

Small Group Guide – Week 12 GOD WHO STRENGTHENS Part 2

The Church at Brook Hills

March 22-28, 2010

Joshua 4-24

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Canaanite Destruction

Through even a cursory reading of Joshua one begins to ask how Israel had any right to conquer the land of Canaan and completely destroy the people living in it. Many may struggle with how God could desire such a thing. Scenes like those described in Joshua have also caused many to believe that God was somehow different in the Old Testament than He is in the New Testament. After all, Jesus Himself in the New Testament instructs God's people to love their enemies and pray for those that persecute them (Matthew 5:44). What's more is that Christ followers today condemn these practices. To question the brutality of the events in Joshua is completely legitimate and it is good to wrestle through the tension they create for the Christ follower.

At the heart of this issue is a firm understanding that the Israelites were acting in obedience to God. They were carrying out God's command to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan. Without God's specific and unique command to them they had absolutely no right to destroy other nations and take their land. It is also very important to note that God's Word in Deuteronomy gives two sets of laws concerning warfare. One set governs wars fought outside the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:10-15) and one set governs those fought inside the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). It is only in this second set, those related to wars fought in conquest of the land, that the people are supposed to be devoted to complete destruction. This was for Israel's preservation – so that they would not be led away from God. In fact, despite the strict terms given in the Law regarding the destruction of nations, those in the Promised Land that professed faith in God were allowed to survive (Joshua 2:9; 9:1-27; 11:19).

Though it is disturbing to think of entire people groups being destroyed we must be careful to recognize that it is God's right to judge and take any means necessary to preserve Israel's purity. Israel was never commanded to commit genocide but God's specific command to destroy the nations of the Promised Land was unique and should not be used to support such actions today.

How can Christ's command to "love your enemies" be harmonized with God's command for the Israelites to destroy the nations living in the Promised Land?

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Study the Text . . .

The Conquest of the Land

After leading the Israelites across the Jordan River, Joshua is now ready to fight his first battle and take the Promised Land. Before he leads the people to victory, however, he encounters a curious figure. Read Joshua 5:13-6:27

- Why was the ground holy where Joshua was standing? (For some possible reasons, see Exodus 3:1-10, Leviticus 25:23, Joshua 1:6)
- Joshua asked what message the man had for him (5:14). What was the man's message from the Lord (5:15, 6:2-5)? What was the significance of this message?
- What was this encounter with the commander of the Lord's army meant to teach Joshua? (God is the One who brings the victory for Joshua and the Israelites, Joshua 6:2, 8:7, 10:8, 11:1, 11:8)

Group Discussion . . .

- What does Joshua's encounter with the commander of the Lord's army teach us about God and His character?
- What relevance does this portrait of God have for our daily lives? What difference should it make on how you approach the biggest struggles and challenges you face today?
- What do we unintentionally communicate to God when we totally neglect this aspect of His character?

Study the Text . . .

Israel's continued loyalty to Yahweh

At the end of Joshua the land has been entered, conquered and distributed. The book concludes with a final meeting between Joshua and the people of Israel. It's here that the Mosaic covenant made years earlier with a previous generation is renewed as God reminds Israel of His past faithfulness and the people rededicate themselves. Read Joshua 24.

- What is the significance of Shechem, the geographical location of this meeting? See Genesis 12:1-7, 35:4; Joshua 8:30-35.

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- How many times is the personal pronoun “I” used by God in reference to himself in verses 1-13? Why is this significant?
- Why does God recount the people’s history in verses 1-13? What point is He trying to make to the people?
- According to verses 14-15 how should the people respond?
- How many times is the word “serve” used in verses 14-33? In light of what God has done in verses 1-13 why is this the appropriate response?
- Within the context what does it mean for the Israelites to “serve” the Lord?
- According to verses 16-18 why did the Israelites choose to serve the Lord?
- Why do you think Joshua tells the people what he does in verses 19-20 in response to 24:16-18?

Group Discussion . . .

- What challenges would the people of Israel face that would make it difficult to keep the promise they made in verses 16 and 24? What about you? What daily challenges are you presented with that make it difficult to serve the Lord and easy to forsake Him?
- Joshua challenged the people of Israel to make a firm commitment regarding whom they were going to serve (v. 15) - either the one true Lord or the many idols and “gods” in the land. What current day idols or “gods” are you often tempted to serve?
- One reason the people were motivated to continue to serve the one true God, rather than the many gods of the land, is because they remembered God’s past faithfulness to deliver and fight for them. What motivates you to continue to serve God rather than the idols of today?