

**What Moses Could Not Do**  
*Nine Studies on Joshua's Major Sections*

*David W. Gooding*

Myrtlefield Sermons



**MYRTLEFIELD**  
HOUSE  
[www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

# Contents

Introduction	
1. (1) <a href="#">The Promised Inheritance and the Covenant</a>	4
2. (2) <a href="#">The Judgment of God on Jericho</a>	12
The First Phase of the Conquest	
3. (1) <a href="#">Bringing Israel into their Inheritance</a>	21
4. (2) <a href="#">Establishing the Law of God in Canaan—Part 1</a>	32
5. (3) <a href="#">Establishing the Law of God in Canaan—Part 2</a>	41
6. (4) <a href="#">Putting Down all Rule and Authority</a>	49
The Second Phase of the Conquest	
7. (1) <a href="#">Setting up the Tent of Meeting at Shiloh</a>	60
8. (2) <a href="#">Provision for Maintaining God’s Service and for the Salvation of those in Danger</a>	72
9. (3) <a href="#">Uninterrupted Service of the Lord</a>	80
Appendixes (Handouts)	
1. <a href="#">The Book of Joshua—Table of Contents</a>	87
2. <a href="#">The Conquest of Canaan—Phase I</a>	88
3. <a href="#">Similarities between Joshua 5–8 and the New Testament</a>	89
<a href="#">About the Author</a>	90

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2018

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Sometimes Dr Gooding gives his own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of nine talks given by David Gooding at Ahoghill Gospel Hall, Ahoghill, Co Antrim, N. Ireland during October 1989.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

Myrtlefield catalogue no: jos.005/bh

## Introduction

### *(1) The Promised Inheritance and the Covenant*

The book of Joshua is an exceedingly old book, written some three thousand years ago, yet it has power to speak to our hearts directly because we cannot read it without it reminding us of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ himself: 'For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on' (Heb 4:8).

### **The promised inheritance**

In the Greek it says, 'If *Jesus* had given them rest.' Therefore the Authorised Version translators of that verse translated it, 'If Jesus had given them rest.' When Joshua brought the Israelites into the promised land, if he had given them complete rest God would not have spoken of another rest. In the first place, the name of our Lord Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua, so the early Christians very soon learned that the book of Joshua and his exploits remind us of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus.

Then of course we may go deeper. For it is not merely a name, it is what Joshua did for the people of his time that so vividly reminds us of what our blessed Lord has done for us. Under God, Joshua was the man who brought Israel into their God-given inheritance, the promised land flowing with milk and honey. When we read it our hearts will immediately jump the centuries and think of our Joshua who has done similarly for us and brought us into our God-given inheritance. We shall be moved to give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us—who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (see Col 1:12). So as we read about Joshua bringing the Israelites into their land we shall not begrudge them one blade of grass in their country, or one little pot of honey. We shall say, 'Yes, thank God for that; but we have "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for (us)'" (1 Pet 1:4). God has made us fit already through Jesus Christ our Lord; he has qualified us for our share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

What do we mean when we think of this term, *inheritance*? It is mentioned very frequently in the New Testament, but of course it is taken from the Old, in particular from these stories that tell how God promised Canaan to the Israelites as their inheritance. When they got into the land the surveyors went round and measured out the farms. The land was divided up and given to each of the Israelites for their enjoyment. So the term was taken from the Old Testament and endures in the New.

As the centuries went by and the Israelites pondered the tremendous blessing that God had given them in their inheritance, they went beyond the literal land of Canaan—beyond the grass and the cows and the milk and the honey. Listen, for instance, to the psalmist David, ‘The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance’ (Ps 16:5–6).

What does he mean, ‘The *lines* have fallen for me’? He’s thinking of the ancient story—when Israel went into the land, eventually they described the land and wrote it down in a book. Lots were cast and each citizen received his bit of land. Some of the citizens thought it was marvellous, because they got rich countryside. Some of them weren’t so pleased, as they got bits that were difficult to farm. Some were very content and some were not so content. As the centuries went by, the great prophets and psalmists thought not only of the physical inheritance that God had given them, they began to think of the great spiritual inheritance they enjoyed even in that far off day. The psalmist says, ‘It’s the Lord who gave me this three acres and a cow! The Lord himself is behind the inheritance that is the portion of my cup. I can honestly and sincerely say that in the bit that’s been measured out for me, ‘the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.’

If we went no further than that, we’ve been moved, haven’t we, to think of a wonderful thing. The infinite God has not only brought us into an inheritance and qualified us to enjoy it, but he has given to each one of us our particular share of that inheritance. You have an experience of the Lord in common with me; and then you have your own experience of the Lord that is totally peculiar to you. As you think of the glorious inheritance that Christ has given you in God, I wonder can you honestly say, ‘Thank God, the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a beautiful inheritance’?

If we want to know more of what our inheritance means to us as Christians, we could start by considering *the earnest of our inheritance*. The New Testament uses that term more than once. Not only do we have an ‘inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for [us]’ (1 Pet 1:4), but God has already given us a part payment, an earnest (Eph 1:13–14). Already now we have some of the joys that we shall have in full one day. The great earnest of our inheritance is the Holy Spirit of God himself (2 Cor 5:5). We have the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. I have no need to remind you of all that that means and what the blessed Holy Spirit has done within us, regenerating us, giving us the very life of God already, introducing us into peace with God. We ‘have access in one Spirit to the Father’ (Eph 2:18), moving in our hearts that deep sense of assurance as he pours out the love of God in our hearts, leading us to cry in genuine reality, ‘Abba, Father.’ Already sensing and knowing that God is our Father, we are children of God; and if children of God then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord (see Rom 8:14–17). The very terminology is based on these ancient parts of the Old Testament and the book of Joshua in particular.

Not only is our inheritance concerned with spiritual blessings. Paul reminds us that the bodies in which we dwell are but fragile tents, blown about with the winds, dilapidated and coming down. It is but a temporary accommodation. ‘For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens’ (2 Cor 5:1).

We long, therefore, to ‘be away from the body and at home with the Lord’ (v. 8). This is not escapism. It isn’t the word and attitude of somebody for whom life has been too much and he’s glad to escape it. ‘The thing that has made heaven real to us,’ said Paul, ‘and the certainty that we shall have an eternal building—our bodies suited to our glorified personalities—is that God has already given us an earnest of it, the Holy Spirit in our hearts’ (1:22).

Enough then, to show the vast blessing that our inheritance in Christ gives us. If we would see the relevance of the story of Joshua to our experience, however, we must first of all study it in its *ancient historical context*. So, to see the significance of what Joshua did, I must ask you to turn to Genesis chapter 15. This is an even more remote Scripture than Joshua, but it tells us two exceedingly important and basic things.

### *1. Abraham was justified by faith*

And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness’ (v. 6). Whatever has that got to do with us? It’s got everything to do with us! If you have any hope whatsoever of an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, that hope is to be found here, because it lays down the legal precedent that tells us once and for all how people are justified, how they may have peace with God. If Abraham was justified by faith, then it follows as a legal precedent that everybody after Abraham will have to be justified by faith in the same way. God has no favourites. He is consistent, and if Abraham was justified by faith then you are justified by faith, if you are justified at all. Genesis 15:6 lays down the abiding principle by which men and women are made right with God.

We can see that from Paul’s discussion in Romans chapter 4. He has made the point that we are justified by faith, but then he says, ‘What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say?’ (vv. 1–3)

Then Paul proceeds to quote Genesis 15:6 that lays it down explicitly—Abraham was justified simply by faith. So it has everything to do with us.

### *2. God made a covenant with Abraham and by that covenant he promised him a glorious inheritance*

Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions’. . . On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.’ (Gen 15: 13–14; 18–21)

Two things therefore in Genesis 15:

1. Abraham was justified by faith, and so must we be;
2. God covenanted to give to Abraham and to his seed this great and glorious inheritance that consisted of so much territory in what we now call the Middle East.

But surely that hasn't got anything to do with us whatsoever? The promise given to Abraham was of an earthly inheritance; in this present day we who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ are part of the church and our portion is a heavenly portion. This covenant with Abraham, that God was going to give him certain square miles in the Middle East, it's interesting historically but it doesn't have anything much in particular to do with us, does it?

### ***The historical context***

Shall we observe first the historical context? Here was God, four hundred years before promising to Abraham that he would give him a glorious inheritance. The programme was this. Abraham's seed would develop into a nation and they would go down into Egypt where they would pass through years of affliction. After that, God would bring them out; he would take them through the wilderness and finally he would bring them into the glorious inheritance. God had covenanted to do it and he would keep his covenant.

The centuries passed by and Abraham's seed went down into Egypt. We know how eventually they were afflicted in Egypt—it proved an oven of affliction to them. We know the stirring story of how God raised up Moses, and Moses celebrated the Passover, and crossed the Red Sea, and he brought the Israelites out. Step by step they marched across the Sinai Peninsula until they got within breathing distance of the glorious inheritance. Then Moses could take them no further.

Not only did the first generation disobey God in the wilderness and prove to be an apostate nation, and God had to swear to them in his wrath, 'You will never enter my inheritance,' but poor old Moses, being hard pressed by the sufferings of the wilderness, rebelled against God himself. For that he was told he could never enter the promised land. What a dismal story it would be if the Bible ended with the book of Deuteronomy and didn't go on into Joshua. I'm here to tell you the wonderful gospel that what God covenanted to Abraham God intended to fulfil. What Moses could not do, that Joshua did. Joshua is the book of the glorious saviour that God raised up to do what Moses could not do, namely to bring God's people into their God-given inheritance.

I could tell you something else our blessed Lord has done:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4)

It is in that way then, that the book of Joshua is going to talk to us about our blessed Lord Jesus, the great captain of our salvation who has done for us what Moses certainly could never do and has brought us into the God-promised inheritance.

But let me backtrack a minute or two. This inheritance that God promised and covenanted to Abraham, are you absolutely sure it's got nothing to do with you? These acres in Canaan—the land of the Hittites and all that in the Middle East—that's nothing to do with us in the church? It would be a little bit worldly of us as the church to interest ourselves in some sort of an earthly inheritance, wouldn't it? Well, would it? Tell me, is the Lord Jesus going to interest himself in any earthly inheritance, or has he given up the earth completely? His portion is certainly going to be heavenly, but has he no interest in this earth? In Psalm 2 God is saying, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession' (vv. 7–8)

Yes, my brothers and sisters, our blessed Lord has not given up his interest in this earth. I hope you believe that!

Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun  
Does its successive journeys run;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.<sup>1</sup>

God is not going to dismiss this earth, tiny as it is, into complete bankruptcy. It has been stained with the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son. On our planet earth a cross was raised, staked into the ground and the Lord of Glory himself impaled on it. Before God calls an end to the history of planet earth he will yet redeem his covenant that he made with Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15. God is going to give the Middle East, and more than the Middle East—he'll give the whole planet—to his blessed Son. He shall inherit the very ends of the earth. Don't say that heaven is enough for Jesus Christ—it isn't, he shall inherit the earth as well. He is the heir of all things, he upholds all things and one day he shall come into his rights (Heb 1:2–3).

## The covenant

So that we may get this historical context well into our hearts, let's turn to the passage in the New Testament that says this explicitly—Galatians 3:15–29. You will remember what the argument of Galatians is at this point. Paul has been striving to prove that justification is by faith and in order to prove that, he proves three other things. Not only is justification by faith, but the promises made to Abraham are to be received by faith as well—the blessing of Abraham is also to be received by faith. The covenant is granted on terms of faith and, because the covenant is thus granted, the inheritance is by faith. Not only is justification by faith, but all these other things as well, so let's prepare ourselves to be spiritual millionaires if we can, and enlarge our hearts and see the argument that Paul uses to prove it.

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring [*seed* KJV]. It does not say, 'And to offsprings', referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring', who is Christ. (Gal 3:16)

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Watts, 1719.



Some people have thought that Paul is arguing unfairly, but he's not, is he? He's giving us, in the first place, a little lesson in grammar.

When I was an infant at school, teachers laboured to tell me that there were such things in the English language as collective nouns. Nouns that looked as if they were singular, but really they were plural. You could say, 'one horse' — that was singular, 'two horses' — that's plural. Then you could say, 'here's a sack of seed.' When you looked, there were millions of seeds in the sack; but if somebody asked you what it was, you would say 'it is seed' — you didn't usually say 'it is seeds.' But you could say, 'how many seeds are in that little packet of flower seeds?' The answer, 'twenty-two forget-me-not seeds,' in the plural. But you could also refer to it in the singular, 'twenty-two forget-me-not seed.'

Paul is taking advantage of that fact here in his argument. The promises were originally made to Abraham and to his seed. Notice not 'seeds', but 'seed'. 'Ultimately,' says Paul, 'the seed in question is Christ.' So here is the affirmation that the inheritance promised in Genesis 15 and secured by covenant, was made to Christ. He shall inherit the land. He shall inherit, in fact, the whole earth. So, what's that got to do with us? How do we come into it? 'To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified' (v. 15).

If somebody makes a covenant in the form of a will, once the will is signed, sealed and settled you can't add anything to it. Your great grandmother dies and you have reason to expect that she might have looked favourably upon you before she left the scene, so you attend with all the rest of the family to hear the lawyer read out the will. Eventually the list has gone through, and your name hasn't appeared. He puts his glasses on and he reads it again. 'No, I'm sorry, there's nothing about you down here.' 'There must be,' you say. 'I know my great grandmother wanted me to inherit something, so put my name in!' Even the lawyer wouldn't do that, however much you paid him. Once the will is signed, sealed and settled, you can't add any more names to it.

So what about this inheritance then, that according to Genesis 15 and Galatians 3 was promised to Abraham and to his seed, which is Christ? Have I any hope of ever inheriting under the terms of that covenant? I didn't see my name. I read about the Hittites, the Gergashites and the Amorites, but I never did read about the Goodingites in Genesis 15! What then is our ground for hope? As Paul comes to the end of his argument he says:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.  
(Gal 3:27-29)

Your heart ought to be jumping for joy, for the spiritual millionaire that you are! Who shall measure your inheritance if this is true? The great inheritance was promised to Abraham and to his offspring. If you have genuinely put your faith in Christ and you've been baptised into Christ, in God's sight you have put on Christ. If you are Christ's and are part of him then you are part of the offspring that God had in mind when he made his great covenant with Abraham. What unimaginable, immeasurable wealth is yours if you are Christ's and the offspring intended by the terms of the ancient covenant.

'This is getting interesting,' you say! 'Tell us again: what is this inheritance we're going to inherit according to Genesis 15:6? It's some area in the Middle East?' Actually it's more than that!

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. (Rom 4:13–16)

Here Paul understands the inheritance promised under the terms of the covenant as nothing less than inheritance of the whole world. The promise in v. 13 to Abraham and to his offspring was that he should be heir of the world. You say, 'The covenant in Genesis 15 only mentioned the land of Palestine, so how can you now say that it meant the whole world?' There is one possible way of doing it. If you were that great grandmother, and you've made your will, signed, sealed and settled it, but later on you choose to give your great granddaughter an extra piece of ground, you can add a codicil to the will. God made the promise to Abraham, but when we come to the New Testament God tells us that he intended far more than you might even suspect from the literal description in Genesis 15, so he has added his codicil to the will and to the covenant. He's going to give not only Canaan, but the whole world to the offspring.

Now we are beginning to see the relevance of the story of Joshua. With so much at stake, here was God promising to Abraham and to his offspring that he would give them this inheritance, and first of all Palestine. Moses had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, but he could not bring them into their inheritance. That had to wait for the coming of Joshua, and what Moses couldn't do Joshua did.

We have a vested interest in it; as we think about it we shall see the parallel between that history and ours. In Galatians 3 Paul is arguing about how the inheritance is to be secured. Is it by the keeping of the law? 'Certainly not,' says Paul. The covenant was made with Abraham long before the law was given (v. 17). In the covenant there was no mention of the keeping of the law; it was a covenant of God's absolute grace, given as a gift to Abraham and to his offspring, and therefore utterly irrevocable. The law that came in between cannot alter it. How then is that covenant to be realised and all its blessings secured?

Certainly not through Moses or through the keeping of the law, but through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is 'kept in heaven for you' (1 Pet 1:4). The Holy Spirit is the earnest of the inheritance and one day our very bodies shall be glorified like the body of the Lord Jesus. A vast eternity of God's ingenuity awaits us, providing delight and entertainment beyond our imagination. If we thought that all that blessing depended on our ability to keep the Law of Moses, all of us without exception would give up any hope of ever inheriting so much as one blade of grass or one pot of honey. 'For the law brings wrath' (Rom 4:15)—the law works condemnation. If the inheritance were of the law none of us would have any hope, but it is all

of grace. 'That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring' (v. 16).

So, in the days when God's promise was being fulfilled at the level of the prototype, it wasn't Moses that brought them into Canaan. He was not allowed to do it. In fact, he couldn't do it. But what Moses couldn't do, Joshua did. In the extended sense it is the same with us. The law could never turn us into heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, but our blessed Joshua, the captain of our salvation—Jesus Christ our Lord—has done it.

Now we must ask ourselves some more questions. When shall we Christians come into our inheritance, and how shall the book of Joshua help us to understand it? The story is of how Joshua brought the people across the river Jordan and into the land of Canaan. How can crossing Jordan and entering the promised land be a picture of going to heaven? When Joshua got the people into the promised land there was a lot of fighting to do—they had to fight to enter their inheritance—how can it be a picture of heaven? When we get home to heaven there won't be any fighting to do! Would you say then, that crossing Jordan and entering the promised land is a picture of where we are now?

According to Ephesians 2:6 we're 'seated with Christ in heavenly places'; but of course we have to 'wrestle against principalities, powers, mights and dominions' (6:12 KJV). We have crossed over Jordan and already are seated, but at the moment there's still fighting to do, very serious fighting. Just like Joshua and the Israelites, when they got into the land they had to fight the enemy.

The apostle Peter talks of our equivalent of Canaan:

[God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Pet 1:3-5)

According to Peter therefore, there is a sense in which our inheritance is reserved in heaven and we're not yet there.

How then shall we interpret the book so that we're not at cross-purposes? It seems to me that we would be wise to look again at our history book a little more carefully. Joshua's great conquest of the land of Canaan was in several different phases. In our third session we shall attempt to get these different phases clear in our minds and apply them as prototypes to our own spiritual experience.

## Introduction

### *(2) The Judgment of God on Jericho*

There is no possible way of denying that the judgments of God that fell upon the ancient city of Jericho were exceedingly severe. So heart-stoppingly severe that many people find it difficult to believe that they were indeed the judgments of God. We are told that when the Israelites destroyed that city everything that breathed within its walls was put to the sword.

Many seriously minded people say, 'How could we possibly bring ourselves to think that a God of love would ever command the Israelites to execute every man, woman and child in that ancient city of Jericho?' Therefore there are many who prefer to believe that what happened was that a band of very primitive savages, used to living in the desert, eventually descended upon the land of Canaan—like in later centuries the Goths and the Vandals descended upon the city of Rome. Being savages, they did not understand the civilisation and the culture that they met in Canaan, and with a savage ruthlessness they destroyed it all.

Before we come to such a conclusion however, it seems to me we would do better to consider the plain and simple facts that are recorded in the Old Testament. The story is telling us of the physical and temporal judgment of God that fell upon that city, but we must beware of exaggeration. It does not pretend to tell us about the eternal destiny of the people who thus suffered; and since the word of God does not tell us, we might be well advised not to suppose that we know. We should content ourselves that here is a story of God's temporal judgment visited upon that ancient city.

We should do well to put this story of ancient judgment into a wider context. It would be unwise to think that this story of judgment is typical of the Old Testament, because it is rather a savage book. The New Testament talks to us quite bluntly that one day God will visit our world with a judgment compared with which the judgment of Jericho fades into insignificance. For the New Testament tells us that not only will God intervene in temporal judgments, it warns us that there is an eternal judgment. So, as we read of this ancient example of God's temporal judgment, we do well to let it remind us of that greater, eternal judgment of God. If it moved us to prepare ourselves to be ready when the eternal judgment of God shall fall, then certainly for all eternity we shall look back upon our study and thank God that he had the courage to talk to us about the unpleasant topic of his judgment.

Then of course we could say other things. Severe as that ancient judgment was that fell upon the city of Jericho, given the historical context there were very powerful reasons for it. Nowadays people say you cannot believe that God himself would have ordered the execution of innocent little babies in Jericho City; but the Old Testament tells us why he did it. Jericho and the other Canaanite cities in the Middle East in those days were in the habit of murdering little children. Given up to their primitive idolatries, from time to time they would take their

innocent babies and put them to death and sacrifice them to their lurid gods. If it was the only way God had of stopping that evil practice, who shall complain against the Almighty? He visited his judgment once upon that city, that for centuries thereafter he might save multitudes of innocent babies.

While we're on the topic of the murder of babies in ancient Jericho, we must ask if our modern society is any kinder to little babies. They don't commonly sacrifice them shortly after they're born, but multimillions of little babies have been deliberately destroyed before their birth. This very solemn passage of Scripture reminds us that God, who visited Jericho in those ancient days with his severe judgment because of their treatment of innocent babies, will eventually visit our modern civilisation with similarly severe and drastic judgment.

The other fact we should bear in mind about the judgment of Jericho is this. The Old Testament tells us more than once the reason why God ordered the armies of Israel to destroy the city. It was because the Canaanite people were guilty of the grossest sexual perversions, and when the Israelites came into the land of Canaan God warned them through his servant Moses that they were not to give way to the same sexual perversions as the Canaanites practised.

Again, we cannot read that without it being a very serious voice to our modern world. AIDS has become a worldwide catastrophe. If we now know that sexual perversion can lead to such a thing, then in that ancient day similar practices would have led to a similar result. Therefore it seems altogether likely that God's severe judgment on that city was but the merciful act of a divine surgeon who chose to excise it from humanity, lest the disease that they had engendered should poison the gene pool of the nations for the rest of history. It must be apparent to us all, surely, that as we read these ancient stories we're not reading of something primitive and irrelevant to our modern living. We are dealing with that same scourge of the human race and its wilful sinfulness that in ancient times brought down God's judgment, and will in our day bring similar judgment.

#### *The longsuffering of God*

Then, as we think of the severity of the judgment that overcame Jericho, we might put it into its proper context by considering how merciful and longsuffering God was, even to that ancient, evil, cruel and perverted civilisation. The Bible tells us that four hundred years before the troops came into Jericho to destroy it, God had spoken to his servant Abraham. He told him that one day Abraham's descendants would be given the land of Canaan to occupy it. But then God added that it would not be all at once, because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full (Gen 15:16). That paints a very interesting scene of a God who for four hundred years was watching that civilisation progress ever downward into its perversions. In his mercy he waited all those long years before eventually their civilisation came to such a stage of corruption that God himself had to obliterate it.

That is another theme that runs through the whole of Scripture. God is longsuffering to us, 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance' (2 Pet 3:9). Peter tells us that in the last days there shall come mockers, saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' (v. 4).

'All this talk of the second coming of Jesus Christ and the judgments of God that are supposed to be spilled out on this world! Our grandfathers talked about it and their grandfathers talked about it; from the beginning everybody has talked about it and it's never happened yet.' The fact remains that the day of the Lord will come (v. 10)—a day of judgment is coming.

#### *Rahab's salvation*

As we think of God's great longsuffering, the story we shall now consider will warm our hearts. It is the delightful record of a woman who, amidst all that carnage, was saved by God, protected from the judgment and brought through alive and safe. It is told in the ancient, charming way of the Hebrew historians and I trust some of its charm will come through to us, for it tells the age-long gospel of God. In whatever age his judgments have descended, always and invariably God has made a way of escape. He has always provided salvation and a Saviour. The great story of Calvary at once comes to mind, to drive it home to our hearts and consciences that the God who gave his Son for our sakes to die at Calvary is the God who would, if he could, have all to be saved and come to the knowledge of his truth (1 Tim 2:4). 'As I live, declares the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (Ezek 33:11).

So not only was this woman saved, but as we go through the New Testament we discover that she was given the inestimable honour and privilege of becoming an ancestress of Christ. Her name was Rahab, her profession the oldest in the world. Yet the amazing fact is that when you open the first page of the New Testament to read the genealogy of Jesus Christ our Lord, there it is for everybody to see. In the ancestry of Jesus Christ himself there was this colourful character, the one time harlot of Jericho. I fancy if some of us had such a woman in our past we wouldn't be so keen on tracing our ancestry or parading it in our family tree. The Saviour doesn't mind you knowing that one of his ancestors was the harlot of Jericho. What can any of us say? As Paul said to the Christians in Corinth, 'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God' (1 Cor 6:11).

He was reminding them of their colourful, not to say lurid past. This is the gospel of a God whose judgments must fall upon sinful men and women. A God who not only delights to save, but has a salvation devised in his heart that would make us all princes and princesses in the royal house of Jesus Christ his Son. A gospel that assures us not only of forgiveness and pardon for the past, but that for everyone who trusts Christ this present life is leading on to an exhibition of God's grace that will stagger the wildest imagination. We shall reign with Christ, says the Bible (see 2 Tim 2:12). We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ his Son (see Rom 8:17). As the heir of all things, the heir of this vast universe, he will share that incalculable wealth with every man, woman, boy and girl that has repented of sin and come for salvation through his atoning death, suffered at Calvary.

So let's think of an actual case of a woman who found salvation. Not only forgiveness, but deliverance from her sad and exceedingly unhappy way of living. Rahab was the harlot of Jericho. What she offered was pleasure without love, or love without loyalty. She turned love into a mere sensation that was to be bought for money and as a result depersonalised that

lovely gift of God the Creator. Before we spend much time in criticising her we should do better to think, perhaps, that, sad and sorry as her profession was, it was in its way merely an expression at one level of the spiritual disease that lay at the heart of all the people of Jericho.

You see, these sinful attitudes at the physical level have their counterpart at the spiritual level. Perhaps, indeed, their source is in the false attitudes of people's hearts towards God. The Bible tells us that the ancient Canaanites, like all the other pagan nations right up to this present, had once known the true God; but they did not like to retain God in their knowledge (Rom 1:28). It irked them to think that they were constantly dependent upon a personal God. The fact that they had to feel grateful for all his gifts, for them became an intolerable burden. A personal God who was always watching what they did, they found insufferable. So, while they knew of the existence of the true and the living God, they didn't like to retain God in their knowledge. To the best of their ability they got rid of God. There are many people still that do the same; they've given up on the idea of God and they think it will lead them to freedom. But if you get rid of the idea of God you don't actually find freedom; you find yourself in a world full of powers, many of which you cannot control. They tend to control you instead of you controlling them.

Having got rid of the idea of a personal God, it wasn't long before those ancient civilisations began to multiply gods to themselves of a different kind. They not only worshipped the sun god up in the sky and the moon god and the storm god, and the god of fertility and gods out of the great powers of the universe, they began to make gods out of their own urges. So it came to be that, feeling the urge of sex, they presently made a goddess out of her. They called her Aphrodite in Greek and by various names in other languages. They made a goddess out of her and lived to serve that goddess. No longer was there any question of moral restraint or rules of behaviour. You just deified the raw urge and satisfied it.

In our modern day we are not altogether different, are we? Days were when men and women believed in the true God, and therefore accepted the moral standards that God laid down to control our behaviour. Multitudes of men and women have scrapped the idea of God; and with it all moral controls and they live to satisfy their urges. If it feels good, do it. If it's pleasurable, do it—away with any constraint or control. As a result they began to dishonour their bodies, depersonalising not only love but the very universe (Rom 1:28–32)).

You see, if you believe in the one true God, then it follows that all the lovely things of life are his gift and meant to lead us to him. These ancient nations wanted all the lovely gifts and all the pleasures that go with them but they didn't want the God who gave them. You'll see that in the modern world. Here is a delightful young lady, a brilliant musician. You sit enthralled with her music, and when she's finished you say, 'That was simply superb—isn't it marvellous of God to have given us the delightful gift of music: the ears to hear it with, the genius to write it and the skill to play it.' 'I don't believe in God,' she says. 'I've got enough with my music. I enjoy my music and I have no time for God and religion!'

How does that strange state of affairs come about, where people can enjoy their music and not be interested in the person who gave them the music? What they're doing is depersonalising music. The Bible's account of music is of a God who invented it and in his love and delight gave it to us to enjoy, so that it might charm our hearts and be one evidence

among many that would lead us to seek the living and true God — the person behind the gift. But they want the gift and not the person. Our Lord Jesus commented upon that type of thing, reminding us that, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God' (Matt 4:4).

Let's imagine that one of these days you invite me to dinner. You've decided for reasons best known to yourself you'd like to get to know me! You sit me down at a beautiful dinner table and presently you say, 'Nice weather today!' —and I take no notice. So you let me go on with the soup and a little bit later you say, 'Have you been on your holidays this year?' —and I carry on lapping up the soup! You think to yourself, this is a very odd Englishman! So you say, 'Have you read any good books recently?' I lift up my head from the anchovies and I say, 'I'd like you to understand something. I'm enjoying this dinner immensely; it's a marvellous dinner, the way it's presented is most artistic. I've been admiring those pictures you have on the wall and I wish I possessed them. But let me tell you this, I'm not interested in you. I don't believe in you anyway, so please will you be quiet. All I'm concerned with is the dinner!' What would you do? I think you'd reach for the ejector button on my seat and have me out of the door!

Who but a fool would act like it? Dinners are good and to be enjoyed; but if there's a person behind the dinner, then I want to know the person. What a fool I would be if I were merely interested in the dinner and the pleasure of my palate and my stomach and missed forming a friendship with you. The reason you gave me the dinner was so that I might form a friendship with you; a friendship that will last for years, long after the carrots have disappeared. How will you explain the attitude of men and women that can take the beautiful things of life — its music, art, literature and all its glories, down to its food and carrots, enjoy them and not be concerned to find out whether there is a person behind them? Oh, the wretched philosophies that depersonalise life and reduce the significance to mere carrots, taste buds and stomachs!

Perhaps circumstances had forced Rahab into her sad and sorry profession; but the society in which we live is guilty of that same sin, at a higher level. The Israelites were spiritual adulterers and adulteresses (see Ezek 16:15). The New Testament picks up the same story: 'You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?' (Jas 4:4). You have a world that is determined to forget God. To interpret life as a self-contained flat, keep God out and go for the enjoyment of life as it is, is nothing short of the idolatry of the ancient world.

How then did Rahab get converted? Let's follow the elements in her conversion step by step. As far as we can deduce from what she tells us in the story, the first glimmer of a change of mind was when she came to be aware of the reality of the true God. You can try as hard as you can to be an atheist; C. S. Lewis came to the point when he began to think that it might be true after all and there is a living God. Rahab heard the evidence and came to the conclusion that this was no fairy story to frighten the kids with. There was a living God who had decided to bring his judgments down upon Jericho. Listen to her talking to the spies: 'Here in Jericho we've heard what your God did in Egypt to Pharaoh. We've heard of the miracle, how he parted the Red Sea and brought you through it on dry land, and I've come to the conclusion that your God is the living God of heaven and earth.'



*What is conversion?*

The dawning of a conversion is to discover evidence that there is a true and living God. What evidence shall we quote; what evidence would suffice us? I have only time to quote one strand of it. I take it from Paul's great sermon before the Areopagites in Athens.

[God] has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:31)

There is to be a judgment—does that sound gloomy to you? I wonder why that is. When you read in the Old Testament about God's judgment, it is very frequently accompanied by expressions of joy.

Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Ps 98:8–9)

Surely that ought to be our reaction. Would you want evil to go on forever? Would you have the gas chambers of Germany and the killing fields of Cambodia repeat themselves? What sensible or sensitive man and woman is there on the face of the earth that wouldn't say, 'If there's a God who would judge our world and put an end to evil, hallelujah'? Why don't we want it? Why should the thought of God's coming judgment be a gloomy thing? From one point of view it's full of hope and delight and wonder that evil is not going to prosper forever. God will one day intervene. It's the biggest compliment God could pay to mankind. Just to think that I mean so much to almighty God and what I do matters to him.

If a mosquito alighted on my brow this evening I shouldn't bring it before the high court in Belfast, I would just give it a slap and that would be the end of the mosquito. It amazes me that almighty God doesn't do the same with us sinners.

What we do matters to God because we matter to him. He takes us seriously; he will never say that we don't matter or that what we have done doesn't matter. And because we matter to God there will be a judgment. That's precisely where our knees begin to quake and why we don't find it a happy prospect. For the simple reason that our consciences tell us that we are sinners, and if there's going to be a judgment then how can we face it? It's better to wake up like Rahab to the fact that the judgment is going to take place, rather than to live with our heads permanently in the sand of wishful thinking. Conscience, morality and the sense of fairness that every one of us has, points to the great source of justice—God himself. As sure as there is a God there shall be a judgment. Rahab came to realise it was true and she took her next step in conversion.

There came two Israelite men to her door. They were spies and they sought a hiding place where men wouldn't be too closely investigated if they stayed a night there. In that moment she took a tremendous decision. If their God was the true God and if judgment was about to fall, then she'd got to make up her mind as to which side she stood on. It was a very real, big, difficult decision to make. If she were to turn and side with the Israelites, if the Jericho people knew of it they would say she was guilty of treason. But her only hope of safety was to change

sides. It wasn't merely a question of changing sides from Jericho to Israel, there was the bigger concept—behind Israel was the true and living God. Should she stay with a sinful world, or change over to the side of the living God? She made her decision and turned to God from her idols, determined to serve the true and the living God.

### *A question of loyalty*

This is raw gospel, it cuts us at the quick; but if we would be saved we must all make that decision sooner or later. Don't say it's too difficult. The Bible says that all we have to do is to turn to God and the living God is at our very elbow. It is a question of loyalty. To whom do you give the loyalty of your heart? Do you give it to the world, the gods and goddesses of mere passing pleasure, popularity, fame, wealth, or whatever it is? Or, surveying life and its ultimate issues, do you say, 'I give the loyalty of my heart to the true and living God'? Let the ancient story impress upon us that there are only two sides. We side with God or we side with the world; we side with Christ or we side with the devil. Which will it be? Moses cried before the host of Israel, 'Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me' (Exod 32:26). Jesus Christ is coming again and God has ordained that it is by him he is going to judge this world. Scripture uses its most solemn language to say that he will come 'in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus' (2 Thess 1:8). In light of that, who is on the Lord's side, to what do you give your ultimate loyalty?

Rahab turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, but then there were practical things to be considered. Before she let them go she went to the roof of her house where she'd hidden the spies and said, 'I have shown kindness to you.' The ancient word that she used is not mere kindness, in the sense of giving them nice gifts. It is a word that at its heart means loyalty—lovingkindness that is loyal. 'I've shown you kindness, I've been loyal to you,' she said. She had indeed and risked her very life in loyalty to them, protecting them against their pursuers. 'What token are you going to give me that you will be loyal to me? I saved your life; will you not save mine?'

'Yes we will,' they said. 'We promise that when we come with the invading armies we will protect your house and save you, so long as you are found inside the house. Get your neighbours and yourself and your family into this house.'

How would she know that these were not mere words? There had been a lot of men in her house who said all sorts of wonderful things. When they'd gone, they never came back or thought of her again. That was the world in which she lived. Love knew no loyalty and you couldn't rely upon anybody's word. Facing eternity and life's big issues, she was beginning to feel the deep need within a human soul. Is there anybody that would be loyal to her? Where could she find a loyalty that she could depend upon? When all is said and done I want to know if there is anybody who really loves me. Is there a love in this universe that will be utterly loyal to me? Is there anyone to whom I may entrust myself, my personality, my soul, and know my life is secure? Rahab wanted something more than words.

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father

and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death. And the men said to her, 'Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you . . . Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household' . . . Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window. (Josh 2:12–14; 18, 21)

In the darkness of the night the men solemnly swore their oath in the name of God and the woman rested on it. Presently she let them down through the window on a rope. I wonder how she felt when that old rope went slack and the men were gone. Soon the armies of Joshua would be coming to execute the wrath of God; how could she be sure that she would be saved? Where in this entire universe can anybody be sure? In a world packed full of lies, where will you find a truth you can hold on to? Where is it? That woman found it and it lay at the heart of her conversion. She found her security in the loyalty of a God who, when he gives his word of oath, will fulfil it through thick and thin. This is love.

I was recently in the Far East and the people had many serious questions to ask. Their chief objection to Christianity was, 'Why do you say that Jesus Christ is the only way to God?' My standard reply was, 'My difficulty is a practical one. I am a sinner, and other religions tell me that I ought to be good. That isn't my problem—I know I ought to be good. My problem is that I haven't been good! What attracts me in Jesus Christ is that he says something nobody else says: "I'm your God, your Creator incarnate, and I love you. I love you personally, for I made you. I love you with a love that is eternally loyal to you. Rather than that you perish, I would die in your place."'

That's love! Not some passing sensation, some sudden surge of emotion, but a love that death itself can never quench and eternity will never see the end of. A love that is utterly loyal. Even though I am a sinner I can say with Saul of Tarsus, 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20).

We have thought of solemn things and the certainty of the coming of Jesus Christ as judge. Oh how wonderful it is to be able to say, in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord, that he who will come in flaming fire first came in his loyalty to us and died at Calvary to pay the penalty of sin so that we might be saved. Not only has God shown it by the gift of Jesus at Calvary, but to comfort our hearts the word of God adds that God himself has sworn an oath:

For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you.' . . . So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. (Heb 6:13–14; 17–18)

So we have two unchangeable things: God's word and God's oath. There is no permanence in the little planet upon which we live, one day it will all dissolve and be gone forever. Permanence, security and loyalty are found in the love of the true God who 'shows his love for us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8). Get hold of it; flee for refuge; take hold of that great oath of God and his word will keep you safe eternally.

### *The importance of evidence*

There's one final little detail that we must not forget. When the spies left the woman, quietly they shouted up to her, 'When the armies begin to come, take the scarlet cord with which you have let us down and bind it in the window, so that we shall be able to see which is your house, upon which we have guaranteed to save alive all that are in it' (Josh 2:18). If I'd been Rahab, how long do you suppose I should have left it before I bound the cord in the window? It wouldn't have been two seconds! I should have cleared the curtains away, no matter what they had cost, in case they should obscure the rope in the window. I would have bound it, not once, but twice or three times. I would have done all in my power so that when the troops came they should be able to see the rope in the window.

I can't see into your heart, but your heart does have a window, doesn't it? Have you bound the rope in your window—the rope of your decision to trust the Saviour? Oh friend, I would like to see it, but it is more important that God should be able to see it. As God looks at your heart now, does he see clearly the evidence that you have trusted Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Saviour? If you have, I may tell you in God's name that you will be utterly secure. As we turn to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, the Bible assures believers that we may put upon our heads as a helmet, the absolute certain expectation of salvation.

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him' (1 Thess 5:9–10).

For all who trust in him as their Saviour, what a glorious day his coming will be. For those that have rejected him, he must come as their judge. How will he know the difference? By the rope in your window! Have you tied it in? If not, in the conscious presence of almighty God, take his word to your heart and bind it there for all to see. We have heard the Saviour, we have repented and trusted him. We have turned to God from the idols and are determined to live to serve him as we wait for his Son from heaven.

## The First Phase of the Conquest

### *(1) Bringing Israel into their Inheritance*

In our first introductory study we reminded ourselves how it is that the book of Joshua, in spite of the fact that it was written some three thousand years ago, still speaks directly to the heart of every Christian man and woman.

In the first place it is because the name Jesus is one of the Greek forms of the Hebrew name Joshua, and therefore you can scarcely read about the exploits of the great captain of Israel's salvation, whose name was Joshua, and not immediately think of Jesus, the captain of our salvation. Of course, the similarity between Joshua and our blessed Lord Jesus goes far deeper. It depends in great part on the similarity of function that they both carried out. It was Joshua, not Moses, who triumphantly brought Israel at last into their God-given inheritance, to munch their grapes, eat their honey and enjoy all these spectacular blessings that God had provided for them. Once they were slaves, but now they have been redeemed by the blood of their Passover lamb. And it is through the death of our Lord Jesus that we have been qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Col 1:12).

In our last session we tried to put the whole thing into its deeper historical context. We saw from Genesis 15 how God made a covenant with Abraham and with his seed, telling him that his descendants would for a while be slaves in the land of Egypt. After some 400 years in Egypt they would come out and God would eventually give them this glorious inheritance in the land of Canaan. In the process of time it happened. Abraham's descendants went down into Egypt, where they were slaves, but at last God raised up Moses to be their deliverer. He celebrated the Passover with them, and by his direction they crossed through the Red Sea. For forty years he led them across the wilderness, ever nearer to their great inheritance, but he died because he too had rebelled against the Lord. A sorry story it would have been had God in his faithfulness not raised up Joshua to fulfil the glorious covenant he had made with his ancestor Abraham. Joshua, the great captain of Israel's salvation, brought them into the land, taking them across Jordan until all Israel had passed over into their God-given inheritance.

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses. And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal allotments. And the land had rest from war. (Josh 11:23)

As we think of that we are moved to think of what the writer to the Hebrews says: 'For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on' (4:8). If Joshua had given Israel perfect and complete rest by bringing them into their inheritance in Canaan, God would not have spoken of another rest.

Centuries after Joshua's time Israel was settled in the land. Later the Psalms were written, and in one of those psalms God is heard to be speaking like this: 'Today if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness' (Ps 95:7-8 KJV).

Their forefathers had disobeyed God and refused to enter into the promised land. 'Don't you do like that—you listen to God's voice,' says the writer to the Hebrews (3:7-8). Joshua had given them physical rest in the land of Canaan, but God had an infinitely more wonderful rest for them. He had in mind a great and eternal rest, and an inheritance not merely in Canaan, with its grass, cows, flowers, bees and its honey. Even when he spoke to Abraham, God had in mind a heavenly inheritance (1 Pet 1:4). Joshua and his great campaign that brought Israel into their inheritance, and into their rest in the promised land, becomes for us Christians a kind of prototype of that greater captain of salvation, our blessed Lord, and of that greater inheritance.

We shall now begin in earnest a series of studies that will illustrate the Christian point of how Jesus, our blessed Lord, brings his people into our great inheritance. First, how he does it; and then on what terms he does it. And again, what his ultimate goal and intention is. The details are found in Joshua chapters 5-8.

The book of Joshua is divided into two parts; the conquest of the inheritance under Joshua fell into two phases. In these early studies we shall be considering the first phase of the conquest, where Joshua along with the united armies of Israel went throughout the land breaking the back of all opposition, so that Israel might enter completely into their God-given inheritance.

The next phase of the conquest would be when Joshua was old and the land was subdued, and the individual tribes went off to enter individually into that part of the land that had been assigned to them.

Now for a little bird's eye view of the first half of the book of Joshua. According to chapters 1-12, there were three major parts in the first phase of the conquest:

1. The three objectives
2. The three major obstacles
3. The three notable miracles

Throughout a great deal of this conquest the Israelites had to fight the enemy themselves. But in each part of this first phase there was a divine miracle which God's almighty and supernatural power exerted, quite apart from anything the Israelites did.

## **The objectives**

In each of these three parts it is recorded how the projected objective was in fact achieved:

1. The first objective was to bring Israel literally across Jordan into the land of Canaan, *to introduce them into their inheritance* (1:1-4:-24).

2. The second objective was somewhat different (5:1–8:35). As soon as possible after they got into the land, they were to conduct a ceremony that should serve *to establish the law of God in Canaan*. The Canaanites were being driven out because of their abominable sin and their wretched perversions, and God sternly warned his people through Moses that if they lived the same way as the Canaanites he would drive them out as well. So when God brought in the Israelites to eat their honey and their milk it was never his idea that they should live just as they pleased, gorging themselves on the cream and the fat and the cakes and the honey, revelling in their wine and their olive presses, boasting in their farms and living carelessly as the Canaanites had done.

One of their prime objectives, then, would be to establish the majestic and holy law of God in what had been an evil and wicked land, and they did that very early on in the proceedings.

3. In the third part of the first phase the objective was *to put down all rule and authority* (9:1–12:24).

In his lifetime Moses had commanded the Israelites to seek all three of these objectives. Moses was very good at commanding but he wasn't always very good at carrying things out, and he was not able to achieve them. But Joshua did what Moses could not do, and did it triumphantly. Moses commanded in detail how they were to put down all rule and authority: every king, every prince, every authority in the land had to be destroyed. We shall be told in the third part how Israel went about their great objectives.

## The obstacles

In each case there was an obstacle, as you might expect. Each time it was different.

1. The obstacle in the first part was *the river Jordan in flood*. If ever Israel were to get into their inheritance, they must overcome this obstacle.

2. In the second division the obstacles in the way of establishing the law of God were *the fortified cities of Jericho and Ai*. It was only when they were captured and destroyed that the objective could be achieved.

3. The obstacle in the third division was *the two great confederacies of Canaan*. First of all the southern confederacy that came to attack Gibeon for making peace with Israel. Then the far more sinister confederacy of the northern kings that came with their mass battalions directly to assault the people of God in their attempt to destroy them.

## The miracles

On each occasion God interposed with a miracle:

1. On the first occasion it was *the passage through the Jordan*.
2. The second was *the coming down of the walls of Jericho*.
3. The third was that God himself fought for the Gibeonites. He rained down *stones from heaven* upon their enemies and at the word of Joshua *the sun and the moon stood still in the heavens*.

We shall find that the text on each of those three occasions lovingly reports in detail that Joshua did not cease his operation until the objective was achieved. Let us savour this ancient record as we follow Israel and Joshua confronting all the obstacles that man and the devil could throw against them.

First of all, when they came to Jordan the ark stood in the depths of the river until all Israel had passed clean over. The historian gets so excited that he repeats it three times in this one narrative.

In the second division, on their way to establish the law the great fortified cities of Jericho and Ai stood in the way. It was with great difficulty that those cities were overcome, in spite of the divine miracle. With glee the historian reports how Joshua raised a javelin in his hand as a signal for Israel to begin the fight and he did not withdraw his hand until the whole of Ai was destroyed.

In the third section the Gibeonites made peace with Israel. Then the southern confederacy of kings came to attack them. God commanded Joshua to come and fight to protect the Gibeonites and miracles began to happen. God himself fought for them, he rained down stones from heaven upon their enemy. And then a wonderful thing happened! Seeing the day decline, Joshua raised his eyes to the sun and the moon and he said: 'Sun, stand still! Moon stand still!'

The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the Lord heeded the voice of a man, for the Lord fought for Israel. (10:13–14)

God set his heart on these objectives. Moses commanded them but couldn't achieve them. But thank God for that ancient captain of Israel's salvation, Joshua, who in the power of God achieved them for God's people. We shall find that each one of them talks to us about our blessed Lord Jesus.

### **The first objective—to bring Israel into their inheritance**

So let's begin with the first of them, to get the people across Jordan into their God-given inheritance, with their feet standing solidly in the promised land.

'What was difficult about that?' someone may ask. Israel had been redeemed out of Egypt, sheltering under the blood of the Passover lamb. They had been baptised by Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and were well on their journey to the promised land. Within a comparatively few months they came to the border and Moses sent out spies to survey the land. They came back turning up their noses to it. 'If we'd known that Canaan was like this,' they said, 'we wouldn't have bothered to come. We remember Egypt with its leeks and garlic!' But they had forgotten all the other things—the taskmasters' whips, the slavery, toil, weariness and hopelessness.

When they came to the borders of the promised land they showed that they had always been unbelievers at heart and they refused to go in. Moses could not drag them in. If you'd been watching Israel going through the desert you would have seen the manna coming down from heaven, but eventually Israel complained at it. They said it was boring old stuff. They



didn't care that it was angels' food. 'Why can't we have a few leeks and quails,' they said. They forgot that God was listening, and it was God who had given them the manna. If you had been there at that moment, you would have had a big question arise in your mind. If they weren't really interested in what God was providing for them now in the form of the manna, how would they enjoy what he would provide for them when they got into the promised land?

It's a question we all ought to ask ourselves if we are on our way to heaven. There is an incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven for us, and many profess to be on their way. But it is not always certain that they really want to go. Are you sure you really want to go? 'Of course I do!' you say. We could test it. God gives us that heavenly manna, Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord. How do you find him? Marvellously appetising? Do you come to feed yourself on that great bread of life? Then you'll surely find the great inheritance superbly interesting. Oh, you don't find Jesus Christ very interesting? You don't find his word entrancing? If the truth were to be told, you find it a bit of a bore. If that's so, would you not ponder the implication? If we are not interested in Christ now, by what kind of magic do you suppose we would suddenly be interested in Christ if we were transported to heaven? That's a solemn thought.

### **The obstacle—River Jordan in flood**

Getting Israel into the great inheritance was an exceedingly difficult task, and because they refused the first time they had to come in another way round. Marching first east and north, they came at last to the banks of Jordan on the east side. The problem was now, how did you get them into their inheritance? The first time there had been no obstacle, but this time there was the obstacle of the river Jordan. And not only the river Jordan, but the river Jordan in flood.

Of the three obstacles, this is a very interesting one. In the second division of this first phase the obstacles will be the walls of Jericho and of Ai. They were man made obstacles. In the third division the obstacle is the great political confederacies of, first the southern kings, and then the northern kings—once more a man-made obstacle. But the first great obstacle for Israel entering into their inheritance was an obstacle put there by nature herself, the river Jordan. No man had dug that river and it was in flood. Consider what an obstacle it was. In that flat ground where the scrub grows thick, when the river overflows you could not have told where its banks were. It would have spread for yards and yards each side of the river, all tangled up with the undergrowth. To take some hundreds of thousands across that swamp, and then the river, would have invited an absolute stampede, and in the end a fearful loss of life at the hand of nature. Joshua brought Israel through that obstacle. Jericho was 'shut up' (6:1), but they didn't have to fight any man. Here, it was no human enemy they faced, it was nature. Nature's great river of Jordan would have spelled death to the troops if they had attempted to cross it by themselves.

## The miracle—passage through Jordan

They didn't have to cross by themselves. A great miracle was done, designed to glorify Joshua and set Israel's heart aflame with the wonder of their God. God himself went through the river. The priests were told to take up the ark and the people were told to follow it at a distance. All eyes were to be concentrated on the priests, and in particular upon that ark as it approached the river.

If we are going to understand the significance of it, we must start by believing what Israel believed. At this stage in our studies I have not begun typology—have no fear, I shall later on! I'm talking now of an event that happened thirteen hundred years BC in the physical country of Palestine, at the literal river Jordan. Jordan is in flood and Israel are waiting to go through. They watch as the ark is lifted up by the priests and as it proceeds towards the river. Israel believed that that ark was the very throne of the Lord of the whole earth. They believed that Jehovah was God, the maker and owner of heaven and earth, and that, in his great mercy, the transcendent Lord had come down and presenced himself upon that ark.

Nature had put a great barrier in front of them, the river Jordan and its threat of death. How would Israel get through it? Watch the great miracle as the Lord of heaven and earth comes, seated upon his throne on the ark. The priests' feet came to the borders of the water, nature recognised her great Creator, and the Creator went through. I don't know if the king of Jericho thought that the river Jordan being in flood was his first line of defence, and that it would stop Israel getting in. But I know this: if God is determined to bring his people into their inheritance there is no force or obstacle in the whole of nature—be it on earth, in heaven, or under the earth—that can stand in his way. Jordan, with its threat of death, bowed and allowed the Creator through.

### *The relevance of this for Christians*

Having made that simple observation, let's turn immediately to the New Testament to see what relevance this ancient story has for us. How do we Christians get into our inheritance, and what is the first obstacle that must be overcome? Not only the inheritance of this world, but the incorruptible inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us. Peter is asserting that there is an inheritance. It lies in a land of fadeless day, where there is no night, its flowers never decay, nothing grows old or weary and nothing ever decays. Is it merely a fairy story, some old wives' tale with which we comfort ourselves when aging begins in our fragile bodies and we like to dream of an incorruptible inheritance? The inheritance is real enough, but how could we men and women ever hope to be there?

You don't have to be very wise as you look around to see that our world is decaying. The great sun up in the sky upon which our planet depends for its light and heat, and therefore its life, in a sense is no better than the coal fire you have in your hearth. When your coal fire burns it gives out heat, but at the same time it loses energy and matter. Unless you supply it with new matter in the end it goes out. So it is with the sun up in the sky, let's not deceive ourselves. It has been going for many centuries, but every minute it is pouring out its heat, energy and matter, by that token it is getting less every minute, every hour, every day, every year, every century. The sun is decaying. The scientists tell us that it will be a long while before

it explodes, but one day it will explode. It will become a great red giant, and in that moment our little earth will evaporate and planet earth will be no more. Isn't that what the physicists tell us— that our world is running down?

We can come nearer home than that. Our bodies are running down, aren't they? Well mine is! Our brain cells are dying at a phenomenal rate every day and those cells are irreplaceable. We are decaying and in front of us stands the great river of death itself. What hope have we of ever seeing our inheritance?

Peter has the answer; God has instilled a hope into these decaying hearts and bodies. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1:3).

By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead God has begotten us again, not merely to new life but to a new hope. This is the biggest and most wonderful story that a decaying earth and decaying people ever heard.

Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Cor 15:3–5)

He was buried, literally buried, as you will be one of these days. But the gospel is this: the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures. For the believer the great barrier of death was shattered forever and the way into the inheritance is wide open. Not only is our blessed Lord Jesus raised, but if you have trusted Christ, God has given you life and you too have been raised and are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). Ponder the miracle. Every single human body since Adam has gone slowly to decay and, with two exceptions (Enoch and Elijah), into the grave to corruption. But when the body of Jesus Christ was put in the grave, Scripture tells us that that great process of decay was stopped. Even in the grave his holy body did not go to decay—he saw no corruption (Acts 13:36–37). God put the whole process in reverse and that once dead body came out of the grave alive.

That miracle is the cornerstone of Christianity and has implications as wide as the universe. Jesus Christ was a human being, exactly as we are human beings, though he was sinless. His body wasn't a pretend human body; it was a real human body with the same chemistry as yours and mine. If it is true that the human body of Jesus Christ has come out of the grave, it holds implications for every human body from the time of Adam until the Lord comes again. I'll tell you something more marvellous. Scientists tell us that the chemistry of the universe is uniform right the way through—he same elements that we find on earth are in the stars and planets. If the real human body of Jesus Christ has come out of the grave alive again and God has reversed the processes of nature, it carries implications for the furthestmost planet and star in the whole universe.

The New Testament is not ashamed to draw the consequences and implications. 'We await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body'

(Phil 3:20–21). ‘Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom 8:21).

What a gospel message we have in a world that otherwise has literally no hope. When we go out to preach God’s promise that one day all things shall be restored, we’re not preaching a blind hope. All those glowing prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel and all the Old Testament prophets from Samuel onwards, of the whole of nature being restored, shall be fulfilled. We are preaching a restoration that has already begun to happen. Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20). A human body has come out of the grave, been glorified and ascended into the very presence of God. Christ is the firstfruits of multimillions that shall rise to meet their returning Lord in a coming day, and the firstfruits of the whole universe restored and reconciled to God. The barrier of death shall be broken.

Hebrews 2:6 quotes the glorious programme laid down in Psalm 8, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?’ The psalmist proceeds to reflect on the original plan of God. Man was to rule for God as the image of God and be over all the works of God’s hand. But sin came in and, with sin, death. It was by the artifice of the great enemy of the human race, Satan himself, who deceived Eve and then Adam into disobedience against God. In transgressing against his purpose, it landed the couple of them, and with them the whole race, into the process of gradual decay and death. Then Satan asserted himself as the one that had the power of death. What a genius he’s proved to be. Having got men and women to sin, death became a terrible thing. ‘The sting of death is sin’ (1 Cor 15:56). Death for some is instantaneous; for the majority the process of dying can be unpleasant enough. Yet, however painful the process of dying may be, the real sting of death is in its tale—it’s what happens after death.

To live without Christ, to be unforgiven and then to die, who shall describe the awful sting of waking up in a great eternity, barred from the great inheritance forever? Do you suppose that you can live unconverted, unsaved and unforgiven, and somehow when you die God has a magic wand that he can wave over you and all will be well? It shall not be so! To die unforgiven means that death will have its sting. ‘The power of sin is the law’ (v. 56), and not to all eternity will God or his law say that sin does not matter. Many men and women try to think that there is nothing beyond the grave. They think they’re clever. ‘We can enjoy ourselves,’ they say. ‘There’s no God, nothing beyond the grave, and there’s no hell.’ But if there’s no hell, there’s no heaven either!

What a sinister thing the devil has done, as the one who has the power of death. Because a lot of folks know there’s going to be a life to come, they live all their time subject to bondage. They go through all sorts of ceremonies—and not only in pagan countries, sometimes in more civilised countries. They ask themselves where their loved ones are now. They’ll pay all amounts of money to try and rescue their departed loved ones from this purgatory or that, all in vain. That’s not the way into God’s great inheritance! The glorious gospel message is that our blessed Lord Jesus has broken the power of him that had the power of death:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the

devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14–15)

How is it that our blessed Lord through his death has put Satan himself out of business? As God's Son he paid the great penalty of sin, and he can assure his followers — 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death' (John 8:51). Believers may well see dying and all its pains, but God himself assures us that we will never see death. For a believer to close his or her eyes in this world is to be absent from the body and immediately at home with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). Death has lost its sting, and we shout in triumph,

'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 15:55–57).

Our greater-than-Joshua has broken the barrier of death.

### **The objective achieved**

If that is in general the New Testament reality that we are meant to draw from the Old Testament prototype, allow me finally to highlight three major points in the ancient story of the crossing of Jordan. When you read the Old Testament you should remember that the ancient historians don't always tell a story as we modern people would tell it. We like to tell a story starting from A, working through B and C, until we have worked with our sublime logic through to Z. And after Z comes nothing! The ancient Hebrews were more humane. They would tell you a story and carry on from one point of view from the beginning to the end. Then they started again and told the same story from another point of view right through to the end. If that weren't enough, they'd come back halfway, take up the story again and once more take it through to the end from a different point of view. It is so in the story of Israel crossing Jordan.

Then Joshua said to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you.' And Joshua said to the priests, 'Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on before the people.' So they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. The LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.' (Josh 3:5–7)

#### *1. The wonder of it*

In the closing moments of our study we're going back in history to that ancient time, to watch and wonder. There was Jordan in flood, Israel ready to march and the priests told to take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD of all the earth (v. 11). The people had to stand back lest they crowd the ark. They had not passed this way before (v. 4), and were about to see a fantastic and almost incredible wonder.

Why should the Lord of the whole earth trouble himself with a few square acres in Canaan, when the vast creations and the galaxies are all his and much more beside? Those

few square miles in the Middle East are his and now he is coming to take his possession. Why shouldn't he have it? But why didn't he just come down from heaven direct to the middle of Palestine? Why did he bother to come through Jordan?

It wasn't merely a question of the Almighty taking the land that was his. That wasn't just the issue. It wasn't merely for himself, but so that he could give it to his wayward, sinful, dying people. How would he bring them into that land? See the wonder of it, as the priests took up the ark where God himself was enthroned. They marched solemnly to the brink until their feet sank in the water and then they saw a sight beyond all telling. The Lord of the whole earth goes down to the very bed of Jordan until all his people are passed clean over (vv. 15–17). Can you believe such a wonder?

Come to thirteen centuries later and I'll show you a bigger wonder. How will God get you into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading? (1 Pet 1:4). He needn't have come to earth at all for that; if it were merely for himself he could have stayed where he was. But he came down, was born in a manger, and at thirty years old walked into the river Jordan and stood in the mud of the literal river beside men and women that were sinners, telling all who could see it what he had come to do. Three and a half years later the Lord of the whole earth went before us, approached the great river of death and went down. This time the waters didn't form a wall on either side, they came over and he was submerged. He tasted death's dark, bitter, offensive waters—he went down to the grave. Not in all of eternity will we discover a bigger wonder than we have seen at Calvary.

## *2. The sign that God gave them with which to remember this great event*

When they had passed through Jordan they were to take twelve stones from the bed of the river and put them on the bank. In the centuries to come when children would ask, 'What do these stones mean?' their parents would tell them that it is the memorial of how God brought the nation into their inheritance (4:1–9).

Why would children need to be told that? The first good reason would be, to give them a sense of gratitude to the far-off historical event that brought Israel into the land. Second, if Israel ever were to forget God's great miracle that brought them into the land they would be in danger of becoming just like the Canaanites—eating their grapes, enjoying their butter and forgetting how they ever got there. They could forget the Lord their God and begin to live as worldly as the Canaanites ever did. To save them from that disaster God made provision in those twelve stones, so that every generation could learn the great historical event and forever be grateful to God.

Our blessed Lord has left us a similar memorial. We have an incorruptible inheritance and in one sense we're already seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but how did I ever get into my inheritance? How could I ever forget it? Forget my gratitude to God and, even as a Christian, begin to take all the blessings and live a worldly life just like the man in the street? For that very reason our Lord has ordained that we gather week by week to remember the great historical event that was the key to entering our inheritance. We take bread and we drink wine, and we remember that for us to be in the inheritance he gave his body and he gave his blood. We need the memorial still and shall need it until the blessed Lord comes.

### *3. The reality of the power of God*

Finally, in the third part of the story they were to put the stones on the bank so that the nation should know how powerful the hand of the Lord is. Imagine standing on the bank with an ancient father and his boy. The father says, 'These twelve stones are a memorial of how Israel was brought into the land' (v. 7). Then he would tell the boy another thing. 'Do you see those dark shapes down there in the swirling, muddy waters? They are stones as well, twelve stones on the bottom of the river. That's where the ark actually stood' (v. 9). Once upon a time in history the Lord of the whole earth was down there in the bottom of the river and Israel were down with him. They marched past the ark through the bed of Jordan and came up the other side.

We need to be reminded of it too. It's not only true that, in order to bring us into the inheritance, Christ died for us and was buried. Another thing is true; we died with him, we were buried with him, so that now we might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). We mustn't be surprised therefore to read that, when all Israel were passed over, Joshua said to the priests who were standing in the bottom of the river, 'Come up out of the Jordan' (v. 17), and they came up with the ark upon their shoulders.

I say it to you, 'Come up my brother, come up my sister. You died with Christ; you were buried with Christ, and you're risen with Christ. — "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God"' (Col 3:1). Live as men and women that are risen with Christ, so that all the world may see the reality of the power of God.

## **The First Phase of the Conquest**

### *(2) Establishing the Law of God in Canaan—Part 1*

In our previous study we found that the first phase of Israel's entry into Canaan under Joshua was in three parts, each with its own objective, obstacle, and miracle. The first elementary objective was to actually bring the people of God into their inheritance; the obstacle in the way was the river Jordan in flood; the miracle was the ark leading the people through the Jordan, even though it was at flood. Thus the objective was achieved and they entered into their long-promised inheritance.

#### **The second objective—to establish the law of God in Canaan**

Two great obstacles stood in the way: the evil cities of Jericho and Ai and once more God performed a miracle. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down, Israel entered the city and destroyed it. The destruction of the second city was not so easy and was not accomplished until Israel had been through a very bitter experience. They had got themselves compromised with sin and were obliged to confess it and judge themselves before God.

Eventually the two cities were completely destroyed and the way was opened up for Joshua to take the people through and fulfil the obligation that Moses had laid upon them. The establishment of the law in the land of Canaan was something about which Moses, the man of God, had commanded the Israelites in punctilious detail (Deut 27). Moses had told them what was expected of them. As soon as they could, they were to make a beeline for the centre of the land and go with their armies to the twin mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, near the modern town of Nablus.

They were to take the ark of God's covenant and assemble the nation, half before one mountain and half before the other mountain. They were to build an altar and write out the laws on the plaster on the stones. Then solemnly, in the presence of God and in the hearing of the mass throngs of the armies of Israel, the Levites were to read aloud the terms of the law of God spoken through Moses. First they were to read the blessings that would come upon Israel if they kept the holy commandments of God's law. As they read each blessing the whole of the nation were to cry, 'Amen, be it so; if we keep the commandment of the Lord may his blessing be upon us.' When they had finished reciting the blessings, then the Levites had to pronounce the curses, 'Cursed be he that does this, or that, or the other, contrary to the holy law of God.' Once more, as each individual curse was pronounced, the mass thousands of Israel were to say, 'Amen, be it so; and if we break the commandments of God's holy law may God's curse fall upon us.'



That is a feature of the book of Joshua not often dealt with, but it is exceedingly important. It is the second major objective. Indeed, it became the first big objective that they were to seek as soon as they got into the land. Joshua did not wait until he had destroyed every pagan citadel of power in the country before he went to Ebal and Gerizim to establish the law. The two cities of Jericho and Ai stood in the way, and he was obliged to deal with them in order to get the armies of Israel through. Once they were destroyed he didn't wait around to try and destroy any of the other enemies. His Number One objective, now that they were in the land, must be to see to it that the law of God was established in that evil civilisation – the righteous requirement of the law must be fulfilled (see Rom 8:4).

Now we see a very important thing. God warned Israel that once they were in the land they would have to be very careful how they behaved. The Canaanites were being destroyed and thrown out of the land, precisely because of their desperate sinning against God; there could therefore be no glimmer of a thought that Israel could do what they liked because they professed to be God's people. God made it very clear that Israel got in by the grace and the mercy of God and they would be expected to keep God's holy law.

That's a sermon in itself of what conversion means for us nowadays. And not only conversion; it is true that for every believer there is an incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven, and every believer will be there. The Bible also says that Christ is now raised above principalities, powers, mights, and dominions, many of them still hostile to God. They are the world rulers of this darkness, the principalities and powers led by Satan himself (Eph 6:12). They war against the believer and the believer is expected to war against them. Satan and his hosts will one day be thrown out of the heavenly places and redeemed men and women taken in. So, if they are to be thrown out because of their sinful rebellion against God, it stands to reason there can be no glimmer of an idea that because believers are saved by grace they may live just as they please. God isn't going to turn Satan out of heaven for his disobedience and allow me in, to disobey just like Satan did.

The great objective must be that the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled, and Moses commanded that the Israelites were to achieve this great objective. As we have noticed before, Moses was very good at commanding but he wasn't always very good at achieving. He rebelled against God eventually, for which he never physically entered the promised land. But the glorious gospel message of our book is, what Moses could not do, that Joshua did. He got the Israelites into Canaan, brought them into their inheritance and fed them the grapes and the milk and the honey. But he did more than that. See him now, with Jericho and Ai destroyed, marching the Israelites to meet their God at Ebal and Gerizim. The altar is there with the ark and God's holy law. As the redeemed of the Lord stand around, the blessings and curses of that law are pronounced. Listen to that full-throated roar of the tribes of God's people, 'Amen, be it so!' The law of God was established in the land of Canaan.

It reminds us of a key verse from the New Testament in studying the book of Joshua, 'That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom 8:4).

God has a scheme for seeing that the righteous requirement of the law shall be fulfilled. What a glorious note of the gospel it is. For all those whose consciences have been awakened, who would long to do his law and feel so often they failed – courage my brother, my sister,

God has a plan and when he's done with it he shall see to it that the righteous requirements of his law are fulfilled in you. They begin to be fulfilled now and there will come a day when they shall be fulfilled in their entirety. We shall go home to be with the Lord and shall sin no more. What a day that will be, but how shall it be done? Let's listen to Paul again. 'For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh' (v. 3).

There's nothing wrong with the law. The difficulty lies with us and the weakness of our fallen human nature. In sending his blessed Son to Calvary, first of all as an offering for sin, God condemned sin. Let's get the order straight. If God didn't condemn sin, you might as well give up any thought of a heaven that's incorruptible and undefiled. People say, 'God is so loving he wouldn't condemn anybody.' If that's true, there's never going to be a heaven; because if God doesn't condemn sin now he won't condemn sin then. Sin has made a ghastly mess of our world, and if God won't condemn it then it will make a ghastly mess of heaven as well. Thank God that he's a god with a backbone; he's a god of holiness. There will be a heaven that is holy and full of undiminished and untarnished joy because of the holiness of God who condemned sin. How serious is his condemnation of sin? See how earnest God is; he sent his son, sinless though he was, in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sacrifice for sin. See the sorrows of Calvary—the darkness, and the wrath—and learn how serious God is in condemning sin.

Not only did God send his Son to condemn sin, but to be a sacrifice for sin on behalf of us sinners and pay the dread penalty of the law that we have broken. In him there is forgiveness, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (v. 1). But there's more than that. We not only have forgiveness, but the righteous requirements of the law are now going to be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Therein lies the secret of heaven already begun. If we learn no more than that from reading these ancient histories we should have learned an exceedingly important thing. But we haven't time to consider further details.

The establishment of the law as the second main objective in the book of Joshua raises a fundamental question. In Israel's day, what was the relation between their keeping of the law and their entry into their inheritance? It was God's desire that they should keep the law; but was entrance into their inheritance conditional upon their keeping the law?

Did God say, 'First of all let us get it clear; before you enter into the land you must keep my law. If you manage to keep it you will be allowed into the inheritance, if you don't you'll never be allowed in—so let's put you on probation and see how well you get on'? Or was it that in his mercy and grace, in response to their faith, he took them in and then expected them as a result of that to establish the law? Which way round was it?

'I don't see why you should make a fuss about such obscure questions of ancient history,' someone may say. But it isn't just ancient history, is it? God has a scheme that the righteousness of the law should be fulfilled and I want to know what relationship it has to my entry to the inheritance, and to yours for that matter. Is it that first of all we have to try and keep God's holy law? If we manage to succeed we shall be allowed into the inheritance, but if we don't manage to keep the law at least reasonably well we shan't be allowed in? Is that how it is? There are millions of people who would say yes to that. 'That's precisely how it is,' they say. 'We're on probation in this life; we have to do our best to keep God's law. If we succeed,

reasonably well at least, he lets us into the inheritance; but if we come short we shall not get in.' Would that be your view?

The alternative is this. First of all, though we are sinners we have forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He qualifies us to enter the inheritance and to start doing it now. He makes us meet to be inheritors and partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Col 1:12). He does so by his redeeming sacrifice at Calvary that pays the debt of our sin and gives us the inheritance for free. Then, in gratitude for what God has done and by the power of his Spirit within, we begin to be able to keep the requirements of God's law more increasingly until the day dawns that we shall be perfect. That is, in fact, the Christian gospel.

A lot of folks think that salvation is like attending a university and trying to get a degree. If you want a degree the first thing you have to do is to get into the university, and that isn't always as easy as you might think. If you do manage to get in, you don't get a degree the first day you attend. If you work sensibly you might have a hope that you will pass finals, but you won't be sure that you'll get a degree until you have passed. A lot of folks think of heaven like that—if you want to get to heaven the first thing you have to do is to be in the running and to do that you join a church and get baptised. Then, by the help of your spiritual guides and doing the best you can to keep God's law, you live your life and you try to improve. But of course you can't be sure until it comes to the final judgment and you hear the verdict of the judge.

That is the very opposite of Christianity! I know it's a widespread view, hence the usefulness of the illustrations that God has given us here. The gospel is that right here and now, as a sinner guilty and deserving of God's wrath, you can repent and put your faith in Christ. His death has paid the penalty of God's law and God immediately takes you out of the kingdom of darkness and translates you into the kingdom of his dear Son—into the glorious inheritance to enjoy even now the blessed fruits of the Holy Spirit, peace with God, forgiveness and the beginnings of a holy life. He guarantees that one day he'll take you bodily into the presence of God to enjoy the rest of your inheritance. The law comes in afterwards, because those who are born again and have God's Holy Spirit now find they have the power to learn how to fulfil the righteous requirements of the law.

How would I prove that Joshua is telling us the same message as that? Chapter 5 is the beginning of certain preparations that were made before Israel went to attack Jericho and Ai and establish the law in the land. The first thing they had to do was to be circumcised and I have an important question to put to you. At exactly what point in the proceedings were the Israelites circumcised—before they got into their inheritance, or after they got into their inheritance? The answer's simple, isn't it? They were circumcised after they got into their inheritance—chapter 5 comes after chapter 4. In chapter 4 they have passed through the Jordan, in chapter 5 they are standing in their inheritance. They're already in when the command goes forth that they are to be circumcised.

What's the point of it? In Jewish thought circumcision stood as one typical command of God's holy law, and those who say that salvation is by keeping the law take circumcision as a test case. They would tell you that unless you are circumcised you cannot be saved and enjoy the great inheritance. Listen to Paul as he discusses the inheritance originally promised to

Abraham and to his seed: 'For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith' (Rom 4:13).

Abraham was promised the inheritance; it was to him and to his seed (Gen 15). So now Paul is asking a similar question to the one I've just asked. 'When did God give him that promise—was it when Abraham had already been circumcised, or did he get the promise before he was circumcised?' What's the difference? Well if Abraham had been circumcised first and then God said, 'Now I'll give you the inheritance'—everybody would have concluded that you have to be circumcised in order to receive the promise of the inheritance. So it is very important to notice that when God promised Abraham that he would give this great inheritance to him and to his seed, Abraham had not yet been circumcised. Paul argues that our entry and enjoyment of that great inheritance does not depend on being circumcised—it does not depend on keeping the law.

I'm arguing the same thing from Joshua 5. When they actually entered in under Joshua's leadership to inherit the inheritance, were they circumcised or not? Before they entered, or after? The answer is as clear as daylight; they entered first and they were circumcised after.

Why do I raise the question of circumcision with a Christian congregation? What has circumcision got to do with us? Well first of all there's the legal point. There are multitudes that tell us that in Christianity infant baptism is the equivalent of circumcision. I won't stay to argue whether that is true or not, I make a simple point. Supposing you could show that, according to the New Testament, infant baptism is the equivalent of Old Testament circumcision, then what would follow? The question would be, does our great inheritance depend on being baptised as infants, or do you get saved first? You first enter the inheritance and then you get baptised? Which way round would it be? The answer is clear, is it not? Just as circumcision didn't qualify you to enter the inheritance or contribute to your right to it, so baptism does not save anybody or help towards our salvation. God's order is this. First we get saved; through the sacrifice of Christ we are able to partake of the inheritance of the saints in light. Then we get baptised as part of our response to the many things our Lord wants us to do. Justification is altogether a gift of God's grace and so is entrance to the great inheritance.

In saying that, I am not in any sense disparaging the law, and if we turn now to the details of the story you will observe a very striking thing. When God took Israel into the land of Canaan he insisted that they join him in the execution of his judgment upon those evil cities. Why do you think he did that? God needn't have done it that way. He could have said to the Israelites, 'You stay in one of the oases like Kadesh-Barnea. There's plenty of palm trees and beautiful water. You can stay there for a few months while I execute my long threatened wrath upon the evil cities of Canaan.'

He could have used the same method that he used with Sodom and Gomorrah and burned them up. Having cleaned the whole place up, then he could have brought his people into their promised land. But he didn't do that. When God executed his wrath upon the cities of Canaan with all their evil, he said to Israel, 'You'll come with me and do it. What is more, you will agree with me that it's right to do it.'

Some people would tell us that these stories of Israel going into Canaan and slaughtering whole cities full of people are really the stories of primitive savages coming upon a civilisation

they didn't understand, and in their ignorance slaughtering the inhabitants and destroying the city. That isn't true, you know. You would be absolutely wrong and mistaken to think that Israel enjoyed what they had to do. In fact the history tells us many times that, far from agreeing with God that it had to be done, they held back and compromised. Here was Joshua repeating the Law of Moses that all these cities and folks had to be destroyed, but when they came up to Jericho, and Ai in particular, they wondered if it could be of God to go in and slaughter such beautiful people.

I think I would have been tempted to argue the same, wouldn't you? Very often, in spite of God's severe warnings, Israel compromised. They didn't want to execute the judgment of God on cities that looked very beautiful; indeed, very often they intermarried with the people of those cities. Why did God insist that the Israelites should join him and be his instruments in the judgment of these people? For the simple reason that before he let them into that land they must agree with him on his judgment of sin. 'Jericho must be utterly destroyed,' said God. 'Nothing that breathes shall be left.' Its gold and silver are to be devoted to the Lord. Nothing is to be salvaged; everything is under God's curse.

Someone will say, 'That's the God of the Old Testament. The God of the New Testament has grown a bit more kindly than that! I thought Jesus Christ taught us that God is love. Did God condemn people to death?' Here we come right down to the foundation of our Christian gospel. If you think the judgment of God on Jericho was severe, what will you say of the New Testament? Paul tells us that he's not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, 'for it is the power of God to salvation' (Rom 1:16). If you were to ask, 'Why you need to be saved,' Paul would say, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven' (v. 18). The first reason we need to be saved is that we stand under the wrath of God.

There are other reasons why we need to be saved. Sin very often has made a mess of our lives; it has wrecked human relationships, broken our hearts and sometimes our emotions as well. We need to be saved because of the wreckage that sin has caused and God can save us at that level too. But the first reason is that we stand under the wrath of God. How severe is that wrath, how big is our need? God's sentence on Jericho was that it had to be utterly destroyed, and God's verdict on you and me as fallen men and women is this, 'Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God' (Rom 3:19). If ever we would be in heaven and enter that glorious inheritance we must now come with God and say, 'Yes God, your judgment is just. I deserve your wrath.'

I find there are many people who profess to be Christians but have no assurance of salvation in their hearts. I have long since come to the conclusion that one of the reasons for this is that they have bypassed this initial step in their conversion. This stands at the very entry—this is our Jericho. It is to agree with God's judgment that we all have sinned. Not only have we sinned in the past, but no matter how long we live it will still be true of us that we come short of the glory of God. God will not bend his law, the penalty of his law must be carried out. When God says therefore that nobody can be saved through keeping the law he's not disparaging his law, he's maintaining it. None of this, 'Do the best you can and in the end, even if you come short, God will be merciful.' That's nonsense. No heaven can be built on the principle of anything being near-enough right.

If you want to see how serious God is about his law, come with me to that dark yet bright night when the hosts of Israel were gathered together and last minute preparations were being made for the judgment of God to descend upon that evil city of Jericho.

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, 'Are you for us, or for our adversaries?' And he said, 'No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.' And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped and said to him, 'What does my lord say to his servant?' And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, 'Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.' And Joshua did so. (Josh 5:13–15)

Who was it? It was none other than a preincarnate manifestation of the second person of the Trinity, the lovely Son of God himself. The one who centuries later came to tell us that God so loved the world; yet it was he that took the sword to execute the wrath of God's law upon Jericho. That's how serious God is about his law, and I'll tell you something more. That same figure who took the sword out of its sheath and executed God's wrath upon Jericho, one day came in human flesh and the sword of God's holy law was raised. For your sake and for mine, the sword fell upon the person of God's dear Son. 'He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed' (Isa 53:5).

If ever we would be in the inheritance we shall have to agree with God that his judgment of us is correct. We deserve to be executed, dead and buried—that's what I say in my baptism. My hope is in this, that Jesus loved me and gave himself for me. The moment I repent and receive him like that I step into my inheritance, assured of it eternally.

### **The first obstacle—Jericho**

God's judgment on Jericho was severe, but Rahab and all her family were saved, and any of her friends that gathered in her house. On what grounds were they saved, when all the rest of Jericho perished? Was Rahab better than the others? Well hardly—she'd been the town prostitute. On what principle was she saved and how did she escape the judgment of God? Indeed, on what principle did she become incorporated with the people of God and enjoy the inheritance with them for the rest of her lifetime? The Bible has the answer, 'By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies' (Heb 11:31).

It was simply by faith. She had no good works to recommend her, nothing but a tarnished past. But she turned to God from idols, to serve the living and the true God, and to wait. As the armies of God massed outside the wall she knew that any day now they'd be coming and Joshua would destroy the city. Rahab knew in her heart she would be saved because she believed the word of God. But the apostle James says that Rahab was justified by her works, 'And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?' (2:25).

I believe what James says as well—was Rahab not justified by her works? Of course she was, but what works? She received the spies with peace, showing that her repentance was real. She left the side of Jericho, her citizens and the king, and came over to the side of the people of God. She received the spies, believed the word of God and declared her loyalty with the people of God. It was a genuine conversion, and to make it clear she bound the cord in the window of her little house up on the wall.

This is salvation. Accepting the fact that judgment is coming and owning we are worthy of it; upholding therefore the law of God. It is repenting, acknowledging we cannot save ourselves and putting our faith in the Saviour, receiving the oath that has guaranteed we shall be saved from the coming wrath. By taking our stand with the people of God and binding his word in our hearts we show that our repentance is genuine.

### **The miracle—walls of Jericho brought down**

Finally, we have to consider how solemn the method was that God used to destroy the city. It was a method he didn't use elsewhere, so we must pay particular attention to it. God didn't order the troops to make an immediate assault on the walls of Jericho; he told the Israelites they were to gather their whole army and the people together. The priests were to go in front of the ark with their trumpets and once each day for six days they were to encircle the city. On the seventh day they were to encircle it seven times. Only when the word of command was given were they to shout and the walls of the city would come down.

For the first six days they just went round quietly (6:10). Nobody said anything; the priests blew the trumpet to draw attention as the people of Jericho peered over the wall. All they saw was a procession of people going around the walls, following an ark. What was God saying? A few days earlier they would have seen Jordan in flood and said to themselves, 'That's our first line of defence, the Israelites will never get across that.' But then they had seen the miracle—the ark of the Lord of the whole earth approached the river, went down into its bed and came up the other side.

### **The objective achieved**

Now the resurrected ark was being paraded around their city by the people of God—it spoke volumes, didn't it? The walls at Jericho would never keep out the ark of God that had been through Jordan and come up the other side.

Do you know that we have the job of bearing the ark of God around the cities of this wicked world? We have a message to preach. There's a day of judgment coming in which God will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has appointed (Acts 17:31). How do we know? Because God has given assurance to all by raising him [Christ] from the dead.

The Holy Spirit came to convict the world of three things: sin, righteousness and judgment: 'Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged' (John 16:9–11).

They said our Lord Jesus was an imposter, a sinner, and he deserved to die. But God raised him from the dead, he ascended and God has proclaimed to the whole world that he is right and the world was wrong. The world crucified him, but God raised him from the dead. And the third thing is true—the prince of this world shall be judged. As sure as Jesus is raised there is coming a day of judgment.

We have our choice. We can stand unrepentant like the Jerichoites, foolishly trusting their fortifications, and perish in our sins. Or we can look on that ark that has come through Jordan and risen again. We can look upon the blessed Saviour, dead, buried and risen again. We can take our stand with Rahab and with all the saints of God and turn to God from idols, 'to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess 1:9–10).



## **The First Phase of the Conquest**

### *(3) Establishing the Law of God in Canaan—Part 2*

We turn now to look at the second story in this particular part of Joshua. In order for the people of God to enter the land and for the law to be established in the land of Canaan, not one city but two had to be conquered. First there stood Jericho with its age-old walls that had to be breached and the city destroyed. After Jericho there stood Ai and when Israel first got sight of it, it seemed by comparison a very little city (Josh 7:2–3).

#### **The second obstacle—Ai**

‘We’ll take it easily,’ said the spies to Joshua, ‘just send a few of the men up.’ But it didn’t prove quite so easy. Perhaps overconfident from their recent victory and not realising the depths of the danger in front of them, they went up to try and take Ai. The men of Ai came out against them and they ran away as fast as they could go. Of course it caused panic in the camp and Joshua as commander in chief saw the implication at once. When the surrounding nations heard that the ark had come through Jordan and a great miracle had been done, their hearts melted for fear. When they heard that God himself had brought down the walls of Jericho, the hearts of the kings melted. But now, if they should hear that little Ai had managed to rout the Israelite attackers, the confidence of the Canaanite kings would revive. If they should assemble and attack Israel so soon, it could have ended in utter disaster. In his fear and panic Joshua fell flat on his face before God and remained there a whole day, until he heard from God the reason why God was no longer with them (vv. 6–11).

#### **A. Judgment on Achan’s sin**

Achan, a private in the army, had committed a fearful sin. When the troops were about to invade Jericho, Joshua in God’s name had told them very clearly that the whole city had to be devoted to God. Every living thing was to be destroyed, the gold and the silver put into the treasury of the Lord. No one was to take anything from the spoil of Jericho (6:17–19). Going here and there in his military duties, in the heat of the moment Achan saw some gold and silver and some lovely vestments among the spoil. He’d been wandering in the wilderness for I don’t know how many years and these things looked so beautiful. He said to himself, ‘What’s wrong with taking a little bit? They do get up to some funny practices in Jericho, but I don’t need to get involved in all that!’ So he took them and hid them in his tent. He broke the curse that God had placed upon the city and brought it both upon himself and upon Israel (v. 12). To use the words of the history book, ‘he troubled Israel’ (v. 25); and in the end Israel and her God troubled him. It wasn’t until his sin was discovered, exposed, confessed, the penalty paid

and Achan executed, that God consented to travel with Israel again and give them the victory over Ai. What a mockery it would have been, to go up to Mount Gerizim and establish the law, if all the time Achan's sin had remained unconfessed in the camp of Israel.

What lesson shall we draw from this great story? I suppose we could give a simplistic answer. We could say that the story of Ai and Achan tells us that if we would be efficient as believers in our spiritual warfare for the Lord we must learn to be obedient and not disobey his commandments. For if in our self-confidence we grow careless and disobey the Lord then the enemy will be able to defeat us. Secondly, if from time to time we discover we have disobeyed the Lord we must confess it and seek the Lord's forgiveness, otherwise we cannot be efficient soldiers in the army of the Lord. That simple answer would be true and not to be despised; the difficulty would be not in learning the lesson, but putting it into practice. Yet it seems to me that we cannot really be content with that simplistic application of the story. It would hardly do justice to all the immense detail in those two very long chapters. Not to speak of the fact that, when Achan's sin was discovered and confessed, there wasn't any forgiveness for it—the man had to be executed. It's a very solemn story and we shouldn't take the edge off God's holy word by treating it as though we were talking of a believer in the Lord Jesus.

So how shall we interpret the story? We could make a beginning by noticing one interesting fact. The phrases and expressions that occur in the story of Achan and Ai have a tremendous amount in common with the language that Paul uses in Galatians.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for the curse that God pronounced upon the city of Jericho is *herem*. It indicates the most sweeping judgment that divine justice could ever pronounce upon a city. In fact, this terrible judgment was applied to Jericho and nowhere else. You will not read again of a judgment so severe and so sweeping. We should stop therefore and examine what the judgment was. When a thing fell under this curse, or ban—*herem*—it meant that everything had to be devoted to the Lord.

This is an old Latin word, and isn't what we mean by devoted nowadays. When we talk about a devoted Christian we mean a man or woman who loves the Lord and serves him as best they can, but in the old days it meant that you were set apart by the Lord for his judgment and execution. A city that was devoted to the Lord meant that all the inhabitants would be destroyed by the sword under the curse of God. The gold and silver and the clothes could not be destroyed, but if they were devoted it meant that nobody may take them; they must be collected and put into the treasury of the Lord. They were handed over to the Lord because they had fallen under his curse. The *herem* was an exceedingly solemn judgment.

Why was God so severe, and how should we begin to interpret it? Is there anywhere in the New Testament that would talk of a judgment as severe as that? Surely a judgment so terribly severe would not be consistent with the mercy and love of God as expressed in Jesus Christ our Lord? The Old Testament was written in Hebrew—*herem* is a Hebrew word. The New Testament's language is Greek—the Greek for *herem* is *anathēma*. To put something under the curse in Greek is *anathēmatizō*, to anathematise. There are a couple of places in the New Testament where that solemn judgment is pronounced. Twice in Galatians 1 Paul pronounces that sweeping judgment, such as fell on Jericho city.

---

<sup>2</sup> See [Appendix 3](#).

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed [*anathēma*]. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed [*anathēma*]. (vv. 8–9)

‘Let him come under the curse,’ the *herem* of God. Something serious must be going on in Galatia, if the great apostle Paul—author of that delightful hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13—says that it must come under the same curse of God as Jericho suffered. God warned the people of Israel that they were not to touch anything in Jericho and take it for themselves; everything was holy unto the Lord. But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction and bring trouble upon it’ (Josh 6:18).

When Achan’s sin was found and exposed, Joshua solemnly faced him and said, ‘Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today’ (7:25). They took him and all that he had and stoned him in the Valley of Achor, which in Hebrew means the valley of trouble.

Three times over Paul mentions those who were troubling the Galatians:

There are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (1:7)

The one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. (5:10)

I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (5:12)

Are there any other corresponding phrases or ideas in this part of Joshua that link with Galatians? In our previous study we thought about the establishment of the law at Gerizim. How the Levites read out the blessings and Israel said, ‘Amen’; and then they read out the curses and they said, ‘Amen’. Galatians is the only place in the Epistles where it is said that Christ was made a curse for us:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (3:13–14)

What is ‘the blessing of Abraham,’ if it isn’t justification and the promise of the great inheritance? When Jericho city was destroyed, Joshua issued another curse: ‘Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho’ (6:26). I think I’ve heard a phrase like that in the New Testament somewhere! Where does Paul say, ‘For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor’? It’s in Galatians of course, where Paul is rebuking Peter for his inconsistent behaviour (2:18). I hope you will conclude that the similarities between Joshua and Galatians are not accidental. The underlying principle at stake, with Achan’s sin and the conquest of Jericho and Ai, is the same fundamental principle that is at stake in Paul’s discussion of the false teaching among the Galatians. That’s how I’m going to think about it for the rest of this lecture.

We ought to start then by considering the nature of Achan's sin and its seriousness. What was it that he actually did? He tried to salvage something that was under the curse of God. God had pronounced his *herem*, his curse, upon that city, so that even the gold and the silver and the clothing had to be devoted to the Lord and put aside in the treasury. No one may touch it. Achan, moved with covetousness because it was so beautiful, took the gold and the silver and the garment that was under the curse of God and tried to salvage it for his own use. He came under the curse and brought Israel under it too.

What's that got to do with the Epistle to the Galatians?<sup>3</sup> According to Paul that's precisely what the false teachers were doing. They were trying to salvage out of Judaism the rite of circumcision and the keeping of the law as a means for salvation, when God has pronounced his solemn curse on anybody that tries to do any such thing. They were saying, 'Yes, you Gentiles have been justified through faith in the Lord Jesus, but that isn't enough. You must add the rite of circumcision and the keeping of the law as a condition for your being saved and for your entry into the inheritance.' Paul says, 'Anybody who teaches that let him be anathema' (1:9). Why anathema? Because he's trying to salvage something that has come under God's own curse. Surely God hasn't cursed his own law, has he? No he hasn't—his law remains holy, spiritual and good. But look at what Paul says, 'For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them' (3:10).

The words are so solemn we must stop and ponder them. What is the verse saying? 'Cursed are all those who take their stand upon doing the law as a means of salvation.' Why is that? Well, what do you mean when you're talking about law in this context? The Ten Commandments—and all the others as well? The Hebrew word for law is *torah*, which basically means instruction. But then God's holy law was more than instruction, and it's this next point about it that we have to grasp.

God's law isn't just instruction. It doesn't come to you and say, 'Here's a law that's quite useful for a good way of living. For instance, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength . . . and your neighbour as yourself"' (Matt 22:37-39). What about trying that for the next week or so? You'll find it's a reasonable way of living. I'd advise you to give it a try!

Indeed not! That would almost be blasphemy. God's holy law isn't just advice, it is command or prohibition plus penalty. Listen to those Levites telling the people, 'Keep the law and God will bless you; break it and God's law will curse you.' The curse of the law is eternal perdition, you must keep the whole law and continue in all that is written. The moment you come short you have broken the law and the penalty is eternal death. 'For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it' (Jas 2:10).

We do well in our modern day to ponder the holiness of God and the seriousness of the divine law. It is ignorant nonsense at the best when folks say they're doing their utmost to keep God's law and on that ground they hope to be in God's great inheritance. God is pleading with us to notice that we have broken the law; we stand already under his curse. This is a message not

---

<sup>3</sup> See [Appendix 3](#).

only for the unconverted, it is God's desired objective that the right requirements of the law should be fulfilled in believers. How is that objective to be reached? Let's take the biggest commandment, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' That's the objective and we tell the Lord in our prayers that we want to do it. We agree with God on the objective; the question is, how is it going to be achieved?

Consider the situation if I were under law as a principle, trying to reach this objective of loving the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind. 'Do it 100% well or I shall curse you,' says the law. What do you think I should do? Have a real go at doing it? I don't make light of sin, but I know how miserably short I have come. Imagine the impossible situation I should be in, if I had to reach the great objective of the law and its righteous requirement being fulfilled in me.

I have a gospel to tell you, and so does Paul: 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal 3:13). Is it that he came into us and empowered us, so that we were able at last to keep the law and thus escape its curse? No, indeed not! Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, 'For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree."' (v. 1 The sinless Lord Jesus, who kept the law and made it honourable—loved the Lord his God with all his heart, mind, soul and strength, and his neighbour as himself—gave himself for me. They spiked him to that wooden tree and he suffered the curse of the law of God. The curse that was mine, he bore it for me. What for? So that, the curse of the law being removed, the blessing of Abraham might come upon us Gentiles. God has not only had mercy on me and I've escaped the curse because Christ bore it, but now the way is open and all the blessings promised to and through Abraham are mine in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Perhaps now we begin to see the seriousness of what these false teachers were saying. They were coming to believers like me, who had confessed their sin and trusted the Saviour, and telling them that to be saved and remain saved and to enter the inheritance they must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. So the very thing that God and the law had cursed, they were now trying to salvage and add it on as a condition of Christian salvation.

If you have any concept of what it meant for God to see his Son bear the curse of a broken law at Calvary so that we might be saved, then you will perhaps begin to see the gravity of what these men were doing. The broken law had put him to the tree, now they were taking circumcision, a bit of that law, trying to salvage it and lay it down as a condition to fulfil in order to be justified. I don't know why they did it. Perhaps they thought it was a nice little ceremony to be performed upon a baby. I say it solemnly and not with any party spirit, there are those in Christendom who say that the Christian equivalent of circumcision is the baptism of infants—if you should take infant baptism as the equivalent of circumcision, please beware. Never say or think that it contributes to your salvation, or is necessary for your justification and inheritance. If you were to do that, you would be doing what these false teachers did; and that goes for anything that supposes we can earn salvation by keeping the law.

*Courage to stand up for what you believe*

So we come to the rebuke that Paul had to give to Peter. Like me, Peter had a certain weakness. Physically he had tremendous courage—he took on the whole squad of soldiers that came to

arrest the Lord and tried to fight them single-handed. But put Peter in a crowd and ask him to stand up and openly confess what he really believed, he found that difficult. God had taught Peter that it was all right to eat with Gentiles, whether or not they were believers. He'd already been taught that if Gentiles put their faith in the Lord Jesus they were justified and heirs of God without circumcision, and Peter had accepted it (see Acts 10).

But one day he was at a conference at Antioch and there came down certain gentlemen from Jerusalem of the Pharisaic party (see Gal 2). When Peter saw them he withdrew from eating with the Gentile believers, afraid of what these good men might say. So he was leaving the table—'No you don't!' says Paul. 'Stay there, Peter, we're not having this. You must not dissemble—meaning, you mustn't pretend that you don't believe what you do believe—your behaviour must be consistent with what you say you believe. We are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles (v. 15). We tried to keep God's law; we were respectable sinners! But we came to see that there is no salvation in keeping the law. Did you find peace with God by keeping the law, Peter? Didn't we discover that we can only be saved by faith in Jesus Christ and we put our faith in him? We turned our back on our merit and were justified solely by faith.' 'Well yes, I suppose that is so,' said Peter. So Paul says to him, 'If I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor' (v. 18).

What does he mean? Well, if Peter is telling the believers that they've got to go back to the law and be circumcised in order to be saved, he would be building up again the very thing he turned his back on when he abandoned faith in the law for salvation and put his faith in Christ. If he were to do that he would show himself to be a transgressor, because by the standard of the law he would still come short and in spite of his faith in Christ the law condemns him. That is very solemn.

In a day of much confusion we must not dissemble. We must not under pressure pretend that we don't believe what we do believe when it comes to the fundamental matter of salvation. I must not compromise with anything that suggests I should think that salvation is partly through faith in Christ but also helped on by some ceremony, Jewish or Christian; for if I build again what I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

So now we have that clear, what is the way forward to the objective that 'the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled in us'?

'Through the law I died to the law', says Paul (v. 19). 'The law condemned me and I agreed with it. I put my faith in Christ because I believe he was crucified to bear the penalty of the law for me. That means I then died to the law, Christ's death was mine and I have been crucified with Christ.'(v. 2

I must get that straight, not only as an unbeliever seeking salvation, but also as a believer. Even Peter needed to get it straight. I have been crucified with Christ—where shall I get the power then, to live to God's glory?

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (v. 20).

Christ lives in me by his Spirit, I have a new life as a believer. But 'the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh' (5:17). Praise God for those many times when God's Holy Spirit wins the victory and little by little I learn more and more to overcome and lead a holy life. Not on the principle of command plus penalty, but on the new principle of the living Lord Jesus living his life within me.

## **B. The destruction of Ai**

One final story. Israel eventually took Ai. When they first went up to Ai they went in self-confidence, but it was a more difficult thing than they thought. Getting my old self out of me is a more difficult thing than you might think! Paul agrees with me, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' (Rom 7:24). How did Israel eventually do it?

### **The objective achieved**

The tactics for overcoming Ai were altogether different from the tactics for overcoming Jericho. With Jericho God took the walls down and they went in and destroyed the people inside. With Ai it was the very opposite thing; they put an ambush behind the city, Joshua came up with the troops as they did the first time, and when the king of Ai came out they ran away as though they were defeated again. The king of Ai came out to give them the coup de grâce, then the ambush came up behind and Joshua got them in between and slaughtered every one of them. He hung the king of Ai upon a tree. That's how they did it—there were the people in the ambush behind the city, then there was that part of the army that had to go up to those walls from which they had earlier run away in defeat. They had to re-enact their defeat and run away again, as though defeated once more.

You've never done that, have you? Have you said, 'I'm never going to make that mistake again?' I've said it thousands of times. I don't know about you, but I am as liable to defeat as ever I was. But this time there was a difference—this time Joshua went with them. He wasn't with the ambush behind the city, he was with the crowd that ran away in defeat. What marvellous grace of Joshua that he should station himself with the people that re-enacted the defeat.

I'm not encouraging you to live in sin, but I want to tell you that God has a scheme to make you at last like his Son—the righteous requirement of the law *shall* be fulfilled in you! Is it because we have become strong? No, indeed not, we are as liable to defeat as ever. But we have with us the greater-than-Joshua, the Captain of our salvation. In those days when once more you suffer defeat and you could cry your heart out for shame, remember that the blessed Lord Jesus stands with you. What he's doing is luring out your old self—like that king of Ai, bringing him out and exposing him—so that you may repent and find that at last you get the victory.

So Joshua took the king of Ai and hung him on a tree. As I look at that corpse I think I begin to know what Paul meant. As a believer now on my way to glory, being conformed to the Lord Jesus, the principle is not law but the Spirit living within me empowering me and bringing me daily to see what a wretched thing my flesh is, so that I learn not to trust it.

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:24–25)



## The First Phase of the Conquest

### *(4) Putting Down all Rule and Authority*

We must try to complete our survey of the first phase of the conquest of the land of Palestine undertaken by Joshua and the Israelites. Moses had set Joshua three main objectives. The first one was obvious, to bring Israel literally to stand within their great God-given inheritance. God did the great miracle to facilitate this objective; by his ark he parted the waters of Jordan and made a passage for the Israelites to enter into their inheritance.

That first objective being achieved, Joshua set before the people the second. That was to establish the holy law of God in the land of Canaan once more, as Moses had commanded them, destroying the cities of Jericho and Ai that lay in the way as obstacles. Joshua then took the nation to the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim and in the presence of the ark, the altar and the written law of God he called upon the Levites to pronounce the blessings and cursings of the law. Israel gathered in their thousands and responded with a full hearted and full throated, 'Amen', so be it. The second objective was achieved and the law of God established in that once evil civilisation.

### **The third objective—to put down all rule and authority**

Now we come to the third objective that was set before Joshua by Moses. Not only was Joshua to execute the judgments of God upon all the Canaanites in those cities, but in particular he was to destroy all the kings, princes, powers and principalities in the land of Canaan. We shall be thinking in this study of how by God's grace and his determination Joshua and Israel managed to achieve this tremendous objective. The judgments of God were exercised and executed, and the land had rest from war.

As we think of those far off events the Holy Spirit will be directing our attention to the New Testament and notably of course to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Once more the lesson will in part be very solemn. It will remind us that one day the greater-than-Joshua, the New Testament Joshua, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, shall come in the glory of his Father, and in the glory of his holy angels,

In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thess 1:8-9)

One day God is going to purge our earth and his kingdom of everything that offends. Evil shall be put down and our blessed Lord will take up the reins of government. Heaven and earth shall rejoice when God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, takes to himself his great power

and begins to reign. The time shall come for the dead to be judged and rewards given to his servants the prophets and to them who fear his name; and for evil men and governments to be put down completely. He shall in fact reign until he has put down all rule and authority, and the very last enemy, death itself, shall be destroyed (1 Cor 15:24–26). Our blessed Lord shall bring in the great age of rest for his people, to which we look forward with inextinguishable hope.

As we think again of Joshua putting down the opposition, in particular the principalities and powers, we should be thinking of our Lord in those very self-same terms. It is not ours nowadays to go around the countryside defending the faith and propagating it by carnal weapons. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, we are strictly forbidden the use of the sword, either to protect Christ or to promote his cause.

‘For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places’ (Eph 6:12).

We are engaged in this struggle and we still have to wrestle against these principalities and powers. We shall be delighted to allow the story of Joshua to remind us of what our blessed Lord has already done, as with joy in our hearts we read those lovely words from the New Testament:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Col 2:13–15)

In one sense our blessed Lord has already triumphed over the principalities and powers, but we still in another sense have to wrestle against them. May our studies encourage us to take courage in both hands and at the Lord’s command put our feet on the necks of God’s enemies, just as the Israelites at Joshua’s command came and put their feet on the necks of the defeated kings of Canaan and executed them. Then we shall look forward to the glorious consolation and final victory, when Satan and his hosts shall be cast down and eventually consigned to the lake of fire. Christ will usher in an eternity of complete rest, when there shall be neither war nor evil.

So let us embark upon our study of this third division of the first phase of the conquest and its three major stories.

1. The covenant of salvation with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). Amidst all the judgment and destruction of the Canaanite cities, the Gibeonites were saved.
2. Obstacle 1. The attack of the Southern Confederacy on the Gibeonites (chapter 10).
3. Obstacle 2. The attack of the Northern Confederacy on Joshua and Israel (chapter 11).

## Story 1. The covenant of salvation with the Gibeonites (ch. 9)

I have to confess to you that the Gibeonites down the centuries have had a very bad press. They deceived the Israelites, so it is no wonder they have had a very severe reputation from commentators by the thousand. Worse than that, it has been the Israelites that have come in for most of the criticism because they allowed themselves to be deceived and they did not enquire of the Lord. Had they done so, who knows, he might have told them that the Gibeonites were telling them lies. But Israel didn't enquire of the Lord and therefore were deceived. They made a covenant with the Gibeonites and swore an oath to them in the name of God that they would be saved from the judgment that befell all other cities.

The lesson that has been drawn from this Old Testament incident usually goes like this. Israel had just come through a series of astounding victories. They had seen the miraculous power of God at the city of Jericho, bringing down its walls and they had triumphantly destroyed that city. They had run into some initial difficulty at Ai, but upon confessing their sin they had once more seen the hand of God take them on the tide of victory and they exterminated Ai. After those two great successes they fell into spiritual danger because, without noticing it, it is possible to become somewhat independent of the Lord. Confident now in past victories, you no longer seek quite so intensively to depend upon the Lord and you go forward without consulting him. Using your own wisdom and strength therefore, you fall into situations, make all sorts of arrangements that can trap and ensnare you and involve you for the rest of your days in unfortunate conditions.

So that is how the lessons of the Gibeonites are preached. God wanted these people destroyed, but they made out they came from far off and they told their lie to the Israelites. The Israelites didn't enquire of the Lord; they made a covenant and afterward were never able to reverse it. They had to live with their mistake for the rest of their days, so we must be particularly careful when we have recently experienced some great victory lest we grow overconfident and independent of the Lord.

The lesson in itself is true. But the more I read the story of the Gibeonites the more I come to the conclusion that this is not the lesson to be drawn from it. Let's suppose the Israelites were mistaken—God really wanted the Gibeonites destroyed and through their mistake the Israelites went and promised them that they would be preserved. But let me remind you, when the Gibeonites made peace with Israel all the surrounding cities gathered their armies against the Gibeonites. When that happened God not only sent Joshua to protect them but he rained down stones from heaven and destroyed their enemies. God himself fought for the Gibeonites and saved them by the intervention of his power. Not content with that, he performed a spectacular miracle in answer to the prayer of Joshua. God commanded the sun and the moon to stand still while the Lord himself fought for the Gibeonites.

What was the real situation? Do you suppose God sat up in heaven upon his throne, intending to destroy the Gibeonites, and his stupid people went and swore an oath in his name that God would save them? Am I to think that God said, 'Now I shall have to save them, though I don't want to'?

Do you suppose one of these days you'll get up to heaven and find that God didn't really want to save you? Some foolish preacher told you that God loved you and 'whosoever will might come and be saved'; and you responded and believed what God said. Now he says,

'I didn't want to save you, but I shall have to because some servant of mine went and assured you that the promises of the gospel applied to you and backed it home by pointing you to my oath.' No, you'll never experience that. If God saves anybody, he saves them because he always did intend to save them.

That goes for the Gibeonites as well. They told a lie and I'm not really going to defend them. Perhaps our sanest way would be to start the story right from the beginning and see where it leads us.

#### *Who were the Gibeonites?*

Let's think for a moment of who these Gibeonites were and why they did what they did. They were ancient pagans living in the land of Canaan, 'sinners of the Gentiles.' To be honest they were not all that much different from what we were. They were dead in their trespasses and sins, besmirched with the evils of their ancient Godless and pagan society. They went about doing the lusts of the flesh and of the mind; and even in those far off days they walked according to the course of this world, living in the grip of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that even then worked in the children of disobedience (see Eph 2:1-2). All their society was evil and when God's judgment was pronounced upon the civilisations of Canaan you could have seen it with your own eyes. They were so far gone from God they deserved his wrath.

While I paint them in lurid colours, am I not painting a picture of us? What were we anyway? I take it that we all are Gentiles and before we met Christ were we any better than these Gibeonites? They were of course not members of Israel. In the words of the New Testament, they were called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision, they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel; the great and glorious covenants that God made with his ancient people had nothing to do with Gentiles. They didn't know a thing about them (vv. 11-12). Even at that time Israel had had the gospel preached to them; the beginnings of that glowing light of the promise that one day the seed of the woman would come into our world and bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). The promise was alluded to by Jacob in his prophecy (Gen 49:10), and Moses in his farewell address, when he promised that 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me' (Deut 18:15). One day God would send the Messiah into our world, deliver his people and restore all things. The Israelites knew it and they had a glorious hope, but these Gibeonites being Gentiles had no messianic hope of salvation.

They were without God of course. Their ancestors had long since rejected the knowledge of the one true God, the Lord of creation, and had gone over to the weak, deadly idolatry of the ancient world. Sunk in their foolish idolatries and being without God, they were without hope.

Many of our fellow citizens are in that precise position at this present day. Not merely the man who is wandering up the street with his head full of drugs and his stomach full of beer. Some of our most brilliant citizens are in precisely that same position. Gentiles, they know nothing of the hope of a coming Saviour and Messiah and they are without God. They've given up the idea of God. They say, 'Who knows how the whole great universe came to be? Ultimately it was by chance.' They mock at those that believe in God, as though they were

primitive savages. But the truth is that the modern humanists and atheists are no better off than those ancient Gibeonites – they have no hope.

‘You don’t believe in God, so tell me what determines your life? What brought you here, and what in the end will take you out of this world? What ultimately controls you? Do you control yourself? Do you run the universe?’

‘No, of course I don’t,’ they will say. ‘The things that control us are the elemental powers of the universe, the processes of physiology and reproduction – chemistry, if you like. These are the things that really control us in this world.’

Of course they don’t call them gods, but actually they’re doing exactly the same thing as the Gibeonites. They didn’t know about atomic power, but they made gods out of the sun, the moon, the storm, the processes of fertility and physiology. They didn’t understand how they work, but they saw (as clearly as a man can see) that these things controlled human life, so they made gods out of them and it led them into a fearful, hopeless bondage.

Sometimes I try to bring it home to my atheist and humanist friends. I say to them, ‘You mock at us who believe in the one true God, but let’s take an example. Here is a mother of three children. She’s thirty-three, the doctors have just told her that she has terminal cancer. I would say to her, “I’m very sorry to hear the verdict of the doctors, but you know there is ultimate hope. Like the rest of us, you are a creature of a personal God who made and loves you, but we all have sinned and are part of a fallen creation. God loves you and there’s a way of reconciliation, a way to be forgiven. There is an eternity with an incorruptible inheritance that doesn’t fade away. If you only trust the Saviour he would not only forgive you now but give you a sure and certain hope of heaven. He would use your sufferings, which the Bible says are for a little while, to work for you an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (see 2 Cor 4:17). You were made in the image of God, the image has been distorted but through Christ it can be restored. You’re not only forgiven, one day you shall reign with the Lord Jesus when he comes again. Do make sure you let the Saviour into your heart.”’

The atheist has utterly no hope to offer. ‘Your illness might help science forward, but as far as you’re concerned there is no hope in this life and there is none to come.’ God’s word is not exaggerating when it says that Gentiles who don’t know God have no hope (Eph 2:12). Joshua descended on the Canaanite pagan cities, executing the judgment of God, and our Godless world has nothing to look forward to except the coming of our Lord ‘in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God’ (2 Thess 1:8).

### *The salvation of the Gibeonites*

Now I want to tell you a marvellous story. God in his mercy saved those pagan Gentiles. Not because he didn’t want to and the Israelites forced him, but because he wanted to save them. Not only did he save them in the sense that he spared them from the judgment, but he gave them the high privilege of being servants to his people. For the rest of their days and all the subsequent centuries he gave them the privilege of being servants to the altar. When the praises of Israel ascended symbolically on the fires of the altar in the tabernacle and later in the temple, it was the Gibeonites who had the privilege of supplying the wood and seeing to all the practical matters.

I can picture many a Gibeonite coming along with his bundle of wood. The priest takes it and puts it on the fire upon the altar, he watches as the animals are put on the fire and the smoke goes up before God. Hearing the music of God's people praising the great God of mercy, a tear runs down the Gibeonite's eye. Says he, 'Who am I that I am allowed the holy privilege of supplying the wood that rises with the prayers and praises of the people of God? I owe it to the mercy of that same God who not only saved his people but saved me, a Gentile.'

But they did tell a lie, so I must come to that now. They did it very deliberately, with all their dressing up in old-fashioned clothes and shoes with holes, and mouldy bread and things like that. You will also observe that Rahab, in the very moment of her getting converted, told a lie. When the army came knocking on the door and said, 'We hear you've got some men in here,' she said, 'No, no, they did come but they've gone away across the brook.' God in his mercy saw the motives of her heart and has recorded in the New Testament that she was not only justified by faith, but she was justified by works. He knew why she did it, even though technically it might have been called a lie.

Why on earth did they tell this lie? After Joshua and the Israelites had sworn an oath in the name of God they couldn't go back on it and the Gibeonites knew that they were now safe. When Joshua asked them, 'Why did you do it, deceiving us like this?' they said that it was because they heard what Moses the man of God had said!

Moses said that when the Israelites came to battle they were to make a distinction between cities that were far off and cities that were near. If the city was far off they were first to offer conditions of peace. If the people wanted to accept the offer of peace they had to abandon their city and give it to the Israelites. Then they had to be prepared to be servants to the Israelites for the rest of their days. If they were prepared to fulfil those two conditions—abandon the city and be servants to Israel—then the Israelites were to make a covenant of peace with them. But if the city was near at hand the Israelites were to destroy them without making any offer of peace whatsoever.

The Gibeonites were only three days' journey up the road, so they knew they would be slaughtered one and all. Then they saw a glimmer of hope. If only somehow they could persuade the Israelites that they were far off, then they might be allowed to live. So they dressed in old looking clothes and horrible shoes. They carried mouldy bread and wine skins that were old and patched. In the end they succeeded in proving to the Israelites that they came from far off.

What would you have done? You are good Christians of course, so what would you advise them? Would you have said, 'You mustn't do that for it would be telling a lie—you're near at hand so you'll have to sit there and wait for Joshua and the Israelites to come and slit your throats'?

Well, the Gibeonites thought otherwise. They said, 'If there's a chance of proving to the Israelites we're far off and saving ourselves, we'll try it.' So they did and it proved successful. Will you begrudge it to them? The Israelites should have enquired of the Lord but they didn't. I am tempted to say, 'what a mercy'. They swore them an oath that God himself honoured forever.

Would you begrudge the Gibeonites that they got saved? Tell me, how did you get saved? Before you found the Lord Jesus you too were children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph 2:3).

You weren't Jews, you had nothing to do with the promises given to Israel; you were alienated from the covenants, weren't you? You were separate from Christ, having no hope and without God in the world. How on earth are you now saved of the Lord? We were far off—not geographically, but something far worse than that—spiritually. Then the blessed Lord Jesus, the greater-than-Joshua, came and preached peace to those that were far off. 'That's true,' you say, 'but we didn't have to tell a lie about it, we really were far off.'

Were you any worse or better than those Gibeonites? God had mercy upon you, the blessed Lord Jesus came in lowly guise to Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's cross. He came and bridged the distance—how near he came! Who shall describe his stupendous message? He came and preached peace to you that were far off. Your moral and spiritual loaves were a bit mouldy, your old shoes weren't worth looking at, but you have been saved. God not only had mercy on you, he came and preached peace that has guaranteed you eternal salvation with his word and with his oath.

I know you'll tell me that they still told a lie. Would you say that they were just making up this story to save their skin, or were they really genuine? In my book, they were genuine men and women; it wasn't just a question of saving their skin. Moses had said that a city that was far off could have peace if they surrendered and were prepared to become servants to the people of God. Notice how sincere and true those men of Gibeon were when they came to Joshua. 'Please make peace with us,' they said. 'How can we make peace with you? You might come from just around the corner for all we know—we can't make peace with you,' he said. The Gibeonites didn't argue about it. 'We are your servants,' they said. Then Joshua made a covenant with them to let them live (v. 15).

When Joshua eventually called them to come and give an account of themselves they said, 'We heard what Moses said' (9:24). 'The covenant stands,' said Joshua, 'you are forever saved from the judgment, but you must become servants of the people of God and to the altar.' The Gibeonites said, 'Yes Joshua, we are one hundred per cent prepared to become servants to the people of God.' 'And Joshua made them cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD (v. 27). They kept their promise and all down the long centuries their successors became servants to Israel and to the altar in the temple. They were genuinely converted.

### *The implications of salvation*

Let us just examine ourselves for a minute. We were far off, now we've been made nigh by the blood of Christ and are eternally saved. How sincere are we? What did we get saved for? Just to save our skin and live as before? If we think we can do that we have gravely misunderstood God's salvation, for to be saved by God's grace means that you become a slave of Christ (1 Cor 7:22). You become like Priscilla and Aquila and many more who risked their necks for the people of God (Rom 16:4). Have you said, 'Lord, had it not been for your grace I wouldn't have survived, I would have perished eternally. All that I am and have is yours—I am your slave from now on and forever'?

Are you a slave to the altar? What do I mean? I'm not thinking of a literal altar that has to be stoked with literal wood and flames. Our blessed Lord Jesus died for us, didn't he? 'And

he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised' (2 Cor 5:15).

This is the mark of genuine conversion. Not doing it just to save our souls from an eternal hell, but prepared forever after to be servants of God's people and not our own any longer. Are we servants to him, who for our sake gave himself upon the altar of Calvary, and claims us as his own?

## **Story 2. Obstacle 1—The attack of the Southern Confederacy on the Gibeonites (ch. 10)**

So the Gibeonites were saved and I call your attention to the wonderful security that God gave them. The other Canaanite cities heard of it and resented the fact that Gibeon, being a great city, had gone over to the other side. As often happened in history, the Canaanites gathered their armies together to come and attack, not Joshua but these new converts whom they regarded as traitors. It happens in many a country still, when a person trusts the Saviour he or she runs the risk of being disowned by family and friends and becoming socially an outcast. Of course Satan will be after the new convert and the rest of us all our days. I read however that, when the Canaanites came against the Gibeonites, the Lord instructed Joshua the saviour to come with his armies and drive them away.

### **The miracles**

#### ***Miracle 1***

As they were running away God himself intervened and threw down stones, mucky stones, from heaven. There were more that died under the stones than under the sword of Joshua. Ah, that's God. Not only does he give his word and his oath, but he guarantees,

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,  
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;  
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,  
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.<sup>4</sup>

I love those words, along with what Paul pens in Romans, 'If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (vv. 31, 38–39). God is for us—not only in the security of our salvation, but I remind you of the glory of it.

#### ***Miracle 2***

As Joshua was chasing the enemy away he saw that the day was fast declining and there would not be enough daylight to finish the task. Looking heavenward, he said, "'Sun, stand

---

<sup>4</sup> Attributed to Robert Keen(e) and George Keith, 1787. 'How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord.'



still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies’ (Josh 10:12–13).

‘Give us the explanation of that tremendous miracle,’ you say. ‘Can you really believe that the sun and the moon stood still in the sky? Explain it now to us in the laws of physics!’ I’m afraid you will be disappointed for I’m not a scientist, a physicist or a cosmologist and I do not know what the scientific explanation is. (I was rather hoping that you would tell me!)

There was a bigger miracle that day than the sun and the moon standing still. It’s the miracle to which the inspired historian calls our attention: ‘There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD heeded the voice of a man’ (v. 14). That’s a bigger miracle than the sun standing still—for a man to command the Lord to interfere with the running of the heavens and for the Lord to listen and do what he says! If you’ve any sense of proportion you will see at once that that is infinitely bigger. The historian sees the point: ‘There was no day like it before or since up to my time,’ he says. Of course he was writing nearly three thousand years ago, perhaps 1300–800 BC. The record’s been broken since, hasn’t it? Somewhere about AD 33 a man stood just outside Jerusalem city—a real man, as real as we are—on his way to Gethsemane and Calvary. He lifted his eyes to heaven and prayed and the Lord heeded his voice. What a tremendous prayer it was:

I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. (John 17:4–5)

The Father heard his prayer and, though Calvary intervened, on the third day he raised him from the dead. On the fortieth day he was raised to glory, a real man. Born in Bethlehem’s manger of a virgin, living in man’s earth, God listened to the prayer of the man—‘Glorify me!’ And today he’s in glory, a real man with a real human body still, though glorified. And I’ll tell you something more wonderful in its way than that. When he came to the end of the prayer, still lifting up his eyes to heaven that lovely man, Jesus Christ our Lord, said,

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world (v. 24).

That prayer shall yet be answered. The blessed Lord shall come and take all his redeemed people home to the Father’s house in heaven. Listen to the inspired apostle talking to Gentiles:

And [that he] might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. (Eph 2:16–17)

‘You once were far off,’ he says, ‘and I do pray that God will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; to understand the unlimited power of God, that he wrought in Christ, when he raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, and sat him at his own right hand in the heavenly places’ (1:17–20). He gave you life and seated you in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (2:6).

We're interested in bigger things than how the sun and moon stood still, aren't we? For your sake—though really for his Son's sake, God has altered the very constitution of the heavens. Since the ascension of our Lord, heaven has seen what it never saw before, a human being with a human body in the glory. Not only shall we be with him bodily one day, but now we are seated with Christ in heavenly places. We find the concept difficult because we have to learn to think as citizens of heaven, not only in spatial terms but in spiritual terms.

If I say to you, 'Her Gracious Majesty sits on the throne of England', what would you take me to mean? When she was crowned Queen she went along to Westminster Abbey and they sat her on a big chair, the throne. So that's one sense of it, physically sitting on a throne. But is there not another sense? If the Queen travels off to Jamaica or some place she's still queen of England. She's still on the throne of England; nobody has toppled her off! In the political sense she's on the throne and Prince Charles belongs to the reigning house already. I was thinking the other day of suggesting to the Queen she might adopt me, so that I could be raised to a position in the reigning house of England—but she apparently prefers me to stay a private citizen! You see, it doesn't matter whether the Queen is in Jamaica, she's still sitting on the throne and Prince Charles is part of the reigning house.

Our blessed Lord is physically in the presence of God and though he travels the whole universe he is still at the right hand of God in the authority that he has. Though you sit here, if you are Christ's you sit with Christ—you reign with him in heavenly places.

Let's return to the story in Joshua chapter 10. The enemy tried to run off and five of the kings got into a cave. Joshua told his men to put a lid on the front of it until the battle was over and the final enemies were destroyed (vv. 16–19). Then Joshua brought out those five great kings, and calling his captains he said, 'Put your feet on their necks' (v. 24). He told them to slay the kings, so they hanged them on five trees and made a show of them openly. 'So shall the Lord do to all your enemies, until there's not one left,' he said.

We are seated in Christ in heavenly places, my brothers and sisters, but we war still against principalities, mights, powers and dominions in heavenly places. The fight is real; you can't fight in this spiritual warfare without running the risk of getting hurt. The enemy comes at you from the most unexpected directions, sometimes from within the church itself. Shall we fight still, or do we take ourselves to the sidelines and watch through binoculars? There's a war on. God give us the grace so that we do not give the enemy any advantage or allow ourselves to be used as his tools. We shall need the grace to stand firm, our loins girded, our feet shod with the readiness to take the gospel of peace to those who, like we once were, are in danger of perishing (Eph 6:13–15). For the final victory is assured. He who stripped the principalities and powers of their weapons at Calvary shall at last cast Satan into the eternal lake of fire. The promise shall be fulfilled and the woman's seed shall crush the serpent's head.

### **Story 3. Obstacle 2—The attack of the Northern Confederacy on Joshua and Israel (ch. 11)**

Finally, there was that Northern Confederacy who came to attack Joshua and Israel and, as Moses had commanded, they were destroyed. The Bible solemnly says that God hardened their hearts so that they should come against Joshua and be destroyed (v. 20).

We've been thinking of the goodness of God and how he spared the Gibeonites. Now it is the severity of God and how he hardened the hearts of some so that they resisted Joshua and were destroyed. Don't think that this is hard of God. Those Northern Confederates had the biggest chance of anybody. If Rahab repented, believed and was saved, so could the Northerners. For all their frailty and the fact that they told a lie, if the Gibeonites could hear what Moses said, come over and stand with the people of God, seek his mercy and be saved, we know the Northerners were much further off than the Gibeonites ever were, so they could have been saved too. It is impossible to think that they never heard what Rahab and the Gibeonites heard. Had they taken the same steps they could have been saved, but they were determined to resist. There came a point when God said, 'Have it your way.' He hardened their hearts and they perished.

The Lord's coming draws near and God shall send to some a strong delusion that they should believe the lie because they would not accept the truth (2 Thess 2:11–12). God give us the grace to enter the battle and take the gospel to those who will accept his mercy before the day of judgment falls.

## The Second Phase of the Conquest

### *(1) Setting up the Tent of Meeting at Shiloh*

In this study we shall notice a big change, both in the tempo of the narrative and in the topics that this second half of the book of Joshua deals with. For now we enter the second phase of the conquest of the land, the second phase of the occupation.

So far we have been spending our time considering the wonderful lessons to be learned from the first half of the book, the first phase of the occupation of the land. We have been reading how Joshua, the appointed servant of God and captain of Israel's salvation, led the people of God into their great inheritance, promised long centuries before by God to Abraham but not actually given to the Israelites until Moses was dead and Joshua had been raised up.

As we thought of those ancient historical events, our minds irresistibly went to our blessed Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation—our New Testament Joshua, his name Jesus being the equivalent of the Hebrew Joshua. Not only have we an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for us, but even here and now we have the firstfruits. The Holy Spirit is the earnest of that inheritance and limitless joys and spiritual blessings are ours who know the Saviour. We discovered that not only shall we one day be physically in glory with him, but in raising our blessed Lord Jesus from the dead and seating him at his own right hand in glory, God has in fact raised us up too to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).

In the previous study we were thinking of the final stage of that first phase of the inheritance, how Joshua gained the victory for Israel over all the principalities and powers that had occupied Canaan. We saw how five of those kings were slain and made a show of openly as Joshua hanged them on five trees. Then our hearts began to overflow with the idea that our blessed Lord Jesus has not only delivered us from the power of darkness, but 'God has seated us in Christ in the heavenly places, far above all principalities, powers, might and dominions, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come' (Eph 1:21).

Joshua eventually put down the Northern Confederacy and gave the land rest. We look forward to the time when our blessed Lord Jesus shall come again and put down all rule and authority, In flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus' (2 Thess 1:8). He shall take to himself his great power and reign until the very last enemy is destroyed. One day we shall say with more meaning than even now, 'O death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?' (1 Cor 15:55 KJV)

## 1. Division of land for the seven tribes

As we move over to the second phase of the conquest and the occupation we shall find that the pace alters. In the first phase Joshua had led the united armies and they had to remain united. As he went round the country and part after part subdued it and broke the power of the opposition, so Israel were brought into the land of their inheritance. At that stage no individual tribe was allowed to settle down or break off from the main body of the army. It was absolutely essential in that first phase of the occupation that the united armies stayed together, otherwise they were no match for the confederacies of kings that came against them. When at last all opposition had been broken and the land had rest from full-scale war, the time came for the individual tribes to begin to split off from the main body and for each one of them to go into that particular part of Canaan that God in his wisdom had assigned to them for their inheritance.

So there were two necessary phases in this matter. First of all Joshua gained their inheritance for them. He put down the opposition and brought them by God's miraculous power so that their feet actually stood in their God given inheritance. In the second phase the individual tribes had to separate off and in fear and trust of God they had to enter into the particular areas assigned to them. They had to take hold of them, enter the houses and the vineyards, begin to plough the fields, have their stock, raise their children and generally reap the harvests of the inheritance that God had now given them. They had to develop it, explore and exploit its potential—make something of the inheritance that God had actually given them.

In the process of that of course, there was still some fighting to be done. The main armies had broken the opposition of the Canaanites, but, as you might expect, an odd Canaanite here and there ran off and hid behind this rock, in that barn, down the other well, behind the mountains, up in the hills and forests, waiting to pounce on an unsuspecting Israelite who came by. So this matter of personally entering into your inheritance and beginning to enjoy it and exploit it would from time to time involve quite a bit of hard work. Not only ploughing the fields, scattering the good seed on the land and reaping the harvest, but there was also still a war against an enemy that wouldn't give up.

### *Pressing on towards the goal of the inheritance*

As we think of those two phases of the conquest, is it not obvious that they bear a very striking analogy to our present position? On the one side, as we have been reminding ourselves, our blessed Lord has already brought us into our inheritance and we have taken quite a considerable time reflecting upon the methods and means that he used—breaking the barrier of death, making provision that the righteous requirement of the law shall be fulfilled in us, overcoming the opposition that was against us. There is a sense in which Christ has brought us into our inheritance, and yet we're not completely there yet, are we? We are not in heaven yet. We have the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts, yet who of us has explored it to the fullest? Even the apostle, towards the end of his life when he was in prison, said:

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:10–14)

Like an Olympic athlete, with every nerve and sinew in his body he pursued the glorious objectives that God had put before him, striving to enter more deeply into the glorious inheritance that Christ had procured for him. If the apostle Paul would have to speak like that, how much more must we?

There is a second phase of occupation in which God puts before us all the great potential that even now, if we had a mind to, we could enter into. He urges and exhorts and challenges us now to roll up our sleeves, gird up the loins of our mind and, with every ounce of spiritual energy we possess, to enter into our inheritance and make it our own. Make it real, make it personal, explore the potential of the great salvation we have and enter into the good of it. So it seems to me that Joshua on the very surface of it, and according to its literary arrangement, preaches us these basic lessons.

If I'm not mistaken, God in his wisdom would preserve us here from two extremes. Some dear folks strain every nerve they have to enter into the fulness of the Christian life, but they haven't let Joshua bring them into the inheritance to start with. To put it bluntly, they've not been born again; they have not received the Holy Spirit. If you ask them are they sure of their inheritance in heaven they hang their heads and say, 'No, you can't be sure, can you?' If only they'd let the greater-than-Joshua bring them into the inheritance they would be abundantly sure, because he gives to the believer the earnest of the inheritance.

God is the most law-abiding businessman that ever was. If he gives you a down payment, he'll guarantee to pay the whole one day. Some folks go to buy a vacuum cleaner; they can't afford the whole lump sum at once, so they put a deposit on it. They take the vacuum cleaner and assure the businessman that they'll pay the rest, but when the old vacuum cleaner is worn out they still haven't paid the full price. God doesn't behave like that. If you are a believer he has given you the part payment in the Holy Spirit ('the earnest' is old-style English for part payment). Then it's his pledge that one day he will give you the full payment of the complete inheritance. That is the delight of those who have allowed the Lord Jesus to bring them into the inheritance. We shall never satisfactorily explore the great spiritual wealth that Christ has for us, unless we start by allowing him first to bring us into the inheritance by his grace and by his power.

Then the other mistake to be made sometimes is by those of us who are already in the inheritance. We have the earnest of that inheritance, the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We have no doubt about it but we don't altogether bother too much about exploring and exploiting and developing all the great potential of the salvation that our blessed Lord has introduced us to. We say to ourselves, 'There will be time enough to do that when I get home to heaven.' I'm

not quite sure there will be! The rumour is that eternity will last an extraordinarily long time of course, by definition; but if I've read holy Scripture right, how much I enjoy eternity will depend upon the development of my capacity now. If I would have the maximum enjoyment of the inheritance in the age to come I must start down here developing my spiritual potential and translating it into actual capacity. So the second part of Joshua is going to talk to us about this matter.

Before we get down to the detail, let's notice another general thing in the simple Table of Contents. Just as the first half of the book of Joshua was in three parts, and in each of those three parts a very clear objective was set before the people and that objective was achieved; so the second part of the book is in three parts. In each of those three parts another major objective is clearly indicated.<sup>5</sup> With the arrival of Israel and the land having rest, the inheritance is distributed to the tribes and the first great objective is reached and achieved. The two and a half tribes had their inheritance, Judah and Benjamin had theirs and the tribes of Joseph were given theirs. Before all the other tribes got their portions, there came a most significant achievement. 'Then the whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. The land lay subdued before them' (Josh 18:1).

Hitherto it had been kept in the army camp, guarded day and night when the camp was settled and when they were on the march. Now that the tribe of Judah had their part of the territory and Israel was settled in theirs, without waiting for the other seven tribes to get theirs at last they had enough territory to take the tabernacle out of the army camp and set it up in its own place. They set it up triumphantly in the place called Shiloh. The presence of God would come and dwell there, so that the tent of meeting should form the centre that would keep the nation together as they now went off from the army into their individual inheritances. It would be the heart that kept the nation together—their centre and the chief of all the blessings that ever could come to them in the land of Canaan. You will see the importance of this objective by the fact that they didn't wait until all the tribes were in their inheritance. They did it as soon as it could be done. With Judah and Joseph settled, they grabbed Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there.

If that was their chief objective as they entered into their inheritance, what would you say was the chief blessing they were aiming at? Was the whole point of entering the promised land to have a land flowing with milk and honey? If you're going to have milk you've got to have cows; and if you're going to have cows you've got to have grass; and if you're going to have honey you'll have to have bees and plant your flowers. Surely the whole point of being redeemed out of Egypt was so that at last they could get into the land and start munching their honey, eating their grapes and drinking their milk—what else? I mean, why else would you want to be redeemed? They had been slaves in Egypt under the taskmasters. They got a few cucumbers apparently, but they didn't get much honey down there. They were slaves and owned very little; surely the whole point of redemption was to get them into the inheritance so they could settle down in their bungalows, enjoy their farms, the milk and the honey.

If you think that, I must ask you another question. You're going home one of these days to your inheritance in heaven—what's the chief point of going to heaven? To be able to ride

---

<sup>5</sup> See [Appendix 1](#), Section IV onwards.

down the streets made of gold, to have a new body with no more arthritis and pain, to have doors made of pearls, whole pearls—why else would you want to go to heaven? In other words, what is the chief point of redemption? What is its goal, its chief enjoyment?

Let this ancient text tell us what in God's mind was the chief benefit he would confer upon them when they came into the land of Canaan. There would be grass and cows and bees and honey and flowers, wine and olive presses and a bungalow or two. But what were they compared with this supreme benefit, that even there in Canaan the transcendent Lord of all creation, time and space, condescended to come down and dwell among them? What joy could you compare with that? How would you rate the grass and the honey compared with having the living God dwell in your midst? You could go to his tent of meeting and know that your prayers reached the very heart of God. He was not a long, long way off in his heaven; he had come down to dwell in your very midst.

Oh my brother, my sister, the real point of going home to heaven is not a few golden streets and pearly gates and one or two angels around you as servants. The real goal that you're longing for is to see the great tabernacle of God descend from heaven. When time was no more and the present earth and heaven had fled away, John waited to see where all history had led and the goal of all God's redemptive ways. He tells us:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them.' (Rev 21:1-3)

A moment's thought tells us that must surely be so. The virgin birth, the manger, all the sorrows of Gethsemane and Calvary, the cross and the resurrection, were not done simply so that we should tread golden streets. They come from the very heart of God who proposes to confer on us the biggest joy and wonder that little creatures could know—to have the living God dwelling in our midst. Isn't that why you want to go?

There came a day in Israel's history in the wilderness where they had grievously sinned against God. They had gone after their golden calf and other silly, nonsensical idols. They found other goals to aim at in their desert pilgrimage and God was so angry he threatened to destroy them. Moses pleaded with God on their behalf, and God in part forgave them. 'All right Moses, I said that I would give Israel the land flowing with milk and honey. Take them to Canaan and they can have it, but I shan't be coming with you. They don't want me; they want their golden calf. So they can have the land without me.'

What would you have said to that offer?—'Sorry you're not coming Lord, but we're still very interested to go'? What Moses said was, 'If you don't go with us we don't want to go.' If you could have heaven without the Lord, would you go? What would a few pearls be, if you could get home to glory and never meet the Lord? But if we have this hope, that one day the chief glory of heaven will be the tabernacle of God with men, it carries an implication, doesn't it? What is the chief point of our salvation? Is it to save us from the risk of perishing eternally? Surely that's not the chief point?



Listen to the blessed Lord Jesus discussing the matter in the famous fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John. Before he leaves his disciples he wants to tell them two things: 'I'm going away to prepare a place for you; and if I go away I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there you may be also' (vv. 2–3). Praise God for that hope. One day he's coming to take us to heaven and where he is there we shall be also. Not long after that he said, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him' (v. 23).

In spite of its waywardness my little heart says, 'Holy Lord, the biggest thing I could know is that the Lord Jesus and the Father should come and make their abode with me.'

## 2. Provision of cities of refuge

Objective Number One was entering the inheritance. What would Objective Number Two be? It follows on logically, doesn't it? When the seven tribes were eventually given their particular inheritances two things are specially mentioned.<sup>6</sup> In the first place, they had to give up a number of cities to become cities of refuge, so that if anybody accidentally killed a fellow human being he could flee there and find security and safety from the hands of the avenger of blood. So the Israelites had to give back some of their inheritance for the salvation of men who were in mortal danger. Then they had to give up a lot more cities for the Levites to dwell in. It was marvellous to have God dwelling among them in a tabernacle; but he would need to be served, so they had to give back some of their inheritance to support the Levites who should maintain the service of God in his tabernacle on behalf of the nation.

We have a vast spiritual inheritance. It is given free, gratis, and for nothing, but am I not right in thinking that God has a claim on us and what he has given us? One of our richest blessings is the lovely bunch of grapes of forgiveness, such as David munched when he wrote his glorious psalm, 'Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered' (Ps 32:1). What a thing it is to sit down and enjoy those lovely grapes out of our God-given inheritance. Tell me, has God given that wonderful gift of forgiveness just for our own selfish benefit, or are there men and women around us who are in mortal danger? The avenger of blood is on their case and they need to be saved. God has a claim on us. He'll expect us to take some of the blessings that we have been given—the spiritual freedom, the spiritual joy, the knowledge of salvation—and use them to construct cities of refuge for men and women that are in mortal danger of perishing eternally. You see, there could come creeping over me at times a kind of a feeling that because I'm saved and secure and I know the wonderful forgiveness of the Lord, that's all I need. No, Christian friend, never! The Lord who has given us these great gifts requires that in return we share in the evangelisation of the world.

## 3. Provision of cities for the Levites

In Israel the service of the Lord was conducted by the priests and Levites. We haven't time to elucidate the details, but God's claim on them was ultimately based on redemption. In the day of the Passover God spared Israel's firstborn, whereas the firstborn of the Egyptians perished.

---

<sup>6</sup> See [Appendix 1](#), Section V.

By an intricate arrangement the Levites were taken in place of the firstborn, so that they might serve God. The logic was that God had provided the Passover lamb by which the wrath of the destroying angel was averted and the firstborn saved. Says God, if it hadn't been for me the firstborn would have perished. They are alive because of my redeeming mercy and now I claim the firstborn for myself. It was no good arguing, 'I have a right to my own life; I don't want to feel that I've got to give my life up to the Lord!'

'Well then, you shouldn't have got saved. You shouldn't have asked me to save you,' God would say.

And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised . . . You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.  
(2 Cor 5:15; 1 Cor 6:19–20)

There's a word for taking something that isn't yours and appropriating it to yourself, and it's a very nasty word. We've been bought with a price; if as believers we take ourselves and use ourselves simply for ourselves and forget that we're owned by the Lord and meant to be living for him, we are guilty of the most appalling theft that is possible for a human being. It is to take something bought with the blood of Christ, belonging to him and to misappropriate it merely for ourselves!

When the Levites entered upon their office (Num 8), first of all they were taken in sight of the altar where Moses offered them to God as a living sacrifice. The same logic is applied to us in the New Testament, 'I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1).

Where shall we get the spiritual strength and the energy to do it? It won't come necessarily out of our poverty stricken hearts. But God has given us a great inheritance, so enjoy your grapes, let your cows munch the grass and give you the milk! Feast yourself on the riches you have in Christ and see whether your heart doesn't begin to burn with desires to give yourself to the blessed Lord as your reasonable service.

## Objective achieved

Out of their inheritance they set up the cities of refuge for those in mortal danger, and they maintained the Levitical priesthood to serve the Lord in his tabernacle. God's Spirit puts the whole business of redemption and enjoying the inheritance in its true sense of proportion. When we come to consider the sixth and last part of the second phase of the occupation, we shall find it deals not with an objective that was actually achieved, but with an objective to be aimed at and remain always before their hearts and eyes and minds.<sup>7</sup> All three major stories are concerned with *the uninterrupted service of the Lord*. Provision was made so that, in spite of all the difficulties that might come in the way, the service of the Lord might nonetheless continue.

---

<sup>7</sup> See [Appendix 1](#), Section VI

So far then we have thought in general terms and surveyed the message that is conveyed to us by the simple literary structure of this book. In our closing moments let's think very briefly of those four stories we read from Section IV. They are easy to remember—a lot of the rest is full of names of geographical places that are impossible to pronounce. Here at least are four stories related to the inheritance that anybody could see what they meant.

1. Caleb claimed what had been promised to him (14:12)
2. Caleb's daughter Achsah came and asked for more and she was granted her request (15:19)
3. The daughters of Zelophehad claimed what had been promised to them (17:4)
4. The whole tribe of Joseph asked for more, but didn't get exactly what they requested (17:16)

Believers all around the world know the story of Caleb very well. By and large he is a much loved character and personality, an inspiration to thousands who like to picture him in their minds, eighty years plus and still chasing giants. May God give us a few more Calebs! He saw giants, not as potential opposition; he saw them as meat to be eaten, something to exercise his muscles on in the morning; giants to be cleared away so that he might enter into his glorious inheritance.

I suppose when Caleb set himself to prayer he talked now and again about difficulties. But I'm persuaded he didn't talk about difficulties like we do in our prayer meetings! You should listen to us; our prayers are full of difficulties. Caleb had a few giants, but he didn't seem to treat them like we treat our difficulties and let them get him down in the dumps. He honestly believed that God meant him to enter his inheritance and giants were made to be taken—alive if need be. He came to Joshua and said, 'Give me this mountain, I've heard there's a few giants up there and I'd like to have a go at them.' Good old Caleb, intending to go into his inheritance, he wholly followed the Lord.

Perhaps we shall see the significance of that phrase more fully if we take a few seconds to put it in its true historical context. When Caleb says, 'I wholly followed the LORD' (14:8), he is not thinking of what he did when he got into Canaan and his inheritance. He did carry on following the Lord, of course; but when he says, 'I wholly followed the LORD', he's thinking of what he did during those forty years in the wilderness before he got into his inheritance. When he and Joshua went with the spies, the other ten brought back an evil report and discouraged the people. They apostatised from God and led the whole nation in revolt against the Lord and against Moses. They refused to go into their inheritance and talked about making a captain to take them back to Egypt. God reacted by saying, 'I swear in my wrath, that they should never enter into my rest' (Ps 95:11).

It is against the background of that great apostasy on the part of the whole nation that Caleb says to Joshua, 'I did not give up the hope of the inheritance and go after other gods, I wholly followed the Lord. Moses promised me that one day I should have my inheritance when God took us into the land' (Josh 14:7–9). Even with his faithfulness to God, for forty-five years he didn't get into the land (v. 10). As he wandered round the wilderness with the rest of them, he maintained his hope that God would fulfil his word. He hoped Moses would bring

them in, but Moses proved incapable of the task. Caleb had to wait until Joshua was raised up and took Israel at last into their inheritance. When Joshua took them in, Caleb said to him, 'I claim what God promised me all those years ago. Now therefore give me this mountain, of which the LORD spoke in that day' (v. 12).

As I think of Caleb, I think first of the Jewish nation all down the centuries—or at least that part of the nation that remained faithful to God. Sometimes it was reduced almost to vanishing point. In the desert it was reduced to two or three or four people and the rest of the nation apostatised. In the days before the exile the vast majority had apostatised from God and it was but a few faithful folks like Daniel who wholly followed the Lord. At the time when our incarnate Lord walked the earth, nearly the whole nation wanted to crucify him. In all the long generations there were people like Caleb who, in spite of Israel's apostasies, remained faithful to God. However, they couldn't enter the inheritance, could they?

They entered Canaan, with its grass and its bees, but as the Epistle to the Hebrews points out they had not yet entered the real rest of God. They could not enter through Moses. With faith and patience they saw the promises far off and embraced them. They lived in hope, but they never actually received the benefit of those promises. 'And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect' (Heb 11:39–40).

Why weren't they allowed immediately to enter into all the spectacular blessings that we have entered into? The writer to the Hebrews says that God had provided some better thing in connection with us, so that those ancient Jewish saints without us should not be made perfect. They had to wait until the Lord Jesus came. King David himself never entered the holiest of all. He was obliged to offer sacrifice after sacrifice, year after year, in which he showed that not yet did he have a conscience made perfect (Heb 9:9). But prophet that he was, like Abraham, he saw the coming great promises of God, the glorious inheritance, and had to wait for it until the greater-than-Joshua came and brought his people into their inheritance.

#### *Genuine profession of salvation*

That has a lesson for us as well. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews was written to people that obviously were Jews by birth. They had made some profession of believing on the Lord Jesus. In their early days they had suffered persecution for the sake of the Lord Jesus, but more recently they had been absenting themselves from meetings of the church. The writer is beginning to get worried about them; why aren't they coming to meet with their fellow believers? Then the terrible question enters the writer's mind: could it be that they are behaving like the generation in the wilderness? They came out of Egypt and journeyed towards the promised land, but when they got there they said, 'If we'd known it was like that we wouldn't have come!' They apostatised from the living God and showed that they were not, and never had been, genuine believers. 'So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief' (Heb 3:19). 'Those who formerly received the good news failed enter because of disobedience' (4:6). The word that the writer uses for disobedience is a word that, although used many times in the New Testament, is never used of a true believer, only of those that profess to be religious but refuse God's salvation. Caleb's contemporaries came out of Egypt, but in the end they were shown never to have been believers at all.

The writer to the Hebrews is wondering if these people who profess to be Christians are genuine. Could it be that what happened to their forefathers in the wilderness has happened to them? That is, they professed to be redeemed, professed to believe in the Lord Jesus, but now they are abandoning the meetings of the church, abandoning fellowship with other believers and not making progress in the things of God. Is it because at heart they never were true believers at all?

We should not shun the exhortation to examine our own hearts. We have professed to be believers, to be on our way to glory. Am I a true believer; am I like Caleb who wholly followed the Lord, or have I merely had a kind of religious experience and some spiritual excitement without ever having been genuinely born again? How would you know whether you were one or the other? Let's use one very simple test from among many. We're hoping one day to be in the inheritance and to be conformed there to the image of God's Son. Says the inspired apostle John, 'Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure' (1 John 3:3). That's not an exhortation; it's a statement of fact.

Caleb wholly followed the Lord and showed himself a genuine Old Testament believer. There were many more who followed him and at last when the Lord Jesus came he showed them the full revelation of God. Then there was Achsah and Othniel (Josh 15:17). They didn't claim what was promised, they asked for more. Can you imagine it! Said Achsah: 'Daddy, you know that I'm grateful for this bit of ground you've given us for my inheritance, but it's a bit of dry ground in the southern Negev—you couldn't grow anything on it! You must give us some water.' Caleb was moved and said, 'You're right, my dear. I tell you what; I'll give you the upper and the nether springs as well' (v. 19). Now Othniel and Achsah could make something of it, they grew the fruits of Zion with these upper and nether springs.

They asked for more. Should not we? We've been brought into our inheritance and we have the Holy Spirit, so why should we ever ask for more? Well precisely because we have the Holy Spirit! Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe. (1:17-19)

My heart is so small and my imagination so poverty stricken. I am saved, but I haven't the beginnings of the notion of what the great hope is that is set before me. I need more. Shall I not come, like Othniel's wife, to the blessed Lord and pray for the ever-increasing illumination of his Spirit, that I may grasp what is the hope of his calling? My dear believer, what will it be to be with Christ, to dwell with the Lord, to be part of his bride? Queen when he is king. What shall it be, with him to rule and reign and to administer the great universe that yet shall be? Who can tell the wonder of it, that little bits of clay should not only be forgiven, but united with a divine person, the Son of God himself—who can explain the mystery? 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor 12:13).

I do so need to grasp the reality and the wonder of his salvation and let the hope that is before me grip my heart. It will only be understood and appreciated as the blessed Holy Spirit continues his work of illumination in my heart. I need to know the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. If I could see you as one day you will be when you're at home with the Lord, I should be tempted right now to get down on my knees and worship you, like John worshipped the angel. You're going to be better than angels, aren't you? That dear man sitting by your side—I know he's a bit of a trial sometimes, like we all are, but you should see him when Christ is finished with him.

You do believe it, don't you? I don't know about you, but the wealth of divine things so easily ebbs away out of my heart and spiritual things become a grind, like a penal servitude. They go like Pharaoh's chariot with the wheels off. We lose the wealth of it and we need to pray for more. More of God's Holy Spirit—more of his Spirit in our Bible readings, in our evangelism, in our worship, in our personal devotions—more of his Spirit illumining our hearts. As Paul prayed also, strengthening our hearts, that the blessed Lord Jesus may dwell in our heart. He's there already, but he wants to extend his residence into every nook and cranny of our personality. I am a genuine believer and I hope to dwell with the Lord above. I shouldn't be content to have the Lord dwelling in just a little bit of me now. I should pray for more; to be strengthened by God's Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may ever more completely take up his residence within (see Eph 3:16–17).

Finally there were the other two stories, but I mustn't enlarge upon them, nor test your patience any more! The daughters of Zelophehad came and they claimed what had been promised. They said, 'Our father died and he had no sons. If you don't give us his inheritance, the family name will die out. Our father was not involved in the rebellion of Korah, he died in his own sin' (Num 27:3). Why then should his family name die out? Moses took it to God and God said, 'The girls can inherit, and keep the family name alive' (v. 7). So now they come to Joshua and claim what God and Moses had promised them. We should be able to urge the same claim before God. We're none of us perfect; but thank God we can say we haven't been involved in the sin of Korah.

Is that kind of thing possible nowadays? Of course it is. Our dear brother Jude warns us of the very same thing. Writing to some of the early Christians he tells them to beware of the false teachers that have and will enter Christendom. He was drawing an analogy between Korah and his spiritual rebellion and some of these false teachers. Korah raised a rebellion against the apostle of his faith, Moses, and against the high priest. He rejected both, just as at Calvary the Jewish nation rose up and rejected their Messiah.<sup>8</sup>

Woe to them! For they walked in the way of Cain and abandoned themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error and perished in Korah's rebellion. (v. 11)

---

<sup>8</sup> The recording ends at this point, leaving the talk unfinished.

## The Second Phase of the Conquest

### *(2) Provision for Maintaining God's Service and for the Salvation of those in Danger*

Now at long last we have come to the final section of the book of Joshua, and in common with all the other sections of this great book it contains three major episodes.<sup>9</sup>

1. The near-battle between the two and a half tribes, their return to their inheritance and their building of an altar on the banks of Jordan (22:1–34).
2. An address that Joshua delivered in his old age to the leaders of the children of Israel (23:1–16).
3. The final address—final so far as we know—that Joshua gave to the elders and the whole nation before he died (24:1–27).

Then again, when we get down to the detail, in common with all the other sections of the book the three episodes of this final section prove to have a major common theme, *a major common objective*. That objective relates to the service of the Lord, as indeed do Sections IV and V. In Section VI the theme of the service of the Lord is particularly taken up with the objective of *Israel continually maintaining it*. We know that was not always achieved, but it was placed before them and provision made for them to be able to maintain the service of the Lord without interruption down through the generations.

The three episodes are concerned also with the obstacles that might arise in the way of achieving that objective, for these chapters are nothing if they are not realistic. They haven't forgotten that all who set themselves to maintain the service of the Lord will from time to time find great pressures and obstacles in the way. So these three chapters shall talk to us at a very practical level about our serving the Lord and about the difficulties that lie in the way of our service too.

### **The obstacles**

1. The tendency already visible in Israel, even in Joshua's day, towards the unscriptural, unauthorised division of the nation; unauthorised and unscriptural exclusivism (ch. 22).
2. The temptation among the people of God to worldliness of heart and to compromise with idols (ch. 23).

---

<sup>9</sup> See [Appendix 1](#), Section VI.

### 3. The difficulty in actually serving the Lord (ch. 24).

As Joshua told them, 'The LORD your God is a jealous God' (v. 19)—he will exert some stringent and rigorous demands of those who would serve him. So they would be very well advised first of all to sit down and count the cost (as our blessed Lord Jesus advised us), to see whether having begun they had enough to finish. Serving the Lord is not just some pastime, a little hobby to be taken in hand when we've nothing more worthwhile to do of a Saturday afternoon, or a Sunday. Because God is a jealous god he will exert tremendously stringent demands upon those who would seriously serve him, and we must be prepared to face those rigorous demands.

In our final session we shall be dealing with the third obstacle and its tremendous challenge, 'Choose this day whom you will serve' (24:15).

#### ***Obstacle 1***

But now we shall concentrate upon the other two chapters. The first story we come to is the story in chapter 22, of the two and a half tribes and the altar that they built on the bank of the river Jordan.

Let's consider first of all the facts and the motives that these two and a half tribes had, for subsequently they got themselves into a tremendous lot of bother for building any sort of an altar like that. The Scriptures tell us that the two and half tribes were given their inheritance east of Jordan. Not only was it given to them by Moses, but, as God's inspired word says, it was given to them according to the commandment of the LORD (v. 3). Therefore, when Joshua dismissed them and gave them permission to go back to their inheritance on the east side of Jordan, they were fulfilling the commandment of the Lord and of Moses. So off they went with the blessing of the Lord bestowed on them through Joshua.

They eventually came to the river Jordan, and what a glad sight it was for their weary war worn eyes to see their lovely God-given inheritance gleaming on the other side. When it was first given them Moses had laid down a condition.

You must not attempt to settle down into your inheritance now. You must build stockades, leave your wives and children behind you, and you yourselves pass over, armed, before the people of the LORD. You are to keep with the united armies of Israel, join in their battles, take the fight to the enemy, and never give up or go back to your inheritance until the LORD has given victory to the whole nation and rest to his people.' (Num 32:20-24)

The two and a half tribes agreed with Moses to do precisely that. They said that they were prepared to leave their families behind, cross over Jordan, go in the vanguard of the army, fight with all their might and main and never give up until the last enemy had been put down (vv. 25-27). Then and then only would they return to their inheritance.

This chapter tells us that they actually did what they promised. They made no attempt to go back; they kept in the fight with the whole of the nation until every enemy was subdued and the land had rest. Now, at long last, they were coming to their inheritance. God had given it to them and they had earned it by years of fighting. It must have been a marvellously enticing sight for the warriors so stained with the toil of war, but just as they got to the river



some of them began to hesitate. You may say that they were ultra-cautious, or timid or something, but some of them began to say,

‘Before we cross this river Jordan, shouldn’t we take a precaution or two? Our brethren are very good fellows, but what if their children in later generations were to come to our children and say,

“We can’t allow you to serve the Lord with us; you don’t belong to us. The Lord has set this river Jordan as a boundary between us. You’re on the other side and you have nothing to do with us whatsoever. Don’t come up to Jerusalem, or to Shiloh where the tabernacle is. You have no portion in the Lord and we shall not allow you to take part because you live on the other side of Jordan.”

Here we are being commanded never to interrupt the service of the Lord and in our hearts we want to serve him, but what a disaster if future generations got it all muddled up and forgot that the Lord gave us this inheritance east of Jordan, and cut us off from serving the Lord because we’ve gone and taken what he has given us.’

So they put their heads together, and came up with a scheme. They decided to build an altar (v. 10). Because it was forbidden in holy Scripture, no burnt offerings, sin offerings, peace offerings or any other offerings would be offered on it. They would just build an altar to the exact specifications of the altar of the Lord in the tabernacle at Shiloh.

‘So then, if ever the children of our brethren come to our children and begin to say that they don’t belong to Israel because they live across Jordan and can have no part in the service of the LORD, they can say, “We do belong to the LORD —look at the pattern of the altar (v. 2. Is it not built exactly to the specifications of the altar in the tabernacle of the LORD?” (v. 28)

‘They’ll have to admit that the specifications are correct and then we shall say, “How do you suppose we got to know those specifications? We were there when they were given! Moreover we haven’t built this altar to offer any sacrifices. We own only one altar—the altar of the Lord in the place where the Lord has put his name. We own only that altar and offer our sacrifices when we ought to on the altar of the Lord at Shiloh, or wherever the Lord might choose to put his name. We built this altar to prove to you that we love the same God as you do; we want to serve the Lord as you do and keep his word as you do. You’ve no right to say that we don’t belong and to shut us out and exclude us.”’

Surely their fears were a bit exaggerated. What Israelite in his senses would ever begin to try and cut off two and a half tribes of the people of the Lord like that? You might so think, but it nearly happened. These two and a half tribes, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh, have received a very bad press over the years. I was brought up to believe that they were a very doubtful lot! World borderers they were, who ought not to have been dwelling on the other side of Jordan. They should have been pressing on across the Jordan, west into the great inheritance. I was told that the trouble was that, when they saw the land east of Jordan full of grass fit for cows and cattle, they asked Moses if they could be given this part of the country for their inheritance. The Lord had given them victory over the people that occupied it and they were now dead, so would Moses consider allotting it to them for their particular possession? My elders taught me that that was their first mistake; deciding these things on business grounds because the grass was green, like Lot did when he went down to Sodom.

Perhaps if you didn't look at it any more deeply you would agree with the conclusion. Indeed, superficially taken, even Moses made a mistake (see Num 32). He spoke to them very strongly and it says something for the grace of the two and a half tribes that they let him have his say completely. When he had finished they said to Moses, 'We don't mean any such thing! We are not refusing to go into the promised land. We want all the land for all the people of God and we're prepared to leave our wives and children east of Jordan and go over armed, like the Lord commanded, and be in the very forefront of the battle. We shall fight for the whole people of God, lead their armies into the conquest and never return to our possession until the Lord has given us perfect rest. We are not refusing to go into the promised land! This is the bit of the promised land that the Lord may be pleased to give us.' Moses said, 'The LORD bless you and give you this land, only you carry on fighting.' It would have been very serious if the two and a half tribes, in choosing to live east of Jordan, were refusing to go on and fight the battles of the Lord.

*How should we convince anyone that we are genuine believers?*

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:12-14 KJV)

Can we say that? How else would you prove that you're a genuine believer? To be saved and then settle down and give up the fight—that not only injures myself, it will injure my fellow believers. It will discourage them. It is at those times when I'm discouraged and I feel like giving up, then I see a brother or sister forging ahead and fighting valiantly the Lord's battles in spite of tribulations and pressures galore, that it speaks to my heart and I pull up my spiritual socks and say, 'Well, if they can do it, so must I.' We do not have permission to give up fighting alongside the whole people of God and making progress until the Lord comes.

If you judge genuineness by those criteria then the two and a half tribes get 100%. Joshua commends them in chapter 1 and he commends them again in chapter 22 for fulfilling what they promised. They marched and fought with the people of God until the Lord gave the nation complete rest. Only now are they returning to their inheritance.

When they built that altar they got themselves into trouble. The other tribesmen didn't wait to come and talk quietly with them and say, 'Brothers, this is a rather novel thing you've done. What have you done this for?' They didn't wait to ask; to them it was self-evident that this was a wicked thing. It was a departure from what always had been done before and, without first consulting the two and a half tribes, they prepared themselves to go to war and destroy their true brothers in the Lord.

It did seem to them to be a very wicked thing that these men had done. Why did they build that altar? Didn't they remember what happened at Baal-Peor, when the whole nation apostatised and went off offering other sacrifices to other gods at other altars (Num 25)? God

had put his judgment upon the whole nation. Didn't they remember what happened with Achan (Josh 7)? He was forbidden to touch the devoted thing; when he took it the whole nation was involved in his folly and God had to judge the whole nation. With high indignation the rest of the tribes came, ready to slaughter the two and a half tribes because they judged them to be utterly apostate and evil.

The fears of the two and a half tribes hadn't been groundless, had they? Once more they waited until the rest had had their say. When they had finished they said, 'We have no intention of offering sacrifices to any other gods and we don't intend to offer sacrifices on this altar to the Lord God. We know that is forbidden in holy Scripture. There is only one altar and it is with the tabernacle in Shiloh. We intend to go up always to the altar at Shiloh to the place where God has put his name, just like you do. "The LORD knows"' —(they repeated it twice because this is the first and basic thing and they were acting before the Lord)—'the Lord God of Israel knows why we've done it and that we have no intention of breaking his word. We said to ourselves that in the course of the years misunderstandings could arise. Your children might come to our children and say, "You have no part with us! We can't allow you into the Tabernacle at Shiloh. You're on the other side of Jordan, and God has put Jordan as a border between us."'

Did Scripture say that? Of course it didn't. God had never put Jordan as a border between them, but these folks were manufacturing ideas that had no biblical basis, no explicit Scripture. They were just using common sense and making unbiblical deductions; setting down borders to keep some of the tribes out and thinking it was Godliness. So, having explained that they had no intention of offering sacrifices on that altar, they explained the reason. 'We built it so that we can say to any that would dismiss us as being schismatic or sectarian or something; we want the altar of the Lord and his pattern for it as much as you do.'

*How should we prove that we are not sectarian?*

As I read those far off stories, I say to myself, 'Suppose anybody were to accuse me of being schismatic, what would I say to them?' Suppose anybody were to accuse you of being sectarian, what would you say to them? How would you prove you weren't? In my heart of hearts I might even adopt the same device as the two and a half tribes.

We have no literal altar now, but we do have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle (Heb 13:10 KJV). That altar stands for us as a symbol of the great sacrifice of our blessed Lord. God help me that my life may be conformed to the pattern of his cross and sacrifice. That's precisely the point, perhaps, that these two and a half tribes were making in their symbolic language and it is even clearer for us as Christians.

And every [Jewish] priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. (Heb 10:11–12)

Behold the pattern of the altar; do you want that pattern? There are many in Christendom that don't. They have turned the Lord's Supper into a sacrifice and day by day and week by

week they repeat the sacrifice—which is a veritable abomination in the eyes of God. God’s pattern is that this blessed man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sin for ever, sat down. It is by virtue of this that God is able to assure all believers that he will remember their sins and iniquities no more (v. 17 KJV). This is basic; but, as the years go by and Christendom becomes more and more confused, how we need to hold to the biblical doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. We need to hold that pattern, it’s absolutely fundamental in my experience of God. I was a sinner deserving hell and my only hope of eternal salvation is that Christ died. This is absolutely basic to salvation for all the people of God.

He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (Heb 9:26–28)

I need no other argument,  
I need no other plea;  
It is enough that Jesus died,  
And that He died for me.<sup>10</sup>

Well if you hold it and I hold it, we’re brothers, aren’t we? So I must ask you to listen to Paul the apostle. ‘Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves’ (Phil 2:3). Alas how often amongst the people of God the service of God has been brought into disrepute because of strife and unbiblical division and exclusivism.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (vv. 5–8)

God help us to maintain the pattern of the Lord. But it is sometimes possible to stand for what we feel is truth—like the rest of the tribes did when they came to fight against the two and a half tribes—and in the very process break the pattern of behaviour that our Lord Jesus himself has placed. You cannot be at the table of the Lord and the table of demons (1 Cor 10:21). God is a jealous God and if we would enjoy the benefits of all that his great salvation brings us through the sacrifice of Christ, then we must see to it that we stand clear of idolatry. If we don’t, the Lord’s jealousy will judge and chasten us until we come to a better frame of mind and we learn to be loyal to him. So therefore, the thing that will keep the Lord’s people together is that by God’s grace we seek to maintain the pattern of the altar.

---

<sup>10</sup> Eliza Edmunds Hewitt (1851–1920), ‘My faith has found a resting place’.

## **Obstacle 2**

In chapter 23 the difficulty was a different one. Not internal within the people of God, but a danger external to them. Joshua pointed out that at this stage there was much land to be possessed; there were enemies still to be conquered. Therefore they were to be careful lest, instead of going on fighting the enemy, they settled down and compromised with them; and then intermarried their daughters with their sons and vice versa. They were to be careful not to go off and serve other gods, nor to love them. They were to love the LORD their God, with all their heart, soul and might (Deut 6:5).

So, obstacle number two is the temptation to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed with idolatry of the sort that we love the world. In New Testament language we would put it like this, 'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1 John 2:15).

### *What is 'the world'?*

In the first Epistle of John there are three aspects of the world.

1. Its hostility. From time to time it will behave like Cain did towards Abel. Don't be surprised if the world hates you (3:13). It hated the Lord first (John 15:18)
2. Its pressure. Then there is the world's massive weight that makes it difficult for a believer to keep the commandments of the Lord. His commandments are not burdensome (5:3); but often the world makes it difficult for a believer to keep them. John encourages us that we have within us the power to overcome that dead weight of the world's pressure. 'For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith' (v. 4).
3. Its attractiveness. The world can be very glamorous. It's after our hearts, to take us away from the love of the Father. 'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides for ever' (2:15–17).

I don't know about you, but when it comes to explaining what the world is, it seems to me that many folks have a difficulty. What is worldliness? I don't mean to be flippant but I tell a story that has a serious intent. Scripture plainly tells us to love not the world, and in my youth it was a thing that exercised the elders in my assembly—naturally so. But when it came to deciding what the world was we ran into a few difficulties.

I remember it was thought a typically worldly thing if a lady came to any meeting with light coloured stockings on. In those days they all wore black stockings, or the most daring wore brown. A young woman once came, and there were cries of horror. How worldly she was, wearing white stockings! That changed and presently all the ladies were wearing light coloured stockings. Fashion changed again and in London the height of fashion was to wear black stockings. One day there came a young lady from London down to my sleepy town,

into my assembly, and she'd got black stockings on. 'How worldly she is,' they said. So black stockings that were once the very opposite of being worldly had somehow become worldly!

I don't know the chemistry of it and I don't trouble to think it through. Of this I'm sure, worldliness in this sense is not in things. We deceive ourselves if we think it's just deciding on the right coloured stockings that will make us unworldly. You can be dressed in the most sombre fashion, if that's what you think is unworldly, and yet your heart be away from the Lord and as worldly as worldly can be.

Worldliness does not consist in things. It's when we take the good and lovely things of life—no harm in themselves—and we let those things claim our hearts. Then, instead of our enjoyment of them leading us nearer to the Lord, to thank him and more rigorously and devotedly to serve him, we let those things, lovely in themselves, devour our heart's affections and take them from the Lord.

You can't get two pints of milk into a one pint bottle; you cannot simultaneously be loving the world and loving the Lord. I could let my studies so absorb me until my love of them draws my heart away from the Lord and I become as worldly as black stockings were thought to be. I could let my farm, my business, my anything become my great objective in life and little by little diminish my heart's love for the Lord. Use the world as God gives it, but don't love it. See to it that in your heart of hearts there reigns One supreme, to whom you give your love absolutely and your love for anything else is subject to him.

So may the Lord use his word to speak to us, that we may ponder it again, determined that our behaviour shall be examined in its light so that we might see its explicit commands for what we do and what we should avoid.

## The Second Phase of the Conquest

### *(3) Uninterrupted Service of the Lord*

In the course of history, there have been multitudes of speeches made by multitudes of speakers. Most of them have perished beyond record, but some of them have been so influential in their day that historians have preserved them for us.

Among those speeches it often happens that one or two phrases have occurred and caught the imaginations of those who have heard and those who have subsequently read them. Such speeches I suppose were those of Winston Churchill. In the dark days of Europe he rallied the British Isles in their fight against the monstrous powers of the axis nations. Out of those many speeches that people listened to with bated breath have come such phrases as, 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'<sup>11</sup>

If we're thinking of speeches that have made their impact on the world and have had a life beyond their original delivery, this speech that Joshua gave in his farewell sermon to his nation deserves to rank high among them. Joshua had been the nation's saviour, the captain of their salvation. He had brought them within sight and within possession of the glorious inheritance that God had promised to them through his servant Abraham. Many an Israelite, particularly in the days when they were living in the slave labour camps of Egypt, had been told by their nurses and their mothers the ancient stories that God had given to their father Abraham. Around the campfires in the slave labour camps after the day was done, their hands were red with the handling of the bricks and their backs were aching, they repeated these glorious stories from the Old Testament. The God of heaven had promised them a glorious inheritance flowing with milk and honey, and the little children listened with wide eyes and open mouths—as they listen still in our Sunday Schools. Of course, when the boys and girls got to teenage years and the young men and women married, they listened to those stories perhaps with a great deal more cynicism. What were these stories of an inheritance flowing with milk and honey? Was it real, this supposed promise of God of his great inheritance? And how are you to face it in a modern day, when you are grown up and no longer children in Sunday School? Is it another story to be entertained with, like the stories of Father Christmas and Red Riding Hood?

Joshua was the man that had made it real. As the captain of their salvation, he had brought them from a veritable desert into the promised land. Their feet now stood amidst the grass and the flowers, and such wealth as they had never conceived of as possibly being their own before. Joshua had brought them in and shown that it was real. Now in his farewell speech he

---

<sup>11</sup> House of Commons, London, 20 August 1940, online at <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/113-the-few>.

brings before them the condition upon which they could continue to enjoy it: 'Choose this day,' said he, 'whom you will serve' (24:15).

This speech deserves to be ranked amongst the great and famous speeches of the world, for not only did it mark the direction of his nation's spiritual experience all down the following centuries, but that little phrase, 'Choose this day whom you will serve,' so encapsulates what lies at the heart of true religion that it has proved effective in untold thousands of people's lives. It has been a verse that God has used at those critical moments in life, when people would come to see that all this talk of heaven in the Bible is no fairy tale—not something to be laid aside with your nursery rhyme book and the pretty pictures.

Jesus Christ our Lord is risen from the dead; he has 'brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim 1:10). The resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord stands amongst the most relevant events in the whole of human history. It shows us that there is an inheritance indeed, which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Sometimes in your quiet moments you've longed for it to be true, haven't you? There has arisen a great longing in your heart. Instinctively you know that man was not made for a few brief years, and that has been reinforced by the great historic fact that Jesus Christ our Lord died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3). He has ascended into heaven, brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, and has gone to prepare that inheritance for us. The beauty of this world was not given to mock us, the music to tantalise us; God doesn't play games with us. He points us to the realities of a glorious eternity—a veritable eternal banquet when God shall satisfy every legitimate desire and infinitely more beside.

### ***Obstacle 3***

And so we come to the third obstacle and its tremendous challenge, the difficulty in actually serving the Lord. Joshua declared to his fellow nationals what the conditions were for enjoying their inheritance and how easy it is for us to borrow his words. The blessed Holy Spirit who inspired Joshua stands in our midst today to speak those words to our hearts, 'Choose this day whom you will serve' (24:15). We come therefore to the very crux of our human relationship with God our Creator, to the very pivot on which the question of our salvation turns. Whether we shall be saved and enjoy heaven eternally, or whether we shall be lost and forever beyond recovery. You must choose whom you will serve; God himself could not make it clearer. If we would be in God's heaven, it depends on our choice. It is of course a wonderful thing that God has placed so much upon our choosing and given us the genuine ability to make that choice. God could have made us like machines, could he not? Indeed, I have known people who have complained and said, 'Why did God allow such a vast amount to hang upon a decision made in one's lifetime?' What alternative did God have? He could have made us without the power of choice like animals—superior robots. The implication of that is, if we had been made like animals we could not have been moral beings. To be moral beings with moral responsibility, it is an indispensable condition that we have power of choice.

If a bumblebee enters your open car window as you are doing 90 mph down the motorway, stings your eye and leads to disaster and you are killed, that would be unfortunate.



But I tell you straight; the magistrates will not haul the bumblebee into court to determine whether it's guilty or not. The bee bumbles as it was made to bumble and never did have the beginnings of a choice. Tell me, would you prefer to be a bumblebee, or a cow eating grass in a field, and never know what moral choice is, nor the haunting sense of the guilt of sin?

*The freedom and responsibility of choice*

To be human is to have choice that makes morality possible. God could have made us machines, but had he done so the greatest thing in all human experience would never have been there. That is of course, love. If you were to go home tired and weary and deposit yourself on the settee, the door opens and in comes a Mitsubishi robot and puts its arms around your neck, and it says, 'I love you', what would you do? You'd kick it in the ribs! Why don't you accept its love? The thing has been programmed to love you! God will not buy your love so cheap as to make you a machine; he wants no heavenly robots. He made us human beings and, therefore, if ever we were to be loved and to love, and to know what it means, we would have to have free choice. God doesn't want you to love him because you couldn't do anything else.

Heaven is not going to be filled with people who have been press-ganged there. They will be in heaven because they wanted to be there. They love God, though they had the choice to do otherwise. They were brought of their freewill to love God. We love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19), but it is not a mechanical compulsion. Who could discover the love of an infinite God, as expressed in the gift of his Son at Calvary, without feeling the overwhelming power of it? 'God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8). He gave us the choice and a very solemn choice it is, that God himself will respect for all eternity whether we say yes or no.

We learn what this means from some of the events that happened in the life of Jesus Christ our Lord, who is, as you know, God incarnate. The Bible record tells us of one occasion when he was crossing the lake of Galilee in a ship and they came upon a storm. Rising in his divine majesty, he commanded the waves and the wind to cease and there was a calm. When he arrived on the shore with his disciples they were met in the road by two demon possessed men who were out of their minds. So fierce were those demons that the locals dared not go through that part of the country. Our blessed Lord used his divine power to cast out the demons and brought the men to sanity.

When the people of the district came out they were told what had happened, and they saw the evidence of the wondrous powers of the Saviour over the very forces of hell itself. The demons had been sent into the swine owned by the local farmers, the swine had rushed into the sea and perished in the water. As the locals surveyed the cost and what it would mean to have a man like Jesus Christ in their neighbourhood, they came to a decision and they made their choice. They came to God incarnate and said, 'You've lost us our pigs. Please go!' And the God whom the wind and the waves could not resist respected the request of his creatures and went.

Such is the love of God that he's given you free will and he will respect it to the limits of eternity. God forbid that any one of us should deliberately say to Jesus Christ, 'Go'—because he will eventually go. There's so much depending upon the way we use our choice, let us listen again to the words that Joshua spoke: 'Choose this day whom you will serve.' Notice the individuality of the command; none can decide for the other. We play football in teams, we work in the factory as teams, but when it comes to the destiny of our souls we must stand individually before God. If you are invited to a party you choose whether you will go or not. However, not to bother to choose is still a choice—because in the end you don't get there. Today every one of us shall have chosen whether to serve God or some other idol.

Even now, after three thousand years, we pick up the urgency of Joshua. From his experience of being a great national leader he had discovered what men and women require to be in a healthy spiritual state. He knew of the almost incessant and invariable tendency to procrastinate—to put it off, to idle. We hope and imagine that somehow or another, we don't know quite how, one day we shall end up in God's heaven. But we shall not wander into heaven mistakenly, you know; we shan't go out for a walk one afternoon and suddenly end up in heaven without intending. If we would be there, the voices of every prophet and of our blessed Lord himself and the Holy Spirit tell us that there is a choice to be made. It must be made now. It is trifling irresponsibly with eternity if we say, 'Not now but some other day.' We must choose today whom we will serve.

Here God points out to us very, very plainly what genuine conversion is. On the one side salvation is a completely free gift of God; it is not by works. It is for all who in true repentance and faith will humbly receive it. Salvation means that I turn from serving one master, and thereafter commit myself to serving another. Writing to the Christians in Rome, Paul says:

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:17–28)

Ultimately there's a choice between two services—you serve sin, or you serve God. There's no option that says you can be saved from serving sin, but you don't need to serve God. There is no such salvation. Conversion is that we turn to God from our idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:9–10).

You may say perhaps, 'I'm not all that bad. You speak as if I were some shocking sinner!' I remember years ago, just after the war, I was travelling somewhere by train. Opposite me sat a young gentleman, a student I think. In those far off days people shared their rations, so he shared his sandwich with me and I shared my cup of tea with him. Eventually things turned to talking about spiritual matters and I happened to use the word *sin*.

'I don't believe in sin,' said he.

I said, 'Suppose you were clever enough to make a motor car, and five times out of ten, when you sat behind the wheel, the car went where you wanted it to go; but five other times it wouldn't take any notice and went where it wanted to go itself, what would you do?'

'I should scrap it,' he said. 'If I made a motor car I should want it to go ten times out of ten where I wanted it to go.'

'You'd better watch out that God doesn't scrap you too,' I replied.

We were made to do God's will, and the Bible's charge against us is, 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6). Just imagine the enormity of our sin. We were made by the transcendent Lord to do his pleasure and we've had the impertinence to go our own way, regardless of him and his word. It isn't that the things we've done have been so terrifically bad. They may have been sophisticated, but if the bent of our life has been just to go our own way then we have forfeited the very reason for which we were made. If you are still going your own way, choose today whom you will serve, otherwise God will have no option one day but to agree with your choice.

What I admire about holy Scripture is its sheer honesty, whether it's Joshua's speech here or what our blessed Lord said on similar topics in the New Testament. When the people, under the thrill of the eloquent preacher Joshua, responded by saying, 'Yes, we will serve the LORD,' Joshua said, 'I'm not talking about stirring some temporary emotion. Do you realise what it is to embark upon a life of serving God? *God is a holy and a jealous god*, and if you merely pretend to serve him he will discipline you.'

In English you can use the word jealous as a bad emotion. But in older English, and in the Hebrew from which this is taken, jealousy is a very good attitude. This is the jealousy that a man feels for a woman whom he loves more than he loves himself. It is indivisible from love. A man who really loves his wife will be jealous if anybody else takes her away. If you tell a man, 'Your wife has gone off with the next door neighbour,' and he says, 'I don't mind that really, she'll come back one of these days,' I think you can decide that he didn't love her. A man who loved his wife would be consumed with jealousy.

Our hearts try to take in the wonder and the awesomeness that God should love me. Why should he bother if I perished? How will you explain it, that I mean so much to God that he would get jealous over me? Has he not enough angels? He has enough believers in him—why should he get jealous if someone took one of his people from him? He's a jealous God and if we grow cold in heart, wander from him and are disloyal, he will be jealous. The New Testament tells us bluntly that he will chastise us (Heb 12:6). No true believer will ever be lost; God will never abandon anyone who has trusted him through Jesus Christ our Lord. But if we grow cold and wander from him and live for ourselves or for the world, he will chastise us until he brings us to a better frame of mind, so that we shall not at last be condemned with the world.

We cannot play with the love of God; it is not a toy thing. His love gave Jesus Christ to the terrors of Calvary so that sin might be put away and we should be forgiven and made holy. God gave everything he had and his Son demands that when we receive him we hand everything over to him. But our Lord said, 'So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has [to his lordship] cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:33).

#### *God's unshakeable faithfulness*

On that great historic occasion Joshua reminded the people of what lay in their past. He talked of Abraham, their great forefather and founder of the Hebrew race. Once upon a time he lived in Ur of the Chaldees, a beautiful and resplendent place, a glorious civilization. (In the various museums of the world we can still catch our breath with wonder when we look at their skill

and beautiful artistry.) But there came a point when Abraham saw that, sophisticated and wonderful as that civilization was, it was built on a decaying foundation. The God of Glory appeared to him and showed him the eternal city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:10). Abraham caught sight of its wonder and reality and for the rest of his life his compass was set upon the great imperishable eternity.

Joshua reminded them of what God had done for them in Egypt. Once they had been slaves, chained to the endless labour and misery of their servitude, but God had broken those chains and set them free. As we hear it we think of the great redemption that there is in Christ. Our chains may not be the chains of unreasonable employers who keep our noses to the grindstone in the factory. We've got more serious chains: the chains of guilt that hold us to our past, evil habits, fear, cowardice, pride and envy that will bind us forever. Christ has come to break those chains and set us free to be the men and women that God designed us to be. He sets us free from all servitudes, external and internal, making us genuinely free human beings, conformed to the image of the Saviour.

Joshua reminded them of what Balaam had tried to do to them when they were on their way towards their inheritance. That spurious religious priest had been hired by the king of Moab to use his occult practices to try and curse Israel. God told Balaam straight:

You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed . . . God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it? (Num 22:12; 23:19)

If he said he'd bless them, bless them he will. God's faithfulness remains unshakable. He'll be loyal to you though hell itself should rise up against you. 'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life' (John 5:24). 'Nothing shall ever separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:38-39).

Joshua said to Israel, 'Thus says the LORD. . . I gave you a land on which you had not laboured and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant' (Josh 24:2, 13). He tells me that there is an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. God waits to give it to us as a gift, and with it now the part payment and the guarantee. When we receive his Son, his Son gives us the gift of God's Holy Spirit, the guarantee that one day we shall possess the eternal inheritance. Why should I trust him? We need to be courageous enough to choose to serve him.

### **Objective to be aimed at**

When Israel decided to serve the Lord, Joshua wrote their words in a book and he raised a big stone to remain forever a witness to the choice they had made (vv. 26-27).

'I made my choice more than 50 years ago—"As for me, I will serve the Lord." Hold it against me forever; I have decided to follow Jesus. I could take you to the very spot where I decided to serve the Lord.'

You raised the stone, didn't you? Your name was carved on it, so to speak. How's the old stone getting on?

'It's standing firm,' you say, 'and everybody can read what's written on it.'

That's marvellous, but some of our stones have got a little bit wobbly in the course of time, like the stones in an ancient graveyard. On some of them the moss of circumstance, the ups and downs of experience, have made the writing a little bit indistinct. If that is so, let us come to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I decided to serve you years ago but my stone of testimony has gone a bit wobbly. Help me to put it up straight, scrub the old moss off it and pull aside the weeds, so that all can see and know that I belong to Christ.'

And if you have never decided before, I call upon you to choose this day, this moment, whom you will serve.

Oh happy day that fixed my choice  
On thee, my Saviour and my God . . .

High heaven, that heard that solemn vow,  
That vow renewed shall daily hear,  
Till in life's latest hour I bow  
And bless in death a bond so dear.

Happy day, when Jesus washed my sins away.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Philip Doddridge, 1755.

## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX 1

### [The Book of Joshua – Table of Contents](#)

<b>I</b> <b>1:1-4:24</b>	<b>II</b> <b>5:1-8:35</b>	<b>III</b> <b>9:1-12:24</b>	<b>IV</b> <b>13:1-18:1</b>	<b>V</b> <b>18:2-21:45</b>	<b>VI</b> <b>22:1-24:33</b>
1. The command to cross Jordan	1. Preliminary exercises	1. Covenant of salvation with the Gibeonites	1. Assignment of inheritance to the 2½ tribes	1. Division of land for the 7 tribes	1. The 2½ tribes return to their inheritance and build an altar at Jordan
2. Rahab's conversion	2. Destruction of Jericho and Rahab's salvation	2. Attack of Southern Confederacy on the Gibeonites	2. Assignment of inheritance to Judah, the major Southern tribe	2. Provision of cities of refuge	2. Joshua's first address to Israel's leaders ch. 23
3. The passage through Jordan	3. Judgment on Achan and destruction of Ai	3. Attack of Northern Confederacy on Joshua and Israel	3. Assignment of inheritance to Joseph, the major Northern tribe	3. Provision of cities for the Levites	3. Joshua's second address ch. 24
OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED	OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED	OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED	OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED	OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED	OBJECTIVE TO BE AIMED AT
The bringing of Israel into their God-given inheritance	The establishment of the Law of God in Canaan	The putting down of all rule and authority — REST	Setting up of the TENT OF MEETING IN SHILOH	Provision for maintaining God's service and for the salvation of those in danger	Uninterrupted service of the LORD

## APPENDIX 2

**The Conquest of Canaan – Phase I**

<b>1:1-4:24</b>	<b>5:1-8:35</b>	<b>9:1-12:24</b>
OBJECTIVE To bring Israel into inheritance	OBJECTIVE To establish the Law of God in Canaan	OBJECTIVE To put down all rule and authority
OBSTACLE River Jordan in flood	OBSTACLE Jericho / Ai	OBSTACLE Southern / Northern Confederacies
MIRACLE Passage through Jordan	MIRACLE Walls of Jericho brought down	MIRACLE Stones from heaven; Sun and moon stand still
OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED 3:17; 4:10; 23	OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED 8:26; 30-35	OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED 10:13; 11:10-23

## APPENDIX 3

**Similarities between Joshua 5–8**  
**and the New Testament**

1. The establishment of the Law: commanded by Moses; achieved by Joshua (8:30–35).	1. What the law could not do . . . God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (Rom 8:3–4).
2. Relationship of circumcision (5:2–9) to Israel's entry into the inheritance (chs 3–4).	2. Relationship between circumcision and the inheritance (Rom 4:13–16; Gal 3:15–29).
3. The curse ( <i>herem</i> ) on Jericho, Achan, and Israel (6:17, 18; 7:12).	3. The curse ( <i>anathēma/herem</i> ) on those who preach another gospel (Gal 1:8–9).
4. Achan troubled Israel (6:18; 7:25–26).	4. There are some who trouble you (Gal 1:7; 5:10, 12; 6:17).
5. The blessing and the curses of the Law (8:33–34).	5. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. . . so that. . . the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles (Gal 3:10–14).
6. He hanged the king of Ai on a tree (8:29).	6. Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree (Gal 3:13)
7. Curse pronounced on any who rebuild Jericho (6:26).	7. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor (Gal 2:18).
8. Victory over: a. Jericho b. Ai	8. The cross by which: a. the world is crucified to me b. and I to the world
9. Circumcision the second time (5:2)	9. The spiritual meaning of circumcision (Phil 3:3).



## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.