

Home group questions 25Apr10 week: victims to victors – Ex 14:11-12; Josh 11:23

Introduction

As a nation we take pride in our freedom, in fact we have fought wars to protect our freedom. Yet how free are we? How many of us are restricted & limited in our lives by some bad habit or weakness? There are sins that so easily defeat us and wrong ways of behaving that we think we cannot change. **John 8:34 (NCV) — 34** *Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, everyone who lives in sin is a slave to sin."*

But we are not meant to live like that but in the freedom that Christ has won for us. Jesus declares that He will bring us true freedom *John 8:36*.

As I reflected on the Israelite victories of Josh 10—12 I found myself comparing them to the whining bunch of dispirited released slaves in the story of the Exodus. What made the difference & what can we learn from it? First of all we tried to discover the roots of their problems at the time of their release from slavery.

Victims

1. Read Ex14:5-12 & Josh 11:23. Share your experiences of what changed when you first became a Christian & the kind of things you nevertheless still struggle with. Do we recognise just how much we need to change straight away? Cp Ps 19:11-14 What does the Psalmist say is difficult for us to do & what should help? What is his aim - & ours (v14)? [see also James 1:22-25]
2. I described the Israelites during the Exodus as having a 'slave mentality' because they did not believe things would really change for them & were better off as slaves [cp Ex2:23]. Cf Ex14:12 & 16:3. How far do we face the same danger, resisting change because 'that's how we are' or are more comfortable with our old ways? Does that mean our fundamental character has to change?
3. I also described them as having a defeatist attitude & a sense of helplessness & hopelessness – on each occasion they panicked crying 'we're going to die, we're going to die!!' [also Ex19:3] Are there any similar responses when we face crises today?
4. What do you think was at the root of these attitudes? Cp Ps 78:16-22 Does the same problem affect us in any way? How?

Victors

5. We reminded ourselves again of the Israelites renewing the sign of their special relationship with God, circumcision (*Josh 5:2-3*), & celebrated Passover (*Josh 5:10*) affirming the truth of God's saving love for them.

What do the words addressed to the sun and the moon mean, then, if not that the earth stopped rotating or shining (or something similar)? Simply this: that God was directing the sun and the moon to fight for Israel in the same way that the stars fought for Israel in Deborah's day (*Judg 5:20*), or else that they were to stand amazed as he fought for Israel, just as they did in *Hab 3:11*. We do not imagine that these statements in Judges and Habakkuk mean anything except that God's victory was total and that his majesty is awe-inspiring. Do we properly read these statements as involving universe-altering astronomical or geophysical phenomena? The issue is the same in *Josh 10:12–13*. The suggestion offered here is that the language is similar to the psalmist's who urges the rivers to clap their hands and the mountains to sing for joy (*Ps 98:8*) or the trees of the field to sing for joy (*Ps 96:12*), or when Isaiah writes that "the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (*Isa 55:12*).¹

do we? *Eph1:18-21* What then should we do when tempted? *1Pet 5:8-11; Phil 4:8*

How far are we tempted to doubt God's character & what steps can we take to affirm the truth? Eg *Ps 73:16-17; 1 Cor11:23-26; Rev 1:5-6*

6. Remind yourselves of *Josh 8:30f* The covenant God made with Israel meant they were a very special people to God with a special purpose & not born to be slaves. Why? See *Deut 7:7-8*? How special are we to God? *Rom 8:16; 1Pet2:9* In what ways does this knowledge encourage us when facing challenges? Cp *Josh 10:6-14* [for v12-13 see info panel] *Rom 8:35f* Have we any experience of this?
7. *10:8,14*. Where did they get the power & strength to overcome? Where

Prayer: break into groups of 2 or 3 to share some issue you need particular help in & discuss any steps you can take. Commit yourselves to enquiring about progress next week.