

Answers to tough questions in Joshua

1. How can we understand the character of God as revealed in the rest of Scripture in comparison with the harsh commands of God to utterly destroy cities and peoples in the conquest of the Promised Land?

When Joshua issued orders for the destruction of Jericho, he was echoing God's very clear commands. Passages like Exodus 23:32, 33; 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:16-18 make it impossible to soften or avoid the truth that God ordered the destruction of entire populations. Those were not just soldiers killing soldiers. Many of the victims were women and children. The challenge for serious and humble Bible students is to face these horrors and the hard lessons they teach without trying to explain them away.

If we do not have a growing awe about the holiness of God and His righteous judgment of sin, our understanding of God's grace and mercy will fade away. Without an acknowledgment that God can and does punish, the possibility of mercy and forgiveness carries little weight. If we do not seek to see the entire scope of God's actions and character, we will tend to gravitate to what we like or don't and miss the connections. The gaps in our understanding can be partly filled by biblical insights.

Israel's role in applying God's judgment had nothing to do with their own righteousness. But for God's grace, they would easily be in the place of those people who were sentenced to death. "Do not think in your heart, after the Lord your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land'; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you" (Deut 9:4).

God could have used sickness, famine, fire, or flood to clear out the land, but He chose to use the people of Israel. In terrible natural disasters, everyone suffers. It isn't easy to accept that little children shared the fate of their parents, but they often do. And they did as Israel carried out God's judgments. Did God unfairly include these children in punishment, or do the parents and leaders bear responsibility for putting the innocent in harm's way by their rejection of God? Some of these issues will have to be settled beyond death, when the final judgment occurs (Heb 9:27).

2. Why did God bless Rahab and give her a unique role in history in spite of her life?

Rahab's life was not spared because of her lie; it was spared because she put her faith in God. Rahab was given a gracious opportunity to side with God by protecting the two Israelite spies, and she acted within her circumstances. She lied daringly and elaborately. Perhaps her initial response was simply a habit of her profession. From the perspective of the kings of Jericho, Rahab would have been guilty of treason, not just lying. She had a new allegiance, and she didn't yet know that the God she now wanted to trust had a rule about lying.

The radical change that came into Rahab's life when those spies knocked on her door can be seen in several ways. She risked her life to trust God. The Book of Ruth also reveals that Rahab married and became the great, great-grandmother of King David and one of the ancestors of Jesus. Centuries later, Rahab was one of the women listed in Hebrews 11 because of her faith.

<https://sites.google.com/a/indubiblia.org/inductive-bible-study/joshua-1>

3. How does God's guarantee of success to Joshua carry over to us?

The Book of Joshua begins with God's commissioning of Israel's new leader. God described Joshua's mission—to go in and possess the land (1:2–6). God hinged Joshua's success on three key factors: (1) God's own presence (1:5); (2) Joshua's personal strength and courage (1:7, 9); and (3) Joshua's attention to and application of God's Word (1:7, 8).

The process of biblical meditation begins with a thoughtful, lingering reading of God's Word. It progresses to familiarity and memorization. In order to “meditate in it day and night” (Joshua 1:8), Joshua needed to spend enough time in the Book of the Law so that the book would eventually get in Joshua. The purpose of God's Word has been achieved when meditation leads us to application—“observe to do according to all that is written in it” (Josh. 1:8).

“Then,” God told Joshua, “you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (1:8). Joshua found that the ultimate measure of prosperity and success was knowing how God wants His people to live and then living that way. God repeatedly assured Joshua of His own presence “wherever you go.” What greater measure of success could there be than to honor the ever-present God with our obedience?