

# Lesson 7

## Boundaries In the Land

### Joshua 9-14

The ninth chapter of Joshua opens rather ominously:

*Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things - those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites) - they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel. (Joshua 9:1-2, NIV)*

*"He makes peace in your borders; He satisfies you with the finest of the wheat."*

*Psalm 147:14*

The enemy was entrenched in the Promised Land! As intimidating as that must have been, God had promised the Israelites complete victory and rest if they would do their part and *possess* the land (Joshua 1:3, 1:13). His plan was that they possess all of the land, not just a portion of it. This is true for us today. We must be conquerors in all of the areas that will keep us from living in the Land of Milk and Honey if we are going to experience the abundant life.

### Inner Vows

Anne and I have discovered that inner vows are one of the major impediments to our complete conquest of the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 9.

1. What motivated the Gibeonites to make peace with the Israelites?

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2. What was the strategy of the Gibeonites and why?

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Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites and delivered them from the hands of the Israelites. He must have been somewhat suspicious because he questioned them extensively and looked for evidence that what they said was true.

3. What did Joshua and the Israelites fail to do according to Joshua 9:14?

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4. Why is it important to seek the Lord's guidance before making decisions?

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The Lord has all of the information! Joshua looked for evidence, interrogated the Gibeonites, but he did not seek the counsel of the One before whom "all things are open and laid bare" (Hebrews 4:13).



5. Read Joshua 10. What were the repercussions of the vow that the Israelites made?

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Although the covenant made was based on deception, Joshua would have to honor it. In Joshua 10, we even see that the Israelites entered battle on behalf of the Gibeonites because of this covenant. In Number 30:1-2, we learn why the Israelites had to honor their word.

6. Write out James 5:12 in the key in the margin.

As we talked about in the last chapter, God is always willing to forgive. However, He does not always excuse us from the consequences of our actions. In the case of the Israelites, they were required to honor their word, even though they were deceived when they made the covenant.

*James 5:12*

7. What does God's word teach us about vows in the following passages?

❖ Leviticus 19:12

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❖ Matthew 5:33-37

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God takes vows very seriously. We can make vows with other people, as the Israelites did with the Gibeonites, but we can also make inner vows – vows made

inside our own hearts. Especially as children, we make inner vows in response to circumstances that we don't like and that are out of our control. We may have made a vow such as "*I am never going to be angry like my father, or I will never do 'that' when I get to be a mother, or I will be just like so-and-so's mother.*" What we (albeit, unintentionally) are saying to God when we make vows is that we don't need His help in that area of our lives. We know exactly how to live, thank you very much. We've got it covered! The Lord respects our wills and our vows. When we make an inner vow, we, in effect, shut Him out of that particular area of our lives. We rely on ourselves, not on Christ living through us.

The events that precipitate our making an inner vow can be traumatic or they can be seemingly insignificant, but the vows are powerful in either case. When Anne was growing up in a large family, her mother was often late picking her up from school. Anne promised herself that if she ever had children, she would *never* be late picking them up. Years later, as a mother, she would anxiously rush to get to school before carpool time. If she arrived late, she was overly apologetic, feeling condemned by her "failure" as a mother. Her kids were happy to hang out with their friends for a few extra minutes, but she was a wreck.

Most of the vows we make come from good intentions – picking up your children on time is an appropriate goal. The problem isn't the goal of the vow; the problem is that we are determining to live through our own strength and willpower. In the Land of Milk and Honey, the Lord is our strength. We are to live by His grace, not dependent upon our own abilities.

One day Anne and I were called to pray with a woman on the psychiatric ward of a major hospital in our city. As we visited with her and began to pray and see what the Lord wanted to do, we uncovered a vow. She had long ago promised herself that she would never have sex before marriage. She was successful in keeping that vow until college when she fell in love and had sex with her boyfriend. Guilt drove her into a marriage to this man that ended in divorce many years later. As the years went by, the feeling of shame grew. She could not forgive herself. She felt slammed by God. She was tired of living, and she was suffering from other physical maladies. Once she repented of and broke the vow, she was able to feel the forgiveness of the Lord, and His love for her flooded into her soul. She told us that she felt a deep sense of peace and joy – her entire countenance changed! A week later she was released from the hospital, and two years later we heard that she was full of life. The physical disabilities had resolved themselves as well!

You see, besides shutting the Lord out of that area, something else happens when we make an inner vow. The enemy of our souls, who always takes the legalistic approach, is put on notice by our vows. He watches and waits for us to fail in this area so that he can slam us with condemnation, just as he did with Anne in the carpool line and this woman in the hospital. We cannot sense the Lord's love for us, and we are crushed by our failure. The power of our inner vows hinders life in the Land of Milk and Honey, robbing us of the abundance that Christ intends.

8. Does this remind you of any vow that you have made? Take some time to get quiet before the Lord. Ask your Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to reveal to you any vows that are keeping you from complete reliance upon Him.

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Since we are living on this side of the cross and Christ has already triumphed over sin, we can repent of our sin of self-reliance and break the inner vows that we have made. For instance, when Anne came out of agreement with the vow to never be late picking up her children, she experienced a new freedom to be a normal mom, not having to be at the front of every carpool line.

**How to Break a Vow**

9. *If the Lord brings a particular vow to mind, pray the following prayer, filling in the blanks with the specifics of your own vow:*

*Lord, I'm sorry for making a vow and for relying on myself to...*

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*I choose now to come out of agreement with this vow.*

*I break this vow in the name of Jesus Christ.*

*Lord, show me how to rely upon You in this and all areas of my life.*

*Thank You for forgiving me and for allowing me to walk in the freedom that You purchased for me on the cross.*

Even if it's a vow to act in a manner that is good, like picking up your kids on time or not having sex before you are married, go ahead and break the vow. Rely upon the Lord to help you accomplish that thing. He not only wants us to do the right thing, He also wants us to do it with the right spirit of reliance upon Him.



*“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”*

*Galatians 5:1*

**Standing Firm**

To keep up with the Israelites’ story, read Joshua 10-14.

To this point in the Book of Joshua, the Israelites have engaged in battle after battle. Drum roll please, as we open to Joshua 14! The Israelites had gained enough territory for Joshua to divide the land among the twelve tribes and send them out to occupy it. Of course, there would still be some run-ins and flare-ups

with the Canaanites, but the Lord instructed the Israelites to occupy the land and to stand firm.

10. What do Galatians 5:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 teach us?

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Many times when the Lord breaks through in our prayers, we experience a freedom in that specific area. I watched as my friend received the awesome grace of God to give up smoking cigarettes. She was set free in a remarkable, supernatural way, and the desire to smoke fell away from her. It was a gift from God! Later, she said that even though the Lord so clearly took away her desire to smoke, she knew that at any moment she could pick up a cigarette and be hooked again. The Lord had set her free, but she had to maintain that freedom – to stand firm and occupy the conquered ground.

Like the displaced enemy in the Land of Milk and Honey, the enemy of our souls is watching for an opportunity to regain the ground that he has lost. He will not give up easily. If we are going to thrive in the Land of Milk and Honey, we will have to stand firm in our victory and freedom.

**Boundaries**

In accordance with the command of Moses, Joshua divided the Promised Land by casting lots. The boundaries were also in accordance with the prophecy of Jacob to his twelve sons just before his death (Genesis 49).

11. Read Joshua 14:1-2 and Proverbs 16:33. How do you see both the sovereignty of God and the actions of man in the dividing of the land?

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It was not the tribes’ job to determine which land would be theirs. God knew what was best for each tribe. Through the casting of lots, the Lord Himself divided the land among them. The Israelites’ job was to occupy the land – to continue to drive out the Canaanites and to take full possession of their piece of the Promised Land.

12. What does Acts 17:26 say about the boundaries that God has drawn for us?

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*“The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.”*

*Psalm 16:6, NIV*

In the same way that God apportioned the Land of Milk and Honey to the Israelites, God sets boundaries in each of our lives. God knows what is best for us. He has chosen this time and this place and this set of circumstances for us. Our job is not to decide whether His decisions are “fair” or “good.” Our job is to walk in gratitude and to glorify God in whatever situation we’ve been given.

13. What does Psalm 16:6 tell us about the boundary lines that God draws for us? (Read this in an NIV translation of the Bible for the clearest translation.)
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Well-defined boundaries are also important in our relationships with one another. Years ago, Dr Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend wrote a book on this subject – *Boundaries*. It is a classic. I pick it back up every year or so just as a refresher. It is such good stuff! I recommend it as a reference book for your personal library. The authors explain how to set and maintain healthy boundaries in all relationships.

Healthy boundaries have gates. We are to honor others’ gates, not go barging through their fences, and we should expect others to respect our boundaries in the same way. Fellowship and closeness are intended by God to enrich our lives, but this only happens when we mutually honor one another’s boundaries.<sup>viii</sup>

God sets forth the importance of boundaries early in Genesis. At the first marriage in Scripture God commands: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). And this was spoken before there were in-laws! Many marriages suffer because parents do not respect this God-drawn boundary for their married children. They may dangle financial strings to manipulate their grown children, or they may use guilt to get their way. Sometimes it is the adult child who cannot draw the boundary and “leave” their father or mother to cleave to their spouse. As a mother of three married children, I am acutely aware of the danger of crossing these invisible boundaries. No wonder the Lord put this instruction right up front in Genesis 2.

Some people think that setting boundaries sounds mean and not Christ-like. Actually, God Himself models for us how to set boundaries.

14. What does Revelation 3:20 tell you about who opens the door for Christ to “come in and eat”?
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God respects our boundaries. He doesn't manipulate or intimidate to get us to come into relationship with Him. He doesn't trick us into doing His will. He doesn't grovel at our feet, begging us to come to Him. He simply invites us to come. He will not barge through closed doors. He knocks. He seeks. He waits for each of us to respond to His call. He does not come through that door until we open it for Him.

- 15. Read about the rich young ruler's encounter with Jesus in Mark 10:17-27. Focus on the Lord's feelings for this man and what the Lord does when he turns away from Him. Discuss the boundaries of the Lord Jesus.

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The Lord has issued an open invitation to all of us to come to Him and receive salvation. He then lets us decide what our response will be. (If you are unsure if you have responded to His invitation or if you would like to consider this offer of salvation further, please turn to *Appendix I: Cities of Refuge* on page 113.)

- 16. Ask your Counselor, the Holy Spirit, if you have a relationship that needs healthier boundaries. Ask Him to give you the wisdom and strategies for establishing those boundaries.

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Something that often happens when we don't have good boundaries in our relationships with others is that we buy into negative things that someone says about us: "You will never amount to anything. You are lazy. You are stupid." The words of those in authority over us have especially great power. When we open our hearts to those negative words, we are not free to be who the Lord created us to be.

- 17. Take some time to ask the Lord if you have believed any negative declarations that have been spoken about you. If He reminds you of any, simply state that you do not agree with it and thank the Lord for the freedom to be who He says you are.

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*"For as [a man] thinks in his heart, so is he."*

*Proverbs 23:7, NKJV*

Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV) says, “As [a man] thinks in His heart, so he is.” Make sure you are agreeing with the Lord, not the negative words that may have been spoken about you.

### Soul Ties

A very close “cousin” to boundaries is something we call soul ties. Soul ties are formed when boundaries are crossed over. Mark Virkler defines soul ties this way: “when you enter into a covenant with another person or with God, a soul tie develops which allows the life, energies and provisions of the two to be shared.”<sup>ix</sup> This word is not used in the Bible, but we do see examples of soul ties in the lives of some of the people of the Bible.

18. Read about a godly soul tie in 1 Samuel 18:1-4 and discuss.

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19. In contrast, discuss the ungodly tie of Jacob to his youngest son, Benjamin, in Genesis 44:29-31.

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*“Do not move your neighbor's boundary stone set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess.”*

*Deuteronomy 19:14, NIV*

Soul ties can be godly or ungodly. A godly soul tie is a God-ordained relationship with Jesus at the center of it. Marriage, sibling and parent/child relationships can be examples of godly soul ties. Ungodly soul ties are usually of our own making. In such ties, we require another person to meet unspoken conditions for us. They can be recognized by manipulative, codependent or sinful behaviors. Sometimes godly relationships can have ungodly soul ties mixed up in them. The following examples demonstrate this principle:

A young woman was having difficulty making decisions about her life. She is the second of three daughters who are very close in age. They lost their father when they were young. Their mother was dealing with so many emotional issues of her own that she could not tune into her children. With the best of intentions, the sisters became surrogate parents to each other. They didn't do this consciously, it just happened slowly. By the time the middle sister reached college, she could not make choices for herself without consulting her sisters. A soul tie had formed between the sisters that debilitated her decision-making abilities. When she prayerfully broke this ungodly tie to her sisters, she began to develop into the woman God created her to be!

A mom loved each of her three children dearly, but one particular child seemed to have a harder time with life, and this pulled on her heartstrings. By middle school he suffered from depression. Understandably, she felt so badly for him. In fact, she couldn't really enjoy her own life when he was



having a hard time. When he was down in the dumps, she got in the ditch and wallowed with him. His healing could not begin until this soul tie was broken and he was no longer emotionally attached to his mother in this way. The breaking of the ungodly tie by the mother did not break the natural, God given mother-child bond. But the child was free to begin to take responsibility for himself, and his depression lifted.

I didn't know the term soul tie years ago when I was tempted to make one with our youngest daughter. We were new to Houston and didn't know many people. My husband was planning to go out of town for the weekend. One by one each of our older children were invited to spend the night out with a friend. Our youngest child and I talked about all the fun things we would do when we were hanging out together, just the two of us. And then at the last minute she was invited out. When I drove her over to her friend's house, she hesitated in the car, as if to say, *I can't leave you all alone*. Sensing this, I said to her, "Grab your bag and run on up to the house. I can't wait to have some time to myself for one whole evening!" Looking back, I can see that I could have latched onto her and created an unseen spiritual tie, making her think she was responsible for my well-being. You can see from this example how tempting and easy it is to make these soul ties.

Anne and I are unlikely friends – we are not the same age; we grew up in different parts of the country; our children are not the same ages; we have different interests and hobbies. So it is clear to both of us that our friendship is God's idea! Our common ground is centered on loving the Lord and praying for others. Over the years, because of God's blessing, we have become close friends, bound by a godly soul tie. But also over the years, we have had to repent and break off ungodly ties to one another that can develop between friends. For example, sharing confidences with a trusted friend can turn sinful when criticizing or gossiping becomes the pattern. When the pattern gets entrenched, the ungodly soul tie needs to be broken. Friends, spouses, parents and anyone else who may be joined in a godly soul tie, need to be vigilant in watching for sinful patterns that can lead to ungodly ties. Turning each other back to Jesus and keeping Him at the center of the relationship helps us guard against this.

*20. Spend some time now in prayer, asking the Lord to reveal any ungodly soul ties that you might have created. If He brings someone to mind and you are ready to cut the tie:*

❖ *Tell Him you are sorry you made the soul tie.*

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❖ *Confess and repent of any sin that is in your life because of the soul tie.*

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❖ *Tell Him that you choose to cut if off.*

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❖ *Then ask Him to come into that relationship and be the center of that relationship.*

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### **Prepare for Life**

Living in the Land of Milk and Honey brings new freedom. We are walking out of the vows that we have made into a new level of reliance upon the Lord. We are learning to honor one another’s boundaries and how to prayerfully draw our own. We are shifting our relationships so that the Lord is the center. In short, we are making room for the Lord in areas where we had crowded Him out. We are beginning to walk in more confidence as we are relying upon the Lord in the Promised Land.

21. *Consider the following scriptures and meditate on them using the prayer exercise that was detailed on page 13.*

❖ **Scriptures: *Psalm 16:5-8***

❖ **Word or Phrase:**

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❖ **Insight:**

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❖ **Invitation:**

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<sup>viii</sup> Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *Boundaries*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>ix</sup> Mark and Patti Virkler, *Prayers That Heal the Heart: Seminar Guide*, (Cheektowaga, NY: Communion With God Ministries, 2004), 9.

## Lecture Notes: