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LIGUORI CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY



Historical Books I

JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, 1 AND 2 SAMUEL

WILLIAM A. ANDERSON, DMIN, PHD



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Introduction to *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*

READING THE BIBLE can be daunting. It's a complex book, and many a person of goodwill has tried to read the Bible and ended up putting it down in utter confusion. It helps to have a companion, and *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is a solid one. Over the course of this series, you'll learn about biblical messages, themes, personalities, and events and understand how the books of the Bible rose out of the need to address new situations.

Across the centuries, people of faith have asked, "Where is God in this moment?" Millions of Catholics look to the Bible for encouragement in their journey of faith. Wisdom teaches us not to undertake Bible study alone, disconnected from the Church that was given Scripture to share and treasure. When used as a source of prayer and thoughtful reflection, the Bible comes alive.

Your choice of a Bible-study program should be dictated by what you want to get out of it. One goal of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* is to give readers greater familiarity with the Bible's structure, themes, personalities, and message. But that's not enough. This program will also teach you to use Scripture in your prayer. God's message is as compelling and urgent today as ever, but we get only part of the message when it's memorized and stuck in our heads. It's meant for the entire person—physical, emotional, and spiritual.

We're baptized into life with Christ, and we're called to live more fully with Christ today as we practice the values of justice, peace, forgiveness, and community. God's new covenant was written on the hearts of the people of Israel; we, their spiritual descendants, are loved that intimately by God today. *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* will draw you closer to God, in whose image and likeness we are fashioned.

Group and Individual Study

The *Liguori Catholic Bible Study* series is intended for group and individual study and prayer. This series gives you the tools to start a study group. Gathering two or three people in a home or announcing the meeting of a Bible-study group in a parish or community can bring surprising results. Each lesson in this series contains a section to help groups study, reflect, pray, and share biblical reflections. Each lesson, except the first, also has a second section for individual study.

Many people who want to learn more about the Bible don't know where to begin. This series gives them a place to start and helps them continue until they're familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Bible study can be a lifelong project, always enriching those who wish to be faithful to God's Word. When people complete a study of the whole Bible, they can begin again, making new discoveries with each new adventure into the Word of God.



Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

BIBLE STUDY isn't just a matter of gaining intellectual knowledge of the Bible; it's also about gaining a greater understanding of God's love and concern for creation. The purpose of reading and knowing the Bible is to enrich our relationship with God. God loves us and gave us the Bible to illustrate that love. As Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, a study of the Bible is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a spiritual adventure that should influence our dealings with God and neighbor.

The Meaning of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina is a Latin expression that means "divine or sacred reading." The process for *lectio divina* consists of Scripture readings, reflection, and prayer. Many clergy, religious, and laity use *lectio divina* in their daily spiritual reading to develop a closer and more loving relationship with God. Learning about Scripture has as its purpose the living of its message, which demands a period of reflection on the Scripture passages.

Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Prayer is a necessary element for the practice of *lectio divina*. The entire process of reading and reflecting is a prayer. It's not merely an intellectual pursuit; it's also a spiritual one. Page 16 includes an Opening Prayer for gathering one's thoughts before moving on to the passages in each section. This prayer may be used privately or in a group. For those who use the book for daily spiritual reading, the prayer for each section may be repeated each day. Some may wish to keep a journal of each day's meditation.

Pondering the Word of God

Lectio divina is the ancient Christian spiritual practice of reading the holy Scriptures with intentionality and devotion. This practice helps Christians center themselves and descend to the level of the heart to enter an inner quiet space, finding God.

This sacred reading is distinct from reading for knowledge or information, and it's more than the pious practice of spiritual reading. It is the practice of opening ourselves to the action and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As we intentionally focus on and become present to the inner meaning of the Scripture passage, the Holy Spirit enlightens our minds and hearts. We come to the text willing to be influenced by a deeper meaning that lies within the words and thoughts we ponder.

In this space, we open ourselves to be challenged and changed by the inner meaning we experience. We approach the text in a spirit of faith and obedience as a disciple ready to be taught by the Holy Spirit. As we savor the sacred text, we let go of our usual control of how we expect God to act in our lives and surrender our hearts and consciences to the flow of the divine (*divina*) through the reading (*lectio*).

The fundamental principle of *lectio divina* leads us to understand the profound mystery of the Incarnation, "The Word became flesh," not only in history but also within us.

Praying *Lectio* Today

Before you begin, relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). Then practice these four simple actions:

1. Read a passage from Scripture or the daily Mass readings. This is known as *lectio*. (If the Word of God is read aloud, the hearers listen attentively.)
2. Pray the selected passage with attention as you listen for a specific meaning that comes to mind. Once again, the reading is listened to or silently read and reflected or meditated on. This is known as *meditatio*.
3. The exercise becomes active. Pick a word, sentence, or idea that surfaces from your consideration of the chosen text. Does the reading remind you of a person, place, or experience? If so, pray about it. Compose your thoughts and reflection into a simple word or phrase. This prayer-thought will help you remove distractions during the *lectio*. This exercise is called *oratio*.
4. In silence, with your eyes closed, quiet yourself and become conscious of your breathing. Let your thoughts, feelings, and concerns fade as you consider the selected passage in the previous step (*oratio*). If you're distracted, use your prayer word to help you return to silence. This is *contemplatio*.

This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

Many teachers of prayer call contemplation the prayer of resting in God, a prelude to losing oneself in the presence of God. Scripture is transformed in our hearing as we pray and allow our hearts to unite intimately with the Lord. The Word truly takes on flesh, and this time it is manifested in our flesh.



How to Use This Bible-Study Companion

THE BIBLE, along with the commentaries and reflections found in this study, will help participants become familiar with the Scripture texts and lead them to reflect more deeply on the texts' message. At the end of this study, participants will have a firm grasp of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, and Second Samuel, becoming therefore more cognizant of the spiritual nourishment these books offer. This study is not only an intellectual adventure, it's also a spiritual one. The reflections lead participants into their own journey with the Scripture readings.

Context

When the authors wrote the historical books, they didn't simply link random stories together. Rather, they placed them in a context to stress a message. To help readers learn about each passage in relation to those around it, each lesson begins with an overview that puts the Scripture passages into context.

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Part 1: Group Study

To give participants a comprehensive study of these historical books, the book is divided into eight lessons. Lesson 1 is group study only; Lessons 2 through 8 are divided into Part 1, group study, and Part 2, individual study. For example, Lesson 2 covers passages from Joshua 5 through 24. The study group reads and discusses only Joshua 5—7 (Part 1). Participants privately read and reflect on Joshua 8 through 24 (Part 2).

Group study may or may not include *lectio divina*. With *lectio divina*, the group meets for ninety minutes using the format at the top of page 14. Without *lectio divina*, the group meets for one hour using the format at the bottom of page 14, and participants are urged to privately read the *lectio divina* section at the end of Part 1. It contains additional reflections on the Scripture passages studied during the group session that will take participants even further into the passages.

Part 2: Individual Study

The Scripture passages not covered in Part 1 are divided into shorter components, one to be studied each day. Participants who don't belong to a study group can use the lessons for private sacred reading. They may choose to reflect on one Scripture passage per day, making it possible for a clearer understanding of the Scripture passages used in their *lectio divina* (sacred reading).

A PROCESS FOR SACRED READING

Liguori Publications has designed this study to be user friendly and manageable. However, group dynamics and leaders vary. We're not trying to keep the Holy Spirit from working in your midst, thus we suggest you decide beforehand which format works best for your group. If you have limited time, you could study the Bible as a group and save prayer and reflection for personal time.

However, if your group wishes to digest and feast on sacred Scripture through both prayer and study, we recommend you spend closer to ninety minutes each week by gathering to study and pray with Scripture. *Lectio*

divina (see page 9) is an ancient contemplative prayer form that moves readers from the head to the heart in meeting the Lord. We strongly suggest using this prayer form whether in individual or group study.

GROUP-STUDY FORMATS

1. Bible Study With *Lectio Divina*

About ninety minutes of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (30 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud a second time, followed by quiet time for meditation and contemplation (5 minutes)
- ✠ Spend some time in prayer with the selected passage. Group participants will slowly read the Scripture passage a third time in silence, listening for the voice of God as they read (10–20 minutes)
- ✠ Shared reflection (10–15 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

To become acquainted with lectio divina, see page 9.

2. Bible Study

About one hour of group study

- ✠ Gathering and opening prayer (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Scripture passage read aloud (5 minutes)
- ✠ Silently review the commentary and prepare to discuss it with the group (3–5 minutes)
- ✠ Discuss the Scripture passage along with the commentary and reflection (40 minutes)
- ✠ Closing prayer (3–5 minutes)

Notes to the Leader

- ✧ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✧ Plan which sections will be covered each week of your Bible study.
- ✧ Read the material in advance of each session.
- ✧ Establish written ground rules. (Example: We won't keep you longer than ninety minutes; don't dominate the sharing by arguing or debating.)
- ✧ Meet in an appropriate and welcoming gathering space (church building, meeting room, house).
- ✧ Provide name tags and perhaps use a brief icebreaker for the first meeting; ask participants to introduce themselves.
- ✧ Mark the Scripture passage(s) that will be read during the session.
- ✧ Decide how you would like the Scripture to be read aloud (whether by one or multiple readers).
- ✧ Use a clock or watch.
- ✧ Provide extra Bibles (or copies of the Scripture passages) for participants who don't bring their Bible.
- ✧ Ask participants to read "Introduction: Historical Books I" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✧ Tell participants which passages to study and urge them to read the passages and commentaries before the meeting.
- ✧ If you opt to use the *lectio divina* format, familiarize yourself with this prayer form ahead of time.

Notes to Participants

- ✧ Bring a copy of the *New American Bible*, revised edition.
- ✧ Read "Introduction: Historical Books I" (page 17) before the first session.
- ✧ Read the Scripture passages and commentaries before each session.
- ✧ Be prepared to share and listen respectfully. (This is not a time to debate beliefs or argue.)

Opening Prayer

Leader: O God, come to my assistance.

Response: O Lord, make haste to help me.

Leader: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit...

Response: ...as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: Christ is the vine and we are the branches. As branches linked to Jesus, the vine, we are called to recognize that the Scriptures are always being fulfilled in our lives. It is the living Word of God living on in us. Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your divine wisdom, knowledge, and love.

Response: Open our minds and hearts as we study your great love for us as shown in the Bible.

Reader: (Open your Bible to the assigned Scripture(s) and read in a paced, deliberate manner. Pause for one minute, listening for a word, phrase, or image that you may use in your *lectio divina* practice.)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father...

Leader: Lord, inspire us with your Spirit as we study your Word in the Bible. Be with us this day and every day as we strive to know you and serve you and to love as you love. We believe that through your goodness and love, the Spirit of the Lord is truly upon us. Allow the words of the Bible, your Word, to capture us and inspire us to live as you live and to love as you love.

Response: Amen.

Leader: May the divine assistance remain with us always.

Response: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



INTRODUCTION

Historical Books I

Read this overview before the first session.

A pastor, who used stories in his homilies, jokingly said in one of his Sunday homilies, “All my stories are true, and some of them really happened!” He never worried about the truthfulness of the stories he used as long as they seemed plausible and enabled his audience to connect their life stories to his story. He sometimes embellished and idealized some of his stories as long as he believed the story had a lesson to teach. The pastor said his stories were true because they touched upon many of the true emotions and struggles of a person’s life.

In reading the historical books of the Bible, the reader is on an imaginative journey of stories that happened in essence but which were embellished and idealized as they passed by word-of-mouth from one generation to the next before they were finally written down. The historical books belong to the Bible, the inspired Word of God. It is the message that is important, not the exact history. The historical books of the Bible tell us that God was at work in the history of Israel. In these books, there are some historical facts, some embellishments and exaggerations, idealized stories of characters portrayed, biased presentations, and deep faith in God as the one true God.

Sagas in the Early Israelite Community

After reading the first five books of the Bible (Pentateuch), the reader encounters the historical books, which contain the Books of Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Although the Book of Ruth does not strictly belong to the historical books, it is placed before First Samuel in our current Bible

since it includes the story of the grandmother of David. In this volume of *Liguori Catholic Bible Study*, we will study the Books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, and Second Samuel. The remaining historical books (First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah) will be studied in a later volume.

In the historical books, the reader meets some of the major heroes and villains of Old Testament history. Scholars concede that the contents of these books cannot be taken literally, but they are a result of many centuries of collected writings and oral traditions, becoming an idealistic structuring of the historical situations and people involved in these stories. Several authors wrote the books at different times in history. The final writing and editing of the books took place around the sixth or fifth century before Christ, long after the events described took place.

Deuteronomistic History

Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings, along with the Book of Deuteronomy, belong to a group of books known as *Deuteronomistic History*. Deuteronomistic History shares a common theme centered on the need for the people to remain faithful to the covenant established between God and the Israelites. If the nation remains faithful to God's covenant, God will protect it and lead it to victory in battles, but if the nation abandons the covenant, God will abandon it and allow other nations to plunder and conquer it. Although we use the term "the author" or "editor" throughout the book, the historical books are actually the result of many authors or editors.

Throughout the Old Testament, we read about the successes and tragedies endured by the Israelites. Besides invading the Promised Land, the Israelites themselves become victims of massive invasions throughout their history. After the death of Solomon, the Israelite kingdom broke into a northern and southern kingdom, with ten tribes forming the northern kingdom and the tribe of Judah forming the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom became known as the kingdom of Israel, and the southern as the kingdom of Judah.

Around 721 BC, the Assyrians decimated the northern kingdom, conquering the people, sending many of them into exile into other captured

countries and bringing in people from captured countries to intermarry with the survivors. This mixed nation will later become known as Samaria. Some of the Israelites escaped from the invading Assyrians and fled south to the kingdom of Judah, bringing their stories and traditions with them.

Around 587 BC, the Babylonians invaded and destroyed the southern kingdom of Judah, carrying many of its inhabitants into exile to Babylon, an exile that lasted almost fifty years before the Judeans were allowed to return to their homeland. During this exile, the people of Judah kept their faith alive by sharing stories and messages gleaned from their life in Judah. Many of these stories were passed on orally, while some may have been written down.

Throughout their tragedies, the people recognized their failure to remain faithful to the covenant and their need to return to God. The Deuteronomistic author was able to gather ancient written traditions, the oral traditions of the people, and the stories and theological beliefs of the people from the northern and southern kingdoms. The result is a presentation of the history of the Israelite people, a presentation that contains true historical characters whose lives become magnified and idealized in the retelling.

Book of Joshua

The Book of Joshua follows upon the history found in the Book of Exodus, which speaks of the Israelites' escape from Egypt, their sojourn in the desert, and their preparation for entry into the Promised Land. The reader already met Joshua in the Book of Exodus as a military leader and an assistant to Moses, who chose to lead the people after the death of Moses. Just as the Lord was with Moses throughout the Exodus experience, so the Lord is with Joshua during the invasion of the Promised Land.

The theme of the Book of Joshua describes the conquest of the land of Canaan by Joshua and his army, a conquest promised by God to the Israelite ancestors. The book also speaks of a rapid conquest of the land, the battles and setbacks endured in this conquest, the division of the land among the twelve tribes, and a renewal of the covenant. As already mentioned in the Book of Deuteronomy, the success of the Israelites depends on their faithfulness to the covenant they made with God. When they abandon the covenant and worship other gods, God will abandon them.

One of the difficulties experienced by modern readers concerns the placing of a conquered city under the “ban,” which was practiced in the Near East during the time of Joshua. The “ban” called for the total destruction of the conquered people, men, women, children, and livestock, thus avoiding any temptations the Israelites might have to worship the gods of the conquered people. The ban often resulted in burning the conquered city so that even the name of it would be wiped out.

Although the Book of Joshua gives the impression that the Israelites had conquered the Promised Land in a quick and successful manner, the Book of Judges and the books following show that the Israelites still had to fight the original inhabitants of the land. The land of Canaan contained a number of small tribes, not one large army that united the kingdom of Canaan. The conquest would demand a long period of fighting individual tribes before the Israelites could claim a large portion of the Promised Land.

Book of Judges

The Book of Judges does not refer to judges as we know them in a juridical sense today but to chosen leaders at particular times in the history of the Israelite nation in their early years in the Promised Land. Their continual battles are further proof that the Israelites did not sweep through the Promised Land with total victory. The judges include heroic or tragic leaders, some who were faithful to the Lord and some who were not. They were not leaders of the nation but leaders of a small portion of the people.

A common recurring theme in the Book of Judges is the Israelite abandonment of the covenant by turning their backs on God and worshiping other gods. When the Israelites turned against God, God abandoned them to their enemies. At this point, the Israelites would repent, crying out to God for help, and God would send a judge to lead them against their enemies. Although some of the stories of the judges may have come from written sources, most of them seem to come from an oral tradition. Many of them are obviously idealized images of heroic leaders.

A common repeated theme of the Book of Judges is: “In those days there was no king in Israel” (18:1). The book recognizes that God is the king of Israel, but it also prepares for the day when Israel would have a king. At the

time of the final editing of the book, the editor already knew that Israel had a series of kings and had been conquered by foreign invaders.

Book of Ruth

The story of Ruth finds its place in the Bible from the first line of the book, which states: “Once back in the time of the judges....” This book becomes a link between the Book of Judges and First Samuel. It tells of a dedicated Moabite woman who is not an Israelite but who was married to a son of an Israelite woman named Naomi. When Naomi’s son dies, Naomi directs Ruth to return to her people, but Ruth dedicates herself to the people of Naomi’s ancestors.

Ruth will eventually become the wife of Boaz and the grandmother of David. Although she is not an Israelite, the Gospel of Matthew lists her among the ancestors of David and Jesus. The story shows God’s universal concern for all people.

1 and 2 Samuel

Many commentators refer to Samuel as the last of the judges and a prophet. He comes upon the scene when there was still no king in Israel, and he will receive the call to choose a king for Israel. The books tell the story of the development of kingship in Israel and the challenges involved. Although Israel chooses kings, God still remains the king of the nation, and any sin, even those committed by a king, bring disaster upon the nation. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel present a story of Saul who fails as the first king and an idealized image of David.



LESSON 2

The Book of Joshua (II)

JOSHUA 5—24

Thus the LORD was with Joshua so that his fame spread throughout the land (6:27).

Opening Prayer (SEE PAGE 16)

Context

Part 1: Joshua 5—7 At Gilgal, all the male Israelites are circumcised and the Israelites celebrate their first Passover in the land of promise. For seven days, the priests carry the ark around Jericho, and on the seventh day, the people are to raise a loud noise and the walls of Jericho collapse. A short time after the conquest of Jericho, the Israelites are defeated at Ai. An Israelite named Achan had taken some plunder from the conquest of Jericho, and the Lord punishes the whole community. The Lord is appeased when Achan and his entire family are stoned to death.

Part 2: Joshua 8—24 The Israelites capture Ai. A tribe named Gibeonites later trick the Israelites into thinking that they had come from outside Canaan. The Israelite leaders make an oath not to kill them, but they soon discover that they were deceived. They make the Gibeonites slaves of the Israelites. Joshua leads a series of conquests against the Ammonite kings and kills some of the captured kings himself. Joshua seals the commitment of the Israelites to the Lord with a renewal of the covenant and dies shortly thereafter.

PART 1: GROUP STUDY (JOSHUA 5—7)

Read aloud Joshua 5—7.

5—6 Fall of Jericho

The kings of the Amorite tribes feared the Israelites when they heard of the miraculous drying up of the Jordan River that allowed the Israelites to cross on dry land. Those who entered the Promised Land had to live up to the demands of the covenant made between Abraham and the Lord by circumcising all the males. Circumcision was to be the external sign of the covenant. The Lord said to Abraham, “This is the covenant between me and you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised” (Genesis 17:10).

The Lord directed Joshua to make sharp flint knives to circumcise all the males of Israel. The editor added the phrase, “for a second time” (5:2) which is confusing and appears to be added by a later editor. In the Bible, a place is often named after the event which took place there. The name “Gibeath-haaraloth” means “Hill of the Foreskins.” Those who came out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus were circumcised, but the second generation, who were born in the desert and who entered the Promised Land, were not. When all the males were circumcised, they remained in the camp until they recovered.

As a result of the circumcision of all the males, the Lord declared, “To-day, I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you” (5:9). The reproach of Egypt referred not only to the time the previous generation spent in Egypt but also to their disobedience and murmuring in the desert. Because of the Lord’s words to Joshua, the place named Gilgal is considered a sacred place.

The Israelites celebrated the Passover at Gilgal, on the plains of Jericho. It was fitting that they celebrated Passover at the end of their journey in the Promised Land, since it was celebrated by the Israelites right before their exit from Egypt (Exodus 12:1–28) when they were about to begin their journey. On the day of the celebration of the Passover in the Promised Land, the manna, which was given to feed the people in the wilderness, ceased, and the people ate of the produce of the land. The Promised Land,

for the Israelites, was the land flowing with milk and honey, therefore the Israelites no longer had any need for manna.

As Joshua neared Jericho, he encountered someone with a drawn sword facing him. Joshua asked if he were one of his army or one of the enemy's. He was told that the armed one was neither, but was the commander of the Lord's army. When Joshua realized that he was in the presence of a divine being, he fell to the ground in worship. The divine one ordered Joshua to remove his sandals, since he was standing on sacred ground. This command corresponds with God's command to Moses from the burning bush when the Lord ordered Moses to remove his sandals, since he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3:5).

The imagery of the armed one represented one who battles for the Lord, showing that the Lord is the true victor of the battles ahead. The Lord would fight for the Israelites as long as they remained faithful to the covenant but would leave them when the Israelites abandoned the covenant.

The number seven becomes significant in the fall of Jericho. The city was under siege, which means that the city was closed, with no one able to enter or leave. In the midst of this siege, the Lord informed Joshua that the Lord has delivered all of Jericho into his hands. The Lord directed Joshua to have the people and his soldiers circle the city one time each day for six days with seven priests carrying ram's horns ahead of the ark. On the seventh day, the seven priests with horns, the soldiers, and the priests with the ark marched around the city seven times. Joshua told the people to march around the city in silence until they hear the ram's horns and then they are to shout. On the seventh day, after walking around the city seven times, Joshua gave the command to shout. As they shouted and blew their horns, the walls collapsed and the Israelites attacked the city.

The author tells us that the city and all in it is under the ban. Being under the ban means that everything and everyone is to be destroyed. All belongs to the Lord, and no spoils are to be taken for anyone's personal good. If anyone takes anything, misery will come upon the whole Israelite community. All gold, silver, articles of bronze, or iron are holy and belong to the Lord and are to be put in the treasury of the Lord.

The killing of all the people may seem appalling to people of the world today, but when the Book of Joshua was written, this was a common

practice. The reason the Israelites put Jericho under the ban was to avoid being influenced by survivors to worship false gods.

The only ones free of the ban were members of Rahab's family, because she saved the spies. Joshua directed the two spies to bring Rahab and her family out of the city. The Israelites burned the city and all within it. Joshua put a curse at the cost of his youngest son on anyone who would attempt to rebuild Jericho. This curse will be fulfilled later in the history of the kings, when, during the reign of King Ahab, Hiel rebuilds Jericho at the cost of his firstborn son and his youngest (1 Kings 16:34).

As a result of the fall of Jericho, the people recognized that the Lord was with Joshua, and he now became well-known throughout the land.

7:1–26 Achan's Offense

The author begins with a three-generation genealogy of an Israelite named Achan, who is identified as belonging to the tribe of Judah but breaks the covenant by confiscating booty that was under the ban. Since Achan was an Israelite, the whole community would suffer for his sin when they suffer a bitter defeat at a city named Ai.

Two spies—sent by Joshua to reconnoiter the land of Ai—returned to Joshua with a suggestion that he send only a force of about 2,000 or 3,000 to capture the city, since the enemy in the city consisted of only a few. Joshua sent 3,000 men, but they had to make a rapid retreat back to the camp after losing thirty-six men. The defeat destroyed the confidence of the Israelites.

As a sign of mourning this defeat, Joshua, with the elders, tore his garments and threw dust on their heads. They fell face down before the ark until the evening. Joshua asked why the Lord allowed this to happen. He feared that the Canaanites, who had trembled in fear before the Israelite army, would now become willing to engage the Israelites in battle and totally destroy Israel.

Joshua ended his prayer with the words, "What will you do for your great name" (7:9)? Not only would the defeat of the Israelites destroy the nation, but it would also point to a weakness of the God of Israel.

The Lord told Joshua that their defeat came because they had broken the covenant. One in their midst had taken some forbidden treasure from

the battle at Jericho. The Lord directed Joshua to call the tribes together in the morning so that the Lord might designate who broke the covenant. That person and his family are to be destroyed by fire, with all his possessions, since he has committed a disgraceful crime in Israel. As each tribe came forward, the tribe of Judah was chosen by the Lord. When each clan within the tribe of Judah came forward, the Lord chose the ancestral tribe of Achan, and eventually chose Achan who admitted that he took a mantel, silver, and gold from the battle.

When the messengers Joshua sent to the tent of Achan found the hidden plunder, Achan, his family, and all his possessions were taken to Achor, a little more than seven miles south of Jericho, where they were stoned to death and their bodies and possessions burned. They covered the burnt remains with a large amount of stones. The name “Achor” means “trouble,” which is appropriate since Achan brought trouble to the whole Israelite nation.

Review Questions

1. What does the fall of Jericho tell us about God’s presence with the people?
2. Why does the Lord punish the whole Israelite community for the sin of Achan? Discuss.
3. Explain why the people of Joshua’s day completely annihilated a city’s people and livestock after battle.

Closing Prayer (SEE PAGE 16)

Pray the closing prayer now or after *lectio divina*.

Lectio Divina (SEE PAGE 9)

Relax your body and maintain a posture of prayer (back straight, eyes shut, feet flat on the floor). This exercise can take as long as you want, but in the context of this Bible study, 10 to 20 minutes should be sufficient.

The meditations that follow are provided only to help group participants use this prayer form, but note that *lectio* is intended to bring one to a place of prayerful contemplation where the Word of God speaks to the hearer from his or her heart. (See page 9 for further instruction.)

Fall of Jericho (5—6)

The idealistic story of the collapse of the walls of Jericho is a message about the rewards that will be granted those who trust the Lord. The Israelites fulfilled the requirements of the law, and they followed the Lord (the ark) to cause Jericho's downfall. Paul the Apostle often boasts of his weakness, but he is willing to trust the Lord. When he prayed to the Lord for help to overcome a weakness in his life, the Lord did not answer the prayer the way he wished, but the Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Israelite army may have been weaker than the army of Jericho, but the Lord brought them victory. The lesson for our life is to trust that the Lord helps us, even in our weakness and when the Lord seems not to hear our prayer. The grace of God is always at work when we pray.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Achan's Offense (7:1–26)

When some of Jesus' enemies asked if he paid taxes to the Roman conquerors, he responded, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" (Mark 12:17). Implied in his message is that the hearts of all human beings belong to God. We are made in the image and likeness of God. In ancient times, material possessions of a defeated nation belonged to God, unless God decreed otherwise. Achan's sin was not only greed, but the people of the era saw it as a type of blasphemy. He was stealing from God. Whenever we misuse God's gifts for sin, we are, in a sense, stealing from God. We will not be stoned to death for our sins, but we do hurt God's creation in some manner by taking for ourselves what belongs to God.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

PART 2: INDIVIDUAL STUDY (JOSHUA 8—24)

Day 1: Conquest of Ai and the Gibeon Deception (8—9)

The Lord promised Joshua that he will successfully overcome Ai during this second attack and permitted the Israelites to take the spoils and livestock as plunder. Joshua sent several thousand warriors to the west side of the city as an ambush and set up his army to the north, facing the city of Ai. When the king and his army came to fight the Israelites on the north, the Israelites will feign a retreat, leading the whole army of Ai away from the city. As soon as the army was drawn away from the city, Joshua turned on the army of Ai and stretched out his javelin as a sign to those on the west side of the city to ravage and burn it to the ground. When the army of Ai saw the city burning behind them and the Israelite army now attacking them from the front and back, they lost heart and were totally annihilated. The king alone escaped and was captured.

Twelve thousand men and women of Ai, the entire population, were killed. The killing continued as long as Joshua held out his javelin. Following the directions of the Lord, the Israelites captured all the livestock and spoils of the city for themselves. Joshua hanged the king on a tree and left his body hanging from that evening until the next morning. The king was buried under a large pile of stones at the entrance of the city gate.

The victory at Ai came because the Lord fought with the Israelites. Another reason for the victory was that all of Israel's army was engaged in the battle, unlike the first attack, which consisted only of one part of the Israelite warriors and not the entire army. The Israelites would conquer as a nation, not as small segments of the nation.

In Deuteronomy, Moses ordered the Israelites to build an altar on Mount Ebal when they entered the Promised Land. They were to make the altar of stone which no iron tool had touched and coat the stones with plaster. On these stones was to be inscribed all the words of the law (see Deuteronomy 27:1–8). They were to offer burnt sacrifices to the Lord on this altar, which referred to offerings totally dedicated to the Lord to be entirely burnt. They were also to offer communion sacrifices which they were to eat with joy in

the presence of the Lord. Moses also directed the Israelites to pronounce a blessing on Mount Gerizim for those who followed the law and a curse on Mount Ebal for those who disobeyed the law.

Joshua built an altar to the Lord at Mount Ebal, a place in the hill country. Following the directives given to Moses, Joshua made the altar of unhewn stones. The Israelites offered the burnt sacrifice to the Lord and the communion sacrifice as commanded. All were to stand on either side of the ark facing the levitical priests who carry it. Half of the people were facing Mount Gerizim and half Mount Ebal. The law was then read to all the people, with its blessings and curses.

The inhabitants of Gibeon knew that the God of the Israelites had given the land to them and that the Lord directed them to kill all the people of the land they conquered. They also knew that the Israelites were to treat aliens to the land with kindness, so they disguised themselves as travelers from a faraway land. In their weather-worn clothes and with their worn wineskins and dry bread, they approached the Israelites and claimed that they came to serve the Israelites. Without consulting the Lord, Joshua and the elders believed their story and made an oath to let them live.

Three days later, the Israelite leaders came to the city of Gibeon and realized that these people lived near them. Since they made an oath to let them live, they do not kill them. The Israelites grumbled against their leaders for making such an oath which they could not disobey. Since the Gibeonites deceived them, Joshua made them slaves to the Israelites, placing them as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of God. In offering sacrifices, the Israelites used wood for burning and water for dousing the fires. This type of work implied that the Gibeonites would carry out a number of lowly tasks for the Israelites.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

A man came to the door of the rectory and asked the pastor for money for a meal and a motel room. The pastor gave the man money for food and called a nearby motel to arrange a room for the man to stay that evening. Later that evening, a woman called the pastor to report that she saw the man stopping by a liquor store and walking out with a

bottle to take with him to the motel. The pastor, saddened at the news, said to the woman that he did what he could for the man and he felt no regrets. He promised the Lord that he would help someone in need; he thought the man was in need, so he fulfilled his promise.

Like the Israelites who were confronted with the deception of the Gibeonites, those who strive to help others may be taken advantage of, but it is better to take a chance on helping a person who seems to be in need than to make the mistake of turning away someone who is in need.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 2: Further Conquests (10—21)

Gibeon was a city larger than Ai and lay just north of Jerusalem. The king of Jerusalem became anxious when he heard that his northern allies capitulated to the Israelites, and he called upon four other Amorite kings to join him in battle against Gibeon. As the kings laid siege to Gibeon, the Gibeonites sought help from the Israelites. The Lord informed Joshua that the Amorites would be delivered into his hands. Joshua marched all night with his army and overcame the kings with a surprise attack, killing many of the enemy and chasing the rest over a long distance.

While the Amorite kings and armies were fleeing, the Lord cast great stones from heaven on them, killing many of them. These stones may have been hail. Joshua prayed for the sun and moon to stand still while the Israelites slaughtered the Amorites. The story of the sun standing still is a well-known story in an idealized presentation of the battle. Some commentators attempt to explain it as the sun giving a longer period of light, others attribute the appearance of the moon as caused by an eclipse, and others maintain that it was a miraculous act of God. Whatever happened, the story is meant to show that the Lord was fighting along with the Israelites.

The author claims that the event of the sun standing still is recorded in the Book of Jasher, which may be an ancient lost book about the exploits of Joshua and others. The editor comments on the miraculous aspect of the story, declaring that there was never a day like this when the Lord obeyed the prayer of a human being and fought for Israel.

When Joshua heard that the five kings had fled into a cave, he ordered his men to roll a large stone over the entrance of the cave and to continue pursuing and killing the enemy. After pursuing the enemy, Joshua returned to the cave and brought out the kings. The kings were humiliated when Joshua directed the commanders to put their feet on the kings' necks. With a word of encouragement to the commanders to be brave and unwavering, Joshua killed the kings and hanged them on a tree until the next morning. He buried them in the cave in which they hid and placed large stones over the entrance.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

Joshua and the Deuteronomist historian lived in an era when they believed that complete annihilation of the enemy was God's will. Today we have Jesus' message to guide us, telling us that we must love our neighbor as ourselves. This means that even those who war against us are our neighbors. Mark Twain wrote a book titled *The War Prayer*, which prayed for a bloody conquest of the enemy. It is a satire that sees the incongruity of praying for a bloody end to the enemy. Many believe that Christ would see no problem in praying for victory, but the prayer should be a prayer for peace, where few of those engaged in the battle are killed.

✕ *What can I learn from this passage?*

A Note on the Conquests and Divisions of the Land *(found in 10:28—21)*

Beginning in chapter 10:28 to the end of chapter 12, the editor lists a series of conquests in Southern and Northern Canaan, showing that the Israelites, with the help of the Lord, "conquered the entire land" and that he "left no survivors, but put under the ban every living being, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded" (10:40). The Israelites destroyed all the land and possessions except the spoils of the battle when the Lord per-

mitted them to take these spoils. The series of conquests ended with a list of the conquered kings that amounted to “thirty-one kings in all” (12:24).

From chapters 13 to 21, the author lists the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. The division begins with the Lord informing Joshua that although he is now old, a very large portion of the land still remains to be possessed. The land east of the Jordan was given to the Reubenites and Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph. The half-tribe of Manasseh is mentioned because Manasseh will receive another half beyond the Jordan.

The author mentions in detail the land given to these tribes. The Levites received no share of the land, but they were given land in the cities that they occupied as well as pasture lands for their herds and sheep. The Lord commanded the apportioning of the land to Moses. Caleb received the land promised to him by Moses when Caleb and Joshua were the only two in the desert who left Egypt and trusted that the Lord would help them conquer the Promised Land. The land is then apportioned to the tribes of Judah, the two sons of Joseph (Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh). The sons of Joseph were too numerous for the land they received, so Joshua told them to take over the mountain region, which was a forest adjacent to their land.

For the seven remaining tribes, Joshua cast lots and divided the land among them, namely Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan. In cases where the land was not enough for the number of people making up the tribes, the tribes would capture more land from the people of Canaan. The tribes gave Joshua the city he requested as commanded by the Lord.

The Lord ordered the Israelites to set up a city of refuge for those who unintentionally or inadvertently killed another. The killer could flee to one of these places of refuge and plead his case before the elders at the city gate, who could then allow him

to live in their midst. When the high priest died, the killer was free to return to the place where he originally lived. The author names these cities of refuge.

The Levites were not given a portion of the land, but they received cities from each of the tribes in which to reside with a place to pasture their animals. The author then names the cities each of the tribes gave to the Levites.

Day 3: Eastern Tribes Released (22:1–34)

As already mentioned, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh settled on the eastern side of the Jordan. Joshua commended them for remaining faithful to their promise to help the Israelites conquer the Promised Land. Now that the Lord had settled the others as promised, the eastern tribes may return to their tents. The only warning they received is that they remain faithful to the covenant. The warriors from these tribes had amassed an abundance of spoils from plundering and Joshua told them to share their treasures with their allies.

After the three eastern tribes returned home, they built a large altar facing the land of Canaan. Believing that this large altar symbolized worship of a false god, the other tribes prepared for battle with them. They sent a delegation with Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, and representatives of the remaining tribes, expressing their fear that if the tribes across the Jordan had turned away from the God of the Israelites, the whole community would be punished.

The three eastern tribes asserted that if they have rejected the God of gods, they would be punished. The altar was not an altar for sacrifice but an altar to witness that they remained faithful to the one true God worshiped by the Israelites beyond the Jordan. If future generations would believe that the three tribes did not cross the Jordan because they rejected the God of the Israelites, this altar will stand as a witness of the eastern tribes' unity with the other tribes of Israel. The delegation returned home, pleased to pass the good news on to the community across the Jordan.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

The Israelites settled their differences with the eastern tribes by speaking with them and learning that they built an altar as a witness of unity between the eastern and western tribes. Early in the twentieth century, Christian denominations often spoke against each other and rarely with each other, strongly stressing those points that divided them. In the mid-twentieth century, the attitude began to change as the different denominations sat down together and shared their beliefs. To their surprise, they discovered that they agreed on a large number of theological points concerning Christ and his message, although many theological differences still remained. Open dialogue, like that of the eastern and western tribes in the past and that of the different denominations in the present, leads to peace, understanding, harmony, and love.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Day 4: Joshua's Farewell (23—24)

The scene moves to years later. The author, continuing to recognize that the Lord has been the one to lead the Israelites to victory, states that the Lord now gives them rest from their enemies. Joshua, who is old, gathers together the Israelites and reminds them how the Lord, who fought for them, helped them defeat all the nations in the land.

In speaking of the allotment of the land as a heritage given to each tribe, Joshua encouraged them to trust that the Lord will drive all enemies from their land. For their part, they were to remain faithful by observing all that the Lord commanded them, neither worshiping false gods nor mingling with those who worship false gods. Joshua called on the Israelites to acknowledge that all that the Lord promised had been fulfilled. If they turn away from the Lord, the Lord will reject them, and their enemies would totally drive them out of the land they now possess.

Joshua told the people that he is “going the way of all the earth” (23:14), which means that he is dying. He urged them to acknowledge that all that

the Lord promised had been accomplished from the time the Lord chose Abraham down to their invasion of the Promised Land. He warned them that just as God has fulfilled every promise, so God will also fulfill all the threats made against them if they fail to remain faithful to the covenant.

Joshua challenged the people to decide if they will follow the Lord of the Israelites, the gods of the lands they left behind or the gods of the land they conquered. He declared that he and his household will serve the Lord. In response, the people asserted that they too will follow the Lord who led them from slavery and fought for them in the Promised Land. Joshua warned the people that God is a holy and passionate God and that it will be a challenge for the people to remain faithful, but the people remained unyielding in their commitment to the Lord.

Joshua ended by renewing the covenant of the Lord with the Israelites. He wrote statutes and ordinances in the book of the law of God at Shechem and set up a large stone in the sanctuary as a witness to the covenant. He sent the people to the land allotted them as a heritage for their tribe.

Just as the author refers to Moses as a “servant of the Lord” at the time of his death (see Deuteronomy 34:5), the author likewise calls Joshua “servant of the LORD” at his death (see 24:29). The book ends with a reference to the burial of Joseph. In doing this, the author links Joseph with Joshua. Just as the saga of the Israelites’ progress from Egypt toward the Promised Land began with Joseph inviting the family of Jacob into Egypt (see Genesis 47), so it ends in the Promised Land with the death of Joshua. When Joseph was dying, he made his sons take an oath that they would bring his bones from Egypt (Deuteronomy 50:25). Like Joshua, Joseph lived to the age of 110.

Joshua was buried in the land of his heritage. The Israelites remained faithful to the Lord during Joshua’s lifetime and that of the elders who knew of all that the Lord had done for the nation. The bones of Joseph were buried at Shechem in a plot of ground purchased by Jacob (Genesis 33:18–20). The author tells us that this was the heritage of the descendants of Joseph. The Book of Joshua ends neatly with the death of the high priest Eleazar, the son of Aaron, thus concluding the lives of all who led the people during the time of Joshua. Eleazar was buried on a hill in the mountain region of Ephraim, which was given to his son, Phinehas.

The name of Phinehas begins the new era of the Israelites' sojourn in the Promised Land.

Lectio Divina

Spend 8 to 10 minutes in silent contemplation of the following passage:

At the end of their lives, Moses and Joshua received recognition as servants of the Lord. The stories reserved this praise of them after their death, implying that they remained faithful servants throughout their lives. God established a creation in which God needs all of us as servants of the Lord, no matter what work or ministry we perform in the world. God needs the person performing a minimal, unknown task for the human community as much as God needs leaders to govern and guide the human family. Whatever our work or whatever the condition of our life, God needs us. God needs us to perform our tasks well, as servants of the Lord.

✠ *What can I learn from this passage?*

Review Questions

1. How did Joshua's army conquer the army of Ai?
2. Why were the Gibeonites willing to become vassals of Israel?
3. What caused the tribes on the western side of the Jordan to fear when they saw the altar erected by the eastern tribes?
4. Why does Joshua make a new covenant with God for the people right before he dies?