

## CHAPTER 8: Joshua 6 thru 24 and Judges 1 and 2

The first city the Israelites come up against in their quest to conquer the Promised Land is the large walled city of Jericho. God gives Joshua instructions as to how they are to take the city.

**The Lord told Joshua, “See, I am about to defeat Jericho for you... Have all the warriors march around the city one time, do this for six days. Have seven priests carry seven rams’ horns in front of the ark.”** (Joshua 6:2-4) This is not exactly what you would call conventional warfare.

**“On the seventh day march around the city seven times, while the priests blow the horns. When you hear the signal from the rams’ horns, have the whole army give a loud battle cry. Then the city walls will collapse and the warriors should charge straight ahead.”** (Joshua 6:4-5) So that is precisely what Joshua instructs the people to do.

We have already seen that some of the residents of Jericho, namely Rahab and her family, have turned to God. Rahab told the Israelite spies how she and the people of Jericho had heard all about what God had done. She had made this statement to the spies: **“I know the Lord is handing this land over to you. We are absolutely terrified of you. For we heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you left Egypt...”** (Joshua 2:9-10)

Well, with this knowledge of God that the people in Jericho apparently have combined with them now seeing the mighty army of Israel walking around their city, what will the city of Jericho do? Will they surrender? God gives the people of Jericho plenty of opportunity – seven days – to do just that.

The Israelite army with the priests out in front leading the way march around Jericho one time and then they return to their base camp. They do this for six straight days just as God said. On the seventh day, they march around the city seven times. Following God’s instructions, the priests then blow their trumpets and the people shout. The walls of Jericho fall down flat and that allows the Israelites to take the city.

**They annihilated with the sword everything that breathed in the city, including men and women, young and old, as well as cattle, sheep and donkeys.** (Joshua 6:21)

But, as promised, Rahab and her family are spared. **Yet Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, her father's family, and all who belonged to her. She lives in Israel to this very day because she hid the messengers Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.** (Joshua 6:25)

And so it is that God wins the battle for His people. Their role is simply to trust God, to obey Him and then watch Him at work. **The Lord was with Joshua and he became famous throughout the land.** (Joshua 6:27)

The next city the Israelite have in their sights is the much smaller city of Ai. Joshua sends spies to scope out Ai. **They returned and reported to Joshua, "Don't send the whole army. About two or three thousand men are adequate to defeat Ai. Don't tire out the whole army, for Ai is small."** (Joshua 7:3) In other words, "We got this, Joshua!"

But things will not go exactly as planned.

Little do they know that one of their fellow Israelites, a man named Achan, has taken and hidden some of the spoils of battle from Jericho. He has stolen items designated for God alone. Achan's self-seeking, self-serving "bottom line" action will prove to be disastrous for the Israelite army.

**So about three thousand men went up, but they fled from the men of Ai. The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them and chased them from in front of the city gate all the way to the [ravines] and defeated them on the steep slope. The people's courage melted away like water.** (Joshua 7:4-5)

**Joshua tore his clothes; he and the leaders of Israel lay face down on the ground before the ark of the Lord until evening... Joshua prayed, "O Master, Lord! Why did you bring these people across the Jordan to hand us over to the Amorites so they could destroy us?"** (Joshua 7:6-7)

God reveals to Joshua why Israel had been defeated. It was because of sin in Israel's camp. Joshua investigates further and discovers that many items from Jericho belonging to God were buried in Achan's tent. Achan is taken out and stoned to death along with those in his family who had been complicit in covering up Achan's sin. With the sin in the camp now dealt with, God directs Joshua to head back to Ai and take it.

Joshua splits his army into two groups. One group is sent out under the cover of darkness. They hide themselves just outside the city walls of Ai. The next morning when

it is light Joshua marches a second group up to the city walls. The king of Ai leads his army out to fight against the Israelites. They're pretty confident based on what had happened before. Joshua and his men pretend to retreat as the army of Ai chases after them. With the city left undefended, the first group who had been hiding comes out.

**They entered the city, captured it, and immediately set it on fire... When Joshua and all Israel saw that the men in ambush had captured the city and that the city was going up in smoke, they turned and struck down the men of Ai.** (Joshua 8:19, 21) And that is how Joshua and his army conquered Ai.

Through the painful experience at Ai, Joshua and the Israelites learn a valuable lesson. If they're going to be successful in taking possession of the entire land that God has promised them, they must be completely obedient to God and trust Him. Victory and blessing are not to be taken for granted just because they are God's covenant people. God expects His people to obey Him! This all ties directly to the blessings and curses Moses talked about in Deuteronomy 28. Joshua feels these are important enough that he reminds the entire Israelite nation of them.

The news of Israel's advance westward from their base camp at Gilgal thru the cities of Jericho and Ai quickly spreads. The people of Gibeon figure out fairly quickly that they are next. They fear for their lives. They know that they are no match for the approaching Israelite army.

In a desperate effort to survive, the king of Gibeon sends a small delegation to Joshua pretending to have just traveled from a faraway land. They look the part – dirty, windblown, worn out clothes, stale bread, holes in their sandals, etc. **The men [of Israel] examined some of their provisions, but failed to ask the Lord's advice. Joshua made a peace treaty with them and agreed to let them live. The leaders of the community sealed it with an oath.** (Joshua 9:14-15)

When Joshua finds out the truth, that these weary-looking travelers are actually neighbors living in Canaan, the Gibeonites are allowed to live. After all Israel just made a peace treaty with them. As part of the agreement Israel vows to protect the Gibeonites. But many of the Gibeonites are reduced to a slave status. They are made woodcutters and water carriers for the tabernacle.

The Israelites have just learned another valuable lesson. They must seek God's guidance in all matters. As followers of God they need to rely on God's wisdom and not their own limited understanding.

The Gibeonite king's way of dealing with Israel stands in sharp contrast to the way the other Canaanite kings will approach Israel. Those other kings form various alliances among themselves to fight against Israel. It doesn't turn out to be a very wise strategy.

In battle after battle, with God fighting for them, the Israelites win convincingly. A coalition of men, no matter how strong they are, is NO match for the one true God of Israel!

In one instance the coalition of Canaanite kings deploys their troops to fight against Gibeon. Because of the Israelite peace treaty with Gibeon, they come to their aid. As the Israelites fight against the evil Canaanites the Lord rains down large hailstones upon the Canaanite armies – **more died from the hailstones than the Israelites killed with the sword.** (Joshua 10:11)

Later, in one of the greatest miracles recorded in scripture, God extends the daylight. **The sun stood motionless in the middle of the sky and did not set for about a full day. There has not been a day like it before or since... the Lord fought for Israel!** (Joshua 10:13-14) God's intervention turns the tide of the battle in Israel's favor. Joshua tracks down the five kings of the Canaanite coalition. They're found hiding out in a cave. Joshua pulls them out and executes them. You just don't mess with the God of Israel!

Joshua 11 and 12 summarize Israel's many victories. In all, God and His people defeat and destroy 31 pagan kings and take their cities. They conquer the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites. But there are still several other people groups living in the land that must be dealt with.

At this point I want to address an issue that bothers a lot of people whenever they read the book of Joshua and here it is – Why does God command Joshua and the Israelites to wipe out whole Canaanite cities? Earlier we read the following passage at Jericho: **They annihilated with the sword everything that breathed in the city, including men and women, young and old...** (Joshua 6:21) Then in the various battles that ensued we read such things as: **they left no survivors** (Joshua 10:37); **no one who breathed remained** (Joshua 11:11); and **they totally destroyed all the people.** (Joshua 11:14) Does God really command the mass genocide of the Canaanites? That doesn't sound like a loving God. In fact many voices in our world today point to these Joshua passages as their proof texts that God is a mean, vengeful God. Well, everything has a context, so let's go back...

In Deuteronomy the people were preparing to enter the land of Canaan. God told them, **“Do not think to yourself after the Lord your God has driven [the Canaanites] out before you, ‘Because of my own righteousness the Lord has brought me here to possess this land.’ It is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out ahead of you.”** (Deuteronomy 9:4) So it's not just that God is removing the Canaanites so that His people can possess the land. Certainly that's part of it and it has been the focus of much of the story to this point. But

there's something else going on here. You see, God's instruction to Joshua and the Israelites to go in and wipe out the Canaanites is God's judgment on their wickedness.

In the biblical narrative so far we have seen acts of God's judgment on wickedness several times. God wiped out sinful humanity in by sending a worldwide flood (Genesis 6). His wrath fell upon Egypt thru a series of terrible plagues (Exodus 7 to 10). It culminated with God killing all the firstborn children (Exodus 13). God drowned the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exodus 14). God even judged His own people when the earth opened up and swallowed the rebellious sons of Korah out in the wilderness (Numbers 16). So there IS a precedent for divine judgment on wicked people. What God does to the Canaanites here in the book of Joshua is no different.

If you haven't figured it out by now, God hates sin!!

God told His people: **"You must not do as they do in the land of Canaan into which I am about to bring you..."** (Leviticus 18:3) The Canaanite practices are evil. God doesn't want them to influence His people. So then, the Canaanites MUST be removed from the land.

**"After they have been destroyed from your presence, be careful not to be ensnared like they are; do not pursue their gods... For everything that is abhorrent to Him, everything He hates, they have done when worshipping their gods. They even burn up their sons and daughters before their gods!"**

(Deuteronomy 12:30-31) That is the horrible extent of the Canaanite's evil! From God's perspective they have been allowed to live in the land long enough. Now God's judgment will fall upon them through the swords of His people Israel!

Just for the record, not all of the Canaanites people groups get destroyed. We have already seen the examples of Rahab and the Gibeonites. A handful of Canaanites turn to the God of Israel and are spared. Others groups survive because of Israel's disobedience in not removing all inhabitants of the land. Finally some groups survive by escaping the battles.

After several years of warfare in the land, Joshua divides the conquered territory among the 12 tribes of Israel. Joshua 13 thru 19 provides a detailed description of the boundary lines for each tribe's territory. It must be pointed out that the division of the land occurs before the entire land has been taken. God reminds Joshua of the land that still remains to be conquered. The remaining Canaanite inhabitants are to be dealt with by each individual tribe after they have received their particular portion of land as an inheritance. Unfortunately many of the tribes fail to do this.

**So Joshua said to the Israelites, "How long do you intend to put off occupying the land the Lord God of your ancestors has given you?"** (Joshua 18:3)

A large portion of the Promised Land along the Mediterranean coastline and north into the hill country will remain unconquered for many years.

An aging Joshua addresses the nation. Speaking on God's behalf Joshua reminds the people, **"I took... I made [Abraham's] descendants numerous...I assigned... I sent... I struck Egypt... I intervened... I brought you to the land... I rescued you... I handed them over to you... I gave you the victory..."** (Joshua 24:3-12) "I, God, did all that for you, Israel." And then Joshua adds this great thought: **"I gave you a land in which you had not worked hard; you took up residence in cities you did not build and you are eating the produce of vineyards and olive groves you did not plant."** (Joshua 24:13)

Joshua challenges the people to remain faithful to their covenant with the one true God. This will lead to a long life and blessing in the land.

**Joshua warned the people, "You will not keep worshipping the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God... If you abandon the Lord and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you; He will bring disaster on you and destroy you, though He once treated you well."** (Joshua 24:19-20) Joshua sounds about as optimistic as Moses had been.

**The people said to Joshua, "No! We really will worship the Lord! We will worship the Lord our God and obey Him."** (Joshua 24:21 and 24) The Israelite people renew their commitment to follow God. But will they really? How long will it take before the people fall back to their old faithless ways? We will get the answer to that question in the first two chapters of Judges.

At age of 110 Joshua, that strong and courageous commander in chief of Israel, dies. For the first time in 80 years the people are left without a clear-cut leader. It is the end of an era. The sad period covered in the book of Judges begins.

**After Joshua died the Israelites asked the Lord, "Who should lead the invasion against the Canaanites and launch the attack?" The Lord said, "The men of Judah should take the lead. Be sure of this! I am handing the land over to them."** (Judges 1:1-2) With the men of Judah taking the lead, the people have partial success conquering the land. Do you remember Caleb? He along with Joshua had given the good report to Moses all those years ago. Well, Caleb is still alive and very prominent during this time and he is from the tribe of Judah.

The Israelites only have partial success. Consider the following passages: **The men of Benjamin, however, did not conquer the Jebusites living in Jerusalem... The men of Manasseh did not conquer Beth Shean... The men of Ephraim did not conquer the Canaanites living in Gezer... The men of Zebulun did not conquer the**

**people living in Kitron... The men of Asher did not conquer the people living in Acco... The men of Naphtali did not conquer the people living in Beth Shemesh...** (Judges 1:21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33)

**The Amorites forced the people of Dan to live in the hill country. They did not allow them to live in the coastal plain.** (Judges 1:34) The tribe of Dan could not possess their allotted territory along the Mediterranean coastline. The inhabitants there were too fierce. Instead, they migrate north to the hill country. The Amorites mentioned here become better known later as the "Philistines." They will remain a major thorn in the side of the Israelites for years.

**The people worshipped the Lord throughout Joshua's lifetime and as long as the elderly men who outlived him remained alive. These men had witnessed all the great things the Lord had done for Israel. That entire generation passed away; a new generation grew up that had not personally experienced the Lord's presence or seen what He had done for Israel. The Israelites did evil before the Lord by worshipping the Baals. They abandoned the Lord God of their ancestors who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They followed other gods...** (Judges 2:7-12)

Just ONE generation later, a single generation removed from Joshua, the Israelite nation abandons God. What a tragic statement about Israel's spiritual condition!