

## THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

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## 1:1

Joshua is the book recording the entrance into and the possession of the Promised Land by the children of Israel. The opening words compel us to look back over Biblical history in order to set the context of our studies. Genesis is the book of beginnings, and tells the story of the calling out of Abraham to be the father of the covenant people of God. Exodus is the book of redemption, whereby a people in bondage is delivered by the intervention of God and led out to begin a new life in the salvation of God. Leviticus is the book concerned with the God-given instructions for the worship of God by a redeemed people. Numbers tells the story of how the children of Israel stopped short of the promised land, right on its borders, and in consequence of their unbelief and disobedience spent the next forty years going round in circles in the wilderness, getting nowhere. Because they refused to go forward God barred the way and a whole generation wasted their lives and died in the wilderness. Read of it in Heb. 3:7- 4:13. The Book of Deuteronomy, which concerns the second giving of the law of God, contains the substance of Moses' exhortations to the children of Israel on the border of the promised land. The time had come for the new generation of the people of God to move forward into the next significant stage or dimension of the purposes of God. Then the Book of Joshua tells the story of the conflict necessary for entering, conquering and possessing the land of promise. The land had been given to them by God, but it had to be taken possession of in the name and by the power of God, and in order to do this, the enemies of God, already in possession, had to be driven out. This is a parable of Christian life and experience.

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## 1:1

Keep in mind in these studies that we are dealing with a people already redeemed and instructed by God and made part of His holy purposes. They have been laid hold on by God and even their failures have not been able to break the bonds of the covenant by which God had made them His own. Of course their sins and failures were judged, and for forty years they had known the rebuke of God, being His people yet at the same time the main hindrance to the development of His purposes. Read the use Paul makes of this in writing to the proud Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 10:1-14). By the grace and persistence of God this people was still to be the holy instrument of God's intentions even although only two men of a whole generation, Joshua and Caleb, went forward into this new stage of the work (Num. 32:6-15). God had been waiting eagerly for His people to be ready for this advance, and the years of wandering recorded in Numbers had been years of deep preparation, not least of Joshua who was commissioned to lead the people. God had never for a moment lost sight of His objective and we need to be reminded of this, especially when our spiritual sight gets confused by the smoke and confusion of the daily battle. This is one reason why we need to leave the plains of battle and get on to higher ground regularly, in order to see where we have come from, where we are and where we are going. Once we have got our bearings we can safely go back into the stir of daily life and experience. A wise traveller checks his position regularly.

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## 1:1-2

These verses link the story with the past and at the same time close the door firmly on its failures with all their tyranny of guilt. The command to arise and go over signifies that there must be no paralysis of action lest the future be mortgaged as the past had been. If we recall the facts of the past we shall see how often the work of God is perched on a razor edge with the issue apparently wholly in the hands of men. In Exodus 40:17, 34-38 Israel, chosen of God, taught in the Law and having clear signs of the presence of God in their midst, is

prepared for holy service. In Numbers 1:1, one month later, God is ready to move forward with His people. Eleven days' journey (Deut. 1:2) brought them to Kadesh-Barnea on the borders of the promised land with all the inheritance of God within their grasp. But unbelief took possession of the hearts of the people (Num. 13:21-33) and in spite of the exhortations to faith they would not believe that God would in fact give them the land. As a result, forty years later they were in exactly the same place (Num. 33:37) and God spoke again through Moses (Num. 33:50-56) saying, "When you are come into the land." But how long was it going to take? Were there to be another forty years of wasteful delay because of unbelief? Had the people learned the obedience of faith through the disciplines of the wilderness? Had they faced the fact that victory, together with the necessary conflict, was far better (and far easier to live with) than defeat with all its barrenness and frustration? They had good cause to trust God as their own history testified, but their failures testified against them. Read Psalm 78, especially v.41, where the Authorised Version reads, "They limited the Holy One of Israel." When God spoke to Joshua there was a great deal at stake. There usually is, and God speaks far more often than we care to admit.

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## 1:1-2

The Devil will see to it that when a great man of God (even with faults) dies after years of spiritual and moral leadership, there will be the temptation to doubt and despair. At such a time God spoke to Joshua as He did later to Isaiah (Isa. 6). God had His man prepared. Joshua had been a close servant and trusted colleague of Moses for years. He was no spiritual novice and he knew what it was to be responsible in holy things on different levels of service (Ex. 17:8-16; 33:11). God does not rush inexperienced, ill-prepared men into the thick of service greater than they have been prepared for and we do well to adopt the same policy (cf. 1 Tim. 5: 22). But note here that Joshua is called to do something that had not even been allowed to Moses, namely to cross over into the land of promise (Num. 20:12; Deut. 3:23-29). Read Deut. 34: 7-12 and you will sense the atmosphere of the great changeover of leadership and begin to see at once how Joshua's faith was put to the test, for the river Jordan was in full flood (3:15) and no explanation of God's methods was given *as yet*. This was the crisis hour for Joshua; and he rose to it, as we shall see. If he had had a tendency to lean overmuch on the older man he could do so no longer. In a sense, a great part of Moses' work was now being put to the test in Joshua. It is good that our work and influence should be so tested stage by stage because in the end it will be tested when no rectifying adjustments can be carried out (1 Cor. 3:7-15).

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## 1:1-2

Note that in the clear call of Joshua there is no suggestion of dishonouring the life and work of Moses. In recognising Moses' failures we are saved from idolising him. At the same time, being reminded of how much he was the servant of God and used by God, we are saved from undervaluing or despising him. Moses' work was no longer in dispute. It spoke for itself and for the quality of the man who had been the human instrument of God in the execution of it. But the work of God is one work (John 4:37-38) and in a very real sense all Joshua was yet to do was made possible by what Moses had accomplished by way of foundation. Note too that Joshua was made aware that in his calling to be the leader of the work, he thereby became the shepherd and servant of the people, for the land was given to *them*. It must have been with a deep sense that no man is indispensable that Joshua took up his charge. The man with whom God spoke face to face (Ex. 33:11) was dead, but God was not dead, nor was His work, His power or His purpose. All was moving forward and Joshua was called to come into that close

fellowship with God which he had seen and partially understood in Moses. Would that we could think of our Christian work in terms such as these.

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### **1:3-6**

The first verse today is very significant. Right from the start the land was given to Joshua and the people. That was fact. But at the same time the land had to be taken, and only that which was actually possessed became theirs to enjoy. And what is more, the land could only be taken in terms of experience by driving out the evil powers of the Canaanites already in possession. The land had to be entered by faith, fought for and possessed, and the whole process from the start had to be firmly grounded on the fact that they did not fight towards victory but from victory to victory, *because God had given them the land*. This is a parable or spiritual illustration of the Christian life given in terms of the geography and history of the people of Israel. The principle is that the whole land of salvation is ours, but we must possess it, making our God-given victory a reality in our experience, and by our subduing of the alien inhabitants we make it possible for our new life in God's salvation to grow and become established. If this is a true picture of Christian life it means our experience will always carry the twofold mark of conflict *and* victory. We will never be allowed to forget the fact that we have a persistent enemy external to ourselves, for our battle is not merely against the sinful propensities of the flesh and the clamour of unbelief. As we continue our studies we shall also see that the enemy will not yield easily or peaceably. He must be cast out.

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### **1:3-6**

The sweep of God's promise is indeed glorious but subsequent history tells us that the whole area was never in fact fully held by Israel because of their unbelief and only partial obedience. There is a tragic gulf between what we *could* be and *should* be and what we *actually* are, and there is no real excuse for our falling short. God promised that no man would be able to withstand Joshua effectively from beginning to end (5a). As a guarantee of that promise God pledged Himself to be as close to Joshua as He had been to Moses, and we need to think of all God's dealings with Moses in order to grasp the totality of that pledge. The ground of Joshua's confidence was to be the faithfulness of God and not any merit or worth of his own (Deut. 7:7-11; 9:5-6). God promised He would not fail Joshua, and the word actually means He would not drop him, for the everlasting arms are underneath (Deut. 33:27). God's presence would indeed be with him, effectively manifest in every circumstance whether recognised or not. Now, this ground of confidence here expressed was not a new thing to Joshua. Years previously in Numbers 14:6-10 it was spoken by Joshua to the people who rejected it out of hand. Now, nearly forty years later, we find that none of the trials of the wilderness had whittled down Joshua's faith. He was ready to take God at His word and go forward. The immense responsibility which may have weighed him down at this point is countered at once with the command to be strong, and God gave him yet another word of inspiration. The work about to be begun would be seen through to its effective conclusion in spite of everything. Read Philippians 1:6 and remember that the God who starts a thing sees it through to its completion.

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### **1:7-9**

Three times Joshua is commanded to be strong, and the context seems to suggest the meaning that he is to refuse to be distracted either from his objective or from the methods prescribed by God. This is important, for the Devil, knowing he may well fail in an attempt to make us

deny the faith outright, will usually try to seduce us away from the simple directness of obedience. In like manner we must be strong lest we hold back from some position of leadership and responsibility and in so doing deprive the work of God of needful servants. To keep us right and make us strong we are directed to the Word of God on which and by which our lives must be lived. Here we see one great difference between Moses and Joshua, and all who came after him. God spoke to Moses face to face, but it is not given to us to have such holy, private and personal revelations. We find God's messages to us in His written word (Ex. 17:14-15; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Do not think we are the poorer because we are directed to the written word. In Moses' time the revelation was shadowy and incomplete, but for us everything has been spoken and given in fullness so that we lack nothing (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1-3). In terms of service remember also the words of Jesus emphasising that if people will not heed the word written and preached, they will not pay any attention to miracles (Luke 16:27-31).

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### **1:7-9**

To meditate in the Word of God is not to daydream about it nor to seek to generate appropriate feelings of faith during and after reading it. That is too sentimental an attitude and we should not adopt it either in speaking to friends nor considering the problems of business life. To meditate is to use one's head and by sheer mental effort (aided of course by the Holy Spirit) to seek to master the principles of thought, conduct, action, guidance and spiritual warfare, so that being taught in the Word, we come to know the mind of God and in any given situation know what to do and how to do it. It is no use flying to neglected Bibles when a sudden squall of crises threatens to engulf our lives. Nor is it any use confining our reading to a few well known much loved passages of Scripture. We need the whole word of God for Christian growth, service and warfare. Joshua is commanded to go back to the Word over and over again, never assuming that he knew it all. In this way he would bring his life continually under the discipline and inspiration of the Word of God. His life would be consciously in submission to God, and in this way his future service would be guaranteed. Reservations about the Word of God and subtle neglect of it in practice are dangerous signs and may well lie at the heart of many fruitless Christian lives. The last word of God's charge to Joshua (9) makes it quite clear that in the invasion about to begin Joshua will be no ravaging bandit, seeking loot for himself and a kingdom over which to rule. He is a servant carrying out the commands of his superior, knowing that the course on which he was now about to launch had been marked out for him a long time previously (Deut. 31:1-8). Many would no doubt find themselves unable to understand why Joshua had been chosen to lead (why not Caleb?) and how Joshua was possessed of such spiritual dynamic. The answer is to be found in the kind of man he was. He took God seriously when He spoke to him here, and the outward activity of his life was based on the inner integrity of his person as he walked with God.

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### **1:10-18**

This passage is in two sections and we concentrate today on v.10-11, 16-18. God having spoken to Joshua, Joshua speaks immediately to the people and there is no trace whatever of hesitation in his attitude. Nor is there any hesitation on the part of the people whose words of commitment and exhortation must have thrilled Joshua's heart. In a real sense they were volunteers rather than conscripts, and in terms of spiritual work there is no comparison in value! These people were ready for anything and Joshua simply had to make the tentative suggestion of work to be done and they would jump to do it. Of course, they made it plain to

their leader that it was his responsibility to see to it that he remained true to God (17). We cannot but be a little sceptical when we read in that same verse the reference to their obedience to Moses. Having regard to their vexatious, carping spirit in the past, Joshua must have felt he was in for a rough time! Yet the people spoke their words of loyalty and Joshua took them at their word. Perhaps they were aware that God was about to do a new thing with them in the immediate future and that thought always produces a measure of excited consecration. Whether or not it will last remains to be seen. The astonishing thing is how willing God is to allow us to forget past failures and make a new start.

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### **1:10-18**

Concentrating on the opening two verses we see that the thrilling possibility of a new start with God brings responsibilities as well as privileges, and demands sacrificial labour as well as promising blessing. For forty years in the wilderness Israel had been fed by manna given miraculously by God (Ex. 16:4, 35; Neh. 9:15-21), but now they were told to prepare provisions. In spite of the fact that they had constantly complained about the manna, tired of its repetitive sameness, would they not now be shocked by its coming to an end? It would seem that the visible representation of God's presence in the pillar of cloud and fire had also ceased by this time. Even although the people still had the sign of the Ark of the Covenant at their head and all the promises of God written down for them, these were not so appealing to the emotions of the flesh as the great pillar of cloud or fire standing above them. But they had to learn to trust God in whatever methods He used to provide for them. When they could not be provided for in any other way, God gave them manna from heaven, but now that they were in a position to provide food for themselves God would not support them in idleness. In any case, they were about to press on into unknown territory and the manna which fell around the camp of Israel would be outwith their reach. How well prepared are we to go forward if it means leaving the home base where we have known so much of God's dealings?

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### **1:10-18**

The two and a half tribes spoken of in v.12-16 had been given permission by Moses to settle in Transjordan (Num. 32:1-33) provided they sent their men of war to assist Israel in the conquest of the land. Remember that Moses himself would have given anything to have gone over into Canaan, while the two and a half tribes could have gone but did not want to. Their motives of worldliness are clear in Numbers 32 and the solution reached seems very much a compromise one, in which they justified their attitudes (a comparatively easy thing to do when we are so good at double thinking and speaking). Here Joshua reminds them of their past agreement and says that God has given them their request and that they will enjoy their chosen inheritance when the immediate task of conquest is completed. But the fact remains that these two and a half tribes would always be separated by the river Jordan from the main body of Israel. It would become increasingly hard for them to maintain their identity as a true part of Israel; and in due season, in the time of the kings of Israel, when the enemy came from the north, these tribes were the first to fall. It is seldom true humility that inspires individuals and groups to detach themselves from the body of the work and pursue a private line of action. We must do as Moses and Joshua did, accept the decisions that people make, and let subsequent history be the comment on their actions.

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## 2:1-7

The story of Rahab is a fascinating one and in studying it we are not concerned either to whitewash her character or to condemn her for her lies by which the spies were saved. We will see her later in chapter 6 taking her place in Israel. We find her commended for her faith in Heb. 11:31 and for her works in James 2:25. We also find her listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matt. 1:5. Such references warn us against passing judgment on this woman on the basis of single actions or for that matter on the basis of certain limited phases of her life. We can be quite sure that whatever she had been in the past, she was a different woman after the visit of the spies. We are too prone to judge people according to what they have been and in so doing fail to recognise what they have become by the grace of God. Nowhere in the Bible is Rahab commended for her lies nor for her immorality, and it is wrong for us to be obsessed with either of these things. Can we not rather marvel that such a broken and fallen woman should be reached by the message of the saving power of God and be able to take a share in the progress of the work of God? We never suggest that it is good to do evil in order that good may result (Rom. 3:8), but the fact remains that it was probably because the prostitute's house was known about that the spies considered it the place least likely to be detected in. Remember the spies were in danger of their lives. They were saved by lies which took the form of the most natural language of a woman of this kind of life. But keep also in mind that the story makes plain that Rahab was also a hard working woman with flax, and that she cared for her parents and family. That is more than some very upright people do. Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.

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## 2:1-7

Before her conversion Rahab's whole manner of life was a lie and her spoken falsehood here was her natural method of dealing with a crisis. Just as sin had worked its way right through her personality making her what she was and holding her in thraldom for years, so the salvation of God touching her life would have to drive out these evil things progressively. The "expulsive power of a new affection" asserts itself slowly, and as it progresses it will reveal more and more territory of the personality that needs the cleansing, renewing power of God. This is how it must have been with Rahab, and the fact that on occasions there is some lapse into old ways, some throwback to old characteristics, does not deny the validity of the conversion nor condemn the person. If this were the case most, if not all, the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 would be disqualified. There is an entail of sin which has to be lived with and fought with within the glorious context of salvation, and the arena of conflict can be physical, mental, emotional and psychological as well as spiritual. What we read of here is the *beginning* of Rahab's spiritual pilgrimage, and we must not expect a new-born soul out of a hideous background to behave as correctly as those who may never have known the dread fires of temptation nor the desperate shame of failure. God remembers our frame (Ps.103:13-14), and we must remember the humanity of our fellows.

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## 2:8-13

What a passage! Long before the time for the actual battle God was at work melting the hearts of the enemy by thoughts of Himself and His powerful purposes. This is the dread that comes upon the enemies of God by the conviction of the Holy Spirit and highlights for us how God goes on ahead of His people to prepare the way for them. Since this dread in Jericho was the work of God, we begin to see that the dread which caused panic and disintegration among the children of Israel, forty years earlier on the borders of the land, had been a

deliberate work of Satan, creating in the people of God an evil heart of unbelief so that they refused to do what was well within their power to do. Israel, who had experienced the power of God, refused to believe, while the prostitute who had simply heard of the doings of God believed with her whole heart. Think of Jesus' words in Matt. 21:31-32. Rahab's faith came by hearing the account of what God had done on Israel's behalf. But note that in v.10 there is no mention of the years of Israel's wanderings. You would have thought that the godless would have delighted in such a story and used it to escape from the claims of God's grace and power on their own lives. We cannot explain this fully, but it may be simply another example of the over-ruling of God in respect of His own people and work. On the other hand the explanation may simply be that God's dealings with His own people seldom make sense to the worldly minds of unbelievers. Of course, they are on the outside looking in, and their vision is distorted. Keep this in mind and it will make life more bearable.

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## **2:8-13**

The faith of Rahab is a miracle of the grace of God. There is no other explanation. Consider Eph. 2:8 and Acts 5:31 and hold clearly in your mind that the sign that God is granting repentance to some individual soul is the awakening of desire in their mind and heart. The means or instrumentality by which faith is born in the soul is the word of God (Rom. 10:17 AV) as Rahab testified in v.10. But although the whole of Jericho heard the solemn tidings of God coming to judge the wickedness of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-21), and working mighty miracles in confirmation of His purposes, saving His own people and leading them on safely and surely, none but Rahab was awakened to faith! The rest either dismissed the truth in unbelief or resisted their consciences and manned the walls to withstand the advance of Israel. In Rahab's case the general hearing of the truth was confirmed by the testimony of the spies who no doubt spoke with hearts aflame. She knew that God had spoken and that her whole future was at the point of crisis. Her commitment of faith was clear and her faith prevailed also for her family. This is vicarious faith such as we read of in Mark 2:1-5. In Rahab's case we see how much the "family" was the unit in Jewish thinking in terms of God's dealings with people. Grace having invaded Rahab's heart, it invaded also her family circle and the whole family was spared in the day of battle. We must never fall into the sin of limiting the grace of God. We all have good cause to marvel at how much wider God's workings have been than our expectations. 1 Cor.7:14 (a difficult verse) and 1 Pet. 3:1-2 yield much encouragement to those in earnest.

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## **2-14-24**

When we speak of the possibility of whole families being brought to salvation we must not think of this happening in any automatic or mechanical way. For Rahab herself the only place of safety was sheltering where the scarlet cord was displayed. This was the agreed symbol or token of absolute safety in the day of God's power. And it may have been that the particular sign was chosen because the spies themselves recalled the token sign of the blood of the Passover Lamb which was the safety of the people in Egypt in the time of the Exodus (Ex. 12:2-13). Nothing Rahab had or did or tried to do could avail for salvation. She had simply to take the men at their word and stake all upon what she knew in her heart to be from God. In like manner her family, told no doubt about the whole encounter and instructed in the truth by Rahab, had to choose to avail themselves of the promise of salvation. They could have refused and gone their way with the rest of Jericho, believing that the worst would not happen. But the story testifies that they sheltered under the sign of the saving promise of God and they were safe. Perhaps we over-emphasise the

thought of Rahab speaking to her family of these things. Would her family be disposed to listen to the preaching of a daughter with such a reputation? Perhaps it was her secret intercession for her own loved ones, together with the transformation of her whole manner of life that kept the family together under the saving sign of the scarlet cord. Since we hear nothing more of her family we must leave unanswered the question whether or not they too came to real saving faith.

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## 2:14-24

Is it reading too much into the story to compare the last two verses with the corresponding report of the spies in Num. 13:17-33? Earlier in their history the spies of Israel had searched the whole land, but now they went one stage forward as far as Jericho. Earlier they had carried out of the land tokens of all they would get for their pleasure and satisfaction: the milk, honey and clusters of grapes, but as soon as Israel heard of the difficulties and battles their hearts went cold. This time the report of the spies concerned the dealings of God with them and the thrill of the victory of God is in their souls. Much of our Christian service will be determined and conditioned by what we expect to get out of it, and if we are concerned primarily with the satisfactions of natural and legitimate desires and hopes, we will always be in danger of becoming discontented and rebellious, as Israel did when faced with blessing that could be theirs only by means of victory in battle. It is only a simple step from here to the stage when we barter our spiritual inheritance and potential for the gratification of immediate desires (Heb. 12:15-17). Would it not be true to say that the spies, having grown up under the discipline and strictures of experience under the rebuke of God, had learned to discern the things that really matter and to have a true sense of values and priorities? Jesus had a lot to say about desire for earthly as opposed to heavenly treasure (Matt. 6:19-24). When called to go on in obedience to Christ it is beside the point to ask if it is worth it, although we cannot deny the glorious compensations. Neither is it relevant to question what it will cost, and we know it will cost dearly. The man of God goes on because he knows he can do no other. There is a holy compulsion within his soul and the alternative to advance does not bear thinking about (Heb. 10:32-39).

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## 3:1-5

On the face of it the capture of Jericho was impossible, and the men of Jericho were confident in this in spite of the dread that filled their hearts. How could the army of Israel get across the flooded river Jordan? That was God's problem and it was in hand. The people were commanded to prepare and three vital precepts were given them. They were to *follow the ark* of God. There was no room for individualistic action. They were to be a people under the yoke of God. They were to *keep their distance* from the ark, no doubt to make sure that everyone would be in a position to see it, there no longer being the pillar of cloud hovering over it. There was to be no scramble for place and no presumptuous rushing forward once the journey started as if they felt they could now take over and do the rest themselves. They were reminded of their utter dependence on God as they moved forward into new territory and into new realms of spiritual service. Thirdly, they were to *sanctify themselves*, putting away all carelessness, sin and carnal desire, and setting themselves apart as men ready for God to use. They were not told exactly what God was going to do, but in order that He might do it they had to be prepared to leave behind them all that could possibly come between them and the will of God for them. We must try to sense the thrill in the camp of Israel as they anticipated the future. God was about to do a new thing (Isa. 43:16-19a)! Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward (Ex. 14:15).

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### **3:1-5**

The whole question of guidance for the people of Israel was to be quite simple so long as they looked in the right direction. But there was to be no precipitate dashing after a half-revealed will of God. Not a man was to move until the ark had gone a full thousand yards and that "waiting" gap had to be maintained if the meticulous guidance of God was going to be their practical possession. This detachment of faith (and there *can* be a detachment of indifference) is something we must cultivate or else we will constantly be finding ourselves so involved in situations that we will not be able to discern their true nature and relation to the will and purpose of God. We must stand back frequently even from the work God has called us to, simply in order to check the bearings of our spiritual compass, for to lose track of the appointed direction would be to blunder seriously. He who believes that his God orders and plans all things perfectly for the good of His people and work will not make haste or scurry to and fro in panic (Isa. 28:16 AV). Nor will the man who truly seeks guidance come to God with the issue pre-judged, presenting to God for sanction a plan already decided on and tentatively launched. God may not frustrate such a plan but neither will He give it His divine seal. You will go into the future having no assurance that God goes before you. Israel, walking in obedience, could see quite clearly that they were on the right road.

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### **3:6-9**

We begin to see just how significant a figure Joshua is in this story as he exercises his function of spiritual leadership. He has already spoken to the officers (2) and to the people in general terms (5) and now he addresses the priests. Does everything depend on this man? In one sense, yes, but such spiritual authority need not be a dangerous thing, for Joshua himself will walk behind the ark of God and not in front of it. He does not in any sense usurp the place of God for he speaks and acts only as God gives him command. This is why clear leadership and true humility should always be found together. In v.9 Joshua could well have said, "Hear the words of the Lord, my God," thus drawing attention to his own spiritual importance in the confidences of God. But note carefully that Joshua makes no mention to the people concerning God's private dealings with himself, nor of all the reassuring promises God had given to him in his own personal need, nor of the intention of God to exalt him (that is to authenticate his leadership) by some immediate sign. When a man knows he is dealing with God and doing a work at the command of God, there is no need for him to be constantly justifying his spiritual experience. Think of the reticence of Paul in 2 Cor. 12:1-10 and link that fact of tremendous spiritual experience with his earlier words in 1 Cor. 2:3-5. A man may be tremendously prominent in spiritual leadership and yet totally out of sight, for the simple reason that a "death to self" has been and is being constantly worked within him. People do not see this, but God does, and that is perhaps why God came to Joshua here with repeated assurances concerning the work in hand. It is not easy to lead when you are trembling with weakness and perhaps timidity. But it is when we are weak that we are strong!

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### **3:10-17**

Joshua draws the attention of the people to the seven-fold army of evil entrenched in the land of Canaan, and, having faced the situation realistically, declares that the living God amongst them will drive out the enemy. It is the presence of God amongst them and His activity that is to be the sure confidence of Israel. The statement in v.11 could be read as a command and an explanation by putting a semi-colon after the word "covenant," and omitting the word "of".

The word “see” is better read as “behold” (AV), which really means to look well at and keep your eyes on. This compels us to consider what the ark was and what it contained. It was a large wooden box, covered in gold and carried on poles inserted through rings at the lower corners. The lid, or mercy seat of gold, was adorned with two cherubim with outstretched wings. In the Tabernacle it sat in the inner sanctuary and was the place where God met with His servants and revealed His will. The Ark contained the two tables of the Law of God given to Moses (Ex. 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut. 10:1-5) and the mercy-seat, which was sprinkled with the blood of atonement, (Lev, 16:1-22; cf. Heb. 9) was the shield of safety between the people and the demands of a holy and righteous God. The whole pattern of the sacrificial system depicted pictorially that salvation for the people was provided by God. The passage in Hebrew's says that the Ark also contained a golden pot of manna, recalling how day by day without fail the faithfulness of God had provided for the people. There was also included Aaron's rod that budded (Num. 17: 1-10), recalling the day when God gave clear signs of His choice, His leadership and of the life-giving powers He was prepared to bestow on His people. Everything about the Ark declared the glory and faithfulness of God and it was this the people were commanded to keep their eyes upon. What a lesson a to us all!

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### **3:10-17**

In v. 13 we have the promise and v.14 the declaration that it came to pass exactly as God had promised. The people had absolutely nothing to go on save the word of God, which word of God was the central and most significant thing in the Ark. In one sense they had and we have more than just the bare word of God, for there are the past vindications and fulfilments of that word to confirm and encourage our faith. The longer life goes on the more cause we have to trust God. He does not change and become an untrustworthy liar! But sense the drama of this occasion. There could be no going back for the priests for the eyes of all were on them. There could be no going back for the people once they began to move towards this impossible barrier of a flooded river, led no doubt by Joshua. *If* (and how the Devil must have hammered that word into the minds of Joshua, the priests and all the people) the waters remained, the whole work and people of God would have been brought into ridicule and disrepute. And the enemy in Jericho would have spread the news far and wide to inspire and encourage a rising tide of godless arrogance. The people of God themselves would have been demoralised and incapacitated in respect of further service. But there was no need to doubt. The moment the feet of the priests dipped into the water's edge the miracle happened. If we think of the thrill of vindication in the hearts of the people, let us also think of the thrill of pleasure in the heart of God. He had waited forty years for His people to trust and obey like this!

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### **3:10-17**

We cannot end our study of this passage without noting the remarkable obedience of faith manifested in the priests who carried the Ark. They stood their ground in the midst of the divided waters until the whole procession of Israel had crossed the river. They reckoned upon the total trustworthiness of God in respect of the victory He had promised. This is faith. The Ark, containing the Law of God, stood at the heart of this miracle. The Law spoke to the people of the righteous demands of God upon them; and the mercy seat over the Ark spoke of God's gracious and total provision for them in the two-fold respect of forgiveness for failure to reach that righteousness, and a "given" righteousness whereby they could draw near to God without fear. The Ark stood alone, and it spoke of a full salvation which was the work of God and given to them in its totality. They reckoned upon it and in a sense as they passed

over Jordan they passed through the waters of death, leaving the old life behind to be cut off by the returning waters. A new life in the land of promise stretched out before them. It was theirs for the taking by conquest. What an illustration of the Gospel. It is indeed a death and a resurrection in Christ (typified in the Ark) and it is to be taken by faith. Read Romans 6:1-14.

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#### **4:1-11**

The memorial cairns of stones, representing the essential unity of Israel (twelve stones carried by a representative of each tribe v.4), are set up to keep before the minds of Israel the facts concerning the completeness of what God had done for them as His people. This is a similar provision to that in Exodus 13:1-16, which guaranteed the remembrance of redemption out of Egypt. In Exodus redemption is spoken of in terms of blood and power, deliverance from the bondage and judgment of Egypt. Here redemption is through the waters that typify death to the old life of failure and advance into the land and life of promise. Commentators argue as to the exact siting of one of the cairns, whether it was on the wilderness side of the river and thus still visible, or on the bed of the river and unseen. The spiritual interpretation we give here seems to require it to be beneath the waters to signify the total break with the past. It is dead and gone, buried as it were, in the baptism of Jordan. The past is dead, and with it the "old man", the Israel they once were, full of murmuring and complaining disobedience, whereby they forfeited the blessing of God. The cairn on the Canaan side of Jordan reminded them that they were "new creatures" (2 Cor. 5:17) and that they must *be* new creatures in all the life that lay ahead of them. The cairn of stones taken from the midst of Jordan declared that their experience in the mercy of God was nothing less than life from the dead. They were on the victory side. They stood on victory ground. All they had to do was to go ahead and make it a progressive, practical reality by driving out the foul enemies whose presence soiled and tyrannised the inheritance of God. This is a practical reading, and if we cannot see it, there must be something wrong with our spiritual experience.

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#### **4:1-11**

Some commentators suggest we should link the passage with 3:8 (which pictures the priests standing on the brink of Jordan) which means one cairn stood visible on the wilderness side of the river. This gives another deep lesson of assurance. For Joshua to look back would be a reminder that in spite of forty years of bitter and fruitless wandering in the wilderness, the persistent grace of God had brought a complete Israel to the edge of Jordan. Humanly speaking, the people and the work by themselves would have disintegrated and ceased to be in evidence. But God does not give up so easily, no matter what it costs Him and His people (Jer. 18:1-6 and Hosea 11:7-9; 14:1-8). A whole generation had defected but a whole new generation was now on the verge of a new stage in the work and purposes of God and had in its entirety passed over Jordan. Think of what this thought must have meant to Joshua when the storms of difficulty began to rage again in Israel. Whatever happens we do not need to slump like Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-4), nor to panic like the disciples (Mark 4:37-38), nor to concede defeat like the young servant (2 Kings 6:15-17). The work which belongs to God is indestructible even when it seems to be swamped without trace. We need to learn to have confidence in God and to have bigger thoughts concerning Him. Our thoughts about God are too small. Read Eccles. 3:14; Acts 5:38-39; Rev. 3:7-8, and store up the truth for the day you will need it.

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## 4:12-24

The passage is self-explanatory. The two and a half tribes kept their undertaking (1:12-17). The whole people were girded for war. They were under no delusion about easy conquest but were not deterred. God confirmed the leadership of Joshua and there seems to have been a wonderful unity of the Spirit among the people of God, not least in recognising that the work they were involved in was greater by far than any personal considerations. In terms of human enthusiasm, having crossed the mighty barrier of Jordan, you would have expected the army to strike while the iron was hot. But Joshua was a wiser general than that, and he called the people to halt for worship and to remember who they were and what they were for. It is one thing to forget the past, but these people had to be reminded about the future and those who would inherit the work when their days were done. Embracing all their experience there had to be the awareness of the unbroken succession of the work of God and they had to see their lives as having been caught up into something so vast that it was quite beyond measurement. We shall never grow proud nor will we degenerate into backsliding if we remember what we have been called out from and where we are being called to. But for the grace of God in the past where would we be? Would any of us dare to go on into the future in a way that would deny or frustrate that grace?

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## 4:12-24

Yesterday's note emphasised both our privilege in God and our responsibility to the work of God, but the passage also emphasises God's glorious responsibility towards us. The Ark, which was the symbol of the presence of God with His people, was the first to move into the waters of Jordan and the last to move out. For hours that Ark stood motionless in the midst of the river, a silent but eloquent testimony to the assured power and providence of God. This is our security and it is a theme throughout the Scriptures. Psalm 46 tells of God our refuge. Psalms 90-91 tell the same story and we love to sing the paraphrase of some of these words, "O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.... Under the shadow of Thy throne, Thy saints have dwelt secure: Sufficient is Thine arm alone, and our defence is sure." In Psalm 121 God overshadows our going out and coming in. That makes us think of the Good Shepherd who marks out the road for His own (John 10:1-16). Isaiah 52:12 stands like a great bastion of assurance and Psalm 139:1-18, although it *can* be applied in a disturbing way, is likewise a comfort beyond measurement to the man who is seeking to do God's will. We are held by the right hand of the God of our salvation. As we see the Ark standing in glorious stability in the centre of the waters of Jordan we begin to realise just how total is God's power of control over all earthly and hellish things. It is the sovereign authority displayed in Job 38:11 which brings home to our hearts the strict limits of Satan's operations against us, even although at times he seems to be raging unchecked. Turn lastly to Isaiah 40: 28-31 and think then what it meant to the struggling and slowest members of Israel crossing the river to see the Ark of God waiting patiently for them. God knows our frame, He remembers our limitations (Isa. 42:3) and He waits to be gracious to His people.

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## 5:1

There is sufficient in one verse for a practical lesson. The news of what God had done for His people in the miraculous crossing of Jordan soon spread, as the glorious news of God *is* apt to do. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment to come. But it is one thing to be deeply moved by the near approach of God, and another thing to respond in faith and to yield in obedience. There is no suggestion that Jericho remained in

this condition of dread. The people soon recovered and resisted, and we may see the reason tomorrow when we consider natural man's incapacity to see and receive spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14). But consider also the children of Israel standing now on new, unexplored territory. The waters of Jordan had rolled back again, making retreat impossible. Ahead of them lay the city of Jericho filled with dread, as they had been told (2:24), but as yet showing no sign whatever of capitulation. This is the kind of situation that rocks you back on your heels and you know that the time has come for you to prove yourself spiritually. This is also the time when the Devil will try his utmost to demoralise you by a sense of past failure and present weakness. What must be done? The people must be grounded again in God and that is what this whole chapter is about. It begins with news of a great dread from God on the enemy. It goes on to tell of the rite of circumcision at the command of God, followed by the observance of the Passover in remembrance of God. Finally, the Captain of the Lord's Host stands before Joshua. This is the emphasis: God, God, God! When will we learn to get our eyes off people and circumstances? God is with us. This is rock-bottom reality.

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## 5:2-9

Jericho could not understand why a people who could cross Jordan in flood did not at once advance to the military attack of their fortress. But God knew what He was doing (He always does) and He ordained these days of quiet and rest so that the sign of the covenant of His grace might be reaffirmed in the flesh of His people (circumcision). It is to be understood that for the forty years of wandering this ordained sign of circumcision, by which a people was marked out as the covenant people of God (compare baptism), had been neglected. Perhaps we should say that it had been withdrawn by God because Israel, under judgment for disobedience, was refused the privileges of spiritual inheritance. God could not give Himself to them in these days, and in the absence of the covenant sign the people were made aware of how God had withdrawn Himself from them, although never disowning them. But now Israel, which had failed so signally, was taken back again and there was to be no suggestion that it was restoration to second-rate service. God was putting again His mark of ownership, blessing and destiny upon this people. Think of the restoration of the prodigal in Luke 15:18-24. God made it very clear to Israel what the significance of this renewed circumcision was. God Himself was rolling away the reproach of the past (9). What a burden must have been eased from the hearts of the people and what spiritual encouragement must have filled their hearts. God was, in this quiet way of worship which emphasised personal relationships with Himself, preparing His people for a great advance of service. But such service stems from the inward integrity of our life towards God. The worldly man does not understand this and reckons worship and *waiting* upon God to be a waste of time. But Israel knew from the past (and would soon prove again in the future) that the secret of failure is failure in secret. This is the importance of the secret place where we meet with God.

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## 5:10-12

This is the third occasion in Israel's experience when the Passover was celebrated. The first was in Egypt (Ex. 12:21ff.), the second at Sinai (Num. 9:1ff.), and the third is here. The Law forbade an uncircumcised person eating the feast (Ex. 12:48), hence all through the wanderings in the wilderness this people, in breach of fellowship with God, could not come together to remember with joy the great deliverance of God. But now, by the grace of God, fellowship was restored and in the Passover the remembrance of God's salvation in the past, must have strengthened the hearts of the people for what lay ahead. What God had done before He would do again for His people. To look back strengthens faith and to look forward

strengthens hope, because God does not change. But faith is always being challenged to become stronger, and the very next thing to happen was the stopping of the manna which had been their sufficient sustenance for forty years. As long as it had been *necessary*, the manna had been given, coming regularly, visibly and immediately, but now a new life of faith had begun. This new life was not in any sense going to be inferior to the former. Indeed the life of conflict and victory was to be greater by far than the life of miracle, for it was to be lived by faith. Remember Jesus saying to His disciples that it was expedient for Him to go away and leave them (John 16:6-7). We shrink from the changes and demands that come through withdrawal of blessings we have come to depend on, but they are necessary. Our trust must never be in the blessings, however wonderful, but in the God who gives them, whose purposes are constantly moving forward and developing.

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## 5:10-12

The food of the land is always richer than the provision on the journey, which thing is a parable. The manna was sufficient but the food of Canaan was fuller and more varied, giving pleasure as well as basic sustenance. It would have been foolish to hold on to the old when the new was within grasp. It was on the third day following the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb that the manna stopped and a new life began. Consider this in the light of Jesus' words in John 6:27-35, 41-58. He and He alone is the sustaining food in the land and life of rest, and He is all-sufficient. But if we are to feed on Him we must let go the old life, mortifying the flesh (illustrated by circumcision) and must take our stand again and again in the powerful merit of His saving death and resurrection (illustrated in the crossing of Jordan and the Passover). Let such a book as this always turn out thoughts to Christ. This is what the Bible is all about! Note one last lesson in the stopping of the manna. There is an economy of miracle in the workings of God, not least because miracle can often be a concession to weakness and can lead to carelessness, not to say laziness. God will not do *for* His people by sovereign miracle what they *can* do by the obedience and effort of faith. He *has* set within our power all that we need. God will not subdue our enemies within our flesh unless we lay hold upon the victory He has given. This is all very practical.

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## 5:13-15

Up to this point the book has been concerned with the crossing of Jordan and now the second main section, dealing with the conquest of the land, begins. The vision granted to Joshua, who was in a place of solitude, possibly pondering the immediate future, is said by some to be a rebuke to the man who was perhaps becoming too aware of his leadership. We doubt very much if this is the case although such a lesson is always needed. The true message of the vision seems to be in its revelation of God and the consequent worship by Joshua. In the vision given to Moses at the outset of *his* life's work (Ex. 3) God appeared in the burning bush, signifying His suffering with the people in their affliction. But to Joshua God appears with drawn sword. The emphasis is no longer on submission but on victory, and God Himself stands ready to lead His people forward. The first impact upon Joshua was, of course, a test of his valour. He had been commanded to be strong and of good courage (1:5-9), and this is his attitude for he advances to question this obviously important character as to his intentions. Note that Joshua does not rashly attack the man. He is too disciplined for that and may have been sensitive to the presence of spiritual significance. Then he discovered that this figure was no incidental spectator nor even a sympathetic helper, but the Lord Himself come to direct in person every movement of the coming campaign. Joshua's submission and worship were instantaneous. He was ready. Unlike Jacob in a similar confrontation (Gen. 32:24ff.)

Joshua had no personal matters to be dealt with in relation to God. He was already a man mastered and under subjection. He was ready for service.

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### **5:13-15**

The sword in the hand of the Captain of the Host is a judicial sword to be wielded on behalf of the forces of righteousness and to bring iniquity to judgment. The iniquity of Canaan was ripe now and ready for judgment (Gen. 15:13-16) and this must be kept in mind as we read of the subsequent battles. This comment by Bishop Ellicott is helpful: "Jehovah will take part in this conflict as commander in chief. It is not Israel's quarrel in which they are to ask Divine assistance. It is the Lord's own quarrel, and Israel and Joshua are but a division in His host. The wars of Israel in Canaan are always presented in the Old Testament as the wars of the Lord. Remember this aspect of the story. The conquest of Canaan is too often treated as an enterprise of the Israelites, carried out with great cruelties for which they claimed Divine sanction. The war is a Divine enterprise, in which human instruments are employed, but so as to be entirely subordinate to the Divine will. Jehovah is not for Israel, nor for Israel's foes. He fights for His own right hand, and Israel is but a fragment of His army." The comment goes on to speak of the sun standing still (Josh. 10:12-13), of the stars in their courses fighting (Judges 5:20), and of the treasures of hail standing by as reserves in the battle (Job 38:22-23). When we are fainthearted we need to be reminded of the vast scale of the campaign in which we are engaged and of the fact that the battle is the Lord's, not ours.

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### **6:1-16**

Here is a magnificent example of the efficiency of faith. The way ahead to the fulfilment of the promises of God was effectively barred by the garrisoned city of Jericho, but without a blow being struck the walls of hindrance were shattered. This was God's doing. The best commentary on this is in Hebrews 11:29-30 which first of all highlights the fundamental distinction between faith and unbelief in the story of the crossing of the Red Sea. The world (Egypt) tried to imitate the actions of the church (Israel) and was confounded. (The converse is equally true as the church must remember when it tries to ape the world!) Egypt assumed that circumstances were neutral and would operate consistently for all involved, but it was not so. In Israel's life and activity there was operative the unseen power of God hidden from the eyes of unbelief. But, in Egypt's experience the massive restraints of God were withdrawn and they were overwhelmed. The principle is exactly the same with Jericho. On a basis of military assessment the wicked city was safe, especially from an army whose actions were so grotesquely irrelevant, as it seemed, to the business of war. The only thing Jericho did not reckon on was the power of God; or at least the willingness and capacity of Israel to have faith in God. When the church really takes God at His word, the world is still shaken.

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### **6:1-16**

In the face of the power of God the massive fortresses of evil are exposed as ramshackle edifices waiting to be shattered by men who take God at His word and claim the victory. If we were to concentrate on all the geological data often adduced to explain this event we would not use it to explain away the miraculous element but rather to demonstrate the fundamental insecurity and impermanence of evil, even when fortified by all the determination and ingenuity of men. It was by faith that the walls fell down. Israel committed herself to a course of action both dangerous (Jericho could have attacked) and open to ridicule. You can imagine the shouts of mockery from the battlements. On the other hand, as

a missionary once suggested, Jericho might have been very alarmed, taking Israel's action as some form of "ju-ju". Think also of the discipline of Israel, refusing to be distracted from their God-instructed course of action. They must have been tempted to doubt by the slowness and seeming futility of their actions but refused to retaliate even with shouts of confidence in their God. Here is a people who have taken God at His word (v.2) and are believing that He will indeed grant the victory. No matter the slowness of the process, no matter the seeming irrelevance of their actions, they believed God would work for them, and He did. Faith is foolish in the eyes of the world but it is not irrelevant. Israel did not stroll; they marched with God at their head (the symbolism of the Ark) and they kept their eyes on Him. Consider 2 Cor. 10:3-5, a mine of spiritual truth.

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## 6:17-21

The word translated "accursed"(AV) has the twofold meaning of "devoted to God" and "utter destruction". It is readily seen that all the wealth of gold and cattle was to be devoted to the Lord in order that no-one might be able to accuse Israel of engaging in this warfare for personal gain. But what of the total massacre of the people? Is this a sub-Christian action to be deplored? Remember that we are studying here about pre-Christian days. Some explain the incident as part of the necessary tactics of war to prevent this fortress of Jericho being rebuilt and so becoming a danger to Joshua's base camp as his army moved forward. But, as we have pointed out, the message of this book is spiritual and we must see in the slaughter of Jericho a judicial action of God. He was bringing evil to judgment as He has the right to do, and at the same time cutting out from the land the cancer of wickedness lest it should grow, reassert itself, and in due time progressively eat away the vital new life of the kingdom of God. Keep very much in mind that the people of Jericho were not taken by surprise. The news of the words and works of the God of salvation had reached them, moved them to fear and apprehension, but had not awakened them to repentance. They had already made their decision to refuse and resist and defy this God who came near them. We are all far too quick to criticise the judicial actions of God and to accuse Him of injustice or at least inhumanity. This iniquitous land of Canaan had gone on for centuries spawning wickedness and being apparently immune to correction. But their time came, as it comes to all evil. Read Deut. 32:32-35; Rev. 6:12-17; 9:20-21; 16:7-11. The One who knows most what evil is is best fitted to pronounce its judgment.

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## 6:17-21

We pause with these verses to observe how simply the victory was accomplished just as God had said. The shout of faith came at the appointed moment in God's schedule of timing, not before and not after. But note also in v.16 that faith was active on the basis of what God had already done. It does not say, "God will give you," but, "God has given you." The children of Israel took God at His word. This is faith. The walls of Jericho fell down by the sovereign act of God, for no human power contributed to the success. At the same time, the walls fell by the faith of Israel (Heb. 11:30), after they had been encompassed seven days Note that no single person's faith is mentioned. Israel was in this battle as a united fellowship. It would also be right to say that the walls fell as a result of Israel's obedience when they obeyed God to the letter of His command. We could also point to the courage of faith, for in crossing Jordan Israel had burned its boats and if Jericho had advanced to battle there could have been no going back. This brings us to the consistent thoroughness of faith, for going forward in resolution is the only alternative to going back. Spiritual life is dynamic, not static. The people of God here went straight on before them and took the city. We are reminded of the

word which says that, "The people who know their God shall be strong and get on with it" (Dan. 11:32). If God has laid open the way you should go, get on with it.

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## 6:22-27

We need Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 to hold together the truth of the deliverance of Rahab. She took God at His word, having heard the message of His coming and having thought it through in its application to herself and her family. That is her faith and it was proved effectual. At the same time the proof that she had indeed come to a place of faith lay in her actions. Instead of being primarily concerned with self-preservation in the immediate enquiry by the police force of Jericho, she took her stand on the side of the men of God and acted accordingly. In a very real sense Rahab had been saved from Jericho then, long before its fall. She had in principle forsaken the world that was to be destroyed, in the interest of the world that was to come. She was prepared to abandon the old life in order to guarantee the new. This is the thing that is so perplexingly absent from many modern conversions. There seems to be little if any change of life and we find professing Christians clinging to the worldly world as if it was the most precious thing in the whole of life. When the great day came Rahab was there in Jericho with her colours (the scarlet rope, 2:21) fastened to the window. There was no question to whom she belonged and she could not but be saved in the day of Jericho's judgment. Everything about her marked her out as a woman with faith. What a remarkable thing for someone out of such a background! It was a very positive, constructive, dynamic and all-embracing conversion.

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## 7:1

We must think deeply about this one verse and it may help to read the whole chapter to fill in the details. Some commentators point out that in seven years of campaigning in Canaan this was the only battle Israel lost. Some criticise Joshua's leadership in that he failed to be sure of the mind of the Lord before advancing, but this application of the chapter can scarcely stand examination. Some say this incident gives an illustration of spiritual life and an example of the Christian trifling with the past, yielding to the lusts of the flesh and by carnal desire being led back into bondage and defeat. All these are useful thoughts, but the point of v.1 is that it gives a piece of vital spiritual information, known to God but unknown as yet to men, and this provides the key for interpreting the whole story. The great advance of the work of God had begun with a significant victory but, "*the children of Israel broke faith with God*" (RSV) and almost at once a stream of discord and disaster rushed down on the whole life and work of Israel. When the crash came there was nothing outward to suggest that anything was wrong spiritually with this people who had just won a significant victory by sheer unqualified faith in God. The one thing that seemed sure was that God was with them. Nothing could stand against them, or so it seemed. But they broke faith with God!

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## 7:1-5

Only one man sinned with regard to the loot from Jericho and this is a testimony to the military and spiritual discipline of Joshua's leadership. But the one man's sin involved the whole body of Israel (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-14, 26). Achan had possibly no idea of the long train of disastrous events he was setting in motion when he coveted, but he certainly lived to learn that no man is an island, and no man sins unto himself. He involved in guilt Joshua, all his fellows and the holy work of God. Private backsliding is impossible. The order of the verses seems to indicate that we are to regard Achan's sin as opening the door to Satanic insinuation

of pride into the whole membership of Israel, resulting in the corporate sin of presumption (3). This in turn seems to have involved Joshua in the sin of yielding his spiritual leadership to popular opinion. On the other hand it could be argued that it was the general spirit of complacency that created the atmosphere in which Achan felt safe in taking the risk of disobedience. And in such an atmosphere of over-confidence in spiritual prowess it is hard for a man even of Joshua's stature to stand on the highest ground of humility in terms of leadership. If this is the interpretation we have a lesson on the special danger to believers in a time of spiritual blessing and quickening. If a new and vital work could be brought to such a sudden halt as this, we must needs watch and pray.

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## 7:1-5

The blessings of God are sweet and they make the heart tender, so much so that the loss of them becomes a deep grief (5) which is a means of grace to restore the soul. The following words from hymn 441 in the Revised Church Hymnary provide a fruitful meditation:

"I thank Thee more that all our joy  
Is touched with pain,  
That shadows fall on brightest hours,  
That thorns remain,  
So that earth's bliss may be our guide,  
And not our chain.

For Thou, who knowest, Lord, how soon  
Our weak heart clings,  
Has given us joys, tender and true,  
Yet all with wings,  
So that we see, gleaming on high,  
Diviner things.

I thank Thee, Lord, that here our souls,  
Though amply blest,  
Can never find, although they seek,  
A perfect rest,  
Nor ever shall, until they lean  
On Jesus' breast" (A.A.Procter)

The valley of weeping, sorrow and denial becomes a door of hope. The corrections of God coming so swift are arrows of mercy. He may wound, but His hand makes whole. (Hosea 2:14-15; Job 5:17-18). He withholds in order that in due time He may bless the more.

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## 7:6-12

Joshua is shattered either by the suddenness of the collapse of his work or by a deep awareness of his failure to discern the spiritual slackness that had infected the life of Israel, perhaps even his own life. On the face of it he seems to blame God (7) for the whole mess, a common failing of mortals when things do not work out. But a deeper lesson seems to be that the depression, collapse, demoralisation and desolation he manifests are so total that it is at once marked out as a work of Satan to be resisted. After all, just as one victory is not reckoned to be the end of the campaign, so one failure must not be construed as the end of everything. Joshua cannot deny the failure, but God is greater than our failures, and the

miserable mopings of our hearts. Read Micah 7:8. Get things back into perspective and instead of wailing miserably about what has gone wrong in the past which cannot be recalled, get on with putting things right in the present in the interest of the future. Israel may here have been defeated by sin, but God was not defeated. Indeed He is eager to rectify the whole matter and to that end sin is exposed. The work waited to go forward and would do so the moment the blockage was taken out of the way.

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### **7:13-15**

There is no break between yesterday's reading and todays and we must preserve the earnest urgency of the speech of God by which Joshua is lifted to his feet in order that he might deal with the problem of Israel's sin. This was a crisis of choice for the whole of Israel, for God made two things very clear. They could not stand before their enemies nor could they continue to enjoy the fellowship of God unless and until they returned to God in new sanctification of heart and life. They had to get rid of their sins which were a grief and offence to God, or else they would lose God. They could not have it both ways. Sin causes trouble and nothing else. When it has finished its long course of disruption it finally produces death (Jas. 1:13-15). Sin blocks the channels of God's gracious power towards men, and because of the sins of disobedience and disloyalty the Christian church stands in our generation as a testimony to its own powerlessness. God has not changed. As Shakespeare says, the fault lies not in our stars but in ourselves (Isa. 59:1-3). Our prayer must constantly be that of the Psalmist in Psalm 139:1-4, 23-24. Note very carefully that Achan's sin is spoken of not merely in terms of personal guilt but in respect of the folly, or shame, or damage it caused in the people and work of God.

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### **7:16-26**

The whole of Israel knew the warning of Numbers 32:23 and now they were discovering just how efficiently God could carry out His word. We cannot tell exactly how the process of elimination and identification was carried out. Numbers 27:21 and I Sam. 10:20-21 may give some indication of the specific enquiring of the Lord. The point is that God made His verdict clear. "The representatives of the tribes enter the sacred enclosure in succession, and pass before the High Priest, in awful silence, broken only by the voice of Jehovah, who pronounces at intervals the names of the tribe of Judah, Zerahite, Zimri, Carmi, and Achan. It must have been a terrible ordeal. But all present must have felt that no human partiality, or private animosity, was seeking its victim, The Judge of all the earth was doing judgment. And when the accusation of Jehovah was followed by the explicit confession of the criminal, and this again by the discovery of the stolen spoil which was brought in and poured out before the Lord, and when this discovery was followed by the execution of the awful sentence, all who were present must have received a lesson which it was impossible to forget, as to the reality of the covenant of God." (Ellicott) It is solemn, but sin is a solemn subject. The incident and the severity of the punishment must be viewed in relation to the whole plan of God for the conquest of Canaan. Any suggestion of base motives on the part of Israel would bring the character of God into disrepute. Any gratification of fleshly greed such as this, would identify a man with the worldly spirit of entrenched evil. To leave sin unjudged would have been to menace the hopes of all future generations. Sin must be judged. This is the word of the Cross.

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## 7:16-26

The sin of Achan was on the pattern of the Garden of Eden. There is nothing new under the sun! He saw with his eyes, his imagination was stirred and he desired, then his heart was moved to decision and he took action. As in the Genesis story we go on here to read how he hid, and we can well imagine his fear. Is sin worth the price? Did Achan go the next day to battle, and was his conscience stirred by guilt? He did not make any move to confess his sin. When he heard that an investigation was to be carried out the following day was he able to sleep? As the process went on, did he give any indication of repentance? Did he decide to brazen it out, even before God, or had he already come to the stage when he was insensitive to God? Was his whole spiritual being clouded by the fascination of the forbidden thing which he had determined to have even without the blessing of God? In the end he made a full confession and there is no indication whatever that he protested at the radical nature of the sentence. But note very carefully the tender words of Joshua in v.19, for this may have been the kindness that finally reached Achan's heart enabling him to come back to God. Joshua appealed to the man's spiritual faith and values, calling on him to give God glory; that is to clear God of the false charges made against Him by His own people. There were great issues at stake and yet there was the grace of tenderness in the human judge (cf. Gal. 6:1). Joshua could only pronounce the sentence of death but the greater Joshua, who is Jesus, speaks the word of pardon. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive (1 John 1:9). But never forget that the terrible price of sin was paid for us in a greater judgment than that of Achan.

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## 8:1-2

God does not keep up a grudge and Joshua is urged to go on to further victory against Ai at whose hands he had already suffered defeat. Trace the pattern of the story: victory, moral breakdown, defeat, confession, resumption and victory. This was the very word Joshua and the people needed right then, when the Devil would no doubt seek to keep them in at least partial spiritual paralysis after their shock collapse. One thing the kingdom of evil does not understand is forgiveness. This is why the Devil is called the Accuser, tormenting the saints of God because of their indefensible sins, destroying their peace and clouding their fellowship with God. But Satan's slander goes further, for he attacks the reputation of God, portraying Him as One with whom there is no forgiveness. Chapter 7 has made it clear that God will have no compromise with sin. But now that sin has been exposed, dealt with and forgiven there is no reluctance with God. His word concerns restoration to service, promise of victory and the rich ingathering of blessing beyond anything they had yet known. If Achan had not snatched prematurely at what God had not yet given, but had waited only a short time he and his fellows would have been far, far richer. "Wait, I say, on the Lord."

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## 8:3-13

There are two proofs here that Joshua and his colleagues were men of faith. They believed that God had in fact forgiven them and, far from rejecting them, was prepared to restore and advance them. They also recognised that spiritual victories are won only on a basis of thorough attention to detail. This time there was no presumption in the preparation for war, and the ambush was set, reckoning on a very clear principle (5-7). Joshua had apparently learned to discern the wiles of the Devil and knew that the men of Ai, having won a significant victory, would be quite sure they could do it again. Israel, without the blessing and intervention of God, was pathetically weak, and events had suggested God had forsaken

them. What Ai did not know was the fact of Israel's restoration. Now, consider what God was doing through Joshua and Israel. He was drawing evil out into the open, tempting evil to show its power, and thereby accomplishing its destruction. But God can do this kind of thing only when He has a people who are alive to His will and acknowledging their absolute dependence on Him. The contrast between this passage and chap. 7:1-3 could hardly be greater. How useful we can be to God at times, and how useless at others. It should not be so.

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### **8:14-29**

Note that the whole plan of campaign was geared not simply to rout the men of Ai (the forces of evil) but to destroy their base of operations so that it could never again be a threat to the people of God. Again there are two lessons. We emphasise the discipline and determination of Israel under the leadership of Joshua by which the work was seen through to its end. It could not have been easy for them to see the whole of Ai coming out in shrieking confidence against them. That was a real test of faith, and in the evil day they stood their ground and held their fire until the right time to strike. The second lesson may not be so clear. There was no question of Israel evading an encounter with Ai. That would have left a great question-mark over their spiritual future and could have led to their building their life and service on a false foundation, a hoax victory. This cannot be, and therefore God must in His sovereign providence bring the enemies out into the open. In like manner God must progressively expose to us the hidden pockets of enemy territory within our lives, even if it takes salutary defeats to do so. This He does, not to shame and confound us, but to urge us on to claim and apply an ever fuller victory over evil, which is ours by right in Jesus Christ. The victory Israel had over Ai was so total we cannot but be staggered. It is glorious, and makes us think of Christ's triumph over principalities and powers (Col. 2:15) and of how we are led along in His triumphal procession (2 Cor. 2:14). We must believe this, for this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith (1 John 5:4).

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### **8:30-35**

Read Deuteronomy 27 in conjunction with this passage. The message applies both to the work of God and to the individual lives of the people of God. An altar can be built on ground that was formerly held by the powers of evil only when a full victory has been won. It claims the conquered territory for God and from that ground proclaims the law of God. Note how the altar and the Law go together. Worship without righteousness is an emotional and evaporative thing, and it was in terms of righteousness that the people pledged themselves afresh to God. This was an act both of confession and consecration. They called to mind their sins and in the same act turned from them. They embraced the Law of God as the basis and condition of their victory and life within the land of promise. This was to be their life, not only in times of crisis and warfare, when it might be expected that they would rise to the occasion, but all the time. A vast area of territory lay before them yet to be occupied in God's name, and as they prepared for the campaign of battle they looked to the past mercies of God and took their stand in the great historical succession of faith. They had been brought to the present bridgehead of opportunity by God's grace and they trusted in that grace for what ever lay ahead. Their resolution was to be tested very soon.

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## **9:1-2**

On numerous occasions in Scripture we read of various powers of evil coming together in an attempt to fight against and frustrate the purposes of God in and through His people. We must be warned to expect this and at the same time place our confidence in God who is not alarmed by such presumption (Ps. 2). Compare what we read here with Rahab's words in 2:9-11. These kings were very clear as to what was happening, and the more it became evident that God was in fact with Israel and that the work of conquest could not be stopped, the more they determined to resist, and to do so openly. No doubt they took courage from the sight of Israel's public failure in the first confrontation with the comparatively small garrison of Ai, and concluded that a confederacy was their best chance. We have already faced the antagonism of unbelief and draw a further lesson from today's verses. The situation seems almost as if God, having subdued evil in order to let the work get started, now lifts the restraint and lets evil have its day. We see also in Jesus' words in Luke 22:53. Two things are happening. Evil is being allowed to show itself to demonstrate the absolute necessity of its judgment. At the same time evil is being used by God to purge and mature the faith of God's own people and to compel them to grow up into spiritual maturity. God's ways are often past finding out but they are gloriously competent and effective.

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## **9:1-2**

A revision lesson is not out of place here as the second stage of the conquest of the land begins. Israel is campaigning at the command of God, and her taking possession of the land is no arbitrary thing. On the spiritual level it is a stage in God's programme of advance to the historical revelation of His salvation in the coming of Christ. On the human level it is part of the executive judgment of God on sin (Gen. 15:16). In a very real sense Joshua was taking back the land from wicked powers who had usurped it, and thus he had every right to smite and to make God's victorious purpose a practical reality. The land was given to Joshua and he had to take it. This is the pattern of the life of sanctification. Thus far two deep dangers have been encountered: armed resistance by the evil powers actually in possession and not willing to yield without a fight; and sin within the life of Israel which paralysed spiritual effectiveness. Armed resistance by Jericho had no power to stop the advance of Israel just as open battles seldom overcome true believers. But the inner defect of and compromise in Israel's life of obedience to God sabotaged the work and it ground to a halt. By the grace of God this too was remedied, not without cost, and the moment the work re-started the wiles of the Devil became operative. This introduces tomorrow's reading..

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## **9:3-15**

Satan attacks on two levels. The kings in v.1 decided on war but the Gibeonites worked by deliberate deceit. So cleverly did they work that Israel forged an association with a people who should have been exterminated and she was left with a heavy encumbrance to be carried as the work proceeded. No doubt the Gibeonites were impelled more by self preservation than by thoughts of harming Israel, but the end result was the same. We can imagine the reactions of the other kings to this crafty move and this indicates the dissensions within the kingdom of evil. Never forget this. Sometimes wicked men like Herod and Pilate become friends in common enmity to Christ (Lk.23:6-12), but more often wicked men fall out amongst themselves, for there is no peace to the wicked. There is still another lesson to be pondered today. Israel was deceived and taken in and no doubt hated the fact. But did they not themselves bear the name of Israel, or Jacob the deceiver, and had they not earlier in their

history dealt deceitfully with this same people (Gen. 34:2, 13)? Israel is being paid in her own coin. Whatever a man sows, he shall reap. This is a principle of life that we need to give heed to in our dealings with one another. Do unto others as you would have them do to you. On any other basis you have no cause for complaint when accounts begin to be settled.

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### **9:3-15**

Israel was suspicious of this people and should have given more weight to their suspicions, holding back from commitment until clear spiritual sight indicated the right thing to do. Instead of this, with a real degree of hesitation, they acted, made vows and became involved. But the Bible says that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23) and in this precipitate action we see yet another victory for the persistent powers of evil. Note carefully that there was no change of heart in the Gibeonites (4) and their technique was lies right through. The fact that there was a slight element of truth in v.9-10 made it all the more dangerous. Although the Israelites were hesitant at first (7) the human appeal couched in such "sob-story" terms swayed their better judgment. It is right that men of God should have compassion for their fellows in distress, but they must not become sentimentally involved lest spiritual judgment be abrogated. Face the fact that appearances can be very deceptive and the right course of action is investigation and *only then* commitment. But in v.14 we are told that Israel accepted the Gibeonites at face value without asking counsel from God. Lot made exactly the same mistake when he was setting up house (Gen. 13: 8-13), and chose on a basis of human suitability without regard to the spiritual provision for his life and family. Once the deed was done it was only a matter of time before the sad complications became evident.

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### **9:16-21**

The hesitation Israel had felt about the Gibeonites had been the gentle constraint of God on their consciences, but it had been ignored. It took a mere three days for the deception to become public and even although the people murmured, because the princes kept to the vow, the Gibeonites were saved. Dare we try to adjudicate in this matter? Should the vow have been ignored because it was engineered through trickery and caused Israel to walk in disobedience? If a Christian in a moment of weak confusion and emotion agrees to commit an act of sin with another and then conscience flares into warning conviction, should he go on into sin because he has given a promise to another sinner? Has he not first given his promise of loyalty to God? Have we any right to vow that which is contrary to the will of God revealed to us in His instruction? Think of Jephthah's terrible vow in Judges 11:30ff. Some say that Israel was bound by the vow and could do nothing but pay the price and live with the continuing rebuke of their error and the near presence of a source of temptation. The amazing thing is that down through the following books of the Old Testament the people of God held to their vow in respect of these Gibeonites who are still found working with the Jews in the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah. There is much in history that we do not understand and it is best we should not judge before that day when all will be made plain. What is plain for us now is in Prov. 3:1-6 and Eccles. 5:1-5.

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### **9:22 27**

There is a slight suggestion in this passage that the Gibeonites were somewhat more real after their exposure than before, and it *may* have been the honourableness of the Israelites in respect of the vow that moved them. We cannot tell. But v.24-25 do seem to indicate a degree of submission, although there was little else they could do. To be afraid for your life and seek

human safety by any means is an understandable attitude but it is scarcely saving faith, It is paralleled by the demand of the impenitent dying thief to be saved from the mess he had got himself into. The Gibeonites were quite happy with their lot. They would no doubt enjoy the purity and safety of Israel, just as many unbelieving people today enjoy the love, harmony and happiness of a real Christian fellowship. But such people, while loving the fruits of grace, will not yield to the claims of grace, insisting on the "middle-of-the-road" life. This kind of spirit so closely intermingling with the life of Israel would be a constant source of temptation, not to say irritation. Indeed it becomes a source of grief, for we begin to see that such people like our company but not our God and His Son Jesus who means more to us than all. How sad to be so near Jesus, and yet not desire Him. The Gibeonites were menial servants in the House of the Lord, and that is no small blessing (Ps. 84:4). But did not our fathers say with some cause, "the nearer the Kirk the further from grace"?

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## **10:1-7**

One of the abiding lessons of Old Testament history concerns the complications that stem from sin and from hastily made decisions. Even the glorious forgiveness of God does not cancel out at once the physical and circumstantial effects of wrong-doing and we find that the past is constantly influencing the present. That is what we see here. The defection of Gibeon, a significant city in Canaan, incensed the other five kings who banded together for a major assault against Gibeon. It does not seem to have occurred to them that Joshua would take action on behalf of Gibeon. But of course worldly men cannot understand the thinking of godly men. Some would have expected Joshua to make capital out of the situation and stand by and see the Gibeonites slaughtered, so ridding himself of an embarrassing complication. But it was not so. Israel went to the aid of those men who had deceived her so craftily, perhaps wishing fervently that they had never got involved with the Gibeonites. But Joshua knew full well that he could not live his life on the basis of regrets concerning the past. The real situation was the one confronting him and this had to be faced and fought and he was not afraid to call on his God to help him, The past creates the present, but it is what we do now with the present rather than what we have done in the past which determines the future.

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## **10:8-14**

This is exciting, for it concerns all that God did. He spoke right at the start (8) and proceeded to create panic among the enemy (10). Was this psychological warfare by the influence of the Holy Spirit making hearts melt with apprehension? Then we have the artillery of heaven (11) followed by the final miracle of the sun standing still. Is it not comforting and challenging that we have a God like this? We have no intention of trying to explain away the miraculous element of this passage nor in limited space are we to try to explain the miraculous in terms of scientific knowledge or principles. Read the various commentaries such as Ellicott and IVP. Keep in mind that the instant loyalty of Joshua and Israel to the people who had so recently tricked them is such a contrast to natural human instinct that it must also be counted a miracle of the grace of God. We must not deify what men call "the laws of nature" or "scientific principles". Are there not many exceptions and many facts that refuse to fit the theories? We must begin with our doctrine of God if we are to understand both creation and history. Listen to the Westminster Confession of Faith: "God, in His ordinary providence makes use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure." It is still God's world, not man's, and when we remember this the miraculous element in the Scriptures is easy to accept. Remember that they said of Jesus, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mk.4:35-41 AV).

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## **10:15-27**

The children of Israel refused to be distracted from the main business of routing the evil forces who were a menace to the advance of God's plan of conquest. The five kings who hid in the cave were shut up, to be dealt with later, while the main business was executed thoroughly. What a lesson on spiritual tactics! How often we allow ourselves to be bogged down by incidentals and irrelevancies and are thereby led aside from the spiritual battle. Think how we allow personal slights, other people's business, and petty jealousies to fill our minds so that all our mental and emotional drive is siphoned off from our spiritual service. Little wonder we grow dry and wizened. "First things first," must be our constant guide, and the first thing is to take our stand on the authoritative word which declares that God has given us victory over *all* our enemies. This is the lesson that God through Joshua is pressing home in v24. It is a symbolic action. It is saying to the people of God that they must put their foot down and stand no nonsense from the antagonistic powers of the kingdom of evil. There is no reason why we should constantly be harried into defeat and misery, for God has given us victory and He fights for us. This we must believe, and in faith learn to resist the Devil, facing him squarely in the name of his conqueror. Do not let the historical facts of war and execution according to the custom of the day rob you of the glorious spiritual truth being presented to us here in geographical and territorial terms.

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## **10:28-43**

The spiritual victory in all its totality which we spoke of yesterday does not fall into our laps without effort, and the word "fought" (v.29), "attacked" and similar words, is the recurring note of this passage. Remember that the initial advance of the campaign with all its natural stimulus and excitement was now past and the business of subduing the land lay before Israel,. It is one thing to rejoice in the victory of God manifest in your own experience, but the warning of Jesus in Luke 10:17-20 is always necessary. Our basic rejoicing is that we have been made part of a work that is eternal, and this brings responsibilities together with the joy of assurance concerning the final outcome. Our passage declares the way will not be easy, and if we look on to 11:19 we will see that the battle remains right to the very end. Every single step of advance has to be fought for. If the territorial warfare of the Book of Joshua is a pattern or illustration of the spiritual warfare of the New Testament, we begin to see that in personal sanctification there can be no compromise with any realm of the life of the natural fallen Adam within us. It must be put to death in the death of Christ, in order that the new life might flourish. You will note in all this that Joshua took the initiative against the kings and did not wait for them to catch him on the wrong foot.

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## **11:1-14**

With the help of a map it is possible to trace the place names here and in the previous passage and see the intelligent thoroughness of Joshua in his campaign against evil. From 10:28 he struck westward from Jericho, then south-west until he eventually reached Gaza on the Mediterranean coast. He subdued all the main cities between that coast and the Dead Sea, that is, the whole of the southern part of Canaan. He first divided the land, took the south and then turned his attention to the northern half. The confrontation took place at Merom near what we know as the Sea of Galilee. When we come to chapter 12 we are told of no less than thirty-one different kings and territories that had to be dealt with. We could almost say that every victory won seemed to reveal the existence of yet another pocket of evil to be challenged and

overthrown. Advance in one realm does not constitute victory, nor does one victory mean that other enemies will automatically be subdued. And it is not until the land is possessed in the name of God and conformed to His will that the work is complete. What we see here in Joshua is a man who means business with God and sets about it with *intelligent* spirituality. Not least we see in v.10 that he knew his enemy. So should we!

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### **11:15-23**

The first basic lesson from this passage concerns Joshua and his attitude to his work, as indicated by verses 15, 16, 18 and 23. There is a divine apostolic succession in v.15 which reveals the glorious privilege of all who are called to Christian service. We are neither isolated nor independent in our work. We begin on the basis of what has been done before us, we carry out our God-given task handed down to us, and in doing it we are preparing an inheritance for those who come after us. Never think for a moment that the fortunes of the Kingdom of God rest totally in our own hands. The moment we begin to think ourselves "kingpins" that are indispensable, we have reached the stage where God can do without us for the simple reason that we have made ourselves un-useable through pride. No doubt Joshua made his own particular imprint on his stage of the work according to his natural personality but that was not in any way allowed to obtrude on the basic pattern of the work. He was not doing something different from Moses, although his task was conquest compared with Moses' work as Lawgiver. There was no spirit of competition in Joshua as if he felt he had to prove himself better than Moses. He had been given a task to do and he got on with it, taking possibly seven years of unremitting battle to see it through. But the issue was a situation in which the allocation of the land to the tribes of Israel could take place, and so the work moved forward.

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### **11:15-23**

The second lesson from these verses concerns the nature of the opposition to the advance of the work of God under its appointed leader. It was a long war, for evil is not rooted out in a day (18). It was relentless war with no easing of the enmity even when it became clearer and clearer that Joshua was victor (19-20). There was something quite implacable about the inhabitants of Canaan, and this dogged intensity of refusal to submit indicates a Satanic element in their attitude. Never forget this. We wrestle against the principalities of evil and that which is of the Spirit of God wars incessantly against that which is of the flesh and of the world (Eph. 6:12ff; 1 John 5:19; Gal. 5:17). Grim though this picture be, we must never panic in the face of dogged evil, even when manifested in the form of the Anakim, the giants who made the spies of Israel feel as small as grasshoppers (Num. 13:33). Goliath, champion of the Philistines in 1 Sam. 17:4ff., was a descendant of the Anakim, and some say that their origin is to be traced from the strange reference in Gen. 6:1-2 which seems to speak of an illicit union of demons or spirit-beings with women. Be that as it may, we are to remember that when we face evil and "the eager rage of every foe", God is present, drawing evil from its lair in order to bring about and demonstrate its righteous and necessary destruction. Whenever we are aware of the persistence of evil we must think also of the persistence of God. He cannot be deflected from His purposes. This is our assurance in the evil day.

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### **12:1-24**

The continuity of the work of Moses and Joshua is again emphasised, for the land given to Israel is in two sections. On the east of Jordan the territory conquered by Moses is given to

two and a half tribes, and the territory west of Jordan conquered by Joshua is for the nine and a half tribes. But the land is one and the enterprise of taking it is one work. There is no schism just as there is no schism or disunity in the real church which is the body of Christ. Thirty-three kings in all (count in Moses' two!) had to be ousted from a comparatively small area, possibly about the size of Wales. Perhaps we are to see in this fact a concentration of evil in its variety of powers in the area which is significant and vital in the onward movement of the purposes of God. Never forget that in the Old Testament the eventual goal is the coming of Christ for the salvation of the world. Remember this and we will not be side-tracked by the military aspect of these stories. Remember also that these nations had in fact no right to the land for it was given by God to Abraham and his seed. Remember too that the Canaanites were disinherited of their land as a consequence of exceeding sinfulness. As a last lesson, consider what we have mentioned before, that there may be confederacies formed among evil men and powers but there is no real cohesive unity in the kingdom of evil. It will organise its strategies against God but it contains the seeds of its own destruction.

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### **13:1-6**

We begin here to read the account of the settlement of the people of Israel in the conquered land of Canaan. Those eager to pounce on the seeming contradictions of the Bible will compare 11:23 with 13:1. This may be explained, if explanation is necessary, on three grounds. In the Old Testament you find the historian often runs on to the end of the story and then returns to deal with details. He seems to do this here in beginning the detailed apportioning of the territory to each tribe. Today's passage may also indicate that ground won in the initial forward thrust of eager faith may be lost temporarily and may have to be reclaimed. Such slipping, while not excusable, is nevertheless not fatal. The third explanation is that the whole land had in fact been taken in one mighty campaign of faith in obedience to God, but isolated pockets of resistance, some of them strongly fortified cities such as Jerusalem, had still to be overcome. Some commentators go further and say that the original promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18) speaks of the promised land stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates which links with Joshua 1:4. We do not argue the point geographically but apply it spiritually and set a guard on our souls lest, having made some small local but real advance in the fight of faith, we be tempted to think we have arrived. We must lift up our eyes to the vast possibilities of spiritual advance before us. Do not rest content with victories already won and thereby fail to realise all the purposes of God for us. Do not settle for less than the will of God.

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### **13:1-6**

Consider Joshua, the man, before we go on to detailed lists of names. Age is very relative and Joshua seems to have been old at about 90, whereas Moses was still active at 120. There is no suggestion of rebuke in God's words here, nor any harsh comparison with another man. God knows our frame, its limitations as well as its capacities, and with kind realism Joshua is told that his active life is over. No doubt the good man, with so much positive achievement behind him, would be aware of the immense amount still waiting to be done, but the actual doing of it was not to fall to Joshua. He had redeemed the time of his life, buying up the moments as they sped past, and even now he did not waste time brooding over the past. He had one job still to do. He had to guarantee the continuance of his work and to do so the whole land had to be divided, making each tribe responsible for its due share of the burden. Preparation was already being made for the next generation. If we could remember this it would give a great deal of impetus to our flagging spirits. The work is never done, nor can

any given stage of it be carried out by one man, and it is best that he should not try. Just as it is sinful to fall short of our God-given capacities, so it is sinful to try to exceed them. There is such a thing as "the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3-8) and it is a true mark of grace when we recognise that a given piece of service needs the ministry of a person other than ourselves (Acts. 11: 19-26). Only God is able to do all things well. The lesson is one of encouragement rather than rebuke.

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### **13:7-33**

Lists of names seem very unpromising material for meditation but we must keep in mind that already a land is being prepared for the coming of Messiah 1,500 years into the future It is in this land that we have the stories of Samuel, David, Solomon and all the kings and prophets of Israel through whom God revealed Himself, instructing a people and preparing them to be the cradle of His full and final revelation in Jesus Christ. Perhaps the Israelites, like ourselves, were absorbed in the immediate business of land, houses and income, but there was a higher hand shaping their destiny even though they may not have been fully aware of it. In v.6-7 we have the main division with nine and a half tribes settling between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea; the other half of Manasseh with Reuben and Gad settled on the east side of Jordan. We have already commented on this in the note on 1:10-18. The failure to drive out the Geshurites (13) had repercussions later in history, for David married a Geshurite and the son born was Absalom! This eastern section of the land given to the two and a half tribes, although fairly well brought into subjection, remained in the undisturbed possession of Israel for the shortest time of any. In settling for this rich territory the two and a half tribes had been penny-wise and pound-foolish. For the sake of immediate human satisfaction they perched themselves on the outer perimeter of the glorious work of God, and they were never secure in the enjoyment of that for which they had compromised their spiritual obedience. Jesus had a lot to say about where we should lay up our treasure (Matt. 6: 19-24). The reference to the story of Balaam (Num. 22-24) seems to be a lesson to these tribes that however cunningly they acted, and however strongly they justified their actions in settling for just a remote connection with the vital work of God, their sin would find them out. We may disguise our wrongdoing so well that we even fail ourselves to recognise it for what it is, but in the end the truth cannot be hid.

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### **14:1-15**

It is again emphasised that the Levites were given no strict territorial inheritance but the twelve-fold division of the land is preserved by Joseph's two sons being reckoned as two tribes. The whole matter of the division was under direct control of the sovereignty of God. Reference to Num. 26:52-56 shows that the factors of human need were not overlooked. It would appear that the area allocated was according to numbers, but the location of that area was fixed by divine direction. Neither Joshua nor Eleazar nor the heads of the tribes were free to act in this matter according to their own inclinations or preferences. The land was allocated and each tribe was then responsible for carrying out the thorough subduing of its own territory, the various families being allocated selected areas. This is the context of the story of Caleb who seems to come to claim his promised territory before the lot was cast. In Num. 34: 17-19 we are told that Caleb was appointed one of the commissioners in whose hand the allocation of the land rested. But here there is no affirmation of his position, but rather a quiet submission to Joshua's leadership and a claiming of God's promise in the sight of witnesses, so that there would be no suspicion whatever attending the whole business. In actual fact Caleb asked for the territory of the giants (Num. 13: 30-33) which he had been prevented

from capturing these long years ago by the unbelief of Israel, and which he believed then God had promised to him (Deut. 1:35-36). Faith does not grow less with the delay in fulfilment. The time had now come and with it the opportunity, and faith would prove its reality by its works.

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## 14: 1-15

The testimony of Caleb is tremendously moving, especially as some commentators suggest that his description as a Kenezite marks him out as a man not originally of the promised seed of Abraham but an outsider brought in like Rahab. If this be so his faith is altogether a matter of conviction, owing nothing to inherited family privilege or influence. It is known that some people, converted from lives that have been totally outside Christian influence, turn out to be giants of faith. They have proved in a very clear way what it means to follow the Lord fully, as Caleb did. Though he was possibly only five years younger than Joshua there is no suggestion that he was old and near the end of his days. Away back, forty-five years earlier, at the borders of the land Caleb far outshone Joshua in the matter of resisting the unbelieving spies, yet it was Joshua who had been made Moses' successor. All through the conquest of Canaan Caleb had served under the leadership of Joshua without murmuring and even now he comes to his leader with utmost respect. His request is instantly recognised by Joshua as being a reflection of the will of God and Caleb goes to fight the battle of faith by which he won Hebron, which we are told means the place of fellowship. Caleb's faith had seen that victory coming forty-five years ago. His faith had waited patiently all these years of delay caused by the unbelief of others. But now, having waited in faith, he was ready to go through the door of opportunity and take, in the strength of faith, what he believed God had given to him. Faith is prepared to wait, and grows stronger in the waiting when, like Caleb, we go on to follow the Lord fully even when it means we stand apart from our intimate group of companions, just as Caleb stood out from the unbelieving spies in the day of his testimony on the borders of the land.

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## 15:1-63

Five chapters are devoted to the subject of the division of the land, and on the face of it the material seems barren of spiritual instruction as well as difficult to read. Some will be interested in names and others in seeking to draw out with the help of a map the various territories belonging to the different tribes. We will all seek to learn from basic principles emerging from the chapters and today the human interest centres on v.13-19 and v.63. Caleb could well have accomplished this victory himself, but he used the occasion to inspire and challenge others to come forward and show themselves men of character, spirit and faith. The man who so proved himself spiritually and humanly would be just the kind of man Caleb wanted for his daughter. Perhaps one reason why some have not been granted this human blessing from God is simply that spiritually they have been content to sit back and wait for others to engage in the battle. If Othniel was persuaded of the integrity of Caleb's promise, Achsah was certainly sure of the open-hearted generosity of her father. And if an earthly father be so generous, how much more we should be encouraged to turn to a heavenly Father and say, "Give me a blessing."

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## 15:1-63

If you trace the territory of Judah (29ff) two things will be seen. First, Jerusalem is not actually in Judah's area but in that of Benjamin. Second, the area given to the lion of Judah

was almost completely surrounded by enemies. It was the vigilance necessary to live in the midst of foes that was to preserve the spiritual and moral vitality of Judah. Easy living and spiritual indolence produce more casualties than obedience and conflict. Commentators point out the connection of two cities mentioned with significant Biblical names. Beersheba is linked with Abraham (Gen. 22:19) and Kerioth (v.25) with the traitor Judas Ish-Kerioth (Iscariot) man of Kerioth. The traitor was of the royal tribe of Judah and sold the Master for thirty pieces of silver. What a contrast to Judah who gave himself into slavery to set his brother free (Gen. 44:14-34). It is amazing how children of the same spiritual family can develop so very differently. But there is a maintaining of individuality that is good and right, and we see it in the clear demarcation of the land according to the different tribes. They were to be separate and autonomous and yet they belonged vitally together. There was diversity within unity and, provided a spirit of evil is not allowed to instil rivalry and enmity, this arrangement does nothing but provide a greater vehicle for showing forth the glory of God's grace. The story of Israel, alas, is one of feuding, disaffection and division. This is Devil's work. Guard against it, and maintain the unity of the Spirit.

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## 15:63

The last verse tells that the city of Jerusalem was not taken because Judah was not able to do so. But what of Joshua 10:26 where no exceptions to the promise are named? It would appear from Judges 1:8, 21 that Judah overcame that part of the city which lay outside the walls of the actual fortress and Benjamin dwelt there in close proximity to it, no doubt having come to some compromise settlement. It was not until David's time that the city was taken (2 Sam. 5:6-8), and from then on its significance was established. What are we to learn from this? The city was destined to be great in the purposes of God but for so long it never seemed likely. No doubt it was often written off as having no real future at all, just as we so often write people off who to our eyes seem to be held in thraldom by evil powers (Jebusites). But is it not true that the greater the future purpose of individuals or works, the greater and more intense and more continued will be the attempts of the Devil to frustrate that gracious and glorious design? But why did Joshua and Judah and Benjamin allow this fortress to stand so long as a testimony to the incompleteness of the victory of God? Why do we consent to remain so long only semi-victorious? Is it unbelief, compromise or an unwillingness to burn our boats and go forward at God's command?

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## 16:1-10

Manasseh and Ephraim were the children of Joseph born in Egypt, and in blessing them the aged Jacob blessed the younger above the elder (Gen. 48:8-22). In due time Ephraim so increased in significance that the whole of the ten northern tribes came to be called by the name Ephraim. The territory of these two tribes was the most fertile and beautiful of all the land and it may well have been the spirit of sloth engendered by human comfort that led to their incomplete possession of their territory. In v.9 we are told that certain cities given to Ephraim were actually in Manasseh's area, and in 17:11 certain cities of Manasseh were in the area given to Issachar and Asher. This gives a picture of the tribes being dovetailed into each other so that there would be an interdependence. It would be in the interest of the stronger tribes to aid the weaker ones in subduing their territory. In this way the whole land would be compactly built together. The tribes were being made, under God, members one of another so that there would be no schism in the body and a truly tempered instrument would be available for holy service. This is the message of the New Testament in 1 Cor 12. Ephraim's failure to become what he might have been in the gracious purpose of God is

shown when in due season the nation produced the evil king Ahab and his even more evil wife, Jezebel. Time reveals all. The fruit identifies the tree.

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### **17:1-13**

"Compromise" is an unpleasant word, yet it must be used here in connection with v.12-13, where Manasseh came to a working arrangement with the Canaanites. Territorially it would seem that Manasseh had the largest share of the land, but spiritually they were very suspect. It is all very well to plead difficulties to excuse spiritual failure, but underlying the whole story here is the clear promise of God in chap. 1:3-5. If people are not prepared to take God at His word, and if they are not willing to see and accept the clear line of demarcation between what is of God and what is of the Devil, what is of Christ and what is of the world that crucifies Christ, they will never make the grade. Such people will always compromise and while life may thereby be somewhat easier for a time at least, it will eventually mean loss of testimony and decrease of spiritual effectiveness. Consider v.13 very carefully. God's people exercised their spiritual faith sufficiently to make life pleasant by placing the enemy under tribute, but they refused to do the will of God. They made use of God for their own ends. This is very solemn. It remains only to comment on the opening verses. It seems that Machir (v.1, 5) is the part of Manasseh settling on the east side of Jordan. The ten portions (v.5) are allocated to the names mentioned in v.2, with the exception of Hepher whose share seems to have been divided between his five grand-daughters, there being no male issue. The story of these women is given in Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-13.

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### 17:14-18

After the allocation of the territory the vain, self-important spirit of Ephraim broke out, possibly because of jealousy over Manasseh's greater territory. Perhaps they expected Joshua to be very sympathetic because he was of the tribe of Ephraim. But the leader of God's work knew his people very well indeed and his answer was magnificent. The arrogance of the Ephraimites can be well illustrated from the Old Testament stories, not least their overbearing attitude to Gideon who was of the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 7:24-8:3), as was Jephthah (Judges 12:1). Here was a people constantly asserting their right to a leading place in Israel with out exhibiting any qualification for it. One does well to consider the story of James and John in Mark 10:35-45. Whether or not Ephraim had a just cause for complaint is beside the point. Remember that the land was allocated by the direction of God and they had no cause to complain against Joshua who was only doing what God had said. After all, God's dispositions are perfect, not merely for the satisfaction of the life but also for the spiritual development of it. Joshua's word is very clear. He does not deny their claim to be great, but points out that being great they were well able to clear the woodlands in their given territory and drive out the Canaanites from other areas they still held. In this way they would enlarge their whole inheritance and at the same time vindicate their claim to greatness. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, and in coveting it, because of our envy of another's allotment, we are apt to lose even what we have. Think of Jesus' words in Matt. 25:14-30. The man who is truly great does not need to justify his greatness. It will be clear to all, but the man himself will not be self-consciously aware of it. A true leader *inspires* sacrificial loyalty, he does not *bargain* for it.

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### **18:1-2**

There are deep lessons here. The main armed might of Canaan had been broken and the main allotment of territory to the leading tribes of Israel had been made. Before any further work

was done the spiritual life and destiny of the people of God were affirmed in the setting up of the Tent of Meeting housing the Ark at Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim. That tribe was not disqualified even though its shallow attitude of spiritual pride had been challenged. Before the time-absorbing business of detailed settlement went any further the soul of the nation had to be provided for. This is again a New Testament principle: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Whenever we set out on a new phase of life, be it in marriage, career or dwelling-place, look for and establish the altar of God at Shiloh. Remember Lot, who was responsible for his wife's judgment, who made his assessment and decision on purely human and material grounds (Gen.13:1-13). It was a decision every worldly man would have applauded, but it was wrong in God's sight and it led to disaster. At this stage in the on-going story of settling the land, we believe it was the constraint of the Spirit of God that led to this early affirmation of spiritual need and desire. A spirit of forgetfulness can lead all too quickly to a degeneration of the finer qualities that have been nurtured in the human life over a considerable spell of time. It is sad and grievous to watch people returning in personality to what they were before they were converted. The lines of spiritual communication have been broken, the pipe-lines of renewing grace have been blocked. The savour of the world replaces the fragrance of Christ; because people have not dwelt with Him.

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## **18:1-2**

We are still dealing with deep lessons but viewing the verses from a different angle. We have seen the testimony of God planted at the heart of a land until very recently over-run and held fast in the power of evil. We have yet to see the authoritative victory of God applied and established right throughout the land, and this was in danger of being neglected. The cause seems to have been selfishness. The leading divisions of Israel, Judah and the house of Joseph, were established and satisfied, and seven smaller tribes were left to look after themselves. Some reason, perhaps slackness or lack of urgency or even spiritual torpor hiding in the shelter of "big brother" kept the small tribes from taking the initiative. The big tribes gave no encouragement or assistance. No one felt he was his brother's keeper; no one felt impelled to give a spiritual lead; everyone was in the process of settling down, feeling that God was in His heaven and all was well with the world. This is not New Testament practice. Read Heb.12:12ff. and consider what you should be doing and who you should be helping to go on and forward in the things of the Spirit. If we remain indifferent to our own and to our brother's spiritual obedience, our worship at the altar of God is contradicted, for God is grieved and hindered. Read the familiar and often-preached-on words in Heb. 5:12 – 6:12.

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## **18:2-9**

The great danger is that slackness will become paralysis. The exhortation is always that we shall reap in due season if we faint not. There is more than a suggestion in the story that the Israelites were crowding together causing congestion in a small area rather than spreading out to possess the land. Possibly they felt more secure in their greater numbers and more impressive in appearance, but it was a false confidence for they were not in harmony with God. It is here that true leadership asserts itself and Joshua is not prepared to watch his people forfeiting their inheritance for which they had travelled far and fought long. Ministers of the Word must not shrink back from this kind of personal challenging, even though they be maligned for it. Joshua calls for representatives from each group to go and reconnoitre the land, to investigate its nature and possibilities, and to report back. This was only a small beginning but it is this kind of thing that encourages people to think for themselves of what

might yet be theirs in the will of God. Let us think of this today. Have we missed out somewhere along the line so that spiritually we are in the doldrums, seemingly having no specific purpose? Start thinking again of the God who has saved you and brought you thus far and ask what it is all for.

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### **18:10-28**

We believe the men came back from their journeys far more alive and eager spiritually than when they went out, but we allow the possibility that some were so blinded that they saw nothing at all, felt no kindling of desire and found the whole exercise rather a bore. These would be the ones most critical of all the others! But the work of God does not stop for such weary spirits and the division of the area was made section by section by the will of God. Just how God made His will clear through Joshua is not really known. What is clear is that Benjamin was placed in the position of a buffer state between the two most powerful and naturally rival tribes, Judah and Ephraim. In the earlier story of Israel (Gen. 44) the mutual affection of Joseph and Judah for the youngest son Benjamin was the key to the reconciliation of the family. The city of Jerusalem (28) was in Benjamin's territory, the first king of Israel was a Benjamite and some of the most bitter persecutors of David were of the tribe of Benjamin. But at this particular stage who could have guessed what significant part this tribe would play, knowing that it had been described as being "ravenous as a wolf" (Gen.49:27). Something of that relentless ferocity of spirit is seen in Paul, who was of the tribe of Benjamin, when he persecuted the church (Acts 9:1-2). Read of the blessing of the tribes in Genesis 49:1-27 and be comforted that the ordering of affairs is in the hands of a sovereign God.

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### **19:1-48**

The study of these areas being allocated and the linking of the detail with Genesis 49 and the further tracing of future developments of significance is outwith the scope of these daily notes. A good Bible Dictionary (e.g. IVP) or a commentary such as that of Bishop Ellicott would yield much profit in close study. We take as our lesson from the allocation of the tribes an instance of the principle of distribution employed by God in the fulfilment of His purposes. By nature we all tend to congregate in one place, and in the resultant congestion none develop as they should and could, and the work of God is hindered in its progress. When God scatters a people it may seem disastrous, as it no doubt did in the early days of the church after Pentecost (Acts 8:1), but the effect was that of subduing a far greater territory in the name of God. We must believe that in the wisdom of God the settlement of the tribes in Canaan did not ignore or deny their natural capacities and potential, but rather served to develop these. Let us confess that our faith will remain weak unless and until we are compelled by the pressures of circumstances and the demands of experience to exercise it. But keep in mind that there was no haphazard movement and settlement and no vague "hoping things would work out". Each tribe took its place by the clear direction of the will of God and it is in this way that we ourselves are guaranteed a future of service. To be in the place God wants you to be, and to be persuaded of it, sets you free for service and is the fountain of peace and endurance. Nothing else serves this end.

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### **19:49-51**

Joshua did not seek his own benefit but the good of the people he served, and for that reason he waited until the end before claiming his own inheritance. Some say the name of the city

means "abundant portion" and others say the place was part of the rough uncultivated hill district of the territory of Ephraim. Both can be true without any contradiction. When the children of Joseph had complained (17:14ff.), Joshua challenged them to go up and take possession of what was theirs in the promise of God. Now Joshua proves he is willing to act himself on the advice given to others. This is the mark of true leadership. It is one thing to be the dispenser of advice to all and sundry, and easy to criticise the defects in the activities of all your contemporaries. It is another thing to show them how to do it by doing yourself what they felt could not be done. This is faith. In this way the division of the land was completed. It was all directed from the door of the tent of meeting ( tabernacle 18:1), from the very presence of God. Here is the secret place of power for effective service. It is those men and women whose communion with God is real who are able to do great things in effective service. How gloriously the last statement of the chapter rings, especially when you compare it with Paul's heart cry of grief, "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Gal. 5:7).

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## **20:1-9**

We consider the institution of the six cities of refuge, first on a historical basis and then in terms of spiritual significance. The law of the cities of refuge is given in full in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19. Commentators tell us that these cities, three on either side of Jordan, were in clearly defined situations within reach of all parts of the land. The road to them had to be clearly signposted and kept clear of all obstacles so that the unintentional killer might be able to flee without hindrance to a place where he would be safe until his case had been thoroughly investigated. The deliberate murderer found no refuge in such cities, and therefore their emphasis must be on the element of absolute justice and righteousness in God. On the other hand these cities were given to the Levites to bear the iniquity of the children of Israel in relation to God (Num. 18:1ff.). The man-slayer, even though innocent, must remain under the shadow of the symbolic sin-bearer until such time as the death of the High Priest, when he would be free. The significance of this we deal with tomorrow. In addition to the references given, we refer to Exodus 21:12-14 where clear distinction is made between acts of killing depending on motive and intent. In Genesis 9:6 the principle of justice is stated, not primarily for the good of society, nor for the restraining of the criminal, but because man is made in the image of God and to smite the image is to signify hatred of the person signified, who is God. It is because we have lost the whole concept of man being answerable to God that our ideas of justice have been so confused.

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## **20:1-9**

Keep in mind that the principle of "an eye for an eye" is in fact *restrictive* legislation, meaning "only an eye for an eye", so that vengeance might be curbed, and that there might be no unrighteousness. It is this basic righteousness of God we must see in the requirement that the innocent shedder of blood must remain under the shadow of mercy until the High Priest died. This was his only protection. But when the High Priest, who carried in a representative sense the sins of the people, finally died, he died bearing the sins of the people. The price of sin thus being paid, the sinner was set free to live again. It is in this way that our hearts are turned to the spiritual significance of the cities of refuge, which centres upon Christ, the great sin-bearer. The cities of refuge (cf. Heb 6:17-19 and Phil. 3:9) are provided by God in His plan of salvation. The way is marked out clearly, the sinner has to leave the place of his sin and fly to the refuge as his only hope. Complacency, trifling, procrastination or refusal to believe the danger of righteous judgment, would keep the sinner back and he

would perish. We are told that these cities were so placed that no-one in Israel was ever more than about thirty miles from any one of them. The refuge is near, so near, but so many pay no heed.

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## **21:1-42**

We are again dealing with difficult verses and a Bible Dictionary is needed to consider in full the relationship between the priests and Levites and their various duties. Levi had three sons (Exodus 6:16ff): Gershon, Kohath and Merari. The two significant children through Kohath were Moses and Aaron. The Kohathites were divided into two sections, those descended from Aaron, who were the priests, and those who did not hold that priestly office. The Levitical cities spoken of here are claimed according to the promise in Numbers 35:1-8, and are allocated from out of the land of the various tribes to the four branches of the family of Levi. Now the function of the Levites was spiritual, and in the carrying out of these duties they had to be provided for by the people because they were given cities with only a little patch of land not sufficient for making a living. This is how the spiritual ministry necessary for the life and well being of the people of God is maintained and supported. In the case of the Levites they could not choose where they would live and work but were allocated to their stations throughout the whole land. They dared not turn aside from their holy calling to become enmeshed in the practicalities of material living. They had to maintain a distinct witness and so become to Israel both salt and light, a living reminder of their calling and destiny. This is exactly what Israel in turn was called to be to the world. It is when we cease to be what we are called to be by God that we deny the Lord who bought us. Read in Hebrews 11:8-27 how the men of faith confessed whose and what they were. It was costly, but effective.

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## **21:1-42**

The picture here is fascinating, not least in that commentators point out that some of the cities given to the Levites were not in fact in Israel's effective possession as yet. More important, we must see how the Levites were scattered throughout the land along with the tribes and so provided in every place a living reminder to the people of God of holy things. Not only were the Levites free from worldly entanglements and thus able to give themselves to their ministry, they, belonging to one distinct family and mingled with each of the twelve tribes, were the "cement" that bound the whole body of Israel into one. They were the "joints and bands" by which all was held together in a living body that could grow in God and unto God (Col. 2:19). The whole picture is one of amazing diversity of place, personality and function, and yet the people were one and thus were fitted to do the will of the God who had called them. There is tremendous spiritual truth here. We are to go where God sends us and stay there. We are to do the work God has allocated to us without the distraction of fruitless comparisons which only create envy. We are to be what God has called us to be, no more and no less. In this way we become a people for God's own possession (1 Peter 2:9-12).

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## **21:43-45**

These verses record the general winding up of the history of the conquest of the land and link with the end of Chapter 13. The final word concerns the faithfulness of God. All the promises of God given to Joshua and the people had been, or were in the process of being, fulfilled. Note how the emphasis of this testimony is that all they were and had was from God alone. Everything was given and none of their enemies had been able to stand before them. All those enemies had not yet been driven out and the fault lay with Israel's disobedience, not

with God. This is a deeply challenging thought. We do well to consider to what extent the territory of our own lives and personalities has been possessed in the name of the Lord and for His glory. God is faithful who will not allow us to be tempted more than we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:12-15). That is His promise. God is faithful (1 Cor. 1:9) who called us to be saints and to stand to the end (1 Thess. 5:22-24). There is no doubting His glorious intentions of grace for us (Phil. 1:2-6) and this is our confidence (2 Thess. 3:3-4). It may be very costly to follow on in obedience to God, but even our stumbling and failing cannot change Him (2 Tim. 2:10-13) and it is time our confidence began to stir up dynamic courage in our hearts (Num. 23:19-20). Let us hold fast our confidence and never waver, for God is faithful who promised (Heb. 11:23, 35-36).

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## **22:1-9**

When a work of God that is seemingly stable, or an individual Christian seemingly wholehearted, turns and goes back, it is seldom without a history of explanation. In the case of the two and a half tribes it is necessary to go back ten years to Numbers 32:1-6, when these people were beguiled by human considerations and decided to call it a day and stop short of the promised land of Canaan. When challenged, they agreed to take their share of the warfare, but all the time they knew that at the first opportunity they would be off to their chosen life which was detached from the holy land and work of which they were a part by the call of God. Their families and farms now called them and drew them like a magnet and neither God, Moses, Joshua nor Israel could keep them. In fact Joshua did not appear to try. Indeed he seemed to send them on their way with his greetings and good wishes, but this does not necessarily mean he agreed with them in what they were doing. He simply accepted the facts of the situation as they were already established beyond reconsideration. Joshua commended them for their share in the conflict and spoke of the reward they were to take with them. But was it a full reward? We need to consider 2 John 8 and 1 Cor. 3:10-15.

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## **22:1-9**

Since this chapter goes on to deal with very deep things, we do well to be clear about this opening section, studying it not in the sense of passing judgment on the action of others, but to be made wise unto God. On the face of it, it seems of little import that the two and a half tribes should be on the other side of Jordan from the main life of Israel, until you realise that the river valley was deep, possibly 4,000 feet, and also very steep and difficult to negotiate. Whether they meant to or not, both geographically and spiritually these tribes were cutting themselves off, and if in due season they were forgotten and left out they could blame none but themselves. Psalm 106:10-15 is a legitimate comment. Although the story indicates that Joshua took the initiative, we need not suppose that he felt it necessary to dismiss these tribes. But at the same time his exhortation in v.5 is very earnest and there is no sign whatever of any reluctance on the part of these tribes to go their own way (9). Perhaps Joshua's earnest concern for their spiritual future is a better guide to the actual spiritual condition of the two and a half tribes than their own confidence. All would have agreed that a close walk with God was fundamental to future spiritual service. But how was that walk to be maintained? This problem became a very real issue in no time at all, and it is possibly in the light of future developments that we must judge the present action. Judge nothing before the time (1 Cor. 4:1-7) and note that Paul says the mere fact that his conscience is clear at a given moment does not necessarily mean he is in the right. It might simply mean his spiritual sensitivity was dulled. We must walk step by step.

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## 22:10-12

We cannot tell how long after the departure of the two and a half tribes this incident occurred, nor can we tell exactly from the passage whether the altar was built on the east or west bank of the Jordan. The tone of the passage *suggests* it was built on the east side, in the actual territory of the two and a half tribes. There is no mention at all of these men seeking consultation with or guidance from any man of God nor from God Himself, and their action declares that in spite of all their protestations of integrity they were already feeling that they were a separate people, detached from the main life, worship and work of the promised land. They built their altar because they felt they had a right to act on their own behalf. It was a great altar, as if to assert *their* standing in the face of public criticism, or to reassure themselves in the face of their own inner uncertainty. This altar, and not the one at Shiloh (18:1), was to be the focus of their spiritual lives. However we look at it, this was a schismatic altar, a work that divided the unified work and witness of Israel. It was a move impelled by human inspiration rather than by the command of God and was an example of the very things they had been warned about (22:5). Perhaps they had sensed Joshua's concern and were out to show him that he had no need to worry about them. But look what happened! The main body of Israel felt that this was an act of deliberate spiritual disobedience calculated to bring the rebuke of God on the *whole* nation, as had the sin of Achan (7:1ff) and they prepared for war. This would have been civil war and, if Israel had been rent by such discord, the inhabitants of Canaan could well have risen up again and the fruits of seven long years of conflict would have been lost and the work of God set back for an unlimited time. How careful we should be before we take action that might have such far-reaching results.

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## 22.13-20

We see the tribes being called upon to assess their present position in the light of past history and then on that basis to make their decision and set their course for the future. The children of Israel (12), having precipitously decided on war as the only remedy found, when they gathered in God's presence in Shiloh, that their attitude was changed and they sent a deputation to reason with the two and a half tribes. Phineas, well qualified to be a defender of the faith (Num. 25:7), was a man of clear thought and action and his words in v.16 are to the point. But yet they may have tended to bring out the worst in those he spoke to, since they would not take kindly to such a public rebuke. When you say to a man that everyone thinks he is wrong that man will, if he is proud, react with stubbornness. Reference is made to Peor (Num. 25: 1-5) and Ai (Joshua 7) where opportunity was given to Satan to attack the work of God, and the present situation is paralleled to these incidents. It was a solemn warning but it was backed with a wonderfully gracious offer to these tribes to return to the parent territory which would be shared with them, even although it was already proving too narrow for their brethren. It would be better to share a little in the will of God than have a lot out of His will. We have in v.19 a great appeal to the two and a half tribes to acknowledge that the step they had taken was wrong and to come back to God. But it takes a big man to admit he has been wrong, and pride has kept many a prodigal from returning. Look back to where you have been, look at where you are, and look to the future to where you might yet go. Will it be with the smile of God?

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## **22:21-29**

One must not be cynical, but this speech seems to protest innocence just a bit too much. In the opening verses they are really saying, "May God strike us dead if we are going against His will." But God seldom acts in this way, for it allows no possibility of the erring one returning! These men claim that what they are doing is for the sake of their children, and indeed for the spiritual future of their children. Now that is very high ground to take, for parents are all too often concerned only with the temporal needs of their families. But why should it come to pass that Israel would fail to recognise these children as truly belonging to the holy people of God? Would there not be manifest evidences? Not if they followed the example of their parents in drifting away from a true participation in Israel! Note how subtly the blame is shifted on to God in v.25. But it was *at their request!* Israel is also blamed in advance for any spiritual backsliding of the children of the secessionist tribes (v.25). It is always someone else's fault when we go wrong! So we say, but would not a righteous God vindicate us if we were the victims of another's unrighteousness? The two and a half tribes affirm their spiritual loyalty (v.29), declaring their altar is not for sacrifice but simply a witness, a reminder and a help to keep them near to God (v.28). But the only altar that is effective is that of absolute obedience to God. Anything else is an instrument of camouflage to hide the error of our ways.

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## **22:30-34**

You cannot argue when people speak in the way we considered yesterday. The explanation offered is accepted by Phinehas and all thought of civil war is put away. If the actions of the two and a half tribes were as innocent as they said, we have a lesson here on how the Devil pounces on misunderstandings and uses them to destroy the basic fellowship of God's people. It seems clear that precipitate action with no attempt to ascertain the truth is always Satanic. Over against this we have the attitude and work of the Holy Spirit in the grace of love, which believes the best and hopes with anguish right to the end (1 Cor. 13). It also seems from the story that Phinehas and his deputation were satisfied on the ground that nothing had been done to bring the anger of God upon the whole of Israel. That being so, nothing more is done to persuade the two and a half tribes to reconsider the choice they had made. It was all very well to claim that the Lord was amongst them, but true fellowship with God and with men is possible only on the grounds of truth and obedience (1 John 1:3-10). Without passing any final judgment on this whole situation it is clear that if there had been more open-ness of mind and heart and more mutual discussion of problems there would have been less chance of such a bitter tension arising within the life of God's people. What seems to be the final issue is that the two sections of the people, who had been together so long in conflict, service and victory, now go their separate ways. It does not seem right! If they did so with mutual respect of the kind that leads to genuine prayer for God's blessing on each other, there might be hope, but we are apprehensive.

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## **23:1-10**

This chapter contains the first of Joshua's farewell addresses to the people he had led for a lifetime. In such a situation we do well to listen, for a man will not speak lightly when he feels himself virtually in God's eternal presence. Note that all his emphasis is upon God and on all the limitless possibilities of their future service in God (10) if they walked in obedience to Him, There is no mention here of the confusion of the last chapter, and it may be that the old leader was not aware of it, although that is hardly likely. Instead of adjudicating on the

respective merits or demerits of the parties, he speaks of the future work that waits to be done. It is as if Joshua reminded the people that their very existence as a people could never be understood or assessed, let alone enjoyed, apart from what God had done in the past and what He desired to do in, through, with and for them in the future. The future would tell so clearly who was going on to know the Lord and who was going back into spiritual apathy. In v.6-8 we have words which echo the charge given by God to Joshua in chapter 1 and they call the people to courage, consistent obedience, separation from compromise, and continuing loyalty. The ground of this appeal is the abiding faithfulness of God to His people, and we could almost say that the impact of the appeal was to remind the people that they too in due time would have to give to God an account of their stewardship, as Joshua was soon to do. Of course, at the end of the journey our past dealings with God become very important and heavy on the conscience because there is no time left to remedy them. Even further, we would realise that we have become what our works have made us, and in such condition we would step over into eternity.

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## **23:11-16**

Having awakened the response of gratitude by reminding the people that all they are and have is due to the grace of God, and that all their future lies in Him, Joshua calls them to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength (11). The same exhortation to love is found in the New Testament (Matt. 22:37-40 Jude 20-21). If we do not love we will not serve. If we do not love Jesus, the way will soon prove far too hard for us and we will give up the unequal struggle and give our hearts to the love of the world. The warning given here of the consequences of disobedience is thoroughly New Testament in character, and is echoed in the words of the glorified Christ to those who had left their first love (Rev. 2:1-7). Joshua's action in giving a final charge is repeated in the case of Samuel (1 Sam. 12:1-7), Paul (Acts 20:17-38) and Peter (2 Peter 1:10-15). Joshua could well have spoken of his wonderful experiences with Moses on the holy mountain (Ex. 24:13), in meeting the Captain of the Host (5:13ff), and in all his mighty battles. But his emphasis was not on the greatness of what a man may be given to do, but on the faithfulness with which he does it. You could imagine how Joshua would scan the faces of the gathered people to see if he could discern who would step forward and fill the breach. Here is a man who is utterly real, and his holy earnestness fills us with awe.

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## **23:11-16**

We look today at v.14 and observe that there was no strange conspiracy of silence to keep from Joshua the fact that he was dying. He knew it better than any and was quite prepared to speak of it. Now, not all are able to face reality in this way when the day comes, but it is manifest folly to live life as if we were never going to die. "Lord make me to know my end .... that I may know what little time I have" (Ps. 39:4-5). It is a wise man who keeps the house of his soul in order for he knows not what a day may bring. There is nothing morbid in this meditation. Indeed we engage in it simply to note the serenity of this man Joshua and to compare him with the great apostle Paul who spoke of his near death with the same glorious calm. In 2 Tim. 4:6-8 he pictures his near death as the final pouring out, or offering of himself as a living sacrifice unto God. His whole life had been this, and now only the last few drops remained and they would be given gladly. His departure is likened to the casting off of the mooring ropes of a vessel when the tide is high, and the wind filling the sails and taking the vessel out into the stream. If this be death for the faithful believer, it is anything but negative and certainly not to be feared. Please God we shall look back on life without too

many regrets and look on with perfect trust. Remember that the first martyr saw the glorified Christ standing to receive him (Acts 7:55-56, 59-60). What a prospect!

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### **24:1-13**

In the previous chapter Joshua's charge centred on the fact of God's faithfulness in relation to the experience of that one generation. But now the experience of the present generation is set into the context of the wider and fuller purposes of God. This is important to remember lest we begin to think that God's interests in the world begin and end with ourselves. Others have laboured and we have entered into their labours and in due season others will inherit what we have made of the situation, perhaps thinking very little of us. This short passage summarises the history of the people from Abraham down to Joshua's day and shows it to be a glorious recital of the sovereign grace of God. It is a sign of our spiritual insensitivity that we can read it without our hearts exulting within us, for this same God is our God to this very day. Turn over to Acts 7:1-53 and read a similar recital of the dealings of God with His people, and then ponder very solemnly the perversity of the people who so persistently resisted the grace of God, persecuting His prophets, taking His benefits and refusing His claims. This was a momentous day for Israel (did the two and a half tribes from east of Jordan make the journey?) as they gathered themselves before God, for God spoke with them. To imagine yourself amongst them might be the most beneficial exercise for today.

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### **24:1-13**

The choice of Shechem for this gathering would have had great significance for Israel, and it would impress them that here again God was giving His testimony to His own chosen people. It was at Shechem that the God of glory appeared to Abraham (Gen. 12:6-7, Sichem, Sychar and Shechem being the same place) and pledged His promise to His chosen man and his descendants. But Abraham in answer made a solemn response of obedience, renouncing his old life and religion, and staking his whole future on God. In like manner Jacob, after all his wanderings and strivings in which he fought against the disciplines of God, is in Gen. 35:1-4 returning to Bethel, the place he should never have left. The place of crisis and decision was Shechem, where there was a sweeping away of all his idols. If God was to be his God there were to be no half measures. Then again in Joshua 8:30-35 (Mt. Ebal overshadows Shechem) this very people had made solemn covenant with God. Now, in Joshua's last ministry to them, they are being brought back to the place of their earlier vows, and asked if they are ready and willing to ratify these vows in respect of obedience to the God who had done so much for them. This is a good exercise for the soul. Let us go back over the years in our thoughts today, back to the beginning of our Christian life when first we answered the call of God's grace and came to Christ. In the light of all the way God has led us are we ready for a new consecration?

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### **24:14-15**

Commentators point out that in fact there is no mention of any of Joshua's family in Scripture. "It is one more analogy between Joshua of the Old Testament and his great Antetype in the Gospel: whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb. 3:6). The house of Joshua embraces all the faithful servants of the Lord." (Ellicott) It seems that Joshua was already aware that the people were compromised. Where did the idols come from that were to be put away? Is this something that runs in the blood of the families? If so, it should alarm us and drive us to Christ for our

hearts to be changed and our natural flesh crucified and slain. What a challenge Joshua issues! If they are determined to go back from God, let them be honest, let them count the cost and put their decision down in black and white. As we have said before, if people are determined to go no-one can stop them! But Joshua declares that he himself cannot and will not go back with them. It takes great courage to speak like this when, as yet, there is perhaps no visible, obvious sign of the idolatry and backsliding of their hearts. It may be a comfort to go on to read v.31, but our comfort is qualified if we go further on and read Judges 2: 6-13. Take Joshua's great affirmation of faith and make it your own right now.

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## **24:16-28**

The first reaction to Joshua's impassioned appeal was one of shocked protest, and if we read v.16-18 we will discern a degree of resentment on the part of the people. There is nothing new under the sun! You can imagine them saying in their hearts, "Joshua, you are not the only spiritual man in the nation. We too can speak of God's wonderful works. You have no right to brand us all as backsliders. After all, you are not perfect yourself, as we all know." The people declared their loyalty with alacrity. "Though all men forsake God, yet we will remain faithful." (Matt. 26:33-35). Perhaps they were too quick to respond and Joshua goes on to test the depth of the reality of their hearts. Easy vows mean nothing! Will God in fact accept a people who are determined to share their hearts' loyalty with other gods? If there was more plain speaking like this we would have fewer disappointments among our converts! We must not be afraid of plain speaking, for real faith will not be put off by it but will rather be strengthened. Consider Jesus' dealings in Luke 9:57-62; Matt. 15:21-28; 19:16-26. Joshua makes it very plain. It must be one thing or the other.

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## **24:16-28**

When we speak of the sore consequences of turning back from God, many reply by asking if there is no forgiveness with God and no restoration of grace. The whole story of the failures of Israel cries aloud that there is forgiveness with God. They would never have been in Canaan but for the mercy and loving kindness of their God. But let it be said clearly that all talk about easy repentance is dangerous and suspect. The beginning of Hosea 6, which we sing in the Scottish Paraphrase, "Come let us to the Lord our God, with contrite hearts return," really takes a light attitude to sin as if saying: "Let's go back to God and in a few days everything will be fine." Joshua says that if they vow and go back on it, God will prove to be their adversary. To start and not to see their consecration through is to make their last state worse than the first. It may not seem to be so at first, but it will in the end. Study these references carefully: Matt. 12:43-45; Eccles. 5: 1-6; Heb. 6:1-12; 10:19-39; 12:12-17; John 6:66-68. Now, whatever is in our hearts that could turn us away from God, even though it may not be visible as yet, let it be put away that we may be God's people.

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## **24:29-33**

We suggested in chap. 13:1 that Joshua was about ninety years old and a full twenty years have elapsed since then. Now he dies, his work being over, and such was his personal influence and such the quality of the men he had trained, that Israel walked in God's ways for many years. This was the influence Paul sought to exercise, as we learn in 2 Tim. 2:1-2. But unless the faith and spiritual integrity of godly men is forged in our own souls and personal experience, the memory of such men will fade and so will their influence. Gradually worldliness will infect the fellowship of God's people and idolatry will take fresh hold on

people's hearts. When the church tries to live on the spiritual capital laid up by the giants of a former generation, it is only a matter of time before the capital is expended, the influence evaporated and a great wave of unbelieving godlessness engulfs the people. Read Judges 2:7-12 and think seriously. This is the situation we find ourselves in today. When we come to the end of our story we must remind ourselves that it is Joshua who has died and not God, and we need to take up for ourselves the opening words of the Book of Joshua (1:1-9), and to set our eyes and our hearts to the future. This is how it must always be. We press towards the mark for the prize (Phil. 3:1-15). The work is God's and it cannot be stopped (Acts 5:33-42). Thank God!

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## **24:29-33**

For this last day we consider the person of Joshua, the man who had for so long led the people and directed the work of God. No better words could be found than those from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress concerning Mr. Valiant-For-Truth: "After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-For-Truth was sent for by a summons.... when he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, 'I am going to my Father's: and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder.' When the day that he must go hence was come, many accompanied him to the riverside, into which as he went he said, 'Death, where is thy sting?' and as he went down deeper he said, 'Grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

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