



## Discussion Questions for Sermon Based Home Fellowships

Week of April 13, 2008

Pastor Brian Long

Series: Finding Courage through the Challenges of Life

Title: Freeing God in our Lives

Scripture: Joshua 8

### Opening Sharing

When in your life did victory follow a defeat?

### Discussion Questions

Any reading of Old Testament war scenes will raise questions of the mercy and love of God. How could a God of mercy/love order the destruction of innocent people (including women and children) and animals. It is not an easy subject and requires some background thinking and a basic faith embrace of the character of God as revealed in the Bible and history. The conquest of Canaan and the required destruction of its people was foretold 400 years prior to its actuality. In Genesis 15:16, God told Abram in a vision that his progeny would be in captivity in Egypt and their entrance into the land would not happen until the 4<sup>th</sup> generation. A very basic reason for the very long delay was given: "because the sin of the Amorites [speaking of all Canaanites] does not yet warrant their destruction." One scholar wrote: "The Canaanites were not extirpated by any willful decree to make room for Israel, but as an act of justice." He further wrote: "So, throughout the history of the world, whenever nations settle down in vice and corruption, the decay of their institutions follows upon that of their morals, and they either waste away or give place to some more manly race of conquerors."

- ✚ In view of these statements on how God works in human history, give illustrations from recent history of this same type of thing.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ✚ Do you think the United States is setting itself up for the judgment of God? Why or why not? What could prevent such a disaster?

Central to a discussion of the character of God is the attribute of holiness. What should we understand when we talk of this quality? Here is a point of beginning: "By the holiness of God we mean that He is absolutely separate from and exalted above all His creatures, and that He is equally separate from moral evil and sin. In the first sense His holiness is not really an attribute that is coordinate with the other attributes, but is rather coextensive with them all. It denotes the perfection of God in all that He is" (Henry Thiessen: *Lectures in Systematic Theology*)

The pastor brought out this fact: "*We have to keep in mind that every living thing was put to death in these towns for two primary reasons:*

- *They were sacrificial offerings to God*

- *God's justice was being administered*
  - *Genesis 15*
  - *Romans 1*
  - *Joshua 11*
- ✚ How does this point change the temperature of this discussion?

With that input, discuss these points Pastor Brian emphasized: *"How do we keep sin from making us vulnerable to defeat and discouragement in our lives?"*

- *Ask God to help you recognize sin when it's present in your life.*
- *When sin is identified, acknowledge and confess it.*
- *Trust in Christ's death as your atonement for sin.*
- *Yield to the Holy Spirit, repent and walk in obedience."*

✚ Of these four action points, which do you find the hardest to get done? Why?

✚ Why is God's judgment against sin so distasteful to our culture in this generation of time?

✚ Discuss the difference between God's act of judgment as given repeatedly in the Old Testament and the jihadist actions of today. This quote from J. I. Packer may help the discussion: "The wrath of God in Romans denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin. It is as much the expression of a personal, emotional attitude of the Triune Jehovah as is His love to sinners: it is the active manifesting of His hatred of irreligion and moral evil" (*Knowing God* 139).

The following is from one of Ravi Zacharias' staff speakers:

*"The reality is, judgment is just not palatable in our culture...we like to hear God is love but not that he is a consuming fire.... And this is the big difference between Islam and Christianity. In the Quran God is described as many things, but love is not one of them."*

\* Regarding your point above, one thing that I find that resonates with people here is to describe the beauty of the cross--how God never dishes out anything on us that he didn't take upon himself. Dorothy Sayers puts it much more eloquently:

"For whatever reason God chose to make man as he is – limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death – He had the honesty and the courage to take His own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with His creation, He has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair and death. When He was a man, He played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it well worthwhile." (Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* New York, Harcourt Brace, 1949, p. 4).

You may want to take your group in a different direction in discussion Joshua 8. Here are some questions:

- ✚ Compare and contrast Josh. 7:2-3 with Josh. 8:1-2. Both describe preparations for the attack on Ai. How are they different?
  
- ✚ Joshua was a gifted military general. At what other times in history were gifted generals used by God.
  
- ✚ In Josh. 8:30, Joshua built an altar to commemorate God's power in their victory. Tell the group about a recent time when God deserves praise for His power in your life.
  
- ✚ Telling someone what God did is what it means to be a "witness." A witness is someone who has seen or heard something and is therefore competent before a court of law to give evidence of what was seen or heard. You just told the group about something God did. Now, what unbeliever can you tell the same story? Ask the group to pray that you will be as open with an unbeliever as you are with the group.
  
- ✚ In Josh. 8:34, the ENTIRE law of Moses was read to the people. When was the last time that you read through the entire Bible?
  
- ✚ There are many approaches to reading through the Bible. Discuss those approaches in your group. If it's been awhile since you've done so, commit to reading through the Bible using one of the approaches you've discussed.