

Bible Challenge 2018

Week 8: February 18-24

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Chapter 23-24: Covenant Renewal and Joshua's Death

The Book of Joshua covers only about a seven year span of time, from Joshua's taking leadership at the death of Moses until the majority of the land had been conquered or settled into, at the death of this leader at 110 years of age. He is one of two men who left Egypt who was given the privilege of entering into the Promised Land — he along with the other faithful spy, Caleb.

The Baton Passed to Joshua

If you have ever thought you have had big shoes to fill, then think about Joshua having to take over and follow after Moses. At the same time, the counsel that God gives to Joshua will serve you just as well today as it did him all of those years ago. God tells him to set the "Book of the Law" (the Word of God) before his eyes day and night so that he may do "according to all that is written in it." There is an old Jewish story that speaks of a young Rabbi wishing to learn the philosophy of the Greeks. The older master told the apprentice to find the hour that is "neither day nor night" and in those hours study the thought of the Greeks. Thus, it becomes a matter of priority. The majority of the day, study the Word of God, and in the hours of dawn and dusk, study the other things...not that they are unimportant, it is just that their importance pales in comparison to the importance of God's Word.

The Spies in the Land

The story of Rahab and the spies is a favorite of mine. It is a reminder of God's grace to this woman who fears the God of Israel more than she fears her own people or their idolatrous gods. God rewards this woman not for the lie she told to those searching for the spies, but for her submission to Him. She effectively betrays her people by hiding the spies. Her reward? Deliverance from Jericho, a godly husband named Salmon, a godly son named Boaz (and daughter-in-law named Ruth), and a place in the genealogy of David and the Messiah — a King's reward for her faithfulness.

Crossing the River Jordan

Much like the generation before them had crossed the Red Sea, God brings the people through the Jordan River, a river that while today is relatively gentle thanks to modern dams, was in ancient times a river with a strong current and that presented a substantial threat to those who wished to ford it. Yet, as the river parted, the Israelites were also commanded to place twelve stones in the middle as a monument to God's faithfulness in delivering them through it.

Circumcision and Passover

We discover that those who were born in the wilderness were not circumcised, thus, upon arrival, both circumcision for all men and the celebration of the Passover was observed. They are also introduced to the "Captain of the Lord's Army," a person who speaks with the authority of God and is considered by many the pre-incarnate Christ addressing Joshua and the people. Indeed, it is God who fights the people's battles for them — the people indeed participate but whether there is victory or defeat is in God's hands entirely.

The Defeat of Jericho

As the old Gospel song goes, "Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down!" Of course, once again, this is God's doing and the defeat at Ai that followed is a testimony that God blesses his people when they obey him and brings judgment when his people disobey.

It should be noted that many people really struggle with God's command to put this (and future) cities to the ban — to tear them down to the ground and to kill everything and everyone that is living within it — even women and children. God is, of course, a righteous judge, and he has put this region under his condemnation (remember, women and children died in Noah's flood as well). In a very real sense, it is a picture of God's eternal judgment when all things will stand before him and his enemies will be condemned to Hell's fires. Remembering Rahab, before, though, there is hope and salvation for those who turn from their evil and toward God.

The Attacks on Ai and the Covenant Renewed

Wicked Achan disobeyed God and brought back treasure for himself and his family from the raid on Jericho. As a result, God brought judgment on Israel and they were defeated by the men of Ai, with many Israelites dying in the fighting. It would be revealed that Achan was guilty and thus, he and his family were put to death there before Israel. It is a reminder of God's demand of obedience on his own and a reminder of the covenant structure of the family — even Achan's children suffered as a result of their father's sin. How often we too, act as if God cannot see our sin if no one else can, yet the consequences can affect many.

The Gibeonites

Joshua got bamboozled...even the best of us can be. His mistake? He acted on his own reason without consulting first with the Lord. As a result, the Gibeonites remained in the land even up until the days of King David. Sin has consequences and those consequences can sometimes be long lasting.

Jerusalem rallies Five Armies and the Conquest of the Land

As Israel continues to steamroller over its enemies, the king of Jerusalem seeks to ally himself with the other pagan cities of the land to combine their armies for an attack. Yet, God cannot be defeated by any number of armies that stand against him and so their combined efforts only speeded their defeat.

A Recounting, Inheritances, Cities of Refuge, and Levitical lands

As we see regularly in Jewish literature, there is a recounting of the armies that God defeated. It not only reminds the people of God's faithfulness, but also keeps the people from falling into the despair of day to day doldrums. How we need to do more of that in the life of the church — remembering through what God has brought us so that we do not begin to think that God is not ever-present with us.

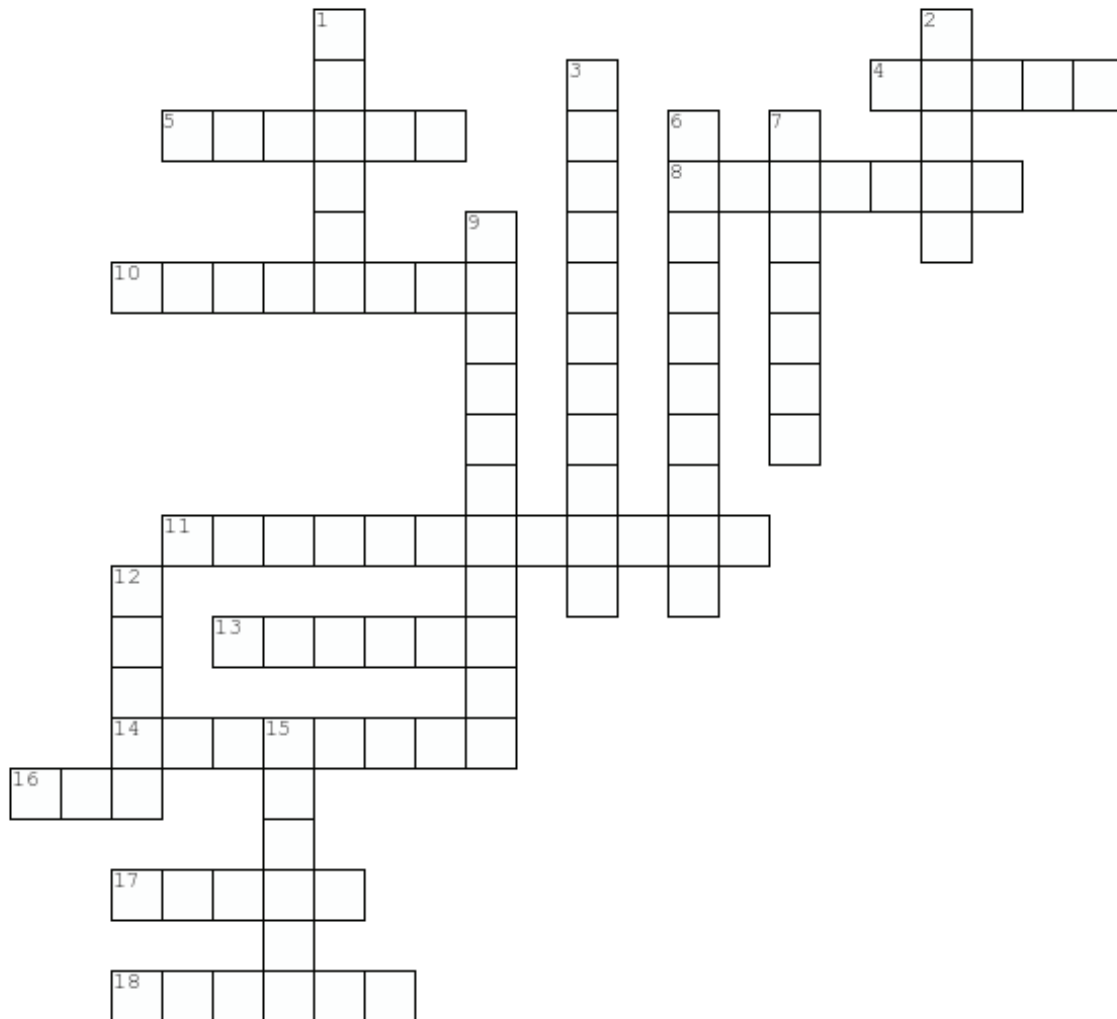
Inheritances are dispersed with indications of which cities are to be cities of refuge. And though the Levites did not have an inheritance in the land, they still needed regions where they could tend their livestock and grow crops, thus these areas were so indicated.

One final thing to note in this section. Even here (verse 18:5) we see the makings of a rivalry between the northern and southern kingdoms. Such is not something that happened only in the days following Solomon's death — the division at that time had been formed even as the land was being laid out and allocated.

The Eastern Tribe and a Renewed Covenant

There is a question regarding whether the Eastern tribes (those settling on the other side of the Jordan), were engaged in idolatry as they set up a marker of witness. This was investigated (worship is taken seriously), and the book closes with a covenant renewal service where Joshua proclaims the famous words, "choose this day whom you will serve, but for me and for my household, we will serve the Lord." Amen and Amen. As we close out the book of Joshua, may these be your own words as well.

Week 8: Joshua



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Across

4. Hebron was given as part of the inheritance of this man (hint: he was one of the original spies who spied out the land).
5. The inhabitants of this city put on old clothes and fooled Joshua into thinking they had come from afar.
8. Joshua would be given the city of Timnath-serah in the hill country of this tribe.
10. Five Amoite kings hid in a cave located here.
11. This shall not depart from Joshua's mouth (4 words).
13. God divided this river so the people could pass through.
14. God made the sun stand still when Joshua was pursuing this group.
16. What is the name of Joshua's father?
17. It is considered by many scholars that the Commander of the Lord's Army was none other than the reincarnate _____ himself.
18. The bones of this patriarch are buried at Shechem.

Down

1. Joshua instructed that this many stones be set up in the midst of the river as a testimony of God's deliverance.
2. This prostitute abandoned her culture for the God of Israel.
3. After crossing into the Promised Land, the Israelites had to be _____.
6. This man had daughters but no sons and thus they were given his inheritance.
7. This is the place where Joshua renewed the covenant with Israel.
9. The land of this prominent group would remain unconquered in the days of Joshua.
12. This man caused the defeat of the Israelites at Ai.
15. These cities were established for mercy to the sanslayer.