MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study One

Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

By accepting Moses' mantle of leadership, Joshua was no longer the servant of Moses. He was the leader of the Hebrews.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

When the Lord commissioned Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, He spoke to Moses from a burning bush. Forty years later, when Moses died, the Lord commissioned Joshua to lead the people into the promised land. Instead of setting a bush on fire, however, the Lord ignited Joshua's heart with this fiery mandate:

> *"Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* (Joshua 1:9)

The same God who once led Moses now led Joshua. The same divine voice that Moses heard rumbling in the wilderness of Midian now reverberated on the plains of Moab. Joshua would have to press on without Moses, his mentor and friend, but he would have the Lord to guide him and the Lord's presence to empower him. As A. W. Tozer wrote, "Nothing of God dies when a man of God dies."[1]

Joshua may have wondered whether anyone could fill Moses' sandals. "There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). How could Joshua compare? Was he really up to the task?

The Lord thought so, and that's all that mattered.

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Has the Lord put you in a situation in which you doubt your abilities? Perhaps someone you've relied on is no longer with you, and you truly feel alone. Open this *Searching the Scriptures* study of Joshua's commissioning with a prayer of dependence on the Lord.

> *Father, the task You have laid out for me is too big for me to accomplish on my own. I need Your arm under me and around me, supporting and empowering me to do what You've called me to do. I depend wholly on You. Show me from Your Word the truth to help me feel strong and courageous. I pray in Jesus' true name. Amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Joshua, the sixth book of the Bible, traces the Hebrews' conquest of the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Begin this new series on Joshua by examining Pastor Chuck Swindoll's overview of the book on the following page. The book can be divided into two main parts consisting of twelve chapters each (Joshua 1–12 and 13–24). Below the book chart, write down a basic outline of Joshua.

Searching the Scriptures Method and Resources

Searching the Scriptures is a four-step Bible-study method that includes observing the passage, interpreting the meaning, correlating with similar passages, and applying the principles. For helpful instruction, consult the Insight for Living Ministries online web page, *"How to Study the Bible for Yourself."* There, you can also follow the *link to purchase a copy* of Pastor Chuck's book, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs.*

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES
The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Pastor Chuck Swindoll

JOSHUA
OVERVIEW BIBLE CHART

OUTSIDE CANAAN: PROMISES GIVEN	COMMISSIONING THE LEADER PREPARING THE PEOPLE	CONQUERING THE ENEMY		DIVIDING THE SPOIL				WARNING THE VICTORS	**INSIDE CANAAN: PROMISES FULFILLED**
	Joshua 1–5	**Joshua 6–9**	**Joshua 10–12**	**Joshua 13–17**	**Joshua 18–19**	**Joshua 20–21**	**Joshua 22**	**Joshua 23–24**	
	Invasion of Land	**Subjection of Land**		**Distribution of Land**				**Conclusion**	
	Commission *(ch. 1)* Spying *(ch. 2)* Jordan *(ch. 3)* Memorials *(ch. 4)* Consecration *(ch. 5)*	Central campaign Jericho *(ch. 6)* Defeat at Ai *(ch. 7)* Victory at Ai *(ch. 8)* Gibeonites *(ch. 9)*	Southern campaign *(ch. 10)* Northern campaign *(ch. 11)* Summary of kings *(ch. 12)*	PHASE ONE Reuben, Gad, ½ Manasseh *(ch. 13)* Caleb's life story *(ch. 14)* Judah *(ch. 15)* Ephraim *(ch. 16)* ½ Manasseh *(ch. 17)*	PHASE TWO Benjamin *(ch. 18)* Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, Dan, Joshua *(ch. 19)*	PHASE THREE Cities of refuge *(ch. 20)* Levites—48 towns *(ch. 21)*	PHASE THREE Civil war threat *(ch. 22)*	Joshua's final words to Israel *(ch. 23)* Covenant renewed *(ch. 24)*	
THEME	Obedient faith brings abundant blessing.								
KEY VERSES	Joshua 1:8; 24:14–15								
CHRIST IN JOSHUA	Typified by Joshua, a victorious leader whose name means "Yahweh is salvation"; pictured in Rahab's scarlet cord, which symbolizes safety through Christ's blood								

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

Now read Pastor Chuck's summary *article* of Joshua along with any other source you may have in your library. What significance does the name, *Joshua*, have to the main message of the book? Why is the book of Joshua important in biblical history? Answer the questions below and record any other notes you find interesting in your research.

Observation: The Commissioning of Joshua

In *Searching the Scriptures*, we begin with observation. Read *Joshua 1:1–9* carefully and slowly. Follow the progression of thought from God's initial statement, "'Moses my servant is dead'" (Joshua 1:2), to God's promises and commands. Put yourself in Joshua's place as he listens to God speak and try to imagine Joshua's thoughts and feelings.

What was the Lord's charge to Joshua, according to *Joshua 1:1–2*?

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Joshua 1:1–9

The Lord backed His charge with what promise in *Joshua 1:3–5*? Compare this promise with the Lord's promise to Moses in *Deuteronomy 11:22–25*.

God concluded His commission of Joshua with three identical commands. What mandates did the Lord give Joshua after each of these commands to help him be strong and courageous?

Joshua 1:6: _____

Joshua 1:7–8: _____

Joshua 1:9: _____

> ***When we go through the death of a loved one, we think that all is over for us. We forget that the same God who chose to take the loved one left us for a significant purpose.***
> **—Pastor Chuck Swindoll**

Interpretation: Principles from Joshua's Commissioning

Interpretation uncovers the truths that the original author of the biblical text intended his audience to understand. What does the passage mean? From these central truths, you can glean principles that apply not just to Joshua and his culture, but to all people at all times.

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

"Moses . . . Is Dead" (Joshua 1:2)

The reality of Moses' death was obvious. The nation had just finished thirty days of mourning (*Deuteronomy 34:5–8*). The Lord didn't tell Joshua anything he didn't already know. Why do you think the Lord opened His address to Joshua with this cold splash of reality?

What principle or principles can you draw based on these circumstances? A principle can be crafted by using this formula: "When . . . [state a premise or situation], then we should . . . [state a response that captures the biblical truth]." For example:

> *When a godly leader dies, we should face the reality of the person's death.*

Try writing your own principle.

> *The main message Joshua must remember is that even though a great deal of changes were going to occur in his life, nothing of God would change.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

"The Time Has Come for You to Lead" (Joshua 1:2)

Joshua had a close bond with Moses—who trusted Joshua and valued him. Moses sent Joshua into Canaan as one of the twelve spies (*Numbers 13:1–16*) and selected Joshua to command the Hebrew army (*Exodus 17:8–13*). When Moses climbed Mount Sinai, he took Joshua with him (*24:13*). Moses even changed Joshua's name from "Hoshea" to "Joshua" (*Numbers 13:16*)—which means, "the Lord has delivered." Forty years his senior, Moses was like a father to Joshua, as well as a mentor and spiritual model.

When the Lord told Joshua, "The time has come for you to lead" (Joshua 1:2), what implied messages was the Lord giving Joshua?

What principle or principles emerge about moving on after grief?

Never once did God tell Joshua, "Now you be Moses the Second," or "You fill his shoes." No, Joshua had a new leadership style. He was a new man to lead. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

"I Will Not Fail You or Abandon You" (Joshua 1:5)

What foundational promises—that would carry Joshua through hard times—was the Lord giving the newly selected leader in these verses?

> *"No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you."* (Joshua 1:5)
>
> *"Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."* (Joshua 1:9)

What principle or principles do you glean about managing fear?

> ***In grief, we get afraid. We hear noises in the night. We don't have our loved one to reassure us. The Lord says, "Don't be afraid, I'm with you."*** **—Pastor Chuck Swindoll**

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

"Study This Book of Instruction Continually" (Joshua 1:8)

The pathway to success in the Hebrews' mission included what essential actions, according to *Joshua 1:7–8*?

What principle or principles emerge from these verses about the centrality of the Scriptures in our walk with God?

> *In your grief, open your Bible. Don't just listen to someone else read it for you. Read it aloud, read it repeatedly. Let it speak to you. Let it comfort you.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Affirmations of God's Presence

The same promise God gave Moses and Joshua, "'I will be with you'" (Exodus 3:12), He gives us through Christ. What do the following verses promise about the Lord's presence in us?

Matthew 1:23: _____

Matthew 28:20: _____

John 14:15–20: _____

Hebrews 13:5–6: _____

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

How do these promises encourage and inspire you?

Application: Transitions, Reminders, and Applications

Through their wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites transitioned from a ragtag assembly of newly freed slaves to an organized community with a national identity. Now, perched on the plains of Moab overlooking the Jordan River, the Hebrews were peering into a new world—a homeland for their newborn nation. Moses had brought them to this point. Joshua would take them forward.

Perhaps you are standing on the precipice of your "new" world. Here are some possibilities:

1. You lost a loved one or you face the possibility of losing that person. *Remember, nothing of God dies when someone you love dies.* The Lord was with you before, and He is with you now. He has a purpose for you and plans for using you as He did for Joshua.

2. In your organization, a former leader has been replaced by a new leader. *Remember, be flexible, adaptable, and willing to release what once was.* Don't resist changes that may be necessary to move forward.

3. You may be the new leader, following a "legend" who came before you. *Remember, God's hand is on your life.* Don't compete with your predecessor. Acknowledge the differences and be yourself. Seek to please the Lord alone.

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Setting the Leader on Fire

Joshua 1:1–9

Do any of these transitions describe your situation? Are you in a different kind of transition? How can you apply the principles you learned from Joshua's example?

In whatever circumstances you may find yourself, a few simple lessons ring true for every believer. Saturate yourself in the Scriptures—study the Word, meditate on it, and obey it! Knowing and doing God's commands was the key to Joshua's success and ours. Also, stay involved with people who can support you, and seek ways to help others in need. As you do, God will make clear His plan for your future.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, comfort me through loss. When my "Moses" dies, remind me of Your unchanging promise to never abandon me. I cling to You in my grief. Now, hold onto me as I step into the new world ahead of me as I seek to follow Your purpose for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest* (Wheaton, IL: Living Books, Tyndale House, 1995), 5.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Two

Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

Good leadership is not about the leader. It's about turning everyone's focus to the Lord and making Him the focus.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

The book of Joshua bears the name of its central character—who is not who you might think. Tucked into the meaning of Joshua's name is the true hero of the book, the top commander who issues all the orders and wins all the battles. *Joshua* means, "the *Lord* saves."

The chief figure of the book is the God of Israel, the Lord, *Yahweh*. His saving power is the mighty thematic current that carries the plotline from beginning to end, from the commissioning of Joshua in the opening chapter to the death of Joshua in the final chapter.

In between these bookends is the record of Israel's conquests, their possession of their new homeland, and the nation's culminating vow of loyalty to God alone and His laws. With each victory along the way, the nation exclaims, *Joshua—the Lord saves!*

This *Searching the Scriptures* study highlights Joshua's confidence as a leader, which grew out of his faith in the Lord. By keeping his eyes on God and pointing the nation to Him, Joshua inspired his followers—the highest mark of success for any leader.

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

PREPARE YOUR HEART

In prayer, bind your confidence to your Savior as you open His Word.

> *Father, I claim Jeremiah's words, "Blessed are those who trust in the LORD" (Jeremiah 17:7). Renew my hope in You through my study and fortify my confidence. You alone are "my strength and shield" (Psalm 28:7). In Jesus' name, amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In *Joshua 1:1–9*, the text from our previous *Searching the Scriptures* study, the Lord affirmed His commitment to Joshua and, by extension, to the nation.

1) **Land:** "Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you" (Joshua 1:3)

2) **Presence:** "I will be with you" (1:5)

3) **Faithfulness:** "I will not fail you or abandon you" (1:5)

4) **Covenant:** "the land I swore to their ancestors" (1:6)

These commitments echo God's covenants with Abraham (*Genesis 12:1–7*) and Moses (*Exodus 3:12*; *Deuteronomy 11:23–24*). God was accomplishing what He promised them.

In return, the Lord asked His people to . . .

> *"Be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you. Show love to the LORD your God by walking in his ways and holding tightly to him."* (Deuteronomy 11:22)

Known as a man who "wholeheartedly followed the LORD" (Numbers 32:12), Joshua modeled the close walk with God that God seeks in all His people. If there was a single key to Joshua's powerful influence and success as a leader, then this was it. Joshua's commitment to God and abiding relationship with Him permeated his leadership style.

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

Out of these deep spiritual roots grew Joshua's unwavering confidence as a leader. Joshua was dignified, direct, and decisive in his leadership—characteristics we'll observe in his initial addresses to the people.

Observation: The Leader's Confidence and the People's Response

Observation looks at the words, metaphors, contrasts and comparisons, and flow of thought in the biblical passage. The goal is simply to grasp what the text says without exploring its meaning yet. A Bible atlas, such as *Zondervan Essential Atlas of the Bible*, can be helpful in locating cities and regions.

For this study, you'll need a map illustrating the location of Israel at the time of the conquest. The maps in the back of most Bibles give a broad overview of the regions. For an online reference, open the map, *"Twelve Tribes of Israel after the Conquest of Canaan."*

Searching the Scriptures Study Tools

You can read Pastor Chuck Swindoll's list of favorite resources in the online article, *"Basic Bible Study Tools,"* or watch Pastor Chuck in the video, "*How to Use Bible Study Tools*."

Instructions to the Leaders—Joshua 1:10–11

What do you observe about Joshua's first orders in *Joshua 1:10–11*? Whom did he address? What was his tone? What was the focus of his message?

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

Instructions to Certain Tribes—Joshua 1:12–18

Joshua directed his second address to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These tribes had asked Moses to grant them land on the east side of the Jordan River. The Israelites had already taken control of this land, and it was spacious enough for their large flocks and herds. Moses agreed to the request on one condition—they must first fight with their brothers and help them conquer the land on the west side of the Jordan (*Numbers 32:1–33*).

Open your Bible maps and find the location of twelve tribes after the conquest. Notice the location of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The other half of Manasseh inhabited land on the west of the Jordan. What do you observe on the maps?

What instructions did Joshua give these tribes, according to *Joshua 1:12–15*?

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

What do you observe about the people's response to Joshua in *Joshua 1:16–18*? What qualities stand out?

> *The leadership responsibility fell on Joshua. The people must now get used to a new voice, see a new style of leadership, move into a new territory, and take on new challenges. They must now be led by a man they've only known as Moses' assistant.*
> —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Lessons from Joshua's Confidence, Israel's Response

The meaning of a passage emerges in interpretation. The Israelites had never fought the kind of battles that awaited them on the other side of the Jordan. Unlike the nomadic tribes the Hebrews had encountered in the wilderness, the Canaanites lived in fortified cities and brandished well-equipped and experienced armies. What was the underlying message Joshua communicated to his officers in *Joshua 1:11*?

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

Joshua exuded confidence in the Lord, not in the vastness of the Israelites' numbers or the strength of their swords. What lesson in leadership was Joshua modeling?

> ***Joshua was saying to them, "The Lord is the one who goes before us. It is His land, and He is giving it to us."*** **—Pastor Chuck Swindoll**

When Joshua addressed the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, he repeated the name of the Lord:

> *"'The LORD your God is giving you a place of rest.'"* (Joshua 1:13)
>
> *". . . until the LORD gives them rest."* (1:15)
>
> *". . . possess the land the LORD your God is giving them."* (1:15)

What underlying message was Joshua communicating to these tribes . . . and to the reader?

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

Notice that the people respond to Joshua in kind: "'May the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses'" (Joshua 1:17). Also, notice the vows the people make:

"We will do . . ." (1:16)

"We will go . . ." (1:16)

"We will obey . . ." (1:17)

What lesson do you glean about the proper response to godly leadership?

Leaders, people want you to lead them in strength and courage. They don't want fear to grip your heart. They want you to be led by the living God. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: The Name of Jesus

The meaning of the names, *Joshua*, and its Greek form, *Jesus*, links the two men with a tight thematic bond. *Jesus*, or *Yeshua* in Hebrew, means, "the Lord saves." The angel of the Lord told Joseph to name the baby conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb *Jesus*, because "'he will save his people from their sins'" (Matthew 1:21).

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

What thematic comparisons can you make between Jesus and Joshua regarding their roles and their missions?

Joshua's life goal was to lead wanderers out of the wilderness into a place of rest, in fulfillment of God's covenant. The Hebrews conquered the land, but not completely. They never entered the rest God had prepared for them. What did the writer to the Hebrews say about their failure and God's plan to complete His covenant of rest in Jesus, according to *Hebrews 4:8–11*?

What Joshua set out to do physically, Jesus accomplished spiritually. How does this truth inspire you to follow Jesus as your Joshua?

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

Application: Five Responses

Joshua's confidence in the Lord inspired five responses from the nation.

1. They were completely open to the Lord's plan. A willing attitude characterized their mind-set.
2. They had no hidden agenda and didn't try to work a "deal" to get something in return.
3. They transferred allegiance from Moses to Joshua.
4. They blessed their new leader, "May the LORD your God be with you" (Joshua 1:17).
5. They encouraged Joshua to obey God's Word. "Be strong and courageous!" (1:18).

What can you do to follow their example regarding your spiritual leader?

Which of these responses can you apply to your relationship with Jesus, your Savior?

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Confident Leadership . . . Ideal Response

Joshua 1:10–18

How can you settle into His rest today?

We can encourage our spiritual leaders to place their confidence solely in the Lord as Joshua did and pray for them. Our confidence solidly rests in Jesus, the Savior who defeated the enemy on our behalf and who provides a spiritual rest that no power on earth or in heaven can take away. Praise God for our *Yeshua*!

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for a new beginning and a new spiritual homeland for me through the saving work of Jesus Christ. You have ushered me out of my wandering into a place of rest, where I enjoy the security of Your salvation now and forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Three

Are Spies and Lies Okay in God's Eyes?

Selections from Joshua 2

Where sin abounded, grace superabounded. Grace is greater than all our sins.
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

People sometimes think of grace as a New Testament concept, but the theme weaves like a beautiful scarlet thread through the Old Testament too. When the first humans sinned and corrupted God's creation, God launched a plan of grace to rescue humanity from evil and death and to redeem and restore His work of creation.

By grace, the Lord chose Abraham and his descendants to convey the seed of the Savior. "All the families on earth will be blessed through you," God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:3). By grace, God passed His promise to Isaac (*26:2–5*) and then to Jacob (*28:12–15*).

When Jacob's descendants fell into bondage in Egypt, God rescued them. He led them through the Red Sea as a kind of baptism and brought them to the promised land. Along the way, God dwelled with His people in the tabernacle. He established the sacrificial system through which sinful people could approach God, give thanks to God, and receive mercy.

Strangers and foreigners were welcome to join God's movement of grace. Most, like Pharoah, hardened their hearts against the Lord. A few, however, humbled themselves before God. They picked up His scarlet thread of grace and clung to it like a lifeline—like the Canaanite woman in the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study.

INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Are Spies and Lies Okay in God's Eyes?

Selections from Joshua 2

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open God's Word with a prayer of gratitude for God's grace in your life.

> *Father, when I was lost in sin, You found me and whispered words of grace to my heart. I cling to them now as I did the first moment I believed. Thank You for Your Son, who sought me when I was a stranger and bought me with His precious blood. In His name, amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The account of Rahab in *Joshua 2* is a prime example of God finding and rescuing a single lost soul in a sea of sinners. Like all Canaanites, Rahab worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth. Moses had warned the Israelites about the foreigners in the land, not to "imitate their detestable customs in the worship of their gods" (Deuteronomy 20:18). But Rahab was not only an idolator; she was also a prostitute.

The New Testament authors referred to her as "Rahab the prostitute" (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). They used that label to not identify her ongoing way of life but her former life—like "Simon the leper" (Matthew 26:6 NASB). Simon was a leper until Christ healed him. Similarly, Rahab was a prostitute until she put her faith in the God of Israel. The Scriptures don't say exactly when that moment happened, perhaps before the spies arrived.

Certainly, the spies' arrival was perfectly orchestrated to meet Rahab on her road to faith at just the right time. Rahab was the *only* person in Jericho whose heart was open to grace, and, in God's providential plan, it was *her* door to which the Hebrew spies came knocking.

Observation: Rahab's Daring Acts of Faith

The biblical genre of Joshua 2 is narrative, which records the actions and dialogue of characters in a setting. The narrator seeks to bring us into the scene. We sense the tension in the air, the danger of the situation, and the relief that follows when the narrative resolves. Look for literary tools, such as irony and plot twists. All these elements are present in the account of Rahab. Read *Joshua 2* to get the flow, and then answer the following questions.

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Are Spies and Lies Okay in God's Eyes?

Selections from Joshua 2

Years earlier, Joshua had been one of the twelve spies Moses sent into the promised land (*Numbers 13:1–16*). What do you observe about Joshua's plan to send spies in *Joshua 2:1*?

Despite their attempts to blend in, the spies were spotted at Rahab's house. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, called Rahab an innkeeper, which would have meant her house was an inn.[1] How did Rahab protect the spies? What four lies did she tell to mislead the king's men so the spies could escape, according to *2:2–7*?

Rahab courageously put her life on the line to protect the Hebrew spies, an act of bold faith. How did Rahab express her faith in Israel's God, according to *2:8–11*, particularly verse 11? How did her confession of faith in *Yahweh* mirror the Hebrews' confession in *Deuteronomy 4:39*?

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Are Spies and Lies Okay in God's Eyes?

Selections from Joshua 2

What did Rahab request? What agreement was made between the spies and Rahab, according to *Joshua 2:14–21*?

While the king's men went east to hunt for the spies along the Jordan, the spies went west into the hill country until the way back to the Israelite camp was clear. What did the spies report? What was Joshua's response in *2:22–24*?

> *Before the spies came, something must have happened in Rahab's heart so that she would be brought to faith in God as the supreme God of heaven and earth. She was a Canaanite. She was a Gentile, but she embraced the God of the Scriptures.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Are Spies and Lies Okay in God's Eyes?

Selections from Joshua 2

Interpretation: "Passover" at Jericho

After the spies escaped through the window in the wall, Rahab followed the spies' instructions and hung a scarlet cord out the window. The scarlet cord identified her house, which the spies promised would be a sanctuary for her and her family when the Israelites invaded (*Joshua 2:17–19*).

How would the early Israelites reading this account have understood the blood-red cord marking Rahab's house of faith? Perhaps they would have recalled the lamb's blood smeared over the doorposts of the Hebrews' homes the night they escaped Egypt. Under the cover of blood, the Hebrews' families were spared God's judgment. At the time of the exodus, what did Moses promise the Israelites, according to *Exodus 12:21–23*?

In a similar way, Rahab's family was "passed over" when Joshua's army descended on Jericho. What was the "plot twist" in Rahab's situation compared to the original Passover? What was the lesson in grace?

By faith, the people of Israel sprinkled "blood on the doorposts" (Hebrews 11:28). By faith, Rahab hung a scarlet cord from her window. Likewise, by faith, we confess Christ as Lord and mark our lives with the scarlet cord of His blood to save us (*10:21–23*).

> *Rahab probably wrestled with a guilty conscience. But as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our wrongdoings from us (Psalm 103:12).* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Selections from Joshua 2

Correlation: Lies or Acts of Faith?

The Scriptures look kindly on Rahab, despite her sordid past and the lies she told to protect the spies. Rahab's portrait even hangs in the hall of faith alongside the portraits of Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses. That's quite an honor! What does *Hebrews 11:30–31* say about Rahab's faith?

James also featured Rahab as an example of faith. How did James hold up Rahab alongside Abraham as a model for all Christians in *James 2:21–25*?

How are David and Jesus related to Rahab, according to *Matthew 1:5–6*?

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Selections from Joshua 2

Rahab's lies were not counted against her; rather, they were a sign of her faith in action! In what circumstances might telling a lie be ethically acceptable, even an act of faith?

> *Corrie ten Boom and Oskar Schindler are recognized in the avenue of righteous Gentiles at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. But you say, "They were liars and deceivers." They saved lives. It was a circumstantial necessity.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Questions to Ponder

After Joshua rescued Rahab and her relatives from Jericho's collapse, the text adds this interesting note: "And she lives among the Israelites to this day" (Joshua 6:25).

How do you think the other Hebrews treated her? Rahab and her family were hated Canaanites and former idol-worshipers . . . and Rahab was a former prostitute. Would you have seen her scarlet letter or the scarlet cord of God's grace? Would you have welcomed her family into your home? Allowed your children to play with Rahab's children?

Some people consider those whom God has cleansed as still stained by their past sin. To help us avoid the pitfall of prejudice, here are three questions to ponder.

First, put yourself in the place of the spies. Would you have trusted a person who was a former prostitute like Rahab? Would you have believed her confession of faith in God? We have to make a choice to release others from their past and see them as new creations in Christ.

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Selections from Joshua 2

Harshly judging others ensnares people rather than sets them free. Search your heart for a judging spirit. Do you find it difficult to show grace to others? How so?

What change in mind-set can help you be more gracious?

Second, put yourself in the place of Rahab. Do you believe that God, in His grace, would look past your lies and see your motive to protect another person? Grace releases the shackles of guilt when we must make hard ethical choices for the sake of others.

Third, again, put yourself in the place of Rahab. Do you think that God's grace leaves room for all your mistakes, failures, and imperfections? Does God forgive *every* sin? Sometimes, we have more trouble releasing the guilt of our sins than God does.

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Selections from Joshua 2

Have you been able to completely receive God's grace and let go of the shame of your past? What are you still clinging to that you might need to release?

As sinners, we hold tightly to the scarlet cord of grace in Christ. In Him, we "go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him" (Hebrews 10:22). We enter God's presence with confidence, knowing that:

> *our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.* (10:22)

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your grace astounds me. The story of Rahab is yet another example of how You welcome all those who come to You in faith. Help me to be as accepting as Your Son, who came to seek and to save the lost—of whom I was one. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Joshua," *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org, note on Joshua 2:1.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Four

Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

This is a message from God, from His Word to your heart. The walls of Jericho fit perfectly into your story.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

The imposing walls of Jericho must have loomed large in Joshua's mind as he awaited word from the two spies (*Joshua 2:1*). Finally, they returned with hopeful news: "'The Lord has given us the whole land . . . for all the people in the land are terrified of us'" (2:24).

How the tables had turned! Forty years earlier, the *Hebrews* were the terrified ones, afraid the people of the land would crush them like grasshoppers. Now the Canaanites quaked at the sight of the Hebrews.

God removed the privilege of entering the promised land from the exodus generation and gave the privilege to their children born in the wilderness. This generation of Hebrews knew nothing of Egypt, only howling stretches of wasteland and a daily diet of manna. How much manna can a person eat? They were so close to the land of milk and honey they could taste it!

And yet, when they looked at Jericho across the Jordan, they saw towering impossibilities. There was no way to go beneath Jericho's massive walls, no way over, no way around, and no way through. From the human point of view, it looked hopeless.

From God's divine perspective, however, this seeming impossibility was a disguised opportunity for God to fulfill His promises. This new generation trusted the Lord to give them the land, but . . . *how to get past those walls?*

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Perhaps a towering impossibility looms over your life. An intractable marriage or family conflict. A health issue that defies solutions. An oppressive addiction. What impossibility casts its shadow over you?

Use the following space to express it to your Father in prayer and invite Him to show you His perspective.

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The next morning, Joshua led the nation to the banks of the Jordan River. When the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stepped into the Jordan, the river "began backing up a great distance away" (Joshua 3:16). All the people walked across the dry riverbed into the promised land (*3:14–17*)—just as their parents walked to freedom through the Red Sea from Egypt.

After everyone had crossed, "the water of the Jordan returned and overflowed its banks as before" (4:18). The people camped at Gilgal, where they set up twelve memorial stones taken from the riverbed for future generations to remember God's mighty hand that stopped the Jordan's flow (*4:1–24*).

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

Read *Joshua 5:1–12* and write down which covenant ceremonies the nation reestablished. How do you think these ceremonies prepared the Hebrews for the spiritual battles ahead?

For the first time, the Israelites celebrated Passover as free people in their new homeland. God stopped the heavenly manna supply because the days of wandering were over! Now, His people were ready to face those impossible walls.

Observation: The Lord's Instructions and the People's Obedience

Observation is the first step in *Searching the Scriptures*. Read carefully the verses, noting repetition of key words, cause and effect, contrasts, and logical flow. The account of Jericho's fall actually begins with a divine encounter between Joshua and a heavenly being.

What do you observe about this encounter in *Joshua 5:13–15*?

Joshua was face-to-face with an angel or, possibly, the preincarnate Christ. A temporary, visible manifestation of God is called a *theophany*. As Joshua "fell with his face to the ground in reverence" (5:14), Joshua learned that *consecration precedes conquest*. Joshua consecrated himself to do battle according to God's plan, not Joshua's.

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

For each of the three sections in *Joshua 6:1–27*, list the details of that section along with any other key observations, and then write a single-sentence summary of its emphasis.

The Instructions from the Lord—Joshua 6:1–5

Joshua 6:1–5	
Details	**Emphasis**

> *God is nothing like us. He does things we cannot do. He thinks things we cannot think. He sees the end from the beginning, and He knows what can be done. His plan has nothing to do with human strategy.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Obedience of the People—Joshua 6:8–21

Joshua 6:6–21	
Details	**Emphasis**

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

No one in Israel was worried. No one wondered, "Can we really do this?" They got up early the seventh day, anticipating what God was going to do. They believed the walls would collapse. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Collapse of the Wall—Joshua 6:22–27

Joshua 6:22–27	
Details	**Emphasis**

Imagine the sounds—first of the shout of all those people and then of the falling of those walls. I can't read about that without a chill going up my back. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: The Lessons from Jericho

Reflect on the account of Jericho's fall from various angles to discover rich lessons about God and how His people relate to Him.

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

Imagine yourself as one of the Israelites feeling the earth rumble as the massive walls split apart, giant stones tumble from top to bottom, and the entire structure crumbles in a heap. What unforgettable truth or truths does the account reveal about God?

What is the significance of the priests carrying the ark in the middle of the procession and blowing horns to herald it? What lesson or lessons do you draw from that detail?

From a human point of view, God's plan to defeat Jericho made no sense. What lesson was God teaching His people about putting their faith in Him and obeying Him?

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

The Commander of heaven wasn't teaching the Israelites innovative strategies in the art of warfare. By circling the city, the nation experienced God's promise come to life: "'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you'" (Joshua 1:3). What was the *spiritual* lesson God was teaching His people?

The people had been on a march through the wilderness with Moses. They crossed the Jordan with Joshua, and now they're in Canaan. The first thing they see are the walls of Jericho—a 30-foot impossibility. Not if they follow God's plan! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Wait on the Lord's Help

The rubble of Jericho's wall proves that nothing is impossible for God. Jesus echoed the point to His followers who wondered whether anyone could be saved. What did Jesus reply, according to *Luke 18:26–27*?

Higher than the wall of Jericho is the barrier of sin that stands between sinful humanity and a holy God. Through moral effort alone, no human can scale the wall, and yet, the salvation that is impossible for people to achieve is possible with God, who broke down the wall through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If God can break through the sin barrier, then no impossibility can stand against His power.

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

Did the Hebrew nation learn that lesson? Years later, God's people faced an imminent invasion from a powerful enemy. Victory against such a mighty foe was impossible. And yet, God urged His people to trust Him for their salvation:

> *"Only in returning to me*
> *and resting in me will you be saved.*
> *In quietness and confidence is your strength."* (Isaiah 30:15)

What did the nation do instead, according to *30:16–17*, despite God's warning?

What was God's response to His people who had more faith in horses than in Him, according to *Isaiah 30:18*? What lesson do you learn about facing impossibilities?

> ***In the waiting, God will go to work. I don't know how. I don't know when. I don't know what He will do. But we wait on Him to show us His love and compassion.***
> **—Pastor Chuck Swindoll**

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

Application: Consider Your Impossibilities

In *application*, the Scriptures speak to our situations with four statements of reality. Like Jericho's wall . . .

1. *Your impossibility is real, and it isn't going away.* It will likely be there tomorrow unless God immediately and decisively intervenes.

2. *Your impossibility is bigger and stronger than you.* You are outmatched.

3. *In the face of your impossibility, you've tried everything to handle your impossibility on your own.* You can't fix it or remove it. Energy and hope might be running low.

4. *To deal with your impossibility, you need God's strategy from Scripture.* Come to Him for help. Rest in His power. Yield to His methods. Trust in His timing.

Reflect on these points regarding the specific impossibility that you wrote down at the beginning of this *Searching the Scriptures* study. Do you find them true in your life? How so?

So, what is God's strategy for handling impossibilities? Should we circle the problem, blow horns, and shout? No, none of that caused Jericho's wall to crumble. God brought the walls down. Israel's seven-day parade was God's way of teaching His people to *wait on Him* and *trust in Him*. It was a lesson in faith.

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Impossible Walls Still Tumble Down

Joshua 6:1–5, 15–17, 20

In the space below, prayerfully, deliberately, and confidently turn your impossibility over to the One who can cause a breakthrough, resolution, or healing.

Now, leave it with God to handle it in His time, His way, and according to His will. Express your faith in the space below.

Like the Israelites, we have a part to play. A part may be to seek counsel, pursue treatment, pray daily, or any number of things. But only God can do the real work of bringing down walls. Once we place them in God's hands, we are relieved of the worry. The impossibility is in God's hands, and you're trusting Him.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, as I shift the burden of my impossible situation or person into Your hands, I release the outcome to You. I wait on You for help to do what no person can do, for wisdom to know which direction to choose, for the perseverance to keep trusting You when I feel like giving up. You alone are my help. In Jesus' name, amen.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Five

Postmortem of a Deceiver

Selections from Joshua 7

When there's sin in the camp, we're ill-equipped to go any further until we deal with it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

The Israelites' first military encounter in their new homeland was an earthshaking success. God caused the walls of Jericho to collapse as if He had hit them with a battering ram. With Jericho's defenses in ruins, "the Israelites charged straight into the town and captured it" (Joshua 6:20).

The account closes with a favorable wind at Joshua's back: "So the Lord was with Joshua, and his reputation spread throughout the land" (6:27). *Surely the rest of Canaan will fall just as easily*, Joshua must have thought.

Then Joshua 7 opens with the word *but*—what an ominous, bubble-bursting word.

> *But Israel violated the instructions about the things set apart for the Lord. A man named Achan had stolen some of these dedicated things, so the Lord was very angry with the Israelites.* (Joshua 7:1)

What "dedicated things"? Who is Achan? What did he do to rankle the Lord against the entire nation? This *Searching the Scriptures* study reveals the answers, including the disastrous consequences that followed when sin slipped into the camp.

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Postmortem of a Deceiver

Selections from Joshua 7

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sin is an unpleasant subject. Particularly, secret sin. The Lord has compassion toward us when we sin and invites us to come to Him with our struggles. Ask Him to reveal the truth your heart needs to hear through His Word.

> *Father, I stand at the doorway to Your throne seeking mercy—which You have already shown me through Christ. I know I am accepted. Still, I hesitate. Draw me near with Your gracious love as I invite Your light to reveal the sin I must confess and forsake. In Jesus' name, amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The opening verse of Joshua 7 recalls the ban Joshua issued just before God brought down the walls of Jericho. Read *Joshua 6:17–19* and write down Joshua's instructions, noting his reason for the ban.

Interestingly, after the next battle, God allowed the people to "keep the plunder and the livestock for [themselves]" (Joshua 8:2). Jericho's victory, however, was unique. It was the first conquest in the promised land. Just as the people were to offer the first bundle of grain from their annual harvest to the Lord at the festival of the first fruits (*Leviticus 23:9–14*), God wanted the nation to reserve for Him Jericho's plunder as the first fruits of the conquest.

The ban was meant to be a lesson in *gratitude to the Lord for winning the Israelites' battles*. Instead, it became a lesson in the consequences of greed.

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Selections from Joshua 7

Observation: Greed and Its Consequences

The first step of observation is to break the text into manageable bites. Each sentence, phrase, or even word may contain key ideas worth chewing on before moving to the next piece.

Achan's Sin and the Defeat at Ai—Joshua 7:1–5

Read *Joshua 7:1–5*, and write down what you observe. What attitude do you perceive in the spies' report and advice to Joshua? List the consequences of the defeat at Ai.

What was missing in the foolhardy attack on Ai that was so prominent in the Jericho account (see *Joshua 5:13–6:2*)?

> *Three thousand warriors moved up the hill, and, before they knew it, they were in a fast retreat, and 36 of the Hebrews' finest soldiers were killed. The camp was in confusion. How could this be? There was sin in the camp.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Selections from Joshua 7

Joshua's Prayer and the Lord's Answer—Joshua 7:6–15

Plunging from the pinnacle of victory to the depths of defeat, the nation spiraled into a state of shock. "The Israelites were paralyzed with fear" (Joshua 7:5). What did Joshua and the elders do, according to *Joshua 7:6*?

In *7:7–9*, Joshua prayed—something he should have done before sending the army to Ai. In Joshua's prayer, what did he assume? Whom did he blame? What fearful thoughts gripped his heart?

What did the Lord say to Joshua in reply, according to *7:10–15*? Where did the fault lie for the defeat at Ai? What was the Lord's remedy?

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Selections from Joshua 7

Joshua truly believed that the people heard the prohibition and were willing to abide by it. It must have taken him back to hear about the sin. There's always a sense of shock when you find that someone has been living in deceit. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Achan's Confession and the Sin Cleansed—Joshua 7:16–26

Read *Joshua 7:16–19* and follow the process the Lord used to pinpoint Achan, whose name appropriately means "troubler." (Perhaps lots were cast to determine the Lord's choice at each selection stage.) How did Achan describe his descent into sin in *7:20–21*? Pay special attention to the verbs in these verses.

How was Achan's sin dealt with, according to *7:22–26*?

Previously, Joshua ordered that a memorial of twelve stones be built to honor God for bringing the Israelites safely across the Jordan (*Joshua 4:19–24*). The pile of stones covering Achan's body in the "Valley of Trouble," however, stood not as a celebration but as a warning. Two memorials remained—one as a lasting reminder of God's faithfulness and the other, of sin's consequences.

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Selections from Joshua 7

Interpretation: The Path from Temptation to Sin

Four steps marked Achan's descent into deception, which we can identify in his confession in *Joshua 7:20–21*. First, he "saw" the beautiful robe, the silver, and the gold. Second, he "wanted" them. Third, he "took" them. And then, fourth, he hid the stolen items "in the ground beneath [his] tent."

What sins can you identify in Achan's downward spiral?

James explained how sin takes hold of us in stages in *James 1:14–15*. What progression did James describe?

How could the account of Achan be used to illustrate what James was teaching about temptation and sin? At what point could Achan have stopped without sinning?

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Rationalization greases the skids of our slide into sin. What rationalizations do you think Achan used to ease his conscience and smooth his downward path?

If Achan could speak to us about his sin, what lesson would he teach about temptation and sin? What advice might he give?

> *Whatever the garment, the silver coins, or the bar of gold may be for us . . . glance at it but go on. Achan didn't go on. He took it, hid it, and 36 men died because of it. There are consequences that follow disobedience.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: The Remedy of Confession

Only after Achan was caught did he finally confess his sin. What if he had come forward immediately and confessed voluntarily? Perhaps, his life, his family members' lives, and the lives of the soldiers could have been spared.

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Selections from Joshua 7

What warning and promise does the Lord give us in our battles with temptation, according to *1 Corinthians 10:12–13*?

What do the following verses say about confession as a healing remedy for sin?

Proverbs 28:13: _____

James 5:16: _____

1 John 1:8–9: _____

Centuries after Achan's sin, the prophet Hosea reflected on God's compassion toward His sinful people who stumble into their own valleys of trouble. Through Hosea, the Lord called to His people to return like a husband pleading with His wayward wife to come home:

> *"But then I will win her back once again.*
> *I will lead her into the desert*
> *and speak tenderly to her there.*
> *I will return her vineyards to her*
> *and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope."*
>
> (Hosea 2:14–15)

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Selections from Joshua 7

Through Hosea, the Lord was referring to Achan's terrible sin and the trouble he caused the nation in "the Valley of Trouble." But there's hope! Regardless of the wrongs we have committed, God can transform our *valleys of trouble* into *gateways of hope*. What did Hosea say the Lord will do for us when we confess and return, according to *Hosea 6:1–2*?

What hope do these verses communicate to you?

If we're known for nothing else, let's be known for our truthfulness. Let's tell the truth. Let's live the truth. Let's model the truth. Let's uphold the truth, so that God will be glorified.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Selections from Joshua 7

Application: Steps through the Gateway of Hope

No one is immune from following Achan's path into sin and hypocrisy. His tragedy teaches us four lasting lessons about secret sin.

1. *Take God seriously.* He sets the standard for right and wrong, and we must not think we can trifle with His holiness.

2. *Believe His Word.* Don't try to bend God's truth to your own standards.

3. *Confess sin quickly.* The sooner we douse the flame of sin with God's mercy, the less damage it will cause.

4. *Refuse all hypocrisy.* Don't lead others to believe you're something you're not.

Has the Lord answered your opening prayer to use the light of His Word to reveal sin? If so, what sin might you need to confess . . . to the Lord and, perhaps, to another person?

If you're not certain what steps to take, seek counsel with your pastor or Christian counselor. Find a spiritual friend to pray for you.

For further help after we've sinned, in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll follow five specific steps in restoration modeled by Joshua when God offered the nation a second chance at Ai. Let God's compassion for strugglers and mercy for sinners lead you through God's gateway of hope into forgiveness and a new beginning.

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Postmortem of a Deceiver

Selections from Joshua 7

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me not to linger when I see something enticing. Strengthen me to not let temptation sink roots of covetousness in my soul. Speak truth to my spirit when I start to rationalize, and make clear to me a way of escape, Lord. I long to live in Your light of truth with a clean heart and a clear conscience for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Six

What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

Failure is never final. It's never too late to acknowledge the wrong, get up, and start doing what is right. The goal in life is to press on.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

The natural response to making a mistake is to cover it up. Most people would rather sweep the broken pieces of a failure under the rug than face the consequences. And yet, the pieces never stay hidden for long. As the Scriptures wisely warn, "You may be sure that your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23).

When a failure comes to light, the consequences can be hard to bear. A foul-up on the job may result in being fired. A botched project may forfeit future business. A broken promise may lead to a break-up. An embarrassing sin may drive a person into shunned isolation. So, what do we do after we've blown it? How do we recover?

The Israelites suffered a humiliating defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin, and they thought their dream of a homeland was over. The Canaanites "will wipe our name off the face of the earth," Joshua moaned (Joshua 7:9). Through the Israelites' "Valley of Trouble" (Joshua 7:26), however, God provided a way of hope—a second chance. Their failure wasn't terminal, and neither is ours.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study is about second chances. God can redeem our failures—no matter how far we fell, how wrong we were, or how badly we blew it. It's never too late to step back onto God's right path and begin again.

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask the Lord to light a way of hope for you as you study His Word.

> *Father, like the defeated Israelites, after I fail, I can feel paralyzed with fear. Draw me out of my isolation into the hiding place of Your caring, protective presence. Restore my confidence in Your plan and teach me the way of faith beyond failure. In Jesus' name, amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Briefly review the tragic events in Joshua 7.

The defeat at Ai—*Joshua 7:1–5*

Joshua's lament—*7:6–9*

The Lord's answer and instructions—*7:10–15*

The discovery of Achan and his confession—*7:16–21*

The purging of Achan's sin—*7:22–26*

Achan's sin derailed the Israelites' fast-track to the promised land, but only temporarily. Joshua 8 opens with a hopeful, forward-looking message: "Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid or discouraged. . . . I have given you the king of Ai'" (Joshua 8:1).

Observation: Victory at Ai

Observation is the starting point for discovering scriptural treasures. Look for key phrases and action words. Group the main ideas into subjects and note concepts that repeat for emphasis.

As you read the opening verses of Joshua 8, put yourself in the place of Joshua, who was still licking his wounds from the humiliating defeat at Ai. Remember the context. The confidence of the nation had melted away, and Joshua genuinely feared that the Canaanites would attack and chase the Israelites back into the wilderness.

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

Dwell on each of the phrases in *Joshua 8:1–2*. What would it have been like for Joshua to hear these words from the Lord? Write your observations in the chart below.

Phrases	Observations
Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid or discouraged."	
"Take all your fighting men and attack Ai."	
". . . for I have given you the king of Ai, his people, his town, and his land. You will destroy them as you destroyed Jericho and its king."	
"But this time you may keep the plunder and the livestock for yourselves."	

Then the Lord gave Joshua a new battle plan: "'Set an ambush behind the town'" (8:2). Read Joshua's orders to the people in *8:3–8*. Write down what you observe about this new strategy that was so different than the Lord's strategy at Jericho.

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

The Israelites perfectly executed the ambush in *Joshua 8:9–29*. The fall of Ai opened up the hill country and gave access to the north-south ridge route that ran from Shechem to Hebron—the same route Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob traveled.

According to *Joshua 8:30–35*, Joshua built an altar at Mount Ebal and led the nation in reciting the law of Moses. Half the nation stood on Mount Ebal and the other half on Mount Gerazim. With the priests and the ark of the covenant in between the two mountains, Joshua read the blessings and curses of the law.

Interestingly, this same spot was where, centuries earlier, Abraham first entered Canaan, built an altar, and heard the Lord promise, "'I will give this land to your descendants'" (Genesis 12:7). What was the significance of the Israelites renewing their commitment to God at this historic and sacred site?

> *You'll never learn to walk in victory if you lie there in defeat—which the enemy wants you to do. Joshua 8 is a chapter about a group of people who learned how to get back up.*
> —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Truths about Recovery after Failure

A primary task in interpretation is to look for the meaning the biblical author intended to convey to his original audience. How would future Israelites reading about the second battle of Ai have interpreted the account? What truths would they have gleaned that are still true?

Reflect on your observations of Joshua 8 to answer the following questions.

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

After we fail, what truth about God emerges from the Lord's encouragement, "'Do not be afraid or discouraged'" (Joshua 8:1)?

What truth about recovery can you gather from the Lord's instructions, "'Take *all* your fighting men'" (8:1, emphasis added)?

Considering Joshua's humiliation at the hand of Ai's king, what truth do we find in the Lord's promise, "'I have given you the king of Ai'" (8:1)?

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

What truth about God's grace do you find in His gift, "'This time you may keep the plunder and the livestock for yourselves'" (Joshua 8:2)?

Finally, God gave Joshua a new approach to the Ai problem—"'Set an ambush'" (8:2). What truth do you glean about how to move forward in a different way after a failure?

Discouragement always looks back and reminds you of what went wrong. Hope always looks ahead. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: The Power of Forgiveness

Few people in Scripture felt as humiliated and defeated as the woman in *John 8:1–11*. After hauling her in front of a crowd at the temple, the Pharisees megaphoned her scandalous sin: "'This woman was caught in the act of adultery'" (8:4).

Imagine this shamed woman slumping to the ground, her face flushed with guilt, her head hung in shame, her eyes burning with tears. Turning to Jesus, the Pharisees said, "'The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?'" (8:5). *Stone her?* Now, a bolt of panic shot through the woman's soul, making her tremble in fear.

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

How did Jesus defuse the situation, according to *John 8:6–9*?

What healing words did Jesus say to the woman in *8:10–11*?

Whether this woman or the Israelites centuries earlier, those who receive forgiveness are never the same. Forgiveness has great power to restore us, raise us up, and set us on the right path. It's truly transforming. How has God's forgiveness transformed you?

You are a valuable human being who has an eternal soul. The Lord wants to use you, develop you, and cultivate you. The scars you have gained from your failures will give you wisdom to be involved in others' lives far more effectively. You're fallen but forgiven, and God is faithful to take you from where you are to where He wants you to be.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

Application: Five Steps to Recovery from Failure

Let's build a strategy for what to do after we've blown it based on the truths from Joshua 8 and the woman's second chance before Jesus.

Listen to the Lord's counsel, not your guilty conscience. How is guilt accusing you? What message of forgiveness is the Lord telling you in Romans 8:1: "So now there is there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus"?

Include others as you return to your responsibilities. Whom can you "enlist" in the fight to get you get back on your feet?

Draw strength from what the Lord promises you. What promise from Scripture can you claim? Your identity in Christ? The indwelling power of the Spirit? The security of your Father's love?

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What to Do After You've Blown It

Joshua 8:1–7

Be willing and ready to receive even more than you had before you failed. What gift of grace can you wholeheartedly receive? Forgiveness? Mercy? Restoration? A blessing you didn't expect?

Be open and flexible as you recover from failure. What door may the Lord be opening for you?

Failure doesn't have to be a dead-end street. Through God's forgiveness and restoration, failure can lead to a better path you might have never seen before. Redeeming failures into triumphs is God's way, and when He does it, He gets all the glory.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, remove my fear of failure and replace it with confidence in Your redeeming grace. Empower each step of my recovery journey with the assurance of forgiveness in Christ and the promise of grace that is greater than my sin. Keep my eyes on You, not my past, and help me take the next step in following You. In Jesus' name, amen.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Seven

Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

This is my credo: "Since every day is a gift from God, I will live each one enthusiastically for Him."

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

Suppose you didn't know your birth date, so you wouldn't know your age. Someone might ask you how old you are, and you'd pick whatever age you felt like! Think how freeing it would be to not be locked into a number. Milestones such as fifty or sixty or even eighty would be meaningless. You wouldn't think, *I just turned 65. I guess it's time to trade in my office chair for an easy chair.* Why should age dictate what people must or must not do?

Paul urged Timothy, "Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young" (1 Timothy 4:12). He could have also written: "Don't let anyone think less of your because you are *old*!" In other words, if God has called a person to do something, then he or she shouldn't let age get in the way—whether young or old.

Age can either be a label defining your limits or a ticket giving access to new adventures. It's all in your mindset.

This *Searching the Scriptures* study considers the account of Caleb. At age 85, he asked Joshua to allocate to him prime mountain territory occupied by Anakim—giant-sized people living in giant-walled cities. Caleb believed that, *with God*, he could drive them out and claim his piece of the promised land. Now that's a winning mindset!

INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Ask the Lord to open your eyes to new territory that you might have considered out-of-bounds because of your age.

> *Father, is it possible that my attitude about age has been holding me back? If so, Lord, cast a vision that stretches me beyond my limits and that forces me to depend on You . . . which is what I long for. Grow my faith through Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the previous study, we examined the Israelites' conquest of two major cities in the central region of Canaan: Ai and Bethel (Joshua 8:1–29). Before advancing further, Joshua drove a spiritual stake in the ground. At Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, he led the people in renewing their covenant with God by reciting the laws God gave Moses (Joshua 8:30–35). Now the people were spiritually ready to take the rest of the land.

Refer to the chart on *Joshua* to see where we are in the flow of the book. *Joshua 9* wraps up the central campaign with the peace treaty between the Israelites and the Gibeonites. *Joshua 10* chronicles the conquest of territory in the south; *Joshua 11*, the conquest of territory in the north; and *Joshua 12*, the conquest of territory east of the Jordan.

At this halfway point in the book, the emphasis shifts from *conquering the enemy* to *dividing the spoil*. In *Joshua 13*, Joshua allots land to Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan River. But before Joshua and his officials could begin allotting land on the west side of the Jordan, a group of men from Judah led by 85-year-old Caleb stepped forward to stake their claim.

Observation: Caleb's Bold Claim

Caleb's statement to Joshua included two parts: *recounting* God's promise (*Joshua 14:6–9*) and *requesting* Joshua fulfill that promise (*14:10–12*). Joshua *responded* in *14:13–14*. As you observe the details of these sections, notice the repetition regarding Caleb's spiritual commitment, as well as the description of Caleb's character.

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

Caleb Recounts God's Promise—Joshua 14:6–9

In *Joshua 14:6–9*, Caleb recounted the events when Moses attempted to lead the Israelites into the promised land from the south. Write down your observations.

Find Kadesh-barnea in your Bible maps or the online map, "*Exodus from Egypt*," and review the account of the twelve spies and their report in *Numbers 13*. Ten of the spies cowered in terror, but Caleb and Joshua stood tall in faith. How did they express their confidence in God in *14:6–9*?

Caleb and Joshua were urging the people to *move ahead together with a winning mindset*, but fear consumed the people's confidence. So, the Lord said to that faithless generation, "They will never even see the land I swore to give their ancestors" (14:23). In contrast, what did the Lord promise Caleb in *14:24*?

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

Live each day not dreading it but anticipating what God will do through you. That was Caleb. That was his ticket to adventure. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Caleb Makes His Request—Joshua 14:10–12

What do you observe in Caleb's statement in *Joshua 14:10–12*?

When he was a young 40-year-old, Caleb hiked that hill country. Forty-five years later he could still taste the grapes that hung in clusters so heavy two men had to carry them on a pole. His eyes flashed with passionate determination: "Give me the hill country that the LORD promised me" (14:12).

What qualities do you admire in Caleb?

Caleb took on life regardless of his age. Let me assure you: it isn't your age that's important. It's your attitude. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

Joshua's Response—Joshua 14:13–14

What did Joshua say to Caleb, according to *Joshua 14:13–14*?

Hebron is higher in elevation than Jerusalem, and just as elevated in spiritual significance. What made Hebron a holy place based on Abraham's experience there in *Genesis 13:14–18*?

Who was buried near Hebron, according to *49:29–32* and *50:12–13*?

Caleb thoroughly followed the Lord his God. When Joshua dispatched Caleb, Caleb didn't wait around. He took on the giants and the hill country. His timeless confidence set him up for what the Lord wanted from him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

Interpretation: What It Means to "Wholeheartedly" Follow the Lord

Caleb's courage and determination in his old age became legendary. He drove out not just one group of descendants of the feared giants but three groups: "the descendants of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the sons of Anak" (Joshua 15:14). And yet, Caleb slayed giants not because of his physical strength but his resolute faith—the same faith David displayed when he felled Goliath.

Compare the description of Caleb's heart toward God in *Joshua 14:8–9, 14* with the description of David's in *1 Kings 14:8* and *Acts 13:22*. What do these descriptions mean?

We marvel at 85-year-old Caleb's self-confidence and determination—"Give me the hill country" (Joshua 14:12). The true source of his strength, however, was his God-confidence and devotion. What insight into Caleb's heart do the following verses reveal?

Numbers 14:23–24: _____

Numbers 32:11–12: _____

Deuteronomy 1:35–36: _____

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

What principles can you draw from the connection between Caleb's lifelong heart toward God and his positive attitude in his old age?

You will find as you get older that you will get colder regarding the Lord if you don't do something about it. Keep the heat of your devotion on. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: Beware Going through the Motions

Jesus confronted the Pharisees for dousing the fire of their devotion with cold, heartless religious duty. What warning about spiritual apathy do you see in Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in *Matthew 15:7–9*?

Even Solomon, as wise and devoted as he was in his younger years, let the world sway his heart. What happened to him, according to *1 Kings 11:5–6*?

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

How can we keep a Caleb-like devotion burning brightly even in our older years? Let's explore some answers as we apply our study.

Application: Eight Dos and Don'ts to Keep Your Devotion Fire Lit

Here's a checklist for wholehearted devotion that anyone at any age can practice.

1) *Stay tight with the Lord . . . don't drift away.*

2) *Pay close attention to His Word . . . don't doubt it.*

3) *Pray fervently and often . . . don't skip one day.*

4) *Refuse to tolerate fear . . . don't give it an inch.*

5) *Risk reaching out . . . don't stay isolated.*

6) *Keep having fun . . . don't be a grouch.*

7) *Add praise to your day . . . don't stop singing.*

8) *Ignore your age . . . don't forget Caleb.*

Bring this list before the Lord and ask Him to highlight one point on which to focus. Be creative in how you apply it. For example, try singing praises in your car. Add a dash of fun to family mealtimes. Contact a friend you haven't spoken to in a long time. Memorize a Bible verse and repeat it through the day. What might the Lord be leading you to do today?

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Age: Your Ticket to Adventure

Joshua 14:6–14

Copy this list on a card and tape it to your refrigerator or the visor of your car. Keep it as a reminder of Caleb and his lifelong, wholehearted devotion to God.

What hill might the Lord be leading you to climb?

Caleb may have been a giant-slayer, but his real legacy lies in his giant-sized faith. Don't let people think less of you because you are young . . . or old. And if they do, ignore them! God's adventures await those who dare to step out in faith and climb.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, only You know what tomorrow brings. Guard me from fear of the "giants in the land." Keep my eyes and my heart focused on Your goodness and grace. Like a shepherd, You can lead me, and my greatest joy is trusting You and going when You say go. In Jesus' name, amen.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Eight

Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

We have a Savior who accepts us just like we are, sin and all. Let's follow suit for those who need us. Let's become their place of safety, their city of refuge.
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

In his book, *Dropping Your Guard*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll reflects on our need for a place of refuge when we're hurting.

> Where does a [person] go when the bottom drops out? To whom do we Christians turn when stuff that's embarrassing or a little scandalous happens? Who cares enough to listen when we cry? Who affirms us when we feel rotten? Who will close their mouths and open their hearts? And . . . who will embrace us with understanding and give us time to heal?[1]

Where can we go to find caring people? Christ intended His church to be such a place—a haven for shipwrecked hearts, a hospital for wounded souls, a home where hurting people can remove their masks, tell it like it is, and find genuine acceptance.

Illustrating this spirit of compassion were the cities of refuge established by Joshua, outposts of mercy our hearts yearn for when we need a safe place to heal.

INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES STUDY

Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you been weathering a storm lately? Use the following space to tell the Lord about your need for shelter and ask Him to encourage you through His Word.

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Since crossing the Jordan River, Joshua has been following Moses' instruction manual for conquering and possessing the land. In *Joshua 15–19*, just as Moses commanded, Joshua distributed territory to each of the tribes, except for the tribe of Levi. "Moses did not assign any allotment of land to the tribe of Levi" (Joshua 13:14), because the Levites lived off the Lord's provision through their priestly work.

One of Joshua's final duties involved selecting the cities of refuge according to Moses' instructions in *Numbers 35:9–29*, which Joshua followed precisely.

Observation: Six Cities of Refuge

According to *Joshua 20:1–3*, where did the concept of "cities of refuge" originate? What was their purpose?

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Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

These cities were not intended to be hideouts for cold-blooded murderers. What were the key factors in determining whether a person qualified for refuge according to *Numbers 35:22–25*?

> *In His grace, God provided places where people could escape to and be safe. The cities of refuge were to give a fugitive running for his or her life a hop ahead of the hounds.*
> **—Pastor Chuck Swindoll**

What procedures did the fugitive follow to gain entrance, according to *Joshua 20:4*?

What protection and legal "due process" did the citizens of the city provide in *20:5–6*?

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Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

Read *Joshua 20:7–9* and find the locations of the cities of refuge on your Bible map. They are indicated by a white dot on the online map, "*Twelve Tribes of Canaan after the Conquest of Canaan*." What do you observe about where the cities are located?

> ***Those within the cities of refuge were willing to go the distance with the fugitive. They had an attitude of loving compassion rather than judgment. They were available to help in practical and tangible ways, and they were committed to the restoration of the person on the run.*** —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: The Meaning of Cities of Refuge

Cities of refuge served as theological object lessons pointing to God's heart of refuge. What aspects of God's nature did the cities of refuge express, based on the following psalms?

Psalm 7:1–2: _____

Psalm 71:1–3: _____

Psalm 91:1–4: _____

Not by coincidence, each city of refuge was a city inhabited by Levites (*Joshua 21:13, 21, 27, 32, 36, 38*). The Levites served as priests at the tabernacle who mediated between sinful people and God. They were ideal ones to judge a fugitive's case and mete out mercy on God's behalf.

We no longer need Levitical priests as mediators. Jesus is our "merciful and faithful High Priest before God" (Hebrews 2:17) and our "advocate who pleads our case before the Father" (1 John 2:1).

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Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

Although Christ did away with the Mosaic law and altar sacrifices, we still fill priestly roles as followers of Christ. What did Peter say is our responsibility as "royal priests" in *1 Peter 2:9*?

Summarize the theological connection between cities of refuge and churches, priests and Christians. How do cities of refuge serve as a model for today's ministries?

Christians should be people of compassion and comfort. That includes listening better, judging less—still discerning, of course, but having hearts that are able to be touched and even broken. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

Correlation: Reasons People Need Cities of Refuge

Like fugitives on the run, hurting people still seek refuge. In Psalm 31, David described three reasons he came to the LORD "for protection" (Psalm 31:1). Identify David's reasons in the chart below. In the righthand column, give examples of hurting people who might come into your life seeking refuge in a similar way.

Psalm 31	Reasons for Seeking Refuge	Examples
31:9–10a		
31:10b		
31:11–13		

Ridiculed, criticized, rejected, slandered by gossip, stalked, and threatened—David desperately needed a safe place to heal. Maybe you can identify with David, or perhaps you know people like him. Let's explore ways we can provide refuge for today's fugitives.

Application: Extending Christ's Heart of Refuge

Christ's church is not a building made of brick and mortar but a people united by a common faith who minister to wounded souls with the compassion of Christ. Pastor Chuck describes what's involved if we take seriously the "city of refuge" mandate.

1) *A willingness to go the distance for someone in trouble.*

2) *An attitude of loving compassion for the needy.*

3) *Availability to help in practical, tangible ways.*

4) *Helping people feel needed and important in this high-tech, contemporary society of ours that makes us acutely aware of our insignificance.*[2]

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Needed: A Safe Place to Heal

Joshua 20:1–9

Perhaps you are the fugitive seeking shelter. What heartache needs healing? To whom can you reach out—your pastor, Christian counselor through your church, a friend?

Perhaps the Lord has brought to mind someone who needs help. What is this person's need? In what practical ways can you express Christ's heart of refuge?

Imagine Joshua erecting a billboard at the entrance to your town: "City of Refuge. Fugitives Welcome!" How about such a billboard at the entrance to your church? Your home? In a sense, Christ has already posted the sign—the symbol of the cross. All fugitives are welcome at the foot of the cross . . . and that includes all of us.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, remind me that I, too, was a fugitive on the run from sin. Thank You for Your Son who welcomed me at the cross and gave me refuge in His mercy and grace. Help me to show that same welcome to others like me, wounded souls in need of a safe place to heal. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard: The Value of Open Relationships* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 128.
2. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard*, 139.

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MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH A WINNING MINDSET

Study Nine

A Choice You'll Never Regret

Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

Make a choice you will never regret—put the Lord God first. First in plans, first in priorities, first in honor, first in everything.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

The book of Joshua opened with the Israelites outside the promised land looking in. The book closes with the Israelites settled in the promised land and looking back . . . battles won, enemies vanquished, territory claimed. From Egyptian slaves to desert nomads to citizens of their own nation, God's people were finally home and feasting at God's table of blessings.

> *The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had solemnly promised their ancestors. . . . Not a single one of all the good promises the Lord had given to the family of Israel was left unfulfilled; everything he had spoken came true.* (21:44–45)

Rest. The word communicates a happy-ever-after ending to a long, arduous journey. And yet, "Rest is not the final word for life in the land," commentator Trent Butler observes.

> Temptation lurks in the presence of the gods of the peoples remaining in the land. Blessing can last only as long as total faithfulness to Yahweh lasts.[1]

Invisible enemies with weapons far more deadly than swords lay in wait to ambush the Israelites' souls. In his farewell address, aging Joshua warned the people against worshiping idols and issued a clear challenge to serve God alone and put Him first in every part of their lives.

INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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A Choice You'll Never Regret

Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

PREPARE YOUR HEART

Are you enjoying a season of rest and blessing? As you open God's Word, thank the Lord for His gracious provision, and invite Him to deepen your devotion.

> *Father, You have showered favor on me through Your Son—assurance of eternal life, a home in Your kingdom, a secure identity as Your child. Stir in my heart an even stronger commitment to You as I study Joshua's final words. In Jesus' name, amen.*

TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

When people near death, they measure their words carefully, condensing a lifetime of experience into droplets of pure wisdom to share with those they love. Joshua "was now very old" (Joshua 23:1)—110 years old. Sensing the chill of death's shadow, the revered commander-in-chief summoned the leaders of Israel so he could pour precious words of counsel into their hearts.

What central message did he give them in *Joshua 23:6–11*?

Warnings about breaking the Lord's covenant and serving other gods followed in *23:12–16*. And then he dismissed the leaders . . . but he wasn't finished. Next, he summoned the entire nation to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim to speak wisdom from the Lord.

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A Choice You'll Never Regret

Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

Observation: Joshua's Final Address to the Nation

Years earlier, Joshua brought the people to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim after the victory at Ai (Joshua 8:30–35). On these side-by-side hills, the people committed to serve God and obey His laws. Joshua was 80 years old then, and the land had yet to be won. Now, thirty years later, the land was conquered and settled. With his life's work coming to an end, Joshua brought the people full circle—back to where it all began—to renew their commitment to God.

Begin observation with a slow reading of *Joshua 24:1–28*. Note the personal pronouns in *24:2–13*. Take notes below, summarizing Yahweh's message to the people.

List Joshua's main calls to action in *24:14–15*.

How many times did the Israelites answer in *24:16–24*? What did they say?

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Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

How did Joshua memorialize their covenant in *Joshua 24:25–28*? For what purpose?

The final section of the book records Joshua's death with this simple line: "Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110" (24:29).

This epitaph captured well the essence of Joshua's life: *the servant of the LORD*. Along with Caleb, Joshua was the last living Israelite born as a slave in Egypt. His back still bore scars from Egyptian whips. With firsthand knowledge, he spoke of the hushed hurry of Passover night, the mighty wind of God pushing back the Red Sea, and the surge of waves consuming the Egyptians. Joshua felt God's holy thunder at Mount Sinai and God's righteous fury when Aaron crafted the golden calf. *Joshua had seen it all.*

Joshua witnessed God's mighty hand at work in Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the promised land, and he never once wavered from his commitment. To the end of his life, Joshua was a true servant of the Lord.

> *Serve the Lord wholeheartedly. Don't hold back. Train your children in the value of service. Teach them by your model what it means to take time for the things of God. It's not a Sunday religion. It's a lifestyle of faith.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Interpretation: Fear and Serve the Lord

Joshua's final words to the people could be boiled down to two commands: *fear the Lord* and *serve the Lord*.

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Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

To fully grasp the meaning of these concepts, imagine hearing Joshua's address in *Joshua 24:2–13* as if you were one of the Israelites listening to the Lord recounting all He did for His people. Reflecting on *the Lord's authority, providence, and power*, how would the people have understood Joshua's command to "fear the LORD" (24:14)?

Considering *the Lord's gracious and abundant blessings*, how would the people have understood Joshua's command to "serve him wholeheartedly" (24:14)?

Write a principle from your interpretation of these commands. What truth about fearing and serving the Lord can God's people of all eras apply?

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Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

Joshua memorialized the Israelites' covenant by writing it down and setting up a stone. What principle for Christians can you glean from Joshua's actions?

> *Go deep enough into idolatry and you will sink into corruption and immorality. You will throw to the winds a pure mentality, and you will adopt a lifestyle that is the opposite of the way God would have you live.* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Correlation: An Eternal Homeland

God's gift of a home to Israel gives us a glimpse of the eternal homeland God will one day deed to His people. The writer of Hebrews developed this theme in the last three chapters of the letter. First, read *Hebrews 11:8–16*. Describe what God promised Abraham. Did Abraham ultimately receive what God had promised?

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Now, read *Hebrews 12:18–24*. What covenant guarantees our homeland? Who purchased it and how? How do we memorialize this covenant (*1 Corinthians 11:23–26*)?

Because we have this covenant, how should we respond to God according to *Hebrews 12:28*?

"This world is not our permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come," the writer to the Hebrews declares with hopeful anticipation (13:14). He concludes with a challenge in *13:15–16* that echoes the spirit of Joshua's final address to the nation. Considering our future hope, how should we live?

I speak to you based on the Word of God that we must choose now. Make a choice you will never regret. Put the Lord first. —Chuck Swindoll

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A Choice You'll Never Regret

Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

Application: The Choice You Will Never Regret

Joshua's challenge calls out from the pages of Scripture: *Choose today whom you will serve*. The Israelites declared their allegiance to Yahweh . . . only to fall into the trap of idolatry again and again. The book of Judges chronicles Israel's tragic cycle of idolatry, judgment, repentance, deliverance, and then relapse into idolatry.

Does idolatry live on today? It certainly does. We may not sacrifice to idols, but we still feel tempted to pursue our own desires without God. Can you hear the deceptive voices resonating from the temples of modern culture? They tempt you to abandon your faith in God, trust in yourself, control your own destiny, and put yourself first.

Have you sensed the world's idolatrous allure? If so, in what ways do you feel tempted to doubt God's promise to care for you?

Joshua encouraged the Israelites to recall God's providence, power, and goodness: "'Every promise of the LORD your God has come true'" (Joshua 23:14). Then, Joshua challenged them to fear the Lord and serve Him only. What does his challenge mean to you?

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A Choice You'll Never Regret

Joshua 24:14–18, 23–29

God gave the Israelites a homeland on earth, but we look forward to a greater, eternal homeland with Jesus—our Savior and King. Do you wish to renew your covenant with Him, *to put Him first in every part of your life?* How can you memorialize your commitment to the Lord?

With his whole heart, Joshua devoted himself to God alone. "'As for me and my family,'" he resolutely declared, "'we will serve the Lord'" (Joshua 24:15). Joshua never regretted his choice, and neither will you.

A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I commit to serve You alone because only You have the power to protect me from evil's lies and the grace to provide all my needs through Christ Jesus. The kingdoms of this world are mere illusion. Only Your kingdom is real. Only You are worthy of reverence. Keep my eyes on You when doubting voices tempt me. I give my allegiance to You alone because Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 7 (Dallas: Word, 1998), accessed through Logos Library System.

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