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PUTTING GOD'S POWER TO WORK IN YOUR LIFE

OT

COMMENTARY

JOSHUA

Warren W. Wiersbe

FOREWORD BY KEN BAUGH

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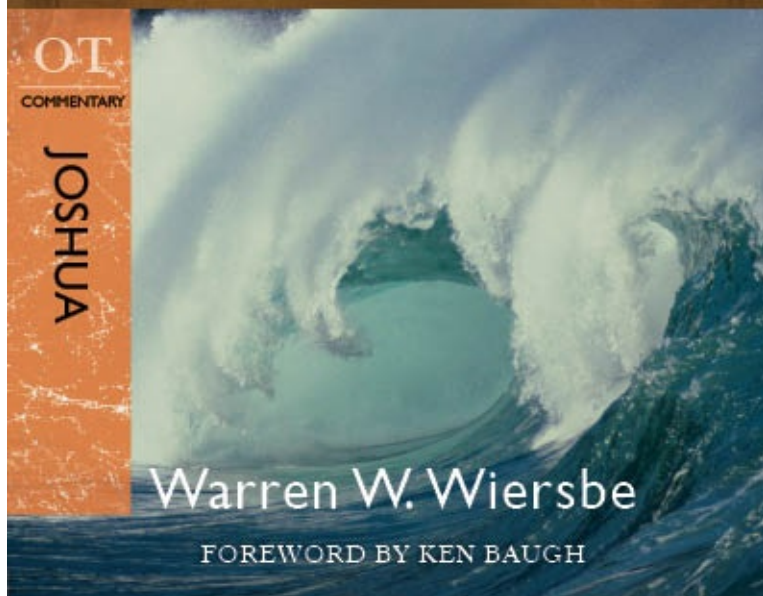
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BE STRONG
Published by David C. Cook

4050 Lee Vance View

Colorado Springs, CO 80918 U.S.A.

David C. Cook Distribution Canada 55 Woodslee Avenue, Paris, Ontario, Canada N3L 3E5

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LCCN 2009934571
ISBN 978-1-4347-6637-3
eISBN 978-1-4347-0095-7

© 1993 Warren W. Wiersbe First edition of Be Strong published by Victor Books® in 1993 © Warren W. Wiersbe, ISBN 978-1-56476-122-4

The Team: Karen Lee-Thorp, Amy Kiechlin, Sarah Schultz, Jack Campbell, and Karen Athen Series Cover Design: John Hamilton Design Cover Photo: Veer Inc.

Second Edition 2010

The Big Idea

An Introduction to *Be Strong*

by Ken Baugh

Joshua and David are two of my favorite Old Testament characters: David because he was a man after God's own heart and Joshua because he was a man with a courageous heart. And in the book of Joshua we see his courageous heart up close and personal.

God's first recorded words to Joshua are these: "Moses my servant is dead" (Josh. 1:2 NIV). God doesn't waste any time helping Joshua deal with reality. It's like God is saying, "Moses is gone, Son, so now it's time for you to step up into my will for your life and lead these people into the Promised Land."

Now put yourself in Joshua's sandals for a moment and let the reality of Moses' death and his new role sink in. The only leader Joshua (and the Israelites for that matter) had ever known was Moses the friend of God (Ex. 33:11). Moses had led them out of Egypt while Joshua was just a little boy. Moses had led them through the Red Sea. God had used Moses to provide water, food, clothing, and shelter. Under Moses' leadership, the Israelites had experienced the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. Under Moses' leadership, the tabernacle had been constructed and the ark of the covenant and the various elements for worship fashioned. Moses had come down from the mountain of God with the Ten Commandments engraved by the very finger of God. And on and on and on it went: Moses this and Moses that, and now Joshua was supposed to step into Moses' sandals and take up the mantle of leadership. Are you kidding me?

I can only imagine how intimidated I would feel if I were to succeed Moses

in leading God's people. But Joshua was a man with a strong faith, and in that faith he stepped up and into one of the most intimidating leadership succession plans in the history of God's people. Where did Joshua's strength come from? Where did he find his incredible confidence in the Lord? The answer is found in the three things that Joshua believed about God. Joshua's belief determined his behavior. And the same can be true about you. If you believe the same three things that Joshua believed, you will become strong in the Lord as well. Let's take a minute to discover what Joshua believed about God.

First, Joshua believed that God was all-powerful. How could Joshua not believe that about God? He had seen firsthand the mighty miracles God had performed on behalf of His people. He had seen the ten plagues that came upon the Egyptians and caused Pharaoh, the most powerful man in the world, to free God's people. Joshua had seen Moses stand and lift his staff against the Red Sea while Pharaoh's army was bearing down on them to take them back to Egypt. Then, after all the Israelites had crossed through the Red Sea on dry ground, Joshua had witnessed God bring the water over Pharaoh and his men, destroying the most powerful army in the world in one fatal swish! Joshua had seen God turn the bitter water at Marah into sweet drinking water to save the people from dying of thirst. Joshua had witnessed over and over how God provided just enough food each day to feed all the people.

For over forty years, Joshua had witnessed time and time again God's overt power, and these experiences had developed in him a deep-seated belief not only in God's power but also in God's willingness to bring His power to bear on behalf of His people. As such, Joshua knew that nothing was too hard for God. If God had chosen him to be the one to succeed Moses and lead His people, then that was what God was going to do, so why be afraid?

How about you? Do you believe that God is all-powerful? Do you believe that nothing is too hard for God? If you don't, I believe by the time you're finished reading and studying Joshua, you will.

Second, Joshua believed that God always keeps His promises. Joshua knew that God had promised his forefather, Abraham, that he and his descendants would occupy the land. In Genesis 12:1–2 (NIV), God had said to Abram: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” God reiterated this promise in Genesis 13:15 (NIV): “All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.”

And now Joshua was standing at the Jordan River, looking into the land that God had promised His people so many years ago, and now it was time: “You will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (Josh. 1:6 NIV). God had kept His promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now He was going to use Joshua to fulfill it: “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses” (1:3 NIV). Joshua knew God could be trusted. He knew God always keeps His promise, and this knowledge forged in his chest a strong and unyielding heart of faith.

How about you? Do you believe that God keeps His promises? Again, if you don’t, keep reading, and I believe you will.

Finally, Joshua believed that God would always be with him. God said to Joshua, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.... Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (1:5, 9 NIV). Not only did Joshua believe that God was all-powerful and kept His promises, he knew that God would be with him personally. What more does a guy need in order to have a strong faith in God?

Jesus promised each of His followers (including you) that He would always be with us too: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”

(Matt. 28:20 NIV). Do you believe that? Joshua did, and it gave him a strong and courageous faith.

Do you want to be strong in the Lord? Then believe what Joshua believed: that God is all-powerful, that God always keeps His promises, and that God is always with you no matter what. If you believe those three things about God, you will be strong in the Lord!

Dr. Wiersbe's commentaries have been a source of guidance and strength to me over the many years that I have been a pastor. His unique style is not overly academic, but theologically sound. He explains the deep truths of Scripture in a way that everyone can understand and apply. Whether you're a Bible scholar or a brand-new believer in Christ, you will benefit, as I have, from Warren's insights. With your Bible in one hand and Dr. Wiersbe's commentary in the other, you will be able to accurately unpack the deep truths of God's Word and learn how to apply them to your life.

Drink deeply, my friend, of the truths of God's Word, for in them you will find Jesus Christ, and there is freedom, peace, assurance, and joy.

—Ken Baugh
Pastor of Coast Hills Community Church
Aliso Viejo, California

A Word from the Author

An author takes a risk writing a book about war at a time in history when war in general, and “religious wars” in particular, are detested, and when some Christians denominations are removing the “militant” songs from their church hymnals.

But I’ll take that risk, because I think the church needs the message of the book of Joshua more than ever before. We’re living in a day of reproach and defeat, and the church is no longer “clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:10). We look more like a bunch of prisoners of war.

Whether we like it or not, God’s people are expected to be soldiers. At least Paul thought so: “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3–4 NKJV).

The book of Joshua tells us how to be victorious soldiers and how to claim our rich spiritual inheritance in Jesus Christ. It tells us how to be strong and courageous as we face our enemies and march forward to claim new territory for the Lord.

In his farewell speech to the American Congress in April 19, 1951, General Douglas MacArthur said, “In war there is no substitute for victory.” General Joshua would have agreed with him; and in his book, he shows us the way to victory.

I hope you will follow—by faith.

—Warren W. Wiersbe

A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA Theme: Claiming our victory and our inheritance in Christ

Key verse: Joshua 1:8

I. Preparing the nation (Joshua 1—5)

[A. Encouraging the leader \(Joshua 1\)](#)

[B. Spying out the land \(Joshua 2\)](#)

[C. Crossing the river \(Joshua 3—4\)](#)

[D. Affirming the covenant \(Joshua 5\)](#)

II. Defeating the enemy (Joshua 6—12)

[A. The Central Campaign \(Joshua 6—9\)](#)

[B. The Southern Campaign \(Joshua 10\)](#)

[C. The Northern Campaign \(Joshua 11\)](#)

[D. Summary of the victories \(Joshua 12\)](#)

III. Claiming the inheritance (Joshua 13—22)

[A. Territory assigned to the tribes \(Joshua 13—19\)](#)

[B. Cities of refuge set apart \(Joshua 20\)](#)

[C. Cities for the Levites identified \(Joshua 21\)](#)

[D. Border tribes sent home \(Joshua 22\)](#)

IV. Renewing the covenant (Joshua 23—24)

[A. Joshua's final message to the leaders \(Joshua 23\)](#)

[B. Joshua's final message to the nation \(Joshua 24\)](#)

Chapter Six

The Conquest Begins!

[\(Joshua 6\)](#)

You are but a poor soldier of Christ if you think you can overcome without fighting, and suppose you can have the crown without the conflict.”

The courageous Syrian preacher and martyr John Chrysostom (347–407) said that, and he was right, for the Christian life involves challenge and conflict whether we like it or not. Our enemies are constantly waging war against us and trying to keep us from claiming our inheritance in Jesus Christ. The world, the flesh, and the Devil (Eph. 2:1–3) are united against Christ and His people just as the nations in Canaan were united against Joshua and the Jewish nation.

It’s unfortunate that many of the “militant songs” of the church have been removed from some hymnals, apparently because the idea of warfare disturbs people and seems to contradict the words and works of Jesus Christ. But these zealous editors with scissors seem to have forgotten that the main theme of the Bible is God’s holy warfare against Satan and sin. In Genesis 3:15, God declared war on Satan, and one day He will declare the victory when Jesus comes as Conqueror to establish His kingdom (Rev. 19:11–21). *If you eliminate the militant side of the Christian faith, then you must abandon the cross, for it was on the cross that Jesus won the victory over sin and Satan* (Col. 2:13–15).

A pastor attended a court hearing to protest the building of a tavern near his

church and a public school. The lawyer for the tavern owners said to him, “I’m surprised to see you here today, Reverend. As a shepherd, shouldn’t you be out taking care of the sheep?”

The pastor replied, “Today I’m fighting the wolf!”

Too many Christians cultivate only a sentimental emphasis on “peace and goodwill” and ignore the spiritual battle against sin, and this means they’ve already lost the victory and are working for the enemy. We must never forget Paul’s warning about the savage wolves that are ready to destroy the flock (Acts 20:28–29).

The Christian’s warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against enemies in the spiritual realm (Eph. 6:10–18), and the weapons we use are spiritual (2 Cor. 10:3–6). Satan and his demonic armies use people to oppose and attack the church of God, and if we don’t take our stand with Christ, *we’ve already lost the battle*. In the army of Jesus Christ there can be no neutrality. “He that is not with me is against me,” said Jesus, and He spoke those words in the context of spiritual warfare (Matt. 12:24–30). Since the apostle Paul often used the military image to describe the Christian life, we dare not ignore the subject (Eph. 6:10ff.; 2 Tim. 2:1–4; Rom. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:8).

Israel’s victory at Jericho illustrates three principles of spiritual conflict and victory applicable to our lives today, no matter what challenges we may be called to confront.

1. BEFORE THE CHALLENGE: REMEMBER THAT YOU FIGHT FROM VICTORY, NOT JUST FOR VICTORY (6:1–5)

The Christian soldier stands in a position of guaranteed victory because Jesus Christ has already defeated every spiritual enemy (John 12:31). Jesus defeated Satan not only in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11), but also during His earthly ministry (12:22–29), on the cross (Col. 2:13–15), and in His resurrection and

ascension (Eph. 1:19–23). As He intercedes for His people in heaven, He helps us mature and accomplish His will (Heb. 13:20–21), and “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

Consider the factors involved in Joshua’s victory:

The fear of the Lord (v. 1). The land of Canaan was divided up among a number of city-states, each ruled by a king (see 12:9–34). These cities were not large; Ai, which was smaller than Jericho (7:2–3), had about twelve thousand people (8:25). Excavations at Jericho indicate that the city covered perhaps eight acres and was protected by two high parallel walls, which stood about fifteen feet apart and surrounded the city. It was the sight of cities like Jericho that convinced ten of the Jewish spies that Israel could never conquer the land (Num. 13:28).

But the news of Israel’s exodus from Egypt and their recent victories east of the Jordan had already spread to Canaan and put the people in panic (Josh. 2:9–11; see Deut. 2:25; 7:23; 11:25; 32:30). “I will send My fear before you,” God had promised; “I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you” (Ex. 23:27 NKJV).

It was said that Mary, Queen of Scots feared John Knox’s prayers more than she feared an enemy army. But is society today afraid of what God’s people may do? Probably not, and it’s mainly because the church hasn’t done very much to display the power of God to a skeptical world. The church is no longer “terrible as an army with banners” (Song 6:4, 10). In fact, the church is so much like the world that the world takes little notice of what we do. We imitate the world’s methods; we cater to the world’s appetites; we solicit the world’s approval; and we measure what we do according to the world’s standards. Is it any wonder that we don’t gain the world’s respect?

But not so with Joshua and Israel! They were a conquering people who made no compromise with the enemy but trusted God to give them the victory. Theirs

was a march of triumph that put the fear of God into the hearts of the enemy.

The promise of the Lord (v. 2). It's possible that the Lord spoke these words to Joshua when He confronted him at Jericho (5:13–15). The tense of the verb is important: “*I have given* Jericho into your hand” (6:2 NKJV, italics added). The victory had already been won! All Joshua and his people had to do was claim the promise and obey the Lord.

Victorious Christians are people who *know* the promises of God, because they spend time meditating on God's Word (1:8); they *believe* the promises of God because the Word of God generates faith in their hearts (Rom. 10:17); and they *reckon* on these promises and obey what God tells them to do. To “reckon” means to count as true in your life what God says about you in His Word.

“Be of good cheer,” Jesus told His disciples; “I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (John 12:31). Christ has conquered the world, the flesh, and the Devil; *and if we reckon on this truth, we can conquer through Him*. It's possible to believe a promise and still not reckon on it and obey the Lord. Believing a promise is like accepting a check, but reckoning is like endorsing the check and cashing it.

The instructions of the Lord (vv. 3–5). “Joshua did not take the city merely by a clever, human military tactic,” wrote Francis A. Schaeffer. “The strategy was the Lord's.”^{[1](#)}

No situation is too great for the Lord to handle, and no problem is too much for Him to solve. When He saw more than five thousand hungry people before Him, Jesus asked Philip, “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” Then John adds, “But this He said to test him; for He Himself knew what He would do” (John 6:5–6 NKJV). *God always knows what He will do*. Our responsibility is to wait for Him to tell us all that we need to know and then obey it.

At the close of the last chapter, I quoted J. Hudson Taylor's words about three different ways to serve the Lord: (1) to make the best plans we can and hope they succeed; (2) to make our own plans and ask God to bless them; or (3) to ask God for His plans and then do what He tells us to do. Joshua received his orders from the Lord, and that's why Israel succeeded.

God's plan for the conquest of Jericho was seemingly foolish, but it worked. God's wisdom is far above ours (Isa. 55:8–9), and He delights in using people and plans that seem foolish to the world (1 Cor. 1:26–29). Whether it's Joshua with trumpets, Gideon with torches and pitchers (Judg. 7), or David with his sling (1 Sam. 17), God delights in using weakness and seeming foolishness to defeat His enemies and glorify His name. "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

God's instructions were that the armed men march around Jericho once a day for six days, followed by seven priests each blowing a trumpet. The priests carrying the ark of the Lord would come next, and the rear guard would complete the procession. The only noise permitted was the sound of the trumpets. On the seventh day the procession would march around the city seven times, the priests would give a long blast on the trumpets, and then the marchers would all shout. God would then cause the walls to fall down flat so that the soldiers could easily enter the city. In this plan the emphasis is on the number seven: seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days of marching, and seven circuits of the city on the seventh day. The number seven is written clearly into the life of Israel: The Sabbath is celebrated on the seventh day of the week; seven weeks from Passover is Pentecost; the seventh year is the Sabbatical Year; and after forty-nine years (seven times seven) comes the Year of Jubilee. Three of Israel's feasts fall in the seventh month: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), and the Feast of Tabernacles. (For details about this remarkable

calendar, see Lev. 23.)

In biblical numerology the number seven represents completeness or perfection. The Hebrew word translated “seven” (*shevah*) comes from a root that means “to be full, to be satisfied.” When God finished His work of creation, He rested on the seventh day and sanctified it (Gen. 2:3), and this helped give the number seven its sacred significance. The Jews noted that there were seven promises in God’s covenant with Abraham (12:1–3) and seven branches on the candlestick in the tabernacle (Ex. 37:17–24). Anything involving the number seven was especially sacred to them. It spoke of God’s ability to finish whatever He started.

The Jews used two different kinds of trumpets, those made of silver and those made of ram’s horns. The silver trumpets were used especially by the priests to signal the camp when something important was happening (Num. 10). The ram’s horns were used primarily for celebrations. The common Hebrew word for “trumpet” is *shofar*; for “ram’s horn,” it is *jobel*, which is the root of the word *jubilee*. The Year of Jubilee was the fiftieth year after seven Sabbaticals, and was a special time of celebration in Israel (Lev. 25; 27:14–17). The priests blew the ram’s horns to “proclaim liberty throughout all the land” (25:10).

The priests didn’t use the silver trumpets in this event because Israel was not declaring war on Jericho, *for there was no war!* The Jews were announcing the arrival of the Year of Jubilee for Israel in their new land. God’s people today can march in triumphal procession because of the victory of Jesus Christ over all the enemies of God (Rom. 8:37; 2 Cor. 2:14; Col. 2:15). We should be living like victors, not victims.

“The wall of the city shall fall down” (Josh. 6:5) was God’s promise, and His promises never fail (21:45; 23:14). God’s people don’t simply fight *for* victory but *from* victory, because the Lord has already won the battle. Reckon on His promises and obey what He tells you to do, and you shall have the victory.

2. DURING THE CHALLENGE: REMEMBER THAT YOU OVERCOME THE ENEMY BY FAITH (6:6–16, 20)

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30). “And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4^{NKJV}).

Faith is not believing in spite of evidence, for the people of Israel had been given one demonstration after another proving that God’s Word and God’s power can be trusted. The Lord had opened the Red Sea, destroyed the Egyptian army, cared for His people in the wilderness, defeated great kings, given Israel their land, opened the Jordan River, and brought His people safely into the Promised Land. How could they do anything other than believe Him?

Joshua first shared the Lord’s plan with the priests. It was important that the ark of the Lord be in its proper place, for it represented the presence of the Lord with His people. When Israel crossed the river, the account mentions the ark sixteen times (Josh. 3—4), and here in 6:6–15, the ark is mentioned eight times. Israel could march and the priests blow trumpets until all of them dropped from weariness, but if the Lord wasn’t with them, there would be no victory. *When we accept God’s plan, we invite God’s presence, and that guarantees victory.* (See Ex. 33:12–17.)

Then Joshua instructed the soldiers. He probably didn’t enlist the entire army for this important event, for that would have involved far too many people. According to the military census of Numbers 26, there were over six hundred thousand men able to bear arms. Think of how long it would take that many men to march around the city walls! And when the walls fell down, Joshua certainly didn’t need hundreds of thousands of soldiers to rush in and overcome the people. The men would have been falling over one another!

Over two million people were in the nation of Israel, and marching all of them around the city of Jericho would have been time-consuming and

dangerous. The people no doubt watched in silence from a distance and then participated in the great shout on the seventh day. It was a victory for Israel and Israel's God, and not just for the priests and soldiers.

It's important that leaders receive their orders from the Lord and that those who follow them obey their instructions. As with the crossing of the Jordan River, so also the conquest of Jericho was a miracle of faith. Joshua and his people listened to God's orders, believed them, and obeyed, and God did the rest. When God's people rebel against spiritual leadership, as Israel often did in the wilderness, it leads to discipline and defeat.

The activities of the week were a test of the Jewish people's faith and patience. No doubt some of them were anxious to get on with the invasion so they could claim their inheritance and settle down to enjoy the rest God had promised them (Josh. 1:13). To some of them, it may have seemed a futile waste of time to devote an entire week to the taking of one city. Impatience was one of Israel's besetting sins, and God was helping them learn patient obedience, for it's through "faith and patience" that God's people inherit what He has promised (Heb. 6:12). *God is never in a hurry*. He knows what He's doing, and His timing is never off.

If the week's schedule was a test of their patience, the divine command of silence was a test of their self-control. People who can't control their tongues can't control their bodies (James 3:1–2), and what good are soldiers whose bodies are not disciplined? "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). In the Christian life there's "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Eccl. 3:7), and wise is the child of God who knows the difference. Our Lord is the perfect example of this (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 26:62–63; 27:14; Luke 23:9).

How did the people in the city of Jericho respond to this daily procession around the city? It's likely that the march on the first day frightened them, for they probably expected the army to raise a siege against the city. But the Jews neither built ramps against the walls nor did they try to batter down the gates.

When the marchers returned to camp after making only one circuit of the walls, the citizens must have felt greatly relieved. However, as the march was repeated day after day, tension must have grown in the city as the people wondered what would happen next. They knew that the God of Israel was a “great God of wonders,” whose power had defeated Egypt and the kings east of the Jordan. What would Jehovah now do to Jericho?

When the procession went around the walls seven times on the seventh day, the tension within the city must have increased to frightening proportions. Then came the blast of the trumpets and the victory shout of the people, *and the walls fell down flat!* All that the soldiers had to do was rush into the city and take over.

The Holy Spirit directed the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews to use this event as one of the “by faith” examples in Hebrews 11. The fall of Jericho is an encouragement to God’s people to trust the Lord’s promises and obey His instructions, no matter how impossible the situation may appear to be. You and I may not capture a city as Joshua did, but in our everyday lives we face enemies and high walls that challenge us. *The only way to grow in faith is to accept new challenges and trust God to give you victory.* “Do not pray for easy lives,” said Phillips Brooks; “pray to be stronger.... Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for power equal to your tasks.”

3. AFTER THE VICTORY: REMEMBER TO OBEY GOD’S COMMANDS AND GIVE HIM THE GLORY (6:17–19, 21–27)

Let me quote again Andrew Bonar’s wise counsel: “Let us be as watchful after the victory as before the battle.” Because one soldier didn’t heed this warning, Israel’s next challenge in Canaan turned out to be a humiliating defeat. Joshua gave the soldiers four instructions to obey after they had taken the city.

(1) Devote the entire city to God (vv. 17–19). This meant that everything was dedicated to the Lord—the people, the houses, the animals, and all the spoils

of war—and He could do with it whatever He pleased. In this first victory in Canaan, Jericho was presented to God as “the firstfruits” of the victories to come. Ordinarily the soldiers shared the spoils of war (Deut. 20:14), but not at Jericho; for everything there belonged to the Lord and was put into His treasury (Deut. 13:16; 1 Kings 7:51). It was this command that Achan disobeyed, and his disobedience later brought Israel defeat and disgrace and brought Achan and his family death.

(2) Rescue Rahab and her family (vv. 22–23, 25–26). When the walls of the city fell down, it appears that the section of the wall that held Rahab’s house (2:15) *didn’t fall down!* It wasn’t necessary for the spies to look for a window with a red cord hanging from it (vv. 18–19), because the only house that was preserved was the house in which Rahab and her family waited. When the spies made their covenant with Rahab, they didn’t know exactly how God would give them the city.

God saved and protected Rahab because of her faith (Heb. 11:31), and because she led her family to trust in Jehovah, they were also saved. These Gentile believers were rescued from a fiery judgment because they trusted the God of Israel, for “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). They were “afar off” as far as the covenants were concerned (Eph. 2:11–12), but their faith brought them into the nation of Israel, for Rahab married Salmon and became an ancestress of King David *and of the Messiah* (Matt. 1:5)!

Rahab and her relatives were put “outside the camp” initially because they were unclean Gentiles, and “outside the camp” was the place designated for the unclean (Num. 5:1–4; 12:14; Deut. 23:9–14). The men in the family would have to be circumcised in order to become “sons of the covenant,” and all of the family would have to submit to the law of Moses. What grace that God spared Rahab and her loved ones, and what *abundant* grace that He chose her, an outcast Gentile, to be an ancestress of the Savior!

Like Jericho of old, our present world is under the judgment of God (John

3:18–21; Rom. 3:10–19), and His judgment will eventually fall. No matter what “walls” and “gates” this present evil world will try to hide behind, God’s wrath will eventually meet them. God has given this lost world plenty of evidence so that sinners can believe and be saved (Josh. 2:8–13; Rom. 1:18ff.). The tragedy is, lost sinners willingly reject the evidence and continue in their sins (John 12:35–41).

(3) Destroy the people (v. 21). It disturbs some people that God commanded every living thing in Jericho to be killed. Isn’t our God a God of mercy? After all, it’s one thing for the Jews to kill the enemy soldiers, but why kill women, children, and even animals?

To begin with, this commandment was not a new one. The Lord had given it to Moses years before. In the “divine law of war” found in Deuteronomy 20, the Lord made a distinction between attacking cities that were far off (vv. 10–15) and cities in the land of Canaan where Israel would dwell (vv. 16–18). Before besieging a city afar off, the Jews were to give that city an offer of peace, and if the city surrendered, the Jews would spare the people and make them subjects. But the people in the cities *in the land of Canaan* were to be destroyed completely, and their cities burned.

Why? For one thing, the civilization in Canaan was unspeakably wicked, and God didn’t want His holy people contaminated by their neighbors (7:1–11). We must never forget that God put Israel in the world to be the channel for His blessing (Gen. 12:1–3), which involves, among other things, the writing of the Scriptures and the coming of the Savior. Read the Old Testament record, and you will see Satan doing everything he could to pollute the Jewish nation and thus prevent the birth of the Messiah. When the Jewish men married pagan women and began to worship pagan gods, it was a threat to the purposes God had for His chosen people (Neh. 13:23–31). God wanted a “godly seed” (Mal. 2:14–15) so that His holy Son could come to be the Savior of the world.

“God is perpetually at war with sin,” said G. Campbell Morgan. “That is the

whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites.”² Because the Jews didn’t fully obey this commandment in later years, it led to national defilement and divine chastening (Ps. 106:34–48). The book of Judges would not be in the Bible if the nation of Israel had remained true to the Lord (Judg. 2:11–23).

There is a second consideration: The people in the land had been given plenty of opportunity to repent and turn to the Lord, just as Rahab and her family had done. God patiently endured the evil of the Canaanites from the time of Abraham (Gen. 15:16) to the time of Moses, a period of over four hundred years. (See 2 Peter 3:9.) From the exodus to the crossing of the Jordan was another forty years in Israel’s history, *and the Canaanites knew what was going on!* (See Josh. 2:8–13.) Every wonder that God performed and every victory that God gave His people was a witness to the people of the land, but they preferred to go on in their sins and reject the mercy of God. Never think of the Canaanites as helpless, ignorant people who knew nothing about the true God. They were willfully sinning against a flood of light.

We should also keep in mind that these historical events were written “for our learning” (Rom. 15:4) as we seek to live for Christ today. In the destruction of Jericho and its population God is telling us that *He will tolerate no compromise with sin in the lives of His people*. To quote Campbell Morgan again: “Thank God that He will not make peace with sin in my heart.... I bless His name for the thunder of His authority, and for the profound conviction that He is fierce and furious in His anger against sin, wherever it manifests itself.”³

When I was a child in Sunday school, the superintendent often chose the song “Whiter Than Snow” for us to sing in general assembly. While we sang “Break down every idol/Cast out every foe,” I confess that I didn’t understand at the time what I was singing, but now I understand. *The Lord will not share my life if there are rival gods in my heart. He will not permit me to compromise with the enemy*. When you grasp this truth, you also better understand His admonition in 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1.

(4) Burn the city (v. 24). “Thy God is a consuming fire” was spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy 4:24 long before it was quoted by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews 12:29. Moses was warning the Jewish people against idolatry and the danger of following the religious practices of the people in Canaan. Moses added a phrase that isn’t quoted in Hebrews but is still important for us to know: “even a jealous God.” God is jealous over His people and will not permit them to divide their love and service between Him and the false gods of the world (Ex. 20:5; 34:14). We cannot serve two masters.

Jericho was a wicked city, *and sin is only fuel for the holy wrath of God*. Jesus compared hell to a furnace of fire (Matt. 13:42), fire that is eternal (25:41, 46), and John compared it to a lake of fire (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14). John the Baptist described God’s judgment as “unquenchable fire” (Matt. 3:12). The burning of Jericho, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7), is a picture of the judgment of God that will fall on all who reject the truth.

Even after he had burned the city, Joshua put a curse on Jericho. This would warn any of the Jews or Rahab’s descendants who might be tempted to rebuild what God had destroyed. The curse was later fulfilled in the days of evil King Ahab (1 Kings 16:34).

As He promised, God was with Joshua (Josh. 1:5, 9), and God magnified Joshua’s name in the land (6:27; 3:7; 4:14). God’s servants must never magnify themselves, and if the Lord magnifies them, they must be careful to give Him the glory. It’s when we are strong that we get overconfident and forget to trust the Lord (2 Chron. 26:15).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is the place of warfare in the church?
2. What does Wiersbe mean by fighting from victory, not just for victory?
3. What is the difference between believing in and reckoning on a promise?
4. Which of these approaches to serving God do you most often use: (1) to make the best plans you can and hope they succeed; (2) to make your own plans and ask God to bless them; or (3) to ask God for His plans and then do what He tells you to do? Why is that your strategy?
5. What should we do if we ask God for His plans and He doesn't tell us right away?
6. What does the number 7 signify in the Bible?
7. How did the Lord's battle plan test the people's patience and self-control?
8. How does the Lord test your patience and self-control?
9. According to Wiersbe, the only way to grow in faith is to accept new

challenges and trust God to give you victory. How do you usually deal with new challenges?

10. Why do you think God commanded “every living thing” in Jericho to be killed?

11. What does the story of Jericho’s destruction teach you about God?

Chapter Seven

Defeat in the Land of Victory (Joshua 7)

Moses described the Promised Land as “a land of hills and valleys” (Deut. 11:11). That statement, I believe, is much more than a description of the contrast between the hilly landscape of Canaan and the flat, monotonous topography of Egypt. It’s also a description of the *geography* of the life of faith that is pictured by Israel’s experiences in Canaan.

As by faith we claim our inheritance in Christ, we experience peaks of victory and valleys of discouragement. Discouragement isn’t inevitable in the Christian life, but we must remember that we can’t have mountains without valleys.

The ominous word *but* that introduces Joshua 7 is a signal that things are going to change, for Joshua is about to descend from the mountaintop of victory at Jericho to the valley of defeat at Ai. Joshua was a gifted and experienced leader, but he was still human and therefore liable to error. In this experience, he teaches us what causes defeat and how we must handle the discouragements of life.

A DISOBEDIENT SOLDIER (7:1, 20–21) The sinner (v. 1). His name was Achan, or Achar, which means “trouble”; and he was from the tribe of Judah (v. 16). (See 1 Chron. 2:7; note in Josh. 7:26 that “Achor” also means “trouble.”) He is known in Bible history as *the man who troubled Israel* (Josh. 7:25). Because of Achan’s disobedience, Israel was defeated at Ai, and the enemy killed thirty-six Jewish soldiers. It was Israel’s first and only military defeat in Canaan, a defeat that is forever associated with Achan’s

name.

Never underestimate the amount of damage one person can do outside the will of God. Abraham's disobedience in Egypt almost cost him his wife (Gen. 12:10–20); David's disobedience in taking an unauthorized census led to the death of seventy thousand people (2 Sam. 24); and Jonah's refusal to obey God almost sank a ship (Jonah 1). The church today must look diligently "lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble" (Heb. 12:15 NKJV). That's why Paul admonished the Corinthian believers to discipline the disobedient man in their fellowship, because his sin was defiling the whole church (1 Cor. 5).

God made it clear that it was *Israel* that had sinned and not just Achan alone (Josh. 7:1, 11). Why would God blame the whole nation for the disobedience of only one soldier? Because Israel was *one people in the Lord* and not just an assorted collection of tribes, clans, families, and individuals. God dwelt in the midst of their camp, and this made the Jews the Lord's special people (Ex. 19:5–6). Jehovah God walked about in their camp, and therefore the camp was to be kept holy (Deut. 23:14). Anyone who disobeyed God defiled the camp, and this defilement affected their relationship to the Lord and to one another.

God's people today are one body in Christ. Consequently, we belong to each other, we need each other, and we affect each other (1 Cor. 12:12ff.). Any weakness or infection in one part of the human body contributes to weakness and infection in the other parts. So it also is with the body of Christ. "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26 NIV). "One sinner destroys much good" (Eccl. 9:18 NKJV).

The sin (vv. 20–21). Achan heard his commander give the order that all the spoils in Jericho were to be devoted to the Lord and were to go into His treasury (6:17–21, 24). Since Jericho was Israel's first victory in Canaan, the firstfruits of the spoils belonged to the Lord (Prov. 3:9). But Achan disobeyed and took the hazardous steps that lead to sin and death (James 1:13–15): "I saw ... I coveted

... [I] took” (Josh. 7:21). Eve did the same thing when she listened to *the Devil* (Gen. 3:5), and so did David when he yielded to *the flesh* (2 Sam. 11:1–4). Since Achan also coveted the things of *the world*, he brought defeat to Israel and death to himself and his family.

Achan’s first mistake was to look at these spoils a *second time*. He probably couldn’t help seeing them the first time, but he should never have looked again and considered taking them. A man’s first glance at a woman may say to him, “She’s attractive!” But it’s that second glance that gets the imagination working and leads to sin (Matt. 6:27–30). If we keep God’s Word before our eyes, we won’t start looking in the wrong direction and doing the wrong things (Prov. 4:20–25).

His second mistake was to *reclassify* those treasures and call them “the spoils” (Josh. 7:21). They were not “the spoils”; they were a part of the Lord’s treasury and wholly dedicated to Him. They didn’t belong to Achan, or even to Israel; they belonged to God. When God identifies something in a special way, we have no right to change it. In our world today, including the religious world, people are rewriting God’s dictionary! “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20 KJV).

If God says something is wrong, then it’s wrong, and that’s the end of the debate.

Achan’s third mistake was to *covet*. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:14 NKJV). Instead of singing praises in his heart for the great victory God had given, Achan was imagining in his heart what it would be like to own all that treasure. The imagination is the “womb” in which desire is conceived and from which sin and death are eventually born.

His fourth mistake was to think that he could get away with his sin by hiding

the loot. Adam and Eve tried to cover their sin and run away and hide, but the Lord discovered them (Gen. 3:7ff.). “Be sure your sin will find you out” was originally said to the people of God, not to the lost (Num. 32:23), and so was “The LORD shall judge his people” (Deut. 32:36; Heb. 10:30). How foolish of Achan to think that God couldn’t see what he was doing, when “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13 NKJV).

Achan’s sin becomes even more odious when you stop to realize all that God had done for him. God had cared for him and his family in the wilderness. He had brought them safely across the Jordan and given the army victory at Jericho. The Lord had accepted Achan as a son of the covenant at Gilgal. Yet in spite of all these wonderful experiences, Achan disobeyed God just to possess some wealth that he couldn’t even enjoy. Had he waited just a day or two, he could have gathered all the spoils he wanted from the victory at Ai! “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33 NKJV).

A DEFEATED ARMY (7:2–5) Like every good commander, Joshua surveyed the situation before he planned his strategy (Num. 21:32; Prov. 20:18; 24:6). His mistake wasn’t in sending out the spies but in assuming that the Lord was pleased with His people and would give them victory over Ai. He and his officers were walking by sight and not by faith. Spiritual leaders must constantly seek the Lord’s face and determine what His will is for each new challenge. Had Joshua called a prayer meeting, the Lord would have informed him that there was sin in the camp, and Joshua could have dealt with it. This would have saved the lives of thirty-six soldiers and spared Israel a humiliating defeat.

It's impossible for us to enter into Joshua's mind and fully understand his thinking. No doubt the impressive victory at Jericho had given Joshua and his army a great deal of self-confidence, and self-confidence can lead to presumption. Since Ai was a smaller city than Jericho, victory seemed inevitable from the human point of view. But instead of seeking the mind of the Lord, Joshua accepted the counsel of his spies, and this led to defeat. He would later repeat this mistake in his dealings with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9).

The spies said nothing about the Lord; their whole report focused on the army and their confidence that Israel would have victory. You don't hear these men saying, "If the Lord will" (James 4:13–17). They were sure that the whole army wasn't needed for the assault, but that wasn't God's strategy when He gave the orders for the second attack on Ai (Josh. 8:1). Since God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8–9), we'd better take time to seek His direction. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18 NKJV). What Israel needed was God-confidence, not self-confidence.

Ai was in the hill country, about fifteen miles from Jericho; and one went *up* to Ai because it was situated seventeen hundred feet above sea level. The Jewish army marched confidently up the hill but soon came down again, fleeing for their lives and leaving thirty-six dead comrades behind them.

Moses had warned Israel that they couldn't defeat their enemies unless the nation was obedient to the Lord. If they were following the Lord by faith, one Jewish soldier would chase a thousand, and two would put ten thousand to flight (Deut. 32:30)! Three Jewish soldiers could have defeated the whole city, if the nation had been pleasing to the Lord. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:2).

A DISCOURAGED LEADER (7:6–15) The leader who had been

magnified (6:27) was now mortified. If some of your best plans have ever been dashed to pieces, then you can identify with Joshua and his officers.

Remorse (v. 6). The hearts of the Canaanites had melted when they had heard about the conquests of Israel (2:11). But now the tables were turned, and it was the Israelites whose hearts were melted as water! The general who had not known defeat spent the rest of the day prostrate before the ark at Gilgal and his leaders with him. They tore their garments, put dust on their heads, lay on the ground, and cried, “Alas! Alas!” This is the way Jewish people behaved whenever they experienced great distress, such as a military defeat (1 Sam. 4:12) or personal violence and shame (2 Sam. 13:19). It was the prescribed course of action whenever the Jews turned to God in times of great danger or national sin (Neh. 9:1; Est. 4:1). Had Joshua humbled himself *before* the battle, the situation would have been different after the battle.

The ark of the covenant was a reminder of the presence of God with His people. The ark had gone before Israel when they had crossed the river (Josh. 3:11ff.), and the ark had been with them when they had marched around Jericho (6:6–8). God hadn’t told them to carry the ark to Ai, but God’s presence would have gone with them if there had not been sin in the camp. Without God’s presence, the ark was simply a piece of wooden furniture, and there was no guarantee of victory just because of the presence of the ark (1 Sam. 4).

Reproach (vv. 7–9). In his prayer Joshua sounded like the unbelieving Jews whenever they found themselves in a tough situation that demanded faith: “Oh, that we had stayed where we were!” They said this at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:11), when they were hungry and thirsty in the wilderness (16:3; 17:3), and when they were disciplined at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 14:1–3). The Jews had frequently wanted to go back to Egypt, but Joshua would have been willing to cross the Jordan and settle down on the other side.

“But read his prayer, and you will catch a strange note in it,” wrote George

H. Morrison; “*Joshua reproaches God.*”¹ He seems to be blaming God for Israel’s presence in Canaan and for the humiliating defeat they had just experienced.

When you walk by faith, you will claim all that God has for you, *but unbelief is always content to settle for something less than God’s best*. This is why the epistle to the Hebrews is in the Bible, to urge God’s people to “go on” and enter into the fullness of their inheritance in Christ (Heb. 6:1). God sometimes permits us to experience humiliating defeats in order to test our faith and reveal to us what’s really going on in our hearts. What life does to us depends on what life finds *in* us, and we don’t always know the condition of our own hearts (Jer. 17:9).

Repentance (vv. 8–9). Now Joshua gets to the heart of the matter: Israel’s defeat had robbed God of glory, and for this they had to repent. If the people of the land lost their fear of Israel’s God (2:8–11), this would make it difficult for Joshua to conquer the land. But the important thing was not Joshua’s fame or Israel’s conquests, but the glory of the God of Israel. Joshua’s concern was not for his own reputation but for the “great name” of Jehovah. Joshua had learned this lesson from Moses (Ex. 32:11–13; Num. 14:13–16), and it’s a lesson the church needs to learn today.

Rebuke (vv. 10–15). The Lord allowed Joshua and his leaders to stay on their faces until the time for the evening sacrifice. He gave them time to come to the end of themselves so that they would obey His directions, and then He spoke to Joshua. There is a time to pray and a time to act, and the time had now come to act.

Since Israel had sinned, Israel had to deal with its sin. God told Joshua that the nation had stolen that which belonged to Him and had hidden it among their own possessions as if it were theirs. Note the repetition of the word “accursed,” which is used six times in this paragraph. The nation had been sanctified in preparation for crossing the Jordan (3:5), but now they had to be sanctified to

discover an enemy in the camp. They had to present themselves to God so He could expose the guilty man.

What the Lord said to Joshua helps us see Achan's sin (and Israel's sin) from the divine point of view. What they did was *sin* (7:11), a word that means "to miss the mark." God wants His people to be holy and obedient, but they missed the mark and fell short of God's standard. It was also *transgression* (v. 11), which means "to cross over." God had drawn a line and told them not to cross it, but they had violated His covenant and crossed the line.

This sin involved *stealing from God* and then *lying about it* (v. 11). Achan had taken the forbidden wealth but pretended that he had obeyed the Lord. Achan had done a foolish thing (v. 15) in thinking he could rob God and get away with it. Israel couldn't face any of her enemies until their sin had been put away. The tribes could never claim their inheritance as long as one man clung to his forbidden treasures. Everything God had done for His people up to this point was to no avail as long as they couldn't go forward in victory. What a lesson for the church today!

That evening Joshua sent word throughout the camp that the people were to sanctify themselves and prepare for an assembly to be held the next morning. You wonder whether Achan and his family got any sleep that night, or did they think they were secure?

A DISCOVERED SINNER (7:16–26) The investigation (vv. 16–18). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” asked the prophet (Jer. 17:9), and he answered the question in the next verse: “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.”

Nobody can hide from God. “Can any hide himself in secret places that I

shall not see him?” (Jer. 23:24). Whether sinners run to the top of the mountains or dive to the bottom of the seas, God will find them and judge them (Amos 9:3). “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14).

God’s approach was methodical. First He singled out the tribe of Judah, then the family of the Zerahites, then the household of Zabdi, and finally the culprit Achan. Perhaps the high priest used the ephod to determine God’s direction (1 Sam. 23:6, 9; 30:7–8), or Joshua and the high priest may have cast lots. It must have been frightening for Achan and his immediate family to watch the accusing finger of God point closer and closer. “My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes” (Jer. 16:17 NIV). Read Psalm 10, especially verses 6, 11, and 13 to see what may have been going on in Achan’s mind and heart during this tense time of scrutiny.

When Joshua singled out Achan as the offender, the people watching must have asked themselves, “What evil thing did he do that the Lord was so displeased with us?” Perhaps the relatives of the thirty-six slain soldiers were angry as they looked at the man whose disobedience caused the death of their loved ones.

The confession (vv. 19–23). The phrase “Give glory to God” was a form of official oath in Israel (John 9:24 NIV). Achan had not only sinned against his own people, but he had also grievously sinned against the Lord, and he had to confess his sin to Him. When he said “I have sinned,” he joined the ranks of seven other men in Scripture who made the same confession, some more than once, and some without sincerity: Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), King Saul (1 Sam. 15:24, 30; 26:21), David (2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10, 17; Ps. 51:4), Shimei (2 Sam. 19:20), Judas (Matt. 27:4), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:18, 21).

Before he could execute the Lord’s judgment, Joshua had to present the

evidence that substantiated Achan's confession. The messengers dug under Achan's tent and found "the accursed thing" that had brought defeat to Israel. The stolen goods were spread out before the Lord so He could see that all Israel was renouncing their hold on this evil treasure. The confession and the evidence were enough to convict the accused man.

The judgment (vv. 24–26). Since a law in Israel prohibited innocent family members from being punished for the sins of their relatives (Deut. 24:16), Achan's family must have been guilty of assisting him in his sin. His household was judged the same way Israel would deal with a Jewish city that had turned to idols. Achan and his family had turned from the true and living God and had given their hearts to that which God had said was accursed—silver, gold, and an expensive garment. It wasn't worth it!

At the beginning of a new period in Bible history, God sometimes revealed His wrath against sin in some dramatic way. After the tabernacle had been set up, Nadab and Abihu invaded its holy precincts contrary to God's law, and God killed them. This was a warning to the priests not to treat God's sanctuary carelessly (Lev. 10). When David sought to restore the ark to its place of honor, and Uzzah touched the ark to steady it, God killed Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:1–11), another warning from God not to treat sacred things carelessly. At the beginning of the church age, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to God and God's people, the Lord killed them (Acts 5:1–11).

The death of Achan and his family was certainly a dramatic warning to the nation not to take the Word of God lightly. The people and the animals were stoned, and their bodies burned along with all that the family possessed. The troubler of Israel was completely removed from the scene, the people were sanctified, and now God could march with His people and give them victory. The Valley of Achor is mentioned in Isaiah 65:10 and Hosea 2:15 as a place where the Jews will one day have a new beginning and no longer be associated with shame and defeat. The Valley of Achor will become for them "a door of

hope” when they return to their land and share in the blessings of the messianic kingdom. How wonderful the Lord is to take Achor, a place of sorrow and defeat, and make it into a place of hope and joy.

The heap of stones in the valley would be a reminder that God expects His people to obey His Word, and if they don’t, He must judge them. The heap of stones at Gilgal (Josh. 4:1–8) reminded them that God keeps His Word and leads His obedient people to the place of blessing. Both memorials are needed in the walk of faith. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and longs to bless His people, but God is also light (1 John 1:5) and must judge His people’s sins.

It had been a trying two days for Joshua and his leaders, but the situation was about to change. God would take charge of the army and lead His people to victory. When you surrender to the Lord, no defeat is permanent and no mistake is beyond remedy. Even the “Valley of Trouble” can become a “door of hope.”

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How did the Israelites’ defeat begin?
2. Why did one man’s disobedience cause the whole nation to be defeated?
3. Achan’s steps to sin were “I saw ... I coveted ... I took.” How might the same steps to sin play out today?

4. What does it mean to “covet”?

5. How could Joshua have avoided defeat? What mistakes did he make?

6. How did Joshua respond to the defeat? Why?

7. Why does God permit His people to suffer defeat?

8. How does God view sin? How does He respond to it?

9. How should God’s reaction to sin influence our actions?

10. How can we prevent defeat from becoming permanent?

Chapter Nine

We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Our Neighbor

(Joshua 9:1—10:28)

An anonymous wit reminds us that a dentist's mistake is pulled out, a lawyer's mistake is imprisoned, a teacher's mistake is failed, a printer's mistake is corrected, a pharmacist's mistake is buried, a postman's mistake is forwarded, and an electrician's mistake could be shocking. The novelist Joseph Conrad wrote, "It's only those who do nothing that make no mistakes."

In Joshua's case, however, doing nothing *was* his mistake, and this chapter explains what happened. It records the three stages in his second failure (after Ai) in the conquest of the Promised Land. It also tells us how Joshua turned his mistake into a victory.

BELIEVING THE ENEMY (9:1–15)

While Israel was at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, reaffirming their commitment to the Lord, the kings in Canaan were getting ready to attack. They had heard about the defeat of Jericho and Ai and were not about to give up without a fight. It was time for them to go on the offensive and attack these Jewish invaders. The city-states in Canaan were not always friendly with one

another, but local rivals can often come together when they have a common enemy (Ps. 2:1–2; Luke 23:12).

After an experience of great blessing, God's people must be especially prepared to confront the enemy, for like Canaan, the Christian life is "a land of hills and valleys" (Deut. 11:11). But Israel's greatest danger wasn't the confederation of the armies of Canaan. It was a group of men from Gibeon who were about to enter the camp and deceive Joshua and the princes of Israel. Satan sometimes comes as a devouring lion (1 Peter 5:8) and sometimes as a deceiving serpent (2 Cor. 11:3), and we must be alert and protected by the spiritual armor God has provided for us (Eph. 6:10–18).

What the Gibeonites did (vv. 3–5). Gibeon was located only twenty-five miles from the camp of Israel at Gilgal and was on Joshua's list to be destroyed. In Deuteronomy 20:10–20, God's law stated that Israel must destroy all the cities in Canaan. If after the conquest Israel was involved in other wars, they could offer peace to cities that were outside the land. (See also 7:1–11.) Somehow the Gibeonites knew about this law and decided to use it for their own protection. Since the enemy knows how to use the Word of God for their own purposes, God's people must keep alert (Matt. 4:5–7).

The Gibeonites assembled a group of men and equipped them to look like an official delegation from a foreign city. Their clothing, food, and equipment were all designed to give the impression that they had been on a long and difficult journey from a distant city. Satan is a counterfeiter and "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14 NIV). He has his "false apostles" and "deceitful workmen" (v. 13 NIV) at work in this world, blinding the lost and seeking to lead believers astray. It's much easier for us to identify the lion when he's roaring than to detect the serpent when he's slithering into our lives.

What the Gibeonites said (vv. 6–13). Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and human nature is such that many people find it easier to tell lies

than the truth. With tongue in cheek, the American political leader Adlai Stevenson said, “A lie is an abomination unto the Lord—and a very present help in trouble.” The Gibeonites told several lies in their attempt to get out of trouble.

First, they said they were “from a very far country” (Josh. 9:6, 9) when they actually lived twenty-five miles away. Then they lied about their clothing and food. “This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is” (v. 12 NIV). They also lied about themselves and gave the impression that they were important envoys on an official peace mission from the elders of their city. They also called themselves “your servants” (vv. 8, 9, 11), when in reality they were the enemies of Israel.

These four lies were bad enough; but when the visitors said they had come “because of the name of the LORD” (v. 9), it was blasphemous. Like the citizens of Jericho (2:10), the people in Gibeon had heard about Israel’s march of conquest (9:9–10), but unlike Rahab and her family, they didn’t put their faith in the Lord. These men were wise enough not to mention Israel’s victories at Jericho and Ai, for that news couldn’t have reached their “far country” that quickly. Satan’s ambassadors can lie more convincingly than some Christians can tell the truth!

Satan knows how to use “religious lies” to give the impression that people are seeking to know the Lord. In my pastoral ministry I’ve met people who have introduced themselves *as seekers*, but the longer they talked, the more convinced I was that they were *sneakers*, trying to get something out of me and the church. They would make their “profession of faith” and then start telling me their sad tale of woe, hoping to break my heart and then pick my pocket. Of all liars, “religious liars” are the worst. If you need to be convinced of this, read 2 Peter 2 and the epistle of Jude.

Why they succeeded (vv. 14–15). The reason is simple: Joshua and the

princes of Israel were impetuous and didn't take time to consult the Lord. They walked by sight and not by faith. After listening to the strangers' speech and examining the evidence, Joshua and his leaders concluded that the men were telling the truth. The leaders of Israel took the "scientific approach" instead of the "spiritual approach." They depended on their own senses, examined the "facts," discussed the matter, and agreed in their conclusion. It was all very logical and convincing, but it was all wrong. They had made the same mistake at Ai (Josh. 7) and hadn't yet learned to wait on the Lord and seek His direction.

The will of God comes from the heart of God (Ps. 33:11), and He delights to make it known to His children *when He knows they are humble and willing to obey*. We don't seek God's will like customers who look at options but like servants who listen for orders. "If any of you really determines to do God's will, then you will certainly know" (John 7:17 TLB) is a basic principle for victorious Christian living. God sees our hearts and knows whether we are really serious about obeying Him. Certainly we ought to use the mind God has given us, but we must heed the warning of Proverbs 3:5–6 and not *lean on* our own understanding.

If this group of men had been an authentic official delegation, it would have comprised a much larger company bearing adequate supplies, including sufficient provisions for the trip home. Real ambassadors would have thrown away their "dry and moldy" bread because their servants would have baked fresh bread for them. As officials, they would have packed the proper attire so that they might make the best impression possible as they negotiated with the enemy. Had Joshua and his leaders paused to think and pray about what they saw, they would have concluded that the whole thing was a trick. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5 NKJV).

True faith involves exercising patience (Heb. 6:12). "Whoever believes will

not act hastily” (Isa. 28:16 NKJV). Moses had told the Jews, “Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you” (Ex. 34:12 NIV). But in their haste Joshua and the Jewish leaders broke God’s law and made a covenant with the enemy. Since their oath was sworn in the name of the Lord (Josh. 9:18), it could not be broken. Joshua and the princes of Israel had sworn to their own hurt (Ps. 15:4; Eccl. 5:1–7), and there was no way to revoke their oath or be released from their promise.

Like Joshua and the nation of Israel, God’s people today are living in enemy territory and must constantly exercise caution. When you believe the enemy instead of seeking the mind of the Lord, you can expect to get into trouble.

ENLISTING THE ENEMY (9:16–27)

How did the leaders of Israel discover that they had made a big mistake? Knowing that they were now out of danger, perhaps the “ambassadors” openly admitted what they had done. Or maybe the Gibeonites were overheard rejoicing in their success. Did some of Joshua’s spies return to camp after reconnaissance and recognize the enemy? Perhaps the Gibeonites overheard the plans for Israel’s next attack and had to inform the leaders that a solemn oath now protected those cities. However it happened, Joshua discovered that he and the princes had blundered, and no doubt they were humbled and embarrassed because of it.

We must give the leaders credit for being men of their word. To violate their oath would have been to take the holy name of Jehovah in vain, and this would have brought about divine judgment. Years later King Saul violated this oath, and God judged the nation severely (2 Sam. 21). Military leaders of lesser character than Joshua might have argued that “all’s fair in love and war” and forced the Gibeonites to divulge information that would help him conquer their city. Instead, when the Jewish army arrived at Gibeon and the neighboring cities,

they didn't attack them.

Why did the Jewish people grumble at what their leaders had done? Because this covenant with Gibeon would cost the soldiers dearly in plunder they would never get from the protected cities. Furthermore, the Gibeonites and their neighbors might influence the Jews with their pagan practices and lead them away from the Lord. Moses had given Israel stern warnings against compromising with the people of the land (Deut. 7), and now they had foolishly made a covenant with the enemy. However, we wonder what decisions the common people would have made had they been in the place of the leaders. It's easy to criticize after the fact!

That wasn't the end of the story. Joshua and his associates teach us an important lesson: If you make a mistake, admit it, *and then make your mistake work for you!* The leaders put the Gibeonites to work hauling water and fuel for the service of the tabernacle, where both water and wood were used in abundance. In later years the Gibeonites were called *the Nethinim* ("given ones" = given to assist the priests) and labored as servants in the temple (1 Chron. 9:2; Ezra 2:43, 58; Neh. 3:26). In Joshua 10, we shall see that God overruled Joshua's mistake and used it to give him a signal victory over five kings at one time.

Of course, the Gibeonites would rather submit to humiliating service than be destroyed as were the inhabitants of Jericho and Ai. There's no evidence in Scripture that the descendants of the Gibeonites created any problems for the Jews.

It's likely that their service in the tabernacle, and later in the temple, influenced them to abandon their idols and worship the God of Israel. The fact that over five hundred Nethinim returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 2:43–58; 8:20) suggests that they were devoted to the Lord and His house.

DEFENDING THE ENEMY (10:1–28)

When you make agreements with the enemy, expect to end up paying a price and having to defend them in order to protect yourself. This is why God's people must remain separated from the world (2 Cor. 6:14–18). I wonder whether Paul had Joshua in mind when he wrote, “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4 NKJV).

The king's call to the armies (vv. 1–5). The king of Jerusalem, whose name means “lord of righteousness,” heard what the Gibeonites had done and announced that these traitors had to be punished. If a great city like Gibeon capitulated to the Jews, then one more barrier was removed against the advancement of Israel in the land. It was important for the Canaanites to recover that key city, even if they had to take it by force. Four other Canaanite kings allied with Adoni-zedek, and their combined armies encamped before Gibeon. The poor Gibeonites had made peace with the invaders and were now at war with their former allies!

As this confederation of armies and kings assembled, God in heaven must have laughed (Ps. 2:1–4), because unknown to them He was using these events to accomplish His own purposes. *Instead of having to defeat these five city-states one by one, He would help Joshua conquer them all at one time!* Just as God used the defeat at Ai to form a battle plan for victory over Ai (Josh. 8), so also He used Joshua's mistake with the Gibeonites to protect Gibeon and accelerate the conquest of Canaan.

The mistakes we make embarrass us, especially those mistakes that are caused by our running ahead of the Lord and not seeking His will. But we need to remember that no mistake is final for the dedicated Christian. God can use even our blunders to accomplish His purposes. Somebody defined success as “the art of making your mistakes when nobody's looking,” but a better definition

would be “the art of seeing victory where other people see only defeat.”

The Gibeonites’ call to Joshua (vv. 6–7). In spite of their paganism, these Gibeonites are a good example for people to follow today. When they knew they were headed for destruction, they came to Joshua (“Jehovah is Savior”) and obtained from him a promise of protection. Would that lost sinners realize their plight and turn to Jesus Christ by faith! When the Gibeonites found themselves in danger, they believed Joshua’s promise and called on him for help. That’s what God’s people need to do when they find themselves facing the battles of life. The Gibeonites turned the whole burden over to Joshua and trusted him to keep his word, and he did.

Joshua’s call to the Lord (vv. 8–15). Three factors combined to give Joshua success in this attack: believing a divine promise (v. 8), using sound strategy (v. 9), and calling on the Lord in prayer (vv. 10–15).

The promise. Joshua’s actions here illustrate two important verses: “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23) and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (10:17). Whenever we believe the promises of God and obey the commands of God, we act by faith and can expect God’s help. The Jews didn’t have to be afraid, because God had already promised them victory. God’s promises of victory had encouraged Joshua when he became leader of the nation (Josh. 1:5–9), when he anticipated attacking Jericho (6:2), and when he attacked Ai after a humiliating defeat (8:1). God’s promises would be fulfilled because “there has not failed one word of all His good promise” (1 Kings 8:56 NKJV).

The strategy. But faith apart from works is dead, and Joshua proved his faith by using wise strategy. He ordered an all-night march and a surprise attack on the enemy army, strategy he had used before when attacking Ai (8:3ff.). It was a long trek from Gilgal to Gibeon, and the road was uphill, but Joshua assembled his troops and made the journey as quickly as possible. No doubt the

men were weary when they arrived, but the Lord was with them and gave them victory. What kept the soldiers going? They believed God's promise and knew that the victory was assured.

God assisted the weary Jewish soldiers by killing the enemy army with large hailstones. The timely occurrence of the storm was itself a miracle, but an even greater miracle was the fact that the stones *hit only the enemy soldiers*. God took His special "ammunition" out of His storehouse and used it to good advantage (Job 38:22–23). When God's people are obeying God's will, everything in the universe works for them, even "the stars in their courses" (Judg. 5:20). When we disobey God's will, everything works against us. (Read Jonah 1 for a vivid illustration of this truth.)

The prayer. But the miracle of the hailstorm was nothing compared to the miracle of extending the day so that Joshua could finish the battle and secure a complete victory over the enemy. His men were weary and the task was great, and if night came on, the enemy could escape. Joshua needed a special act from God to enable him to claim the victory the Lord had promised.

This is the last miracle recorded in Joshua and certainly the greatest. Joshua prayed for God's help, and the Lord answered in a remarkable way. This event is questioned by those who deny the reality of miracles and look only to science for truth. "How could God stop the rotation of the earth and extend the length of a day," they ask, "without creating chaos all over the planet?" They seem to forget the fact that days are *normally* of different lengths in various parts of the world without the planet experiencing chaos. At two o'clock in the morning, I read the newspaper *by sunlight* in Norway.

But how do you explain a miracle, *any* miracle? Of course, the simplest answer is the answer of faith: The Lord is God and nothing is too hard for Him (Jer. 32:17, 27). Day and night belong to God (Ps. 74:16), and everything He has made is His servant. If God can't perform the miracle described in Joshua 10, then He can't perform any miracle and is imprisoned in His own creation, unable

to use or suspend the very laws He built into it. I have a difficult time believing in that kind of a God.

An Old Testament expert, Gleason L. Archer, points out that the phrase “hasted not to go down” in verse 13 indicates “a retardation of the movement” and not a complete cessation.¹ The sun and moon didn’t stand still permanently and then suddenly go down but were held back so that the daylight was lengthened. God stopped the sun and moon and then retarded the rotation of the planet so that the sun and moon set very slowly. Such a process would not create chaos all over the globe.

A corollary to this view is that the sun and moon remained on their normal course and it only *appeared* that the day was lengthening because of the way God caused their light to be refracted. But verse 13 states twice that the sun “stood still” and once that the moon “stayed.” However, these verbs need not describe a permanent situation but only the beginning of the miracle. God stopped the sun and moon in their courses and then controlled their gradual descent, all the while causing the light to be refracted for a much longer period of time.

Since verses 12b–15 (NKJV) are poetical in form, a quotation from the unknown book of Jasher, some students interpret the words symbolically. They say that God so helped Israel that the army was able to accomplish two days’ work in one day. But Joshua’s words sound very much like a prayer that the Lord would intervene, and the description of what occurred doesn’t read like the report of an efficiency expert.

Why try to explain away a miracle? What do we prove? Certainly not that we’re smarter than God! Either we believe in a God who can do anything, or we must accept a Christian faith that’s non-miraculous; and that does away with the inspiration of the Bible, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Certainly there’s room for honest questions about the *nature* of the

miraculous; but for the humble Christian believer, there's never room for questioning the *reality* of the miraculous. C. S. Lewis wrote, "The mind which asks for a non-miraculous Christianity is a mind in process of relapsing from Christianity into mere 'religion.'" [2](#)

You find seemingly contradictory facts stated in Joshua 10:15 and 21. Why would the army go all the way back to Gilgal when the battle wasn't over? The best explanation is to see verse 15 as the completion of the quotation from the book of Jasher, beginning at verse 13b. The temporary Jewish camp was at Makkedah, which was near Libnah, and the army didn't return to Gilgal until they had established their control over central Canaan.

Joshua's call to his army (vv. 16–28). At the end of an incredible battle, Joshua performed a public ceremony that gave encouragement and strength to his soldiers. Their past victories had given them control over the central part of the land, but now they faced campaigns in both the south and the north of Palestine. "Divide and conquer" was Joshua's strategy, and it worked. Joshua wanted to remind his men that the Lord would give them victory throughout the land.

Knowing that the five kings were trapped in a cave, Joshua temporarily left them and led his men in the "mopping up" operation, which verse 20 describes as "slaying them with a very great slaughter." Only a few of the enemy soldiers escaped to the cities, but since those cities would eventually be destroyed anyway, those fugitives had no hope.

Returning to the camp, probably the next day, Joshua ordered the kings to be taken from the cave and put on the ground, their faces in the dirt. This humiliating posture announced that Joshua had won a total victory and their end had come. But there was more. He called for his officers to put their feet on the necks of the kings, symbolic not only of the past victory but also of the victories the Lord would give His people in the days ahead. The kings were slain and the five corpses hung on five trees until sundown. Then their bodies were put into

the cave, with a pile of stones closing up the entrance. This pile of stones was another monument in the land speaking of the power and victory of the Lord.

In verse 25, Joshua's words must have thrilled the hearts of his brave soldiers. They echo the words God spoke to him when he began his career (1:6–9). Since Joshua is a type of Jesus Christ, we can apply this scene and these words to Christ and His people. Jesus has defeated all His enemies and will one day return and destroy them forever. No matter how they may rage and rebel (Ps. 2:1–3), our Lord's enemies are only the footstool at His feet (Ps. 110:1; 1 Cor. 15:25). Through Him, we can claim victory and put our feet on the necks of our enemies (Rom. 16:20).

As you review the whole episode of Joshua and the Gibeonites, you can't help but be both warned and encouraged. These events warn us to be alert and prayerful lest the enemy deceive us and we start walking by sight instead of by faith. Then we'll find ourselves making decisions that are wrong and getting into alliances that are dangerous. But there's also a word of encouragement: God can take even our blunders and turn them into blessings. This isn't an excuse for carelessness, but it is a great encouragement when you've failed the Lord and His people.

“And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4 NKJV).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. In what ways do some Christians ally themselves with God's enemies?

2. Why did Israel ally herself with the Gibeonites?
3. What mistake did Joshua make that opened him to being deceived by the Gibeonites? Why is that an easy mistake to make?
4. What sorts of alliances are unbiblical, and why? See James 1:5–6; Proverbs 3:5–6; and 2 Corinthians 6:14.
5. Why can't we always trust a person or ministry who uses the Word of God?
6. How can we avoid making the same mistake Joshua did?
7. How did God use Joshua's unwise alliance with Gibeon to speed up the conquest of Canaan?
8. What contributed to Joshua's success in the battle of Joshua 10?
9. How did Joshua deal with the five kings? Why?
10. What principles for spiritual victory did you learn from this chapter?

Interlude

(Joshua 10:29—12:24)

This section of the book of Joshua summarizes Israel's conquest of the southern (10:29–43) and northern cities (11:1–15) in Palestine, and closes with a list of the names of some of the kings whom Israel defeated (11:16—12:24). Since there is probably a map of the conquest located in the back of your Bible, consult it as you read these chapters.

Two things stand out in this record: It was the Lord who gave the victory (10:30, 32, 42; 11:6, 8), and Joshua obeyed the Lord by utterly destroying the enemy, just as Moses had commanded (11:9, 12, 15, 20). The only exception was Gibeon.

Joshua's strategy was to cut across the land and divide it, conquer the southern cities, then the northern cities. On more than one occasion, he made a surprise attack on the enemy (10:9; 11:7), and the promises of the Lord encouraged him (v. 6; see 1:9; 8:1).

In 10:29–35, you have the record of the army fighting in the foothills; but in verse 36, the campaign moves to the mountains. The northern coalition of kings was unable to defeat Israel even though their army was much larger than that of the Jews (11:1–9).

The "long time" of verse 18 is about seven years. Israel's failure at Kadesh Barnea (Deut. 2:14), at which time Caleb was forty years old (Josh. 14:7), to their crossing of the Jordan was thirty-eight years. He was eighty-five when the conquest was over (v. 10), which means that at least seven years had been

devoted to the campaign.

The Anakim mentioned in 11:21–22 were a race of giants, descendants of Anak, who were greatly feared by the ten unbelieving men who had spied out Canaan (Num. 13:22, 28, 33). The two believing spies, Joshua and Caleb, didn't fear them but had trusted the Lord for victory. Joshua's victory over the Anakim is recorded in Joshua 11:21–22 and Caleb's victory in 14:12–15.

The apparent contradiction between verses 11:23 and 13:1 can easily be explained. Joshua and his army did take control of the whole land by destroying the key cities with their kings and people. Israel didn't take every little city or slay every citizen or ruler, but they did enough to break the power of the enemy and establish control over the land. Once this was accomplished and there was rest in the land, Joshua was able to assign each tribe its inheritance, and within each inheritance, the tribes had to gain mastery over the remaining inhabitants who were still there. Even after the death of Joshua and his officers, there was additional land to be taken (Judg. 1—3).

Thirty-three kings are named in [Joshua 12](#), beginning with Sihon and Og, whose lands were east of Jordan and had been conquered under the leadership of Moses (vv. 1–8; Num. 21:21–35). The sixteen kings defeated in the southern campaign are listed in Joshua 12:9–16 and the fifteen northern kings in verses 17–24.

Now we turn to the actual assigning of the land to the tribes (chaps. 13—21) to discover the spiritual truths we need to learn and apply as we claim our own spiritual inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Chapter Ten

This Land Is Our Land!

[\(Joshua 13—21\)](#)

Joshua had successfully completed the first half of his divine commission: He had conquered the enemy and was in control of the land and the cities (1:1–5). Now he had to fulfill the second part of that commission and divide the land so that each tribe could claim their inheritance and enjoy what God had given them (v. 6). (See Num. 34—35.)

The word *inheritance* is found over fifty times in these nine chapters and is a very important word. The Jews *inherited* their land. They didn't *win* their land as spoils of battle or *purchase* their land as in a business transaction. The Lord, who was the sole owner, leased the land to them. "The land must not be sold permanently," the Lord had instructed them, "because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants" (Lev. 25:23 NIV). Imagine having God for your landlord!

The "rent" God required was simply Israel's obedience to His law. As long as the Jewish people honored the Lord with their worship and obedience, He would bless them, make their land productive, and keep their nation at peace with their neighbors. When Israel agreed to the blessings and curses at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (Josh. 8:30–35), they accepted the conditions of what is called the "Palestinian Covenant." Their *ownership* of the land was purely the

gracious act of God, but their *possession* and *enjoyment* of the land depended on their submission and obedience to the Lord. (See Lev. 26 and Deut. 27—30 for the details of the Palestinian Covenant.)

The Promised Land was a gift of God's love, and if the Israelites loved the Lord, they would want to obey Him and please Him in the way they used His land (Deut. 4:37–39). Unfortunately, they eventually defied the Lord, disobeyed the law, and defiled the land, and God had to chasten them in the land of Babylon.

There were four main stages in the distribution of the land, and in each of these stages, you will find spiritual lessons for God's people today who want to enjoy their spiritual inheritance in Christ. As you study these chapters, I suggest you consult a map of the Holy Land that shows the boundaries of the twelve tribes and the cities that are involved.

1. THE ASSIGNMENTS MADE AT GILGAL (13:1—17:18)

Throughout the conquest of Canaan, Gilgal had been the center of operations for Israel. Later, Joshua moved the camp and the tabernacle to a more central location at Shiloh (18:1).

We don't know Joshua's exact age at this time in Israel's history, although he could well have been a hundred. Caleb was eighty-five (14:10), and it's likely that Joshua was the older of the two. Joshua lived to be 110 (24:29), and the events described in the last half of the book could well have taken over ten years.

The system for assigning the territories in Canaan is given in 14:1–2. Eleazar the high priest, Joshua, and one representative from each of the tribes (Num. 34:13–29) cast lots before the Lord and in this way determined His will (Prov. 16:33). When Joshua relocated the camp at Shiloh, they changed the system (Josh. 18:1–7).

The two and a half tribes east of the Jordan (13:1–33). Reuben, Gad, and

the half tribe of Manasseh had agreed to help the other tribes conquer the land before they returned to the east side of the Jordan to enjoy their inheritance (Num. 32). They had asked for this land outside the boundaries of Canaan because it was especially suited to the raising of cattle. The fact that these two and a half tribes would not be living within God's appointed land didn't seem to worry them. Moses graciously agreed to their choice and let them settle across the Jordan. When we study the twenty-second chapter of Joshua, we'll learn that while their choice may have been good for their cattle, it created serious problems for their children.

These tribes became a sort of "buffer zone" between the Jews in Canaan and the heathen nations like Moab and Ammon. Of course, their location made them extremely vulnerable both to military attack and ungodly influence, and both of these liabilities eventually brought about their downfall (1 Chron. 5:25–26). The boundaries are given for Reuben in the south (Josh. 13:15–23), and the half tribe of Manasseh in the north (vv. 29–32), with Gad sandwiched between (vv. 24–28).

Lesson #1. Don't become a "borderline believer." Enter into the inheritance God appoints for you and rejoice in it. "He will choose our inheritance for us, the excellence of Jacob whom He loves" (Ps. 47:4 NKJV). The will of God is the expression of the love of God and is always the best for us.

Since the tribe of Reuben had taken its territory from Moab, it was logical for the story of Balaam to be mentioned here (Josh. 13:22–23; see Num. 22–25). When Balaam saw that God was turning his curses into blessings, he advised Balak to be friendly to the Jews and invite them to one of the Moabite religious feasts. This resulted in some of the Jewish men taking Moabite women

for themselves and thus violating the law of God. What Satan couldn't accomplish as a lion, cursing Israel, he accomplished as a serpent, beguiling Israel and leading the men into wicked compromise.

Four times in these chapters, we are reminded that the Levites were given no inheritance in the land (Josh. 13:14, 33; 14:3–4; 18:7), because the Lord was their inheritance (Deut. 18:1–8; 10:8–9; Num. 18). The priests received certain portions from the sacrifices as their due, and both the priests and Levites shared in the special tithes and offerings that the people were commanded to bring.

But other factors were probably involved in scattering the tribe of Levi. For one thing, God didn't want tribal responsibilities to distract the priests and Levites; He wanted them to devote themselves fully to serving Him. (See 2 Tim. 2:4.) Also, He wanted them to be “salt and light” in the land as they lived among the people and taught them the law. Simeon and Levi were also scattered in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jacob (Gen. 49:5–7; see chap. 34). Simeon eventually became a part of Judah.

The two and a half tribes west of the Jordan (Josh. 14:1—17:18). The next tribes to be settled were Judah in the south (14:6—15:63), Ephraim across the middle of the land (16:1–10), and the other half of Manasseh in the north (17:1–18).

Since Caleb belonged to the tribe of Judah and had been one of the two faithful spies, he received his inheritance first (Num. 13:30). Joshua, the other faithful spy, was the last to receive his inheritance (Josh. 19:49–51). Caleb reminded his friend Joshua of the promise Moses had made to them forty-five years before (Num. 14:24, 30; Deut. 1:34–36), that they would survive the years of wandering and receive their inheritance in the land. This promise gave Joshua and Caleb joy and courage as they endured years of wandering and waiting.

Lesson #2. Be encouraged in your pilgrim journey! You have already received your inheritance in Christ and can claim “every spiritual

blessing” (Eph. 1:3 NKJV). Since you have a glorious inheritance before you (1 Peter 1:3–6), keep looking up! The best is yet to come!

Caleb was eighty-five years old, but he didn’t look for an easy task, suited to an “old man.” He asked Joshua for mountains to climb and giants to conquer! His strength was in the Lord, and he knew that God would never fail him. The secret of Caleb’s life is found in a phrase that’s repeated six times in Scripture: “He wholly followed the LORD God of Israel” (Josh. 14:14; also see Num. 14:24; 32:12; Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:8–9). Caleb was an overcomer because he had faith in the Lord (1 John 5:4).

Lesson #3. We are never too old to make new conquests of faith in the power of the Lord. Like Caleb, we can capture mountains and conquer giants if we wholly follow the Lord. No matter how old we become, we must never retire from trusting and serving the Lord.

In Joshua 15:13–19, we see Caleb providing for the next generation. Some of Caleb’s daring faith rubbed off on his son-in-law Othniel, who later became a judge in the land (Judg. 3:7–11). Caleb’s faith also touched his daughter, for she had the faith to ask her father for a field and then for springs of water to irrigate the land. Caleb’s example of faith was more valuable to his family than the property he claimed for them.

Lesson #4. The older generation must provide for the next generation, not only materially but most of all spiritually. “Senior saints” must be examples of believers and encourage the younger generation to trust the Lord and wholly follow Him.

The inheritance of the rest of the tribe of Judah is described in Joshua 15:1–12 and 21–63. We’re not sure why verse 32 says twenty-nine cities when thirty-six are named, but perhaps the names of some of the “villages” outside the city walls are included in the list. At that time the Jews couldn’t take Jerusalem (v. 63). They held it temporarily later on (Judg. 1:8), and then David captured it permanently and made it the capital city (2 Sam. 5:6–10).

Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph, whom Jacob “adopted” and especially blessed (Gen. 48:15–22). Since the tribe of Levi wasn’t given any territory, these two tribes made up the difference so that there were still twelve tribes in Israel. The birth order was “Manasseh and Ephraim” (Josh. 16:4; 17:1), but Jacob reversed it. God rejects our first birth and gives us a second birth. He accepted Abel and rejected Cain; He rejected Ishmael and accepted Isaac, Abraham’s second-born son; He rejected Esau and accepted Jacob.

In the nation of Israel the sons inherited the property, but the daughters of Zelophehad saw to it that the daughters weren’t discriminated against (vv. 3–6; Num. 27:1–11). Like the daughter of Caleb, these women had the faith and courage to ask for their inheritance, and they even changed the law!

Lesson #5. God wants to give all His people their inheritance. “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2 NKJV). In Jesus Christ, all believers are one and are heirs of God (Gal. 3:26–29). Nothing from your first birth should hinder you from claiming all that you have in Jesus Christ.

Joshua had a problem with the children of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), who complained because the Lord didn’t give them enough room (Josh. 17:14–18)! You can detect their pride as they told Joshua what a “great people” they were. After all, didn’t Jacob personally adopt and especially bless them? And

hadn't they multiplied in a great way? And wasn't Joshua from the tribe of Ephraim (Num. 13:8)? They were a special people who deserved special treatment.

If you compare the statistics given in 1:32–35 and 26:34 and 37, you learn that the descendants of Joseph had increased from 72,700 to 85,200, although Ephraim had 8,000 fewer people. But six other tribes had increased their number since the last census. Thus the children of Joseph weren't the only ones who were fruitful.

Joshua told his brethren that, if they were such a great people, now was their opportunity to prove it! Let them do what Caleb did and defeat the giants and claim the mountains! It's worth noting that the people of Ephraim and Manasseh seemed to be given to criticism and pride. They not only created problems for Joshua but also for Gideon (Judg. 8:1–3), Jephthah (12:1–7), and even David (2 Sam. 20:1–5). “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (James 3:16 NKJV).

Lesson #6. It's not your boasting but your believing that gives you the victory and gains you new territory. Sometimes those who talk the most accomplish the least.

2. THE ASSIGNMENTS MADE AT SHILOH (18:1—19:51)

Five tribes now had been given their inheritance as Joshua, Eleazar, and the twelve tribal leaders cast lots at Gilgal. Then Joshua moved the camp to Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim, where the tabernacle remained until David moved the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). The Lord must have directed Joshua to make this move or he would not have done it (Deut. 12:5–7). Shiloh was centrally located and was more convenient for all the tribes.

Seven tribes still had to have their inheritance marked out for them, and

apparently they were slow to respond to the challenge. Unlike Caleb and the daughters of Zelophehad, these tribes didn't have faith and spiritual zeal. These tribes had helped fight battles and defeat the enemy, but now they hesitated to claim their inheritance and enjoy the land God had given them. "The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession" (Prov. 12:27 NKJV).

At this point, Joshua and the leaders inaugurated a new system for allocating the land. After each of the seven tribes appointed three men, all twenty-one men went through the remaining territories and listed the cities and the landmarks, describing each part of the land. They brought this information back to Joshua, who then assigned the various portions to the remaining seven tribes by casting lots before the Lord.

Since Benjamin was the full brother to Joseph, his territory was assigned adjacent to Ephraim and Manasseh (Josh. 18:11–28). Simeon shared his inheritance with Judah (19:1–9) and eventually inhabited the cities assigned in Joshua 15:21ff. The children of Joseph wanted more territory, but weren't willing to fight for it by faith, but the people of Judah had so much land that they shared it with Simeon. What a contrast!

The area north of Manasseh was assigned to Zebulun (19:10–16), Issachar (vv. 17–23), Asher (vv. 24–31), and Naphtali (vv. 32–39). Zebulun and Naphtali later became "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matt. 4:15–16), where our Lord ministered when He was here on earth. The "sea of Chinneroth" (see Josh. 12:3; 13:27) is the Sea of Galilee. The Hebrew word *chinnereth* means "harp," and the Sea of Galilee is shaped like a harp.

The last tribe to receive its assignment was the tribe of Dan (19:40–48), which immediately went to work and expanded its territory. Dan and Benjamin formed a "belt" across the land, connecting the Dead Sea with the Mediterranean.

Being the leader that he was, Joshua waited until the very last to claim his own inheritance, and the Lord gave him the city of Timnath Serah (vv. 49–50 ^{NIV}). Like his friend Caleb, Joshua preferred living in the mountainous region of the land.

3. THE ASSIGNMENT OF THE CITIES OF REFUGE (20:1–9)

When the nation was still on the other side of the Jordan, God told Moses to have the people set aside special cities for the Levites (Num. 35:1–5), as well as six “cities of refuge” (Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:6–34; Deut. 19:1–13). Now that the tribes had received their territories, Joshua could assign these cities.

Even before the law of Moses was given, God had laid down the basic rule that those who shed blood should pay for their crime with their own blood (Gen. 9:5–6; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:16–21). This principle was enunciated repeatedly in the law, but God made a distinction between murder and manslaughter (Ex. 21:12–14; Deut. 19:11–13). “Blood defiles the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. Therefore do not defile the land which you inhabit” (Num. 35:33–34 ^{NKJV}).

The six cities of refuge were needed because society in that day had no police force to investigate crimes. It was the responsibility of each family to see to it that murders were avenged, but how could they tell whether it was a case of premeditated murder or accidental manslaughter? In the heat of anger a relative of the dead person might kill somebody who was really innocent of a capital crime.

Joshua set apart three cities of refuge on each side of the Jordan River. On the west side, Kedesh was farthest north, in the territory of Naphtali; Shechem was in the middle of the nation in the tribe of Manasseh; and Hebron was in the south in the tribe of Judah. On the east side of the Jordan, the cities were Golan

in the north in Manasseh, Ramoth in Gad, and Bezer farther south in the tribe of Reuben. Since the Holy Land is about the size of the state of Maryland, you can see that nobody was very far from a city of refuge.

The law was really quite simple. Anybody who killed another person could flee to a city of refuge and be protected from “the avenger of blood” until the elders of the city could investigate the circumstances. If they found the fugitive guilty, he or she was put to death, but if they concluded that it was a case of manslaughter, the fugitive was allowed to live in the city and be protected from the avenger. Upon the death of the high priest, the fugitive could go home again. It was a case of forfeiting freedom in order to save his or her life.

Many students have seen in the cities of refuge a picture of our salvation in Jesus Christ, to whom we “have fled for refuge” (Heb. 6:18). The lost sinner, of course, is in danger of judgment because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The avenger of blood is after him or her! God’s appointed Savior is Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12), but the sinner must come to Him by faith in order to be saved (Matt. 11:28–30; John 6:37). The way to each city was kept open with roads that were cared for and marked (Deut. 19:3 NIV). God wanted it to be easy for the fugitives to find their way to safety.

Beyond this, the picture is one of *contrast*. When we come to Christ for salvation, there’s no need for an investigation or a trial, because we *know* we’re guilty, *and we admit it!* The only people Jesus can save are those who confess their guilt and throw themselves on His mercy.

If the fugitive prematurely left the city of refuge, he could be killed, but our salvation in Christ is not conditional. Our High Priest will *never* die, and we are forever secure. “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24–25 NKJV).

The meanings of the names of the cities are interesting. Taking them in the order listed in Joshua 20:7–8, you have: Kedesh = “righteousness”; Shechem = “shoulder”; Hebron = “fellowship”; Bezer = “fortress” or “strong”; and Ramoth = “heights.” Hebraists do not agree on what Golan means, but the *Gesenius Lexicon* says it means “exile.”

These names then can be used to describe what sinners experience when they flee by faith to Jesus. First, He gives them His *righteousness*, and they can never be accused again. There is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1)! Like a shepherd, He carries them on His *shoulders*, and they enter into *fellowship* with Him. He is their *fortress*, and they are safe. They dwell in the *heights* even though they are *exiles*, pilgrims, and strangers in this world.

Lesson #7. Unless you have fled by faith to Jesus Christ, you aren’t saved! Since our sins put Jesus on the cross, all of us are guilty of His death. He is the only Savior, and apart from faith in Him, there is no salvation. Have you fled to Him?

Before leaving this theme, we should note that there is also an application to the nation of Israel. The people were guilty of killing the Lord Jesus Christ, *but it was a sin of ignorance on the part of the people* (Acts 3:12–18). When Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34), He was declaring them guilty of manslaughter rather than murder (1 Cor. 2:7–8). The way was open for their forgiveness, and God gave the nation nearly forty years to repent before He brought judgment. This same principle applied to the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1:12–14). However, no lost sinner today can plead ignorance, because God has declared *the whole world* guilty and without excuse (Rom. 3:9–19).

[4. THE ASSIGNMENT OF THE LEVITICAL CITIES \(21:1–45\)](#)

As we noted before, the tribe of Levi didn't have territory assigned to it but was scattered throughout the land. This way, they could teach the people the law and influence each of the tribes to be faithful to the Lord. But the Levites needed places to live and pastures for their cattle. Thus God assigned forty-eight cities for them to live in, along with a specific amount of land for pasture (Num. 35:1–5). The pastureland could not be sold, but their houses could be sold, and the Levites even had special privileges for redeeming their property.

The two lists of Levitical cities that we have—Joshua 21 and 1 Chronicles 6:54–81—do not always agree, but names of cities and spellings change over the years, and it's possible that from time to time new cities were selected and old ones abandoned.

There were forty-eight Levitical cities, six of which were also cities of refuge. Each of the tribes contributed four cities, except Judah and Simeon, who together contributed nine, and Naphtali, who contributed three. The descendants of the three sons of Aaron—Kohath, Gershon, and Marari—were assigned to the various cities, although other Jews also lived in them. In Numbers 26:62, the writer states that there were twenty-three thousand Levites before Israel entered the land, a big crowd to distribute among forty-eight cities.

It was important that Israel have qualified and authorized people to minister in the tabernacle and later in the temple, and we must never minimize the teaching ministry of the priests and Levites (2 Chron. 17:7–9). Since the common people didn't own copies of the Scriptures, it was important that the Levites identify with the people and explain the law to them. These Levitical cities were so located that nobody was too far away from a man who could help them understand and apply the law of Moses.

This long section in the book of Joshua closes with three wonderful affirmations:

First, God was faithful and gave Israel the land (Josh. 21:43). He kept the covenant that He made, first with Abraham (Gen. 12:7) and then with his descendants.

Second, God gave Israel victory over all their enemies and then gave them the rest from war (Josh. 21:44; see 1:13, 15; 11:23). What the ten unbelieving spies at Kadesh Barnea said could never happen *did* happen, because Joshua and the people believed God and obeyed His Word.

Third, God kept His promises (21:45). At the close of his life Joshua would remind the people of this (23:14), and Solomon reminded them of it when he dedicated the temple (1 Kings 8:56).

As the people of God, we can claim these assurances by faith. God's covenant with us is not going to fail; God's power and wisdom can give us victory over every foe; and God's promises can be trusted, no matter what the circumstances may be.

The covenant of God, the power of God, the promises of God—these are the spiritual resources we can depend on as we claim our inheritance in Jesus Christ.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why is the use of the word *inheritance* in the book of Joshua so important?
2. What were the four main stages in the distribution of the land?

3. Why don't Christians today cast lots to determine God's will? Is there ever a time when this might be appropriate?
4. Why were the Levites scattered and given no inheritance in the land?
5. What might hinder a believer from claiming all that he or she has in Jesus Christ?
6. What was the purpose of the cities of refuge? What do we learn about God as we see how He made this provision?
7. What are some comparisons and contrasts between cities of refuge and our salvation in Jesus Christ?
8. Of the seven lessons Wiersbe highlights in this chapter, which has the most impact on you? Why that one?
9. What spiritual resources can we depend upon as we claim our spiritual inheritance?

Chapter Eleven

And When the Battle's Over

[\(Joshua 22\)](#)

It was on V-E Day, May 8, 1945, when the nation heard President Truman announce over the radio: “General Eisenhower informs me that the forces of Germany have surrendered to the United Nations. The flags of freedom fly all over Europe.”

I remember V-J Day, August 14, 1945, when the downtown area of our city was jammed with people and total strangers were hugging one another and cheering. The Japanese had agreed to the Allied terms of surrender, and the war was over. My two brothers serving in the Marine Corps would be coming home!

The soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh must have been especially euphoric when the Jewish conquest of Canaan ended. For over seven years they had been away from their families on the other side of the Jordan, and now the victorious soldiers were free to go home.

But their return home was not without incident. In fact, what they did, well-meaning as it was, almost provoked another war. Let's consider the events involved and the lessons we can learn from them.

THEIR HONORABLE DISCHARGE (22:1–8) “In defeat unbeatable; in victory unbearable.” That's the way Sir Winston Churchill

described a British army officer famous in the Second World War. The first half of the description would apply to Joshua, because he knew how to win victory out of defeat. But the last half doesn't apply at all; for as commander of the Lord's army, Joshua was magnanimous in the way he treated his troops after the victory. An Italian proverb says, "It's the blood of the soldier that makes the general great." But this general made his soldiers great! This is clearly seen in the way he discharged the tribes who lived on the east side of the Jordan.

He commended them (vv. 1–3). These two and a half tribes had promised Moses that they would remain in the army until all the land was conquered, and they kept their promise (Num. 32; Deut. 3:12–20). After the death of Moses, they pledged that same loyalty to Joshua, their new leader (Josh. 1:12–18). These tribes had been loyal to Moses, to Joshua, and to their brothers from the other tribes. “For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you” (22:3 NIV).

Why had they been so loyal to their leaders and fellow soldiers? Because they were first of all loyal to the Lord their God. It was *His* mission they were carrying out and *His* name they were seeking to glorify. In the service of the Lord, far above our devotion to a leader, a cause, or even a nation is our devotion to the Lord. “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23–24 NKJV).

He discharged them (v. 4). Having fulfilled their mission and kept their promise, the tribes were now free to go home, for God had given His people rest. The concept of *rest* is important in the book of Joshua and means much more than simply the end of the war. The word carries with it the meaning of both

victory and security, and it involved Israel having their “resting place” in the land. God promised to give His people rest (Ex. 33:14; Deut. 12:9–10; 25:19; Josh. 1:13, 15), and He kept His promise (11:23; 14:15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1).

The spiritual application of this *rest* for God’s people today is made in Hebrews 3 and 4. When we trust Christ as Savior, we enter into *rest* because we’re no longer at war with God (Rom. 5:1). When we yield ourselves completely to Him and claim our inheritance by faith, we enter into a deeper rest and enjoy our spiritual riches in Christ. (See Matt. 11:28–32 for our Lord’s invitation.) When we *come to Him*, He gives us rest. When we *take His yoke of discipleship*, we find that deeper rest.

Imagine what it would be like for these soldiers to return home after being away for so many years! Think of the love they would experience, the joys they would find, the treasures they would share! That’s just a small picture of what happens when the children of God enter into the rest God gives to those who will yield their all to Him and trust His Word.

He admonished them (v. 5). Like any good leader, Joshua was more concerned about the spiritual walk of his people than anything else. The army had experienced victory in Canaan because Joshua loved the Lord and obeyed His Word (1:7–8), and that would be the “open secret” of Israel’s continued peace and prosperity. Just as they had been diligent in battle, obeying their commander, so they must be diligent in worship, obeying the Lord their God. This was the promise each of the tribes made to the Lord at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.

The motive for their obedience had to be love for the Lord their God. If they loved Him, then they would delight in walking in all His ways and obeying all His commandments. Instead of trying to serve two masters, they would cling (cleave) to the Lord and serve Him alone, with all their heart and soul. Jesus said this was the first and greatest commandment (Matt. 22:36–38); therefore, to disobey it would mean to commit the greatest sin. “If you love Me, keep My

commandments” (John 14:15 NKJV).

He blessed them (vv. 6–8). It was the ministry of the high priest to bless God’s people (Num. 6:22–27), but the common people could invoke God’s blessing on others, especially a leader upon his people or a father upon his family (Gen. 27:4; 48:9; 2 Sam. 6:18, 20; 1 Kings 8:55). What a sight to see a great general asking God’s blessing on his troops!

This blessing also involved sharing the rich spoils of battle with them and their family members back home. It was the custom in Israel that those who stayed home, or who couldn’t participate in the battle for some good reason, also shared the spoils (Num. 31:25–27; 1 Sam. 30:23–25). After all, these people had protected the home cities and kept the machinery of the community going while the men had been out fighting, and it was only fair that they share in the spoils.

Indeed, for the two and a half tribes that lived east of the Jordan, it was an honorable discharge.

THEIR HONEST CONCERN (22:9–10) As the men of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh made their way east and passed landmarks that brought back memories of the great things God had done, their hearts began to disturb them. Happy as they were to be going home, it wasn’t easy to say good-bye to their brothers and leave behind the nearness of the priesthood and the tabernacle. They were leaving the land that God had promised to bless. Yes, they were going home to the land that they had chosen for themselves, but somehow they began to feel isolated from the nation of Israel.

When you read and ponder Numbers 32, you discover that there is no record that Moses consulted the Lord about this decision. The thing Moses was most concerned about was that the men of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh do their share

in fighting the enemy and conquering the Promised Land, and this they agreed to do. Moses' first response was that of anger mingled with fear, lest God judge the nation as He had at Kadesh Barnea. Perhaps this first reaction was the right one.

There's no question that Canaan was God's appointed land for His people; anything short of Canaan wasn't what He wanted for them. The two and a half tribes made their decision, not on the basis of spiritual values, but on the basis of material gain, for the land east of the Jordan was ideal for raising cattle. I'm reminded of the decision Lot made when he pitched his tent toward Sodom (Gen. 13:10–11). In both instances, the people walked by sight and not by faith.

By making this decision, the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh divided the nation and separated themselves from the blessings of the land of Canaan. They were farther away from the tabernacle and closer to the enemy. They became what I call "borderline believers." You'll recall that Egypt represents the world and Canaan the believer's inheritance in Christ. The wilderness wanderings represent the experience of believers who don't enter by faith into the *rest* God has for them (Heb. 3–4). The two and a half tribes portray believers who have experienced the blessings and battles of Canaan—their inheritance in Christ—but prefer to live on the border, outside God's appointed place of blessing.

"Faith can never be satisfied with anything short of the true position and portion of God's people," wrote C. H. Mackintosh in his *Notes on Numbers*. "An undecided, half-and-half Christian is more inconsistent than an open, out-and-out worldling or infidel."

How did they decide to solve the problem which they themselves had created? By building a large altar of stones by the Jordan River, on the Canaan side, as a reminder to everybody that the two and a half tribes also belonged to the nation of Israel. Had these tribes been living in the land of Canaan where they belonged, nobody would have questioned their nationality. But living outside the land, they gave the impression that they were not Israelites.

This is now the eighth memorial erected in Canaan (Josh. 4:9, 20–24; 7:26; 8:29–32 [three memorials]; 10:27). But it's unfortunate when believers have to resort to artificial means to let people know they're God's people. In recent years we've seen a spate of "religious" bumper stickers, jewelry, decals, and other items (including mirrors and combs with Bible verses on them), all of which are supposed to help identify the owners with Jesus Christ. While these things might occasionally open doors of opportunity for witness, how much better it would be if our Spirit-led conduct and speech made the lost sit up and take notice. When we're living as God wants us to live, we're salt and light, and the Lord uses our witness for His glory.

If the people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh faithfully attended the feasts in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:17), honored the Lord by obeying His Word, and talked about His Word in their homes (Deut. 6:6–9), they would be able to raise their children to know and serve the Lord. The altar on the Jordan bank, however, was no guarantee of such success.

THEIR HUMBLE SUBMISSION (22:11–29) The alarm (vv. 11–14). The word traveled quickly that the tribes east of the Jordan had erected an altar. While these Transjordanic tribes had been very sincere in what they did, their action was misunderstood, and the other tribes prepared for possible war. But wisely, they waited while an official delegation investigated what was going on. "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13 NKJV).

The delegation of ten princes, one from each tribe, was led by Phinehas, the son of the high priest, a man who had already proved himself courageous in defending the law of the Lord (Num. 25; Ps. 106:30–31). It was the responsibility of the tribal leaders and the priests to investigate every situation in

Israel that appeared to be a breach of the law (Deut. 13). God had instructed the Jews to destroy the altars of the heathen nations in Canaan and not to build altars of their own. There was to be one altar of sacrifice at the one sanctuary that God had appointed (Deut. 12; Lev. 17:8–9).

The appeal (vv. 15–20). It's likely that Phinehas made the speech, but note that his address represented the agreement of all the tribes. Phinehas called what they had done a *trespass* (vv. 16, 20, 22 [*transgression*, KJV], 31), which means “an act of treachery.” Joshua had commended these two and a half tribes for their loyalty, and now they had proved faithless. They had *turned away* (vv. 16, 18, 23, 29), which meant they were no longer following the Lord (see v. 5). This word carries the idea of “backsliding,” gradually moving away from the Lord.

The strongest word used was *rebel* (vv. 16, 18–19 [twice], 22, 29), which means deliberately resisting God's will and disobeying His law. In building an unauthorized altar, these two and a half tribes were guilty of apostasy. “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23).

From the nation's recent history Phinehas cited two serious cases of rebellion as warning to these tribes. The first was the participation of Israel in the heathen rites of the Moabites, when the men committed harlotry with the Moabite women (Josh. 22:17; Num. 25). As a result, twenty-four thousand people died. The second was the sin of Achan after the victory at Jericho, when he deliberately took the spoils that belonged to the Lord (Josh. 22:20; see Josh. 7). His sin led to defeat at Ai and the deaths of thirty-six Jewish soldiers. It also led to his own death and that of the members of his family.

The delegation gave a wise word of counsel: “Come over and dwell with us, because we have the Lord's tabernacle in our land” (22:19, paraphrase). No man-made altar could substitute for the presence of the Lord among His people in His tabernacle. It's too bad the two and a half tribes didn't take this advice

and claim their inheritance within the land that God had promised to bless (Deut. 11:10–32).

The argument (vv. 21–29). The accused tribes invoked the name of the Lord six times as they replied to the charges, and in so doing, they used the three fundamental names for the Lord: “El [the Mighty One], Elohim [God], Jehovah [the Lord].” It was a solemn oath that their intentions were pure and that the Lord knew their hearts.

Of course, the fact that the Lord knows our hearts, and that we’ve taken an oath, is no guarantee that our actions are right, *because we don’t know our own hearts* (Jer. 17:9). All sorts of questionable activities can be shielded by, “But the Lord knows my heart!” Paul gives us the right approach in 2 Corinthians 8:21: “For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men” (NIV). When a whole nation misinterprets what is supposed to be a good deed, and it brings them to the brink of war, then there must be something wrong with that deed.

The accused tribes made it clear that they weren’t setting up a rival religion, because the altar they built wasn’t for sacrifices. Rather, they were putting up a witness that would remind the tribes west of the Jordan that Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were a part of the Jewish nation.

It’s interesting that the Transjordanic tribes pointed to the children as their concern. But it wasn’t *their* children who would ask, “What have we to do with the Lord God of Israel?” No, their children would be provoked by the children of the tribes in Canaan! Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh were not even living in the land of God’s choice, *yet they feared lest the children across the river would lead their children astray!* It seems to me that the danger was just the opposite.

Not only did the Transjordanic tribes accuse their fellow Jews of having worldly children, but they even accused God of creating the problem in the first place! “For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between you and us” (Josh.

22:25 NKJV). No! *They were the ones who had made the Jordan River the dividing line!* In choosing to live east of the Jordan, the two and a half tribes separated themselves from their own people and from the land God had given to all of them. They put their cattle ahead of their children and their fellow Jews, but they blamed God and the other tribes for the problem that they created.

What kind of “witness” was this huge pile of stones? Was it a witness to the unity of the nation and to the obedience of the Transjordanic tribes? No, it was a witness to *expediency*, the wisdom of man in trying to enjoy “the best of both worlds.” The two and a half tribes talked piously about their children, but it was their wealth that really motivated their decision to live east of the Jordan.

Somewhere near this “witness altar” were the twelve stones that the men had carried from the midst of the Jordan River (4:20–24). It reminded the Jews that they had crossed the river and buried their past forever. Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh had crossed the river *and gone back again*. Their “altar” contradicted the altar that Joshua had erected to the glory of God. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1 NKJV).

THEIR HAPPY AGREEMENT (22:30–34) Phinehas was pleased, the delegation was pleased, and the children of Israel across the Jordan were pleased; *but was the Lord pleased?* The delegation rejoiced that the purpose of the altar was for witness and not sacrifice, and this seemed to settle the matter. They rejoiced that God wouldn’t send judgment to the land (v. 31) and that there would be no civil war in Israel (v. 33). *But the nation was divided, in spite of the “altar of witness.”* Like Abraham and Lot (Gen. 13), part of the nation had a spiritual outlook while the other part was concerned with material things.

“Peace at any price” isn’t God’s will for His people. This decision in Gilead was made on the basis of human wisdom and not God’s truth. “But the wisdom that is from above is *first pure*, then peaceable” (James 3:17, italics mine). *The peace that God’s people achieve at the price of purity and truth is only a dangerous truce that eventually explodes into painful division.* There is always a place in human relations for loving conciliation, but never for cowardly compromise. “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality” (1 Tim. 5:21 NKJV).

The Transjordanic tribes named their altar “A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God” (NIV). (The Hebrew word *edh* means “witness.”) But if the Lord is God, why didn’t they obey Him and live in the land He had appointed for them? The stones may have been a witness, but the people certainly were not. Surrounded by heathen nations and separated from their brothers and sisters across the river, these tribes quickly fell into idolatry and were eventually taken by Assyria (1 Chron. 5:25–26).

On September 30, 1938, British Prime Minister Sir Neville Chamberlain, just back from Germany, told a gathering at 10 Downing Street: “My good friends, this is the second time in our history that there has come back from Germany to Downing Street peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. And now I recommend you to go home and sleep quietly in your beds.”

Less than a year later, England was at war with Germany, and World War II had burst upon the world.

Church history is replete with agreements and accords that magnified unity over purity and truth, and therefore never lasted. Whether in our personal relationships, in our homes and churches, or in our nation, the only peace that lasts is peace that is based on truth and purity. It’s a peace that demands sacrifice

and courage, and a willingness to stand up for God's Word, but the results are worth it.

The well-known Bible commentator Matthew Henry said it best: "Peace is such a precious jewel that I would give anything for it but truth."

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why is lasting peace based on truth and purity?
2. What makes us vulnerable to unbiblical promises?
3. How can we keep from making compromises as the Israelites did after the war?
4. What kept the soldiers from the two and a half tribes so loyal to their leaders and fellow soldiers? Do you have similar loyalty?
5. What is the fuller meaning of the word *rest* when the war ended? What is the spiritual application of this for Christians today?

6. On what basis did the two and a half tribes make their decision about where to live? What was good or bad about that basis?
7. Why did the Transjordanic tribes build the altar? What did it communicate?
8. What, if any, is the proper role of religious paraphernalia, such as T-shirts, bumper stickers, and memorials?
9. When is peace not necessarily God's will for His people?
10. What can the church today learn from the quick falling away of the separated tribes?

Chapter Twelve

The Way of All the Earth

[\(Joshua 23—24\)](#)

The well-known psychoanalyst Eric Fromm wrote in *Man for Himself*, “To die is poignantly bitter, but the idea of having to die without having lived is unbearable.”

Joshua the son of Nun had lived! His long life started in Egyptian bondage and ended in a worship service in the Promised Land. In between those events God had used him to lead Israel in defeating the enemy, conquering the land, and claiming the promised inheritance. With the apostle Paul, Joshua could sincerely say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

Joshua was about to go “the way of all the earth” (Josh. 23:14), the way you and I must go if the Lord doesn’t return first. But at the end of a long and full life, Joshua’s greatest concern wasn’t himself. His greatest concern was his people and their relationship to the Lord. He didn’t want to leave until he had challenged them once again to love the Lord and keep His commandments. His life’s work would be in vain if they failed to keep the covenant and enjoy the blessings of the Promised Land.

He first called a meeting of the leaders of the nation (v. 2), either at Shiloh or at his home in Ephraim, and warned them what would happen if they deserted

the Lord. Then he gathered “all the tribes of Israel to Shechem” (24:1) and gave a farewell address that reviewed the history of Israel, starting with Abraham, and challenged the people to love the Lord and serve Him alone. In these two addresses Joshua emphasized three important topics.

1. ISRAEL’S FUTURE DANGERS (23:1–16)

Having assembled the leaders of the nation, Joshua presented them with two scenarios: Obey the Lord, and He will bless you and keep you in the land; disobey Him, and He will judge you and remove you from the land. These were the terms of the covenant God had made with Israel at Mount Sinai, which Moses had repeated on the Plains of Moab, and which Israel had reaffirmed at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.

Joshua’s emphasis was on possessing the land (v. 5) and enjoying its blessings (vv. 13, 15–16). While Israel had gained control of Canaan, there still remained territory to possess and pockets of resistance to overcome. (See 13:1–13; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12–13; 18:3; Judg. 1—2.) The task of the tribes wasn’t finished! The great danger, of course, was that the people of Israel would gradually change their attitudes toward the pagan nations around them and start accepting their ways and imitating them.

To counteract this danger, Joshua gave the people three strong motives for remaining a separated people and serving the Lord faithfully.

(1) What the Lord did for Israel (vv. 3–4). From the day that Israel left Egypt, the Lord had fought for His people and delivered them from their enemies. He drowned the Egyptian army in the sea and then defeated the Amalekites, who attacked the Jews soon after they left Egypt (Ex. 17). The Lord defeated all of Israel’s enemies as the nation marched toward Canaan, and He gave His people victory over the nations in the Promised Land.

This review of history reminded Israel of two great facts: Those Gentile

nations were God's enemies and therefore must be Israel's enemies, and the same God who overcame the enemy in the past could help Israel overcome them in the future. God had never failed His people, and, if they would trust Him and obey His Word, He would help them completely conquer the land. "For the LORD your God is He who has fought for you" (Josh. 23:3 NKJV).

This is a good reminder to God's people today. As we read the Bible and see what God did in the past for those who trusted Him, it encourages us to trust Him today and face all our enemies with courage and confidence. The Presbyterian missionary leader A. T. Pierson used to say that "history is His story," and this is true. From age to age, God may change His methods; but His character never changes, and He can be trusted.

(2) What the Lord said to Israel (vv. 5–10). The secret of Joshua's success, and therefore the reason for Israel's victories, was his devotion to the Word of God (vv. 6, 14; see 1:7–9, 13–18; 8:30–35; 11:12, 15; 24:26–27). He obeyed God's commandments and believed God's promises, and God worked on his behalf. But even more, his devotion to the Word of God enabled Joshua to get to know God better, to love Him, and to want to please Him. It isn't enough to know the Word of God. We must also know the God of the Word and grow in our fellowship with Him.

God kept all His promises, and He had every right to expect Israel to keep all His commandments as well. Some of God's promises are unconditional, but some of them are conditional and depend on our obedience for their fulfillment. Israel entered and conquered the land as the fulfillment of God's promise, but their enjoyment of the land depended on their obedience to the law of the Lord. God would enable them to claim all their inheritance if they would obey Him with all their hearts.

The most important thing was that Israel remain a separated people and not be infected by the wickedness of the Gentile nations around them (23:7–8; see

Ex. 34:10–17; Deut. 7:2–4). Joshua warned them that their disobedience would be a gradual thing. First they would associate with these nations in a familiar way; then they would start discussing their religious practices; and before long Israel would be worshipping the false gods of the enemy. The Jewish men would then start marrying women from these pagan nations, and the line of separation between God’s people and the world would be completely erased. Imagine the folly of *worshipping the gods of the defeated enemy*!

All of us feel the pressures of the world around us, trying to force us to conform (Rom. 12:1–21; 1 John 2:15–17), and it takes courage to defy the crowd and stay true to the Lord (Josh. 23:7). But it also takes love for the Lord and a desire to please Him (v. 8). The word translated “cleave” in verse 8 is used in Genesis 2:24 to describe a husband’s relationship to his wife. Israel was “married” to Jehovah at Mount Sinai (Jer. 2:1–3; Ezek. 16) and was expected to be a faithful spouse and cleave to the Lord (Deut. 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4). How tragic that she became an unfaithful wife, a prostitute, as she turned to the gods of other nations.

The promise in Joshua 23:10 is quoted from Deuteronomy 32:30, which shows how well Joshua knew the Word of God. (See also Lev. 26:7–8.) He meditated on God’s Word day and night (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2) and hid it in his heart (Ps. 119:11).

(3) What the Lord would do to Israel (vv. 11–16). The Word of God is like a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12): If we obey it, God will bless and help us; if we disobey it, God will chasten us until we submit to Him. If we love the Lord (Josh. 23:11), we’ll want to obey Him and please Him, so the essential thing is that we cultivate a satisfying relationship with God.

Joshua reminded the people that God’s Word never fails, whether it’s the Word of promise for blessing or the Word of promise for chastening. Both are evidences of His love, for “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Prov. 3:11–12; Heb. 12:6). Charles Spurgeon said, “God will not allow His children to sin

successfully.”

Moses had warned Israel against compromising with the evil nations in the land (Ex. 23:20–33; 34:10–17; Deut. 7:12–26), and Joshua reaffirmed that warning (Josh. 23:13). If Israel began to mingle with these nations, two things would happen: God would remove His blessing, and Israel would be defeated; and these nations would bring distress and defeat to Israel. Joshua used vivid words like *snares*, *traps*, *scourges*, and *thorns* to impress the Jews with the suffering they would experience if they disobeyed the Lord. The final stroke of chastening would be Israel’s removal from their land to a land of exile. After all, if you want to live and worship like the Gentiles, then live with the Gentiles! This happened when God permitted Babylon to conquer Judah, destroy Jerusalem, and take thousands of the Jews into exile in Babylon.

Three times in this brief address Joshua called Canaan “this good land” (vv. 13, 15–16). When God called Moses at the burning bush, He promised to take Israel into a “good land” (Ex. 3:8), and Joshua and Caleb described Canaan as “a good land” after forty days of investigation (Num. 14:7). In his farewell message Moses used the phrase “good land” at least ten times (Deut. 1:25, 35; 3:25; 4:21–22; 6:18; 8:7, 10; 9:6; 11:17). The argument is obvious: Since God has given us such a good land, the least we can do is live to please Him.

Meditating on the goodness of God is a strong motivation for obedience. James connects the goodness of God with our resisting of temptation (James 1:13–17), and Nathan took the same approach when he confronted King David with his sins (2 Sam. 12:1–15). It was not his own badness but his father’s goodness that brought the Prodigal Son to repentance and then back home (Luke 15:17). “The goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4 NKJV). The danger is that the material blessings from the Lord can so possess our hearts that we focus on the gifts and forget the Giver, and this leads to sin (Deut. 8).

Joshua’s three main admonitions in this address need to be heeded by God’s

people today: Keep God's Word (Josh. 23:6), cleave to the Lord (v. 8), and love the Lord (v. 11). Too many Christians have not only compromised with the enemy but also have capitulated to the enemy, and the Lord is not first in their lives.

2. ISRAEL'S PAST BLESSINGS (24:1–13)

In the April 15, 1978, issue of *Saturday Review*, the late author and editor Norman Cousins called history “a vast early warning system,” and philosopher George Santayana said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” A knowledge of their roots is very important to the Jews because they are God's chosen people with a destiny to fulfill in this world.

Shechem was the ideal location for this moving farewell address by Israel's great leader. It was at Shechem that God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land (Gen. 12:6–7), and there Jacob built an altar (33:20). Shechem was located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, where the people of Israel had reaffirmed their commitment to the Lord (Josh. 8:30–35). Shechem was indeed “holy ground” to the Israelites.

If *nation* and *land* were the key words in Joshua's first address, then *the Lord* is the major focus in this second address, for Joshua refers to the Lord twenty-one times. In fact, in 24:2–13, it is the Lord who speaks as Joshua reviews the history of the nation. Another key word is *serve*, used fifteen times in this address. Jehovah gave them their land and would bless them in their land if they loved Him and served Him.

God chose Israel (vv. 1–4). Abraham and his family were idolaters when God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to Canaan (Gen. 11:27—12:9). “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham,” declared Stephen in his own farewell speech (Acts 7:2), reminding the Jews that their national identity was *an act of God's grace*. Abraham didn't seek after God and

discover Him; it was God who came to Abraham! There was nothing special about the Jews that God should choose them (Deut. 7:1–11; 26:1–11; 32:10), and this fact should have kept them humble and obedient.

“You did not choose Me,” Jesus told His disciples, “but I chose you and appointed you” (John 15:16 NKJV). Believers were chosen in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) and are called “God’s elect” (Rom. 8:33; Titus 1:1). One of my professors in seminary used to say, “Try to explain election and you may lose your mind, but explain it away and you may lose your soul.” No matter what “school” of theology we belong to, all of us must admit that *God takes the first step in our salvation*.

Abraham’s firstborn son was Ishmael (Gen. 16), but God rejected him and gave His covenant to Isaac, the child of Abraham and Sarah’s old age (17—18, 21). Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, and God chose Jacob. Paul called these choices God’s purpose “according to election” (Rom. 9:11). Esau became the ancestor of the Edomites in Mount Seir, and Jacob became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. Eventually, the children of Israel went to Egypt, where God made them into a great nation.

One of the repeated titles for God in the book of Joshua is “the LORD God of Israel,” used fifteen times (7:13, 19–20; 8:30; 9:18–19; 10:40, 42; 13:14, 33; 14:14; 22:16, 24; 24:2, 23). The Jews were indeed an elect and a special people, for the Lord of heaven chose to associate His great name with them and be their God.

God delivered Israel (vv. 5–7). God sent Joseph ahead to Egypt to preserve the nation during the famine (Ps. 105:16–22), and then He sent Moses and Aaron to deliver the nation from bondage (vv. 23–45). Egypt had been saved from starvation because of the Jews, but instead of being grateful, the rulers of Egypt eventually enslaved the Jews and made their lives bitter (Ex. 3:7–9). All of this was a fulfillment of what God had promised to Abraham centuries before (Gen.

15:1–17), but their suffering in Egypt only made the Israelites multiply more.

God judged the gods and rulers of Egypt by sending ten plagues to the land, climaxing with the death of the firstborn (Ex. 7—12). Only then did stubborn Pharaoh give the Jews permission to leave the land, but then he changed his mind and sent his army after them. God not only brought His people *out*, but He also led them *through* the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptian army in its waters (chaps. 14—15).

God instructed His people to observe the Passover as an annual reminder of their redemption from Egyptian bondage (chaps. 12—13). In his farewell speech Moses frequently reminded the Jews that they had once been slaves in Egypt but the Lord had set them free (Deut. 5:15; 6:12; 8:14; 13:5, 10; 15:15; 16:3, 6; 20:1; 24:22). It does a believer good to remember what it was like to be in bondage to sin and then to rejoice in the redemption that was purchased so dearly for us on the cross. It's a dangerous thing to take the gift of salvation for granted.

God guided Israel (vv. 8–10). God brought Israel out that He might bring them in (Deut. 6:23). His goal for them was the Promised Land, but their sin at Kadesh Barnea caused them to wander in the wilderness until the old, unbelieving generation had died off. As Israel marched behind the ark of God, the Lord defeated their enemies. When Balaam tried to curse Israel, God turned the curse into a blessing (Num. 22—24; Deut. 23:5; Neh. 13:2). Whether Satan came against Israel as the lion (the army of the Amorites) or as the serpent (the curses of Balaam), the Lord defeated him.

God gave them their land (vv. 11–13). The same God who took Israel through the Red Sea also took them across the Jordan River and into their inheritance. Except for a temporary defeat at Ai (Josh. 7), and a humiliating compromise with Gibeon (chap. 9), Joshua and his army defeated every enemy in the land because the Lord was with them.

The “hornet” mentioned in 24:12 (see Ex. 23:28; Deut. 7:20) may have been the insect whose sting is extremely painful, but it's possible that the word is an

image of something else. Invading armies are compared to bees (Deut. 1:44; Ps. 118:12; Isa. 7:18), and some students think that's the meaning here. God sent other armies into Canaan to weaken the people and prepare them for the invasion of Israel.

But perhaps the hornets better represent the reports that came to Canaan of Israel's conquests, reports that frightened and almost paralyzed the inhabitants of the land. The words of Rahab describe the panic of the Canaanites because of what they heard about Israel: "And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you" (Josh. 2:11; see 5:1 and 9:24). God had promised to do this and He kept His promise (Deut. 2:25).

In Joshua 24:13, God's words remind us of what Moses said to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:10ff. Once again, the emphasis is on the goodness of God and all that He did for Israel because He loved them. When the Jews started taking their blessings for granted, they began drifting away from sincere worship of the Lord. A grateful heart is a strong defense against the Devil's temptations.

3. ISRAEL'S PRESENT RESPONSIBILITIES (24:14–33)

One of the key words in this section is *serve*, used fifteen times. To serve God means to fear Him, obey Him, and worship only Him. It means to love Him and fix your heart upon Him, obeying Him because you want to and not because you have to.

Decision (vv. 14–18). Joshua made it clear that the people of Israel had to make a decision to serve the Lord God of Israel. There could be no neutrality. But if they served the Lord, then they would have to get rid of the false gods that some of them secretly were worshipping. Even after the great experience of the exodus, some of the Jews still sacrificed to the gods of Egypt (Lev. 17:7; Amos 5:25–26; Ezek. 20:6–8; Acts 7:42–43). Jacob had given this same warning to his

family (Gen. 35:2), and Samuel would give the same admonition in his day (1 Sam. 7:3ff.).

Joshua wasn't suggesting that the people could choose to worship the false gods of the land and God would accept it, for there was no other option but to serve Jehovah. Being a wise and spiritual man, Joshua knew that everybody must worship something or someone, whether they realize it or not, because humanity is "incurably religious." If the Jews didn't worship the true God, they would end up worshipping the false gods of the wicked nations in Canaan. His point was that *they couldn't do both*.

The people assured Joshua that they wanted to worship and serve only the Lord God of Israel, and they gave their reasons. The Lord had delivered them from Egypt, brought them through the wilderness, and taken them into their Promised Land. (The first half of Joshua's address [Josh. 24:1–13] had made an impression on them!) Joshua had declared that he and his house would serve only the Lord (v. 15), and the people said, "Therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God" (v. 18).

Devotion (vv. 19–28). When the former generation had met the Lord at Mount Sinai, they had said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8 NKJV). But a few weeks later, they were worshipping a golden calf! Joshua knew that it was easy for the people to *promise* obedience to the Lord, but it was quite something else for them to actually *do* it. His stern words were meant to curb their overconfidence and make them look honestly into their own hearts (Josh. 24:19).

Israel was "married" to Jehovah, and He would not tolerate any rivals in their hearts. He is a jealous God (Ex. 20:5) and a holy God, and He could never permit them to be divided in their loyalty. Just as a husband and wife are faithful to their marriage vows and jealously guard their mate's affection, so Israel and the Lord had to be faithful to each other.

Joshua warned them what would happen if they didn't get rid of their idols: They would eventually forsake the Lord, and then He would have to chasten them. They would lose all the blessings He had so graciously given them in the Promised Land. Their great need was to cleanse their hearts of allegiance to other gods and to incline their hearts only to the Lord (Josh. 24:23). If they persisted in their hidden disloyalty, God would not forgive them (Ex. 23:21) but would punish them for their sins.

Three times the people affirmed their desire to serve only the Lord (Josh. 24:16–18, 21, 24), and Joshua took them at their word. So that they wouldn't forget this solemn covenant with Jehovah, Joshua wrote it in the book of the law and then set up a large stone as a perpetual witness to their agreement. This is the ninth and last memorial mentioned in the book of Joshua. The nine memorials are:

1. The stones in the midst of the Jordan (4:9).
2. The stones on the western bank of the Jordan (4:20–24).
3. The stones in the Valley of Achor (7:26).
4. The heap of stones at Ai (8:29).
5. The altar on Mount Ebal (8:30).
6. The stones of the law on Mount Ebal (8:32).
7. The stones at the cave at Makkedah (10:27).
8. The altar built by the Transjordanic tribes (22:10ff.).
9. Joshua's stone of witness (24:26–28).

There's certainly nothing unbiblical about God's people memorializing a wonderful event or a sacred decision, so long as the memorial doesn't become the focus of idolatrous worship. It's good to remember what the Lord did and how we responded, but we must never live in the past. Religious traditions can be helpful or hurtful, depending on how we use them.

The book closes with three burials. Joshua died at the age of 110 and was buried in his own inheritance. Eleazar the high priest (Num. 20:28) died and was also buried in Ephraim, near Shiloh, where his son Phinehas had property. The bones of Joseph were buried in Shechem in the plot of ground Jacob had bought from Hamor (Gen. 33:19). Shechem became an important city for Ephraim and Manasseh, who were the two sons of Joseph. Thus it was fitting that their great ancestor be buried there. (See Gen. 50:25; Ex. 13:19; Heb. 11:22.)

Moses had named Joshua as his successor, but it's significant that God didn't tell Joshua to appoint a successor. The elders who had served with Joshua guided the nation after his death, but then the people went astray and began to disobey the Lord and worship the false gods of the Canaanites (Judg. 2:6–15). Why didn't the next generation know the Lord and what He had done for Israel? *Because the people of Joshua's generation failed to keep their promise and teach their children and grandchildren to fear and serve the Lord.*

God kept His promise and chastened His people, first by bringing other nations into the land (vv. 14–19), and then by taking the Jews out of their land, the northern kingdom to Assyria and the southern kingdom to Babylon. But one day the Lord will regather His people Israel and establish them in their land (Isa. 11—12; 51—52; Ezek. 36:24ff.). Then “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. If you knew the time of your death was near, what would you want to do?

2. What important topics did Joshua emphasize in his farewell address? What were his key words?
3. What were some strong motives for the Israelites to remain a separated people? How could they be strong motives for Christians today?
4. Why is it usually the case that disobedience to God is a gradual thing?
5. What does it take to stay true to the Lord?
6. What is the link between the goodness of God and our obedience?
7. How can we make sure not to take the gift of salvation for granted?
8. What does it mean to serve God?
9. What was Joshua's point when he asked the people to choose whom they would serve? What did Joshua warn them would happen if they didn't worship God alone?
10. Why didn't the next generation know the Lord and what He had done for

Israel? How can we make sure we don't repeat this?

Notes

Chapter Four

- [1.](#) The NIV text applies the verse to the monument at Gilgal, but the marginal note makes this a separate monument, which I think is the accurate interpretation. The NASB reads, “Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day.”

Chapter Five

- [1.](#) Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Biography of James Hudson Taylor* (London: China Inland Mission, 1965), 271.
- [2.](#) Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 282.

Chapter Six

- [1.](#) Francis A. Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 102–3.
- [2.](#) G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1912), 1:104.
- [3.](#) Ibid., 114.

Chapter Seven

- [1.](#) George H. Morrison, *The Footsteps of the Flock* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 106.

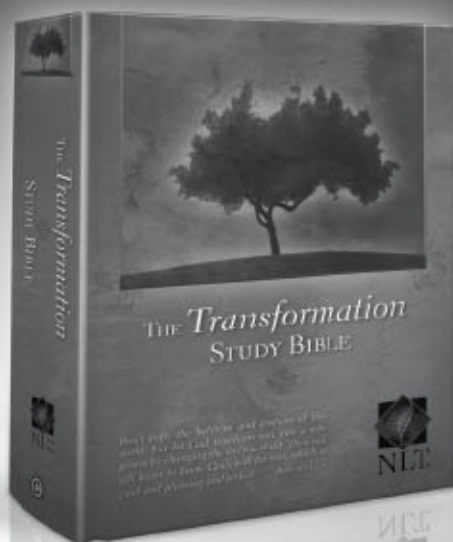
Chapter Eight

- [1.](#) Frederick W. Robertson, *Sermons Preached at Brighton, First Series* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1898), 66.

Chapter Nine

- [1.](#) See Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 161–62.
- [2.](#) C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 133.

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