border that the Jordan forms between them? Will they allow geography to set its mark on their national identity, or will they let their common worship of the only God keep them as His chosen nation, united and strong under His theocratic guidance?

Joshua explains the only way that such fidelity has been possible: they did not serve their fellow Israelites but Yahweh Himself, who charged them with their mission.

We find this same principle in the New Testament. The apostle Paul admonished Christians to render their service as if they were working for God and not only for human beings (*see Eph. 6:7, Col. 3:23, 1 Thess. 2:4*). What higher calling is there than working for, ultimately, the Creator of the cosmos?

In everyday life, we often face challenges and difficulties that can easily discourage us and make us want to give up the fight. That's easy, at times, to do. Yet, we can call upon the power of the Lord, who promises to be with us and enables us to do what He asks of us. If we keep our higher calling before us, we can be motivated to press on ahead, despite the inevitable challenges and discouragements that are part of our fallen existence here.

Joshua 22:5, 6 reports that Joshua appealed to the departing tribes to remain faithful to the Lord, and then he blessed them. How would our relationships in the church be transformed if we prayed for each other more than we do?

Accusations . . .

Read the story of the returning tribes in Joshua 22:9–20. What accusations do the West Jordan tribes level against the East Jordan tribes? To what extent were these accusations well founded?

In contrast with verse 1, where the tribes on the east side are called by their usual form (Reubenites, Gadites, etc.), here a different expression is used: “sons of Reuben,” “sons of Gad,” and “the half-tribe of Manasseh,” which is in contrast to the “sons of Israel” (*Josh. 22:11, NASB*), thus representing a different entity.

In the narrative, the expression “the whole congregation of Israel” refers only to the nine and a half West Jordan tribes, underlining the rift that developed between the two groups. Indeed, the underlying question of the ensuing story is whether the tribes on the east side of the river can be seen as Israelites.

We would expect a smooth conclusion to the story; however, tension arises as the tribes from the east are reported to have erected an altar at the Jordan. The text here does not offer any reason for the act, nor does it describe the function of the altar or specific activity related to it. The ambiguity concerning the meaning of this altar is increased even more if we observe the flashbacks to the first crossing of the Jordan, in chapters 3 and 4, where all Israel entered the edge of the Jordan to cross the river into mainland Canaan. Here a part of Israel comes to the region of the Jordan, but now to cross the river in the opposite direction.

In both cases, a structure of stones is erected. The first served as a memorial, while the second is perceived to be an impressive altar. The question that inevitably comes to mind is: “What do these stones mean?” (*compare with Josh 4:6, 22*). Is this altar built for sacrifices, or is it only a memorial? Are these other tribes already starting to fall into apostasy?

Lack of consultation with Joshua, Eleazar, or the tribal leaders creates room for a misunderstanding that potentially can lead to terrible conflict.

What are Jesus and Paul referring to when they admonish us to avoid judging others? Read Luke 6:37, John 7:24, and 1 Cor. 4:5. Why is it so easy to jump to wrong conclusions about the motives of others?

Haunted by the Past

Read Joshua 22:13–15 again, but now in the light of Numbers 25. Why do the Israelites choose Phinehas as the head of the delegation to the two-and-a-half tribes?

Before giving full credit to the rumors of what might be perceived as a declaration of independence, the nine-and-a-half tribes, labeled twice as “the sons of Israel,” send a delegation to clarify the intent and meaning of the altar. The delegation consisted of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, who would succeed Eleazar after his death (*Josh. 24:33*). Phinehas already has gained some visibility as the priest who put an end to the debauchery of Israel at Baal Peor (*Numbers 25*).

“Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel” (*Num. 25:7, 8, NKJV*).

Phinehas surely had some influence. The other emissaries were representatives of the nine-and-a-half tribes west of the Jordan, each being the head of a tribal family (literally, “head of his father’s house”), within the clans of Israel.

The delegation opens the indictment of sacrilege and rebellion with the official prophetic formula “thus says.” The distinction here is that it is not the Lord speaking but the “whole congregation of the LORD” (*Josh. 22:16, NKJV*). They launch the accusation that Israel committed trespass, treachery, and rebellion. The term “trespass” is the same Hebrew word that was used to describe Achan’s sin (*Josh. 7:1*) and appears several times in the first five books of Moses (*for example, Lev. 5:15; Lev. 6:2; Num. 5:6, 12*). The examples of Achan and Baal Peor serve as precedents: one for treachery and the other for rebellion. They also express the fear of the nine-and-a-half tribes that the act of building an unauthorized altar will lead to apostasy, idolatry, and immorality, which will incur the wrath of the Lord upon the entire nation of Israel.

We all have negative experiences from the past that will shape the way we deal with similar incidents in the future. How can God’s grace help to ensure that the tragedies of our past do not determine the way we treat our neighbors in the present?

A Gentle Answer

Read Joshua 22:21–29 in the light of Proverbs 15:1. What can we learn from the answer of the eastern tribes?

The answer of the accused, as straightforward and powerful as the accusation, constitutes both thematically and structurally the heart of the chapter. So far, the tribes have not replied to the accusations but instead have quietly listened to the allegations against them. Given the seriousness of the charges, their patience is exemplary as they display the true meaning of the proverb: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (*Prov. 15:1, NKJV*).

The opening sentence of the defense is a string of divine names attributed to Israel’s God: *El, Elohim, Yahweh* (*Josh. 22:22*). It is repeated twice with a growing force, as it becomes a solemn oath in order to dispel the doubts and false accusations that almost lead to a civil war in Israel. They are strongly convinced that God fully knows and understands the situation, and they hope that the present delegation will arrive at the same conclusion. The two-and-a-half tribes also recognize their accountability before the Lord by calling Him to take vengeance (*compare with Deut. 18:19, 1 Sam. 20:16*) if they are indeed guilty.

A surprising revelation follows, which on the one hand proves the basis of the indictment void (an altar cannot serve only as a place of sacrifice) and on the other hand discloses their true motivation. Fear of separation from Israel, rather than apostasy, was the true ground for their action. Thus, the building of the altar is not evidence of apostasy, as had been supposed. Actually, the contrary is true: they have acted out of fear of the Lord, just as the western tribes did. The true basis of Israel’s unity is not geography or the physical extent of the inheritance but their spiritual allegiance to the requirements of the Lord.

The genuine concern of the tribes on the west side of the river also is revealed in their authentic joy as the innocence of the tribes on the east is ascertained. Instead of feeling defeated by the arguments of their brothers, they show sincere happiness that their suspicions turned out to be wrong. Civil war in Israel was avoided and the unity of the nation preserved.

How do you handle false accusations? Share some of the principles that guide your attitude. For inspiration, see Psalm 37:3–6, 34, 37.

Conflict Resolution

Read Joshua 22:30–34. How does this entire incident give us some insights into conflict resolution and ways of ensuring the unity of the church? (Compare with Psalm 133; John 17:20–23; 1 Pet. 3:8, 9.)

The story of Joshua 22 has several principles of communication that can apply to everyday human relationships in the family, church, and community.

1. When things go wrong, or seem to go wrong, the best thing to do is to communicate instead of suppressing our observations until they explode. It is good for God's people not to remain indifferent when problems seem to arise. Of course, had the Transjordanian tribes communicated their intent of building an altar, the whole issue could have been avoided.
2. Even if one is convinced about their judgment, do not jump to hasty conclusions. The West Jordan tribes were quick to believe the rumor that reached their ears and to draw the false conclusion that the East Jordan tribes already had apostatized.
3. Talk about the real or perceived problems before you act on your conclusions.
4. Be willing to make a sacrifice in order to achieve unity. The West Jordan tribes were willing to give up part of their allotment to accommodate the other tribes, if being on the other side of the Jordan was the cause of their assumed apostasy.
5. When accused, falsely or rightly, give a gentle answer that turns away wrath. To answer an accusation with a counter-accusation will never lead to peace. Try to understand before attempting to be understood.
6. Rejoice and bless God when peace is reestablished. It is wonderful to see that the main Israelite congregation experienced genuine joy when they learned about the true motivation of the two-and-a-half tribes. They were not so proud of their judgment that they could not admit they were wrong in making it.

Had the East Jordan tribes apostatized, the people of Israel would have applied the requirements of the covenant. Unity can never be an argument to water down truth or give up on biblical principles. However, church discipline should always be the last (and not the first) resort, after attempts at reconciliation and pastoral assistance based on God's Word have failed. How different would our churches look if these simple principles were consistently applied!

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Division of Canaan,” pp. 517–520, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“While it is important on the one hand that laxness in dealing with sin be avoided, it is equally important on the other to shun harsh judgment and groundless suspicion. . . .

“The wisdom displayed by the Reubenites and their companions is worthy of imitation. While honestly seeking to promote the cause of true religion, they were misjudged and severely censured; yet they manifested no resentment. They listened with courtesy and patience to the charges of their brethren before attempting to make their defense, and then fully explained their motives and showed their innocence. Thus the difficulty which had threatened such serious consequences was amicably settled.

“Even under false accusation those who are in the right can afford to be calm and considerate. God is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misinterpreted by men, and we can safely leave our case in His hands. He will as surely vindicate the cause of those who put their trust in Him as He searched out the guilt of Achan. Those who are actuated by the spirit of Christ will possess that charity which suffers long and is kind.

“It is the will of God that union and brotherly love should exist among His people. The prayer of Christ just before His crucifixion was that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father, that the world might believe that God had sent Him. This most touching and wonderful prayer reaches down the ages, even to our day; for His words were, ‘Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word.’ John 17:20. While we are not to sacrifice one principle of truth, it should be our constant aim to reach this state of unity.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 519, 520.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How can the admonition of Paul to “count others more significant than yourselves” (*Phil. 2:3, ESV*) help us to avoid surmising evil about our brothers and sisters?
- ❷ Why do we often overreact to a situation because of our past failures or mistakes? How can we avoid this tendency?
- ❸ Discuss the significance of listening to the viewpoint of others. How can we develop a culture of listening in our church? (*Compare with James 1:19.*)
- ❹ We live in a society in which the requirements of our professional life, family responsibilities, church-related commitments, and other duties can seem overwhelming. How can the principle of doing everything as to the Lord not only make us more responsible but also bring us peace of mind?

Mission: God's Helping Hand

Kim Sun was excited to be sent to a remote area of the Philippines to serve as a missionary for 10 months with the 1000 Missionary Movement. But he wondered how he would spend those 10 months. He remembered that he had argued with his parents about the Bible for five years and gotten nowhere. Now he only had 10 months.

As he prayed, he thought, "If I bring the Bible first, maybe people will reject it like my parents. Maybe I first need to show them the character of Jesus."

Sun decided not to tell anyone that he was a missionary. He wouldn't tell anyone about biblical doctrines. He would just make friends for three months.

Upon arriving at the rural town where he would live, Sun visited each of its 20 to 30 houses to offer to help his new neighbors.

"Do you need help with anything?" he asked the woman at the first house. "I want to serve you. Please let me know how I may be of help." She happily accepted Sun's kind offer.

News of the helpful new neighbor spread from house to house in the neighborhood. Soon a line of people came by who needed or wanted help. The first woman whose house he visited kindly fed him lunch and supper as he helped 17 people in the neighborhood that first day.

As Sun walked home, he felt tired. But he thought, "I'm a missionary!"

Sun soon had a long list of names of people to visit who wanted his help. From Monday to Friday, he visited two homes in the morning and two in the afternoon.

He also found other ways to be a friend to the townspeople. He grew corn and gave it away. When people asked how much they owed, he replied, "Nothing! The corn came from God. God has paid for you." Once, he saw a boy with a sore on his leg, and he treated the sore with ointment. When the sore healed completely a few days later, the parents came to him and asked, "How can we ever thank you?"



Sun served the townspeople without identifying himself as a missionary for three months. It wasn't a secret; nobody asked him. He prayed about the next three months.

Kim Sun is associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Proverbs 15:1*

Study Focus: *Joshua 22; Eph. 6:7; John 7:24; Numbers 25; Prov. 15:1; 1 Pet. 3:8, 9.*

There is no nation without law and land. Such is the case with the biblical Israel, which receives God's law in Exodus and obtains the land in Joshua. However, as a kingdom of priests, they also needed a strong identity, rooted in their call as the chosen people to be God's representatives on earth. Such an identity would not endure without two basic elements: total commitment and unity. This theme is what Joshua 22 is all about.

At this time, the land has been conquered and divided among all the tribes—at least partially (because there is work yet to be done). Regardless of this fact, Israel still needed to understand what it meant to be Israel. Their needing to understand their identity is the purpose of the concluding speeches of the book, found in Joshua 22:1–8, Joshua 23, and Joshua 24:1–28.

As with the speeches found in chapters 23 and 24, Joshua's words in Joshua 22:2–8 to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, who were leaving for the other side of the Jordan, were intended to be a farewell discourse. In the discourse, Joshua unveils the path toward total commitment, which starts with love and finishes with service. The incident involving the Transjordan tribes, in the second part of the chapter, shows that without unity individual, or corporate, commitment to the Lord is also a threat to God's plan. If Israel wants to endure the challenges ahead, they cannot forget who they are in relation to God and one another.

Part II: Commentary

Joshua 22 contains the last narrative of the book, which is preceded by a short speech of the esteemed leader to the Transjordan tribes, who, after complying with Moses' command by helping their brothers in the conquest, were ready to cross back over the Jordan. Joshua's speech emphasized that even though they would be geographically separated, the Transjordan tribes were still part of Israel and should live accordingly. His message focused on the importance of wholehearted commitment to Yahweh within the context of the covenant, which requires service based on love. Despite the geographical separation, they were called to remain united in their devotion to the Torah and its giver. The erection of an altar would serve as a test of both their commitment and their unity.

From Love to Service

In Joshua 22, the leader of Israel nears the end of his commission. The land is divided, and Israel has relative control over the remaining territory to be conquered. Now the farewell season is set to start. As Joshua was convinced that he would not see the leaders of the Transjordan tribes again (which quickly proved wrong), he gave them the last instructions. In a typical covenant structure, Joshua commended them for following all that Moses and he himself had ordered and for helping their brothers during the conquest (*Josh. 22:2, 3*). Then he emphasized God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises and said that it was time for them to rest (*Josh. 22:4*). Before their departure, he summarized the core of the Torah (law) and explained the path to complete commitment in five infinitive phrases, progressing logically from love to service:

First, "*to love Yahweh, your God*" (*Josh. 22:5, NKJV*). Love is the foundation of God's character, and everything starts with it. Service without love is legalism. Such service is a distortion of the Torah, and it cannot be accepted by God. Alongside walking and keeping, loving is the summary of the law already in Moses' mouth before his death (*Deut. 10:12, 13, 20; Deut. 11:1; Deut. 6:4–15; Deut. 13:4, 5*). There is no contradiction between the Old and New Testaments' revelation of God: He created human beings to have a relationship with Him based on love, not fear. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:2: Without "love," we are "nothing" (*NKJV*). Our love is already a response, for we love Him because He loved us first (*1 John 4:19*). The object of our love is balanced between the divine transcendence of the Creator (*Elohim*) and the immanence of our Lord (Yahweh), who dwells with His people.

Second, "*to walk in all His ways*" (*Josh. 22:5, NKJV*). The Bible often uses the metaphor of "walking" to refer to the relationship between God and His people. It expresses, on the one hand, intimacy and, on the other, agreement. In a literal sense, God walks (Heb. *halk*) with His people (*Exod. 13:21; compare with Gen. 3:8*). In a spiritual sense, He calls them to walk with Him. Against this background, the image becomes relational, for "can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (*Amos 3:3, NKJV*). Additionally, it indicates the conduct expected from those who choose to walk with God, as seen in Leviticus 26:23, 24: "[If you] continue to be hostile toward me, I myself will be hostile toward you" (*NIV*).

Third, "*to keep His commandments*" (*Josh. 22:5, NKJV*). Keeping the law as an expression of God's will is the natural outcome of a thankful heart that comprehends what God has done. In this sequence, there is a progression from love as the starting point, the first spark, to a trusting relationship, which results in obedience. That is why John says that "His commandments are not burdensome" (*1 John 5:3, NKJV*). It's clear that true obedience

stems from love, as evident in Jesus' words to the disciples: " 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' " (*John 14:15, ESV*). Observing the law would bring life for Israel (*Lev. 18:5*)—not life in a salvific sense but a bountiful life in the land. By adhering to the divine principles, Israel could establish a just and prosperous society whose success would be a testament to the world.

Fourth, "*to hold fast to Him*" (*Josh. 22:5, NKJV*). The Hebrew verb *dbq* also means "to cling" or "to cleave" in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. In the latter, it indicates a state of allegiance, affection, and closeness. The first occurrence of the word describes a man clinging to his wife in marriage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined [*dbk*] to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (*Gen. 2:24, NKJV*). The same injunction to cling, but to Yahweh, also preceded by the appeal of loving and obeying Him, appears in Deuteronomy 30:20, in which Moses also presents the reason: " 'For He is your life' " (*NKJV*). Like a life preserver for a drowning person, Israel should cling to God as its only hope. The image also evokes the need for persistence and perseverance in keeping the connection with God in a land and in a time in which innumerable distractions would vie for their attention.

Last, "*to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul*" (*Josh. 22:5, NKJV*). The expression "to serve Yahweh" occurs 56 times in the Old Testament and often denotes "to worship" or "to keep the covenant faithfully." Serving Yahweh was the reason presented to Pharaoh for Israel's departure from Egypt: " 'And you shall say to him, 'The LORD God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, 'Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness' ' ' " (*Exod. 7:16, NKJV; compare with Exod. 12:31*). When Israel left Egypt, the people were essentially changing masters by accepting the service of Yahweh instead of Pharaoh. By serving God, they would experience blessing and fulfill their design to bless all families on the earth. Ultimately, the redeemed also are called to serve God forever (*Rev. 22:3*). Therefore, human beings find their true identity only when they willingly serve their Creator with love. This blending of love with service is the paradox of existence: when creatures live to serve themselves, they encounter only confusion, despair, and death. But when they surrender their self-serving attitude and submit to the will of the Creator, they find true purpose, satisfaction, and abundant life. We see this same reasoning behind Jesus' statement in Luke 9:24: " 'For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it' " (*NKJV*).

After delivering his farewell speech, Joshua blessed the Transjordan tribes and sent them away to their inheritance (*Josh. 22:6*). These words were meant to be the last of Joshua to them, but not long after, the episode of the altar would test their determination to follow Joshua's advice. The lack of unity would become an issue throughout the history of Israel.

Shortly after Joshua's death, their failure to love, walk, obey, hold fast, and serve revealed a lack of theological unity, as evident in the book of Judges, leading to the eventual disintegration of Israel. By the end of the book, a civil war nearly brought the Benjamites to extinction (*Judges 20, 21*). Although the united monarchy brought political and spiritual unity for a time, this state of affairs did not last long. After the schism between the northern and southern tribes, Israel never was one nation again. Apostasy proved to be a force of disintegration and disunity. The history of Israel illustrates that unity and total commitment are interdependent.

Part III: Life Application

Lasting Relationship

In the Bible, God's relationship with His people is often compared to a marriage, with God as a loving husband and Israel as an unfaithful wife. This metaphor illustrates the idea of God's unwavering love contrasted with Israel's disobedience. In the New Testament, the promised Messiah's arrival is likened to a wedding ceremony.

Think about your own experiences as a spouse, if married, or reflect on your own deep friendships and consider how Joshua's recipe for total commitment is essential for a happy and enduring relationship. Reflect on each of the following imperative actions individually and how they contribute to the success of a relationship:

1. Love _____

2. Walk _____

3. Respect _____

4. Cling _____

5. Serve _____

Lasting Unity

“A visitor to a mental hospital was astonished to note that there were only three guards watching over a hundred dangerous inmates. He asked his guide, ‘Don’t you fear that these people will overpower the guards and escape?’ ‘No,’ was the reply. ‘Lunatics never unite.’ ”—Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 65. In our spiritual sickness, we have difficulty uniting. From the New Testament perspective, unity in the church is a miracle carried out by the Holy Spirit in cooperation with us (*Eph. 5:2–15*).

1. **Yes or no: Are you contributing to division in the church, or are you working to promote unity?**

2. **In light of your answer above, if you find yourself hindering unity, how can you change your habits and attitudes to become a unifying force instead?**

God Is Faithful!



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Josh. 21:43–45; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; Joshua 23; Rev. 14:10, 19; Deut. 6:5.*

Memory Text: “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass” (*Joshua 21:45, ESV*).

When John F. Kennedy addressed the United States at his inauguration, on January 20, 1961, his speech was only 1,366 words, but it left an indelible mark on the American mind. As he encouraged his country to focus on their responsibilities instead of their privileges, he said: “With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”

As Joshua, the aging leader of the Israelites, sensed that he was nearing the end of his life, he decided to address the leaders of the nation and the Israelites (*Joshua 23 and 24*). Joshua 23 is focused more on the future and on how to worship God—exclusively. Joshua 24 reviews God’s faithful acts in the past, with the purpose to prompt a decision concerning who alone deserves to be worshiped: Yahweh.

This week, we will study together the first speech of Joshua, in which he glances back at the victories of Israel but at the same time traces the path of future success for Israel.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.

All Came to Pass

In Joshua 21:43–45, what picture does the book paint of God? How do these words apply not only to the historical Promised Land but also to the reality of our salvation (2 Tim. 2:11–13)?

These verses constitute the climax of the book and its theological summary. They highlight one of the major themes of the whole book: the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh, who keeps His promises and fulfills His oaths. This short section also summarizes the entire content of the book so far. Joshua 21:43 speaks of the allocation and settlement of the land (*Joshua 13–21*), while Joshua 21:44 refers to victories won over the enemies and control gained over the land (*Joshua 1–12*). All this retrospective is viewed through the prism of God's faithfulness. The Israelites must always remember that they can never claim the victories over their enemies or the land as their inheritance—except through God's loyalty to His given word.

He gave “all the land” (*Josh. 21:43, NKJV, emphasis supplied*), delivered “all their enemies into their hand” (*Josh. 21:44, NKJV, emphasis supplied*), and according to “all that He had sworn” (*Josh. 21:44, NKJV, emphasis supplied*), “all came to pass” (*Josh. 21:45, NKJV, emphasis supplied*). The repeated use of the word *kol*, “all,” six times in three verses (*Josh. 21:43–45*), emphasizes once again the truth that the land is the gift of Yahweh, and Israel can take no credit for receiving it. It was the Lord who swore to “give” the land and who “had given” their enemies into their hands.

All Israel's success has to be attributed solely to God's divine initiative and trustworthiness. This is equally true concerning our salvation: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (*Eph. 2:8, 9, ESV*).

Indeed, emphasizing God's faithfulness, Paul also wrote: “The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:11–13, *ESV*).

How does God's faithfulness in keeping His promises give us confidence that none of His promises for the future will fail? (See 1 Cor. 10:13 and 2 Cor. 1:18–20.)

A Sign of Concern

The glorious conclusion of the whole section (*Josh. 21:43–45*) carries within it the fulfilled condition of obedience. Success is never to be taken for granted; it is always linked to obedience to God's Word. Thus, the allotment of the land, besides being the token of God's faithfulness to Israel (*Neh. 9:8*), creates space for an open-ended future development based on Israel's attitude. Will Israel be able to secure what has been achieved?

Read Joshua 23:1–5. What are the major focal points of Joshua's introduction?

Joshua's speech moves from the old and aged speaker (emphasized twice) to the audience who will have to carry on the mission entrusted to them by God. He describes how the conquest of the land was possible: the Lord fought for them. Even though, because of their unfaithfulness and disbelief, the Israelites had to be involved in warfare after the Exodus, it was not through their military power but through God's intervention that they managed to possess the land.

God has given rest to Israel from its enemies, but there are some nations left that still have to be dispossessed. Victory is not an accomplished, unchangeable reality for Israel but an ever-present possibility by constant reliance in faithfulness on God's available help.

What are the similarities between how the Israelites conquered Canaan under Joshua's leadership and the way Christians today can live a victorious spiritual life? (Read *Josh. 23:10*, *Col. 2:15*, *2 Cor. 10:3–5*, and *Eph. 6:11–18*.)

The victories of the Israelites could not be attributed to their strength and strategy. Similarly, spiritual victory over sin and temptation have been secured through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but God's people today must constantly rely on the spiritual supplies provided by the Holy Spirit in order to live a triumphant life.

With so many wonderful promises before us, why do we still find it so easy to sin?

Clear Boundaries

Using the same words that were addressed to him at the beginning of the book (*Josh. 1:7, 8*), Joshua states that the task that lay ahead of Israel is not primarily military in nature. It is spiritual. It has to do with obedience to God's revealed will in the Torah.

Why do you think Joshua took such a strong position concerning Israel's relations with the surrounding nations (*Josh. 23:6–8, 12, 13*)?

The danger facing Israel is not the threat of the remaining nations' animosity but the risk of their friendship. Their weapons might not represent any challenge to Israel; however, their ideology and values (or counter-values) could prove to be more harmful than any military force. Joshua draws the attention of the leaders to the crucial fact that the conflict they have been involved in is first, and ultimately, spiritual. Therefore, Israel has to maintain its unique identity.

The prohibition of invoking the name of a god, swearing by it, and serving or bowing to it has to do with idolatry. In the ancient Near East, the name of a deity represented his or her presence and power. Invoking or mentioning the names of foreign gods in everyday greetings or business transactions meant recognizing their authority and helped lead the Israelites to seek their power in time of need (*compare with Judg. 2:1–3, 11–13*).

The danger of intermarriage with the remaining Canaanites consisted in losing Israel's spiritual purity. The intent of Joshua's admonition is not to promote racial or ethnic purity but rather to avoid idolatry, which can lead to the spiritual collapse of Israel. The case of Solomon is a dramatic example of the sad spiritual consequences of intermarriage (*1 Kings 3:1, 1 Kings 11:1–8*); in the New Testament, Christians are openly warned against seeking marital relationships with nonbelievers (*2 Cor. 6:14*), although, in the case of existing marriages, Paul does not advise divorce from the unbelieving spouse but calls them to live an exemplary Christian life in hope of winning the spouse to the Lord (*1 Cor. 7:12–16*).

Joshua's warning against harmful associations inevitably leads to the question of the Christian's relationship to the "world." How can we find a balanced relationship with the society that surrounds us?

The Anger of the Lord

How should we interpret the descriptions of God's wrath and retributive justice in Joshua (*Josh. 23:15, 16*) and elsewhere in Scripture? (See also *Num. 11:33; 2 Chron. 36:16; Rev. 14:10, 19; Rev. 15:1.*)

Israel already has experienced the Lord's anger during the wilderness wanderings (*Num. 11:33, Num. 12:9*) as well as in the Promised Land (*Josh. 7:1*) and was fully aware of the consequences of provoking Yahweh's anger by flagrantly breaking the covenant. These verses represent the climax of the severity of Joshua's rhetoric. It is shocking to hear that the Lord will destroy Israel, as the same term has been previously used to refer to the annihilation of the Canaanites. As surely as the promises of the Lord have been faithfully fulfilled concerning Israel's blessing, the curses of the covenant (*Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28*) also will become true if the Israelites reject the covenant. In light of the dispossession and destruction of the Canaanites, these verses demonstrate once again that Yahweh is ultimately the judge of all the earth. He declares war against sin, irrespective of where it is found. Israel was not sanctified, and did not acquire special merits, through participation in holy war any more than pagan nations did when they later became the means of Yahweh's judgment against the chosen nation.

It lies within Israel's power of choice to make the glorious certainties of the past the foundation for facing the future.

At first glance, the biblical teaching on God's anger seems to be incompatible with the affirmation that God is love (*John 3:16, 1 John 4:8*). Yet, it is exactly in the light of God's wrath that the biblical doctrine of God's love becomes even more relevant. First, the Bible presents God as loving, patient, long-suffering, and ready to forgive (*Exod. 34:6, Mic. 7:18*). However, in the context of a world affected by sin, the wrath of the Lord is the attitude of His holiness and righteousness when confronted by sin and evil. His wrath is never an emotional, revengeful, unpredictable overreaction. The New Testament teaches that Christ became sin for us (*2 Cor. 5:21*), and through His death we have been reconciled with God (*Rom. 5:10*). Whoever believes in Him will not have to face God's wrath (*John 3:36, Eph. 2:3, 1 Thess. 1:10*). The concept of the wrath of God presents God as the righteous judge of the universe and the One who upholds the cause of justice (*Ps. 7:11, Ps. 50:6, 2 Tim. 4:8*).

Cling to God

The only way Israel will be able to avoid the temptation of idolatry and the wrath of God is not by constantly remembering the “don’ts” of the covenant but by fostering a conscious and consistent allegiance to the Lord. The same verb, “to cleave, adhere” to the Lord (*see Deut. 4:4*), also is used to describe the marriage covenant that was intended between wife and husband (*Gen. 2:24*) or the loyalty of Ruth to Naomi (*Ruth 1:14*). It is important to note that, according to Joshua’s evaluation, such faithfulness has characterized Israel as a nation “to this day.” Unfortunately, the same assertion will not be true for later periods of Israel’s history, as the book of Judges sadly demonstrates (*Judg. 2:2, 7, 11; Judg. 3:7, 12; Judg. 4:1, etc.*).

Joshua appeals to Israel to love the Lord their God (*Josh. 23:11; compare with Deut. 6:5*). **Love cannot be forced; otherwise, it will cease to be what it essentially is. Yet, in what sense can love be commanded?**

In order for the Israelites to continually enjoy the blessings of the covenant, they will have to stay loyal to God. The Hebrew is extremely emphatic: “Be very careful for the sake of your own soul.” The word *’ahabah*, “love,” can refer to a wide range of human affections, including friendly attachment, sexual intimacy, maternal tenderness, romantic love, and loyalty to God. If we understand love for God as a conscious commitment and devotion to Him, it can be enjoined without violating its true nature (*compare with John 13:34*). God always intended that obedience to His commands should spring from a personal relationship with Him (“*I . . . brought you to Myself*” [*Exod. 19:4, NKJV*]; *Deut. 6:5; compare with Matt. 22:37*) based on what He has done for them in His great mercy and love.

The command to love God also expresses the mutual, but not symmetrical, nature of divine love. God desires to enter into an intimate, personal relationship with every person who reciprocates His love. Thus, His universal love to all constitutes the framework for the manifestation of our voluntary, mutual love.

Jesus gave a new commandment to His disciples. In what sense was this commandment new and old at the same time? (Read John 13:34, John 15:17, and 1 John 3:11; compare with Lev. 19:18.)

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Words of Joshua,” pp. 521, 522, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Satan deceives many with the plausible theory that God’s love for His people is so great that He will excuse sin in them; he represents that while the threatenings of God’s word are to serve a certain purpose in His moral government, they are never to be literally fulfilled. But in all His dealings with His creatures God has maintained the principles of righteousness by revealing sin in its true character—by demonstrating that its sure result is misery and death. The unconditional pardon of sin never has been, and never will be. Such pardon would show the abandonment of the principles of righteousness, which are the very foundation of the government of God. It would fill the unfallen universe with consternation. God has faithfully pointed out the results of sin, and if these warnings were not true, how could we be sure that His promises would be fulfilled? That so-called benevolence which would set aside justice is not benevolence but weakness.

“God is the life-giver. From the beginning all His laws were ordained to life. But sin broke in upon the order that God had established, and discord followed. So long as sin exists, suffering and death are inevitable. It is only because the Redeemer has borne the curse of sin in our behalf that man can hope to escape, in his own person, its dire results.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 522.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Review the evidence of God’s faithfulness in your life. What can you point to? At the same time, how do you respond when things haven’t gone as you have hoped or prayed for, or when claimed promises are met with silence?
- ② Discuss the biblical teaching about God’s anger. How would you present the wrath of the Lord as part of the good news?
- ③ What principles can you gather from this week’s lesson regarding association with unbelievers? How can we balance having clear boundaries in terms of our principles and practices while mingling with people to serve them and to look out for their well-being?
- ④ What are some of the obstacles that prevent you from clinging to the Lord with all your heart?

“Tell Us About the Bible”

The woman didn't want any help when Kim Sun arrived at her house at the regularly scheduled time.

“Why?” asked Sun, a South Korean serving as a missionary in her remote town in the Philippines. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No, no,” the woman replied. “I want you to take a break. You'll have more people to help around the neighborhood this afternoon. Here, have some cookies and relax.”

Sun was touched by the woman's concern. He had been helping people free of charge since arriving in the town three months earlier. Rather than tell people that he was a missionary, Sun had sought to be their friend and show God's love. For three months, the townspeople had accepted his help without any thought about him. But now, this woman was expressing care for his well-being. He realized that he had made a first real friend.

But she wasn't the last. Around the same time, many townspeople began to view Sun as their friend, and they piled him with questions.

“Why are you helping us for free?” said one.

“Where are you from?” said another.

Sun replied that he came from the 1000 Missionary Movement.

“I'm a missionary,” he said. “I want you to know Jesus Christ, so I have been serving you.”

The townspeople were astonished to hear that Sun was a missionary and said, “If you are a missionary, then why don't you tell us about the Bible?”

“Do you want to study the Bible?” Sun said.

“Yes! Yes!” they replied.

Before long, no one wanted Sun's help anymore. Everyone was studying the Bible with Sun. A few people didn't request Bible studies, but they agreed when Sun invited them. After three months of free labor, how could they refuse?

Sun remembered the mistake he made with his parents. As a new Adventist, he had sought to convince his parents to embrace his beliefs for five years and failed miserably. Now, he presented each Bible truth as an expression of God's love.



He shared the Genesis story of creation. “This is God's love for you,” he said. He read the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. “This is God's love for you,” he said. He spoke about Jesus dying on the cross. “This is God's love for you,” he said.

Kim Sun is associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read the rest of the story next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Joshua 21:45*

Study Focus: *Josh. 21:43–45; 2 Tim. 2:11–13; Joshua 23; Rev. 14:10, 19; Deut. 6:5.*

The Bible relates history with a specific purpose. The authors are not neutral observers; they always aim to convey a theological message. They depict the inspired version of what happened but are also interested in the meaning of history. Divine inspiration gave biblical historians the right glasses to see history. The prophetic meaning of the book of Joshua is more evident in the Hebrew tradition, which includes the book in the section called “Nevi’im” (The Prophets). The history between Joshua and 2 Kings is known as the “Former Prophets,” and it is part of the historical background that sets the stage for understanding the major and minor prophets, which are known as the “Latter Prophets” in the Hebrew canon.

Joshua’s final speeches in the book present its theological core. The main message can be summarized in three words: “God is faithful.” Because He also is powerful, not one of His promises can fail. The book presents the biblical perspective that history progresses in line with God’s sovereign purpose, regardless of Israel’s response. However, it points out that for Israel to receive and maintain God’s blessings, they must also be faithful. Regrettably, subsequent generations did not heed this admonition, as shown in the canonical flow of Scripture. In this context, Joshua and Judges represent two sides of the same coin: the first is God’s unwavering faithfulness, and the second is Israel’s persistent unfaithfulness.

Part II: Commentary

God’s faithfulness became apparent in the relationship with His children within the covenant context. The biblical account portrayed God’s unwavering devotion to His covenant, despite the backsliding attitude of human beings. God’s fidelity was an attribute of His character (*Deut. 32:4, Isa. 49:7*), which was rooted in His “loyal love” (*hesed*) (*Deut. 7:9, LEB*). In fact, God’s loyal love and faithfulness are often mentioned together (*Mic. 7:20, LEB*). The divine commitment to uphold His promises despite shameful human failures is a concrete manifestation of God’s loyal love (*hesed*), evident in every covenant throughout the Bible, from the Adamic to the Davidic covenants.

Adamic Covenant

The fundamental promise of the Adamic covenant involved numerous offspring and dominion over the earth (*Gen. 1:28*). Human beings, as bearers of the image of God, were meant to thrive as co-rulers of God by reproducing life and governing over creation. However, this divine blessing is disrupted by human disobedience. Despite this disruption, God's plans were not thwarted. In the new reality, childbirth became painful (*Gen. 3:16*), and human interaction with the earth was directly impacted (*Gen. 3:17–19*). Nevertheless, despite human failure, God remained committed to His plan and promised that the seed of the woman would destroy the serpent and restore the lost dominion (*Gen. 3:15*). The tragic chapter of Genesis 3 closed with Adam's naming Eve (in Hebrew, "life"), who would become the mother of all life (*Gen. 3:20*), clearly indicating that death would not have the final word.

Noahic Covenant

By Genesis 6, sin had led humanity almost to the point of no return. In the moral realm, there was a process of de-creation, reverting the good creation to a state of only evil all the time (*Gen. 6:5*). So, it comes as no surprise that de-creation takes place in the natural world, as well, bringing the earth to the initial state of watery silence. The silence was broken only by Noah and his family on the ark. After the Flood, God renewed the Adamic covenant with Noah, using the same phraseology found in Genesis 1:28 (*compare with Gen. 9:1*). As a new Adam, Noah was blessed with the promise of many descendants and dominion. However, Noah also failed. Echoing the Fall, Noah took the fruit of the vine, drank, and exposed himself, becoming naked, as Adam and Eve had before him. As a result of his action, a curse, which defined the future of his offspring, was pronounced. But still, God remained committed to His plan.

Abrahamic Covenant

The primeval history concluded with Genesis 11, where humanity once again rebelled against God. In an attempt to frustrate God's original plan to scatter humanity and to establish a dominion independent from Him (by making "a name for ourselves" [*Gen. 11:4, NKJV*]), humans constructed the Tower of Babel, which became a monument to confusion. Casting doubt on God's faithfulness to His promises, they epitomized legalism by seeking to save themselves without Him. From a canonical perspective, the appearance of Abraham at this point was not coincidental. Abraham's call showed that not everything was lost. There was still faithfulness on this earth. The same elements of original blessing were found in the Abrahamic covenant: numerous descendants and dominion

(*Gen. 12:1–3*). This covenant marked a fresh start for creation. Indeed, the parallels between the Abrahamic and Noahic covenants were remarkable and indicated that they were different phases of the same covenant. However, like Adam, Abraham failed by heeding Sarah's advice to take Hagar as a wife. The parallels between Adam's fall and Abraham's actions are evident, as shown in the table below.

Genesis 16	Genesis 3
So Sarai said to Abram (v. 2)	The woman said (v. 2)
And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai (v. 2)	You listened to the voice of your wife (v. 17)
[Sarai] took Hagar her maid (v. 3)	[Eve] took from its fruit (v. 6)
And [Sarai] gave her to Abram (v. 3)	And [Eve] gave it also to her husband (v. 6)

Undoubtedly, Abraham was obedient, but his obedience was too precarious. His offspring followed his faithful example but were also below the mark. In fact, the loyal lineage became a mess between Isaac and Jacob. Still, God could use them to be a blessing to the nations (see Joseph's story in which life was preserved and the Abrahamic seed held dominion), but they ended up stuck in Egypt, later to become enslaved. Nevertheless, God remained committed to His plan.

Mosaic Covenant

Even when God's people were slaves in Egypt, His plan for them was progressing. The echoes of Genesis 1:28 were evident in Exodus 1:7: "But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them" (*NKJV*). There was only one element missing: dominion. And that was where Pharaoh's concerns started. He devised a plan to decrease Israel's number to prevent them from becoming stronger than the Egyptians, who, in turn, would be dominated by them. In this context, Pharaoh was thus intervening in God's original plan, and for this reason he and his kingdom were judged.

God brought His people out of Egypt in order to renew the covenant with them on Mount Sinai. And again, humanity fell short of the divine expectation. Moses was still on the top of the mountain when the people started to worship the golden calf, attributing to it their deliverance from slavery (*Exod. 32:4*). Just a few weeks later, the Israelites were once again in rebellion, refusing to enter Canaan because of their unbelief

(*Num. 14:11*). But God was still committed to His plan. It is true that in each covenant new human players appeared, and God adapted to the new circumstances. But His faithfulness remained unaltered.

Davidic Covenant

The initial conquest under the leadership of Joshua was a success, but it still needed to be completed. In addition to the need to finish occupying the territory, God's people needed to keep what was conquered. The period of Judges shows the failure of the second generation to do that. In His mercy, God raised deliverers (called judges in the book) to defend Israel, but as the story progressed, even these judges became unfaithful, and chaos ensued. God called Samuel to be a priest, judge, and prophet simultaneously. As he grew older, though, the people realized that his children would not follow in his footsteps, and, motivated by the example of other nations, they asked for a king.

Again God adapted His plan—a move already foreseen in Deuteronomy—and allowed Israel to choose a king. Saul seemed to be the perfect fit, but his conduct revealed that he was a king according to the people's hearts. After Saul's rejection, David was anointed king by Samuel. God reaffirmed His promises to Abraham in His covenant with David: a great name, a place for Israel, and an offspring (*2 Sam. 7:9–14*). However, David and his descendants also failed miserably, leading Israel to split into two kingdoms, that were either destroyed (the northern kingdom) or exiled (the southern kingdom). Nevertheless, God still stuck to His plan and did not give up on His people.

This sequence of covenants shows a pattern of blessing, sin, and grace. It demonstrates that God's faithfulness and loyal love (*hesed*) remained constant over the ages. Jesus inaugurated the new covenant, which, based on His merits, would not fail as did the previous ones. In the eschatological lines from Daniel to Revelation, it is clear that in Jesus, the original blessings of Genesis 1 and 2 are restored to humanity: the numerous seeds of the woman receive the kingdom. Dominion is restored to the right hands again (*Dan. 7:13, 14*).

Part III: Life Application

God's Faithfulness Today

Joshua encouraged Israel to reflect on God's promises and past deeds to recognize His faithfulness in the present (*Josh. 23:2–5*).

Think about your life journey and pinpoint the seasons in which you have witnessed God's faithfulness more vividly than in other times. Share your insights with the class.

One of the best-known verses about the faithfulness of God is Lamentations 3:23, in which Jeremiah proclaims, “Great is Your faithfulness” (*NKJV*). At the time of this proclamation by Jeremiah, God’s people, because of their rebellion, were in a dark place. The three fundamental pillars of the Judean society were ruined: the land, the monarchy, and the temple. But even in the face of the hard reality of exile and destruction, the prophet boldly proclaimed the words that have inspired the beloved hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

1. How can you see God’s faithfulness amid the hard times of life?

2. How can the fact that God is trustworthy and dependable help you navigate life’s troubled waters when you do not see His actions clearly?

3. Consider the immediate context of Lamentations 3:23, especially verses 22 and 24. Notice how these verses help answer the questions above. Dwell upon God’s “mercies” (*hesed*), compassion, and the hope He instills in us in the context of these verses and in light of Jeremiah’s situation. What encouragement do these verses give you?

Our Faithfulness Today

In Galatians 5:22, faithfulness is identified as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

1. How can you mirror God’s faithfulness vertically in your relationship with Him?

2. How can you mirror God’s faithfulness horizontally in your association with your fellow human beings?

Choose This Day!



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Joshua 24; Gen. 12:7; Deut. 17:19; Deut. 5:6; 1 Kings 11:2, 4, 9; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8.*

Memory Text: “ ‘And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD’ ” (*Joshua 24:15, NKJV*).

The final chapter of Joshua is set in the context of a covenant renewal ceremony, but this time conducted by the aged leader of Israel. Although not a covenant itself but rather a report of a covenant renewal ceremony, the chapter has the elements of ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties: (1) a preamble in which the suzerain, the initiator of the treaty, is identified; (2) the historical prologue, which describes the relationship between the overlord and the vassal; (3) the covenant stipulations asking the vassal to manifest total allegiance to the suzerain based on, and motivated by, gratitude; (4) blessings for obedience and curses for breaking the covenant; (5) witnesses to the pledge of the vassal; (6) deposition of the document for future reading; and (7) ratification of the covenant.

Joshua is close to the end of his life; no replacement is on the horizon. The covenant renewal is a reminder to the Israelites that their king is Yahweh Himself and that, if they remain loyal to Him, they will enjoy His protection. Israel does not need a human king. As a theocratic nation, they have to ever keep in mind that their only king is the Lord.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.

You Were There!

“Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God” (*Josh. 24:1, NKJV*).

Shechem was the place where Abraham had built an altar upon his arrival in the land and where God first gave him the promise of the land (*Gen. 12:6, 7*). Now, when the promises given to Abraham have been fulfilled, Israel renews the covenant with God at the very place where the first promise had been given. The appeal of Joshua recalls the words of Jacob to “‘put away the foreign gods which are among you’ ” (*Josh. 24:23, NKJV; compare with Gen. 35:2–4*). The geography of the event in and of itself conveys the call to demonstrate undivided loyalty to the Lord, rejecting all other “gods.”

Read Joshua 24:2–13. What is the main thrust of God’s message to Israel?

God is the main subject of the reviewed past: “I took,” “I gave,” “I sent,” “I plagued,” “I did,” “I brought you out,” “I delivered you,” and so on. Israel is not the main protagonist of the narrative but rather its object. It is God who created Israel. Had not God intervened in the life of Abraham, they would have been serving the same idols. Israel’s existence as a nation is not the merit of any of its ancestors but the exclusive work of God’s grace. The fact that the Israelites are settled in the land is not a ground for boasting but the very reason why they should serve God.

The Lord’s speech contains a shift that occurs five times between “you” and “they” (the fathers). The fathers and this generation at Shechem are treated as one. Joshua is seeking to show what Moses affirmed already in Deuteronomy 5:3, that the Lord did not make the covenant only with the fathers but with all those present at the moment of Joshua’s speech. The vast majority there now had not experienced the Exodus. Not “all” of them were at Horeb. Yet, Joshua says that all of them were there. In short, the lessons of the past must be appropriated by each new generation. The God who worked for the ancestors in the past is ready to act on behalf of the present generation.

What are ways in which we can, as a church, have a better sense of corporate responsibility—that is, grasp the idea that what we do impacts everyone in the church?

In Sincerity and Truth

What did Joshua appeal to the Israelites to do (*Josh. 24:14, 15*)? What does it mean to serve the Lord in sincerity and in truth?

Joshua's appeal clearly expresses the fact that the Israelites have to decide whether, through loyalty to their Creator, to keep their uniqueness and live in the land or to fade back into being one among many idolatrous peoples, with no clear identity, purpose, or mission. The choice is theirs.

Joshua's appeal is twofold: Israel should fear the Lord and serve Him "in sincerity and in truth." To fear the Lord does not mean a life of perpetual trembling and emotional insecurity. It rather refers to the reverence and awe that stem from the recognition of the unfathomable greatness, holiness, and infinity of God on the one hand and our smallness, sinfulness, and finitude on the other. To fear God is a constant awareness of the magnitude of His demands, a recognition that He is not only our heavenly Father but also our Divine King. Such awareness will lead to a life of obedience to God (*Lev. 19:14, Lev. 25:17, Deut. 17:19, 2 Kings 17:34*). While "fear" describes the inner attitude that must characterize an Israelite, the practical outcome of reverence to God is service.

The service that is required of Israel is characterized by two Hebrew terms: "in sincerity" and "in truth." The first term (*tamim*) is mostly used as an adjective to describe the perfection of the sacrificial animal. The second term that describes Israel's service is "truth," or "faithfulness" (Heb. *'emet*). The term generally connotes constancy and stability. It usually refers to God, whose character is intrinsically characterized by faithfulness, which is manifested toward Israel.

A faithful person is somebody who is dependable and trustworthy. Basically, Joshua is asking Israel to demonstrate the same loyalty to God that God has displayed toward His people in the course of their history. It is not merely outward compliance to His requirements but what springs from an undivided inner consistency of the heart. Their lives should reflect gratefulness to God for what He has done for them. Basically, it is how we today should relate to Jesus, as well.

What does it mean to you to serve the Lord "in sincerity" and "in truth"? What are some of the distracting factors in your life that prevent your full devotion to God?

Free to Serve

As a true and faithful leader, Joshua respects the free will of his people and wishes that Israel would serve the Lord out of free choice rather than compulsion. That was exactly the point made by the deliberate use of the verb “chosen” (*see Josh. 24:22*). In other passages *bahar*, “to choose,” describes Yahweh’s election of Israel (*Deut. 7:6, 7; Deut. 10:15; Deut. 14:2*). Israel is free to say “no” to Yahweh after their divine election, but that would be nonsensical and absurd. Israel can say “yes” to God and continue to live, or they can turn their backs on Him and cease to exist.

What was Israel’s response to Joshua’s appeal (*Josh. 24:16–18*)? **Why** do you think Joshua reacted to their answer in the way he did (*Josh. 24:19–21*)?

In their categorically positive answer, the Israelites recognize that the God of the patriarchs and of their fathers is now also “our God” (*Josh. 24:17, 18, NKJV*), whom they are willing to serve with undivided allegiance. After such an unquestionable affirmation of their loyalty, we would expect words of affirmation and encouragement from Joshua. However, this is not the case. The dialogue between Joshua and the people takes a radical turn in which Joshua seems to play the role of the devil’s advocate. He shifts from speaking about God’s gracious providence in the past to threatening the Israelites with a picture of a God who is not easy to serve.

Joshua knows the instability of the first generation, who promised to obey God in similar terms (*Exod. 19:8, Exod. 24:3, Deut. 5:27*) yet who forgot their promises while the words were still on their lips (*Exodus 32*). Thus, Joshua, by means of rhetoric, wants to make the Israelites aware of several things. *First*, the decision to serve God is a serious one. It will have to shape the entire nation according to God’s revelation. The blessings of pursuing that goal are evident, but the consequences of disobedience must also be fully understood. Forgiveness of sins is not an unalienable right of humanity but a miracle of God’s grace.

Second, the decision of the Israelites to serve God must be their own decision, not something imposed by a leader, even Joshua.

Third, Israel must realize that humans cannot serve God in their own strength. Serving God is not achieved by a mechanical adherence to the stipulations of the covenant but by a personal relationship with the saving Lord (*compare with Exod. 20:1, 2; Deut. 5:6, 7*).

The Dangers of Idolatry

Read Joshua 24:22–24. Why would Joshua need to repeat his appeal to the Israelites to get rid of their idols?

The threat of idolatry is not a theoretical one. Earlier, on the plains of Moab, in a similar context, Moses asked for the same decision (*Deut. 30:19, 20*). The gods that are in view now are not the ones of Egypt or those beyond the river, but they are found “among them.” Therefore, Joshua pleads with his people to incline their hearts to the Lord. The Hebrew term used here, *natah*, means “to stretch,” “to bend.” It describes a God who is expected to bend down and listen to prayers (*2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 31:2, 3; Dan. 9:18*), and it is also the attitude required of Israel later by the prophets (*Isa. 55:3, Jer. 7:24*). It is employed to indicate the apostasy of Solomon when his heart inclined toward foreign gods (*1 Kings 11:2, 4, 9*). The sinful human heart does not have the natural tendency to bend and listen to God’s voice. It takes conscious decisions on our part to incline it toward fulfilling God’s will.

The Israelites’ answer literally reads: “We will listen to His voice.” This expression emphasizes the relational aspect of obedience. Israel is not asked to routinely follow lifeless rules. The covenant is about a living relationship with the Lord, which cannot be fully expressed by mere regulations. Israel’s religion was never intended to be legalistic; rather, it was to be a constant conversation in faith and love with a holy and merciful Savior.

Even after the people’s threefold promise to serve the Lord, which implies, as Joshua commanded, the removal of foreign gods from among them, there is no report that it actually happened. Throughout the entire book, it became customary to report on the fulfillment of Joshua’s commands (or those of Moses) as examples of obedience. The lack of it now at the end of the book leaves the plea of Joshua open-ended. The central appeal of the book to serve the Lord is not only for Joshua’s generation but also for each new generation of God’s people who would read or hear this message.

How often have you promised the Lord you would do something, but then you didn’t? Why didn’t you? What does your answer tell you about grace?

Finishing Well

Read the concluding words of the book of Joshua written by an inspired editor (*Josh. 24:29–33*). How are these words not only looking back to Joshua's life but also looking forward to the future?

In the epilogue reporting on the deaths of Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest brings the book of Joshua to a sobering end. By recounting together the burial of Joshua, the burial of Eleazar, and the burial of Joseph's bones, the author creates a contrast between the life outside the land and the beginning of life in the land. There is no need to wander anymore. The earthly remains of the leaders don't have to be carried along with them. The patriarchs buried their relatives in a cave (*Gen. 23:13, 19; Gen. 25:9, 10*), on a plot purchased at Shechem (*Gen. 33:19*). Now the nation buries its leaders in the territory of their own inheritance, thus having a sense of permanence. The promises given to the patriarchs have been fulfilled. Yahweh's faithfulness constitutes the historical thread that links Israel's posterity to its present and future.

As the concluding paragraphs of the book link the whole narrative to a larger story in the past, they also open the way for the future. Ex-archbishop of Canterbury Lord George Cary, in a keynote speech delivered at Holy Trinity Church in Shrewsbury, declared that the Anglican Church was "one generation away from extinction."

In fact, the church is always one generation away from extinction, and so it was with the Old Testament people of God. A great chapter in the history of Israel comes to an end. Its future depends on what kind of answers it will give to the many questions that concern the future. Will Israel be loyal to the Lord? Will they be able to continue the unfinished task of possessing the whole land? Will they be able to cling to Yahweh and not get entangled in idol worship? A generation under Joshua has been faithful to the Lord, but will the next generation maintain the same spiritual direction that has been traced by its great leader? Each successive generation of God's people, reading the book of Joshua, must face these same questions. Their success depends on the nature of the answers they provide in their everyday lives and how they relate to the truths they have inherited.

Joshua, like Paul, "fought the good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7, NKJV). What was the key to Joshua's success? What decisions do you need to make today in order to finish with the same assurance of salvation?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Words of Joshua,” pp. 522–524, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Among the multitudes that came up out of Egypt were many who had been worshipers of idols; and such is the power of habit that the practice was secretly continued, to some extent, even after the settlement in Canaan. Joshua was sensible of this evil among the Israelites, and he clearly perceived the dangers that would result. He earnestly desired to see a thorough reformation among the Hebrew host. He knew that unless the people took a decided stand to serve the Lord with all their hearts, they would continue to separate themselves farther and farther from Him. . . . While a portion of the Hebrew host were spiritual worshipers, many were mere formalists; no zeal or earnestness characterized their service. Some were idolators at heart, who would be ashamed to acknowledge themselves as such.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 19, 1881.

“This solemn covenant was recorded in the book of the law, to be sacredly preserved. Joshua then set up a great stone under an oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. ‘And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.’ Here Joshua plainly declares that his instructions and warnings to the people were not his own words, but the words of God. This great stone would stand to testify to succeeding generations of the event which it was set up to commemorate, and would be a witness against the people, should they ever again degenerate into idolatry.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1881.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the meaning of the expression: “He [the LORD] is a holy God. He is a jealous God” (*Josh. 24:19, NKJV*). In what sense is God a jealous God?
- ❷ How is our love for God connected to the freedom of choice that He grants us? That is, could we truly love if we didn’t truly have freedom? Can true love ever be forced? If not, why not?
- ❸ What are some practical ways that leaders of the church today can pass on the torch to the next generation?
- ❹ Think about the life of Joshua and the conclusion that in all his life the Israelites served the Lord. What conclusion would you like people to draw about your life?

“How Do We Love God?”

Kim Sun, a missionary from South Korea, shared 15 stories of God’s love with the residents of a remote town in the Philippines for three months.

The townspeople were amazed to learn that God created everything in the world for them. They marveled at God’s love in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. Their hearts were touched to realize that Jesus died on the cross for them. After three months, many said, “We understand that God loves us. But how can we respond? How do we love God?”

“It’s so true,” Sun thought in amazement. “When we know someone loves us, we want to show the love in return.” It was time to dig deeper into the Bible.

For the next three months, he taught about the seventh-day Sabbath, clean and unclean food, tithe and offerings, and other Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs. Many townspeople accepted what they learned. They wanted to know how to love God, and the doctrines showed the way.

Sun served as a missionary for 10 months: offering three months of labor, free of charge, three months of stories about God’s love, and three months of digging deeper into the Bible. That left one month to say goodbye. Sun spent the last month going door-to-door, inviting people to follow Jesus. “I’m leaving soon,” he said. “I would like you to join my church. I’ve been so blessed, and I’d like you to be blessed, too.” Many townspeople accepted his invitation.

Ellen White says, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143). For ten months, Sun practiced Christ’s method: mingling with people, desiring their good, showing sympathy, ministering to their needs, and winning their confidence; then he invited them to follow Jesus.

Today, Sun is a full-time missionary. He works as associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, an organization that is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Southern Asia-Pacific Division. He trains hundreds of missionaries every year at its headquarters, built with the help of a 1996



Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, in Silang, Philippines. “Being a missionary is the highest calling,” he said. “Missionaries don’t only give Bible studies. We especially need to show Jesus in our lives.”

Just as the 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is still being felt across the Southern Asia-Pacific Division and beyond through the work of the 1000 Missionary Movement, this quarter’s Thirteenth Sabbath Offering can, with God’s blessing, also have a long-lasting impact. Thank you for your generous offering this Sabbath.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Joshua 24:15*

Study Focus: *Joshua 24; Gen. 12:7; Deut. 17:19; Deut. 5:6; 1 Kings 11:2, 4, 9; 2 Tim. 4:7, 8.*

In Mosaic fashion, the book of Joshua concludes with a speech in which Joshua urges the people to take a stand. After a long and intense life, Joshua is ready to complete his mission. In the first part of the address, Joshua's words are Yahweh's, recounting what God has done for Israel since Abraham's call (*Josh. 24:1–13*). By using 19 verbs in the first person, God reinforces the passive role of Israel in this enterprise, in contrast with the repeated use of the second person “you/your” to describe Israel.

The second part of the speech begins with the adverb “now” (*atta*), introducing Joshua's last call for a present response, an appeal to the people to exercise their freedom of choice. A covenant renewal ceremony follows, during which two witnesses are set up: the people themselves and another stony memorial. Still echoing the end of Deuteronomy, the dialogue between Joshua and the people sets a tension between two trajectories: one toward conformity, stability, and unity, and another toward disloyalty, uncertainty, and disintegration. At this crossroads, each individual decision rests. Joshua makes his choice clear in the center of the chapter: “ ‘As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD’ ” (*Josh. 24:15*).

The book concludes with three graves (*Josh. 24:29–33*). The note about the final resting place of Joseph's remains brings closure to a cycle that began in Genesis. Like the death of Aaron and Moses in Deuteronomy, the deaths of Joshua and Eleazar mark the end of an era. In the uncharted waters of this new age, Israel can trust in God's unshattered commitment to His promises.

Part II: Commentary

At Shechem Again

In the Bible, geography is also theology. God's providence in bringing Israel to Shechem for this covenant renewal is not coincidental. Centuries before, Jacob was at Shechem when God appeared to him, instructing him to go to Bethel (*Gen. 35:1*). In preparation for the journey, Jacob urged his household to “ ‘put away the foreign gods

that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments' ” (*Gen. 35:2, NKJV*). The people complied, handing over their foreign gods and the ornamental rings, which then were buried under an oak. As a result, the terror of God was upon the inhabitants of Canaan until Jacob arrived in Bethel to build an altar in honor of Yahweh (*Gen. 35:3–7*). In Bethel, God reaffirmed His promise to Jacob in familiar terms: “ ‘I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land’ ” (*Gen. 35:11, 12, NKJV*).

Likewise, Joshua promotes a spiritual revival, reaffirming God's commitment to His promises. Standing on the buried idols, he reminds Israel about the danger of idolatry and the importance of faithfulness. At this point, the children of Israel are at the same crossroads. Shechem is a place of decision, a place to look into the future without forgetting the past. Such a choice would determine not only the individual but also the collective destiny of Israel. The removal of the foreign gods in Shechem cements the singular identity of Jacob's household. The issue in Joshua's time was whether Israel would remain Israel or not.

I or We?

One of the worldview differences between modern Western society and the society in the biblical world is the relationship between individual and corporate personalities. In temporal terms, individual choices were always seen in connection with the whole community. This notion is evident in Joshua 24:6, in which God says, “ ‘Then I brought *your fathers* out of Egypt, and you came to the sea’ ” (*NKJV*, emphasis added), even though many in the audience were not born yet when the Exodus took place.

Wheeler Robinson was the first scholar to apply the concept of “corporate personality” to the biblical text. The concept, which comes from English law, refers to “the fact that a group or body can be regarded legally as an individual, possessing the rights and duties of an individual.”—J. W. Rogerson, “Corporate Personality,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 1156. Robinson uses the term in two senses: corporate responsibility and corporate representation. Although criticized for lacking precision and using (now) outdated anthropological principles, Robinson's idea should not be entirely ignored. In biblical studies, his concept has been appropriately updated as “corporate solidarity,” which refers to “the oscillation or reciprocal relation between the individual and the community that existed in the Semitic mind. The act of the individual

is not merely an individual act, for it affects the community and vice versa. The individual is often representative of the community and vice versa.”—G. K. Beale, *The Right Doctrine From the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), p. 37.

Corporate solidarity is not only an undeniable reality behind the biblical text—and still alive within many societies that emphasize interdependence, conformity, and strong family identity today—but also a basic presupposition of biblical typology. In fact, it is at the center of the gospel. On the negative side, although we are not responsible for Adam’s sin, his failure opened the door to evil, whose influence no one except Christ was able to contain in a comprehensible way. As Paul says, “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (*Rom. 5:12, NKJV*). On the positive side, Christ’s victory as the new Adam, the representative of the new humanity, brings the influence of good and the possibility of victory to all: “One died for all, then all died” (*2 Cor. 5:14, NKJV*). Paul complements this notion by saying: “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (*Rom. 5:18, NKJV*).

Individual Freedom

In the context of the temporal blessings and curses of the covenant, God never dealt with His people individually. The New Testament image of the church as the body of Christ is rooted in this social understanding. In the Old Testament, the sum of individual decisions always affected the people as a whole. This concept is evident in Daniel’s prayer, in which he seeks forgiveness for sins he had not personally committed (*Daniel 9*).

However, Scripture clearly affirms the value of individual freedom. According to Ezekiel, “‘the soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself’ ” (*Ezek. 18:20, NKJV; compare with Deut. 24:16*). From an eternal point of view, God will deal individually with us. We can face the consequences of the sins of others but not their guilt.

Joshua’s final speech presents this tension between collective and individual identity. While in a collective sense he mentions God’s acts of redemption in the past and alludes to God’s acts of judgment in the future, his appeal is individual. This individual freedom should be understood within the confines of the covenant. In fact, freedom without form is a vacuum. People can decide whether to marry, but once they agree to marry, they are bound within the limits of the marriage covenant. In practical terms, unchecked freedom turns into bondage.

In biblical language, it's important to note that being freed from slavery is referred to as redemption, not freedom. When Israel left Egypt, it wasn't just about being able to choose whether or not to serve but rather about having the freedom to choose whom they would serve. In fact, "Joshua's challenge cements the case that those who become Israel are those who are chosen and rescued by Yahweh. Those who *remain* Israel are those who choose and serve Yahweh."—Mark Ziese, *Joshua* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2008), p. 383. In this sense, "freedom is the state that emerges after God has acted to remove all hindrances—social, spiritual (sin and death), economic, and institutional—that block our creational purpose. This purpose is to know, love, worship, and enjoy God forever."—Esau McCaulley, "Freedom," in Douglas Mangum, ed., *The Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Logos Edition (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014).

Freedom is the most powerful gift God gives to His creatures. However, as human history shows, it is also the most dangerous one because it can be misused with dire consequences. God is, essentially, love, and there is no love without freedom. Therefore, the point is not whether we have freedom but how we will use this amazing gift. This question is addressed at the end of the book of Joshua.

Part III: Life Application

The Challenge of Freedom

It's not easy to be free. This idea is demonstrated in the history of Israel, whom God led into the wilderness to learn the essence of freedom. Although this period was prolonged, the desert school was not meant to last more than a year and a half—roughly the time between the Exodus and the arrival in Kadesh Barnea (*Exod. 19:1, Num. 10:11, Deut. 1:2*).

1. Why do we need to learn how to use freedom?

2. If you are a parent, consider how you may teach your kids to use their free will. Discuss your ideas.

3. How can difficult circumstances boost our learning?

Idolatry Today

Consider the following definition of an idol proposed by Martin Luther in his comment on the first commandment in his *Large Catechism*: “Confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. . . . Whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is really your God.”—Luther, *Luther’s Large Catechism*; trans. by John Nicholas Lenker (Minneapolis, MN: Luther Press, 1908), p. 44. Idolatry was a basic feature of the culture in biblical times. Indeed, it was a continuous threat to God’s people that eventually led Israel and Judah to captivity.

Although, as a Seventh-day Adventist, you don’t worship the statues of gods, how can idolatry still be a threat to your faith?

The End

Like Deuteronomy, the book of Joshua ends with a reference to burial places. It seems odd to conclude a book that is predominantly about victories with this kind of detail.

1. Why do you think the book concludes in this manner?

2. What message is God conveying about the nature of leadership and His continuous control over history?

3. How might this message affect your perspective on leadership and the divine oversight of the church?

This quarter's study, entitled *Uniting Heaven and Earth: Christ in Philippians and Colossians*, by Clinton Wahlen, examines these two epistles of Paul. They have important similarities. Above all, they reveal Christ, the only One who is able to unite heaven and earth. He is the ladder that Jacob saw stretching from earth to heaven (*Gen. 28:12*; compare *John 1:51*). And as the Son of man and the Son of God, Christ redeems us from sin, and He intercedes for us.

In studying these letters, we will see both these aspects of Jesus. We'll see Paul wrestling from prison with problems in one church he raised up (Philippi) and in one that he himself never even visited (Colossae). The connections Paul established throughout the "world church" of that time enabled him, even from a Roman prison, to respond to challenges. He knew his time was short, and he did all that he could to draw the church closer to heaven and to each other. In doing so, he shows us how God's church today can unite with Heaven to fulfill the last-day commission of Revelation 14, which we know as the three angels' messages.

Lesson 1—Persecuted But Not Forsaken

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Paul, the Prisoner of Jesus Christ** (*Eph. 3:1*)

MONDAY: **Paul in Chains** (*2 Cor. 6:5*)

TUESDAY: **Paul in Philippi** (*Acts 16:12*)

WEDNESDAY: **Paul and Colossae** (*Col. 4:9*)

THURSDAY: **The Churches of Philippi and Colossae** (*Phil. 1:1–3; Col. 1:1, 2*)

Memory Text—*Philippians 4:4, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Paul saw a larger purpose for the adverse circumstances he faced. Perhaps we can learn from him as we face our own trials.

Lesson 2—Reasons for Thanksgiving and Prayer

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Fellowship in the Gospel** (*Phil 1:3–8*)

MONDAY: **Paul's Prayer Requests** (*Phil 1:9–11*)

TUESDAY: **Spiritual Discernment Applied** (*Phil 1:12–18*)

WEDNESDAY: **Gospel Fruit** (*Col. 1:4–8*)

THURSDAY: **Prayer Power** (*Col. 1:9–12*)

Memory Text—*Philippians 1:6, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: We, like Paul, have much to be thankful for. We have experienced God's grace and peace in profound ways—ways that even angels cannot comprehend.

Lessons for People Who Are Legally Blind The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free in braille, on MP3 disc, and via online download to people who are legally blind and individuals who cannot hold or focus on ink print. Contact Christian Record Services, Inc., PO Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981, option 3; email: services@christianrecord.org; website: www.christianrecord.org.