

# The Lord Your God Goes Before You

## God's Work in the Book of Joshua

### *Holy War and Holy Purposes*

10:1-12:24

#### **Focus Attention:**

*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,  
who have been called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:28

What does this verse mean for you? How have you found it to be true in your life? When has this promise sustained you ...

- ✦ During times of stress or crisis?
- ✦ In the important relationships in your life?
- ✦ During periods of doubt or questioning?
- ✦ After you have disappointed God in some way?

The promise of God, as recorded by the apostle Paul, has at least three significant aspects.

1. Not everything in our lives will be good, but God activity in our lives can turn even the negative around and make it work toward positive results.
2. This promise is made for those “who love him.” Psalms 37:4 declares, “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Experiencing the promise of good from God depends in some measure on how we have placed the affection of our hearts. We recognize the “good” when our hearts desire the things of God.
3. The promise is also for those “who have been called according to his purpose.” God’s working of good in our lives has a greater goal that just ourselves. We recognize the “good” when we understand how His work brings about His purposes in our lives.

In Joshua 9, the leaders of Israel had made an unwise alliance with the Gibeonites in Canaan. Instead of inquiring of God, they trusted their senses. As a result of their impulsive treaty with the people of Gibeon, Israel failed in following God’s instructions to destroy the pagan Gibeonites from the land – a mistake that had the potential of preventing Israel from fully receiving the inheritance God was giving them.

Are mistakes fatal? Is it possible to recover from times when God is overlooked and poor choices are made? Or is God able to bring about good in all circumstance “for those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”?

In chapters 10-12, we will notice how God takes Israel’s mistake and turns it for victory. What’s more, the conquest of Canaan in this section gives us insight into how we can partner with God in the spiritual battles we face in our lives. What is God’s plan for victory? How can we experience the good that God wants to bring in our lives?

## **Focus on the Word:**

### **A. A Mistake Worked for Good (10:1-28)**

1. At the beginning of chapter 9, the account records that several city-states in Canaan allied together to make war against the invading Israelites. Gibeon had chosen a different tactic against Israel and through deception had saved themselves from defeat by forming a treaty with Israel's leaders.
2. Adoni-Zedek assembles an army with four other southern kings.
  - a. Gibeon's alliance with Israel is too much for Adoni-Zedek to take. Because Gibeon chose Israel over its neighbors, the king of Jerusalem decides the Gibeonites needed to pay a price.
  - b. When the Amorite kings lay siege to Gibeon, Gibeon calls upon Israel to fulfill its treaty of peace.
  - c. Joshua's mistake is turned for good. The kings of southern Canaan have assembled for defeat. "God in heaven must have laughed (Ps 2:1-4), because unknown to them He was using these events to accomplish His own purposes. Instead of having to defeat these five city-states one by one, He would help Joshua conquer them all at one time! Just as God used the defeat at Ai to form a battle plan for victory over Ai, so also He used Joshua's mistake with the Gibeonites to protect Gibeon and accelerate the conquest of Canaan."  
<Wiersbe, pp 112-113>
3. Four reasons are given why Joshua and the army of Israel had success over Adoni-Zedek and the armies of the Amorite kings. <Wiersbe, pp 113-114>
  - a. Joshua trusted the promise of God (v 8). God begins with a familiar refrain: "Do not be afraid of them." After the defeat at Ai resulting from a lapse of following God's guidance, Israel had to trust God for the next battle. Here again they are faced with a choice of trusting God after a failure. "Be strong," God admonishes, "the next battle belongs to you."
  - b. Joshua uses sound strategy (vv 7, 9). Faith in the promises of God requires action upon those promises (cf. James 2:17ff). The strategy employed by Joshua is similar to that used at Ai. The whole army of Israel marched out against the Amorite kings. Joshua surprised the enemy at daybreak after preparing his army the night before. It was a hard, uphill march to reach Gibeon by morning. It was an equally long day of battle after the lengthy march. What kept the weary soldiers going? It must have been strength afforded by the promise of God.
  - c. The battle was won by God (vv 10-11, 13b-14). The army of Israel engaged in the battle, but there was no mistake who won the victory. God fought the enemy on behalf of the weary soldiers. God "threw them into confusion." He sent a timely hailstorm on the enemy – and interestingly enough, the hail only hit the enemy soldiers as they were pursued by the army of Israel. Then an even greater miracle took place. At Joshua's request, God delayed the passing of the day so Israel could have time to finish the battle.

d. Joshua praised God for the victory (vv 12-13a, 25). Joshua fully understood where the power for the victory had come. He gave God the credit and the glory for defeating the enemy. In giving praise to God, Joshua was specific about what God had accomplished on that day. He then used his praise for God as a way of encouraging Israel for the battles that were yet to come.

☞ Are you picking up on lessons for your own battles against the Evil One as you take possession of the inheritance that is yours in Jesus Christ? In what ways are the four factors listed above a part of your life, or which ones are missing?

## **B. Victory over Canaan (10:29-12:24)**

1. Joshua records the first three major battles for Canaan in much detail. From there, however, the author's style of reporting changes. Beginning in 10:29, the conquest for Canaan is recorded briefly as a series of victories over the peoples of Canaan.
  - a. Joshua slices Canaan in half, first turning his attention to the cities in southern Canaan. Each of these cities had been left without leadership and without fighting men after the battle at Gibeon.
  - b. Joshua then turns his army to the north. Here, as in the south, a confederation of city-states battle Israel. This northern coalition is as unsuccessful as the previous one had been even though their army was much larger than that of Israel. From there, Israel proceeds to take the cities of the north.
  - c. 11:23 gives the end result: "So Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war." Control of the land now belonged to Israel with the destruction of the key cities. From here, the individual tribes would be instructed to gain mastery over the remaining inhabitants (13:1).
  - d. All in all, the conquest took seven years to accomplish (based on 14:6-10).
2. God's battle plan for taking possession of His inheritance for Israel.

With each victory in Canaan, a pattern of conquest develops. These elements are repeated to some degree in each battle for the land.

(Are you serious about taking your possession in Christ? Do you wonder about God's battle plan for your life as you meet the schemes of the Evil One? Attacks on your marriage? Your family? Your work relationships? An addiction? A struggle with temptation? A battle with loving the things of the world? Joshua's pattern may be of help.)

- a. Israel moves to engage the enemy.

☞ Are you facing the enemies to your spiritual health? Or do you ignore them, hoping they will go away? What scheme of the devil do you need to confront? What battle do you need to give a name and bring out into the light of God's purposes?

- b. Israel attacks the enemy.
  - ☞ Acknowledging and giving a name to your enemy is a start, but without taking up the battle, you will never know victory. Are you actively seeking God’s instructions for overcoming the battles that loom against you, and are you tenaciously fighting for mastery over those areas?
- c. The Lord gives Israel the victory.
  - ☞ God’s promise is to give us victory through Jesus Christ. Are you trusting in His power? Can you, with Paul, say, “His grace is sufficient for me. His power is made perfect in my weakness” (2 Cor 12:9)?
- d. Israel completely destroys the enemy.
  - ☞ Am I content with a draw in my spiritual battles, deciding to find compromise with those things that war against God’s purposes for me? Or do I seek God’s power to win an overwhelming victory? This does not mean achieving an “overnight” win over my enemy, but it does mean remaining vigilant and steadfast against the enemy even as I wait for God’s timing.
- e. Israel moves on to the next enemy.
  - ☞ How many of your battles do you attempt to fight on your own? God has provided a household of believers to stand with you during the challenges that come your way. We are not to be a burden on others, but we are to give others the opportunity to bear our burdens with us (Gal 6:2, 5).

### **C. Holy War and Holy Purposes**

1. Application of God’s work for our lives out of the story of the conquest in Joshua sometimes hits several sticking points.
  - a. What are we to make of the God of War described in the book?
  - b. How can we reconcile the God of love that we know with the God of savagery we read in this book?
  - c. What are we to do with the genocide that is commanded?
  - d. How can we make sense of the command to destroy not just the men and women, but the children also?

Who is this God that we serve?
2. Before we can understand the events in Joshua, we must place it in the context of God’s work up to that point.
  - a. Genesis 15:13-16 – God had made a promise to make Abraham’s descendants into a great nation through whom He would bless all others. Part of the promise was to give to Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan. The promise, however, would not be fulfilled in Abraham’s day “for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.” The possession of the land of Canaan would serve more than one purpose.

- b. Deuteronomy 7:1-6 – Four hundred years after Abraham, God was ready to fulfill His promise to Abraham’s descendants. God gives instruction through Moses for the complete annihilation of the peoples in Canaan. Anything short of that would result in dire consequences for the children of promise. The people of the land, God warned, would draw God’s holy nation away from God’s purposes for them.
  - c. Deuteronomy 7:17-26 – God makes it clear that, though Israel will fight the battles, it will be God who wins the victories. The war that Israel is to wage against the peoples of Canaan is a holy war, fought under the direct leadership and power of God.
  - d. Deuteronomy 9:1-6 – The reason Israel is to destroy the people of Canaan is not because Israel was somehow superior to the others. Instead, Israel was to serve as an instrument of judgment on the wickedness in Canaan.
3. This brief history highlights two reasons for the holy war against Canaan.
- a. It would protect God’s holy people from being drawn away from their covenant relationship with God.
  - b. It would bring about God’s righteous judgment against the godlessness and wickedness that had developed in the land.
  - c. “These nations were cut off to prevent the corruption of Israel and the rest of the world (Deut 20:16-18). When a nation starts burning children as a gift to the gods (Lev 18:21) and practices sodomy, bestiality and all sorts of loathsome vices (Lev 18:25, 27, 30), the day of God’s grace and mercy has begun to run out. Just as a surgeon does not hesitate to amputate a gangrenous limb, even if he cannot help cutting off some healthy flesh, so God must do the same... God could have used pestilence, hurricanes, famine, diseases or anything else he wanted. In this case he chose to use Israel to reveal his power.” *<Hard Saying of the Old Testament, p 108>*
  - d. Israel was a holy nation, set apart by God for His holy purposes. One purpose God had for Israel was to be a blessing to all nations. He also used Israel to bring judgment on nations. And in reality, the latter was one way of accomplishing the former.
4. Why include the children in the destruction of Canaan? How are we to make sense of the annihilation of innocent lives?
- a. There is a universal in this created world that individuals share in the life of their families, communities, and nations. This unfortunately involves the innocent along with the guilty.
  - b. There is also the possibility that if the children were spared, how long would it have been before a new generation had emerged like their pagan predecessors?
  - c. Perhaps there is a measure of God’s mercy in the killing of the children. If it is true that the Bible teaches that children are safe in God’s care until they reach an age when they become accountable for their choices and actions, these children would have been brought into God’s presence before they had the opportunity to follow in their fathers’ footsteps of wickedness and godlessness.

5. What can we take with us?
- a. God's ways are not our ways (Ps 92:5-8; Is 40:13-14; Rom 9:20-21). We must be careful about forcing God to live up to our standards or sensibilities about what is right and what is wrong. When we are tempted to sit in judgment on God, it is time to step back and remember God is holy, righteous and true.
  - b. Sin is significant and demands a significant response. The Christians Peter wrote to in 2 Peter apparently confused God's longsuffering with complacency with sin (3:9). Sin is serious and must be dealt with. A time comes even in God's mercy and patience when sin can no longer be tolerated.
  - c. "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12).
    - i. Our "familiar triad of enemies in the New Testament is the flesh, the world, and the devil. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul emphasizes the world and the devil. He says that 'flesh and blood' in the sense of physical humans is not our enemy. But 'flesh' in the sense of [that part Satan tempts in] each of us has *is* our enemy." <Joshua in *The LifeChange Series*> Our war is with the spiritual forces in our world that draw heart, minds and souls away from a relationship with God in Jesus Christ.
    - ii. Jesus described the aggressive way we ought to fight this battle in the Sermon on the Mount: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matt 5:29-30).
    - iii. In his first epistle, John proclaims, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).
    - iv. Joshua's "take no prisoners" approach to holy warfare is the same attitude we must have when it comes to our battle against the Evil One in this world. There cannot be any compromise or treaty with the enemy.
  - d. We bless the world by holding out hope in the midst of this struggle.
  - e. In all of this, we have the power of Christ at work in our lives winning a glorious victory. We participate in the battle, but the victory is won by Jesus Christ.

## **Focus on Tomorrow**

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith....  
The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his  
heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Tim 4:7, 18)*

Are you fighting the good fight? Are you determined to finish the race? In what ways do you need to step up your battle against the devil's schemes this week?