

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

JOSHUA 20-24

Thanks to endless *Matlock* reruns and episodes of *Law and Order* I'm sure most of us know the difference between *first degree murder* and *manslaughter*.

Murder in the first degree is a premeditated act with lethal intent.

Manslaughter is an unintentional or accidental taking of another human life.

In ancient times if you were guilty of manslaughter the family of the victim had the right to avenge their brother's death... *They could chase you down and kill you in cold blood... You were a target... You lived your life looking over your shoulder.*

It reminds me of the two guys walking through the forest, when a hungry bear jumped out of the woods. One guy pulls off his backpack - takes off his heavy hiking boots - and starts to lace up his Nike sneakers...

His buddy laughs, "Tennis shoes won't make you faster than that bear."

As the guy ties his laces he answers, "I don't have to be faster than the bear. All I've got to do outrun is you!" In Old Testament times it literally came down to a race between the avenger and the slayer... which guy was faster of foot.

The Law of Moses provided protection for the person guilty of an accidental murder. In Numbers 35 the Lord had told Moses when Israel enters the land they are to set up certain cities as safe havens for the manslayer. These cities were

called “**cities of refuge**”. They could run to one of these cities and be safe.

Joshua enacts this law in chapter 20.

Verse 1, “The LORD also spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Appoint for yourselves cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, that the slayer who kills a person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there; and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood.

And when he flees to one of those cities, and stands at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declares his case in the hearing of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city as one of them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. Then if the avenger of blood pursues him, they shall not deliver the slayer into his hand, because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, but did not hate him beforehand.

And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the one who is high priest in those days. Then the slayer may return and come to his own city and his own house, to the city from which he fled.”

When a manslayer arrived at a city of refuge he reviewed his case with the city elders. If they believed his crime was unintentional they took him in. As long as he stayed in the city he was safe. If he went outside city limits he was fair game for an avenger. His dilemma continued until the death of the High Priest. Whether the priest lived to be 35 or 95 the slayer could return home - *only upon his death*.

All this seems like such an archaic rule with little relevance for you and me...

Until we study this provision as a type of Christ. Whenever you get lost trying to decipher a Scripture always look for Jesus. In Hebrews 10:7 Jesus said, “In the volume of the Book it is written of Me.” Jesus is on every page of this Book. And here is a classic example...

In a sense, all sin is murder. The wages of sin is death. When you sin you take your own life. You initiate a slow suicide. We need a place to run when we sin where we can find a safe haven, and avoid the consequences of our sin.

Jesus is that place of refuge. As long as we're in Christ we're forgiven – we're safe from judgment. When we sin we need to run to Jesus as fast as we can.

According to Jewish tradition the roads leading to the cities of refuge were kept cleared and passable. Bridges remained open. Signs with large letters which read, “*Miklac*”, or “*refuge*”, marked the way. Everything was done to make it as easy as possible for the guilty party to find his way to a place of safety and refuge.

And in parallel this is our job...

God wants us to make it as easy as possible for people to come to Christ. Our job is to keep the road cleared of misconceptions - the bridges of understanding open. Our lives should be huge road signs pointing people to Jesus Christ.

There are at least 8 other parallels between Jesus and the

cities of refuge...

The gates were never locked, and the way to Jesus is never barred.

As long as you were inside the city you were safe, if you left you were on your own. The same is true with Jesus. We need to continue to abide *in Christ*.

You had to pick up and leave all your possessions to come. Likewise, to follow Jesus you have to leave behind anything that rivals your devotion to Him.

Refuge was available, but you had to come. The same is true with Jesus.

Once inside the city there were plenty of provisions. Likewise, all that a human heart might need to be satisfied is found in fellowship with Jesus.

The cities of refuge were established in advance. Likewise Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world. He too was chosen beforehand to save us.

According to Numbers 35:15, **strangers and Gentiles, as well as Jews, were welcomed to come to the cities of refuge** – just as they are in Christ Jesus.

And **the death of the High Priest granted total freedom.** And it's because of the death of our High Priest, Jesus, that we receive a permanent pardon.

Verse 7 lists the cities of Refuge. They were scattered strategically throughout Israel to provide easy access – three were west of the Jordan - three were east.

And even the names of the cities spoke of our blessings in Christ... **“So they appointed Kedesh** (which means *holiness*) **in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, Shechem** (which

means *shoulder*) in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba (which is Hebron (which means *fellowship*)) in the mountains of Judah.” Jesus is our *holiness*. He *shoulders our burdens*. He provides us *fellowship with God*.

“And on the other side of the Jordan, by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer (or *fortified place*) in the wilderness on the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth (or *exaltation*) in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan (which means *joy*) in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.” Jesus is our *protection*. In Jesus we’re *exalted*. And Jesus brings us *joy*. All six blessings we find in Christ.

“These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwelt among them, that whoever killed a person accidentally might flee there, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stood before the congregation.

Chapter 21, “Then the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites came near to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel. And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded through Moses to give us cities to dwell in, with their common-lands for our livestock.”

In Joshua 13:33 we were told, “But to the tribe of Levi Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD God of Israel was their inheritance...”

When Israel sinned at Mt. Sinai by worshipping the golden calf the tribe of Levi was quick to repent and side with the Lord. As a result, the Lord blessed them with a special

privilege. The other tribes inherited a *parcel*, Levi inherited a *privilege*.

Levi was the only tribe without a territory. The *Lord* – not the *land* – was their inheritance. They were given the privilege to serve the Lord in the Tabernacle.

The Levites were allowed to live in close proximity to God. The beauty of God’s holiness – the magnificence of His glory – offered far more stimulating views than the highest mountain peak, or the greenest valley. The Levites had a better deal.

But they still needed a place to live – so they were given cities throughout the land. They lived within the borders of other tribes in what were called Levitical cities. Chapter 21 lists 48 cities given to accommodate the priests and Levites.

Verse 3, “So the children of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, at the commandment of the LORD, these cities and their common-lands: Now the lot came out for the families of the Kohathites.” Remember the three families among the Levites... **Kohath** handled the Tabernacle *furniture* – the Ark, and the golden menorah, and the table of showbread, etc. The family of **Gershon** was in charge of the *fabrics* – the tent coverings and the veils that led into the two chambers. And **Merari** handled the Tabernacle *frame* – the sockets, poles, and boards.

And there were specific cities for each of these three families.

The rest of the chapter lists these 48 cities.

Among them were **Hebron, Beth Shemesh, Gibeon...**

Remember the deception of the Gibeonites. The men of Gibeon knew God had told Joshua to conquer and kill all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. The men of Gibeon were Canaanites – next on Joshua’s hit list - but they pretended to be from a far country. They ended up signing a peace treaty with Israel.

And though he’d been duped Joshua was a man of his word. The Gibeonites were allowed to live and work in the Tabernacle as water carriers and wood choppers. That Gibeon was made a Levitical city was an act of God’s grace.

Verse 18 says **Anathoth** became a Levitical city.

Anathoth was the prophet Jeremiah’s hometown. And it was the men of Anathoth that plotted his assassination. Jeremiah’s message was so hated by even the religious leaders his own relatives put out a contract on him.

Shechem was another Levitical city in the mountains of Ephraim.

As was the city of **Golan** on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

And **Mahanaim**, also east of the Jordan, future capitol of Saul’s son, Ishbosheth.

Verse 41 **“All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel were 48 cities with their common-lands. Every one of these cities had its common-land surrounding it; thus were all these cities.**

So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had

sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.” Hey, God is faithful. His word fails not.

It’s been said, “God never makes a promise too good to be true.”

In chapter 22 the 2½ tribes who chose to settle east of the Jordan return home. But a misunderstanding follows that almost erupts into an east / west civil war.

Chapter 22, “Then Joshua called the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, and said to them: “You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. You have not left your brethren these many days, up to this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God.

And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brethren, as He promised them; now therefore, return and go to your tents and to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.”

Verse 5, “But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to

keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents.

"Now to half the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan, but to the other half of it Joshua gave a possession among their brethren on this side of the Jordan, westward. And indeed, when Joshua sent them away to their tents, he blessed them, and spoke to them, saying, "Return with much riches to your tents, with very much livestock, with silver, with gold, with bronze, with iron, and with very much clothing. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren."

So the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel at Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, which they had obtained according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

"And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan - a great, impressive altar.

Now the children of Israel heard someone say, "Behold, the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh have built an altar on the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan - on the children of Israel's side."

And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole

congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them.

Deuteronomy 12 made it clear that Israel was to worship God in a designated place. Sacrifices could only be offered in a centralized location – at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. So what are these renegade tribes doing on the banks of the Jordan?

At first it seems they're erecting some kind of alternate altar. *Is this idolatry?*

This must've been the assumption, for we're told, "the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to go to war against them."

It's a good thing cooler heads prevailed. Before brother starts slaughtering brother someone suggests the two sides have a conversation.

Why is it we always want to fight before we talk?

Phinehas, the priest, and a delegation go down to the Jordan to find out what's really going on with the Rueben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

In verse 16 they ask, "Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD: 'What treachery is this that you have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the LORD, in that you have built for yourselves an altar, that you might rebel this day against the LORD?'"

Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us..." This was a reference to Balaam's scheme that led Israel into idolatry. Moabite women sexually enticed the men of Israel. The blood rushed from the *head* and they ended up in *bed* with idols.

“Is the iniquity of Peor not enough for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the LORD, but that you must turn away this day from following the LORD? And it shall be, if you rebel today against the LORD, that tomorrow He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel.”

Nevertheless, if the land of your possession is unclean, then cross over to the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take possession among us; but do not rebel against the LORD, nor rebel against us, by building yourselves an altar besides the altar of the LORD our God. Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity.”

Verse 21, “Then the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh answered and said to the heads of the divisions of Israel: The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know - if it is in rebellion, or if in treachery against the LORD, do not save us this day.

If we have built ourselves an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer on it burnt offerings or grain offerings, or if to offer peace offerings on it, let the LORD Himself require an account. But in fact we have done it for fear, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your descendants may speak to our descendants, saying, "What have you to do with the LORD God of Israel? For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between you and us, you children of Reuben and children of

Gad. You have no part in the LORD." So your descendants would make our descendants cease fearing the LORD."

Phinehas, and the western tribes, were afraid the eastern tribes had forsaken God – but just the opposite had happened.

The 2½ tribes east of the Jordan had started to doubt their decision to separate themselves from their brothers. They worried that one day the West Bank tribes might use the river as a boundary to block them from coming to the Tabernacle and worshipping God. Their altar was not to make a sacrifice - but serve as a memorial and a reminder of their allegiance to the one true God.

They explain in verse 26, "Therefore we said, 'Let us now prepare to build ourselves an altar, not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, but that it may be a witness between you and us and our generations after us, that we may perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your descendants may not say to our descendants in time to come, "You have no part in the LORD." '

"Therefore we said that it will be, when they say this to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say, 'Here is the replica of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, though not for burnt offerings nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between you and us.' "Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn from following the LORD this day, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for grain offerings, or for sacrifices, besides the altar of the LORD our God which is before His tabernacle."

Verse 30 “Now when Phinehas the priest and the rulers of the congregation, the heads of the divisions of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh spoke, it pleased them.

Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and the children of Manasseh, "This day we perceive that the LORD is among us, because you have not committed this treachery against the LORD. Now you have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD."

And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the rulers, returned from the children of Reuben and the children of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the children of Israel, and brought back word to them. So the thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God; they spoke no more of going against them in battle, to destroy the land where the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar, Witness, "For it is a witness between us that the LORD is God."

Remember though how this whole story started... Back in verse 11, “Now the children of Israel heard someone say...”
They got all heated up over hearsay!

Here’s the point we need to take to heart... The nation almost goes to blows – brother almost kills brother - a bloody war almost erupts – over a stinking rumor.

Guys, this is how civil war starts among friends - and in churches... someone hears someone else say... *They take it to heart without checking it out.*

It's been said, "When you jump to conclusions you land in confusions."

Relationships blow up over hearsay, and miscommunication.

How many church splits were the result of a misunderstanding that could've been averted had both sides just sat down and talked. It's been said, "Handle a rumor like a check - never endorse it until you know it's genuine."

On April 19, 1951 General Douglas MacArthur delivered a farewell speech before the US Congress. In his speech General MacArthur commented...

"I still remember the refrain of an old but popular barracks ballad which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die; they just fade away. And like the old soldier in that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the sight to see that duty."

That old ballad could've been sung by General Joshua.

Joshua is now 110 years old. He's also an old soldier who did his duty before God, and now it's time to fade away. But first Joshua also has a speech to make.

In chapter 23 Israel's warrior says his farewells. The aging General calls together the nation – the leaders and people – to speak to them a final time.

Verse 1, "Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD

had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age.

And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: "I am old, advanced in age. You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you."

Notice the General takes none of the credit. Joshua knows the Lord alone was responsible for Israel's victories.

He makes it clear, "the LORD your God is He who has fought for you."

Verse 4 "See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward. And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you."

God is faithful to do His part - but in every work of God there are two parts... There's *God's part* and *man's part*.

The question for Israel is not will God be faithful, but will Israel be obedient.

Verse 6 "Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you.

You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, (don't even speak them) nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold

fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.

For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.”

“Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God.

Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations - these that remain among you - and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you.” Separation from the world meant power with God. And the opposite is true, go to bed with the world and you forfeit God’s blessing.

How can you expect God to drive out the enemy with whom you’ve snuggled up? *You can’t repent of the thing you’re trying to nurture.* It’s a contradiction.

Joshua is concerned about the Canaanites who’ve been allowed to remain in the land. He knows it’s a lot easier for bad people to rub off on good people, than it is for good people to rub off on bad people. Sin is a communicable disease. Righteousness is not. Righteousness takes initiative. Sin is contagious.

Parents, need to remember this when your kids start to select their friends.

Joshua can foresee the day when *toleration* will become *socialization* - and *socialization* will become *assimilation*. The

Hebrews will inter-marry the pagans around them, and be drawn into their idolatry. Joshua warns Israel that the little pockets of paganism they've allowed to remain will ultimately be their downfall.

Guys, we too have to be on guard against the danger of assimilation.

As the old saying goes, “**We are in the world, but not of the world.**” Too much exposure to godless philosophies and secular values will draw us into its web.

We're all like Noah's Ark. God designed the Ark to float in the water. The Ark in the water was no problem. But if the Ark had started taking on water – if water had gotten into the Ark - it would be a different story. And the same is true with us...

Christians are designed to overcome this world and be a witness. A Christian in the world is no problem. The danger is when the world gets into the Christian.

This is why a certain amount of separation is necessary to live a godly life.

God wants us to be holy – a word that means *separate*. He expects us to reserve our mind and heart for godly influences and healthy preoccupations.

Temptation is like flypaper – once you land, it's hard to leave.

In verse 13 Joshua warns Israel of pagan influences, “**But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.**”

Alan Redpath puts it this way, “How often we see that the temptation we have pampered and encouraged and indulged in has become a scourge and a thorn in our side. The compromising Christian is not a happy man. Let the enemy remain in a Christian life, let him have one foothold, and he soon becomes a scourge.”

How often has a thing that brought initial pleasure ended up being a thorn? Joshua warns Israel not to marry pagans - a *bride* can become a *blight*...

Verse 14 "Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed." Hey, the Word of God is fail proof.

“Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you. When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you." God is always faithful - but it's up to our response whether He's faithful to bless or curse.

After Joshua's farewell speech the ole General calls all Israel together at Shechem - a few miles north of his home in

the mountains of Ephraim.

Here Joshua issues a final challenge...

Verse 1, “Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.” Joshua gives them a history lesson...

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.’” This raises my appreciation of Abraham’s faith. His own dad was an idolater. Apparently, the only impetuous in Abraham’s life that drew Him to God was the hunger of his own heart.

It’s fitting that Abraham is called “*the father of our faith*”. He was surrounded by idols and idolaters, yet faith in the one true God sprung up in His unlikely heart.

“Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.

Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them.” There were 10 plagues to be exact. “Afterward I brought you out.”

Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots

and horsemen to the Red Sea.

So they cried out to the LORD; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time.” 40 years.

“And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you.” This a reference to their victories over King Sihon and Og – the nations east of the Jordan River.

In verse 9 he reminds them of Balaam, and their victory over the Moabites.

“Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand.”

Joshua next recounts the battle of Jericho, and sums up their victories over the Amorites. “Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you - also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand.”

“I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but not with your sword or with your bow.”

The Hebrew word translated “*hornet*” means “*stinging*”

wasps". The Hebrew army was assisted by a swarm of insects. Long before cruise missiles, and scud missiles, and patriot missiles - the Hebrew artillery consisted of wasp missiles.

Imagine going into combat after you've been stung by a swarm of hornets. Any Georgia Bulldog will tell you its no fun to be stung by a Yellow Jacket.

Last week we mentioned the parallels between Joshua and Revelation.

Here's another – the 5th trumpet judgment in Revelation 5 predicts a 5 month plague of stinging locust. *A swarm of hornets also helped Joshua in his conquest.*

Verse 13, "I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant." When Joshua invaded he took a land already furnished.

This is God's grace – its love and blessing we didn't manufacture or earn. It was paid for on the cross. We receive it by faith – not effort or elbow grease.

In verse 14 Joshua continues, "Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!" Notice a detail. The Hebrew slaves in Egypt had sunk so low in their faith they worshipped the gods of the Egyptians.

Moses not only overcame Pharaoh's stubbornness, but

Israel's unbelief.

Joshua says “serve God in sincerity and in truth...” – and in verse 15 he issues his immortal challenge... “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Patrick Henry shouted, “Give me liberty or give me death!”

Israeli soldiers go out into battle today with shouts of “Kadima” or “Let’s go!” The word is now the name of the political party started by Ariel Sharon.

The battle cry among the passengers that thwarted the terrorist attempts to take over United Flight 93 on September 11th was “Let’s roll.”

Japan’s battle cry in World War 2 was “Tora, Tora, Tora” - “Tiger, Tiger, Tiger.”

But here’s Joshua’s famous battle cry. And it’s become the battle cry for the Christian family, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Here’s a line that’s adorned bookmarks, and cross-stitch, and wedding albums. You see it just about everywhere – “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Yet let me ask you tonight, *is this declaration written in your heart?*

Has Joshua’s statement become the battle cry of your heart? As for me - and my spouse - and my kids – we’re determined to serve the Lord?

Sometimes my kids want to indulge in a questionable activity, and I'll say "no" – and that's why they'll respond, "Ah dad, everybody else is doing it."

My reply is simple, "Who cares?" The majority yelled out, "Crucify Him. Crucify Him." *Did they make the right choice? Notice a river... only the dead fish go with the flow.* The fish that are alive are the one's swimming against the current.

I love Joshua's attitude. His decision has already been made. He doesn't care what everybody else happens to do. He's determined. His mind is made up. He says to the Hebrews, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

In verse 16 Israel answers Joshua, "So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed.

And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."

But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good." You can't thumb your nose in God's face – deliberately defy Him – then expect His favor and forgiveness.

A relationship with God doesn't work that way. *God is no fool.*

Verse 21, "And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD!"

So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses!" The new LeBron James T-shirt is black with white letters that read "Witness". This was originally the T-shirt worn by the Hebrews who told Joshua they would serve the Lord. They were witnesses to their own commitment.

Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!" So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem."

Verse 26 "Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God."

So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.

"Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son

of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.” And the greatest tribute that a leader can be paid is attributed to Joshua in verse 31. It sums up Joshua’s marvelous legacy...

“Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.” As long as Joshua was at the helm the ship never strayed off course. Joshua even managed to pass his convictions on to his elders.

Joshua was such an example of faith, obedience, and determination he literally impacted two generations... *his own* - and *the generation that came after him*.

He lived to the grand old age of 110, and was buried at home – at home in the Promised Land – in the land it had taken him 40 years to enter. He was buried in the mountains of Ephraim – in the inheritance he had received from God.

Where else would the good General have wanted his body to rest?