

JOSHUA

The Name and Character of the Person:

The name of the hero of this book was originally Hoshea, meaning “salvation.” Moses changed this name to Joshua or Yehoshua, by prefixing the name of *Yahweh* to the root word *yasha*, “safe.”¹ The name Joshua, therefore, signifies “Yahweh is salvation.” Yehoshua is also the Hebrew form of the name Jesus.²

The Pulpit Commentary presents a rather extensive comparison between Joshua and Jesus, stating: “If we look on Joshua as the ‘minister of Moses,’ he is even in that a type of Christ, ‘the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God.’ If we look on him as the successor of Moses, in that he represented Jesus, inasmuch as ‘the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.’ If we look on him as judge and ruler of Israel, there is scarce an action which is not predictive of our Savior. He begins his office at the banks of Jordan, where Christ was baptized and enters upon the public exercise of His prophetic office; he chooses there twelve men out of the people to carry twelve stones over with them, as our Jesus thence began to choose His twelve apostles, those foundation stones in the Church of God (...Revelation 21:14). Joshua smote the Amalekites and subdued the Canaanites, by the first making way to enter the land, by the second giving possession of it. And Jesus in like manner goes in and out before us against our spiritual enemies, subduing sin and Satan, and so opening and clearing our way to heaven; destroying the last enemy, death, and so giving us possession of eternal life.”

Richard S. Hess, in his commentary *Joshua*,³ remarks, “Moses’ act of renaming may be compared with God’s action in renaming the patriarchs Abram and Jacob. In such cases, a quality of the person’s character or future role is discerned. Is this a confession of a special act of God’s salvation of Joshua or a desire by Moses to affirm the salvation that the Lord has given to Israel?”

Joshua’s name appears in the Bible for the first time in the Book of Exodus, where we meet him, without any introduction, as the commander in chief of Israel’s army. We read: “Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.’”⁴

Since Joshua is never properly introduced to us, we do not know how he distinguished himself to the point that Moses picked him to become Israel’s chief military man. We get a brief glimpse of Joshua’s spiritual maturity, in spite of his young age, in the display of his hunger for the glory of God. We read: “The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.”⁵ The words David would pen centuries later could be applied to Joshua: “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.”⁶ We see in him a young man who learned from his elderly master what it means to have fellowship with God. Joshua must have begun by admiring Moses, which drove him to search for the secret of this master’s life. He found it and clung to it to the end.

Joshua accompanied Moses when he climbed Mount Sinai, but, evidently, he did not enter the cloud that covered Moses when God spoke to him. He must have waited on the mountain, close to the top for the forty days Moses spent there, while the others who had accompanied Moses returned to the camp. We read: “Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, ‘Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.’”⁷ When Moses came out of the cloud, he found Joshua waiting for him. The latter was unaware of what happened in the camp during that time, while the Israelites fabricated the gold calf and celebrated its worship. During their descent from the mountain the noise of that orgy came up to them, which Joshua wrongly interpreted as “the sound of war.” We read: “When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting,

1. See Num. 13:16.
2. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament uses the name Jesus for Joshua.
3. Part of the series *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*.
4. Ex. 17:9
5. Ex. 33:11
6. Ps. 27:4
7. Ex. 24:13,14

he said to Moses, 'There is the sound of war in the camp.' Moses replied: 'It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear.'¹ In a sense Joshua was more right than Moses at this point. There had been a war, a spiritual battle, and Israel had been defeated.

At one point, when Moses faced a public uprising because of the people's being malcontent about their meat supply, and he complained to the Lord about his heavy burden, God sent His spirit upon seventy of Israel's elders to lighten Moses' load. Two of those seventy had not bothered to assemble with the others at the tent of meeting but God's Spirit came upon them anyhow and they prophesied like the others. Joshua saw this as a diminishing of Moses' importance as leader in the camp and he protested.² We read: "Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, 'Moses, my lord, stop them!' But Moses replied, 'Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!'"³

Joshua was one of the twelve spies Moses had sent out to survey the Promised Land. Together with Caleb son of Jephunneh, Joshua distinguished himself by voting against the majority of the delegation of spies and of the nation as a whole, thus risking his life. The ten other spies told the people, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." The record states, "And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.'" We read that the people were ready to stone Joshua and Caleb.⁴

Their dissenting opinion paid off in that they were the only two people who ultimately survived the desert crossing and were allowed to enter the Promised Land. God said to the whole nation of Israel that had left Egypt: "Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun."⁵

Before Moses died, he asked God to appoint his successor and God told him to lay his hands on Joshua. We read: "So the LORD said to Moses, 'Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him. He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD. At his command he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.'

Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses."⁶ When the Book of Joshua opens, Moses has died and Joshua has become the leader of the nation with the responsibility to lead them into the Promised Land.

The Book of Joshua:

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia observes that "The use of the title by the Jews to denote the Book of Joshua did not imply a belief that the book was actually written or dictated by him; or even that the narratives themselves were in substance derived from him, and owed their authenticity and reliability to his sanction and control. In the earliest Jewish literature the association of a name with a book was not intended in any case to indicate authorship. And the Book of Joshua is no exception to the rule that such early writings, especially when their contents are of a historical nature, are usually anonymous. The title is intended to describe, not authorship, but theme; and to represent that the life and deeds of Joshua form the main subject with which the book is concerned."

The same *Encyclopaedia* notes: "As a historical narrative, therefore, detailing the steps taken to secure the conquest and possession of Canaan, Joshua is incomplete and is marked by many omissions, and

1. Ex. 32:17,18

2. See Num. 11:20-27.

3. Num.11:28,29

4. See Num. 13:26-14:10.

5. Num. 14:30

6. Num. 27:18-23

in some instances at least includes phrases or expressions which seem to imply the existence of parallel or even divergent accounts of the same event, e.g. in the passage of the Jordan and the erection of memorial stones (chapters 3, 4), the summary of the conquests of Joshua (Josh 10:40-43; 11:16-23), or the references to Moses' victories over the Amorite kings on the East of the Jordan. This last fact suggests, what is in itself sufficiently probable, that the writer or compiler of the book made use of previously existing records or narratives, not necessarily in every instance written, but probably also oral and traditional, upon which he relied and out of which by means of excerpts with modifications and omissions, the resultant history was composed. The incomplete and defective character of the book therefore, considered merely as a history of the conquest of Western Palestine and its allotment among the new settlers, would seem to indicate that the 'sources' available for the writer's use were fragmentary also in their nature, and did not present a complete view either of the life of Joshua or of the experiences of Israel while under his direction. ... A perhaps more striking omission in both narratives is the absence of any reference to the conquest of Central Palestine. The narrative of the overthrow of Bethel and Ai (Josh 6:1-8:29) is followed immediately by the record of the building of an altar on Mt. Ebal and the recitation of the Law before the people of Israel assembled in front of Mts. Ebal and Gerizim (8:30 ff). Joshua then turns aside to defeat at Beth-horon the combination of the Amorite kings, and completes the conquest of the southern country as far south as Kadesh-barnea (10:41). Immediately thereafter he is engaged in overthrowing a confederacy in the far north (11:1-15), a work which clearly could not have been undertaken or successfully accomplished, unless the central region had been already subdued; but of its reduction no account is given. It has been supposed that the silence of the narrator is an indication that at the period of the invasion this district was in the occupation of tribes friendly or even related to the Israelite clans; and in support of the conjecture reference has been made to the mention of Israel on the stele of Merenptah, the Egyptian ruler in whose reign, according to the most probable view, the exodus took place. In this record the nation or a part thereof is regarded as already settled in Palestine at a date earlier by half a century than their appearance under Moses and Joshua on the borders of the Promised Land. The explanation is possible, but perhaps hardly probable. The defects of the historical record are irremediable at this distance of time, and it must be acknowledged that with the available material no complete and consistent narrative of the events of the Israelite conquest of Palestine can be constructed."

Outline of the Book of Joshua:

In his commentary *Joshua*, Richard S. Hess gives the following analysis of the contents:

- I. THE CONQUEST (1:1 – 12:24)
 - a. The book's goal and procedure (1:1-18)
 - b. Rahab and the mission of the spies (2:1-24)
 - c. Rites of passage across the Jordan River (3:1 – 4:24)
 - d. Rites of preparation: circumcision (5:1-12)
 - e. The first assault: the capture of Jericho (5:13 – 6:27)
 - f. The second assault, part 1: the defeat at Ai and its consequences (7:1-26)
 - g. The second assault, part 2: the victory at Ai (8:1-29)
 - h. The covenant at Mount Ebal (8:30-35)
 - i. Summary of the threat against Israel (9:1-2)
 - j. The Gibeonite exception (9:3-27)
 - k. Victory over the leader of Jerusalem and the coalition of southern Canaan (10:1-43)
 - l. Victory over the northern coalition (11:1-11)
 - m. By divine command: a summary of the whole conquest (11:12-23)
 - n. An outline of the conquest (12:1-24)
- II. THE ISRAELITE TRIBAL ALLOTMENTS (13:1 – 21:45)
 - a. The remaining land (13:1-7)
 - b. The allotment east of the Jordan River (13:8-33)
 - c. Introduction to the allotments west of the Jordan River (14:1-5)
 - d. The allotment for Judah (14:6-15:63)
 - e. The allotment for the tribes of Joseph (16:1 – 17:18)
 - f. The allotment for the remaining tribes (18:1 – 19:51)

- g. Towns of refuge (20:1-9)
- h. Towns for the Levites (21:1-45)
- III. THE CONCLUSION: PROPER WORSHIP OF GOD (22:1 – 24:33)
 - a. The disputed altar (22:1-34)
 - b. The farewell address (23:1-16)
 - c. The covenant at Shechem (24:1-27)
 - d. The settlement in the land (24:28-33)

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

I. THE CONQUEST (1:1 – 12:24)

- a. The book's goal and procedure (1:1-18)

*1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide:
2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites.*

3 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

4 Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates — all the Hittite country — to the Great Sea on the west.

5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

6 "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them.

7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

10 So Joshua ordered the officers of the people:

11 "Go through the camp and tell the people, 'Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.'"

12 But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said,

13 "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: 'The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.'

14 Your wives, your children and your livestock may stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers

15 until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise."

16 Then they answered Joshua, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go.

17 Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses.

18 Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!"

The Hebrew word opening the Book of Joshua is *hayah*, meaning, "to come to pass." *The Darby Translation* renders it, "And it came to pass..." This links Joshua to the last chapter of the last book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, where we read: "The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over. Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom

because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt — to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”¹

Joshua had been appointed to fill the shoes of one of the greatest men in biblical history and the history of the whole world. Moses had been “a greater than life” personality, yet he had failed to reach the goal God had set for him and the people.

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, points out about vv. 2-5 of the first chapter, “This text summarizes the book. Verse 2 describes the crossing of the Jordan as found in 1:1 – 5:12. Verse 3 outlines the ‘conquest’ of 5:13 – 12:24. Verse 4 implies the distribution of the land in 13:1 – 22:34. The emphasis on *all the days of* Joshua’s life in verse 5 is found at the end of Joshua’s life in the final two chapters of the book. These verses also introduce the character of the LORD God of Israel. He is one of the main actors in the book. Here he reveals himself through his promises on behalf of Joshua and Israel.”

The keywords in this section, which could be considered the theme of the whole book, are “be strong and courageous.” The words are found four times in this section, three times spoken by God to Joshua and once by the Israelites. The impression we get is that Joshua felt himself overwhelmed by the task that lay ahead of him, and rightfully so! But the fact that Joshua reached the goal that had eluded Moses makes him, at least, Moses’ equal if not superior. Yet, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews suggests, Joshua did not reach God’s ultimate goal either. We read: “It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”² As Moses points to Joshua, so Joshua points to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes, “The Lord gave Joshua four specific orders: (1) go over Jordan; (2) be strong ...; (3) cause this people to inherit; (4) observe to do according to all the Law.”

We are not told when and how God spoke to Joshua. It may have been during the thirty-day mourning period for Moses, or immediately afterward. The latter seems to be more likely. God probably communicated with Joshua in a different way than with Moses. God had testified about Moses, “When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.”³ But regarding Joshua, God had said, “He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD.”⁴

In the opening verses of this book God says to Joshua, “Moses is dead.” There is a sense in which Moses was more alive than ever. Jesus reminded the Sadducees of His time that, “He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”⁵ Joshua knew of course that his master was no longer in the land of the living, but this truth had, probably, not taken a hold of him and of the people, as it ought to have. In a way, the ghost of Moses was still wandering among them. God even emphasized this by reminding Joshua of Moses’ legacy: “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.” How could Joshua meditate on the Book of the Law and not think of the one who had written it? Quoting a homily by Origen, *The Pulpit Commentary* states, “When you see Jerusalem overthrown, the altar forsaken, no sacrifices, no holocausts, no drink offerings, no priests, no Levitical ministry, when you see all these things cease, say it is because Moses the servant of God is dead, and Jesus the Son of God obtains the leadership.”

Joshua took up Moses’ cloak acting energetically and strongly in his own right. The One who inspired him

1. Deut. 34:8-12
2. Heb. 4:6-10
3. Num. 12:6-8
4. Num. 27:19
5. Matt. 22:32

was not the spirit of Moses but the Spirit of God. The death of Moses ended the forty-year-long period in which Israel wandered through the desert. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the nation of Israel, at this point, consisted of people who had been younger than twenty-years-of-age when God meted out His punishment.¹ Moses had died on top of Mount Nebo, at the eastern corner of the Dead Sea.² The Israelite army was only a few miles from the place where the River Jordan ended in the sea. The crossing of the Jordan would mark the transition from a dispensation of wrath into a dispensation of grace.

The crossing of the River Jordan, which is described in detail in Ch. 3, must have seemed to Joshua and the Israelites a formidable obstacle. The name Jordan, meaning “Descender” describes the river’s nature. *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* clarifies its character: “At Lake Huleh the headwaters of the Jordan are about 70 meters (230 feet) above sea level. Some 16 kilometers (10 miles) south of the Sea of Galilee the river is about 213 meters (700 feet) below sea level. At the northern end of the Dead Sea (the end of the Jordan), the river has dropped to about 393 meters (1,290 feet) below sea level. This drastic drop is reflected in the name of the river, which means ‘the descender.’ The Jordan made a natural boundary as a serious obstacle in any east-to-west movement in the land of Palestine. A number of shallow spots, or fords, occur in the Jordan. Since bridges did not exist in the biblical period, possession of these fords was an important military factor.”

In V. 3 the term “Promised Land” acquires new meaning with the affirmation “I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.” God’s promises must be claimed in order to become effectively ours. God did not force His promise upon the people of Israel. Certain parts of the Books of Joshua and Judges demonstrate that God’s promise eluded the Israelites because they did not put their foot on it. Blessings tend to waste away because of a lack of desire. Much of God’s abundance never reaches us because of our apathy. The Christian life ought to be characterized by our stepping on the promises and standing on them.

The words “I will give you every place where you set your foot” were in fact originally given to Moses. God had said: “Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the western sea.”³ It would take Israel more than five centuries, until the reign of King Solomon, to cover this territory.⁴ Possession of the Promised Land had been part of God’s promise to Abraham. We read: “Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ ”⁵ And, “The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.’ ”⁶

Possession of the land was not intended to happen overnight. God had said to Moses, “Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. ‘I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you.’ ”⁷ It was meant to take several generations of people who would take the promise seriously enough to act upon it to bring about its realization.

There is, however, a marked difference between the way Abraham traveled through the land and Israel’s invasion and conquest of Canaan. In Abraham’s day, the Canaanites who lived there did not consider Abraham as a threat. Some of the inhabitants worshipped the God of Abraham, like Melchizedek, who “was priest of God Most High.”⁸ But the next-door neighbors in Sodom and Gomorrah had become so sinful and

1. See Num. 14:26-35.
2. Deut. 34:1-6
3. Deut. 11:24
4. See II Chr. 9:26.
5. Gen. 12:6,7
6. Gen. 13:14-17
7. Ex. 23:30,31

depraved that God could no longer stand the stench of their sins and He destroyed them.¹ Eventually the poison reached its full measure by the time Israel arrived at Canaan's border and depravity covered the whole country.

Joshua must have faced east when God gave him the description of the boundaries of the land. The Hebrew text reads, "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, all the land even unto the great river, the River Euphrates ..." "This Lebanon" may be explained by the fact that, from Joshua's position, Mount Hermon would be visible. "All the Hittite country" probably stands for the whole of central and north Palestine. The Hittites were the most warlike tribe that occupied the northern part of the country. The Gibeonites, with whom Joshua unwittingly made a covenant, were Hittites. Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, writes: "The reference to *all the Hittite country* is missing in the Septuagint. Located in what is now the country of Turkey, the Hittites were a 'superpower' during the age of Joshua. The area north of the Lebanon was under Hittite control at various times in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC. Alternatively, perhaps the phrase intends the entire region west of the Jordan River occupied in the thirteen and twelfth centuries by groups migrating south during the last days, or after the collapse, of the Hittite empire."

V. 5 contains what is probably the greatest promise in the Book of Joshua. The promise was, obviously, not limited to the person of Joshua alone; it pertained to the whole nation of Israel. But it was particularly Joshua who, by faith, put his foot on this promise, which made him the undisputed leader of the nation. It was this promise that gave Joshua the conviction that, in spite of the appearance of strong enemy resistance, the power of God would prevail. When the tribe of Joseph was faced with the superior weapons of the people that inhabited the territory allotted to them, Joshua told them, "You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have iron chariots and though they are strong, you can drive them out."²

The words "Be strong and courageous" are not only words of encouragement but, being the Word of God to Joshua, they creatively imparted strength and courage to him. The strength in Joshua was the strength of the Holy Spirit. We must not image Joshua to be a super hero who exuded self-confidence and energy. As with the apostle Paul, God's strength may have evinced itself in his personal weakness. God had said to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."³ God's strength may have come to Joshua in the form of His grace. God's grace and His strength are inseparable.

In the same breath in which God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous, He commands him to meticulously observe the Law of Moses. In the conquest of Canaan, Joshua must "go by the book." God ordered him to speak about it, to meditate on it day and night, and to obey it scrupulously. Day and night meditation is only possible if the material is committed to memory. Joshua had to know the law and fill his mind with it in order to be victorious.

It is impossible not to draw a spiritual application from these verses. As God had already conquered the Promised Land for His people and the people had only to set their foot on it to possess it, so must we make Christ's victory over the world, the flesh, and Satan our own. We are more than conquerors because the conquest is already an accomplished fact. The key of victory is in the written Word of God. In C. S. Lewis' book *The Silver Chair*, the lion Aslan gives to Jill a series of four signs she and the boy Scrubb need to remember in order to successfully rescue a prince who is held captive by an evil power. Before blowing her into the country of Narnia, Aslan says to Jill: "Remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night. And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs. And secondly, I give you a warning. Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearances. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters."

8. See Gen. 14:18.

1. See Gen. 18:16-19:29.

2. Josh. 17:17,18

3. II Cor. 12:9

Life in the Promised Land is like a treasure hunt, only more real and difficult. We may have moments in our life in which we hear God speak to us clearly, as on the mountain where the air is clear. But daily life is lived in thick air that tends to confuse our mind and remembering God's signs and believing them is much harder than we anticipated. Our enemy has a clever and elaborate system of demonic propaganda that easily penetrates our mind and pollutes it unless we have our heart and head filled with the Word of God. It takes moral courage to deny the enemy access to our inmost being. He will try to overpower or seduce and if we are not forewarned by the written Word, we will be his easy prey. What we do with God's Word will decide whether we are victorious or not. The experience of God's presence will depend on how well we do with the Book He has given us.

The Hebrew words for "prosperous and successful" are *tsalach* and *sakal*. The first word means, "to push forward" with the idea of being profitable. We find it in the story of Eliezer, Abraham's servant in search of a bride for Isaac. We read, "Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey *successful*."¹ It is also the key word in Joseph's biography, of whom we read, "The LORD was with Joseph and he *prospered*, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master."² *Sakal* conveys the idea of "being circumspect and intelligent." We find it in the Second Psalm in "Therefore, you kings, *be wise*; be warned, you rulers of the earth."³

The words "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous" are given in the form of a Hebrew idiom. *The New Living Translation* renders the phrase: "I command you — be strong and courageous!" As to Joshua the Book of the Law, so comes the Bible to us as a command to be obeyed. God not only orders us to study the written Word but also to apply it to our daily life. Spiritual weakness and fear are the fruit of disobedience; obedience to the Word of God will generate strength and courage. The implication of God's Word to Joshua is that the circumstances he was going to encounter would tend to discourage him and make him fearful. The promise of God's presence with him and with Israel would need faith in His promise in order to become a reality. God's presence would not always be a visible experience. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews testifies about Moses: "He persevered because he saw him who is invisible."⁴

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, observes: "Joshua 1:1-9 introduces the entire book with promises and instructions for Joshua and for all Israel. The literary relationship with Deuteronomy suggests that what follows is the implementation of the Deuteronomic programme. These opening verses summarize the instruction of God to Moses by repeating it to Joshua. They also serve a political purpose which is found throughout the first few chapters, that Joshua is the leader of Israel recognized by God as the successor to Moses. Times of transition in leadership are occasions of potential instability and disaster for the security of any group. In these opening chapters of Joshua, the reader finds text after text that legitimates Joshua's authority and thus guarantees that Moses' passing would not be the beginning of a struggle for power, as had occurred repeatedly in the wilderness. Instead, the texts show Joshua as successor to Moses, receiving the divine promises and instruction for the leadership of the people which had also been given to Moses. Joshua's leadership roles in political, military and religious matters are in evidence before the crossing of the Jordan takes place."

Apparently, Joshua lost no time in carrying out God's command. We read that he gave command to the officers to get the people ready for the crossing of the Jordan River in three days. The Hebrew word rendered "officer" is *shoter*, which is derived from a word, meaning, "to write." We find the same word in the Book of Numbers where God said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and *officials* among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone."⁵ We suppose that these were the kind of officials to whom Joshua gave his commands. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* assumes that it was their "duty it was to keep a regular genealogical register of the peo-

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1. Gen. 24:21
 2. Gen. 39:2
 3. Ps. 2:10
 4. Heb. 11:27
 5. Num. 11:16,17

ple in their divisions and sub-divisions, to allot to each one his share of public work, by levying men for military service, and noting those who claimed exemption.”

The crossing of the River Jordan would mark the passage through a second body of water that marked the end of the dessert crossing as the crossing of the Red Sea marked the beginning. We have Paul’s authority to give a spiritual connotation to these crossings and call them an image of baptism. Paul writes: “For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”¹ The Red Sea marked a dividing line between slavery and freedom; Jordan marks the transition between defeat and victory. The passing through the Red Sea indicated the birth of a nation; the crossing of Jordan provided the nation with a homeland. In between the two lines lies a period in which God revealed Himself to His people and established His presence among them. The fact that the time between the two bodies of water stretched out to forty years was, obviously, not part of God’s original plan. What ought to have been a period of celebration and rejoicing turned into a voyage of defeat and death because of the people’s disobedience. What God had in mind is expressed clearly in the words Moses and Aaron spoke to Pharaoh: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.’”² The festival for the Lord in the desert ought to have been the basis for Israel’s victory over the kingdom of darkness of which Canaan was an image.

In Verses 12 to 18 Joshua addresses the tribes of Rueben, Gad, and part of Manasseh which had already claimed their territory east of Jordan. He reminds them of the arrangement Moses made for them to inherit Gilead that had belonged to the kings Sihon and Og, with the stipulation that they would join the troops that crossed the Jordan River and fight with the others for the conquest of Canaan. The Book of Numbers tells how the Reubenites and Gadites, who had large herds, went to Moses to ask for the land of Gilead instead of being given land east of the Jordan River. Moses’ initial reaction was negative. He thought that these tribes wanted to leave the heavy task of fighting the inhabitants of Canaan to the other tribes. When they clarified that they would join the war as long as they were needed, leaving their wives, children and herds east of Jordan, he agreed to their request.³ Moses confirmed this arrangement in his farewell speech in Deuteronomy, where we read: “To the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory extending from Gilead down to the Arnon Gorge (the middle of the gorge being the border) and out to the Jabbok River, which is the border of the Ammonites. Its western border was the Jordan in the Arabah, from Kinnereth to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea), below the slopes of Pisgah. I commanded you at that time: ‘The LORD your God has given you this land to take possession of it. But all your able-bodied men, armed for battle, must cross over ahead of your brother Israelites. However, your wives, your children and your livestock (I know you have much livestock) may stay in the towns I have given you, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they too have taken over the land that the LORD your God is giving them, across the Jordan. After that, each of you may go back to the possession I have given you.’”⁴

There is a question about the number of these tribesmen who did in fact fulfill the promise to join the other tribes in their conquest. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments, “The word ‘all’ (v. 14, like Num 32:21,27) must not be pressed. According to Josh 4:13, there were only about 40,000 men belonging to the two tribes and a half who crossed the Jordan to take part in the war; whereas, according to Num 26:7,18,34, there were 110,000 men in these tribes who were capable of bearing arms, so that 70,000 must have remained behind for the protection of the women and children and of the flocks and herds, and to defend the land of which they had taken possession.”

The men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh pledged allegiance to Joshua, promising to fulfill their obligation to the rest of the nation. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes, “Calvin remarks that the Israelites did not hearken unto Moses, but replies that, compared with the conduct of their fathers whose bodies lay in the wilderness, the conduct of this generation was obedience itself. It certainly appears as though for the last two years of the wandering in the wilderness there was far less rebellion against Moses than before; and after the

1. I Cor. 10:1,2

2. Ex. 5:1

3. See Num. 32:1-33.

4. Deut. 3:16-20

solemn repetition of the precepts of the law to the new generation which had arisen, given in the Book of Deuteronomy, there seems to have been no rebellion at all.”

The pledge of allegiance the trans-Jordanians make to Joshua sounds almost too good to be true. “Whatever you command, wherever you send us ...” They make it sound as if they would personally put to death anyone who would oppose Joshua’s leadership. Their pledge closes with a blessing identical to the words God had spoken to Joshua. Yet, we have no reason to doubt their sincerity. The fact that sincere promises made in the past arouse our suspicion some thirty centuries later may be put on account of the devaluation of the spoken word throughout the ages.

b. Rahab and the mission of the spies (2:1-24)

1 Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

2 The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land."

3 So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from."

5 At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them."

6 (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.)

7 So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

8 Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof

9 and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.

10 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.

11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

12 Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign

13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death."

14 "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

15 So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall.

16 Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

17 The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us

18 unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house.

19 If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him.

20 But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

21 "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

22 When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them.

23 Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them.

24 They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."

Much has been written about this fascinating chapter. The fact that Joshua had been divinely ordered to conquer the land did not keep him from taking human precautions. As *Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes, "Faith in God's promise ought not to supersede but encourage our diligence in the use of proper means. Joshua is sure he has God with him, and yet sends men before him. We do not trust God, but tempt him, if our expectations slacken our endeavors."

In sending out the two spies Joshua must have relived his own experience of some 38 years earlier. Conditions had changed much since that time. The twelve original spies had entered the Promised Land from the south. Israel had been encamped in the desert of Paran.¹ Now, Israel approached Canaan from the east. The people of Israel were at Shittim on the west bank of the Jordan River. This was the second time in their journeys they found themselves there. The first time they reached that place they had fallen into the trap that the Moabites had set them at Balaam's advice, and several of the men participated in a ritual sexual orgy in honor of Baal Peor.² The prophet Micah mentions the place, stating: "My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember [your journey] from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."³

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary explains, "Jericho was two hours' journey to the west of the Jordan, situated in a plain that was formerly very fertile, and celebrated for its palm trees and balsam shrubs, but which is now quite desolate and barren. This plain is encircled on the western side by a naked and barren range of mountains, which stretches as far as Bashan towards the north and to the Dead Sea on the south. Every trace of the town has long since passed away, though it evidently stood somewhere near, and probably on the northern side of, the miserable and dirty village of Rîha, by the Wady Kelt."

The scope of this spy expedition was much more limited this time than that of the time before. Only two men were sent instead of twelve and they were not to travel beyond Jericho. Joshua did not need an update of the information he had personally gathered 28 years earlier; he wanted to know the state of preparedness of the city and the emotional condition of its inhabitants. The two men must have entered the city through the gates without being apprehended, but their presence had obviously been noticed. In slipping into Rahab's house they did the most inconspicuous thing they could do. People who saw them enter may have thought that they were "stray Israelites" who came to avail themselves of Rahab's services.

Some Bible scholars have argued fervently that the Hebrew word *zownaah* ought to be rendered "innkeeper" instead of "prostitute." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments, "It does not appear that the spies entered the house of Rahab with any evil intent, but simply because to enter the house of a woman of that kind — and women of that kind must have been very numerous in the licentious Phoenician cities — would have attracted far less attention than if they had entered any other. Even there it did not escape the notice of the king, who had been thoroughly alarmed (ver. 3) by the successes of Israel eastward of Jordan." Somehow the presence of the two men had been noticed and the king was alerted. We assume that, if the two had been recognized as Israelites when they entered the city gate, they would have been arrested immediately. No explanation is given as to how the discovery was made at a later stage. Rahab may have had some other men in her house when the two entered and thus their presence was reported; we do not know.

The spies must have entered the city in broad daylight because city gates were usually closed at sunset. When Jericho's police arrived at Rahab's house to arrest the men it was evening, because Rahab told them that they left at dusk. The narrative does not reveal any details of Rahab's dealings with the spies prior to the arrival of the king's delegation. Whether Rahab knew they were Israelites before the arrival of the police, or whether the men told her, or why she hid them on the roof before the search party arrived, none of this is explained.

The narrative focuses particularly on Rahab's testimony to the spies. We read about her lie to the

1. See Num. 12:16-13:1.

2. See Num. 25:1-3.

3. Micah 6:5

police on which the Bible passes no judgment. Rahab's words express the feeling of most of the people of Jericho. Although she begins by giving her personal conviction she also reveals the general state of mind of all the people in Jericho. "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you." Jericho knew it was lost before it had even been attacked. It is amazing to read the testimony of this woman. She better understood the meaning of God's miracles in Israel's deliverance from Egypt and their passage through the Red Sea than the Israelites had themselves during their forty years in the desert. God's power seemed to be more real to her than it had been to Israel. It often takes someone outside the Kingdom of Heaven to understand how the children of the Kingdom ought to live. We do not know how old Rahab was when she first met the spies. The miracles of the exodus and the parting of the sea may have happened before she was born. The defeat of Sihon and Og, the kings from east of the river, were to her and to the people of Jericho the ultimate proof of God's power and intent. Everybody in Jericho knew that they belonged to the losing party. That is what made Rahab decided to switch sides. Her statement "the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" sounds like it is a quotation from the Lord's Prayer. It was not mere fear but this conviction of who God is that made her risk her own life and hide the spies. It seems inconceivable that the policemen who knocked at Rahab's door took Rahab's word and did not search her house. They may have been some of Rahab's clients who did not want to offend her. Rahab pleads for her own life and that of her family as if the conquest of Jericho were already an accomplished fact. The spies swear an oath to her, saying: "Our lives for your lives!" upon which Rahab helps them escape.

We get the impression that God's purpose in sending the spies to Jericho was more than a survey of the city; He needed Rahab for a reason that went well beyond the conquest of the Promised Land. Rahab was to become a vital link in bringing about the salvation of the whole world. In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham, we read: "Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab."¹

Bible scholars have argued about the location of Rahab's house, whether it was built on top of the city wall, or as part of the wall, or in such close vicinity to the wall that it could be considered to be part of it. Whatever its position, it enabled Rahab to let the two spies down her window so they would get out of the city. Another point of discussion is whether the conversation recorded in v. 16 took place before the men were let down or afterward. Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, comments: "The arrangement of the narrative in verses 15-21 has been a matter of much discussion, as have the questions surrounding the order of events in verses 3-8. Rahab first lets the spies escape out of her window and then converses with them regarding their oath. However, this seems unreasonable. Why would she not discuss the oath before letting them out of the window? Why would they wait until they were in a vulnerable position, on the wall of Jericho or at its base? Is one to imagine that the spies shouted up to Rahab from the ground, and thereby revealed their position to the inhabitants of Jericho? Or is it that they swore their oath while dangling by the rope that Rahab held? The narrator wished to stress certain features. In order to do so, it was not necessary to follow a linear sequence of events or to mention an event or a statement only once. There could be summaries of events before they were described in greater detail and there could be repetition of important matters. The NIV attempts to convey the sense by introducing Rahab's conversation in verse 16 with a pluperfect tense, *she had said to them*. Thus the conversation took place before they exited through the window."

The spies set three conditions Rahab would have to meet in order to ensure the safety of herself and the members of her family: she had to identify her house by tying a scarlet cord in the window, all her relatives had to gather in her house, and everyone must stay inside until the attack on the city was over. The question has been asked whether the scarlet cord was the rope with which the spies were let down. The words "this scarlet cord" made Luther conclude that it must have been the one that helped the spies escape. It could also have been a cord they saw inside the house. We assume that Rahab tied a scarlet cord to her to identify her house as a brothel, much in the same way as some quarters with houses of ill repute in big cities are called "red light districts." To use such a piece of identification of an immoral trade and make it a symbol of salvation would lend a very profound meaning to it.

For Israelites approaching the city, the sight of a house with a red mark on it would bring up associations with the first Passover in Egypt when the angel of death passed by the house that had been marked by

1. Matt.1:5

the blood of the slain lamb. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This line of scarlet thread is regarded by the Fathers generally, and by our own divines, as Bishop Hall and Bishop Wordsworth, as symbolical of the blood of Christ." It appears that Rahab tied the scarlet cord as soon as the men had left. Not knowing when the attack upon the city took place, that makes sense.

The men heeded Rahab's advice and stayed in hiding for three days, after which they returned to Joshua with the message, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us." How different from the report the first spies had brought back to Moses 38 years before. We read: "But the men who had gone up with him said, 'We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, 'The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.'"¹

c. Rites of passage across the Jordan River (3:1 – 4:24)

1 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over.

2 After three days the officers went throughout the camp,

3 giving orders to the people: "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it.

4 Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it."

5 Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you."

6 Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people." So they took it up and went ahead of them.

7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.

8 Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

9 Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.

10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites.

11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you.

12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe.

13 And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth — set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

14 So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them.

15 Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge,

16 the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho.

17 The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

4:1 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua,

2 "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe,

3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe,

5 and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the LORD had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.

9 Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

10 Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the LORD had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over,

11 and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the LORD and the priests came to the other side while the people watched.

12 The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, armed, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them.

13 About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the LORD to the plains of Jericho for war.

14 That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they revered him all the days of his life, just as they had revered Moses.

15 Then the LORD said to Joshua,

16 "Command the priests carrying the ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan."

17 So Joshua commanded the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan."

18 And the priests came up out of the river carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD. No sooner had they set their feet on the dry ground than the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and ran at flood stage as before.

19 On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho.

20 And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan.

21 He said to the Israelites, "In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?'

22 tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'

23 For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over.

24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."

Much has been written about the chronology of these events. We read in the first chapter that Joshua gave the command for the people to get ready for the crossing of the Jordan in three days.¹ In the third chapter we read that the officers gave orders to the people "after three days." The expedition of the spies must be fitted in somewhere in that time frame. We must also bear in mind that the Jewish time reckoning differs from ours. We count three days as 3x24 hours. The Old Testament day began and ended at sunset and every minute before and after the hours of sunset was counted as one day. The Jewish day could be as short as 25 hours, but it could also be as long as 72 hours. Somewhere in that period of time the spies were in Jericho and, after a brief visit at Rahab's house they hid in the hills for "three days." The evacuation of the people from Shittim to the east bank of the river must have taken a good amount of time. A crowd of more than 2,000,000 people with their tents and animals does not move in just a few hours. Bible scholars have puzzled over the apparent inconsistent way of reporting the events. *Barnes' Notes* observes about this, "The contents of this and the next chapter, which record the miraculous passage of Israel over Jordan, are given in four sec-

1. See Josh. 1:10,11.

tions:

- (1) Josh 3:1-6, describing the preliminary directions;
- (2) Josh 3:7-17, the commencement of the passage;
- (3) Josh 4:1-14, the accomplishment of it;
- (4) Josh 4:15-24, the conclusion of the passage and erection of a monument to commemorate it. A certain completeness and finish is given to each division of the narrative, and to effect this the writer more than once repeats himself, anticipates the actual order of events, and distributes into parts occurrences which in fact took place once for all.” And *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* adds: “This arrangement was adopted by the author for the purpose of bringing distinctly out to view, not only the miracle itself, but also the means with which God associated the performance of the miracle, and also of impressing deeply upon the memory of the people both the divine act and the end secured. In doing this, however, some repetitions were inevitable, in consequence of the endeavor, so peculiar to the Hebrew mode of writing history to mark and round off the several points in the occurrences described, by such comprehensive statements as anticipate the actual course of events. It is to this arrangement and dovetailing of the differing points that we must attribute the distribution of the revelation and commands which Joshua received from God, over the several portions of the history; and consequently we are not to suppose, that at each separate point during the passage God revealed to Joshua what he was to do, but must rather assume that He actually revealed and commanded whatever was requisite all at once, on the day before the miraculous passage.”

The crossing of the Jordan marked the end of the desert crossing and the beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land. It was an event of the same magnitude as the crossing of the Red Sea, which marked the beginning of the journey. Actually, we could say that Israel’s journey started on the night of the Passover in Egypt. After the crossing of the Jordan, the Israelites celebrated the Passover again in the Promised Land.¹ A period of forty years separated these two celebrations.

The crossing of the Jordan also marked the beginning of a new dispensation. God’s guidance took on a different mode. Thus far the cloud that covered the ark had been Israel’s guide. We read: “In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out — until the day it lifted.”² Evidently, the cloud was no longer visible when Israel crossed the river; their new guide was the ark itself, carried by the priests. This also signified a change, since it had been the task of the Kohathites, the common Levites who were not the sons of Aaron, to carry the ark. God had given these instructions to Moses: “After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting.”³ We assume that the ark was covered with the curtain that separated the holy from the most holy place in the tabernacle. The instructions for the transportation of the ark, given to Moses were, “When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place.”⁴ The Israelites had to keep a distance from the ark of about a thousand yards. The Hebrew states, “two thousand cubits.” This distance was probably also kept during the actual crossing.

In preparation for the crossing the people had to consecrate or ritually purify themselves, meaning that they had to bathe and wash their clothes.

The crossing of the Jordan River in flood stage must be considered a physical impossibility. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* explains: “The river itself averages about 100 ft. in width when confined strictly within its channel, but in the early spring months the flood plain of the Zor is completely overflowed, bringing into its thickets a great amount of driftwood which increases the difficulty of penetrating it, and temporarily drives out ferocious animals to infest the neighboring country.”

When the Israelites left Egypt and stood at the Red Sea, they panicked when they saw the Egyptian army

1. See Josh. 5:10.
2. Ex. 40:36,37
3. Num. 4:15
4. Num. 4:5,6

approaching. At that time God had ordered Moses to stretch out his staff over the sea and part the waters. So Israel crossed the sea and when the Egyptians tried to follow the whole army drowned.¹ This time there was no panic and no stretching out of staffs. The priests simply had to carry the ark to the riverbank and walk in the river. God told Joshua that one of the reasons He would perform a miracle was for Joshua's own benefit. The miraculous crossing would elevate him to the status of Moses. Nothing is more humbling than being used by God to perform a miracle. It glorifies God, not the person who is the instrument. Jesus says: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit." Yet, God said to Joshua: "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses." The fact that Joshua announced the miracle before it happened, obviously, played an important part in this exaltation. When the priests reached the river and proceeded to enter it, they faced, humanly speaking, certain death. The only thing they were given was a promise, which was the basis upon which they acted. The symbolism of this scene ought not to escape us. It is when we accept our death that God gives us life. These priests exemplify the truth of Jesus' words: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."²

The crossing of Jordan was also to be proof to the people of Israel that the living God was in their midst and that He would give them victory in the Promised Land. The Hebrew title, rendered "the living God" is *El Chay*. The sons of Korah used this name for God in the Psalms, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God," and "By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me — a prayer to the God of my life."³ God would fight their battles and drive out the inhabitants of Canaan. The ark that traveled ahead of them is called "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth." The title implies that the God of Israel was also the God of the Canaanites who were being driven out. Their uprooting was the result of their failure to recognize God as their Creator and Lord.

If Joshua told the Israelites the reason for their choosing of twelve men to represent them, it is not recorded at this place but in the next chapter. We assume that the task was explained at the time the command to choose was given.

The flood stage of the Jordan River is a yearly event, occurring approximately in late March or early April when the melting snow from Mount Hermon feeds the river. Some eyewitnesses have observed that the river had risen fourteen feet above its normal level. The harvest mentioned is supposedly the barley harvest because at the time of the wheat harvest at Pentecost the river returns to its normal stage. As soon as the feet of the priests touched the water the violent current ceased to flow. The biblical record states that the water "piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea) was completely cut off." Efforts to determine the location of the town of Adam have been unsuccessful. According to Richard S. Hess in *Joshua*, "Adam is a site in the Jordan Valley, identified with Tell ed-Dāmiye, 18 miles north of Jericho. Zarethan also lies east of the Jordan. Archaeologists have identified it with Tell es-Sa'idīyeh, 12 miles north of Adam, or with Tell Umm Hamīd, 3 miles north of Adam. The site of Adam, immediately south of the Jabbok River, is important as a convenient point for crossing the Jordan. South of Adam the river becomes more difficult to cross. *The Sea of Arabah (the Salt Sea)* is the Dead Sea which lies 18 miles from Adam, although the meandering Jordan is several times longer. The flood affected 29% of the Jordan Valley. The text defines this length so as to emphasize the magnitude of the *amazing thing*." Some Bible scholars have supposed that an enormous landslide completely cut off the flow. In that case not only the water coming from the north into the river but also that from the various tributaries south of Adam had to be blocked. Even if the event was caused by natural phenomena, the timing of it remains miraculous. If Adam, as some suppose, was located about fifteen miles upstream, it means that the riverbed was visible as far as could be seen. The crossing occurred in full view of Jericho. We are not told how long the river remained in this dried-up condition, but we may assume that the crossing of some two million people with their livestock must have taken the better part of a whole day.

Immediately after the crossing, Joshua ordered the construction of a monument of twelve stones, one for each of the tribes. In reality there were actually thirteen tribes, since the tribe of Joseph was divided

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1. See Ex. 14:10-31.
 2. Matt. 16:24,25
 3. See Ps. 42:2,8.

into Ephraim and Manasseh. Since the tribe of Levi was not given any tribal heritage but was to be spread out over the whole land, the number was maintained at twelve for all practical purposes. How this principle was upheld in the building of the monument is not explained. Either Joseph was counted as one tribe, or the Levites were exempt from carrying a stone.

In his commentary, *Joshua*, Richard S. Hess observes: “The narrative focuses again on the priests. A series of wordplays relate their actions to the waters and the people. The priests *stood* (Heb. *wayya’am^edu*) in the midst of the river just as the waters *stopped flowing* (*wayya’am^edu*) at Adam. The priests stood *on dry ground* just as the people crossed *on dry ground*, and just as Moses turned the sea into dry land (Ex. 14:21). The water was *completely cut off* (Heb. *tammû*) *until the whole nation had completed (tammû) the crossing*.. These wordplays demonstrate that all the actions were related to one another. The priests who bear the ark of the covenant initiate the action. Thus they receive the most attention among the three groups (*i.e.* priests, twelve men, and all the people) in this first perspective on the crossing of the River Jordan.”

Bible scholars have argued extensively about the stones that were taken to build a monument to commemorate the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan River. The text seems to indicate that two memorials were built, one on the west bank of the river and one in the middle of the river at the spot where the priest who carried the ark had stood. Some scholars believe that only one monument was erected, the one on dry ground, but others insist that there was also one in the riverbed. The last one would then only be visible when the Jordan was at its lower level. It seems that a strong current would have displaced the stones. It sounds more logical to accept that there was only one monument, but this cannot be determined with certainty. Since there is some repetition in the whole account, the erection of the monument may very well refer to one incident told twice. It is certain that at least one monument was built at Gilgal, which is a few miles east of the riverbank, where the Israelites made their first camp inside the Promised Land.

V. 10 recapitulates the event of the crossing as if the author wanted to emphasize the miraculous aspect. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “This must have been a majestic sight. While the people ‘hasted’ to cross, either that they might effect the passage during the day, or, more probably, because they crossed in fear and trembling, partly in spite of, and partly because of, the miraculous interposition on their behalf, the priests bearing the ark of God, the visible symbol of His presence, stood solemnly still at the brink of the river, nor did they stir until every one of that mighty host had passed over. Then, when all had safely crossed, the ark of God was borne across the bed of the river, and as soon as the soles of the priests touched the highest point that the waters had reached on the other side, they returned to their place, and all was as it had been before. Well might the Israelites erect a double memorial of a scene so wonderful as this!”

As we saw earlier, the number of soldiers from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh that accompanied the main body of Israel was only part of the armed men of those tribes. From the 110,000 men that had been counted in the Book of Numbers¹ as being able to bear arms, only 40,000 crossed the Jordan. The remaining 70,000 must have stayed in Gilead to protect wives, children, and possessions against potential enemies.

The miracle of the crossing of the Jordan River elevated Joshua to the heroic leader God wanted him to be. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* quotes Calvin, who observed: “This was not the chief end of the miracle, that Joshua increased in power and authority; but since it was a matter of great importance, so far as the public interests were concerned, that the government of Joshua should be established, it is very properly mentioned, as an addition to the benefits that were otherwise conferred, that he was invested as it were with sacred insignia, which produced such a feeling of veneration among the people, that no one dared to treat him with disrespect.”

The date of Israel’s official entrance into Canaan is stated as “the tenth day of the first month.” *The Living Bible* paraphrases this: “This miracle occurred on the 25th of March.”

Both Moses and Joshua were very much aware of the fact that they were making history and that it was important that the future generations would be made aware of the importance of the facts that constituted their history. Referring to the celebration of the Passover, Moses said: “In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’ ”² In repeating Moses’ words about the Passover and applying them to the monument at

1. See Num 32:21,27.

2. Ex. 13: 14

Gilgal, Joshua intimated that the entrance of Israel in the Promised Land was an event of the same magnitude as their exodus from Egypt. Both incidents were marked by an act of God's miraculous intervention. As the Passover signified salvation from death, the crossing of the Jordan meant entrance into the fullness of life. Both events have their spiritual counterpart in the life of a child of God. For Israel it was of the utmost importance that the younger generations, who had not personally experienced these acts of God, would identify with them and make them their own. Unfortunately, history demonstrates that most people do not come to the point where they make the lessons of history their own and draw the consequence of their spiritual heritage.

d. Rites of preparation: circumcision (5:1-12)

1 Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites.

2 At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again."

3 So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.

4 Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt — all the men of military age — died in the desert on the way after leaving Egypt.

5 All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.

6 The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.

7 So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way.

8 And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

9 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

10 On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.

11 The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

12 The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.

The word of Israel's miraculous crossing of the Jordan River must have traveled like wildfire throughout all Canaan. Even the tribes living along the Mediterranean coast heard about it. Rahab had already told the spies the reaction of the people to the news about the crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of the trans-Jordanian kings. She had said: "When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."¹ But fear and lack of courage does not always lead to surrender. Most of the inhabitants of Canaan put up a fierce fight instead of flight. Before any military campaign was to be undertaken Israel needed the spiritual preparation of renewing its covenant with God. No one could consider himself to be a member of God's people without carrying in his body the outward sign of the covenant. When God made His covenant with Abraham, He said: "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My cove-

1. See Josh. 2:11.

nant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”¹

From a human and strategic point of view, circumcising the greater part of an army is an invitation to defeat by the enemies. Most of the army would be immobilized for several days and even the smallest attack by an enemy could have wiped them out. Simeon and Levi, the sons of Jacob, used that ruse to wipe out the male population of the town where Sechem, son of Hamor lived, because of the rape of their sister Dinah.² For these men, submitting to circumcision was an act of faith; they were convinced that God’s protection made them invincible. The conquest of Canaan began in weakness of the flesh in order to demonstrate the source of its divine power. In the words of the apostle Paul, “The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”

There has been much discussion about how many men were to be circumcised. There must have been a good number of males alive who had been circumcised in Egypt and who were under the age of twenty when the rebellion occurred³ and who were now over forty years of age. Those who were circumcised were the ones born in the desert, probably during the 38-year wandering period. They had never known Egypt and its slavery. Opinions among Bible scholars about the number of men involved in this operation differ widely. It is quite probable that they composed the majority of the arm-bearing population. One of the reasons this circumcision was required at this point was the upcoming celebration of the Passover. Circumcision was a requirement for participation of the Passover. God had said to Moses and Aaron: “An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you.”⁴ The Israelites had celebrated the Passover at the first anniversary of the exodus.⁵ Since no further celebrations are mentioned during the desert crossing, we may assume that the rebellion took place before the second anniversary.

Flint knives were used for this rite although iron was known and used among Israelites at this time. There is some evidence that the use of iron was considered desecrating in certain rituals. The ritual took place at Gibeath Haaraloth.. The Israelites evidently gave the name to this place because the foreskins were buried there. A footnote in the NIV states that Gibeath Haaraloth means hill of foreskins. God gave the name Gilgal to the place, meaning, “roll away.” We read: “Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.’ So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.” Although the men who had just been circumcised never were slaves in Egypt, they had inherited “the reproach of Egypt” from their parents. The Hebrew word rendered “reproach” is *cherpah*, meaning “shame.”

The incident reminds us of another time at which God rolled away the shame of Israel and of the whole human race, the shame of death. In connection with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we read: “When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.”⁶ Death had been Satan’s means of keeping humanity in slavery. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews states: “Since the children have flesh and blood, [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”⁷

The apostle Paul explains the consequences of circumcision for our daily life in his Epistle to the Colossians, “In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and

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1. Gen. 17:10-14
 2. See Gen.34:13-29.
 3. See Num. 14:21-35.
 4. Ex. 12:48,49
 5. See Num. 9:1-5.
 6. Mark 16:1-4
 7. Heb. 2:14,15

raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”¹ What God did for the Israelites at Gilgal amounted to a prophetic image of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the consequences for our daily life.

There was a period of three days between the circumcision and the celebration of the Passover. We read in the previous chapter that the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on the tenth day of the first month, which is the month of Abib, corresponding to March or April on our calendar. It was the exact month and day on which Israel had left Egypt forty years earlier.² That day had started for them after sunset with the celebration of the Passover. Here it marked the arrival of a new day, the day of the fulfillment of the promise of God.

The Passover also meant the beginning of the weeklong celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which symbolized a life of holiness. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”³ A weeklong celebration stands for a lifelong celebration. Holiness is a lifelong feast that we ought to celebrate!

The Passover at Gilgal also marked the end of the miracle of manna. We read that the people ate the produce of the land. Since it was the time of the barley harvest that is probably what they ate. They may have helped themselves to what they found on the fields that were ready to be harvested. It is generally assumed that before eating of the grain, they sacrificed a sheaf of barley to the Lord. The law stated that God had said to Moses: “When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.”⁴

All these rituals were observed in full view of the enemy. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments, “We may well imagine that the people of Canaan were astonished, and that when they observed the motions of the enemy they could not but think them very strange. When soldiers take the field they are apt to think themselves excused from religious exercises (they have not time nor thought to attend to them), yet Joshua opens the campaign with one act of devotion after another. What was afterwards said to another Joshua might truly be said to this, Hear now, O Joshua! thou and thy fellows that sit before thee are men wondered at (Zech 3:8), and yet indeed he took the right method. That is likely to end well which begins with God.”

e. The first assault: the capture of Jericho (5:13 – 6:27)

13 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

15 The commander of the LORD’s army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

6: 1 Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

2 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.

3 March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days.

4 Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams’ horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets.

5 When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."

6 So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD

1. Col. 2:11,12

2. See Ex. 13:4.

3. I Cor. 5:7,8

4. Lev. 23:9,10

and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it."

7 And he ordered the people, "Advance! March around the city, with the armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD."

8 When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the LORD went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the LORD's covenant followed them.

9 The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding.

10 But Joshua had commanded the people, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!"

11 So he had the ark of the LORD carried around the city, circling it once. Then the people returned to camp and spent the night there.

12 Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD.

13 The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the LORD and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets kept sounding.

14 So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

15 On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times.

16 The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city!"

17 The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

18 But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it.

19 All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury."

20 When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

21 They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

22 Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her."

23 So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.

24 Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD's house.

25 But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

26 At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: "Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: "At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates."

27 So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

The section, beginning with Chapter 5:13 and ending with 6:5, marks a change in Joshua's relationship with God. Thus far, God had communicated with him by means of the Urim and the Thummim that were kept by the high priest Eleazer. Now, God appears to Joshua as He had appeared to Moses. God had said before to Aaron and Miriam, "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."¹ Evidently, Joshua was quite unpre-

1. Num. 12:6-8

pared for this encounter because when it occurred he did not recognize the person. When Joshua asked “the man” to identify himself, he understood that he was the Angel of the Lord, *sar-ts^abaa’-Yahweh*, the “commander of the army of the LORD,” the Second Person of the Trinity, the one we know as our Lord Jesus Christ. Joshua meets his namesake *Yehoshua* or *Yeshua*.

When Joshua asked this man, “Are you for us or for our enemies?” he received the answer, “Neither!” This surprising answer deserves a closer look. God is not on our side in the sense that He chooses for one individual as opposed to another. It is up to us to take our stand with God, not the other way around. When the Israelites had made the gold calf, we read that Moses stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.”¹ Only the Levites responded to this call. It is important to remember that God was not for the Israelites and against the Canaanites. When the apostle Paul exclaimed, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”² he said this in the context of God’s plan of salvation. God is for us in Jesus Christ, but we cannot make God subservient to our own causes and strategies. God is for us if He is in control and we submit to His ultimate authority. When Joshua asked “Are you for us or for our enemies?” he spoke as the commander of the Israelite army. God answered him by saying, “You are not in command, I am!” The Canaanites would have saved their lives if they had recognized this.

It was of the utmost importance for Joshua to realize who was in control of the battle for the Promised Land. If he had thought that he was, the whole campaign would have failed miserably. We can only be victorious if God fights our battles for us. Joshua recognized this and he responded appropriately by falling facedown to the ground before Jesus Christ. When he asked God what the message was, he received the answer, “Take your shoes off.” Moses had received a similar command when God first met him at the burning bush.³ *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments on this encounter: “The further expressions of reverence which this divine captain required from Joshua (v. 15): Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, in token of reverence and respect (which with us are signified by uncovering the head), and as an acknowledgment of a divine presence, which, while it continued there, did in a manner sanctify the place and dignify it. We are accustomed to say of a person for whom we have a great affection that we love the very ground he treads upon; thus Joshua must show his reverence for this divine person, he must not tread the ground he stood on with his dirty shoes, Eccl 5:1. Outward expressions of inward reverence, and a religious awe of God, well become us, and are required of us, whenever we approach to him in solemn ordinances. Bishop Patrick well observes here that the very same orders that God gave to Moses at the bush, when he was sending him to bring Israel out of Egypt (Ex 3:5), he here gives to Joshua, for the confirming of his faith in the promise he had lately given him, that as he had been with Moses so he would be with him, Josh 1:5. Had Moses such a presence of God with him as, when it became sensible, sanctified the ground? So had Joshua.”

There is one point that needs further explanation in the command to remove the shoes. I don’t believe it is a matter of dirty or clean shoes but of the fact that shoes are made of pieces of leather, that is skin of a dead animal, that isolates the foot from the dust of the earth from which it was formed. It is this piece of animal skin, this symbol of death, which desecrates us in the sight of God. The dust of the earth of which we have been formed is holy because of the presence of God. When we are in God’s presence God wants us to be in life-contact with His holiness and not be isolated from Him by an element that reeks of death.

At this point, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “There is scarcely a more unfortunate division of chapters in the whole Bible than that here. Through this very circumstance many persons have been puzzled to know what was intended by this extraordinary appearance, because they supposed that the whole business ends with the chapter, whereas, it is continued in the succeeding one, the first verse of which is a mere parenthesis, simply relating the state of Jericho at the time that Joshua was favored by this encouraging vision.”

God tells Joshua that the battle is already over. It has been fought in heaven and Satan lost. God gives Jericho to Joshua and to the Israelites. It is as if God said to him, “The money is in the safe and this is the combination!” There are two ways to open a safe: it can be blown open with dynamite or by turning the knob. Turning the knob is easy if you know the combination. For Jericho it was one turn every day for six

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1. Ex. 32:26
 2. Rom. 8:31
 3. See Ex. 3:5.

days and seven turns on the seventh day. The city walls would crumble at the blowing of the trumpets and the shouting of the people.

As a parenthesis in the dialogue between the Angel of the Lord and Joshua, we read that Jericho was tightly shut up. The Hebrew reads literally, “shutting and closely shut up.” Humanly speaking the city was impregnable. God’s strategy to conquer the city amounts to a mockery of all human defenses. This is an object lesson of what the apostle Paul describes as: “The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”¹ Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, observes: “If the mission of these spies had been, at least in part, to seek out those who believed in Israel’s God, then the act of shutting the gates in Joshua 2 signified the official rejection of this opportunity. The shut gates in 6:1 serve the same purpose. Jericho has refused to hear the message of Israel, proclaimed in the great deeds of the exodus, in the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan, and in the military victories that had already occurred.”

No indication is given of the day on which the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joshua. But since the instructions for the battle of Jericho prescribe seven days of walking around the city, one of those days must have been a Sabbath. Whether it was the last day or not cannot be ascertained. We might like to think it was, but that cannot be taken for granted. The fact remains that the Israelites were ordered to break the Sabbath by walking around the city. God ordered them to break the Sabbath and He broke it Himself in the fact that the priests carried the ark, symbol of His presence, around the city.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary comments: “Thus the fall of Jericho became the symbol and type of the overthrow of every worldly power before the Lord, when He should come to lead His people into Canaan and establish His kingdom upon earth. On the ground of this event, the blowing of trumpets is frequently introduced in the writings of the prophets, as the signal and symbolical omen of the manifestations of the Lord in great judgments, through which He destroys one worldly power after another, and thus maintains and extends His kingdom upon earth, and leads it on towards that completion to which it will eventually attain when He descends from heaven in His glory at the time of the last trump, with a great shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, to raise the dead and change the living, to judge the world, cast the devil, death, and hell into the lake of fire, create a new heaven and new earth, and in the new Jerusalem erect the tabernacle of God among men for all eternity (1 Cor. 15:51ff.; 1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 20:1 and 21).”

According to the divine instructions, seven priests had to walk before the ark with seven trumpets. The Hebrew words are *yobel shophar*, which the NIV renders as “trumpets of rams’ horns.” A literal translation would be “trumpets of jubilee.”

Having received his divine instructions, Joshua called the priests, evidently without delay, and orders them and the people to carry out the orders. The battle of Jericho was spearheaded by the priests who blew their trumpets and carried the ark. This was not a war of humans against humans; it was a spiritual battle. Jericho was the symbol of demonic resistance against the Kingdom of God. This was not a battle against flesh and blood.

We may ask the question why God wanted this campaign to stretch out for seven days. If it was a matter of light conquering darkness, why did the walls of Jericho not come down when the parade of the priests with their trumpets and the ark and the people encircled the city the first time? One of the reasons must have been that God gave the inhabitants of Jericho a whole week to repent. One wonders what the people of Jericho must have thought about the sight of Israel’s army marching around the city. The first day they may have reacted with fright, which diminished as the days went on. By the seventh day when nothing had happened, fear must have subsided and made place for mockery. On the last day of grace they must have thought it was all a joke. Their reaction was probably like Lot’s sons-in-law in Sodom about whom we read: “Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, ‘Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!’ But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.”² But God mocks those who mock Him.

We are not told how many days had passed since the men of Israel had been circumcised and since the celebration of the first Passover in the Promised Land. Israel had probably just finished the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread before the people entered this week of walking around Jericho. It is not difficult

1. I Cor. 1:25
2. Gen. 19:14

to see the connection between the period of time in which the people abstained for the use of yeast, symbol of sin, and this week of victory over evil. Strongholds outside us will only come down after they have come down within us.

We are not given a day-by-day description of events since the same ritual was performed for six days. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes, "It is evident, however, that the militia only of the Israelites had been called to the march; because it is inconceivable that 2,000,000 people could have gone so frequently round the city in a day." It was only on the seventh day that Jericho was ripe enough to be taken and the Israelites were mature enough to take it. The weeklong ceremony served to test Israel's faith as it hardened Jericho's resistance. We do not know the size of the city or how long it took the Israelites to walk around it. Archeologists have located three sites of what is believed to be old Jericho. *The Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states about one site: "By far the most imposing site of the three is Old Testament Jericho, a pear-shaped mound about 366 meters (400 yards) long, north to south, 183 meters (200 yards) wide at the north end, and some 67 meters (70 yards) high. It has been the site of numerous archaeological diggings and is a favorite stop for Holy Land tourists." Taking these measurements the circumference of Jericho would have been approximately 1 kilometer or 6/10th of a mile. If we multiply this by three that seems to be very small even for a city in ancient times. Walking around Jericho seven times would only cover a distance of approximately 12 miles. Since the biblical record states that the Israelites got up at daybreak on the seventh day, we assume that they had a walk ahead of them that would take a good part of the day. The greater part of that day, however, would be taken up by the destruction of the city and its inhabitants. According to *Halley's Bible Handbook*, "The walls of Jericho enclosed about 7 acres."

At the end of the seventh walk around Jericho the Israelites had to break their seven-day silence and shout their shout of victory. We get the impression that the priests had sounded their trumpets all the time during the daily walks. We may suppose that the trumpets were silent for a moment when Joshua gave the command for the people to shout and issued a warning about all the property of the people of Jericho that was under a ban and devoted to the Lord.

Many have tried to explain the miracle of the collapse of the city walls. The fact that it was a miracle that brought them down does not mean that God did not use natural causes. But since the Bible gives no indication what those causes were, we are left in the dark. We may say that God never performs magic in the sense that He does not use the laws He himself created to achieve His means. It is no sign of unbelief to think that there was an earthquake. Some have suggested that the shouts of the people mixed with or independent of the sound of the trumpets caused a vibration that made the walls collapse. Voices of singers are known to have caused glass to break. Whatever the natural cause, the timing was certainly a most miraculous element in the event. One of the miracles certainly was the fact that, while the walls collapsed, the part on which Rahab's house was remained standing.

Halley's Bible Handbook gives the following information about the walls of Jericho in an archeological note: "Dr. John Garstang, director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and of the Department of Antiquities of the Palestine Government, excavated the ruins of Jericho, 1929-36. He found pottery and scarab evidence that the city had been destroyed about 1400 B C, coinciding with Joshua's date; and, in a number of details, dug up evidence confirming the Biblical account in a most remarkable way. 'The wall fell down flat,' Dr. Garstang found that the wall did actually 'fall down flat.' The wall was double, the two walls being 15 ft apart; the outer wall, 6 ft thick; the inner wall, 12 ft thick; both being about 30 ft high. They were built, not very substantially, on faulty uneven foundations, of brick 4 inches thick and 1 to 2 ft long, laid in mud mortar. The two walls were linked together by houses built across the top, as Rahab's house 'on the wall.' Dr. Garstang found that the outer wall fell outwards, and down the hillside, dragging the inner wall and houses with it, the streaks of bricks gradually getting thinner down the slope. The foundation walls of the palace, 4 courses of stone high, remain, in situ, tilted outward... Dr. Garstang thinks there are indications that the wall was shaken down by an earthquake." In all honesty, it must be observed that some scholars object to Dr. Garstang's conclusions on the grounds that his findings may have pertained to a period preceding the city Joshua destroyed.

The number "seven" stands out in this chapter to the point that the symbolic significance forces itself upon us. Seven priests carried seven trumpets for seven days and on the seventh day the people walked seven times around Jericho. We could say that God works in "sevens." The Genesis account divides creation into seven days, the seventh being the Sabbath. There were $7 \times 7 = 49$ days between the Passover celebration and

Pentecost. It was on the fiftieth day after Jesus' resurrection that the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles. The fall of Jericho illustrates this principle by contrasting God's power with the power of men. "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit."¹ Whatever the physical force that destroyed the city, we must not discard the role of faith the Israelites displayed. According to the author of Hebrews, it was "By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had marched around them for seven days."²

Moses had laid down the general principles for the conquest of Canaan. We read: "When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves.. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God."³

If the prescribed treatment for Jericho seems harsh to us we must bear in mind the horror of the pagan practices of idolatry. It was the abomination of bringing human sacrifices in which infants were thrown into the flaming mouth of an idol that made the inhabitants of Canaan such a stench in God's nostrils. Richard S. Hess in *Joshua* seems to suggest that V. 21 does not really prove that every living being was exterminated. Speaking about the items that were to be placed in the sanctuary, Hess writes: "This is formulaic, a kind of checklist for what belongs to the sanctuary, rather than an inventory of what was purported to have been actually taken at Jericho. Therefore, the text does not indicate what was taken in defeat but indicates what would have been devoted to the sanctuary if it had been taken. Is the same also true of the list of those who were to be slaughtered in verse 21? Does the text tell the reader anything at all about the inhabitants of Jericho, other than the king, the army, and the family of Rahab?" This seems a rather kind effort to soften the blow and quite contrary to what Moses had ordered in Deuteronomy.

At the announcement of the destruction and the proclamation of the ban which would keep anyone from taking any loot for himself, the special treatment of Rahab and her family is mentioned. As soon as the walls collapsed, Joshua sent the two spies to Rahab's house to provide her and hers safe conduct out of the rubble. Being members of the cursed race, however, they were escorted to a place outside the camp of Israel. Eventually the ban must have been lifted because, according to Matthew's Gospel, Rahab married Salmon, the father of Boaz.⁴ *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* quotes Jerome, who wrote: "In the genealogy of the Savior none of the holy women are included, but only those whom the Scriptures blame, that He who came on behalf of sinners, being himself born of sinners, might destroy the sins of all."

There has been a lot of speculation about Rahab's house and about her person. Some Jewish Rabbis have suggested that Rahab married Joshua or that Salmon was one of the two spies who originally had entered her house. Since there is no Old Testament record about this, there is no reason to accept this as historical fact. Statements made by medieval pilgrims that they had seen the house of Rahab started the fable that Rahab's house was spared the final burning and leveling of the city. The only thing that can be concluded from the words "she lives among the Israelites to this day" is that the Book of Joshua was written while Rahab was still alive. This fact makes the book of Joshua into an eyewitness account.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary draws a spiritual conclusion from the fall of Jericho, stating: "Thus the fall of Jericho became the symbol and type of the overthrow of every worldly power before the Lord, when He should come to lead His people into Canaan and establish His kingdom upon earth.. On the ground of this event, the blowing of trumpets is frequently introduced in the writings of the prophets, as the signal and symbolical omen of the manifestations of the Lord in great judgments, through which He destroys one worldly power after another, and thus maintains and extends His kingdom upon earth, and leads it on

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1. Zech. 4:6
 2. Heb. 11:30
 3. Deut. 20:10-18
 4. See Matt. 1:5.

towards that completion to which it will eventually attain when He descends from heaven in His glory at the time of the last trump, with a great shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, to raise the dead and change the living, to judge the world, cast the devil, death, and hell into the lake of fire, create a new heaven and new earth, and in the new Jerusalem erect the tabernacle of God among men for all eternity (1 Cor 15:51ff.; 1 Thess 4:16-17; Rev 20:1 and 21).”

Toward the end of this chapter we find the remarkable curse Joshua pronounced upon anyone who would endeavor to rebuild Jericho. Bible scholars have disagreed about the implications of this curse, which did not take its effect until the time of King Ahab of Israel some 550 years later. We read in First Kings: “In Ahab’s time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun.”¹ Evidently, Jericho did not remain an uninhabited pile of rubble until that date. There is mention of the City of Palms in the time of the Judges.² And we read about Jericho at the time of King David: “So Hanun seized David’s men, shaved off half of each man’s beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away. When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, for they were greatly humiliated. The king said, ‘Stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back.’”³ Some believe that the sites may not have been identical and that the new Jericho was built at a different spot than the old city. But then Hiel’s rebuilding the wall could hardly have fallen under Joshua’s curse. Others understand that the rebuilding of the wall signifies that Jericho became anew a fortified city, whereas before it had been inhabited like a village without the benefit of the protection a city wall would provide. The Hebrew verb *banah*, however, means, “to build” in the widest sense of the word. We find the same word in the verse “Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.”⁴ *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* comments on the verse: “The rhythmical parallelism is unmistakable in this curse. The two last clauses express the thought that the builder of the town would pay for its restoration by the loss of all his sons, from the first-born to the very youngest. The word ‘buildeth,’ however, does not refer to the erection of houses upon the site of the town that had been burnt to ashes, but to the restoration of the town as a fortification.”

Joshua’s curse implies that the rubble of Jericho ought to be kept as a constant reminder of God’s wrath upon idolatry as it manifested itself in all its demonic excesses in Canaan. Some Bible scholars believe that Hiel did not lose all his sons to death in the rebuilding of the wall of Jericho, but that the mention of his oldest and youngest son indicates that the building was a long drawn out process. There seems to be some archeological evidence that bones of infants were entered into the foundation of Jericho’s rebuilt wall and also in the foundation of the gate. That would make the reference to Ahab, during whose reign Baal worship was rampant more understandable, since Jericho actually belonged to the southern kingdom of Judah, not to the kingdom of Israel.

The fall of Jericho was the ultimate proof of God’s election of Joshua as leader of the people of Israel. In a way it was obvious that Joshua had not caused the fall of the city; the event had been so supernatural that no human agency could have produced it. Joshua had been nothing more or less than God’s instrument through his obedient faith in God’s command. It was this reduction of his own power that made him the prominent leader whose fame spread, not only throughout Israel, but throughout the land. The inhabitants of Canaan came to realize who this opponent was and who the God was who made him do what he did.

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, reflects on the fall of Jericho with: “For the Christian, the fall of Jericho represents an example of the power of faith in God. Without this faith, nothing can happen. With this faith, however, and the faithful obedience that it brings about, the Christian can overcome any obstacle in life, no matter how great (cf. Heb. 11:30).”

f. The second assault, Part 1: the defeat at Ai and its consequences (7:1-26)

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1. I Kings 16:34
 2. See Judges 1:16; 3:13.
 3. II Sam. 10:4,5
 4. Gen. 8:20

1 But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel.

2 Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, "Go up and spy out the region." So the men went up and spied out Ai.

3 When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there."

4 So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai,

5 who killed about thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water.

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads.

7 And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"

8 O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?

9 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"

10 The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"

11 Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.

12 That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction.

13 "Go, consecrate the people. Tell them, 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow; for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it.'

14 "In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD takes shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD takes shall come forward man by man.

15 He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel!"

16 Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken.

17 The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zerahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken.

18 Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

19 Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."

20 Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done:

21 When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath.

23 They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD.

24 Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor.

25 Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.

26 Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary comments on this chapter: "The story of this chapter begins with a but. The Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was noised through all that country, so the foregoing chapter ends, and it left no room to doubt but that he would go on as he had begun conquering and to conquer. He did right, and observed his orders in every thing. But the children of Israel committed a trespass, and so set God against them; and then even Joshua's name and fame, his wisdom and courage, could do them no service. If we lose our God, we lose our friends, who cannot help us unless God be for us."

The first thing that strikes us when reading this chapter is the fact that what one man did affected the whole nation of Israel. Sin never constitutes an isolated incident. When Eve and Adam sinned they brought about the fall of all of creation. When Achan sinned he caused the whole of Israel to be without divine protection. This reveals the principle that God deals with humanity as if it is one person, whether this person be Adam who caused the fall or Jesus Christ who brought about reconciliation.

Another principle that is revealed in this story is that faith and overconfidence do not go together. The spies who went to Ai underestimated the enemy. They came back with the report that there were not many people in Ai and that an army of two or three thousand troops would be sufficient to take the city. Size does not determine strength. One microbe can kill the body. As the Song of Solomon states, "the little foxes ruin the vineyards."¹ As it turned out, the little town of Ai was a much greater obstacle than the invincible fortress of Jericho had been. The difference between the one and the other was determined by the greed of one man, Achan. Jericho had fallen because of the faith of the nation. Satan had been unable to save his citadel, but he had found a foothold in the heart of one man, which enabled him to bring about the defeat of the nation in the next campaign.

We are rarely aware of the fact that greed and faith cannot go together. We may not consider ourselves a greedy person, but yet we find ourselves wondering what we would do if we had the money to do it. The Hebrew text calls Achan's sin "a trespass." The word used is *ma'al*, which means "treachery." The word is derived from a word that means, "to cover." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: "In addition to the primary sense of 'trespass,' given in KJV, there may be an indication of the motivation through which the sin was committed. Most of the usages support the idea of 'faithlessness, treachery.' It is an act committed by a person who knows better but who, for selfish motives, acts in bad faith. The story of Achan bears out the attitude of treachery Josh 7:1. Joshua challenged Israel not to follow the example of Achan: 'Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit [ma'al] a trespass [ma'al] in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel?' Josh 22:20." Achan betrayed the cause of Israel by prioritizing his own interest. The cause of Israel was God's cause. Israel's conquest of the Promised Land was God's means to punish Canaan for its sin. We are told to "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to [us] as well."²

Somehow Achan must have thought he could commit sin and avoid discovery. His concept of God was seriously flawed to the point where he did not believe in God's omniscience. Achan was like the wicked man in the Book of Psalms who said: "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees."³

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, observes: "This corporate punishment is suggested by the perpetrator's genealogy. No other figure has been introduced in the book of Joshua with such detail about his family background. Four 'generations' are listed. Achan's sin is part of the action of the 'sons of Israel' who have acted unfaithfully. The specifics prepare the reader for the identification of Achan which proceeds in the opposite direction (from the general ancestor, Judah, to Achan) in verses 16-18. The father of Achan is Carmi, a name whose root means 'vineyard'. The name of the next figure in the line is Zabdi in the MT of Joshua 7. The root *zbd*, 'to give a gift', appears in other Hebrew names. Zabdi is called Zimri in 1 Chronicles 2:6. Zabdi's father is Zerah, a name meaning 'brightness, sunrise'. A Zerah also appears as the son of Judah in Genesis 38:30. The identification of Achan concludes with a note of his sin. The translation of the NIV, *took some of them*, obscures the fact that Achan took from the ban (*hērem*), *i.e.* from those items of Jericho that were

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1. Song 2:15
 2. Matt. 6:33
 3. Ps. 10:11

devoted to God.”

From the onset of the campaign against Ai something seems to be lacking. The whole plan for the battle of Ai was worked out from a human point of view. There was no apparent consultation of God in the matter. After the supernatural victory over Jericho this strikes us as a spiritual letdown. Achan’s sin must have caused changes in the spiritual climate in which Joshua and Israel had operated before. Had Joshua prayed before sending out his spies, God would have told him what was wrong. Not consulting God beforehand resulted in the loss of Israelite lives. Joshua and Israel learned their lesson the hard way.

Ai was the logical next step in the campaign. It was situated in the mountains in rather rugged territory about ten or twelve miles east of Jericho. Ai and Bethel formed the gate to the heartland of Canaan. Word of the fall of Jericho must have reached the people of Ai. It may be assumed that Ai thought its location in rugged, mountainous terrain could make it withstand a prolonged siege. The ruggedness of the countryside may be expressed in the word *Shebarim*. The NIV translates the word “stone quarries.” Most of the older versions leave the word un-translated. The Septuagint renders it “until they were broken.” It is unlikely, though, that *Shebarim* refers to the defeat of the Israelite army. The NIV’s rendering “stone quarry” makes more sense.

The spies must have underestimated the strength of Ai. The next chapter reveals that the population was 12,000.¹ It is not clear why the spies suggested that the people would be wearied in the battle of Ai. They had no reason to believe that the capture of Ai would be more strenuous than the battle of Jericho. The 3000 troops Joshua sent out to conquer Ai may have been three divisions. Achan’s sin must have cast such a spell upon the people that there occurred a lack of clear thinking. The sins we commit on earth influence the balance of power in the spiritual world above.

The mention of 36 men of Israel’s army losing their lives suggests that no Israelite life was lost in the battle of Jericho. Yet, we may assume that when the city was stormed after the collapse of the wall, the people of Jericho were not slaughtered without putting up some fierce resistance.

More than the loss of life, the fact that Israel had lost the battle brought the whole nation to its knees. The day that ought to have given them the second victory turned into a day of mourning. Joshua tore his clothes as a sign of grief and fell prostrate before the Lord, the other tribal leaders following his example.

Joshua’s prayer seems to put the blame for the defeat on God, as if God made a mistake in leading the people across the Jordan River into the Promised Land. The miracles of the Jordan crossing and the fall of Jericho were, all of a sudden, completely forgotten. Had Joshua been thinking clearly he would have asked: “What did we do wrong?” Instead he asked God: “What did You do wrong?” The only thing he blames himself for was that he and Israel with him were not content to stay east of the Jordan River, as if God’s promise had nothing to do with it.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Calvin makes some severe remarks on Joshua’s folly and want of faith under this reverse. But it may be paralleled by the conduct of most Christians in adversity. How few are there who can bear even temporal calamity calmly and patiently, even though they have abundant reason to know that temporal affliction is not only no sign of the displeasure of God, but the reverse! And when, through allowing secret sin to lurk within the soul, the Christian is overcome and brought to shame by his spiritual enemies, how much more seldom it is that he has the courage to gird up the loins of his soul and renew the conflict, in full confidence that victory will be his in the end! How much more frequently does he despair of victory, wish he had never undertaken the Christian profession, give up his belief in the protecting care and guidance of God, and desist, at least for a time, from the good fight of faith, to his own serious injury and to the detriment of God’s Church! ‘It is not,’ adds Calvin, ‘a new thing for pious minds, when they aspire to seek God with holy zeal, to obscure the light of faith by the vehemence and impetuosity of their affections. And in this way all prayers would be rendered valueless, did not the Lord in His boundless indulgence pardon them, and, wiping away all their stains, receive them as if they were pure. And yet while in thus freely expostulating they cast all their care upon God, this blunt simplicity, though it needs pardon, is yet far more acceptable than the feigned modesty and self restraint of the hypocrites.’ ”

Joshua’s human reaction was that this defeat was the beginning of a total and final downfall. The whole tone of his prayer suggests that God had let them down and that He consequently could no longer be relied upon. In saying, “What then will you do for your own great name?” Joshua tried to emulate Moses’ prayer after

1. See Josh. 8:25.

Israel's sin with the gold calf.¹ But Moses understood that what happened was not God's fault; it was Israel's sin.

The mention of the glory of God's name, however, produces God's answer to Joshua's prayer. It is an answer of unusual bluntness. God says to Joshua, "Stop praying and deal with the sin of Israel." Evidently, there are times when it is wrong to pray! Jesus illustrates this in the story of the person who leaves his gift at the altar and first goes to reconcile himself to his brother.² As we have seen, God treated the sin of Achan as the sin of the nation of which he was a part. It was the mention of the glory of God's name that accentuated awfulness of sin. As the apostle Paul says, sin results in a lack of glory. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."³

The collectiveness of Israel's guilt caused by Achan's act is expressed in the words: "Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions."

The Hebrew word rendered "violated" is *`abar* which literally means, "to cross over." The same word is used in the verse: "So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them."⁴ In the spiritual life there are boundaries that must be crossed and others that must not.

The Hebrew word, rendered "stand up" in V. 10 is *quwm*, "to rise." It occurs five times in this narrative. "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?" (V. 10), "That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies" (V. 12), "Go, consecrate the people" (v. 13), "You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it" (v. 13), and "Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks" (V. 26).

God told Joshua to "consecrate" the people. The Hebrew word *qadash* has the meaning of making things or persons ceremonially clean by setting them apart for the Lord. Declaring themselves to be set apart for God would bring them back under the umbrella of God's protection. It seems strange that God wanted Israel to go through this ritual of elimination in order to pinpoint the tribe, the clan and the person who was the cause of the defeat. God knew who it was but He wanted the people to find out by themselves. And when finally Achan was isolated he was not convicted until he confessed and the booty was produced to prove his guilt. The question as to what method was used to do the selection has been the subject of much discussion. Some Bible scholars believe that the Urim and the Thummim were used, others that lots were cast. That the latter was not uncommon in Israel is evident from the reference in the Book of Proverbs: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."⁵

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary explains the logistics of the selection: "As the tribes were divided into families, so these again were subdivided into houses, commonly called fathers' houses, and the fathers' houses again into men, i.e., fathers of families. ... Each of these was represented by its natural head, so that we must picture the affair as conducted in the following manner: in order to discover the tribe, the twelve tribe princes came before the Lord; and in order to discover the family, the heads of families of the tribe that had been taken, and so on to the end, each one in turn being subjected to the lot."

After the experience of defeat and humiliation of the whole nation, we would have expected Joshua to lash out at Achan. Instead he addresses him with tenderness and compassion. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments: "He might justly have called him 'thief,' and 'rebel,' 'Raca,' and 'thou fool,' but he called him 'son;' he might have adjured him to confess, as the high priest did our blessed Savior, or threatened him with the torture to extort a confession, but for love's sake he rather beseeches him: I pray thee make confession. This is an example to all not to insult over those that are in misery, though they have brought themselves into it by their own wickedness, but to treat even offenders with the spirit of meekness, not knowing, what we ourselves should have been and done if God had put us into the hands of our own counsels. It is likewise an example to magistrates, in executing justice, to govern their own passions with a strict and prudent hand, and never suffer themselves to be transported by them into any indecencies of

1. See Ex. 32:11-14.

2. See Matt. 5:13,14.

3. Rom. 3:23

4. Josh. 3:14

5. Prov. 16:33

behavior or language, no, not towards those that have given the greatest provocations. The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Let them remember the judgment is God's, who is Lord of his anger. This is the likeliest method of bringing offenders to repentance.”

The Pulpit Commentary adds: “This is no mere hypocritical affectation of tenderness. Joshua feels for the criminal, even though he is forced to put him to death. So in our own day the spectacle is not uncommon of a judge melted to tears as he passes sentence of death on the murderer. The expression seems almost to imply a belief that, though Achan must undergo the extremest penalty of the law in this world, Joshua entertained a hope that he might be forgiven in the next. It certainly proves that, stern as the law of Moses was, it was felt, at least in those early days, to be rather against the sin than the sinner that its severity was directed. In commenting upon the severity of the Mosaic covenant, whether towards offenders against its provisions or against the Canaanites, we must remember Bishop Butler's caution, that in this world we see but a very small portion of the whole counsel of God.”

The words “give glory to the LORD” either were or became the standard expression for reminding a person that he was “under oath.” We find the same words in the story of the healing of the man born blind when he was being examined by a council of Pharisees.¹ Giving glory and praise to God means recognizing that God knows every detail of the matter and that He is the only one who can judge the issue objectively.

Achan was not sentenced merely on the basis of identification by the casting of lots. It was his own confession that brought the death sentence upon him. We may assume that this confession assured the salvation of his soul in the world to come. Achan could have maintained his innocence against circumstantial evidence; the fact that he made a clear breast must have cleaned his slate.

There is an amazing similarity between the way Achan described his temptation and the sin of Eve. Sin enters the heart through the eye. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”² In the words of James: “Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”³

Achan recognized that his sin was primarily against God. Not only had he stolen items that were dedicated by ban to the Lord, but the essence of all sin is the offense against God's holiness, even though Israel was harmed by what he had done. David recognized this after he committed the sins of adultery and murder. In Psalm 51 he wrote: “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”⁴

The items Achan stole were a Babylonian robe, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels. *The Living Bible* paraphrases this: “a beautiful robe imported from Babylon, and some silver worth \$200, and a bar of gold worth \$500.”

Quoting from the book *Nineveh* by Layard, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Of all Asiatic nations, the Babylonians were the most noted for the weaving of cloth of divers colors. Into these stuffs gold threads were introduced into the woof of many hues. Amongst those who traded in ‘blue clothes and embroidered work’ with Tyro were the merchants of Asshur, or Assyria; and that the garments of Babylon were brought into Syria and greatly esteemed at a very early period, we learn from their being classed amongst the most precious articles of spoil, even with gold, in the time of Joshua.”

Achan had buried his stolen treasures in the ground inside his tent, probably thinking that he could produce them at a later date after other cities had been captured and the booty could be passed off as coming from another place except Jericho.

Even Achan's confession was not enough to convict him; it was only after the stolen items were found in exactly the way Achan had described that sentence was passed.

The fact that, evidently, not only Achan was executed but his whole family and all the livestock that was his, has evoked various comments and reactions. The Hebrew reads literally, “And all Israel stoned him with stones and burned them with fire after they stoned them with stones. The NIV reads: “Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them.” Some Bible scholars assume that the family was only forced to witness the execution, others that they were executed with Achan because of their involve-

1. See John 9:24.

2. Gen. 3:6

3. James 1:14,15

4. Ps. 51:4

ment in the crime. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "Since the divine law expressly forbade the children to be put to death for the fathers' sins (Deut 24:16), the conveyance of Achan's 'sons and ... daughters' to the place of execution might be only as spectators, that they might take warning by the parental fate; or, if they shared his punishment (Josh. 22:20), they had probably been accomplices in his crime: and, indeed, he could scarcely have dug a hole within his tent without his family being privy to it." The reference in Deuteronomy reads: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."¹ *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* reflects: "But for what reason, then, were Achan's cattle (oxen, sheep, and asses) taken out along with him? Certainly for no other purpose than to be stoned at the same time as he. The law in question only referred to the punishment of ordinary criminals, and therefore was not applicable at all to the present case, in which the punishment was commanded by the Lord himself. Achan had fallen under the ban by laying hands upon what had been banned, and consequently was exposed to the same punishment as a town that had fallen away to idolatry (Deut 13:16-17). The law of the ban was founded upon the assumption, that the conduct to be punished was not a crime of which the individual only was guilty, but one in which the whole family of the leading sinner, in fact everything connected with him, participated. Thus, in the case before us, the things themselves had been abstracted from the booty by Achan alone; but he had hidden them in his tent, buried them in the earth, which could hardly have been done so secretly that his sons and daughters knew nothing of it." The place of execution was called Achor, meaning "trouble." The heap of stone erected over Achan and all that was his became a monument of warning and of hope. In prophesying the restoration of Israel's relationship with God, the prophet Hosea said, "There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt."² God's monuments never convey only a single and negative message and the positive aspect always wins over the negative one. The cross of Christ is a case in point.

g. The second assault, Part 2: the victory at Ai (8:1-29)

1 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.

2 You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city."

3 So Joshua and the whole army moved out to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night

4 with these orders: "Listen carefully. You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on the alert.

5 I and all those with me will advance on the city, and when the men come out against us, as they did before, we will flee from them.

6 They will pursue us until we have lured them away from the city, for they will say, 'They are running away from us as they did before.' So when we flee from them,

7 you are to rise up from ambush and take the city. The LORD your God will give it into your hand.

8 When you have taken the city, set it on fire. Do what the LORD has commanded. See to it; you have my orders."

9 Then Joshua sent them off, and they went to the place of ambush and lay in wait between Bethel and Ai, to the west of Ai-but Joshua spent that night with the people.

10 Early the next morning Joshua mustered his men, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai.

11 The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it. They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city.

12 Joshua had taken about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city.

1. Deut. 24:16

2. Hos. 2:15

13 They had the soldiers take up their positions—all those in the camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it. That night Joshua went into the valley.

14 When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah. But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city.

15 Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled toward the desert.

16 All the men of Ai were called to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city.

17 Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel. They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel.

18 Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city." So Joshua held out his javelin toward Ai.

19 As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire.

20 The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising against the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction, for the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the desert had turned back against their pursuers.

21 For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that smoke was going up from the city, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai.

22 The men of the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives.

23 But they took the king of Ai alive and brought him to Joshua.

24 When Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the desert where they had chased them, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in it.

25 Twelve thousand men and women fell that day—all the people of Ai.

26 For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai.

27 But Israel did carry off for themselves the livestock and plunder of this city, as the LORD had instructed Joshua.

28 So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day.

29 He hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body from the tree and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate. And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.

The capture of Ai is the first example of military strategic ruse in the Bible. The story is given in very vivid detail. Ai was almost due west of Jericho but the Israelite army approached it from the north, because of the terrain. In the light of the opening words of this chapter we conclude that the way God showed Joshua how to capture Ai was meant as an encouragement to make him overcome his sense of failure in connection with the first attempt. While the fall of Jericho was an act of God, the capture of Ai and Bethel was the result of human effort and initiative. God told Joshua how to proceed, but Israel had to do the fighting. Joshua was personally involved in the battle, a fact we do not observe in the first attack upon Ai. The words "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged" are similar to those God spoke to Joshua shortly after the death of Moses. We read in the first chapter, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."¹ The Hebrew word *chathath*, rendered "discouraged" literally means, "to prostrate," which is what Joshua did after the first abortive attempt to capture Ai. Joshua needed emotional healing and the creative Word of God provided this for him. Through Joshua this encouragement would affect all of Israel.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary comments: "This intimates that the sin of Achan, and the consequences of it, had been a very great discouragement to Joshua, and made his heart almost ready to fail. Corruptions within the church weaken the hands, and damp the spirits, of her guides and helpers, more than

1. Josh. 1:9

oppositions from without; treacherous Israelites are to be dreaded more than malicious Canaanites. But God bids Joshua not be dismayed; the same power that keeps Israel from being ruined by their enemies shall keep them from ruining themselves.”

The strategic plan God unfolded to Joshua proves how misguided the judgment had been of those who had told Joshua “Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there.”¹ Their mistake had been in their evaluation of numbers. As God can use one or two people to make a difference, so can Satan. It is true that there were only a few men in Ai, if the whole population added up to only twelve thousand, there must have been only a few thousand fighting men, but the whole army of Israel would be needed to gain the victory. As it turned out two towns would be involved in the battle, Ai and Bethel. Whether this possibility had been overlooked earlier is not clear.

God ordered Joshua to set an ambush behind Ai. Although it seems clear enough that thirty thousand men were involved in this operation, Bible scholars differ in opinion as to how many were involved and where they were placed. The problem is due to the fact that in V. 3 thirty thousand troops are mentioned and in V. 12 only five thousand. The difference may be a copying mistake. Another explanation would be that the five thousand were part of the thirty thousand to whom a specific task was given in the ambush which placed them in closer vicinity of the town than the others. In his commentary *Joshua*, Richard S. Hess observes that ambushes were not unknown in Old Testament times. He quotes a passage in *The Annals of Ashurnasirpal* which describes the same kind of ruse. The king of Ai could have been aware of the possibility, but his first successful attempt to rout the Israelites must have rendered him and his people careless.

The next morning all the troops were in place when the first daylight appeared. The Israelite army approached the city from the north, descending into the valley that separated them from the city. Seen from the city, the approach of a whole army coming down the slope must have had the right psychological effect upon the people of Ai; the sight captivated them to the point where they forgot to look in any other direction. Their previous success, which they must have credited to their own prowess, stimulated them to the point where they threw all prudence overboard. All of Ai’s fighting men were drawn into the battle leaving the city proper without any defense. We may assume that the Israelites put up some token of resistance before taking to their heels in order to draw away the whole army from the place that ought to have been defended. It is always important in a war to bear in mind the reason for which one fights. Wars are lost when the attention is diverted from the real issues. This is true both in physical and spiritual warfare.

The mention of Arabah is not very helpful to pinpoint the place of the battle. The word usually refers to a desert or wilderness. If the Jordan Valley is meant, it suggests that the Israelite army had fled back uphill from where the river was visible. It could also be the plain itself north of Ai into which the army had descended for the attack.

Some manuscripts, among which is the Septuagint, omit Bethel. But since the king of Bethel is mentioned later as one of the subjugated monarchs, Bethel was most likely involved in this stage of the battle. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* states, “And all the people in the town were called together to pursue the Israelites, and were drawn away from the town, so that not a man, i.e., not a single soldier who could take part in the pursuit, remained either in Ai or the neighboring town of Bethel, and the town stood open behind them. It is evident from v. 17 that the inhabitants of Bethel, which was about three hours’ journey from Ai, took part in the battle, probably in consequence of a treaty which the king of Ai had made with them in the expectation of a renewed and still stronger attack on the part of the Israelites. Nothing further is known upon this point; nor can anything be inferred from the fact that the king of Bethel is included in the list of the kings slain by Joshua (Josh 12:16). Consequently, we cannot decide whether the Bethelites came to the help of the Aites for the first time on the day of the battle itself, or, what is more probable, had already sent men to Ai, to help to repulse the expected attack of the Israelites upon that town.”

The Hebrew word for “called” in “All the men of Ai were called to pursue them” is more expressive than the English text suggests. The word *za`aq* means, “to shriek.” We find the same word in the verse, “During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and *cried out*, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.”² In the context of this story it acquires a meaning of such

1. Josh. 7:3
2. Ex. 2:23

excitement that all caution is thrown to the wind. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments, “This gives us the scene in all its picturesque detail. We hear the exultant shout of the men of Ai, as they thought the victory won.” Their excitement cost them dearly.

God told Joshua when to turn around and stand. We read, “Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city.’ So Joshua held out his javelin toward Ai.” The Hebrew word *kiydown*, rendered “javelin” has multiple meanings. It can mean a lance, shield, spear, something to strike with, or even a target. Joshua’s holding up of the javelin reminds us of the battle with Amalek when Joshua commanded the army and Moses interceded with his hands raised to heaven. We read: “As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning.”¹ It was more than a sign for those in ambush to enter the city; it was a gesture of prayer that assured victory. “For Joshua did not draw back the hand that held out his javelin until he had destroyed all who lived in Ai” (v. 26).

In the battle of Ai there is also a parallel with Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea. Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, points out “There are four comparisons with the Red Sea crossing: (1) in Exodus 14:16 the same introduction is used as that in Jos. 8:18; (2) in both passages, the leader is instructed to *hold out* ... an instrument in his hand; (3) as a result of his doing so Israel is saved and its enemy is defeated; and (4) there is an emphasis in both accounts upon strength or power, symbolized by references to the hand or arm. A difference exists in so far as Moses used a staff ... while Joshua uses a sickle sword ... The staff is the symbol of Moses’ guidance through the desert, while Joshua’s weapon is for battle. A careful study of the structure of the text reveals a word-for-word parallel between the divine charge, *Hold out towards Ai the javelin that is in your hand*, and Joshua’s obedience, *So Joshua held out his javelin towards Ai*. This literal execution of God’s word is the key to the mission’s success. Between these two phrases is the divine promise *for into your hand I will deliver the city*. The *hand* of Joshua is mentioned three times in these lines, representing his leadership over all that occurs. Thus this leadership is divinely appointed before the defeat of Ai is completed.”

We must assume that at this point the Israelite army had already halted. It is difficult to imagine Joshua holding out his javelin while running backwards. But the Israelites did not counterattack before they saw the city go up in smoke. The terrain must have prevented the army of Ai to escape the attacking armies front and back by fleeing to the side. The KJV reads “they had no power to flee this way or that way” suggesting that escape was not only a physical impossibility but also that they sustained such a blow to their fighting morale that resistance ebbed away at the sight of their burning city. The defeat was complete; the whole army was slaughtered with the exception of the king of Ai. In all likelihood this king was executed with some sentencing ceremony and his body hanged. As far as we know the Israelites did not kill people by hanging but sometimes a body was hanged to express the horror of the crime that led to the execution. A body was, however, not allowed to be kept hanging after sundown. Joshua’s decision to take the body down before sunset was based upon the law that stated: “If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.”²

h. The covenant at Mount Ebal (8:30-35)

30 Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel,

31 as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses — an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings.

32 There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written.

33 All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it — the priests, who were Levites. Half

1. Ex. 17:11

2. Deut. 21:22,23

of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel.

34 Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law — the blessings and the curses — just as it is written in the Book of the Law.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.

In the ceremony described in these verses, Joshua carried out to the letter the instructions Moses had given to the people, as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy.¹ One might wonder why this ritual was observed at this particular moment instead of earlier. Some ancient manuscripts have placed this section at other places. In one of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments, for instance, these verses are found at the beginning of Chapter Five. The Septuagint places them after Chapter Nine, Verse Two. One obvious explanation is that Mount Ebal, mentioned by Moses as the place where the celebration was to take place, was not accessible before the fall of Ai. There are, however, various unresolved problems in connection with the placement of this section in the Book of Joshua, details of which present no hindrance to our study of the message.

Richard S. Hess observes in his commentary *Joshua*, “In the sequence of Joshua’s story, the external events, such as the attacks on Jericho and on Ai, alternate with the internal events, such as the Passover celebration, the punishment of Achan and the covenant celebration. The internal events provide the spiritual center for the external ones. This is nowhere more true than in the account of the covenant at Mount Ebal.. Having introduced covenant concerns with the ‘ban’ and its violation in Joshua 7 – 8, this covenant-making ceremony re-establishes Israel’s relationship with God.”

Another interesting problem is that the Samaritan version of the Pentateuch has Mount Gerizim at the places where the Hebrew text has Mount Ebal. Adam Clarke suggests in his *Commentary* “that the Jews have here corrupted the text through their enmity to the Samaritans.” The *Commentary* states, “On all hands it is allowed that Gerizim abounds with springs, gardens, and orchards, and that it is covered with a beautiful verdure, while Ebal is as naked and as barren as a rock. On this very account the former was highly proper for the ceremony of blessing, and the latter for the ceremony of cursing.” *The Pulpit Commentary* adds, “We are told that Joshua could not have ventured to trust himself so far in the heart of a hostile country. But why not? Gerizim was not more than twenty miles from Ai. The Canaanites, we are told, were panic stricken at Joshua’s success. The Gibeonites were not disposed to offer any hindrance to his progress; on the contrary, they hastened to form an alliance with him. And these solemn religious rites, performed by a people so clearly under the protection of the Most High, were more likely to increase than lessen the awe felt by the surrounding tribes. The only difficulty is that the women and children (v. 35) are expressly said to have gone thither also, and it seems improbable that they, whom we have supposed to have been left under a guard at Gilgal, should have been brought so far while the country was as yet unsubdued. And the difficulty is increased by finding Joshua again at Gilgal in . . . Joshua 9:6. But there is the hypothesis that this was another Gilgal to fall back upon, and this . . . is an extremely probable one. The suggestion of many commentators, that the passage has been transposed, is, of course, possible. We can only leave the difficulty unsolved, as one which a fuller knowledge of the facts, could we obtain it, would clear up at once. But we may be sure that if the passage were an interpolation, some explanation would have been given of the circumstances which seem to us so perplexing. And on the other hand we must remember that, as has been already contended, the notion that the whole camp of Israel performed this journey at a time when stupefaction had seized upon the Canaanitish tribes, though involving some amount of impossibility, is by no means impossible.”

From a military point of view Joshua’s act was foolish. Strategically it would have been advantageous had Joshua capitalized on the victory over Jericho and Ai and continued his victorious advance. This pause of worship was a recognition of the fact that the victory came from God and not from Israel’s superior military tactics.

The ceremony is only given in outline form, suggesting that the readers would be familiar with the details given in Deuteronomy. The altar built of stones that must have been available in abundance was the first one built in the Promised Land. Mount Ebal being the bald mountain, it would be on the mountain of the curse

1. See Deut. 27:1-8.

that the altar was erected in order to emphasize that God would turn the curse into blessing. We are reminded of Paul's profound statement: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" ¹

The two kinds of sacrifices offered on the altar on Mount Ebal were the burnt offering and the fellowship offering or thank offering. The burnt offering was the highest kind of sacrifice that could be brought. It expressed total surrender to God on the basis of love. It conveyed the principle of what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls "the blood of the eternal covenant," ² in which God, the Son, surrenders to God, the Father, because of love divine. That sacrifice surpasses human understanding although humans bring it. The fellowship or thank offering is an act of grateful worship for grace and pardon in the removal of human sin. In bringing these sacrifices, the Israelites demonstrated that they understood how God could give them the victory that brought them into possession of the land of His promise.

Joshua's copying of the law in the presence of representatives of the people was also in accordance with the instructions Moses had given in Deuteronomy. ³ Bible scholars do not agree about what part of the law Joshua wrote on the plastered stones. Some suggest that it was the Ten Commandments, others that it was the blessings and curses recorded in Deuteronomy. Some believe both. There is also disagreement about what stones were used for the inscription. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states about the words "Upon the stones": "Not those of the altar but large pillars, such as the seven-foot-high stele of the famous Code of Hammurabi, with its 3,654 lines of text. According to Deut 27:2-4,8, these stones were to be plastered to receive the inscription. The Egyptians often whitewashed stone before writing or painting on it in black ink. Several stelae, about eight feet tall and whitewashed, were found at Byblos in conjunction with a temple dated about 200 BC. We can only speculate about how much of the Mosaic law was inscribed upon the plastered stones, very possibly Deut 5-26, however. The Behistun Rock inscriptions are about three times as long as Deuteronomy."

Moses had given specific instructions as to where each of the tribes would stand during the ceremony. We read in Deuteronomy: "When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali." ⁴ During the ceremony Joshua deviated from Moses' instructions in that he read the blessings and curses himself instead of having them read by the designated tribes. We may assume that the whole nation answered each part of the reading with a thunderous "amen!"

From *The Pulpit Commentary*, we copy: "Origen's explanation of the spiritual meaning of this passage is noteworthy, even though somewhat farfetched. He regards those of the tribes who stood on Mount Gerizim to bless, as the type of those who are led, not by fear of God's threatenings, but by a longing for God's promises and blessings; those who stood on Mount Ebal to curse, as the type of those who are driven by the fear of punishment to obey the will of God, and these finally attain salvation. The former, he adds, are the more noble of the two; but Jesus, who reads the hearts, gives each their proper station, and places some on Mount Ebal to curse, not that they themselves may receive the curse, but, by regarding the curse pronounced on sinners, may learn thereby how to escape it."

i. Summary of the threat against Israel (9:1-2)

1 Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things — those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)—

2 they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel.

It took the kings of Canaan a while to get their act together. It could be that the initial success scored by the people of Ai had lulled them into a sense of false security, which made them think that if a

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1. Gal. 3:13
 2. See Heb. 13:20.
 3. See Deut. 27:3.
 4. Deut. 27:12,13

small city like Ai could defeat the Israelites the larger ones would have a better chance. Their sense of security failed, however, when Ai was taken and destroyed. But for them the more disturbing event must have been the ceremony at the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal. It is usually the spiritual factor that triggers demonic resistance. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* correctly observes: "Observe, what induced them now at last to enter upon this consultation. When they heard thereof (v. 1), not only of the conquest of Jericho and Ai, but of the convention of the states of Mount Ebal, of which we have an account immediately before, -when they heard that Joshua, as if he thought himself already completely master of the country, had had all his people together, and had read the laws to them by which they must be governed, and taken their promises to submit to those laws, -then they perceived the Israelites were in good earnest, and thought it was high time for them to bestir themselves. The pious devotion of God's people sometimes provokes and exasperates their enemies more than any thing else."

Richard S. Hess, in his commentary *Joshua*, suggests that it was ultimately Achan's sin that caused the kings of Canaan to unite in their resistance against Israel. We read: "Who can say what would have happened had Achan not sinned? Perhaps the battle at Ai could have been Israel's last. The other nations of Canaan would have responded like Rahab (and the Gibeonites) with belief in the one God of Israel, and Israel would have completely occupied the land. It is only with these verses that the reader of Joshua begins to realize the consequences of Achan's sin. The following chapters introduce the transition from a victorious people of God whose occupation of the land could have been the relatively simple matter of defeating those already discouraged to an unending history of battle, bloodshed, and idolatry that would haunt Israel through its history." It seems that the author does not take into account the resilience of demonic resistance and the stubbornness of the human heart. As the case of the Gibeonites indicates, surrender of the Canaanites was not an option. They only succeeded in having their lives spared because of successful deceit. Whereas enemy cities outside the Promised Land could be treated with lenience, that opportunity did not pertain to Canaan. In the instructions Moses left regarding the treatment the Israelites were to mete out to the Canaanites, we read: "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God."¹ Only total rejection of idolatry with all its horrible practices and conversion to the God of Israel could have achieved such an end. That would have been as probable as the conversion of Satan himself. The only alternative mentioned in Exodus would have been a mass emigration of the original inhabitants to another country. God had said to Moses: "I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you. Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you."²

j. The Gibeonite exception (9:3-27)

3 *However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai,*

4 *they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended.*

5 *The men put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy.*

6 *Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us."*

7 *The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?"*

8 *"We are your servants," they said to Joshua. But Joshua asked, "Who are you and where do you come from?"*

1. Deut. 20:16-18

2. Ex. 23:31-33

9 They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt, 10 and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan—Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth. 11 And our elders and all those living in our country said to us, 'Take provisions for your journey; go and meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; make a treaty with us." ' 12 This bread of ours was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and moldy it is. 13 And these wineskins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey." 14 The men of Israel sampled their provisions but did not inquire of the LORD. 15 Then Joshua made a treaty of peace with them to let them live, and the leaders of the assembly ratified it by oath. 16 Three days after they made the treaty with the Gibeonites, the Israelites heard that they were neighbors, living near them. 17 So the Israelites set out and on the third day came to their cities: Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. 18 But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders, 19 but all the leaders answered, "We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now. 20 This is what we will do to them: We will let them live, so that wrath will not fall on us for breaking the oath we swore to them." 21 They continued, "Let them live, but let them be woodcutters and water carriers for the entire community." So the leaders' promise to them was kept. 22 Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, "Why did you deceive us by saying, 'We live a long way from you,' while actually you live near us? 23 You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God." 24 They answered Joshua, "Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this. 25 We are now in your hands. Do to us whatever seems good and right to you." 26 So Joshua saved them from the Israelites, and they did not kill them. 27 That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose. And that is what they are to this day.

Several cities under the leadership of Gibeon decided not to join the confederacy that intended to fight the Israelite invasion. The cities are mentioned in V. 17 as "Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim." There is no mention of a king in connection with them, which makes *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* consider them to be a republic. The people in these places shared in the fear of the other king-cities, but they chose rather to forgo their liberty than to fight to death for their freedom. The fact that they resorted to a ruse suggests that they did not expect the Israelites to accept mere surrender. We, therefore, believe the comments of *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* to be incorrect. Quoting Grotius, *The Commentary* states: "As Grotius correctly observes, what they wished for was 'a friendly alliance, by which both their territory and also full liberty would be secured to themselves.' "

There is an interesting difference in the way translators of V. 4 interpreted the Hebrew word *tsayar*. The NIV, in accordance with most versions, renders it: "They went as a delegation." The RSV reads: "They went and made ready provisions." *Tsayar* is derived from *tsiyar*, which conveys a sense of pressure and can be rendered "a hinge," "a throe," or "a herald." *Tsiyar* in turn comes from *tsuwr* meaning "to confine." It can also mean, "to bind up," or "to put in bags." Seeing that wineskins were used, the idea of preparing provisions for a trip may also be conveyed.

The Gibeonites did a good job in disguising themselves. Their appearance as people who had made a long and exhausting journey must have been very convincing. They presented themselves to Joshua and the lead-

ers of Israel at Gilgal. Bible scholars have argued about whether this is the Gilgal east of Jordan where the men of Israel underwent the rite of circumcision and celebrated the Passover, or whether there was another Gilgal close to Ai and Bethel. That there was another place with the same name may be inferred from Moses' words in Deuteronomy: "When the LORD your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses. As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan, west of the road, toward the setting sun, near the great trees of Moreh, in the territory of those Canaanites living in the Arabah in the vicinity of Gilgal."¹

In spite of their clever charade, the Gibeonites did not avoid suspicion. We read: "The men of Israel said to the Hivites, 'But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?' " *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes correctly: "It is strange they should have had such a suspicion, as the Gibeonites had acted so artfully; and it is as strange that, having such a suspicion, they acted with so little caution." The Gibeonites displayed an amazing knowledge of Israel's history from their supernatural deliverance from Egypt to the defeat of the kings of Heshbon and Bashan. This knowledge suggests that there was some form of trade between Canaan and Egypt or that their cities were on a trade route on which merchants traveled, who told their stories. They stated that they had come to the Israelites "because of the fame of the LORD your God." Their words, however, fall short of Rahab's confession: "The LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." We may assume that their lives would have been saved if they had acknowledged the Lord and turned from their idol worship to the living God. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* states correctly: "Their falsehood cannot be justified, nor ought it to be drawn into a precedent. We must not do evil that good may come. Had they owned their country but renounced the idolatries of it, resigning the possession of it to Israel and themselves to the God of Israel, we have reason to think Joshua would have been directed by the oracle of God to spare their lives, and they needed not to have made these pretensions." The attitude of the Gibeonites exemplifies the tendency of human nature to do everything in its struggle for survival except surrender to God. The only lifesaving way is to surrender oneself unconditionally to God, even if this means death. As Jesus said: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."² It is in our effort to keep control that we lose.

We read that the men of Israel sampled their provisions. The word "sample" is the rendering of the Hebrew word *laqach*, "to take." This can mean that they examined the food or that they actually ate it. That is the way the word *laqach* is used in the verse, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."³ Some Bible scholars interpret it that way, believing that there was an exchange of bread and salt to seal a covenant, as was the custom of the time. It is difficult to imagine, though, that the Israelites would take a piece of moldy bread and put it in their mouth, salt or no salt. The text does state clearly that they made a covenant without consulting the Lord on the matter. That they actually did eat may be suggested by some play-on-words in Hebrew, which reads: "and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD," which is the reading of the KJV. *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "Most commentators prefer this rendering to that of the margin, 'and they received the men because of their victuals.' The natural explanation — though several others are given ... would seem to be that the Israelites relied on the evidence of their senses, instead of upon the counsel of God. They could see the condition of the garments, sacks, and wine skins of the Gibeonites. They tasted of their victuals to convince themselves of the truth of those statements of which the sight was insufficient to take cognizance." Joshua made the treaty and the leaders of Israel confirmed it by swearing an oath. It is understood that the Gibeonites bound themselves by the same oath to the Lord, whom they served not, which could be considered a form of perjury.

The Israelites discovered the deception three days later, but they considered themselves bound by their oath to God. When several centuries later King Saul broke that covenant, Israel suffered the consequences. We read: "During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, 'It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.' The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not

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1. Deut.11:29,30
 2. Luke 9:24
 3. Gen. 3:6

a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to [spare] them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.)”¹

When the truth about the Gibeonites was discovered the whole nation turned against its leaders. We read: “The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders.” They had their reasons to be displeased. The reason for the discontent must have been the failure to consult the Lord in the matter, more than against the entering into a covenant with the enemy. The possibility of declaring the treaty void must have been brought up, although we do not read this, but the answer given to the people, “We have given them our oath by the LORD, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now,” strongly suggests that the matter had been discussed.

It is true that a treaty made with people who act in bad faith cannot stand up to legal scrutiny. But the Bible considers the use of the Name of God so sacred that breaking a promise given by referring to God’s Name is considered a most serious sin. It is the testimony of God that is at stake in such a matter. David would later write in one of his psalms: “LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who keeps his oath even when it hurts.”² *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “But how could the elders of Israel consider themselves bound by their oath to grant to the Gibeonites the preservation of life which had been secured to them by the treaty they had made, when the very supposition upon which the treaty was made, viz., that the Gibeonites did not belong to the tribes of Canaan, was proved to be false, and the Gibeonites had studiously deceived them by pretending that they had come from a very distant land? As they had been absolutely forbidden to make any treaties with the Canaanites, it might be supposed that, after the discovery of the deception which had been practiced upon them, the Israelitish rulers would be under no obligation to observe the treaty which they had made with the Gibeonites in full faith in the truth of their word. And no doubt from the standpoint of strict justice this view appears to be a right one. But the princes of Israel shrank back from breaking the oath which, as is emphatically stated in v. 19, they had sworn by Jehovah the God of Israel, not because they assumed, as Hauff supposes, ‘that an oath simply regarded as an outward and holy transaction had an absolutely binding force,’ but because they were afraid of bringing the name of the God of Israel into contempt among the Canaanites, which they would have done if they had broken the oath which they had sworn by this God, and had destroyed the Gibeonites. They were bound to observe the oath which they had once sworn, if only to prevent the sincerity of the God by whom they had sworn from being rendered doubtful in the eyes of the Gibeonites; but they were not justified in taking the oath.”

When Joshua confronted the Gibeonites with their deception, they answered that they knew about Moses’ command to kill all the inhabitants of Canaan and that they considered themselves doomed unless they pretended to be residents of a place outside Canaan. It seems amazing that knowledge, that could be considered privileged information, meant for Israelite ears only, was somehow passed on to Israel’s enemy. Because of their deceitfulness Joshua put the Gibeonites under a curse by condemning them to slavery.

They did, however, not become slaves of the Israelites but slaves of the Lord; they were given the duty of cutting firewood for the altar and bringing water for the service in the tabernacle and later in the temple. One wonders how much of a curse is involved in that kind of service! The last verse of this chapter adds that they also served “the community,” but that could mean that their service to the Lord would benefit all of Israel.

It appears that David officially incorporated the descendants of these people into the temple service and that, at least some of them, survived the Babylonian captivity. We read in Ezra: “They also brought 220 of the temple servants — a body that David and the officials had established to assist the Levites. All were registered by name.”³ The Book of Chronicles reports their resettlement in the land. We read: “The people of Judah were taken captive to Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. Now the first to resettle on their own property in their own towns were some Israelites, priests, Levites and temple servants.”⁴ The KJV calls them Nethinims in both Scripture references, meaning “the given ones.” Some Bible scholars, however, voice doubt that the “Nethinims” were really the descendants of these Gibeonites. *The International Standard*

1. See II Sam 21:1,2.
2. Ps. 15:1,2,4
3. Ezra 8:20
4. I Chron. 9:1,2

Bible Encyclopaedia, for instance, states: "It is no doubt tempting to see in the Gibeonites the earliest Nethinim, but another tradition traces their origin to a gift of David and the princes for the service of the Levites (Ezra 8:20). Their names, too, indicate diversity of origin; for besides being mostly un-Hebrew in aspect, some of them are found elsewhere in the Old Testament as names of non-Israelitish tribes."

k. Victory over the leader of Jerusalem and the coalition of southern Canaan (10:1-43)

1 Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and were living near them.

2 He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters.

3 So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon.

4 "Come up and help me attack Gibeon," he said, "because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites."

5 Then the five kings of the Amorites — the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon — joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

6 The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: "Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined forces against us."

7 So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men.

8 The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."

9 After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise.

10 The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, who defeated them in a great victory at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah.

11 As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

12 On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon."

13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.

14 There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

15 Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

16 Now the five kings had fled and hidden in the cave at Makkedah.

17 When Joshua was told that the five kings had been found hiding in the cave at Makkedah,

18 he said, "Roll large rocks up to the mouth of the cave, and post some men there to guard it.

19 But don't stop! Pursue your enemies, attack them from the rear and don't let them reach their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand."

20 So Joshua and the Israelites destroyed them completely — almost to a man — but the few who were left reached their fortified cities.

21 The whole army then returned safely to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah, and no one uttered a word against the Israelites.

22 Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me."

23 So they brought the five kings out of the cave — the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon.

24 When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, "Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks.

25 Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is

what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight."

26 Then Joshua struck and killed the kings and hung them on five trees, and they were left hanging on the trees until evening.

27 At sunset Joshua gave the order and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had been hiding. At the mouth of the cave they placed large rocks, which are there to this day.

28 That day Joshua took Makkedah. He put the city and its king to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it. He left no survivors. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

29 Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Makkedah to Libnah and attacked it.

30 The LORD also gave that city and its king into Israel's hand. The city and everyone in it Joshua put to the sword. He left no survivors there. And he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.

31 Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Libnah to Lachish; he took up positions against it and attacked it.

32 The LORD handed Lachish over to Israel, and Joshua took it on the second day. The city and everyone in it he put to the sword, just as he had done to Libnah.

33 Meanwhile, Horam king of Gezer had come up to help Lachish, but Joshua defeated him and his army — until no survivors were left.

34 Then Joshua and all Israel with him moved on from Lachish to Eglon; they took up positions against it and attacked it.

35 They captured it that same day and put it to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it, just as they had done to Lachish.

36 Then Joshua and all Israel with him went up from Eglon to Hebron and attacked it.

37 They took the city and put it to the sword, together with its king, its villages and everyone in it. They left no survivors. Just as at Eglon, they totally destroyed it and everyone in it.

38 Then Joshua and all Israel with him turned around and attacked Debir.

39 They took the city, its king and its villages, and put them to the sword. Everyone in it they totally destroyed. They left no survivors. They did to Debir and its king as they had done to Libnah and its king and to Hebron.

40 So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded.

41 Joshua subdued them from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and from the whole region of Goshen to Gibeon.

42 All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.

43 Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

This is one of the most amazing chapters in the whole Old Testament. The miracle of the standing still of the sun is only surpassed by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a way that was completely unforeseen and unexpected, the ruse of the Gibeonites turned out to be a catalyst for Israel's rapid victory. Paul's words in Romans certainly apply here: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."¹ Had it not been for the betrayal of the cause by the Gibeonites, the kings of southern Canaan would not have taken arms against it and exposed themselves to such a rapid destruction by Israel.

The chapter can be divided into six sections:

Vv. 1-8, the forming of a confederacy of Canaanite kings who attack Gibeon and Joshua's coming to their rescue.

Vv. 9-10, Joshua's surprise attack and the flight of the attackers.

Vv. 11-14, God's supernatural intervention in the battle in the rain of hailstones or meteorites and the standing still of the sun and moon in answer to Joshua's command.

V. 15, end of the campaign and return of the army to Gilgal.

Vv. 16-27 report on the fate of the five kings.

Vv. 28-43 details of the capture of seven cities.

1. Rom. 8:28

Upon hearing about Gibeon's joining of the enemy, Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem took the initiative for a confederacy with four other kings of the area. Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon joined him in a campaign against their traitor. Apparently, Gibeon was one of the larger cities and its loss to the Canaanite cause was considered to be a severe blow to the security of the other cities.

We do not know how much time elapsed between the conquest of Ai and the events described in this chapter. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* suggests, without any apparent reason, that Israel's campaign had slowed down to the point that some people began to criticize Joshua for his inactivity. We read: "Joshua and the hosts of Israel had now been a good while in the land of Canaan, and no great matters were effected; they were made masters of Jericho by a miracle, of Ai by stratagem, and of Gibeon by surrender, and that was all; hitherto the progress of their victories had not seemed proportional to the magnificence of their entry and the glory of their beginnings. Those among them that were impatient of delays, it is probable, complained of Joshua's slowness, and asked why they did not immediately penetrate into the heart of the country, before the enemy could rally their forces to make head against them, why they stood trifling, while they were so confident both of their title and of their success. Thus Joshua's prudence, perhaps, was censured as slothfulness, cowardice, and want of spirit."

For Jerusalem the duplicity of Gibeon was an even worse threat to its security than Israel's capture and destruction of that city would have been. Evidently, Adoni-Zedek considered that a direct attack upon Israel was doomed to fail, but a capture of Gibeon with an appropriate punishment of its inhabitants seemed to be a reasonable and reachable goal. Since the four cities of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon were all within a few miles of one another, the threat against Jerusalem was a threat against them also, and a military treaty was undoubtedly the best guarantee of success against the common enemy. Recapturing Gibeon would check Israel's advance.

The following thirty-six, or maybe even forty-eight hour long campaign of Israel against this confederacy is one of the most amazing "blitz stories" in military history. It was also the most supernatural battle ever fought on earth. Although this is not specifically stated, we believe that Joshua did consult the Lord before deciding to help the Gibeonites. God answered him with the specific promise: "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."

The army of the five kings probably laid siege to the city of Gibeon. We may assume that the envoy that brought word to Joshua escaped from the city before the ring was closed. The Israelite army set out in the evening and reached Gibeon at dawn, taking the enemy by surprise. Since Bible scholars do not agree about the place of departure of the army (some believe in two different places called Gilgal) their estimate of the distance covered varies. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* estimate a distance of 26 miles, while *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "From Gilgal to Gibeon was about eighteen or twenty miles." The latter seems to be more plausible for an army that had to cover any distance by foot. Whatever the distance, the confederate army was thrown in complete confusion by the sudden appearance of the Israelite elite troops. We read: "The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel." The Hebrew word is *hamam*, which means, "to put in commotion," or "to destroy." The same word is used in the verse that describes the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea: "During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion."¹ The following description of abnormal phenomena suggests that the whole of nature took on a threatening character that must have scared the enemy out of its wits. The Israelites had an easy task to finish what the Lord had started. The confederate army was so terrified that those that survived the initial attack fled up the mountain pass to Beth Horon, which even under normal circumstances was very difficult terrain to traverse. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "Beth-horon, or the house of the hollow, consisted of two towns. The one is now called Belt Ur el Foka, or Upper Beit Ur, the other Beit Ur el Tachta, or Lower Beit Ur. To the former led a difficult pass from Gibeon, called the ascent to Beth-horon. From the former to the latter ran a path so rocky and rugged that steps have been made in the rock to facilitate the descent."

The NIV reads: "The LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites." The Hebrew text states literally that the Lord cast down great stones, *'eben*, which are later in the sentence called "hailstones," *'eben barad*.

1. Ex. 14:24

There is a suggestion that these stones may have been meteorites and not just unusually large hailstones. If that is the case, it is easy to connect this event to the standing still of the sun.

There is probably no miracle in the Bible that has caused more controversy than the one described in this chapter: the standing still of the sun over Gibeon and the moon over the Valley of Aijalon. Even the most conservative Bible scholars have tried to explain away this miracle or modify its literal interpretation. In its *Introduction to the Book of Joshua, The Pulpit Commentary* states about this passage: “The earlier Rabbis are unanimous that the sun literally stood still, though they differ, like the Fathers, as to the time that it remained above the horizon. David Kimchi thought that the period was twenty-four hours, and that after the sun had set, the moon still remained stationary that Joshua might complete the slaughter of his foes The Fathers generally take the literal view of the passage, and suppose the sun to have literally stood still in the heavens, some for a longer, some for a shorter period, some supposing it to be forty-eight, some thirty-six ... some twenty-eight hours ... Keil ... believes that the day was supposed by the Israelites to have been lengthened, they being too fully engaged in the conflict with their enemies to take any very accurate note of time.”

The obvious correction that must be made in the narrative is that, if any of the heavenly bodies were arrested in its trajectory, it was the earth that stood still and not the sun or the moon. But that does not change the essence of the miracle. Help for a literal interpretation of the text comes from an unexpected and unbiased source, from someone who makes no claim of being a Christian or of believing in the inspiration of the Bible. Immanuel Veliskowsky, in his book *Worlds in Collision*, presents the theory that Venus entered our solar system as a comet, the tail of which swept over our planet, and caused great disturbances to the point of slowing down, or even changing, the rotation of the earth. He quotes the passage in Joshua that is the topic of our study as well as some South American Indian legends that state that there was once a twenty-four hour long darkness in the Western Hemisphere. Veliskowsky believes that this event triggered sun worshipping among the Indian tribes in the Americas. It is especially the fact that there exists a legend about darkness on the other side of the globe that gives such strong credibility to the account in Joshua.

Interestingly, the Hebrew text uses two different words for standing still in the command and in the effect of the command. In “O sun, stand still over Gibeon,” the word is *damam*, which means “to be dumb,” or “to stop”; in “So the sun stood still,” it is *amad*, meaning “to stand.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* relates this to the command the Creator of the universe gave to the wind and the waves on the Sea of Galilee. We read: “[Jesus] got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.”¹

Some people think that trying to find a logical explanation for a miracle amounts to blasphemy. They consider that only a childlike acceptance of what the Bible states without asking probing questions is glorifying God. Such an approach to Biblical truth amounts to making God a master magician. But God does not perform magic; He created within the universe a set of smoothly operating laws of nature to which all of creation owes obedience. What we call a miracle means that at one point God suspended or modified these laws of nature. According to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the word miracle means “an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs.” This definition is obviously incomplete in that it does not cover God’s intervention in affairs that do not primarily relate to human life on our planet. The standing still of the sun and moon was a miracle of cosmic proportions in which human beings were only involved in that it occurred at Joshua’s command. The latter gives even greater grandeur to the miracle! If Velishowky’s theory is correct, the entrance of Venus into our solar system was an event that had been long in the making. Venus did not pop up simply at the command of Joshua. The miracle, in that case, would be a miracle of timing.

Actually, the greatest miracle in this story is not so much what the heavenly bodies did, but why they did it. The fact that a puny human being on planet earth says to the sun and the moon: “Stand still!” and they stand still is the greatest miracle of all. We may ask about this Joshua what the disciples asked about his namesake, Jesus, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”² The implication is that God will even move mountains if we ask Him.³ The author of *The Book of Joshua* states correctly: “There has never been a day

1. Mark 4:39
2. Mark 4:41
3. See Matt. 17:20.

like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man.” *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments on the miracle: “No doubt Joshua had an extraordinary impulse or impression upon his spirit, which he knew to be of divine origin, prompting him to desire that this miracle might be wrought upon this occasion, else it would have been presumption in him to desire or expect; the prayer would not have been granted by the divine power, if it had not been dictated by the divine grace. God wrought this faith in him, and then said, ‘According to thy faith, and thy prayer of faith, be it unto thee.’ It cannot be imagined, however, that such a thing as this should have entered into his mind if God had not put it there; a man would have had a thousand projects in his head for the completing of the victory before he would have thought of desiring the sun to stand still; but even in the Old-Testament saints the Spirit made intercession according to the will of God. What God will give he inclines the hearts of his praying people to ask, and for what he will do he will be enquired of.” The commentary continues: “But surely this stupendous miracle of the standing still of the sun was intended for something more than merely to give Israel so much the more time to find out and kill their enemies, which, without this, might have been done the next day. First, God would hereby magnify Joshua (Josh 3:7), as a particular favorite, and one whom he did delight to honor, being a type of him who has all power both in heaven and in earth and whom the winds and the seas obey. Secondly, He would hereby notify to all the world what he was doing for his people Israel here in Canaan; the sun, the eye of the world, must be fixed for some hours upon Gibeon and the valley of Aijalon, as if to contemplate the great works of God there for Israel, and so to engage the children of men to look that way, and to enquire of this wonder done in the land, 2 Chron 32:31. Proclamation was hereby made to all the neighboring nations. Come, behold the works of the Lord (Ps 46:8), and say, What nation is there so great as Israel is, who has God so nigh unto them? One would have supposed that this would bring such real ambassadors as the Gibeonites pretended to be from a very far country, to court the friendship of Israel because of the name of the Lord their God. Thirdly, He would hereby convince and confound those idolaters that worshipped the sun and moon and gave divine honors to them, by demonstrating that they were subject to the command of the God of Israel, and that, as high as they were, he was above them; and thus he would fortify his people against temptations to this idolatry, which he foresaw they would be addicted to (Deut 4:19), and which, notwithstanding this, they afterwards corrupted themselves with. Fourthly, This miracle signified (it is the learned bishop Pierson’s notion) that in the latter days, when the light of the world was tending towards a light of darkness, the Sun of righteousness, even our Joshua, should arise (Mal 4:2), give check to the approaching night, and be the true light. To which let me add that when Christ conquered our spiritual enemies upon the cross the miracle wrought on the sun was the reverse of this; it was then darkened as if it had gone down at noon, for Christ needed not the light of the sun to carry on his victories: he then made darkness his pavilion. And, Lastly, The arresting of the sun and moon in this day of battle prefigured the turning of the sun into darkness, and the moon into blood, in the last great and terrible day of the Lord.”

The Book of Jashar, or *Jasher*, to which our text alludes, was according to *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “The book of the upright or righteous man, that is to say, of the true members of the theocracy, or godly men. From the two references given it has been justly inferred that the book was a collection of odes in praise of certain heroes of the theocracy, interwoven with historical notices of their achievements. That the passage in Joshua quoted from this work is extracted from a song is evident enough, both from the poetical form of the composition and also from the parallelism of the sentences. The reference in 2 Sam 1:18 is to an elegy upon Saul and Jonathan in the book of Jasher. Some suppose the book of Jasher to have perished in the captivity.”

The text states: “Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!” That does not mean that Israel did not do any fighting at all. They were certainly not inactive in their all night march to Gibeon and in the annihilation of the confederate army. But without the Lord their efforts would not have amounted to anything. In Jesus’ words: “Apart from me you can do nothing.”¹

Verse 15 apparently marks the end of the campaign. What we read in the following verses did not happen during that longest day in the history of planet Earth. At one point during this great battle, the five kings, who had tried to capture Gibeon and had fled for their lives, were seen entering a cave at Makkedah. A glance at the map reveals that these kings had run approximately twenty miles from Gibeon where Joshua had fallen upon them. They must have thought to be safe in the cave, not realizing that they had entered into

1. John 15:5

a death trap when the entrance to the cave was closed off with a heavy stone and sentries were placed to secure their imprisonment. There is no indication how long they were kept there. V. 21 indicates that Joshua had made camp at Makkedah during this campaign, which means that what is described in these verses preceded the return of the army to Gilgal. Joshua gave orders to first finish the pursuit and annihilation of the enemy before some of them were able to reach their fortified cities. It must have been after this objective had been reached that the five kings were taken out of their prison and brought to justice.

Joshua's command to the army generals to place their foot on the necks of the kings seems to be a crude ceremony. Bible scholars have expressed various emotions about Joshua's treatment of his prisoners of war. We can, however, not judge conditions of Joshua's day in the light of the Geneva Convention. It may be true that Joshua acted according to the custom of his time, but that does not mean that he was morally wrong. Archeological finds indicate in fact that Joshua's act was not unique. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "Representations of the Assyrian monarch placing his foot on the neck of a prostrate captive are exhibited on a bas-relief found at Khorsabad." We come closer to the true significance of the act if we compare the Canaanite kings to war criminals, people who had engaged in gross crimes against humanity. Their defeat was symbolic for the victory of light over darkness, of good over evil. The apostle Paul expresses the spiritual meaning of this ceremony in the words: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."¹ The Bible uses the symbolism of Joshua's act to express Jesus' victory over death. We read: "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."² *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments: "The fact that the military leaders set their feet at Joshua's command upon the necks of the conquered kings, was not a sign of barbarity, which it is necessary to excuse by comparing it with still greater barbarities on the part of the Canaanites, as in Judg 1:7, but was a symbolical act, a sign of complete subjugation, which was customary in this sense even in the Eastern empire ... It was also intended in this instance to stimulate the Israelites to further conflict with the Canaanites. This is stated in the words of Joshua (v. 25): 'Fear not, nor be dismayed (vid. Josh 1:9; 8:1); for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies.' " *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "The thing does indeed look barbarous, thus to insult over men in misery, who had suddenly fallen from the highest pitch of honor into this disgrace. It was hard for crowned heads to be thus trodden upon, not by Joshua himself (that might better have been borne), at least not by him only, but by all the captains of the army. Certainly it ought not to be drawn into a precedent, for the case was extraordinary, and we have reason to think it was by divine direction and impulse that Joshua did this. (1.) God would hereby punish the abominable wickedness of these kings, the measure of whose iniquity was now full. And, by this public act of justice done upon these ringleaders of the Canaanites in sin, he would possess his people with the greater dread and detestation of those sins of the nations that God cast out from before them, which they would be tempted to imitate. (2.) He would hereby have the promise by Moses made good (Deut 33:29), Thou shalt tread upon their high places, that is, their great men, which should the rather be speedily fulfilled in the letter because they are the very last words of Moses that we find upon record. (3.) He would hereby encourage the faith and hope of his people Israel in reference to the wars that were yet before them." Some forty years earlier, Joshua had been in the company of those that had been sent to Canaan to spy out the land. The majority report of the group had been: "All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."³ Here are the grasshoppers putting their feet upon the necks of the great adversaries of old. Fear is conquered when we see the size of our opponents against the background of the greatness of God.

After the five kings were put to death, their bodies were hanged to display the curse of God upon the sin of Canaan which had reached its full measure.⁴ This was also the reason why the bodies were taken down before sunset. In this Joshua obeyed Moses' orders: "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD

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1. Rom. 16:20
 2. I Cor. 15:26
 3. Num. 13:32,33
 4. See Gen. 15:16.

your God is giving you as an inheritance.”¹ The cave that had been their hiding place became their tomb. “That day” does not necessarily mean the day at which the sun stood still or the one on which the five kings were executed. The fact that the sunset is mentioned in the previous verse and the capture of Makkedah in the same breath in the next suggests that no strict chronology is observed. The king of Makkedah had not joined the confederacy and Joshua only arrived at the city gates because of the flight of the five kings in that direction. Joshua treated Makkedah as he had treated Jericho by wiping out the whole population and destroying the city. No explanation is given of the words “And he did to its king as he had done to the king of Jericho.” It could mean that whilst all the inhabitants were killed without any legal process, the king was taken to court and executed because he was found guilty of certain crimes. It may also mean that all the kings were hung on a pole after their execution, as we read about the king of Ai.²

This chapter concludes with a brief outline of the cities Joshua conquered: Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. Evidently, some cities were overrun without any significant form of resistance. About Lachish we read: “He took up positions against it and attacked it. The LORD handed Lachish over to Israel, and Joshua took it on the second day.” This suggests some kind of fighting occurred. Horam, the king of Gezer and his army found their end when they came to the rescue of Lachish.

Although it is stated that Joshua subdued the whole region, Bible scholars assume that the Israelites did not completely occupy the whole area and cleanse it of all its original inhabitants. There is evidence that the Canaanites retook some places after the Israelite army swept through it. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “On the first conquest of the land by Joshua, Masius observes that ‘in this expedition Joshua ran through the southern region with an armed band, in too hurried a manner to depopulate it entirely. All that he needed was to strike such terror into the hearts of all through his victories, that no one should henceforth offer any resistance to himself and to the people of God. Those whom he pursued, therefore, he destroyed according to the commands of God, not sparing a single one, but he did not search out every possible hiding-place in which any could be concealed. This was left as a gleanings to the valor of each particular tribe, when it should take possession of its own inheritance.’ ”

Richard S. Hess, in his commentary *Joshua*, gives the following conclusion and spiritual application of this chapter: “Chapter 10 serves four literary purposes: firstly, it moves Israel out of the central hill country; secondly, it surveys the conquest of the south in the same way that the preceding chapters had focused on the central hill country; thirdly, the panels enable the author to shift back and forth between the work of God and that of Israel; and finally, the structure of the account increases the speed of the action. Fewer verses than before are devoted to the conquest of a whole region with many towns. This more highly paced action will continue in chapter 11 and reach a climax in chapter 12, where it will move so quickly that only the place names will be given. For Christians, this text and the following story of the northern battle symbolize the life of the disciple. Faced with daily pressures and struggles, the decision whether to follow Christ in humility and love forms part of the spiritual warfare described in Ephesians 6. The warrior cannot succeed without divine help, and this is available through constant walking in the will of God as illuminated by a knowledge of God’s Word and as strengthened by prayerful communion with him.”

1. Victory over the northern coalition (11:1-5)

1 When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Acshaph,

2 and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah south of Kinnereth, in the western foothills and in Naphtali Dor on the west;

3 to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah.

4 They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots — a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

5 All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom, to fight against Israel.

6 The LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of

1. Deut. 21:22,23

2. See Josh. 8:29.

them over to Israel, slain. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."

7 So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, 8 and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left.

9 Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

10 At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.)

11 Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anything that breathed, and he burned up Hazor itself.

In introducing this chapter, *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments: "We are here entering upon the story of another campaign that Joshua made, and it was a glorious one, no less illustrious than the former in the success of it, though in respect of miracles it was inferior to it in glory. The wonders God then wrought for them were to animate and encourage them to act vigorously themselves. Thus the war carried on by the preaching of the gospel against Satan's kingdom was at first forwarded by miracles; but, the war being by them sufficiently proved to be of God, the managers of it are now left to the ordinary assistance of divine grace in the use of the sword of the Spirit, and must not expect hail-stones nor the standing still of the sun." Although the text of this chapter does not disprove the old sage's observation, it would be farfetched to build a doctrine of dispensations upon this record of Joshua's campaign. When Jesus said to His disciples: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well,"¹ He did not set a time limit at which the miracles would be cut off.

A glance at the map reveals that there is, at this point, an obvious hiatus in the report of the conquest; the story shifts from the extreme south to the farthest north. Hazor is a city north of the Sea of Galilee. As was mentioned in the introduction to this book, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* observes that "Joshua is incomplete and is marked by many omissions." The emphasis is more on the spiritual lessons to be drawn from divine intervention in the conquest of Canaan than on the details of a military campaign.

There is an obvious connection between this chapter and the previous one that began with an account of a coalition of kings who wanted to oppose Israel's advance by recapturing Gibeon. Here, the confederacy launches a direct attack upon Israel with heavy armament. We read: "They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots — a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore." Thus far, Israel had not been confronted by this kind of opposition. Here, they were numerically at a disadvantage. Humanly speaking they were doomed to lose the battle. This kind of confrontation is comparable to a band of natives armed with bow and arrow attacking an army with nuclear missiles.

Most Bible scholars suppose that Jabin was more a title than the name of a person. We find another Jabin, king of Hazor in the Book of Judges, some 140 years later.² Jabin means "intelligent." Hazor probably stands for "watchtower."

In spite of the appearance of powerful opposition *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The political constitution of Palestine was, humanly speaking, the cause of its overthrow. The division of the country into a host of petty states, and the consequent want of cohesion and concert, made its conquest a comparatively easy task. Had the kings of the north rallied round the standard set up in Central Palestine by Adonizedek, a far more formidable opposition would have been offered to Joshua at Gibeon."

The location of most of the cities mentioned in the beginning of this chapter has not been established by modern archeology. We understand from the Biblical record that Hazor was allocated to the tribe of Naphthali. Although Joshua destroyed it during this campaign, the Canaanites succeeded in rebuilding it and Naphthali was not able to secure it until much later.³

When the Lord gave His promise to Joshua that he would be victorious over this overwhelming

1. Mark 16:17,18

2. See Judg. 4:2.

3. See Judg. 4:2; I Sam. 12:9.

resistance, Joshua cannot have been at Gilgal, since it would have been impossible for him and the whole army to make the march to the North in one day. At this point in the campaign Israel must have been somewhere in the central part of Canaan, fighting that part of the war that is not recorded in the Book of Joshua. The Lord commanded Joshua to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots. It seems strange and unusually cruel to us that the horses were to be maimed instead of killed. It may be that the horses were killed anyhow and that hamstringing them was done initially as an act of symbolic significance. Another possibility is that only one leg was lamed, which would render the animal useless for warfare but still able to drag itself around. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “This rendered the horse useless, for the sinew could not reunite. The effects of the horses and chariots upon the mind of Joshua and his host, who had neither, is here traceable. ‘Those very horses and chariots, which seem to you so formidable, will I, the Lord of hosts, by tomorrow at this time deliver into your hand. The horses shall be forever useless to your enemies, and the dreaded chariots shall cease to be.’ Why should Joshua have destroyed the horses? Perhaps (as Keil, following Calvin, suggests) in order that the Israelites should not put their trust in chariots or in horses (...Psalm 20:7; 147:10), but in God alone.”

The Lord’s encouragement to Joshua and the people before this second great battle is of enormous significance. Thus far Israel’s conquest had been accompanied by supernatural phenomena to assure the people that what they were doing was, in fact, the Lord’s work. God’s supernatural intervention is like a double-edged sword. It can make a person humble, but it can also have the opposite effect of making him proud. Moses fell victim to the latter when God ordered him to speak to the rock so that water would come out of it. We read: “He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, ‘Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.’”¹ Keeping God as the focus of our vision will have as a result that we understand, in Jesus’ words: “Apart from me you can do nothing,”² and also: “Nothing will be impossible for you.”³

*There have been incidents in Israel’s history when they adopted the idol worship of the people they had conquered. It is difficult to explain what devious twist of mind could make them turn to deities that had proved their inability to protect those that trusted in them, but that is what occurred. We read about King Amaziah: “The anger of the LORD burned against Amaziah, and he sent a prophet to him, who said, ‘Why do you consult this people’s gods, which could not save their own people from your hand?’”⁴ In the same manner, as *The Pulpit Commentary* suggested, the horses and chariots could have become a snare for Israel in that they would have shifted from trusting the Lord for their victories to putting their trust in their own armament. David testified: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”⁵*

m. By divine command: a summary of the whole conquest (11:12-23)

12 Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded.

13 Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds — except Hazor, which Joshua burned.

14 The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed.

15 As the LORD commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.

1. Num. 20:10-12
2. John 15:5
3. Matt. 17:20
4. II Chron. 25:15
5. Ps. 20:7

16 So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills,
17 from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and struck them down, putting them to death.
18 Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time.
19 Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle.
20 For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses.
21 At that time Joshua went and destroyed the Anakites from the hill country: from Hebron, Debir and Anab, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua totally destroyed them and their towns.
22 No Anakites were left in Israelite territory; only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod did any survive.
23 So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

These verses give us a sweeping account of the campaign covering the whole territory from the Negev and Goshen (not the Goshen that is part of Egypt, but a place near Gibeon) to the mountains of Lebanon in the north.

The NIV reads V. 13 as: “Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds — except Hazor, which Joshua burned.” This differs from the reading of the KJV: “But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn.” The Hebrew word *tel* has the double meaning of “heap,” or “strength.” This is not the word normally used for hill, which in Hebrew is *gib`ah*. We find the word *tel* in names of places like Tel-Aviv and *gib`ah* in Gibeah. The building of cities on mounds or hills suggests that there was a good amount of hostility among the tribes of Canaan. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “As many of the towns in Italy, and the castles in Germany in the middle ages, so these Phoenician cities were placed upon hills, that they might be more easily defended. The various tribes of Palestine were no doubt continually at war, and, as regards these northern tribes at least, were not accustomed to subsist by commerce.” Since the campaign of the Israelites was a hasty one and much terrain remained to be conquered, Joshua did not take any time to destroy every little stronghold; he burned Hazor because it was the most important city in the area. In all this Joshua meticulously carried the instructions God had given to Moses and Moses had passed on to Joshua.¹

The observation in V. 20 – “For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the LORD had commanded Moses” is important in that it suggests that the destruction of the population was ultimately a matter of their own choice. They had the option of migrating to other areas but they chose to resist the Israelites instead. The fact that the Lord hardened their hearts does not mean that their hearts had originally been soft. As was the case with Pharaoh, they started the hardening process that the Lord brought to a point of no return. This observation, however, does not clear up all the theological problems raised by the text. As we have seen, the Israelites were forbidden to enter into a covenant with the people of Canaan. The fact that they did so with the Gibeonites was because they failed to consult the Lord on the matter. On the other hand, the story of Rahab’s salvation indicates that confession of God’s supremacy could have saved the lives of others in Canaan also. All the kings of Canaan must have known what Rahab knew and after the battle of Israel with the confederacy led by Adoni-Zedek in which meteorites rained down and the sun stood still, they knew much more than Rahab. Yet, they chose to resist the God of Israel. Joshua also exterminated the Anakites or Anakim, as the NKJV calls them. The name means literally “the long-necked ones,” meaning “tall.” They were the descendants of Anak, which the twelve spies identified with the Nephilim of the antediluvian times.² Returning from their survey of Canaan, they reported to Moses: “We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like

1. See Ex. 34:11-13; Deut. 7:2.

2. See Gen. 6:4.

grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”¹ Some of those giants escaped and settled in the cities of the Philistines. They still existed in the days of David, Goliath being one of them. Thus basically ends the battle of Canaan, the most conclusive battles being the campaign that began at Ai and ended at Gaza and the one in the north, ending with the destruction of Hazor. This did not mean that all the pockets of resistance were wiped out. The Book of Judges testifies to this fact. The basic victory that broke the power of Canaan had been won in this seven-year campaign and the various tribes were given the opportunity to complete their own conquests upon it. God had said to Moses: “I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.”²

The spiritual application of this story forces itself upon us. Joshua’s victory in Canaan foreshadows the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and Satan. Paul writes about this: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”³ This basic victory provides the basis for victory in our personal lives, according to the testimony of the Book of Revelation, where we read: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”⁴ *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* appropriately comments: “According to the apostle, Heb 4:8, etc., Joshua himself was a type of Christ; the promised land, of the kingdom of heaven; the victories which he gained, of the victory and triumph of Christ; and the rest he procured for Israel, of the state of blessedness, at the right hand of God. In this light we should view the whole history, in order to derive those advantages from it which, as a portion of the revelation of God, it was intended to convey. Those who finally reign with Christ are they who, through his grace, conquer the world, the devil, and the flesh; for it is only of those who thus overcome that he says, ‘They shall sit with me on my throne, as I have overcome, and am set down with the Father on the Father’s throne;’ Rev 3:21. Reader, art thou a conqueror?”

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, comments: “*Inheritance* is first used here in Joshua, but it will recur forty-two times. It describes that which has been divinely given to the families of Israel for their possession. This could not become an inheritance until God gave it to Israel in the conquest. Now that the conquest has occurred, it will form the concrete expression of the promised blessings of God’s covenant with Abram and his descendants. The *rest from war* that the land enjoyed suggests that the conquest part of Israel’s work was finished for the moment. Land remained to be possessed, but there were to be no more wars from this point. This phrase recurs in Joshua 14:15, where it concludes Caleb’s campaign to conquer Hebron. There too it signals that the wars are ended. The prophetic promise of a land at peace is here realized, however briefly, while the Israelites receive their allotments and reaffirm their covenant. For the Christian, the ‘battle’ against the powers of darkness has been won by Christ. At best the ‘rest’ for the Israelites of Joshua was temporary (Heb. 4:8). In Christ, eternal rest is promised. This rest comes through justification (Heb. 4:10). It is described as the Sabbath rest of God’s people (Heb. 4:9), who will enjoy their inheritance for ever (1 Pet. 1:4-5).”

n. An outline of the conquest (12:1-24)

***1 These are the kings of the land whom the Israelites had defeated and whose territory they took over east of the Jordan, from the Arnon Gorge to Mount Hermon, including all the eastern side of the Arabah:
2 Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon. He ruled from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge — from the middle of the gorge — to the Jabbok River, which is the border of the Ammonites. This***

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1. Num. 13:33
 2. Ex. 23:28-30
 3. Col. 2:15
 4. Rev. 12:10,11

included half of Gilead.

3 He also ruled over the eastern Arabah from the Sea of Kinnereth to the Sea of the Arabah (the Salt Sea), to Beth Jeshimoth, and then southward below the slopes of Pisgah.

4 And the territory of Og king of Bashan, one of the last of the Rephaites, who reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei.

5 He ruled over Mount Hermon, Salecah, all of Bashan to the border of the people of Geshur and Maacah, and half of Gilead to the border of Sihon king of Heshbon.

6 Moses, the servant of the LORD, and the Israelites conquered them. And Moses the servant of the LORD gave their land to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh to be their possession.

7 These are the kings of the land that Joshua and the Israelites conquered on the west side of the Jordan, from Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir (their lands Joshua gave as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel according to their tribal divisions—

8 the hill country, the western foothills, the Arabah, the mountain slopes, the desert and the Negev — the lands of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites):

9 the king of Jericho one the king of Ai (near Bethel) one

10 the king of Jerusalem one the king of Hebron one

11 the king of Jarmuth one the king of Lachish one

12 the king of Eglon one the king of Gezer one

13 the king of Debir one the king of Geder one

14 the king of Hormah one the king of Arad one

15 the king of Libnah one the king of Adullam one

16 the king of Makkedah one the king of Bethel one

17 the king of Tappuah one the king of Hopher one

18 the king of Aphek one the king of Lasharon one

19 the king of Madon one the king of Hazor one

20 the king of Shimron Meron one the king of Acshaph one

21 the king of Taanach one the king of Megiddo one

22 the king of Kedesh one the king of Jokneam in Carmel one

23 the king of Dor (in Naphoth Dor) one the king of Goyim in Gilgal one

24 the king of Tirzah one thirty-one kings in all.

The thirty-one kings mentioned in this chapter as monarchs who were defeated and killed were not sovereigns in the sense that we would use the word. With the exception of Sihon and Og, they were mostly princes of city-states who had little or no authority beyond the meadows that surrounded their cities. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “A list of thirty-one chief towns is here given; and as the whole land contained a superficial extent of only fifteen miles in length by fifty in breadth, it is evident that these capital cities belonged to petty and insignificant kingdoms. With a few exceptions, they were not the scenes of any important events recorded in the sacred history, and therefore do not require a particular notice here, especially as they are mentioned particularly in Josh 15.” And *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “In the historical account of the wars of Joshua in the south and north of Canaan, the only kings mentioned by name as having been conquered and slain by the Israelites, were those who had formed a league to make war upon them; whereas it is stated at the close, that Joshua had smitten all the kings in the south and north, and taken possession of their towns (Josh 10:40; 11:17). To complete the account of these conquests, therefore, a detailed list is given in the present chapter of all the kings that were slain, and not merely of those who were defeated by Joshua in the country on this side of the Jordan, but the two kings of the Amorites who had been conquered by Moses are also included, so as to give a complete picture of all the victories which Israel had gained under the omnipotent help of its God.”

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, gives the following comprehensive outline of the conquest: “Continuing with the theme of the defeated leaders (Jos. 11:17b-22), this section describes their territories, in Transjordan under Moses’ leadership (12:1-6) and west of the Jordan under Joshua (12:7-24). The phrase *these are the kings of the land* (v. 1) introduces the names of the kings. Their people are defined and their land is described, including capitals and regions. Verse 6 concludes the section by noting how Moses allocated the

land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. The second section has similar elements but in reverse order as a mirror image. *These are the kings of the land* (v. 7) introduces the leadership of Joshua and his allocation of the lands for tribal possessions. Regions and boundaries are summarized in verses 7 and 8. Then a list of the various peoples of the region appears, including names found in Joshua 3:10 and 11:3. This introduces the list of towns and their leaders.”

The Hebrew in V. 1 is more expressive than the English translation reveals. We read literally: “Now these are the kings of the land, which smote the children of Israel and possessed their land on the other side of the Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the river Arnon unto Mount Hermon, and all the plain on the east...”

The land east of Jordan that was conquered under Moses’ leadership extended from the Sea of Galilee, here called “the Sea of Kinnereth” to “the Sea of the Arabah,” which is the Dead Sea. The Book of Numbers records that the Israelites initially approached the Amorites peacefully and asked permission to pass through their territory. This was not only refused flatly but the Amorite army attacked Israel and was totally destroyed. Sihon, the king, was killed and the whole land was taken.¹ When Og, the king of Bashan, attacked Israel, he and his army suffered the same fate and so Bashan was occupied before the Israelites had entered the Promised Land.²

Barnes’ Notes observes about the list in Vv. 7-24: “The names of the kings are given in the order of their actual encounter with Joshua. Those enumerated in Josh 12:10-18 either belonged to the league of the southern Canaanites (Josh 10:1 ff), the power of which was broken in the battle of Beth-horon, or were at any rate conquered in the campaign following that battle. Those mentioned in Josh 12:19-24 were in like manner connected with the northern confederates (Josh 11:1 ff), who were defeated at the Waters of Merom.”

These names and places contain very little that is of interest to us or that sounds stimulating for our spiritual life. The author of this book simply compiled a list of defeated foes, an inventory of victory. As such it has some value for us in that it may prompt us to look back and see how far we have come in our life of spiritual victory or the lack of it. From the two major battles recorded in the previous chapters it is obvious that the victory belonged to God. Israel had not defeated the enemy because of its own strength. The standing still of the sun during the battle in the valley of Aijalon proves that our whole galaxy was involved in this victory of light over darkness. It was obviously not Joshua who caused the sun to stand still although it occurred in answer to his prayer. It is the Lord who answers prayer who intervenes supernaturally when we ask Him to do so. “For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”³

IV. THE ISRAELITE TRIBAL ALLOTMENTS (13:1 – 21:45)

a. The remaining land (13:1-7)

1 When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the LORD said to him, "You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.

2 "This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites:

3 from the Shihor River on the east of Egypt to the territory of Ekron on the north, all of it counted as Canaanite (the territory of the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdoda, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron — that of the Avvites);

4 from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, from Arah of the Sidonians as far as Aphek, the region of the Amorites,

5 the area of the Gebalites; and all Lebanon to the east, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.

6 "As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an

1. See Num. 21:21-26.

2. See Num. 21:32-35.

3. II Chron. 16:9

*inheritance, as I have instructed you,
7 and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh."*

With this chapter begins the second part of the book which deals with the results of the conquest and the division of the land. Richard S. Hess, in his book *Joshua*, observes: "The reader approaching this material will perceive what appears as a complex maze of place names interspersed with occasional notes related to the acquisition and distribution of some of the places. Resisting the temptation to skip over this section of Joshua can result in an appreciation of important features of God's covenant with Israel. Beyond the obvious detail of the content of these chapters and the means by which God blessed those who remained faithful in the conquest of the land, this passage also addresses the question why the land formed so significant a part of God's promises to the patriarchs and remained a key feature of the covenant."

Although all of Canaan had not yet been subdued and occupied by the Israelites, the Lord told Joshua to go ahead with the distribution of the land among the nine-and-a-half tribes that had not received their inheritance yet. The reason given for this rather premature allocation was Joshua's age. We do not know how old he was when the Lord spoke these words to him. We only know that he died at the age of 110.¹ Compared to the ages of the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis, that was comparatively young. Jacob died at the age of 147, and Abraham and Isaac reached an even higher age.

Getting old is not a pleasant experience for most people. Denial of infirmities and decline of mental and physical energy are common among the elderly. It is interesting to see that the Lord reminded Joshua of his age and told him to be realistic about it. No doubt Joshua had had visions of completing the conquest of the whole country and parceling out the different allotments to the tribes. God wanted him to accept the fact that he would not be allowed to do this. Toward the end of this book we read that Joshua was afraid that the following generation would not get the job done as it should be done. The overall testimony of the Book of Judges is that he was correct in this assumption. It would take several centuries and the coming of David to finish the work that Joshua had begun.

This chapter deals with the theme of consolidating victories won. It is important to take possession of that which God has provided for us in the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Corrie ten Boom once observed that some missionaries had given their all to the Lord, but they had not taken all from the Lord that He had provided for them. It is quite legitimate in the light of Biblical revelation to spiritualize the truths of this chapter. David realized that not every Israelite who lived in Canaan really lived there as steward of the heritage God had given to Israel. David wrote in Psalm Thirty-Seven: "Those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land," and "But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace." The thought is repeated seven times in different form.² Yet at the time of writing, Israel had already dwelt in Canaan for approximately five hundred years.

The Pulpit Commentary observes that the most powerful tribes were the first ones to take possession of the territory allotted to them: Judah and Joseph. The same commentary offers the following spiritual comment: "We may observe here that, as with the literal so with the spiritual Israel, whether the antitype be the Christian Church or the human heart, the work of subduing God's enemies is gradual. One successful engagement does not conclude the war. The enemy renews his assaults, and when force fails he tries fraud; when direct temptations are of no avail he resorts to enticements. The only safeguard in the war is strength, alertness, courage, patience. The fainthearted and unwatchful alike fail in the contest, which can be carried on successfully only by him who has learned to keep guard over himself, and to direct his ways by the counsels of God." Satan never gives up without fierce resistance and even the fact that the basis for his power has been knocked out from under him does not deter him in trying to cause as much damage to the believer as he can.

Verses 2 through 5 describe in a sweeping motion the territory which God intended Israel to possess but which had not yet been surveyed and occupied. The region of the Philistines and the Geshurites refers to the strip of fertile coastland stretching for approximately 60 miles along the Mediterranean Sea and the southern part that separated Canaan from Egypt.

In the description of the various allotments we find, in some instances, a rather detailed account of

1. See Josh. 24:29.

2. See Ps. 37:3,9, 11,22,27,29,34.

the boundaries and even the cities, but in other instances the lines are drawn more vaguely and details are lacking.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary states: “For example, in the account of the inheritance which fell to the lot of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, not only are the boundaries most carefully traced, but the towns are also enumerated one by one (ch. 15 and Josh 18:11-28); whereas in the tribe of Joseph (Ephraim and half Manasseh) the list of the towns is altogether wanting (ch. 16 and 17); and in the possessions of the other tribes, either towns alone are mentioned, as in the case of Simeon and Dan (Josh 19:1-9,40-48), or the boundaries and towns are mixed up together, but both of them given incompletely, as in the case of Zebulon, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali (Josh 19:10-17-24-32-39). This incompleteness, particularly in the territories of the tribes mentioned last, may be explained from the fact, that in northern Canaan there were still very many tracts of land in the hands of the Canaanites, and the Israelites had not acquired a sufficiently exact or complete knowledge of the country, either through Joshua’s campaign in the north, or through the men who were sent out to survey the northern land before it was divided (Josh 18:4-9), to enable them to prepare a complete account of the boundaries and towns at the very outset.”

After having commented on the refusal of the Israelites to enter Canaan forty years earlier and Joshua’s conquest of large sections of the Promised Land, the author of Hebrews draws us into a spiritual application that pertains to us and he writes: “It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”¹

God told Joshua: “As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites.” These words must be seen in the context of what God had told Joshua earlier: “I will give you every place where you set your foot.”² It was not as if the Israelites could stand by as observers. They had to actively put their foot on the promises of God in order to make them into a reality. Richard S. Hess in his commentary *Joshua*, points out: “The outsiders of the book of Joshua are either destroyed or they are brought into the covenant community. This was true for Rahab and the Gibeonites. It will also be true for Caleb the Kenizzite, for the daughters of Zelophehad and for Acsah and for the Canaanite enclaves that remain. As these groups were allowed to live and given a share in the inheritance, Israel would be reminded of its present failure to fulfill completely those commands. These observations in Joshua 13 – 21 contrast with the allotment of all the land described in the same chapters. The full sense of this contrast reaches its climax at the end. For the Christian, Israel’s failure to conquer the land fully anticipates the inability to enjoy the full favor of God’s blessing in life (1 Cor. 10:1-13). Christians are not perfect, though they are called to perfect holiness. They live in a tension between the rewards of a life lived fully in the Holy Spirit, which are available here and now, and their own failure, which prevents the appropriation of those gifts. This paradox has no resolution in this life but it does have the promise of God’s continual presence with believers to enable them to receive forgiveness and life a life of obedience (1 Jn. 1:5-10).”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary explains: “Biblical writers differ in opinion as to the exact limits of the Israelite possession on the northwest—whether the land of promise was to extend to the

1. Heb. 4:6-16

2. See Josh. 1:3.

shores of the Mediterranean, or a narrow tract was to be reserved to the Sidonians. The former view is most generally preferred, for this reason, that the phrase ‘all the Sidonians’ seems clearly to include the inhabitants of that district among the people who were to be driven out (cf. Josh 19:28-29; Judg 1:31). The fulfillment of this promise was conditional. In the event of the Israelites proving unfaithful or disobedient, they would not subdue the districts now specified; and, in point of fact, the Israelites never possessed them, though the inhabitants were subjected to the power of David and Solomon.”

b. The allotment east of the Jordan River (13:8-33)

8 The other half of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites had received the inheritance that Moses had given them east of the Jordan, as he, the servant of the LORD, had assigned it to them.

9 It extended from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, and from the town in the middle of the gorge, and included the whole plateau of Medeba as far as Dibon,

10 and all the towns of Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, out to the border of the Ammonites.

11 It also included Gilead, the territory of the people of Geshur and Maacah, all of Mount Hermon and all Bashan as far as Salecah—

12 that is, the whole kingdom of Og in Bashan, who had reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei and had survived as one of the last of the Rephaites. Moses had defeated them and taken over their land.

13 But the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day.

14 But to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance, since the offerings made by fire to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them.

15 This is what Moses had given to the tribe of Reuben, clan by clan:

16 The territory from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, and from the town in the middle of the gorge, and the whole plateau past Medeba

17 to Heshbon and all its towns on the plateau, including Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Beth Baal Meon,

18 Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath,

19 Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shahar on the hill in the valley,

20 Beth Peor, the slopes of Pisgah, and Beth Jeshimoth

21 -all the towns on the plateau and the entire realm of Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled at Heshbon. Moses had defeated him and the Midianite chiefs, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba — princes allied with Sihon — who lived in that country.

22 In addition to those slain in battle, the Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.

23 The boundary of the Reubenites was the bank of the Jordan. These towns and their villages were the inheritance of the Reubenites, clan by clan.

24 This is what Moses had given to the tribe of Gad, clan by clan:

25 The territory of Jazer, all the towns of Gilead and half the Ammonite country as far as Aroer, near Rabbah;

26 and from Heshbon to Ramath Mizpah and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the territory of Debir;

27 and in the valley, Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth and Zaphon with the rest of the realm of Sihon king of Heshbon (the east side of the Jordan, the territory up to the end of the Sea of Kinnereth).

28 These towns and their villages were the inheritance of the Gadites, clan by clan.

29 This is what Moses had given to the half-tribe of Manasseh, that is, to half the family of the descendants of Manasseh, clan by clan:

30 The territory extending from Mahanaim and including all of Bashan, the entire realm of Og king of Bashan — all the settlements of Jair in Bashan, sixty towns,

31 half of Gilead, and Ashtaroth and Edrei (the royal cities of Og in Bashan). This was for the descendants of Makir son of Manasseh — for half of the sons of Makir, clan by clan.

32 This is the inheritance Moses had given when he was in the plains of Moab across the Jordan east of Jericho.

33 But to the tribe of Levi, Moses had given no inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inherit-

ance, as he promised them.

The mention of half the tribe of Manasseh included in the tribes that inherited the territory west of the Jordan, brings the author to direct his glance to the land east of the Jordan River, the area that used to belong to Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites and Bashan. That encounter had been the first major victory of Israel over a formidable foe. The editor of Deuteronomy, reporting Moses' speech, observed: "Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaites. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide. It is still in Rabbah of the Ammonites."¹ In this battle Israel came into possession of the first "king-size bed" mentioned in the Bible. It became an emblem of victory over giants.

The tribes Reuben and Gad had approached Moses with the request to be given this trans-Jordanian territory since it contains superb grassland. Their request initially provoked Moses' anger since he thought that the petitioners meant to withdraw from the campaign to conquer the actual land of Canaan. Moses had entered into a lengthy tirade against them. But when they pledged their full support to the other tribes and explained that they would only settle their families and livestock, Moses granted them their request. Afterward half of the tribe of Manasseh joined the petitioners and were granted territory also.²

Bible scholars have found some difficulty identifying the exact boundaries of the east-Jordanian territory since there are at least three cities that bear the name Aroer. Since the boundary line runs from the south to the north, this Aroer must have been the most southern point. The northern border reached all the way into Gilead and Bashan. It appears that this territory did not permanently remain in Israelite hands but reverted to Moab. Centuries later Jeremiah mentioned Aroer in a prophecy about the destruction of Moab.³

Apparently, the people of Geshur and Maacah had been driven away by the advancing Israelites from other areas and taken up their abode in the cavernous area east of the Jordan River from where they which never expelled.

"But to the tribe of Levi he gave no inheritance, since the offerings made by fire to the LORD, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them." These words are a refreshing interruption in this section about real estate; they make us realize that the background of it all is not material possessions, but spiritual blessing. The connection between the mention of the Levites and the fact that they were not to inherit any land, as the other tribes of Israel, must be seen in the setting of the land east of Jordan. God had stipulated that the priests and Levites were to receive their support through the sacrifices the other tribes brought to the Lord, and that they were to be given cities to live in scattered throughout the whole Promised Land. We read in the Book of Numbers: "The LORD said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. 'I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting. From now on the Israelites must not go near the Tent of Meeting, or they will bear the consequences of their sin and will die. It is the Levites who are to do the work at the Tent of Meeting and bear the responsibility for offenses against it. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the LORD. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.'"⁴ And: "On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, the LORD said to Moses, 'Command the Israelites to give the Levites towns to live in from the inheritance the Israelites will possess. And give them pasturelands around the towns. Then they will have towns to live in and pasturelands for their cattle, flocks and all their other livestock.'⁵ Some of these Levite cities were to be designated as cities of refuge. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: "On the East of the Jordan they were Bezer in the lot of Reuben, Ramoth-gilead in the tribe of Gad, and Golan in the territory of Manasseh."

The arrangement for these cities of the Levites as well as their support from what the Israelites

1. See Deut. 3:11.

2. See Num. 32:1-33.

3. See Jer. 48:19,20.

4. Num.18:20-24

5. Num. 35:1-3

would bring by way of sacrifices may, in practice, have left them holding the shorter end of the stick. Their material welfare would depend upon the spiritual relationship of their fellowmen with God. That seems to be a shaky foundation. As long as the Israelites were faithful in their worship, the Levites would do well, but when the people slid back the priests and Levites would go hungry. Yet, they possessed the real riches of which material possession is only a shadow. The person to whom God says: "I am your inheritance" is richer than anyone else. And that is what God says to us in Jesus Christ. The matter of the towns allotted to the Levites will be fully dealt with in Chapter Twenty-One.

The allotment of the land to the tribe of Reuben is dealt with in vv. 15-23. Reuben was Jacob's oldest son, who lost his birthright because of the sin he had committed with his father's concubine.¹ He owed the privilege of being served first to the fact of Sihon's resistance against Israel. As *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes, "Sihon, king of the Amorites, who reigned in this country, ... might have kept it and his life if he would have been neighborly, and have suffered Israel to pass through his territories, but, by attempting to oppose them, justly brought ruin upon himself, Num 21:21, etc." *Barnes' Notes* explains about the inheritance of the tribe of Reuben: "This territory was the most southerly of the trans-Jordanic possessions of Israel, and adjoined Moab, which lay only on the other side of the Arnon. Hence, the Reubenites became in after times much intermixed with the Moabites, who in fact eventually acquired much of the land, and several, if not all, of the cities here named as belonging to Reuben. This acquisition was probably assisted by the fact that the territory north of Arnon had formerly belonged to the Moabites, from whom it was wrested by the Amorites ... It is not likely that the Amorite conquerors had completely extirpated the Moabite inhabitants. Hence, in the days when the Reubenites became engrossed in their pastoral pursuits, and probably not very long after the days of Joshua, the Moabites easily encroached on their inheritance, and in the end probably reoccupied nearly the whole of the ancient kingdom of Sihon."

It had been Balak, king of Moab, who had invited Balaam to curse the Israelites when they first appeared at his borders. God reversed this into a blessing by not permitting Balaam to pronounce any curses.² Balaam managed to produce some kind of victory for Moab by advising that the women of Moab invite the men of Israel to fornicate with them in connection with their pagan worship. This cost the lives of twenty-three thousand Israelites as well as Balaam's own life.³

Moses had pronounced his final words, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy, on the plains of Moab.

Vv. 24-28 draw the boundary lines of the territory Moses gave to the tribe of Gad. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The border of Gad extended further eastward than that of Reuben. Westward, of course, its border was the Jordan. Its northern border was nearly coincident with that of the land of Gilead, and passed by Mahanaim and Jabesh Gilead, unto the extreme southernmost point of the Sea of Galilee. Many of these places also are mentioned in Isaiah 15 and Jeremiah 48." The Aroer mentioned in this section is, obviously, a different place from the one mentioned in v. 9. The Hebrew reads literally: "Aroer that is before Rabbah," meaning "facing Rabbah." Moses had declared about this parcel of land: "From Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, and from the town in the gorge, even as far as Gilead, not one town was too strong for us. The LORD our God gave us all of them. But in accordance with the command of the LORD our God, you did not encroach on any of the land of the Ammonites, neither the land along the course of the Jabbok nor that around the towns in the hills."⁴ Although the land had originally belonged to Ammon, the Israelites came in possession of it because Sihon had conquered it and annexed it to his territory. Ramath Mizpah is the same as Ramoth Gilead, which became one of the cities of refuge. Evidently, this land changed hands again in later time, because we read that Joab besieged it in the days of King David.⁵

We read in the Book of Judges that the Ammonites later attacked Israel and were defeated by Jephthah.⁶ Looking at subsequent history, one may wonder how wise the tribes of Reuben and Gad had been in

1. Gen. 49:3,4

2. See Num. 22-24.

3. See Num. 31:15,16.

4. Deut. 2:36,37

5. See II Sam. 11:1.

asking for this land instead of settling within the actual borders of the Promised Land. By settling in this area, especially the tribe of Reuben exposed itself to temptations that turned out to be its undoing. The tribe of Gad appears to have fared only slightly better. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “The cause of the difference between the Reubenites and the Gadites may perhaps be thus explained. While both inhabited a similar tract of country, a country from its open and pastoral character likely to develop a hardy and healthy race of men, the Reubenites were exposed to the seductions of the Moabitish worship of Chemosh, which, when combined with an ancestral temperament by no means prone to resist such influences (see ... Genesis 49:4), soon proved fatal to a tribe, itself not numerous (... Deuteronomy 33:6), and hemmed in on every side but the north by the unbelievers. The temperament inherited by the Gadites added to their more favorable situation and the nature of their pursuits, developed a hardy and warlike race ready to do battle, and fearless of their foes (... 1 Chronicles 5:18). Of this tribe came the valiant Jephthah, and of it also came the brave soldiers of David, whose qualifications stir to poetry the sober chronicler of Judah (... 1 Chronicles 12:8). We may see here the influence of circumstances on the character of a people. Originally (... 1 Chronicles 5:18) the Reubenites and the Gadites were alike. But the Reubenites, as we have seen, from unfavorable surroundings, lost the character which the Gadites, more favorably situated, were enabled to preserve. And the distinctions of tribes, producing as they did a separate *esprit de corps* in each tribe, will serve to explain why one tribe did not immediately succumb to influences which proved fatal to another. In the end, as we know, all the people of Gad fell victims to the temptations which surrounded them, and, save in the case of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin, and the few faithful Israelites who went over to them, irrevocably. The same phenomenon may be observed in the history of nations generally. As long as their manners were simple and their morals pure, they have preserved their liberty, and in many cases have acquired empire. As soon as their bodies were enervated by luxury, and their minds corrupted by vice, they fell a prey to foes whom formerly they would have despised. Thus fell the Greek and Roman republics, thus the Britons became an easy prey to the Saxons, and the Saxons to the Danes. In every instance the history of a tribe and of a nation serves to illustrate the maxim that ‘righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.’ ”

Moses’ allotment of territory to the half-tribe of Manasseh differed from the allocations to the tribes of Reuben and Gad in that Manasseh conquered land that had not been taken from King Sihon. We read in the Book of Numbers: “The descendants of Makir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it and drove out the Amorites who were there. So Moses gave Gilead to the Makirites, the descendants of Manasseh, and they settled there. Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, captured their settlements and called them Havvoth Jair. And Nobah captured Kenath and its surrounding settlements and called it Nobah after himself.”¹ So what Moses did was actually no more than sanctioning what these people had done.

At the end of this chapter the position of the Levites in connection with the division of the land is repeated. Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, explains: “Several points are significant. Firstly, the mention of the Levites in connection with the allotments east of the Jordan River recalls that both groups were given their inheritance under the leadership of Moses. Neither owed it to Joshua. Secondly, their mention in connection with allotments on both sides of the Jordan recalls their role as representatives of the first-born of all families from all tribes. Thus they are the tribe that links all the inheritances together. Thirdly, their service to the Lord provides a theological theme for the inheritances on both sides of the Jordan. All tribes worship God with the help of the Levites, who assist in the sacrifices and blessings. This point anticipates the allotment of the towns of the Levites in chapter 21, already mentioned in 14:4. By scattering throughout the land, they would also represent the unity of the people who worshipped the God of Israel.”

This whole area had played an important role in the life of Jacob. Gilead was the place where Laban overtook Jacob after the latter had fled his father-in-law to return to Canaan.² And Mahanaim was the place where he had the vision of angels coming to his encounter.³ Jacob was the one who gave names to several of the places mentioned here. The names constituted a reminder of the reliability of God’s promises. When Jacob fled his parental home for fear of Esau, we read that God appeared to him. “He had a dream in which

6. See Judg. 11:4-33.

1. Num. 32:39-42

2. See Gen. 31:25-47.

3. Gen. 32:1

he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: 'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'¹ God did for Israel what He had promised to Jacob for the purpose of blessing all peoples on earth.

c. Introduction to the allotments west of the Jordan River (14:1-5)

1 Now these are the areas the Israelites received as an inheritance in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel allotted to them.

2 Their inheritances were assigned by lot to the nine-and-a-half tribes, as the LORD had commanded through Moses.

3 Moses had granted the two-and-a-half tribes their inheritance east of the Jordan but had not granted the Levites an inheritance among the rest,

4 for the sons of Joseph had become two tribes — Manasseh and Ephraim. The Levites received no share of the land but only towns to live in, with pasturelands for their flocks and herds.

5 So the Israelites divided the land, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

We now enter the Promised Land as the place in which God wanted His people to find His rest. Two significant points mark this introductory section. The first is the mention of Eleazar, the high priest, and the second the reference to the Levites and the fact that they were not given any inheritance. The tribes of Israel numbered twelve, but with the splitting of the tribe of Joseph into Manasseh and Ephraim the total became thirteen. The subtraction of Levi brought the total again back to twelve. The amazing thing is that it was the tribe that was not counted that gave spiritual meaning and significance to the whole nation. Those who were dispossessed of earthly goods formed the backbone of the people. They were the salt of God's covenant that gave the nation its flavor of being one nation under God.

The division of the land was done by the casting of lots under the direction of the high priest Eleazar, as the representative of God, and Joshua, as the head of the civil government and as commander in chief. The heads of each tribe were responsible for the subdivision of what was allotted to the tribe they represented. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes here: "A picture of national unity; the head of the Church, representing the religious aspect of the community; the head of the State, representing its civil aspect; the heads of the tribes, to signify the general assent of the body politic. A work so begun was likely to be satisfactorily carried out. And accordingly the distribution of the land, recognized as carried out according to the will of God, displayed no partiality, and excited no jealousies."

This section forms the introduction to the division of the land which ends in Chapter Nineteen, where we read: "These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And so they finished dividing the land."²

Moses had set the boundaries in the Book of Numbers, where God had said to him: "Command the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance will have these boundaries: Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. On the east, your southern boundary will start from the end of the Salt Sea, cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue on to Zin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon, where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea. Your western boundary will be the coast of the Great Sea. This will be your boundary on the west. For your northern boundary, run a line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor and from Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath. Then the boundary will go to Zedad, continue to Ziphron

1. Gen. 28:12-15

2. Josh. 19:51

and end at Hazar Enan. This will be your boundary on the north. For your eastern boundary, run a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. The boundary will go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain and continue along the slopes east of the Sea of Kinnereth. Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan and end at the Salt Sea. This will be your land, with its boundaries on every side.”¹

The importance of casting lots is emphasized in the Book of Numbers.² To our modern western mind the casting of lots, as the participation in a lottery, amounts to an appeal to chance. As Christians, we usually abstain from such activities. We find it difficult to see the hand of God in the throwing of dice. Yet the Book of Proverbs states: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD,”³ and: “Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart.”⁴

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary quotes Calvin, who wrote: “This was the force of the lot: there were ten lots cast in such a manner as to decide that some were to be next to the Egyptians, some to have the sea-coasts, some to occupy the higher ground, and some to settle in the valleys. When this was done, it remained for the heads of the nation to determine the boundaries of their different territories according to some equitable standard. It was their place, therefore, to ascertain how many thousand heads there were in each tribe, and then to adjudicate a larger or smaller space according to the size of the tribe.” The same commentary explains: “The casting of the lots was probably effected, as the Rabbins assumed, by means of two urns, one filled with slips having the names of the tribes upon them; the other, with an equal number, representing separate divisions of the land: so that when one slip, with a name upon it, was taken out of one urn, another slip, with a division of the land upon it, was taken from the other. The result of the lot was accepted as the direct decree of God.” The general consensus among Bible scholars is that the division of the land was done in rough outline and the details of the boundaries was determined later as the various parcels were actually occupied.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary furthermore observes: “In the account of the casting of the lots, the first fact which strikes us is, that after the tribes of Judah and Joseph had received their inheritance, an interruption took place, and the camp was moved from Gilgal to Shiloh, and the tabernacle erected there (Josh 18:1-9); after which the other tribes manifested so little desire to receive their inheritance, that Joshua reproved them for their indolence (Josh 18:3), and directed them to nominate a committee of twenty-one from their own number, whom he sent out to survey the land and divide it into seven parts; and it was not till after this had been done that the casting of the lots was proceeded with, and each of these seven tribes received its inheritance. The reason for this interruption is not given; and the commentators have differed in their opinions as to the cause.”

The Book of Numbers puts the total numbers of Israelites, that is of the males of twenty years of age and above who were able to bear arms, on 601,730.⁵ We ought to deduct the clan of Reuben, numbering 43,730,⁶ of Gad, 40,500,⁷ and half of the tribe of Manasseh, roughly 26,000,⁸ from this total.

d. The allotment for Judah (14:6-15:63)

6 Now the men of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me.

7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions,

8 but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed

1. Num. 34:2-12

2. See Num. 26:55,56; 33:54; 34:13; 36:2.

3. Prov. 16:33

4. Prov. 18:18

5. See Num. 26:51.

6. See Num. 26:7.

7. See Num. 26:18.

8. According to Num. 26:34, the total tribe numbers 52,700 soldiers.

the LORD my God wholeheartedly.

9 So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.'

10 "Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the desert. So here I am today, eighty-five years old!

11 I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.

12 Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

13 Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.

14 So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

15 (Hebron used to be called Kiriath Arba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.)

Then the land had rest from war.

15:1 The allotment for the tribe of Judah, clan by clan, extended down to the territory of Edom, to the Desert of Zin in the extreme south.

2 Their southern boundary started from the bay at the southern end of the Salt Sea,

3 crossed south of Scorpion Pass, continued on to Zin and went over to the south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it ran past Hezron up to Addar and curved around to Karka.

4 It then passed along to Azmon and joined the Wadi of Egypt, ending at the sea. This is their southern boundary.

5 The eastern boundary is the Salt Sea as far as the mouth of the Jordan. The northern boundary started from the bay of the sea at the mouth of the Jordan,

6 went up to Beth Hoglah and continued north of Beth Arabah to the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben.

7 The boundary then went up to Debir from the Valley of Achor and turned north to Gilgal, which faces the Pass of Adummim south of the gorge. It continued along to the waters of En Shemesh and came out at En Rogel.

8 Then it ran up the Valley of Ben Hinnom along the southern slope of the Jebusite city (that is, Jerusalem). From there it climbed to the top of the hill west of the Hinnom Valley at the northern end of the Valley of Rephaim.

9 From the hilltop the boundary headed toward the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, came out at the towns of Mount Ephron and went down toward Baalah (that is, Kiriath Jearim).

10 Then it curved westward from Baalah to Mount Seir, ran along the northern slope of Mount Jearim (that is, Kesalon), continued down to Beth Shemesh and crossed to Timnah.

11 It went to the northern slope of Ekron, turned toward Shikkeron, passed along to Mount Baalah and reached Jabneel. The boundary ended at the sea.

12 The western boundary is the coastline of the Great Sea. These are the boundaries around the people of Judah by their clans.

13 In accordance with the LORD's command to him, Joshua gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion in Judah-Kiriath Arba, that is, Hebron. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.)

14 From Hebron Caleb drove out the three Anakites-Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi — descendants of Anak.

15 From there he marched against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher).

16 And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher."

17 Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage.

18 One day when she came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What can I do for you?"

19 She replied, "Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water." So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

20 This is the inheritance of the tribe of Judah, clan by clan:

21 The southernmost towns of the tribe of Judah in the Negev toward the boundary of Edom were: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur,

22 Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah,
 23 Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan,
 24 Ziph, Telem, Bealoth,
 25 Hazor Hadattah, Kerioth Hezron (that is, Hazor),
 26 Amam, Shema, Moladah,
 27 Hazar Gaddah, Heshmon, Beth Pelet,
 28 Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah,
 29 Baalah, Iim, Ezem,
 30 Eltolad, Kesil, Hormah,
 31 Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah,
 32 Lebaath, Shilhim, Ain and Rimmon — a total of twenty-nine towns and their villages.
 33 In the western foothills: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah,
 34 Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam,
 35 Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah,
 36 Shaaraim, Adithaim and Gederah (or Gederothaim)-fourteen towns and their villages.
 37 Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad,
 38 Dilean, Mizpah, Joktheel,
 39 Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon,
 40 Cabbon, Lahmas, Kitlish,
 41 Gederoth, Beth Dagon, Naamah and Makkedah — sixteen towns and their villages.
 42 Libnah, Ether, Ashan,
 43 Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib,
 44 Keilah, Aczib and Mareshah — nine towns and their villages.
 45 Ekron, with its surrounding settlements and villages;
 46 west of Ekron, all that were in the vicinity of Ashdod, together with their villages;
 47 Ashdod, its surrounding settlements and villages; and Gaza, its settlements and villages, as far as the
 Wadi of Egypt and the coastline of the Great Sea.
 48 In the hill country: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh,
 49 Dannah, Kiriath Sannah (that is, Debir),
 50 Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim,
 51 Goshen, Holon and Giloh — eleven towns and their villages.
 52 Arab, Dumah, Eshan,
 53 Janim, Beth Tappuah, Aphekah,
 54 Humtah, Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) and Zior — nine towns and their villages.
 55 Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah,
 56 Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah,
 57 Kain, Gibeah and Timnah — ten towns and their villages.
 58 Halhul, Beth Zur, Gedor,
 59 Maarath, Beth Anoth and Eltekon — six towns and their villages.
 60 Kiriath Baal (that is, Kiriath Jearim) and Rabbah — two towns and their villages.
 61 In the desert: Beth Arabah, Middin, Secacah,
 62 Nibshan, the City of Salt and En Gedi — six towns and their villages.
 63 Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live
 there with the people of Judah.

Apparently, the division of the land began in the south and went up to the north. The first tribe to receive its inheritance was Judah, being the largest tribe. The Book of Numbers puts the number of men aged twenty and above at 76,500.¹ Caleb acted as the representative of the tribe, but he also had a personal claim on God's promise.

The literal meaning of the name Caleb is "dog." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, however, contests this and states that the proper meaning is: "raging with canine madness." Whether the name is in

1. Num. 26:22

any way descriptive of his character cannot be determined. It appears, though, that Caleb was not an “under-dog” but a man with a strong faith in the reliability of God’s promises. In the account of the twelve spies who were originally sent up to survey the land, Caleb, together with Joshua, stands out on account of his faith in the promise of God. When the ten spies reported that the Promised Land would be impregnable, we read: “Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, ‘We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.’”¹ When the Lord sentenced the whole nation of Israel that refused to enter Canaan to die in the desert, He made an exception for Caleb. We read that God said: “But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.”² As the hymn writer sings: “Others saw the giants, Caleb saw the Lord. They were sore disheartened, he believed God’s word. And that word he fully, fearlessly obeyed.” Caleb was a Kenizzite, a descendent of one of the original tribes that inhabited Canaan at the time of Abraham. We read that God said to Abraham: “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”³ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: “The Kenezites were the clan whose name-father was Kenaz ... Their land, along with that of their Canaanite tribes, was promised to Abram (Gen 15:19). To this clan belonged Jephunneh, the father of Caleb (Num 32:12; Josh 14:6,14). It had evidently been absorbed by the tribe of Judah. If the Kenezites went down with Jacob into Egypt, they may have become identified with his family there.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: “Before the Exodus Caleb’s father, a non-Israelite, had married a daughter of Hur of the clan of Chelubai (Caleb) in the tribe of Judah (1 Chron 2:9,18-19,50). She bore to Jephunneh his first son, to whom was given her family name, Caleb. This youth inherited the prerogatives of her clan, and eventually became a chief of her tribe. Caleb’s relative, Othniel (Josh 15:17), is called a son of Kenaz (1 Chron 4:13,15), i.e., a Kenizzite.” Some Bible scholars, however, believe that Caleb was not a descendant of any of the original Canaanite tribes, but that Kenaz was a son of Perez, son of Judah. But nothing is known of that Kenaz.

Apparently, Caleb’s request was made to avoid being allocated terrain by the casting of lots. Since the two-and-a-half Transjordanian tribes had received their allotment without the casting of lots, Caleb did have a precedent to which he could appeal. His claim that Moses promised Hebron to him cannot be substantiated by the records in Numbers or Deuteronomy, but does not mean that it was not true. Since Joshua was present when Moses was alleged to have made that promise, we may assume that Caleb was telling the truth. If he was in fact a member of the original Canaanite tribes, one who had remained true to the Lord when the other tribes became corrupted in sin, he may have had a personal and historical vendetta in wanting to restore true religion to the land that once belonged to his ancestors.

Caleb had once risked his life with his clear and courageous testimony. We read: “Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, ‘The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.’ But the whole assembly talked about stoning them.”⁴ Now, he was ready to once again risk his life in taking on the Anakites who inhabited the hills of Hebron. While some of the other men of Judah did not fare so well, Caleb succeeded in conquering the land that had been promised to him. We read in the Book of Judges: “As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak.”⁵

The mention of Caleb’s age as being 85 suggests that it took Joshua and the leaders of Israel seven years to finish the original conquest and occupation of the land. Caleb was 40 when he went out as a spy and subsequently Israel roamed through the desert for 38 years.

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1. Num. 13:30
 2. Num. 14:24
 3. Gen. 15:18-21
 4. Num. 14:6-10
 5. Judg. 1:20

In a *Homily* by S.R. Aldridge, attached to *The Pulpit Commentary*, we read about this conversation between Caleb and Joshua: “Assuredly no Israelite could look without emotion upon the face and form of Caleb, the utterer of the words of the text. His very existence was a memorial of a memorable day. And when he arose and stood before Joshua, and the two engaged in the conversation recorded in this chapter, who could note them without recollecting that out of the laymen of Israel they were the only survivors of the generation to which they belonged? Like venerable towers that rear their heads above the building which is attached to them but plainly bears the marks of more recent construction, these two men stood an age above their surroundings, but with strength as unyielding as that of their latest compeers. Time and sickness had leveled their contemporaries with the dust, but they remained ‘with eye undimmed and natural force unabated.’ God had kept His threat and promise.”

And *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “Caleb is an outstanding example of a godly believer. Because he wholly followed the Lord, God kept him physically strong and courageous to the age of eighty-five. He claimed a glorious inheritance - Hebron, near which Abraham had tented and died - and was eager to fight to overcome the Anakim, illustrative to us of inward sins and outward temptations. In capturing Hebron he rendered the whole nation valuable service; later he willingly yielded his city to the Levites and lived in the suburbs (Josh 21:12).”

There is in fact something particularly refreshing and inspiring about Caleb’s attitude in his exchange with Joshua. The two men must have been about the same age. Both had been well preserved because of their strong faith and intimate personal relationship with God. Joshua had remained the commander-in-chief of the Israelite army and fought a campaign of such brilliance and magnitude that it would have made any younger general blush with envy. Caleb had remained hidden and virtually unnoticed during the forty years between his courageous declaration of faith in God and his appearance in this chapter. But both these men had kept the faith. When Joshua blessed Caleb it must have been a very emotional experience for both of them and for all the younger ones who witnessed it.

Caleb’s testimony about his unfailing strength is proof of the fact that faith in God is good for one’s health. This does not mean, however, that failing health is always an indication of a lack of faith. In the words of the apostle Paul when he wrote the Corinthians: “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”¹ The work of an evangelist had taken a heavy toll on Paul’s physical health, but we cannot accuse the apostle of a lack of faith as old age made him groan and long for his heavenly dwelling. His own testimony was: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”²

Joshua had captured Hebron in the initial conquest; he had killed its king and driven out the Anakites.³ Evidently, the Anakites had managed to retake the city and move back in while Joshua carried on his northern campaign.

The phrase “Then the land had rest from war” links this chapter to the eleventh chapter of Joshua.⁴ It marks the end of the grand military campaign. From here on each tribe was responsible for the ethnic cleansing of its own territory. We may assume that the intermediate chapters are a parenthesis in the story. Most Bible scholars believe that Hebron was the original name of the place and that Kiriath Arba was the name the Ana-

1. See II Cor. 4:7-12; 5:1-4.

2. II Tim. 4:7

3. See Josh. 10:39; 11:21.

4. See Josh. 11:23.

kites had given to it. Later on in the narrative we learn that Hebron was designated as one of the cities of the Levites and became a city of refuge.¹

Richard S. Hess in *Joshua*, comments: “Along with Benjamin, Judah has the most extensive boundary description in chapters 13 – 19. It begins in the southern desert and moves counter-clockwise. Although the eastern border saw no change, the southern and northern borders changed from time to time during the history of ancient Israel. Westward as the boundary moves into the Shephelah (low hill country) and especially along the plain, fewer points are designated, testifying that it remained unconquered before this area fell under the control of David.” At the second census, the tribe of Judah numbered 76,500 fighting men,² making it the largest tribe in Israel.

1. See Josh. 20:1-3,7; 21:10,11,13.

2. See Num. 26:22.

Map of Tribal Divisions



The map shows that Simeon occupied territory of approximately 800 square miles in the center of the allotment given to Judah. Interestingly, the boundaries that were determined by the drawing of lots correspond with the ones God had commanded Moses to allocate to Judah in the Book of Numbers. We read there:

“Your southern side will include some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. On the east, your

southern boundary will start from the end of the Salt Sea, cross south of Scorpion Pass, continue on to Zin and go south of Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and over to Azmon, where it will turn, join the Wadi of Egypt and end at the Sea.”¹ Evidently, the drawing served not only to confirm the Word of God to Moses but also to take away all grounds for jealousy or suspicion of preferential treatment. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “A wall of mountains extends southwestward from the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and formed the natural boundary of Judaea.” Archeologists have encountered problems in identifying the exact location of the demarcation lines because not all the places mentioned have been rediscovered. *The Pulpit Commentary* further observes regarding the southern border: “The general view is that it lay somewhat to the northeast of Hezron and to the northwest of Petra, at the foot of the range of mountains which form the southern boundary of Judea. Here the spies brought their report to Moses (ch. 14:6, 7; ... Numbers 13:26). Here Miriam was buried, and where Moses incurred the wrath of God from his mode of working the miracle which supplied the Israelites with water (Num, 20.). It was ‘a city in the uttermost border’ of Edom (...Numbers 20:16), and it was some distance from Mount Hor, for we find it described as a journey (...Numbers 20:22); and by passing from Kadesh to Mount Hor and thence by the way of the Red Sea, the Israelites ‘compassed the land of Edom’ (...Numbers 21:4), a fact which seems to prove that Petra and Kadesh-barnea were not the same place.”

In the delineation of the northern border there is mention of “the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben” and “the Valley of Achor.” We know that the Valley of Achor was the place where Achan and his family had been executed and a heap of stones marked their burial site.² Nothing is known about “the Stone of Bohan,” but it is not unreasonable to assume that this was another grave marker. Bohan, son of Reuben, is not found in any of the Old Testament genealogies. The Hebrew word *bohan* means “thumb.” It could be that it was given to one of Reuben’s sons as a nickname. All that has been said, or can be said, about him is speculation.

We find another intermezzo of human interest about Caleb in Vv. 13-19, in which we read what Caleb did with the inheritance given to him. The Anakites play a large part in this story because of their impressive size and the almost mythical aura that hovered about them. The spies who had returned from the first survey of the Promised Land had made it sound as if these giants were survivors of Noah’s flood. They had said: “We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”³ Caleb, who had been a member of the twelve and who had tried to set the record straight, had a point to prove in the defeat of these Anakites. Evidently, he succeeded in killing three of them, but he found he needed help in capturing Kiriath Sepher. So he offered his daughter, Acsah, in marriage to whoever captured that city. We find the same story in the Book of

Judges.⁴ His nephew, Othniel, succeeded and received his cousin in marriage. Some Bible scholars believe that Othniel was Caleb’s younger brother. The text reads that Acsah tried to persuade her husband to ask her father for a certain field. But some manuscripts read that Othniel suggested to Acsah to do the asking. Since the rest of the text confirms that this is what actually happened the other manuscripts seem to give a more correct reading. There is a suggestion in the story that Othniel may have been embarrassed to ask too much of his father-in-law, or that the consensus of the newlyweds was that Caleb would be easier to convince if approached by the female part of the family.

Bible scholars have endeavored to visualize this scene. Supposedly, when Othniel came to claim his bride from her father’s house, she whispered to him that he ought to ask for a good present. Being reluctant to appear too demanding to his father-in-law, he hesitated, so Acsah lit off her donkey, which made her father inquire if she had forgotten something. She then asked for some very valuable piece of property that had a yearlong water supply, a rock with a spring on top and one at the bottom. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “These springs are supposed to be described by Dr. Robinson in his account of Kurmul (the ancient Carmel - i.e., fruitful land), of Judah, which lies near the point where the fertile plain of Hebron slopes down eastwardly to the less favored Negeb. ‘The ruins of the town lie around the head and along the two sides of a valley of some width and depth, the head of which forms a semi-circular amphithe-

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1. Num. 34:3-5
 2. Josh. 7:24-26
 3. Num.13:33, cf. Gen. 6:4.
 4. See Judg. 1:12-15.

ater, shut in by rocks. The bottom of the amphitheater is a beautiful grass plat, with an artificial reservoir in the middle, measuring 117 feet long by 74 feet broad. The spring from which it is supplied is in the rocks on the northwest, where a chamber has been excavated. The water is brought out by an underground channel, first to small basin near the rocks, and then five or six rods further to the reservoir. It is only necessary to add the important facts, that there is no living water within the territory, and that, when the cisterns become exhausted late in summer, the Arab shepherds have no resource but to remove their flocks and other animals to the vicinity of Kurmul, in order to complete the chain of evidence which goes to prove that this rich plain is the very ‘field’ desired by Achsah, and that the fountain of Kurmul with its ‘excavated chamber’ and ‘basin’ high up among the rocks, and its capacious ‘reservoir’ in the grassy ‘amphitheater’ below, is identical with those ‘upper and nether springs’ which so richly supplemented the dowry of Othniel’s bride’ ... The request, being reasonable, was granted; and the story, while it shows the invaluable privilege of an abundant water-supply in the East, conveys this important lesson in religion, that if earthly parents are ready to bestow on their children that which is good, much more will our heavenly Father give every necessary blessing to them who ask Him.”

The remainder of this chapter, Vv. 20-62, traces the borders of Judah’s territory in greater detail. Vv. 21-32 draw the lines of the southern border, listing the cities in that part. Vv. 33-47 trace the lines toward the west along the Mediterranean Sea. Vv. 48-60 list the towns in the northwest corner and along the northern border toward the Dead Sea. V. 61 traces the line along the Dead Sea.

The priority given to Judah in this parceling out of the land was not merely a matter of the size of the tribe but also of its importance as being the tribe from which the Messiah was to be born. In measuring out the land for Judah, the Father must have had the birth of His Son in mind. He prepared the baby room centuries before the fullness of time arrived.

V. 63, which reads: “Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah” deserves a closer look. When Joshua began his campaign of conquest, it was the king of Jerusalem, Adoni-Zedek, who took the initiative to organize the alliance of five kings who resisted Joshua.¹ All five kings were defeated and executed.² We may assume that Jerusalem was taken at that time, although that is not specifically stated. The Book of Judges records: “The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire. The Benjamites, however, failed to dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the Benjamites.”³ *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes about this apparent contradiction: “The whole history of Jerusalem, previously to the time of David, is encumbered with many difficulties. Sometimes it is attributed to Judah, sometimes to Benjamin; and it is probable that, being on the frontiers of both those tribes, each possessed a part of it. If the Jebusites were ever driven out before the time of David, it is certain they recovered it again, or at least a part of it-what is called the citadel or strong hold of Zion, (see 2 Sam 5:7,) which he took from them; after which the city fell wholly into the hands of the Israelites.” Apparently, Jerusalem straddled the boundaries of Judah and Benjamin’s territory and each tribe must have had a claim to at least part of it. Judah’s ransacking of the city must have affected only part of it and did not devastate it enough to drive out the inhabitants from its center. No reason is given here for Judah’s failure. The verse is probably the insertion of a fact that occurred after Joshua’s death. The old warlord was no longer there to stimulate the faith and consequently both Judah and Benjamin failed.

e. The allotment for the tribes of Joseph (16:1 – 17:18)

1 The allotment for Joseph began at the Jordan of Jericho, east of the waters of Jericho, and went up from there through the desert into the hill country of Bethel.

2 It went on from Bethel (that is, Luz), crossed over to the territory of the Arkites in Ataroth,

3 descended westward to the territory of the Japhletites as far as the region of Lower Beth Horon and on to Gezer, ending at the sea.

1. See Josh 10:1.

2. See Josh. 10:20-26.

3. Judg. 1:8,21

4 So Manasseh and Ephraim, the descendants of Joseph, received their inheritance.

5 This was the territory of Ephraim, clan by clan: The boundary of their inheritance went from Ataroth Addar in the east to Upper Beth Horon

6 and continued to the sea. From Micmethath on the north it curved eastward to Taanath Shiloh, passing by it to Janoah on the east.

7 Then it went down from Janoah to Ataroth and Naarah, touched Jericho and came out at the Jordan. 8 From Tappuah the border went west to the Kanah Ravine and ended at the sea. This was the inheritance of the tribe of the Ephraimites, clan by clan.

9 It also included all the towns and their villages that were set aside for the Ephraimites within the inheritance of the Manassites.

10 They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor.

17:1 This was the allotment for the tribe of Manasseh as Joseph's firstborn, that is, for Makir, Manasseh's firstborn. Makir was the ancestor of the Gileadites, who had received Gilead and Bashan because the Makirites were great soldiers.

2 So this allotment was for the rest of the people of Manasseh — the clans of Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hephher and Shemida. These are the other male descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph by their clans.

3 Now Zelophehad son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, had no sons but only daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.

4 They went to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders and said, "The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers." So Joshua gave them an inheritance along with the brothers of their father, according to the LORD's command.

5 Manasseh's share consisted of ten tracts of land besides Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan,

6 because the daughters of the tribe of Manasseh received an inheritance among the sons. The land of Gilead belonged to the rest of the descendants of Manasseh.

7 The territory of Manasseh extended from Asher to Micmethath east of Shechem. The boundary ran southward from there to include the people living at En Tappuah.

8 (Manasseh had the land of Tappuah, but Tappuah itself, on the boundary of Manasseh, belonged to the Ephraimites.)

9 Then the boundary continued south to the Kanah Ravine. There were towns belonging to Ephraim lying among the towns of Manasseh, but the boundary of Manasseh was the northern side of the ravine and ended at the sea.

10 On the south the land belonged to Ephraim, on the north to Manasseh. The territory of Manasseh reached the sea and bordered Asher on the north and Issachar on the east.

11 Within Issachar and Asher, Manasseh also had Beth Shan, Ibleam and the people of Dor, Endor, Taanach and Megiddo, together with their surrounding settlements (the third in the list is Naphoth).

12 Yet the Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region.

13 However, when the Israelites grew stronger, they subjected the Canaanites to forced labor but did not drive them out completely.

14 The people of Joseph said to Joshua, "Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are a numerous people and the LORD has blessed us abundantly."

15 "If you are so numerous," Joshua answered, "and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites."

16 The people of Joseph replied, "The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the plain have iron chariots, both those in Beth Shan and its settlements and those in the Valley of Jezreel."

17 But Joshua said to the house of Joseph — to Ephraim and Manasseh — "You are numerous and very powerful. You will have not only one allotment

18 but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have iron chariots and though they are strong, you can drive them out."

The first four verses of this chapter outline the whole territory that was given to the tribe of Joseph,

consisting of Manasseh and Ephraim. As we have already seen, half of the tribe of Manasseh had received an allotment east of the Jordan. A look at the map shows that the two parts together constitute almost half of all the territory of the Promised Land. There was, however, no common border between the two parts of the tribe of Joseph. In order to travel from one section to the other people had to traverse the land of Gad.

Evidently, in the initial casting of lots, Ephraim and Manasseh were considered as one tribe, the tribe of Joseph. The division of land between them must have taken place later. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "The first four verses describe the territory allotted to the family of Joseph—namely, the tribe of Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh—in the rich domains of central Palestine. It was drawn in one lot, that the brethren might be contiguously situated; but it was afterward divided. The southern boundary only is described here; that on the north, being irregular and less defined (Josh 17:10-11), is not mentioned."

There does not seem to be any apparent reason for the order followed in the division. The fact that Judah was the first tribe to receive territory suggests God's priority. Jacob had singled out Judah with the blessing: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."¹ The fulfillment of this prophecy was well beyond the horizon of Joshua's day, but it may have influenced him in the giving of priorities. Whether the fact that Joshua himself was of the tribe of Ephraim had something to do with Joseph receiving the second lot cannot be stated with any kind of certainty.

Ephraim's allotment measured approximately 40 by 25 miles. It shared its borders with Benjamin, Judah and Dan to the south and west and with Manasseh to the east and north.

V. 10 informs us that "They [Ephraim] did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor." Gezer was located at the western border of Ephraim's territory, facing Dan and Judah. *Easton's Bible Dictionary* states: "The Canaanites retained possession of it till the time of Solomon, when the king of Egypt took it and gave it to Solomon as a part of the dowry of the Egyptian princess whom he married (1 Kings 9:15-17)." We read earlier, "Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah."² This gives us the impression that Judah may have tried to evict the Jebusites but failed. In Ephraim's case, however, it seems to be a deliberate measure to keep the people of Gezer in order to make them into slaves. This amounted to direct disobedience to God's command which would eventually cause Israel's downfall.

Makir opens the list of Manasseh in connection with the allotment east of Jordan. We read: "The descendants of Makir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it and drove out the Amorites who were there. So Moses gave Gilead to the Makirites, the descendants of Manasseh, and they settled there. Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, captured their settlements and called them Havvoth Jair. And Nobah captured Kenath and its surrounding settlements and called it Nobah after himself."³ Bible scholars have wondered about the reason for reverting to the half tribe of Manasseh who had already received its allotment before the division was made for the other tribes. At this point Makir had become a family name, since, according to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the original Makir would have been 200 years old if he had still been alive. The reason for the digression may be to emphasize the contrast between the action of the Makirites and the Ephraimites. The people from Manasseh had exhibited a zeal and energy in conquering their inheritance that no other tribe had demonstrated. They stood in sharp contrast to the tribe of Ephraim who had disobeyed the Lord's command and, opportunistically, made slaves of the people of Gezer whom they ought to have expelled.

Jacob had reversed the birthrights of Joseph's sons. Manasseh, being the oldest should have received the oldest son's blessing, which Jacob gave to Ephraim.⁴ One could ask if Jacob had really been divinely inspired in doing so or whether his own experience had set the precedent. When Rebekah was pregnant with twins God

1. Gen. 49:10

2. Josh. 15:63

3. Num. 32:39-42

4. See Gen. 48:13-19.

had told her: “The older will serve the younger.”¹ Historically, Manasseh seems to have behaved like a first-born. It is difficult to say whether or not the Ephraimite, Joshua, made a statement in the way in which this report of the division is made. The way the story reads Joshua may have tried to say that he recognized the superiority of his older brother’s tribe over his own. Makir’s premature zeal for the Lord must have been much closer to God’s heart than the lazy, self-serving attitude of Ephraim.

Another reason for turning to the tribe of Manasseh that occupied Gilead was the position of the daughters of Zelophehad. They had approached Moses to plead their case. Since they had no brothers to keep alive the name of their father, the memory of Zelophehad would have disappeared from Israel’s history. The Israelite mind thought of eternity in terms of remembrance. There may have been some influence of Egyptian religion in this. The reason for embalming of the dead in Egypt was the thought that as long as the deceased was remembered he was kept alive in the hereafter.

The names of Zelophehad’s daughters are given as Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. According to *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, the meaning of Zelophehad is “the shadow of fear or dread.” Mahlah means “infirmity,” Noah “wandering,” Hoglah “turning about or dancing for joy,” Milcah “a queen,” and Tirzah “well pleasing or acceptable.”

This section also tries to explain why the tribe of Manasseh ended up with ten parcels east of the Jordan River. Gilead had six sons, whose names are given as Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hopher and Shemida. Hopher’s daughters, who are mentioned above, each received a parcel of land in the name of their father, not in the name of the husband they had married. So the Transjordanian part of the tribe of Manasseh ended up with ten allotments. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes about the claims of the ladies: “Joshua knew very well what God had ordered in their case, and did not object that they having not served in the wars of Canaan there was no reason why they should share in the possessions of Canaan, but readily gave them as inheritance among the brethren of their father. And now they reaped the benefit of their own pious zeal and prudent forecast in this matter. Thus those who take care in the wilderness of this world to make sure to themselves a place in the inheritance of the saints in light will certainly have the comfort of it in the other world, while those that neglect it now will lose it for ever.”

Vv. 7-17 lead us back to Canaan proper and the inheritance of the other half of the tribe of Manasseh. The important observation following this section is that the Manassites were unable to occupy some of the cities that had been allotted to them, the reason being “for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region” (V.12). This puts these Manassites in contrast with their fellow tribesmen east of the Jordan. There appears to have crept in a sort of battle fatigue that made them lose the vision Joshua had tried to instill among them. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* correctly observes: “Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities. Indolence, a love of ease, perhaps a mistaken humanity, arising from a disregard or forgetfulness of the divine command, a decreasing principle of faith and zeal in the service of God, were the causes of their failure.”

The discussion between the people of Joseph and Joshua in Vv. 14-17 probably took place before the preceding report about the inability of Manasseh to dislodge the Canaanites. We assume that the people of Manasseh joined the Ephraimites in their effort to persuade Joshua, thinking that the people of his own tribe would more easily convince Joshua. But Joshua did not yield to that kind of pressure. The land had been allocated to both tribes by lot, that is by divine decision. To go beyond that or to change that would mean going against the expressed will of the Lord. *The Pulpit Commentary* assumes that Joshua answered the request with a good deal of sarcasm. We read: “As though Joshua would say, ‘You are ready enough to boast, but unwilling to act. If your tribe be as large as you say it is, it is capable of taking care of itself. There is the vast forest of Central Palestine before you. Do not complain to me, but go and take possession of it.’ ” The NIV reads: “Go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites,” which the KJV renders: “Get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and of the giants.”

It was not that the land allotted to these people had been insufficient in size, but Manasseh and Ephraim had not taken what was theirs. They boasted on their size, as if they were the largest tribes in the nation, while in reality they were outnumbered by Judah. About this *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The attitude of the children of Joseph throughout the history of the twelve tribes is in precise accordance with the

1. Gen. 25:23

hint given here. They were proud of their numerical preponderance over the remaining tribes. Thus they, and they only, ventured to remonstrate with Joshua about the inadequacy of the portion allotted to them. Such a sensitiveness was likely to degenerate into insolence when the authority of the great leader was removed ... The tribe of Joseph, at the census described in Numbers 1, outnumbered every tribe but that of Judah. At the census in the plains of Moab (Numbers 26.) the tribe of Joseph outnumbered them all, though the relative proportions of Ephraim and Manasseh were altered, the latter being now considerably the larger of the two tribes. The whole number of the fighting men of Israel underwent a slight diminution during the passage through the wilderness. But the demand of the tribe of Joseph seems to have been a little unbecoming, since Joseph had obtained *two* lots and *two* portions, since half the tribe of Manasseh had settled on the east of Jordan. Hence no doubt the covert sarcasm of Joshua's reply, for, as Delitzsch shows, Judah, and even Dan, considerably outnumbered Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh. Part, however, of their complaint was no doubt caused by the idea that Joshua, as one of themselves, ought to have taken more care of the interests of his own tribe. Joshua, however, as a true servant of God ought to be, was above such petty considerations, though many who live under a higher dispensation find it impossible to emancipate themselves from such bondage."

The concession Joshua made to Manasseh and Ephraim was not a compromise in the sense that they were given more than was due to them. They had the right to develop what had been allotted to them, but the giants and the iron chariots had kept them from it. Joshua knew as they did that, humanly speaking, numerical superiority was no match for superior armor. It would take a miracle of divine intervention to drive out the enemy. But divine intervention had been the mode by which Canaan had been conquered so far. The people of Joseph had no reason to believe that God would abandon them in the claiming of the promise. " 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."¹ The Holy Spirit is stronger than tanks or nuclear weapons.

f. The allotment for the remaining tribes (18:1 – 19:51)

1 The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there. The country was brought under their control,

2 but there were still seven Israelite tribes who had not yet received their inheritance.

3 So Joshua said to the Israelites: "How long will you wait before you begin to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?"

4 Appoint three men from each tribe. I will send them out to make a survey of the land and to write a description of it, according to the inheritance of each. Then they will return to me.

5 You are to divide the land into seven parts. Judah is to remain in its territory on the south and the house of Joseph in its territory on the north.

6 After you have written descriptions of the seven parts of the land, bring them here to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the LORD our God.

7 The Levites, however, do not get a portion among you, because the priestly service of the LORD is their inheritance. And Gad, Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh have already received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. Moses the servant of the LORD gave it to them."

8 As the men started on their way to map out the land, Joshua instructed them, "Go and make a survey of the land and write a description of it. Then return to me, and I will cast lots for you here at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD."

9 So the men left and went through the land. They wrote its description on a scroll, town by town, in seven parts, and returned to Joshua in the camp at Shiloh.

10 Joshua then cast lots for them in Shiloh in the presence of the LORD, and there he distributed the land to the Israelites according to their tribal divisions.

11 The lot came up for the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan. Their allotted territory lay between the tribes of Judah and Joseph:

12 On the north side their boundary began at the Jordan, passed the northern slope of Jericho and headed west into the hill country, coming out at the desert of Beth Aven.

1. Zech. 4:6

13 From there it crossed to the south slope of Luz (that is, Bethel) and went down to Ataroth Addar on the hill south of Lower Beth Horon.

14 From the hill facing Beth Horon on the south the boundary turned south along the western side and came out at Kiriath Baal (that is, Kiriath Jearim), a town of the people of Judah. This was the western side.

15 The southern side began at the outskirts of Kiriath Jearim on the west, and the boundary came out at the spring of the waters of Nephtoah.

16 The boundary went down to the foot of the hill facing the Valley of Ben Hinnom, north of the Valley of Rephaim. It continued down the Hinnom Valley along the southern slope of the Jebusite city and so to En Rogel.

17 It then curved north, went to En Shemesh, continued to Geliloth, which faces the Pass of Adummim, and ran down to the Stone of Bohan son of Reuben.

18 It continued to the northern slope of Beth Arabah and on down into the Arabah.

19 It then went to the northern slope of Beth Hoglah and came out at the northern bay of the Salt Sea, at the mouth of the Jordan in the south. This was the southern boundary.

20 The Jordan formed the boundary on the eastern side. These were the boundaries that marked out the inheritance of the clans of Benjamin on all sides.

21 The tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, had the following cities: Jericho, Beth Hoglah, Emek Keziz,

22 Beth Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel,

23 Avvim, Parah, Ophrah,

24 Kephart Ammoni, Ophni and Geba — twelve towns and their villages.

25 Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth,

26 Mizpah, Kephirah, Mozah,

27 Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah,

28 Zelah, Haeleph, the Jebusite city (that is, Jerusalem), Gibeah and Kiriath — fourteen towns and their villages. This was the inheritance of Benjamin for its clans.

19:1 The second lot came out for the tribe of Simeon, clan by clan. Their inheritance lay within the territory of Judah.

2 It included: Beersheba (or Sheba), Moladah,

3 Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem,

4 Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah,

5 Ziklag, Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susah,

6 Beth Lebaoth and Sharuhen — thirteen towns and their villages;

7 Ain, Rimmon, Ether and Ashan — four towns and their villages—

8 and all the villages around these towns as far as Baalath Beer (Ramah in the Negev).

This was the inheritance of the tribe of the Simeonites, clan by clan.

9 The inheritance of the Simeonites was taken from the share of Judah, because Judah's portion was more than they needed. So the Simeonites received their inheritance within the territory of Judah.

10 The third lot came up for Zebulun, clan by clan: The boundary of their inheritance went as far as Sarid.

11 Going west it ran to Maralah, touched Dabbesheth, and extended to the ravine near Jokneam.

12 It turned east from Sarid toward the sunrise to the territory of Kisloth Tabor and went on to Daberath and up to Japhia.

13 Then it continued eastward to Gath Hopher and Eth Kazin; it came out at Rimmon and turned toward Neah.

14 There the boundary went around on the north to Hannathon and ended at the Valley of Iph-tah El.

15 Included were Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah and Bethlehem. There were twelve towns and their villages.

16 These towns and their villages were the inheritance of Zebulun, clan by clan.

17 The fourth lot came out for Issachar, clan by clan.

18 Their territory included: Jezreel, Kesulloth, Shunem,

19 Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath,

- 20 Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez,
 21 Remeth, En Gannim, En Haddah and Beth Pazzez.
 22 The boundary touched Tabor, Shahazumah and Beth Shemesh, and ended at the Jordan.
 There were sixteen towns and their villages.
 23 These towns and their villages were the inheritance of the tribe of Issachar, clan by clan.
 24 The fifth lot came out for the tribe of Asher, clan by clan.
 25 Their territory included: Helkath, Hali, Beten, Acshaph,
 26 Allammelech, Amad and Mishal. On the west the boundary touched Carmel and Shihor Libnath.
 27 It then turned east toward Beth Dagon, touched Zebulun and the Valley of Iphtah El, and went north to Beth Emek and Neiel, passing Cabul on the left.
 28 It went to Abdon, Rehob, Hammon and Kanah, as far as Greater Sidon.
 29 The boundary then turned back toward Ramah and went to the fortified city of Tyre, turned toward Hosah and came out at the sea in the region of Aczib,
 30 Ummah, Aphek and Rehob. There were twenty-two towns and their villages.
 31 These towns and their villages were the inheritance of the tribe of Asher, clan by clan.
 32 The sixth lot came out for Naphtali, clan by clan:
 33 Their boundary went from Heleph and the large tree in Zaanannim, passing Adami Nekeb and Jabneel to Lakkum and ending at the Jordan.
 34 The boundary ran west through Aznoth Tabor and came out at Hukkok. It touched Zebulun on the south, Asher on the west and the Jordan on the east.
 35 The fortified cities were Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Kinnereth,
 36 Adamah, Ramah, Hazor,
 37 Kedesh, Edrei, En Hazor,
 38 Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth Anath and Beth Shemesh. There were nineteen towns and their villages.
 39 These towns and their villages were the inheritance of the tribe of Naphtali, clan by clan.
 40 The seventh lot came out for the tribe of Dan, clan by clan.
 41 The territory of their inheritance included: Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir Shemesh,
 42 Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah,
 43 Elon, Timnah, Ekron,
 44 Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath,
 45 Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon,
 46 Me Jarkon and Rakkon, with the area facing Joppa.
 47 (But the Danites had difficulty taking possession of their territory, so they went up and attacked Leshem, took it, put it to the sword and occupied it. They settled in Leshem and named it Dan after their forefather.)
 48 These towns and their villages were the inheritance of the tribe of Dan, clan by clan.
 49 When they had finished dividing the land into its allotted portions, the Israelites gave Joshua son of Nun an inheritance among them,
 50 as the LORD had commanded. They gave him the town he asked for — Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim. And he built up the town and settled there.
 51 These are the territories that Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans of Israel assigned by lot at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And so they finished dividing the land.

The most important information in this chapter is the moving of the tabernacle from Gilgal, where it had been for approximately seven years, to Shiloh. The choice of Shiloh, which was in the territory allotted to Ephraim, was undoubtedly, made under divine direction. Moses had commanded: “Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name — there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD.”¹

Bible scholars have extensively discussed the meaning and spelling of the name Shiloh. It is first

found in Jacob's prophecy and blessing for Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."¹ Whether the name Shiloh was given to the place after the moving of the tabernacle or whether it existed before and the place was chosen because of the name is not certain. Shiloh means "tranquil," or "peaceful." We may assume that much more is involved here than a play-on-words. The Holy Spirit meant to demonstrate that there was a connection between the ark as the place of God's revelation on earth and the coming of the one Jacob called "Shiloh."

The moving of the tabernacle from Gilgal to Shiloh is described as being done by the whole nation of Israel. Although this is not specifically stated, the moving of the tabernacle and its furniture must have been done by the Levites to whom Moses had assigned that task. *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* explains: "The Kohathites held the highest office and bore the ark (except on solemn occasions when the priests bore it: Josh 3:3,15) and vessels, after the priest had covered them (Num 4:15). The Gershonites bore the tent hangings and curtains; the Merarites the tabernacle boards, bars, and pillars; the Kohathites under Eleazar bore the vessels on their shoulders (Num 7:9); the Gershonites and Merarites under Ithamar (Num 4:28,33), because of their weighty charge, were allowed oxen and wagons." Although the Levites did the actual work, they carried out the responsibilities assigned to them as representatives of the whole nation. In that sense "The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting there." The tabernacle remained at Shiloh until the time of Samuel. When the Philistines captured the ark and afterwards returned it, the tabernacle was moved to Kiriath Jearim.² In David's early days we find the tabernacle in Nob,³ but after Saul's massacre of the priests, it was removed to Gibeon, where it remained until the temple was built. David eventually brought the ark to Jerusalem and placed it in a tent. During most of David's years as king, there were two places of worship, the tabernacle (without the ark) in Gibeon and the tent which contained the ark in Jerusalem. In the new temple the ark was the only object of the original furniture. The original tabernacle was probably so old at that time that most its non-metallic material had disintegrated.

One would have expected that at the time the allotment of the territory to Judah and Joseph, that is Manasseh and Ephraim, was made, all the other tribes would also have received their inheritance. But that is obviously not the way it went. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "While the selection of Shiloh and the consequent assembling of the nation there had necessarily interrupted the process of assigning portions to the last seven tribes, these tribes, on their part, were slack in going out to conquer the remaining land in Canaan. Joshua had to commission a twenty-one-man reconnaissance expedition to describe the land in seven parts." The problem in this, however, is that Joshua seems to reproach the seven remaining tribes that they had not claimed their territory. And it was only after a committee of twenty-one scouts had made their survey that Joshua and Eliezer, the high priest cast the lots.⁴ The question remains how the tribes could take possession of land that had not been allotted to them. We assume, therefore, that some kind of allotment had been made but these seven tribes had not acted upon it. There may have been feelings of jealousy among them that caused arguments and divisions that prevented action. The twenty-one-member commission Joshua suggested to be formed must have served, not only for the purpose of surveying the land, but also for arbitration. It would not be the first time in history that internal strife kept believers from obeying the Lord's will.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary observes: "God by his grace has given us a title to a good land, the heavenly Canaan, but we are slack to take possession; we enter not into that rest, as we might by faith, and hope, and holy joy; we live not in heaven, as we might by setting our affections on things above and having our conversation there. How long shall it be thus with us? How long shall we thus stand in our own light, and forsake our own mercies for lying vanities? Joshua was sensible of the inconveniences of this delay, that, while they neglected to take possession of the land that was conquered, the Canaanites were recovering strength and spirit, and fortifying themselves in the places that were yet in their hands, which

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1. Deut. 12:11
 1. Gen. 49:10 (KJV)
 2. I Sam. 6:13-21
 3. See I Sam. 21:1-7.
 4. See Josh. 18:10; 19:51.

would make the total expulsion of them the more difficult. They would lose their advantages by not following their blow; and therefore, as an eagle stirreth up her nest, so Joshua stirs them up to take possession of their lot. He is ready to do his part, if they will but do theirs.”

The Adam Clarke's Commentary suggests that it was reluctance to engage again in battle that kept the individual tribes from claiming what was theirs. We read: “We find an unaccountable backwardness in this people to enter on the inheritance which God had given them! They had so long been supported by miracle, without any exertions of their own, that they found it difficult to shake themselves from their inactivity. When it was necessary that all the people should go out to battle, they went with a measure of confidence, expecting miraculous help from God, and confiding in their numbers, but when each tribe found it necessary to fight for itself, in order to its establishment and the extension of its borders, it was discouraged, and chose rather a life of inglorious ease than the possession of an inheritance which would cost it much labor to conquer.”

Joshua seems to have shown little tolerance toward those who did not act in faith upon God's promises. To the members of his own tribe he said: “You will have not only one allotment but the forested hill country as well. Clear it, and its farthest limits will be yours; though the Canaanites have iron chariots and though they are strong, you can drive them out.”¹ He showed the same kind of impatience toward the seven tribes mentioned in this chapter. In this he reflected the attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ. We read about Him: “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.”² Jesus demonstrated compassion and sympathy towards all kinds of human suffering and weakness except a lack of faith. For Joshua we can understand this in view of his own experiences of answered prayer. When God stops the rotation of the world, keeping the sun from going down in answer to prayer, it is difficult to doubt Him for anything else. But Joshua was not alone in experiencing the power of God; all Israel had been with him in seeing God at work. There was no reason why Joshua's faith would be greater than the faith of his fellowmen. In the same way, the faith of the man Jesus shows us what faith in God can accomplish.

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, comments on these verses: “Unlike the spies in Numbers 13 and Joshua 2, the purpose of the map-makers is not to study the opposition but to provide information about the land. In verse 9, they ‘map’ the towns so that they can be divided into seven regions. For the Christian, the establishment of a sanctuary and center at Shiloh testifies to how God fulfils his promises. God has given his people the blessing of his presence among them. They must respond in obedience by occupying the land and living according to the divine covenant. The fundamental importance of the sanctuary is illustrated by its central position among the tribes (in the central hill country) and by its central position in the midst of the allotments of Joshua 13 – 21. Christians are also called upon to see the worship of God as central to their lives. As with the gatherings at the Shiloh sanctuary so regular meetings for worship are a chief means to provide unity and common encouragement for faithful living (Heb. 10:25).”

This is the first instance of cartography in the Bible. Benjamin received the first allocation. As far as the casting of lots is concerned, we saw before that probably two vessels, one containing the names of the tribes, the other containing those of the seven portions, were used and that the two were drawn out simultaneously. Vv. 15-20 trace the boundaries, beginning at the Jordan River and moving toward the west, following the border of Ephraim on the north, Dan on the west side and Judah on the south. Benjamin's territory was barely 30 miles from east to west and approximately 10 miles from north to south at its widest point. The stretch that bordered the Jordan was about 5 miles wide.

Moses had prophesied about Benjamin: “Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.” The Lord's shoulders, supposedly, refer to the mountains of Jerusalem, which include Moriah where Abraham sacrificed Isaac and where eventually Solomon built the temple. It was the place where Jesus would be crucified. The chapter ends with a list of cities that fell in the region allotted to Benjamin (Vv. 21-28).

The next tribe to receive its inheritance was Simeon. They received an enclave inside the tribe of Judah. At the last census Simeon turned out to be numerically the smallest tribe, counting only 22,200 men who could bear arms.³ Jacob had prophesied about Simeon and Levi: “Simeon and Levi are brothers — their

1. Josh. 17:17,18

2. Mark 6:5,6

swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.”¹ Jacob had linked the two tribes together because of their crime against the city of Shechem. The two brothers killed all the men in the city in retaliation for Shechem’s rape of their sister Dinah.² As far as the scattering of Levi in Israel was concerned, Jacob’s curse partly turned into a blessing. The dispersion of the Levites became the salt of the nation to keep the people from corruption in maintaining fellowship with God. For Simeon it simply meant that they would be completely landlocked by Judah. Evidently, Judah’s territory was considered to be too large for the tribe and we do not read that Judah protested against some of it being taken away.

It is interesting to observe the different outcome of Jacob’s prophecy about Simeon and Levi. We could say that Levi’s “curse” was totally reversed but Simeon’s was not. Simeon’s inheritance was simply restrictive, but Levi received an inheritance that surpassed all the others. Levi received God Himself as his portion. The other tribes only received an image of the real riches, a shadow of the reality. The reason for this difference was the obedience of one man, Moses. Moses was a member of the tribe of Levi. However reluctant he had been in answering the call of the Lord, (He said to the Lord: “O Lord, please send someone else to do it.”) he did obey and go. His obedience became a blessing, not only for himself and his tribe, but for the whole nation and eventually the whole world. We will never be able to fathom the result of our obedience to God’s call.

Vv. 10-15 deal with the inheritance of Zebulun. Zebulun was flanked by the tribes of Manasseh to the south, Asher to the west, Naphtali to the north and Issachar to the east. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, Tabor “is one of the most conspicuous mountains of Palestine.” It can be seen on all sides and is approximately 1,750 feet above sea level. Tabor is supposed to be the scene of the Transfiguration.

Moses had prophesied about Zebulun: “They will summon peoples to the mountain and there offer sacrifices of righteousness; they will feast on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand.”³ Initially, Zebulun’s allotment did not reach to the shore of the Mediterranean, but if Moses’ prophecy was fulfilled they must have eventually extended their territory farther west. Not all of the places named in these verses have been identified by modern archeology; the exact extent of the territory has, therefore, not been established. Jacob also had prophesied: “Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.”⁴

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Zebulun’s country: “It is strange that the beautiful and fertile land occupied by the tribe of Zebulun does not appear to have brought prosperity with it. Possibly the fact that ‘lines’ of this tribe had ‘fallen in pleasant places,’ had tended to induce sloth. Certain it is that we hear but little of this tribe in the after history of Israel. They were not, like Reuben, absent from the great battle of Tabor, for there we read that, like Issachar, they ‘jeopardized their lives unto the death’ for their homes and liberties. Yet though they seem thenceforth to have slackened in their zeal, theirs was a fair portion. It bordered on the slopes of Tabor, and seems (though the fact is not mentioned here) to have extended to the Sea of Galilee, as we may gather from ... Isaiah 9:1.” There is a danger in too much blessing. As George McDonald, the Scottish writer once stated, God can punish people by making them rich. We need strong legs to carry the burden of wealth. What Moses predicted about the whole nation of Israel, may have found its ultimate fulfillment in Zebulun. Moses said: “Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior.”⁵

Vv. 17-23 describe the inheritance of Issachar. Issachar shared its northern border with Zebulun and Naphtali. To the south it touched Manasseh and its eastern limit was the Jordan River with Gad as its neighbor. Its longest distance from east to west was approximately 20 miles and 15 north to south. Considering the fact that Issachar was one of the larger tribes in Israel, at the last census they numbered 64,300,⁶ this tribe

3. See Num. 26:14.

1. Gen. 49:5-7

2. See Gen. 34:25-29.

3. Deut. 33:19

4. Gen. 49:13

5. Deut. 32:15

must have burst at the seams. Issachar's territory would become the place of several important events in the history of Israel, not all of them good. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* traces some of these: "The most considerable places in this tribe were, 1. Jezreel, in which was Ahab's palace, and near it Naboth's vineyard. 2. Shunem, where lived that good Shunammite that entertained Elisha. 3. The river Kishion, on the banks of which, in this tribe, Sisera was beaten by Deborah and Barak. 4. The mountains of Gilboa, on which Saul and Jonathan were slain, which were not far from Endor, where Saul consulted the witch. 5. The valley of Megiddo, where Josiah was slain near Hadad-Rimmon, 2 Kings 23:29; Zech 12:11." It will be the scene of the world's last battle at Armageddon, which means "Mountain of Megiddo. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states that it is: "the site of the final battle of this age in which God intervenes to destroy the armies of Satan and to cast Satan into the bottomless pit (Rev 16:16; 20:1-3,7-10). Scholars disagree about the exact location of this place, but the most likely possibility is the valley between Mount Carmel and the city of Jezreel. This valley (known as the Valley of Jezreel and sometimes referred to as the Plain of Esdraelon) was the crossroads of two ancient trade routes and thus was a strategic military site. Armageddon is the Greek word for this area, which was the scene of many ancient battles. Because of this history, Megiddo became a symbol of the final conflict between God and the forces of evil. According to the Book of Revelation, at Armageddon 'the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His [God's] wrath' (Rev 16:19) will be poured out, and the forces of evil will be overthrown and destroyed."

Vv. 24-31 trace the boundaries of Asher, beginning at the southeastern point of Helkath. Its eastern neighbors were Zebulon, Manasseh and Naphtali. In the west, along the Mediterranean Sea it touched Carmel to the south. The northern border marked the boundary of Canaan. It included Phoenicia and part of, what later came to be known as Galilee. Mount Carmel would become famous because of Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal.¹ The only wellknown person from the tribe of Asher was Anna, who appeared at the celebration of Jesus' circumcision.² Jacob had prophesied about Asher: "Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king."³ In a way this prophecy was fulfilled in Anna's recognition of Jesus' birth. Moses' prediction about Asher was one of generous blessing. We read: "Most blessed of sons is Asher; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him bathe his feet in oil. The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days." The latter part of this statement is probably a reference to the fortress of Tyre.

Asher's material blessing may have been his undoing. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about Asher's allotment: "Asher appears to have been allotted a long but narrow strip of territory between Naphtali and the sea. The natural advantages of the territory must have been great. Not only was it described prophetically by Jacob (... Genesis 49:20) and by Moses ... Deuteronomy 33:24, 25), but the prosperity of the two great maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon was due to the immense commercial advantages the neighborhood afforded ... Asher, however, never employed the advantages its situation offered. They never subdued the Canaanites around them, but, unquestionably, at a very early date (see ... Judges 5:17) preferred a life of compromise and ignoble ease to the national welfare. But it would be incorrect to suppose that because the tribe is omitted in the list of rulers given in 1 Chronicles 27, it had ceased to be a power in Israel. For Gad is also omitted in that list, while among the warriors who came to greet David when he became undisputed king of Israel, Asher sent 40,000 trained warriors, a number exceeding the men of Ephraim, and those of Simeon, of Dan, and of the half tribe of Manasseh (see 1 Chronicles 12.), and far exceeding the numbers of Benjamin, which had never recovered the war of almost extermination waged against it, in consequence of the atrocity at Gibeah (Judges 20.). Possibly the reason why so few are mentioned of the tribe of Judah on that occasion is because so many were already with David."

The sixth lot (Vv. 32-39) fell to Naphtali. With Benjamin, Naphtali had the distinction of sharing its borders with five other tribes. With Asher and half the tribe of Benjamin it formed the northern border of Canaan. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The border of Naphtali is more lightly traced than any previous one, and is regarded as being sufficiently defined, save toward the north, by the boundaries of the other

6. See Num. 26:25.

1. I Kings 18

2. See Luke 2:36-38.

3. Gen. 49:20

tribes.” Part of Galilee also fell in Naphtali’s territory.

The only thing Jacob said on his deathbed about Naphtali was: “Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.”¹ *Barnes’ Notes* comments on Jacob’s pronouncement: “Eloquence in prose and verse was characteristic of this particular tribe. The only important historical event in which they are concerned is the defeat of Jabin’s host, which is celebrated in the song of Deborah and Barak (Judg 4:5). In this passage we may study the character of the tribe.” And Moses predicted about this tribe: “Naphtali is abounding with the favor of the LORD and is full of his blessing; he will inherit southward to the lake.”² “The lake” is the Sea of Galilee, which mostly fell in Naphtali’s territory. This must have made fishermen of most of the men of that tribe.

The tribe of Dan received the last lot of approximately 20 x 10 miles. For a tribe numbering 64,400 men bearing arms,³ that allotment seems to be rather inadequate. To the west Dan faced the Mediterranean Sea. It shared its northern border with Manasseh. Ephraim was at the east and Judah to the south.

Jacob’s characterization of Dan is expressed in the words: “Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider tumbles backward.”⁴ And Moses said about this tribe: “Dan is a lion’s cub, springing out of Bashan.”⁵ The reference to Bashan in the northeast of Canaan was not topographical. Evidently Bashan was lion country. The two prophecies seem to depict Dan’s prowess and aggressiveness. The men of Dan, finding themselves cramped, decided to solve their problem by attacking Leshem and annexing the territory. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The border of Dan did ‘go out’ far beyond the borders originally assigned to the tribe, in fact to the extreme northern limit of Palestine. The account of the taking of Laish, or Leshem, is given more fully in Judges 18. The inheritance assigned to Dan was extremely small, but it was also extremely fertile.” The NIV reads in V. 47: “The Danites had difficulty taking possession of their territory,” but the KJV stays closer to the meaning with: “The coast of the children of Dan went out too little for them.” *The Living Bible* reads: “But some of this territory proved impossible to conquer, so the tribe of Dan captured the city of Leshem, slaughtered its people, and lived there; and they called the city ‘Dan,’ naming it after their ancestor.”

The last one to receive an inheritance was Joshua himself. He requested a parcel in the territory of his own tribe, Ephraim, and received Timnath Serah, which is called “Timnath Heres” in the Book of Judges.⁶ Timnah Heres means “Timnah of the sun.” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Rabbi Solomon Jarchi gives a singular reason for the latter name. It came to be so called because there was a representation of the sun upon the tomb of him who caused the sun to stand still.”

Richard S. Hess, in his commentary *Joshua*, states: “The two spies who returned a good report in Numbers 13 are rewarded with their own inheritance. That of Caleb, in the south of the central hill country (at Hebron) is described at the beginning of the allotment for the tribes west of Jordan (Jos. 14:6-15; 15:13-19). The inheritance of Joshua is described at the end of the allotments. It is in the central hill country of Ephraim (Joshua’s tribe) at Timnath Serah and is identified with Khirbet Tibnah, 16 miles south-west of Shechem. From a literary perspective, the two individual inheritances begin and end the allotments. Joshua waits until all the other inheritances are assigned before taking any for himself. Thus he preserves his right to a share of the land without any suggestion of an abuse of his leadership responsibilities. The allotment was done according to God’s will, with Eleazar the priest presiding ‘before the Lord’ at Shiloh’s sanctuary. The land is God’s blessing upon Israel and forms a testimony of the divine presence among them.

For the Christian, this account of Joshua’s inheritance provides several lessons about Christian ministry. Firstly, the leader seeks to proclaim and follow God’s Word through to its conclusion, without compromising or changing things midway (1 Tim. 4:11-16; Tit. 1:9). Joshua and Eleazar obeyed God throughout the allotment. Secondly, the leader exhibits courtesy and humility (Gal. 5:22-26). Although Joshua could have

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1. Gen. 49:21
 2. Deut. 33:23
 3. See Num. 26:43.
 4. Gen. 49:17
 5. Deut. 33:22
 6. Judg. 2:9

rightly claimed his portion at the beginning of the allotment or during the allotment to Ephraim, the text places it as the last of all the portions allotted to Israel. Joshua receives his land, as God promised, but he does so only after everyone else has received theirs. Thirdly, Joshua as God's appointed leader does indeed receive an allotment. He is given a fair share in Israel's inheritance (1 Tim. 5:17-18)."

The last verse of this chapter confirms that the division of the land was done by Eliezer, the high priest, and Joshua, leader of the nation, in the presence of the Lord. The parceling out of the land was God's gift to Israel. The Lord knew each of the tribes, their needs, their character and their potential and He gave them according to what they would be able to receive. We may quote Paul's introduction to the gifts the Holy Spirit endows to the church of Jesus Christ: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."¹

In concluding this chapter, we must ask the question about what Israel did with the land that was given to them. The land belonged to God and the children of Israel were given the use of it. God had told the Israelites: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants."² Israel's inheritance came with conditions. God said: "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you."³ In Psalm Thirty-Seven David displays the standards of moral conduct required to live in the Promised Land. "Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. The meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace."⁴ Israel, in general, never met God's standards required to live in the land and the land did vomit out its inhabitants in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. They never entered the Promised Land in the spiritual sense of the word.

The writer to the Hebrews draws the New Testament conclusion from this by stating: "It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."⁵

g. Towns of refuge (20:1-9)

1 Then the LORD said to Joshua:

2 "Tell the Israelites to designate the cities of refuge, as I instructed you through Moses,

3 so that anyone who kills a person accidentally and unintentionally may flee there and find protection from the avenger of blood.

4 "When he flees to one of these cities, he is to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state his case before the elders of that city. Then they are to admit him into their city and give him a place to live with them.

1. I Cor. 12:7,11

2. Lev. 25:23

3. Lev. 18:24-28

4. Ps. 37:3,9,11

5. Heb. 4:6-13

5 If the avenger of blood pursues him, they must not surrender the one accused, because he killed his neighbor unintentionally and without malice aforethought.

6 He is to stay in that city until he has stood trial before the assembly and until the death of the high priest who is serving at that time. Then he may go back to his own home in the town from which he fled."

7 So they set apart Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah.

8 On the east side of the Jordan of Jericho they designated Bezer in the desert on the plateau in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the tribe of Manasseh.

9 Any of the Israelites or any alien living among them who killed someone accidentally could flee to these designated cities and not be killed by the avenger of blood prior to standing trial before the assembly.

This chapter deals with the cities of refuge to which a person who committed manslaughter could flee in order to save his life from the revenge of the victim's relatives. At three occasions in the Pentateuch God had spoken to Moses about the subject: "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.

However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate."¹ And secondly: "When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to

which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee."² And the third time: "Set aside for yourselves three cities centrally located in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess. Build roads to them and divide into three parts the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, so that anyone who kills a man may flee there."³ At that point the occupation of the land east of Jordan had not yet been taken into consideration.

Giving an example, God explained to Moses what was meant: "This is the rule concerning the man who kills another and flees there to save his life — one who kills his neighbor unintentionally, without malice aforethought. For instance, a man may go into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and as he swings his ax to fell a tree, the head may fly off and hit his neighbor and kill him. That man may flee to one of these cities and save his life. Otherwise, the avenger of blood might pursue him in a rage, overtake him if the distance is too great, and kill him even though he is not deserving of death, since he did it to his neighbor without malice aforethought. This is why I command you to set aside for yourselves three cities."⁴

In our present day western society it is difficult to understand the conditions and circumstances that required such a provision. We consider taking justice in your own hands to be as great a crime as murder, even if it pertains to murder in the first degree. Our system of justice seems to err rather on the side of letting criminals go free on a technicality. For us the days of the Wild West are ancient history. We do not favor lynching anymore.

This law was written with the Old Testament Jewish temperament in mind, although we still find some of the mentality of the avenger in the New Testament as exemplified in the crucifixion of Jesus and the attempts on Paul's life. God knew what His hotheaded children were capable of doing and therefore He made this provision for those who were innocent. The law was evidently meant to limit the effects of revenge, not to condone it.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: "The practice of Go'elism - i.e., of the nearest relation of an individual who was killed being bound to demand satisfaction from the author of his death-existed from a very remote antiquity (Gen 4:14; 27:45). It seems to have been an established usage in the age of Moses; and although in a rude and imperfect state of society it is a natural and intelligible principle of criminal jurisprudence, it is liable to many great abuses. The chief of the evils inseparable from it are, that the kinsman, who is bound in duty and honor to execute justice, will often be precipitate, little disposed, in the heat of passion, or under the impulse of revenge, to examine into the circumstances of the case-to discriminate between the premeditated purpose of the assassin and the misfortune of the unintentional homi-

1. Ex. 21:12,13

2. Num. 35:10,11

3. Deut. 19:2,3

4. Deut. 19:4-7

cide. This practice of Go'elism obtained among the Hebrews to such an extent, that it was not perhaps expedient to abolish it; and Moses, while sanctioning its continuance, was directed, by divine authority, to make some special regulations, which tended both to prevent the unhappy consequences of sudden and personal vengeance, and at the same time to afford an accused person time and means of proving his innocence. This was the humane and equitable end contemplated in the institution of cities of refuge."

It has been observed that all the cities designated as cities of refuge are cities that in the next chapter are also assigned to the Levites. Most Bible scholars, therefore, assume that the chronology has been reversed in this account and that the Levites received their share before the cities of refuge were assigned.

The Hebrew word translated here avenger is *ga'al*, meaning: "to redeem according to the Oriental law of kinship." *Ga'al* is actually the verb form of the noun *go'el*. It usually has a positive connotation as in "If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold."¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: "The law of blood-revenge ... made it the sacred duty of the nearest relative to avenge the blood of his kinsman. He was called the *go'el ha-dam*, 'the avenger of blood.' This law was based upon the command given in Gen 9:5 f: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed,' and was carried out even if an animal had killed a man; in this case, however, the payment of a ransom was permitted (Ex 21:28 ff)."

The whole issue of guilt and cities of refuge acquires tremendous depth if we see in it a picture of the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the fulfillment of what the *go'el* stood for in the Old Testament. The word *go'el* is used in Job's exclamation: "I know that my Redeemer lives."² And in the psalmist's plea: "Defend my cause and redeem me; preserve my life according to your promise."³ The Book of Proverbs warns: "Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you."⁴ And Isaiah prophesied: "'Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little Israel, for I myself will help you,' declares the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel."⁵

Job's words have correctly been put in the context of Jesus' resurrection. And it is obvious that every Old Testament reference to redemption, whether related to a material or spiritual need, is an image of the death and resurrection of our Savior. Jesus Christ became the avenger of blood in that He, first of all, gave His own blood for the salvation of the world. The first human blood that was shed on earth, the blood of Abel, cried for vengeance. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states that we have come "to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."⁶ *The Living Bible* paraphrases this beautifully with: "the sprinkled blood, which graciously forgives instead of crying out for vengeance as the blood of Abel did." But the Book of Revelation also portrays Christ as the judge and avenger of blood for those who persist in sin and refuse the redemption He offers. "He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."⁷

The cities of refuge themselves are types of Jesus in whom we may take refuge. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* gives the following interesting comments on the cities of refuge: "Some observe a significance in the names of these cities with application to Christ our refuge. I delight not in quibbling upon names, yet am willing to take notice of these. Kedesh signifies holy, and our refuge is the holy Jesus. Shechem, a shoulder, and the government is upon his shoulder. Hebron, fellowship, and believers are called into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord. Bezer, a fortification, for he is a stronghold to all those that trust in him. Ramoth, high or exalted, for him hath God exalted with his own right hand. Golan, joy or exultation, for in him all the saints are justified, and shall glory. Lastly, besides all these, the horns of the altar, wherever it was, were a refuge to those who took hold of them, if the crime were such as that sanctuary allowed. This

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1. Lev. 25:25
 2. Job 19:25
 3. Ps. 119:154
 4. Prov. 23:10,11
 5. Isa. 41:14
 6. Heb. 12:24
 7. Rev. 19:15

is implied in that law (Ex 21:14), that a willful murderer shall be taken from God's altar to be put to death. And we find the altar used for this purpose. 1 Kings 1:50; 2:28. Christ is our altar, who not only sanctifies the gift, but protects the giver."

The most important point of comparison is in the reference to the death of the high priest. The fact that a court of justice declared a person who had caused an accidental death, not guilty of murder, did not free that person to leave the city of refuge but the death of the high priest allowed him to return to his home. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "That death meant a change of priestly administration and acted as does our statute of limitations." Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, comments: "The high priest represents the nation, especially in terms of its guilt and its sacrifice (Lev. 16). The death of the priest symbolically terminates the guilt incurred by the killer's act. Presumably, the avenger of blood would accept this death as a substitute for the death of the killer. The compensation had been paid. Nothing further was required."

Much more is involved in the principle of the cities of refuge than a mere judicial procedure. The issue was obviously not a crime but an accident. We may argue that there are no accidents for God. But yet we live in a world in which things go wrong although we do not want them to. The example of the man killing his neighbor because his ax flew off the handle illustrates this clearly. We do not understand enough of the eternal power struggle between God and Satan that makes this world unsafe for human habitation, but we see that bad things happen even if people try to avoid them. The cities of refuge demonstrate that God sets limits to the destructive powers of evil until the day that "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."¹This consummation was symbolically portrayed in the anointing of the high priest. We find this mentioned in the Book of Numbers in reference to the cities of refuge: "The assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the avenger of blood and send him back to the city of refuge to which he fled. He must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil."²This same anointing recurs in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the author writes: "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."³The writer calls this "the hope offered to us," and he says: "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."⁴

Finally, *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "We never read in the history of the Old Testament of any use made of these cities of refuge, any more than of other such institutions, which yet, no doubt, were made use of upon the occasions intended; only we read of those that, in dangerous cases, took hold of the horns of the altar (1 Kings 1:50; 2:28); for the altar, wherever that stood, was, as it were the capital city of refuge. But the law concerning these cities was designed both to raise and to encourage the expectations of those who looked for redemption in Israel, which should be to those who were convinced of sin, and in terror by reason of it, as the cities of refuge were to the manslayer."

The Hebrew verb, rendered here "set apart" is *qadash*, which has the meaning of "being made holy." We find it in the verses "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy"⁵ and "Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy."⁶The use of *qadash* gives a deeper meaning to the whole process of protecting the life of the innocent. Human life is holy because a holy God created it. Speaking about murder and capital punishment, God said: "I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow

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1. See Isa. 11:9.
 2. Num. 35:25
 3. Heb. 9:14,15
 4. Heb. 6:17-20
 5. Gen. 2:3
 6. Lev. 20:8

man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”¹Both the life of a murder victim and the life of an unwilling man slaughterer are holy.

The cities east of Jordan were Kadesh in the north in the territory of Naphtali, Sechem in Ephraim’s property and Hebron in the land of Judah. East of Jordan, we find Bezer in Reuben’s land, Ramoth in Gilead, property of Gad, and Golan in the tribe of Manasseh. Golan and Ramoth-Gilead were closer together than the cities west of Jordan, which were more or less equal distance from each other. No reason is given for this; the condition of the terrain may have made travel more difficult. *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states: “According to the rabbis, in order to aid the fugitive it was the business of the Sanhedrin to keep the roads leading to the cities of refuge in the best possible repair. No hills were left, every river was bridged, and the road itself was to be at least thirty-two cubits broad. At every turn were guideposts bearing the word ‘Refuge,’ and two students of the law were appointed to accompany the fleeing man and to pacify, if possible, the avenger, should he overtake the fugitive.”

h. Towns for the Levites (21:1-45)

1 Now the family heads of the Levites approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the heads of the other tribal families of Israel

2 at Shiloh in Canaan and said to them, "The LORD commanded through Moses that you give us towns to live in, with pasturelands for our livestock."

3 So, as the LORD had commanded, the Israelites gave the Levites the following towns and pasturelands out of their own inheritance:

4 The first lot came out for the Kohathites, clan by clan. The Levites who were descendants of Aaron the priest were allotted thirteen towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.

5 The rest of Kohath’s descendants were allotted ten towns from the clans of the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and half of Manasseh.

6 The descendants of Gershon were allotted thirteen towns from the clans of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

7 The descendants of Merari, clan by clan, received twelve towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

8 So the Israelites allotted to the Levites these towns and their pasturelands, as the LORD had commanded through Moses.

9 From the tribes of Judah and Simeon they allotted the following towns by name

10 (these towns were assigned to the descendants of Aaron who were from the Kohathite clans of the Levites, because the first lot fell to them):

11 They gave them Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), with its surrounding pastureland, in the hill country of Judah. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.)

12 But the fields and villages around the city they had given to Caleb son of Jephunneh as his possession.

13 So to the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Libnah,

14 Jattir, Eshtemoa,

15 Holon, Debir,

16 Ain, Juttah and Beth Shemesh, together with their pasturelands — nine towns from these two tribes.

17 And from the tribe of Benjamin they gave them Gibeon, Geba,

18 Anathoth and Almon, together with their pasturelands — four towns.

19 All the towns for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were thirteen, together with their pasturelands.

20 The rest of the Kohathite clans of the Levites were allotted towns from the tribe of Ephraim:

21 In the hill country of Ephraim they were given Shechem (a city of refuge for one accused of murder) and Gezer,

1. Gen. 9:5,6

- 22 *Kibzaim and Beth Horon, together with their pasturelands — four towns.*
- 23 *Also from the tribe of Dan they received Eltekeh, Gibbethon,*
- 24 *Aijalon and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands — four towns.*
- 25 *From half the tribe of Manasseh they received Taanach and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands — two towns.*
- 26 *All these ten towns and their pasturelands were given to the rest of the Kohathite clans.*
- 27 *The Levite clans of the Gershonites were given: from the half-tribe of Manasseh, Golan in Bashan (a city of refuge for one accused of murder) and Be Eshtarah, together with their pasturelands — two towns;*
- 28 *from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion, Daberath,*
- 29 *Jarmuth and En Gannim, together with their pasturelands — four towns;*
- 30 *from the tribe of Asher, Mishal, Abdon,*
- 31 *Helkath and Rehob, together with their pasturelands — four towns;*
- 32 *from the tribe of Naphtali, Kedesh in Galilee (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Hammoth Dor and Kartan, together with their pasturelands — three towns.*
- 33 *All the towns of the Gershonite clans were thirteen, together with their pasturelands.*
- 34 *The Merarite clans (the rest of the Levites) were given: from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam, Kartah,*
- 35 *Dimnah and Nahalal, together with their pasturelands — four towns;*
- 36 *from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer, Jahaz,*
- 37 *Kedemoth and Mephaath, together with their pasturelands — four towns;*
- 38 *from the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in Gilead (a city of refuge for one accused of murder), Mahanaim,*
- 39 *Heshbon and Jazer, together with their pasturelands — four towns in all.*
- 40 *All the towns allotted to the Merarite clans, who were the rest of the Levites, were twelve.*
- 41 *The towns of the Levites in the territory held by the Israelites were forty-eight in all, together with their pasturelands.*
- 42 *Each of these towns had pasturelands surrounding it; this was true for all these towns.*
- 43 *So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there.*
- 44 *The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them.*
- 45 *Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.*

In introducing this section, Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, states: “The forty-eight towns of the Levites are carefully organized and listed. There are headings and summaries at the beginning and end of each subsection as there are for the whole list. The numbers of towns allocated are included with each summary. Specific notes remind the reader of those towns that are towns of refuge and of the two names of Hebron/Kiriath Arba and its occupation by Caleb.”

The first thing that draws our attention in this chapter about the allocation of the Levitical cities is the fact that the Levites had to remind the leaders of the nation about the arrangement. One would think that spiritually minded people would not need to be reminded of the needs of their spiritual leaders. Israel’s well-being, both material and spiritual, depended on the presence of the priests and Levites. Evidently, our sinful human nature does not understand its own needs.

The Pulpit Commentary does not agree with the above; it comments: “We are not to suppose, with Calvin, that the Levites had been overlooked. Such a supposition is little in keeping with the devout spirit of him who now directed the affairs of the Israelites, who had been minister to Moses the Levite, and had but lately been concerned with Eleazar, the high priest, in making a public recognition of that God to whose service the Levites had been specially set apart. The delay in appointing to the Levites their cities arose from the nature of the arrangement which had to be made for the Levitical cities. The prophecy which threatened (...Genesis 49:7) to ‘scatter them in Israel’ was to be fulfilled for the benefit of the whole people. Instead of a portion for himself, Levi, as we have been repeatedly informed (...Joshua 13:33; 14:3; 18:7), was to have ‘the Lord God of Israel for his inheritance.’ Since, therefore, their cities were to be assigned them within the limits of the other tribes, it was impossible to apportion them until the other tribes had been provided for.” I

tend to agree with Calvin, at least at this point. If *The Pulpit Commentary's* assumption were correct, we would have read that Joshua took the initiative and called the Levites. As it stands, the Levites had to claim what God had promised to them.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary comments: "They [the Levites] had not their lot assigned them till they made their claim. There is an inheritance provided for all the saints, that royal priesthood, but then they must petition for it. *Ask, and it shall be given you..* Joshua had quickened the rest of the tribes who were slack to put in their claims, but the Levites, it may be supposed, knew their duty and interest better than the rest, and were therefore forward in this matter, when it came to their turn, without being called upon. They build their claim upon a very good foundation, not their own merits nor services, but the divine precept: '*The Lord commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities*, commanded you to grant them, which implied a command to us to ask them.' Note, The maintenance of ministers is not an arbitrary thing, left purely to the good-will of the people, who may let them starve if they please; no, as the God of Israel commanded that the Levites should be well provided for, so has the Lord Jesus, the King of the Christian church, ordained, and a perpetual ordinance it is that *those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel* (1 Cor 9:14), and should live comfortably."

The first reference to the cities of the Levites is found in the Book of Numbers¹, where the measurements for pastureland outside the city walls are specified. We find an almost identical list of cities as given here in the Book of First Chronicles.²

Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath, Merari who became the three branches of the tribe of Levi. The first lot fell to the Kohathite clan, which is the family of Moses and Aaron. The name Kohath means "congregation." The Hebrew word for "priest" is *kohen*, a word that still lives on in the Jewish family name Cohen. The descendants of Aaron formed the priestly clan in the tribe.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "We have remarked above (...Joshua 19:50) on the disinterestedness of Joshua. We have now to remark on the same characteristic as displayed by Moses. There was no attempt on the part of Moses to 'found a family,' the object of ambition with most men, whether kings or private persons possessed of wealth. No special privileges belonged to his descendants. They merged in the undistinguished herd of the Levites generally. In this Moses contrasts favorably with most public men in our own day; he stands out prominently before nearly all the great leaders and conquerors before or even after the Christian era. The same may be said of Joshua, his successor."

Before Israel had entered Canaan the total number of males above the age of one month in the tribe of Kohath was 8,600. This included 2,750 men between the ages of thirty to fifty who served in the tabernacle.³ We may assume that their number had increased since that census was taken. The priests, the descendants of Aaron, were allotted thirteen cities in the territory of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin. The rest of the Kohathites received 10 cities in the country of Dan, Ephraim and Manasseh west of Jordan. Although at this point the number of Aaron's sons is not given, the obvious imbalance between the number of towns given to Aaron's sons and the rest of the clan is obvious. Since the allocation was done by drawing of lots we must conclude that it hinged on God's decision, not on human choice. The future revelation about the place of worship in Jerusalem must have determined the outcome at this time. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* quotes Calvin, who stated: "This did not happen by chance; but God, according to His wonderful counsel, placed them just in that situation which He had determined to select for His own temple."

V. 6 outlines the thirteen towns given to the branch of Gershon in the northern part of the country, comprising the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the half-tribe of Manasseh in Bashan. In V. 7 we read the allocation of towns to the descendants of Merari in the territory east of Jordan in land belonging to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

Vv. 9-40 detail the inheritance of each of the three branches of the tribe of Levi, giving the names of the cities and particularly those that became cities of refuge. The most interesting comment is given about Hebron, which had been given to Caleb and became a city of refuge. We saw earlier that Caleb acquired Hebron because he had specifically asked for it.⁴ Now the old hero loses it again. An exception is made, however, in

1. See Num. 35:2-8.

2. See I Chron. 6:54-81.

3. Num. 3:28; 4:34-37

that Caleb was allowed to retain the pastureland surrounding the city, which normally would have fallen to the Levites. We assume that this meant that he was allowed to keep living in the city although he could no longer call it his own. Some Bible scholars believe that the Levitical cities actually remained in the hands of the tribe to which they had been originally allocated and that the Levites rented houses within the city walls and were only given part of the pastureland surrounding the town, but this cannot be substantiated. In Caleb's case we see an illustration of what possession means to a person dedicated to the Lord. Caleb was honored because he had obeyed God and had believed God's promise. In a sense Hebron was not taken away from him but God added honor to him by making it a Levitical city. When Caleb conquered Hebron, he did not conquer it for himself but for the Lord. The presence of the Levites, even more of the Levites who belonged to the priestly clan, made Caleb's inheritance one of the most special places in the land. Added to this it became a haven of refuge for people who had forfeited their lives. Only what we give to God becomes our real possession. The apostle Paul defines the principle in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away."¹

The allotment of these forty-eight towns to the Levites was meant to be a measure to maintain the spiritual integrity of the nation as a whole. The Levites were to be "the salt of the earth" as stewards of the counsel of God and ministers of the priestly ceremonies. The allocation of the Levitical cities marked the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel. Vv. 43-45 read: "So the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there. The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their forefathers. Not one of their enemies withstood them; the LORD handed all their enemies over to them. Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled."

God had promised to Moses: "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."² The Hebrew word translated "rest" is *nuwach*, which means: "to rest," "to settle down." It is a word used in reference to the Sabbath. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."³ The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews contextualizes this for us: "Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, ' 'They shall never enter my rest.' ' And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work. And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."⁴

Yet, as we have seen, many pockets of Canaan's original inhabitants continued to live in the land and most of them were not expelled or exterminated. The Book of Judges testifies to the fact that Israel did not avail itself of the full blessing of God's promises. In the last three verses of this chapter the author makes it sound as if the matter were settled and nothing remained to be done. Evidently, this was what it looked like

4. See Josh. 14:6-15.

1. I Cor. 7:29-31

2. Ex. 33:14

3. Ex. 20:11

4. Heb. 4:1-10

to him at the time of writing, particularly as long as Joshua was still alive. The fact that the enemy was not completely defeated and Israel did not complete the task of entering into God's rest does not mean that God had not done what He promised. Israel had not taken everything that God wanted to give them.

Some Bible scholars consider these verses to express "an irony that describes an ideal." *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* presents several quotations from Calvin's commentary on the text: "If any one should raise a question as to their actual peace, the solution is easy enough. The tribes of Canaan were so alarmed and broken down with their fear, that in their opinion nothing could serve their purpose better than to purchase peace from the children of Israel by the most obsequious servility. Clearly, therefore, the land was subdued and their home at peace, since no one disturbed them, or attempted anything against them; there were no threats, no snares, no violence, and no conspiracy." And: "In order to remove every appearance of discrepancy, it is right to distinguish well between the clear, unwavering, and certain fidelity of God in the fulfillment of His promises, and the weakness and indolence of the people, which caused the blessings of God to slip from their hands. Whatever war the people undertook, in whatever direction they carried their standards, there was victory ready to their hand; nor was there anything to retard or prevent the extermination of all their enemies except their own slothfulness. Consequently, although they did not destroy them all, so as to empty the land for their own possession, the truth of God stood out as distinctly as if they had; for there would have been no difficulty in their accomplishment of all that remained to be done, if they had only been disposed to grasp the victories that were ready to their hand." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "Calvin concludes a similar argument with the words, "nothing but their own cowardice prevented them from enjoying the blessings of God in all their fullness."

But there is more involved than only a matter of military conquest. As the author of Hebrews emphasizes, entering into God's rest is primarily an act of spiritual obedience. David elaborates on this theme in Psalm Thirty-Seven. Dwelling in the land is a lifestyle of high moral standards and integrity. The requirements for spiritually living in the Promised Land and inheriting it are:

- 1 - *Trust in the LORD* and *do good*; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture (v. 3)
- 2 - Those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land (v. 9)
- 3 - The meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace (v. 11)
- 4 - *Those the LORD blesses* will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off (v. 22)
- 5 - *Turn from evil* and *do good*; then you will dwell in the land forever (v. 27)
- 6 - The *righteous* will inherit the land and dwell in it forever (v. 29)
- 7 - *Wait for the LORD* and *keep his way*. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it (v. 34).

It was particularly in this respect that Israel failed. Not merely cowardice, as Calvin states, but corruption of morals caused Israel to be vomited out by the land they were supposed to possess. God's promises had not failed, but they had. Entering into God's rest, as the Epistle to the Hebrews states, means resting from our own work, just as God did from his.¹

In trying to harmonize what modern Bible critics say about the problems in the text, Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, writes: "The idealistic nature of the statements invites comparison with the unrealized ideals of the Deuteronomic laws, and thereby unites both Deuteronomy and Joshua as two dimensions of a single covenant between God and his people. The emphasis on conflicting plots moves the reader forward, but also anticipates the terrible truth that God's judgment for Israel's failure is coming. Finally, an understanding of how the references to Israel's enemies are used in the book of Joshua resolves the contradiction of 21:43-45 into a contrast with chapters 13 – 21, and attaches these three verses to the remaining three chapters in the book. For the Christian, this text illustrates the tension between two opposites. On the one hand, there is the power of God's word to effect his will and to bring about a good end to his plan of redemption (Is. 55:10-11). On the other hand, sin and suffering remain in the world. These two contrasting 'plots' of world history await resolution in the final victory of Christ and his eternal rule of salvation, health and peace (Is. 2:1-4; Rev. 19 – 21)."

IV. THE CONCLUSION: PROPER WORSHIP OF GOD (22:1 – 24:33)

a. The disputed altar (22:1-34)

1. See Heb. 4:10.

*1 Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh
2 and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded.*

3 For a long time now — to this very day — you have not deserted your brothers but have carried out the mission the LORD your God gave you.

4 Now that the LORD your God has given your brothers rest as he promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

5 But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul."

6 Then Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their homes.

7 (To the half-tribe of Manasseh Moses had given land in Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua gave land on the west side of the Jordan with their brothers.) When Joshua sent them home, he blessed them,

8 saying, "Return to your homes with your great wealth — with large herds of livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and a great quantity of clothing — and divide with your brothers the plunder from your enemies."

9 So the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the Israelites at Shiloh in Canaan to return to Gilead, their own land, which they had acquired in accordance with the command of the LORD through Moses.

10 When they came to Geliloth near the Jordan in the land of Canaan, the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an imposing altar there by the Jordan.

11 And when the Israelites heard that they had built the altar on the border of Canaan at Geliloth near the Jordan on the Israelite side,

12 the whole assembly of Israel gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them.

13 So the Israelites sent Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, to the land of Gilead — to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

14 With him they sent ten of the chief men, one for each of the tribes of Israel, each the head of a family division among the Israelite clans.

15 When they went to Gilead — to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh — they said to them:

16 "The whole assembly of the LORD says: 'How could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the LORD and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? 17 Was not the sin of Peor enough for us? Up to this very day we have not cleansed ourselves from that sin, even though a plague fell on the community of the LORD!

18 And are you now turning away from the LORD? "'If you rebel against the LORD today, tomorrow he will be angry with the whole community of Israel.

19 If the land you possess is defiled, come over to the LORD's land, where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and share the land with us. But do not rebel against the LORD or against us by building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the LORD our God.

20 When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin.'" "

21 Then Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh replied to the heads of the clans of Israel:

22 "The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows! And let Israel know! If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day.

23 If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account.

24 "No! We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, 'What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?

25 The LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you — you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the LORD.' So your descendants might cause ours to stop fearing the LORD.

26 "That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar — but not for burnt offerings or

sacrifices.’ 27 *On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, ‘You have no share in the LORD.’*

28 *“And we said, ‘If they ever say this to us, or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the LORD’s altar, which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.’*

29 *“Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle.”*

30 *When Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the community — the heads of the clans of the Israelites — heard what Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had to say, they were pleased.*

31 *And Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, said to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, “Today we know that the LORD is with us, because you have not acted unfaithfully toward the LORD in this matter. Now you have rescued the Israelites from the LORD’s hand.”*

32 *Then Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, and the leaders returned to Canaan from their meeting with the Reubenites and Gadites in Gilead and reported to the Israelites.*

33 *They were glad to hear the report and praised God. And they talked no more about going to war against them to devastate the country where the Reubenites and the Gadites lived.*

34 *And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God.*

Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, introduces this last section of the book with: “Each of the final three chapters describes a single event. At first glance, these events seem to be a random collection of leftovers: a dispute between the tribes about an altar, a farewell address, and another covenant ceremony. However, upon closer examination it becomes apparent that they all focus on a single matter, the proper worship of Israel’s God – how to offer it and what will happen if Israel does not do so. Thus the altar law teaches how community worship should unify the tribes, not divide them. Joshua’s farewell address recalls his role and authority as Moses’ successor and warns the people against violation of God’s commands. The covenant renewal at Shechem brings together all the people for a final time. United under a single political and religious leadership, the tribes confess their allegiance to God and accept his covenant. The deaths and burials of Joshua and Eleazar, as well as the reburial of Joseph, signify the living symbols of Israel’s unity.”

Actually, Chapter Twenty-two consists of two sections, Vv. 1-9 report Joshua’s blessing of the two-and-a-half tribes living east of Jordan and Vv. 10-34 describe the misunderstanding between the tribes west and east of Jordan regarding a replica of the altar at the tabernacle the Transjordanian tribes built at Geliloth. The first part is very positive in that Joshua acknowledges the role the east Jordanians played in the conquest of Canaan. They had fulfilled their obligation to assist the other tribes and they fully merited going home and enjoying the blessings of God’s rest in the land of promise, even though they lived outside its borders. In reality, the transjordanian area was included in God’s plan for His people, according to the promises given in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Promised Land was meant to include the whole area from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates River.¹ The mention of Moses’ command refers to a portion of the Book of Numbers.²

Besides complimenting them for a job well done, Joshua blessed them and sent them home with a large amount of plunder taken from the conquered Canaanites. The tribes were well compensated for their spearheading efforts. Joshua also issued a warning emphasizing the importance of obedience to the law God had given to all of Israel. It was particularly this part that caused the misunderstanding between the tribes when the transjordanians built a replica of the altar the stood in front of the tabernacle of Shiloh.

Some Bible scholars assume that Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh may have been separated from their wives and children for as long as 14 years, but this cannot be stated with certainty; others believe the time to have been 7 years. Joshua called it “a long time.” The fact that these tribes departed from Shiloh may indicate that the lots for the division of the land had been cast. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* suggests

1. See Deut. 1:7; 11:24.

2. See Num. 32:20-33.

that the men had enjoyed periods of leave and draws a spiritual application. We read: "It is probable that this army of Reubenites and Gadites, which had led the van in all the wars of Canaan, had sometimes, in the intervals of action, and when the rest of the army retired into winter-quarters, some of them at least, made a step over Jordan, for it was not far, to visit their families, and to look after their private affairs, and perhaps tarried at home, and sent others in their room more serviceable; but still these two tribes and a half had their quota of troops ready, 40,000 in all, which, whenever there was occasion, presented themselves at their respective posts, and now attended in a body to receive their discharge. Though their affection to their families, and concern for their affairs, could not but make them, after so long an absence, very desirous to return, yet, like good soldiers, they would not move till they had orders from their general. So, though our heavenly Father's house above be ever so desirable (it is bishop Hall's allusion), yet must we stay on earth till our warfare be accomplished, wait for a due discharge, and not anticipate the time of our removal."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "It is a remarkable and almost inexplicable fact, that while the sojourn in the wilderness is represented as one long catalogue of murmurings, not one single complaint (unless we may call the gentle expostulation of the tribe of Joseph, in ch. 17, a complaint) disturbs the peace of the tribes while Joshua led them ... Why there was this marked difference between Israel under Joshua, and Israel at any other time, is a question somewhat difficult to determine. Yet we may believe that it was the evidence of visible success. While the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they felt keenly, as men accustomed to a civilized and settled life, the inconveniences of a nomad existence. By their mingled impatience and cowardice they had forfeited their claim to God's protection. Even the observance of their feasts, and still further the rite of initiation into the covenant itself, were in abeyance ... So uncertain, humanly speaking, was their future, that it was as difficult a task, and one the successful accomplishment of which was above unassisted human powers, for Moses to keep them together in the wilderness, as it was for Joshua to lead them to victory in the promised land. And it is one of the commonest of Christian experiences, both in the history of individuals and of the Christian Church, that times of prosperity are times of content and outward satisfaction. It is the times of adversity that try men's faith and patience. As long as the Israelitish Church was subduing kingdoms, winning splendid victories, experiencing the encouragement derivable from God's sensible presence and intervention, there was no discontent, discouragement, or wavering. But the trials of the long wandering, as well as those incident to the quiet, unostentatious discharge of duty, were fatal to their faith and patience. Can theirs be said to be a singular history?"

As we saw earlier a section of the transjordanian military was kept at home for the defense of the homestead. They were, evidently, the ones with whom the returning soldiers were to divide the booty. David would later adopt Joshua's policy when he said to his own men: "The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."¹

The second part of this chapter deals with the controversy triggered by the building of an altar, a replica of the burnt offering altar that stood at the entrance of the tabernacle at Shiloh. The NIV calls it "an imposing altar." *Young's Literal Translation* reads: "a great altar for appearance." Some Bible scholars interpret this to mean that this replica was larger than the original and that it was obviously not meant to be used for sacrifices. Such was the intent of the transjordanian tribes but that was not the message the monument conveyed to the rest of Israel. The other tribes came up in arms, literally, and intended to fight their brothers if they would not remove the offending shrine. In this they believed to obey God's command to Moses in Deuteronomy: "If you hear it said about one of the towns the LORD your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods you have not known), then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock. Gather all the plunder of the town into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt. None of those condemned things shall be found in your hands, so that the LORD will turn from his fierce anger; he will show you mercy, have compassion on you, and increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your forefathers, because you obey the LORD your God, keeping all his commands that I am giving you today and doing what is right in his eyes."²

1. I Sam. 30:24

It appears that the inquiring party considered the transjordanian tribes to be guilty until proven innocent. They saw in the construction of the altar an act of breaking faith with the God of Israel. The Hebrew word used is *ma'al*, meaning, “to act treacherously,” which is used very forcefully in v. 16 by its double use. “Breaking faith” is literally expressed as “treachery, treachery!” The word is used four times in this section (Vv. 16, twice, 20, 23). As in V. 30, the spokesman here was probably Phinehas, the son of the high priest Eleazar, and the leader of the delegation. He had played the most important role in diverting God’s wrath when the men of Israel committed idolatry and adultery with the women of Moab and Midian.¹ His mention of that matter seems natural in this context. He must have relived the event from time to time and the sight of the offending altar brought it back to him in all its horror. The allusion to that incident of idolatry and the mention of Achan’s sin changes the accusatory tone into a strong plea for the transjordanian tribes to consider the consequences, not only for themselves but for all of Israel. Thousands of people had perished as the result of those two sins. And Phinehas felt as if he and the nation had never been cleansed from the consequences. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “Here we have the expression of the feeling which was never removed until Christ came. It was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats could take away sin. No ceremonial lustrations could ‘cleanse us from its guilt and power.’ No destruction of the prime mover of the offence, though it may avert the wrath of God, can remove the moral reproach which lies upon the sinner. Not even the destruction of twenty-four thousand persons (... Numbers 25:9) can purify Israel from the taint of pollution. In the eyes of a sincere servant like Phinehas, the stigma rests upon Israel still, nor could anything avail to take it away. Truly, the law was, indeed, ‘our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ.’ ”

The words “If the land you possess is defiled” are difficult to interpret. Some Bible scholars believe that this means that since the two-and-a-half tribes lived in land that was not part of the Promised Land, their territory could not be considered to be under God’s protection. Others interpret this to mean that the absence of the tabernacle made the transjordanian realm unholy ground. The underlying thought is that the Reubenites and the others built the altar so that they could offer sacrifices on it and that this would cleanse the land. As we saw earlier, the transjordanian territory was definitely included in God’s overall plan, which drew the boundaries of Israel’s inheritance between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates. The vision of the tribes west of Jordan did not match God’s vision for the nation.

Two things made the building of this altar such a serious offense. If the two-and-a-half tribes thought they could build an altar for sacrificial purposes wherever they wanted and sacrifice to Yahweh, they disobeyed God’s direct command to come to the place of *His* choosing. God had said to the people through Moses: “You are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you” and “Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name — there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. And there rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own. Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you.”²If, however, the altar was not meant for sacrifices to Yahweh but for the appeasement of local deities, the offense was even worse and certainly punishable by death.

But in all this misunderstanding the delegation shows a spirit of generosity and compassion in offering the transjordanian tribes to move into their territory. They were willing to share what they had with the others. After all, it was a matter, not only of the survival of the transjordanian tribes, but of the whole nation. The sin of Achan and its consequences was an example.

The reaction of the two-and-a-half tribes to the accusations is passionate. The way the call upon

2. Deut. 13:12-18

1. See Num. 25:6-15.

2. Deut. 12:5-7, 11-14

God as their witness is unparalleled. “The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD! He knows!” The Hebrew reads: *El Elohim, Yahweh!* meaning, “the Almighty God.” Their oath was more than an affirmation of the truth, it was an appeal to God’s omnipotence in behalf of generations to come. After all, they had not built this altar for themselves but for their children and grandchildren, those future generations that had not experienced the miracles of conquest they had. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The double repetition of this adjuration is suited to the greatness of the occasion. No words can suffice to express the horror and detestation of the two and a half tribes at the sin of which they have been supposed guilty. Nor does our version at all approach the majesty of the original form of oath. . . . No translation can do justice to the vigor of the original.”

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh evinced a grandiose vision in their look into the future. They realized that the River Jordan could become not only a physical separation between them and the other tribes of Israel, but a spiritual one as well. Jordan has served as such throughout the centuries. It has acquired symbolic meaning as the demarcation line between life and death. “Crossing Jordan” means “to die,” as in the hymn: “When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside.” Others see in it a threshold we must cross to enter a life of victory over sin. The transjordanian tribes thought it could become a separation from fellowship with God in future generations. Although we do not read this it is logical to assume that the tribe of Manasseh felt particular concern about this. After all, half of their families lived on the west side of the river.

But all these tribes understood that children do not inherit spiritual values from their parents unless they enter into a personal relationship with God. It has been said that God has no grandchildren. They also understood that God’s revelation was given to Israel as a whole and that a breakup of unity among the twelve tribes would mean a breakdown of God’s revelation. In this their farsightedness put them ahead of the other tribes of Israel. Had all of Israel possessed such concern about the future, the history of salvation would have taken a different turn. The lessons of history can only be learned by those who look into the future. We will only know where we are going if we know where we came from. And this gives us the key to do what we ought to do in the present. We read about our Lord Jesus Christ: “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”¹

More than their concern about how their children would look upon the children of those living west of Jordan, they were concerned about how they may be looked upon by those who lived there. “We did it for fear that some day your descendants might say to ours, ‘What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?’ ” It was the unity of the nation that form the main concern of the transjordanian tribes. We do not read whether there was worry about their testimony to the outside world in this. When God addressed Israel on Mount Sinai, He said: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”²God intended Israel to be “a kingdom of priests” as He wants the church of Jesus Christ to be the instrument through which He can reveal Himself to a lost world. As Jesus said in the prayer He prayed for His disciples: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”³Neither the nation of Israel, nor the church has ever fully comprehended this mission. Israel began to boast in its exclusiveness and the church has not done much better.

We have an interesting construction in V. 29, which the NIV renders: “Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and turn away from him today by building an altar for burnt offerings, grain offerings and sacrifices, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle. The KJV reads: “*God forbid* that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn this day from following the LORD, to build an altar

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1. John 13:3-5
 2. Ex. 19:4-6
 3. John 17:20-23

for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the LORD our God that is before his tabernacle.” The Hebrew word used is *chaliylah*, which means literally “a profaned thing.” Abraham used this expression in his prayer for Sodom when he said to God: “Far be it from you to do such a thing — to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”¹

The explanation given was accepted without any further questions. This suggests the genuineness of intent among the tribes east of Jordan. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “We have here the good issue of this controversy, which, if there had not been on both sides a disposition to peace, as there was on both sides a zeal for God, might have been of ill consequence; for quarrels about religion, for want of wisdom and love, often prove the most fierce and most difficult to be accommodated.”

Their conclusion: “Now you have rescued the Israelites from the LORD’s hand,” suggests how painfully aware everyone was of the consequences of unfaithfulness to the Lord. Had the tribes that lived in the western part of the Promised Land found themselves obliged to carry out Moses’ instructions about how to deal with cities that committed idolatry,² they considered this to be an act of God. When later the tribes of Israel found themselves in need of fighting the tribe of Benjamin because of the gang rape and murder of a woman, it almost destroyed the whole nation.³ The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts the matter in a New Testament setting and comments: “Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

When the delegation went home and reported their findings, all of Israel rejoiced in the fact that a civil war, which would have meant devastation of the whole country, had been avoided. Richard S. Hess in *Joshua*, comments: “For all the destruction that takes place in the book of Joshua, it is surprising that the common verb *to devastate* appears only here.”

The chapter ends with the mention that the offending altar is given a name: “A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God.” The KJV inserts the name “Ed” but according to *The Pulpit Commentary* that word is not found in the oldest manuscripts.

b. The farewell address (23:1-16)

1 After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years,

2 summoned all Israel — their elders, leaders, judges and officials — and said to them: “I am old and well advanced in years.

3 You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you.

4 Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain — the nations I conquered — between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west.

5 The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

6 “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.

7 Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them.

8 But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

9 “The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you.

1. Gen. 18:25

2. See Deut. 13:12-18.

3. See Judg. 20.

10 One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised.
11 So be very careful to love the LORD your God.
12 "But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them,
13 then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.
14 "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.
15 But just as every good promise of the LORD your God has come true, so the LORD will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.
16 If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you."

Joshua's farewell address actually covers all of Chapter Twenty-three and most of Twenty-four. Most Bible scholars, however, believe that the two chapters deal with two different occasions. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "Whether this assembly was held at Timnath-serah, where Joshua lived, or at Shiloh, where the ark was, or at Shechem, as in Josh 24:1, we cannot tell. Some think that the meeting here, and that mentioned in Josh 24, were the same and if so, Shechem was the place of assembling, but it is more likely that the two chapters treat of two distinct assemblies, whether held at the same place or not."

As in Chapter Thirteen, we are told that Joshua was "very old." Since he died at the age of 110, this address must be considered his last public statement to the nation of Israel and to the world. Old age is a relative concept. When Pharaoh asked Jacob his age, the old patriarch answered: "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers."¹ Compared to Methuselah who lived to be 969,² Joshua was still a young man!

We read that Joshua "summoned all Israel — their elders, leaders, judges and officials." We understand this to mean that the whole nation of Israel did not attend this meeting but that Joshua only addressed the representatives of the nation. The term "elders" probably comprises the leaders, judges and other officials. We must not understand that four different groups of representatives are meant.

At no point Joshua emphasized his own importance in the conquest and occupation of Canaan. He evinced genuine humility in attributing the success of the operation to God. A comparison between Joshua and Moses seems to make the latter greater than life. Yet, without Joshua the nation of Israel would never have been able to take possession of the Promised Land. If Moses could compare himself to Jesus Christ, by saying: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers,"³ Joshua could have said even more since he shared the name of Him who would be the savior of the world. For a man who had been God's instrument to let the sun stand still for the simple reason that he wanted to defeat the enemy, to be so humble as to not even mention the fact, is supreme proof of being totally dedicated to God's glory. The only boast Joshua allowed himself was to say that he rolled the dice that allotted the parcels of land to various tribes. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments here: "The modesty and humility of Joshua are remarkably displayed at the commencement of this address. Sinking all thoughts of his personal services, he ascribed the subjugation and occupation of Canaan entirely to the favoring presence and aid of God; and in doing so, he spoke not more piously than truly. This had been promised (Deut 1:30; 3:22); and the reality of the divine aid was seen in the rapid overthrow of the Canaanites, which had already led to the division of the whole land among the tribes."

The main reason for this convocation seems to have been to emphasize the fact that the work was not finished yet. The Canaanite armies had been destroyed and the kings of the various areas had been exterminated, but the land as a whole had not been cleansed of people who could form the seed for Israel's future

1. Gen. 47:9
 2. See Gen. 5:27.
 3. See Deut. 18:15.

corruption. Israel would never be a kingdom of priests in this world if they allowed idol worshippers, people who stood under Satan's control, to remain living among them. One piece of rotten fruit is enough to contaminate a whole basket.

The Lord had warned Israel about the situation in which they would find themselves after the basis of victory had been laid in Canaan. By the mouth of Moses, He had said: "You may say to yourselves, 'These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?' But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. Moreover, the LORD your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished. Do not be terrified by them, for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you. But the LORD your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them. The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God. Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Utterly abhor and detest it, for it is set apart for destruction."¹

Joshua links strength to obedience when he says: "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left." It is doubtful that the words "right" and "left" had the same "political" meaning in Joshua's day as they do now. But it is safe to state that obedience to the Word of God throughout the ages loses its effect if we take too liberal a view of it or if we elevate the literal meaning of words above the spirit of the law. God's pledges His omnipotence to us in order to make us victorious if we pledge our obedience to Him because we love Him. As the Scriptures state: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."²

The fact that the great battles for the conquest of Canaan had ceased did not mean that strength was no longer needed. Victory over the enemy would henceforth be a slow process and the temptation would be to accommodate to the present situation rather than act against it. This picture, more than any other in the Book of Joshua, illustrates our condition as people who have been saved by the blood of the Lamb and who are on their way to heaven. The basis for victory over sin and death in us was laid but in our everyday life the presence of "the old man" is still being felt. We need all of the Lord's strength in order to die to ourselves and live for Him. A literal reading of V. 7, given in the NIV "Do not associate with these nations" is "so as not to go in among these nations, these who are left with you" (*Young's Literal Translation*). The most dangerous form of association would be intermarriage. The main reason for these restrictions was the idolatrous practices of the original inhabitants of Canaan. The Old Testament is never very explicit about the subject of the ritual of sacrifices of infants, but that horror was evidently present in most idol worship of that time. Moses briefly mentioned this: "You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods."³ No wonder these people had become loathsome to God! Association with the tribes of Canaan would inevitably lead to involvement with the idols of those people, which means with demons.

Invoking the names of such idols or swearing by them could consist of nothing more than a habit of using certain innocent sounding words, such as "by Jove" would be in modern English. But demons have a tendency to answer us when we call them and we may end up with much more than we had bargained for.

It may be difficult to see how the initial great victories Israel had won in the power of God could be transformed into a life of daily victories that would show none of the thrilling elements of the first phase. For people who have been involved in any of the great wars of the previous century or the present one, the victo-

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1. Deut. 7:17-26
 2. II Chron. 16:9
 3. Deut. 12:31

ries of daily life often seem too easy to require much attention. The truth remains that we need as much of God's power to be victorious on a daily basis as in moments of a life and death crises. It was about the quiet process of bearing fruit that Jesus said: "Apart from me you can do nothing."¹ God intends us to be "more than conquerors through him who loved us"² in the odds we face in daily life. The key is in His love for us and our love for Him.

The words: "One of you routs a thousand" are a free quotation of Moses' statement: "Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you."³ Joshua's warning is very graphic: "If you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, ... they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes." Joshua's attitude toward the Canaanites seems very harsh to us when we look at it from the prejudiced viewpoint of our time. Words like "they destroyed with the sword every living thing in it — men and women, young and old" recur over and over again in this story. Like David, Joshua identified himself with the hatred God expresses toward the sins of His creatures. "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."⁴

In the pluralistic society in which we live, none of the elements of Joshua's story can be applied in a literal or physical sense. It would be immoral for us to go around killing all those who do not share our intimacy with the Lord. But we can certainly apply the lesson of association, particular in the matter of choosing a marriage partner, or even business associates. A primary requirement in every marriage ought to be a harmony of religious convictions. For a Christian to marry an atheist would be a certain recipe for failure to live a life of victory over sin. Holiness is not contagious, but sin is.

Evidently, Joshua knew that his life was drawing to an end. The words: "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth" imply that this great hero of faith was also subject to the punishment God meted out to Adam, the whole human race and everything he represented. "For dust you are and to dust you will return."⁵ Not only the whole human race, but all of creation has been "subjected to frustration" and groans "as in the pains of childbirth" to "be liberated from its bondage to decay," to quote Paul's words.⁶ Only Joshua's great namesake, our Lord Jesus Christ could say: "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."⁷ It was from the vantage point of his own death that Joshua warned his contemporaries against the danger of something worse than death, that which the Bible calls "the second death" of which expulsion from the Promised Land of Canaan was merely a shadow. If we are convinced of God's faithfulness in the realm of blessing, we ought to be convinced also of His faithfulness in the area of punishment. Any of God's promises for blessing can turn into a curse if we misuse it. Taking liberty to sin because we believe to be covered by God's covenant will turn out to be a costly mistake. The story is told that Herbert Hoover, then director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the United States, complained to President Kennedy about some of his ambassadors, who had been seen going to houses of prostitution. Kennedy jokingly answered that he would henceforth choose faster ambassadors. None of God's ambassadors ought to think that God's call upon his life gives license to immorality.

The Pulpit Commentary reflects upon this with: "But the memory of these words, and of the great deeds of Jehovah, faded quickly from their minds. And then, like the people of the earth before the flood, like the men of Sodom before it was destroyed, and like many other people since, they turned a deaf ear to the prophecies of evil which faithful souls foresaw and foretold. The warnings of the prophets are but a variation upon the predictions of Moses in ... Leviticus 26:14-33, ... Deuteronomy 28:15-68, 29:14-28, and of

1. John 15:5
2. Rom. 8:37
3. Lev. 26:8
4. Ps. 139:21,22
5. Gen. 3:19
6. See Rom. 8:20-23.
7. John 10:17,18

Joshua, here addressed to a generation who had brought some of the predicted evil upon themselves, and would not see that by refusing to listen, they would bring upon themselves yet more. How terribly have these predictions been fulfilled! First, the Babylonian captivity; then the disorders and anarchy in a territory which the Jewish people inhabited, but which they were not strong enough to rule; then the siege of and destruction of Jerusalem under Titus with its accompanying horrors. Then the dispersion of the Jews among all the nations, the barbarous and inhuman persecutions they met with in the Middle Ages from priest and monarch alike: the Inquisition in Spain, the contempt and hatred which continued to be felt for them among more enlightened nations, as evidenced in Marlow's 'Jew of Malta,' and Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice,' in the days of our own Queen Elizabeth. Only in our own age has a brighter day begun to dawn on them, and three thousand years of oppression, relieved only by the brief glories of David and his dynasty, are beginning to be compensated by a share in the world's rewards and honors." These words were, obviously, written long before Hitler's "Final Solution" materialized in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and other concentration camps.

God's faithfulness to destroy does not make Him an evil deity. By transgressing the boundaries of God's moral law, we enter into a territory in which we are out of God's protection over us and we become instant victims of demonic attacks. The psalmist states: "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart." If we withdraw from His protection by disobedience, the responsibility for our destruction will be ours, not His.

c. The covenant at Shechem (24:1-27)

1 Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

2 Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.

3 But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac,

4 and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.

5 "Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out.

6 When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea.

7 But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time.

8 "I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land.

9 When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you.

10 But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

11 "Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands.

12 I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you — also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow.

13 So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.'

14 "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom

you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

16 Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!"

17 It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled.

18 And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."

19 Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins.

20 If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."

21 But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD."

22 Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD."

"Yes, we are witnesses," they replied.

23 "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

24 And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."

25 On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws.

26 And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

27 "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

As was mentioned at the beginning of the previous chapter, Bible scholars disagree about the unity of the last two chapters of this book. Some believe that the gathering described in this chapter is a continuation of the one reported in Chapter Twenty-three, others take the one mentioned here to be held at a separate occasion. The place of convocation is Shechem, centrally located between the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim.

The Septuagint names the place of gathering in the chapter Shiloh instead of Shechem. The general consensus of Bible scholars is that this is a mistake and that the solemn gathering described here took place, in fact, at Shechem. Shechem was a place of great historical significance for Israel. It had played a major role in the lives of the patriarchs. It had been the place of Abraham's first arrival in the Promised Land. We read: "Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him."¹ We read about Jacob who upon his return from Mesopotamia settled at Shechem. "After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it El Eloe Israel."² Thus Shechem became the first place in Canaan Israel could legally claim as their possession. It was the site of two altars built by these patriarchs to establish a relationship with God.

Jacob had made a similar covenant with the Lord at Shechem as Joshua was about to conclude here. "So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, 'Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.' So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around them so that no one

1. Gen. 12:6,7

2. Gen. 33:18-20

pursued them.” *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* remarks: “As Jacob selected Shechem for the sanctification of his house, because this place was already consecrated by Abraham as a sanctuary of God, so Joshua chose the same place for the renewal of the covenant, because this act involved a practical renunciation on the part of Israel of all idolatry. Joshua expressly states this in v. 23, and reference is also made to it in the account in v. 26.” The same commentary quotes Calvin, who wrote: “It is stated that they all stood before God, in order that the sanctity and religious character of the assembly may be the more distinctly shown. And there can be no doubt that the name of God was solemnly invoked by Joshua, and that he addressed the people as in the sight of God, so that each one might feel for himself that God was presiding over all that was transacted there, and that they were not engaged in any merely private affair, but were entering into a sacred and inviolable compact with God himself.”

We read that Joshua had previously built an altar in the vicinity of Shechem, on Mount Ebal, to carry out the command Moses had given about the reading of the law and the pronouncing of a blessing and a curse from the two mountaintops. We read in Chapter Eight: “Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites. He built it according to what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses — an altar of uncut stones, on which no iron tool had been used. On it they offered to the LORD burnt offerings and sacrificed fellowship offerings. There, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied on stones the law of Moses, which he had written. All Israel, aliens and citizens alike, with their elders, officials and judges, were standing on both sides of the ark of the covenant of the LORD, facing those who carried it — the priests, who were Levites. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel. Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law — the blessings and the curses — just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.”¹

Joshua’s history lesson reveals details that are not too obvious in the Genesis account of Abraham’s travels. We are told nowhere else that Terah and Abraham “worshipped other gods.” But reading that “Rachel stole her father’s household gods”² when Jacob decided to return to Canaan after spending some twenty years in Mesopotamia, gives credibility to Joshua’s statement. The fact that Joshua introduces his farewell speech with the words “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel” makes the utterance prophetic and relieves all doubt. *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: “The Rabbinic tradition has great probability in it, that Abraham was driven out of his native country for refusing to worship idols. It is difficult to understand his call otherwise. No doubt his great and pure soul had learned to abhor the idolatrous and cruel worship of his countrymen. By inward struggles, perhaps by the vague survival of the simpler and truer faith which has been held to underlie every polytheistic system, he had ‘reached a purer air,’ and learned to adore the One True God. His family were led to embrace his doctrines, and they left their native land with him. But Haran, with its star worship, was no resting place for him. So he journeyed on westward, leaving the society of men, and preserving himself from temptation by his nomad life.. No wandering Bedouin, as some would have us believe ... but a prince, on equal terms with Abimelech and Pharaoh, and capable of overthrowing the mighty conqueror of Elam. Such an example might well be brought to the memory of his descendants, who were now to be sojourners in the land promised to their father. Guided by conscience alone, with every external influence against him, he had worshipped the true God in that land. No better argument could be offered to his descendants, when settled in that same land, and about to be bereft of that valuable support which they had derived from the life and influence of Joshua.”

God, speaking through Joshua, packs some four centuries into a few sentences, describing Abraham’s call, his offspring, the separation between Esau and Israel, and the call of Moses and Aaron, which resulted in Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The destruction of the Egyptian army that drowned in the Red Sea is briefly alluded to and the forty-years’ wandering in the desert is simply referred to as “a long time” without reference to the disobedience that caused it. The Amorite resistance against Israel and Balaam’s failed endeavor to curse Israel is mentioned, but not Balaam’s successful attempt to tempt the men into idolatrous fornication with the Moabite women. History is recounted from the viewpoint of forgiveness and not in a

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1. See Josh. 8:30-35.
 2. See Gen. 31:19.

condemnatory manner. The fall of Jericho and the subsequent conquest of most of Canaan are dealt with in a few words. This being recent history, no lengthy reminder was needed.

Interesting is the mention about the hornets, of which we find no record elsewhere in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *tsir'ah* appears only three times in the Bible.¹The literal meaning is “wasp.” The question is whether the insect is meant literally or symbolically. In Revelation, John uses locusts as a symbol of a demonic attack upon the human race. We read: “The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.”²

Adam Clarke experimented with some hornets and gives us this description: “It is a most voracious insect, and is exceedingly strong for its size, which is generally an inch in length, though I have seen some an inch and a half long, and so strong that, having caught one in a small pair of forceps, it repeatedly escaped by using violent contortions, so that at last I was obliged to abandon all hopes of securing it alive, which I wished to have done. How distressing and destructive a multitude of these might be, any person may conjecture; even the bees of one hive would be sufficient to sting a thousand men to madness, but how much worse must wasps and hornets be! No armor, no weapons, could avail against these. A few thousands of them would be quite sufficient to throw the best disciplined army into confusion and rout. From Josh 24:12, we find that two kings of the Amorites were actually driven out of the land by these hornets, so that the Israelites were not obliged to use either sword or bow in the conquest.” Evidently, this Bible scholar believed that the Canaanites were literally driven out by an invasion of wasps. But Richard S. Hess, in *Joshua*, comments on “the hornet”: The identity of *the hornet* has been disputed. Is it (1) Egypt, (2) insects in warfare, or (3) terror? Egypt is unlikely since it is nowhere mentioned and this identification does not exist in the Bible. Insects may have been used in warfare, but their presence in this text is unlikely, since only one hornet is mentioned and there is no account of their use in Joshua or anywhere else in the Bible. The alternative translation of this word as ‘terror’ or the use of the picture of a hornet to symbolize such terror seems to satisfy the descriptions of the enemies in Exodus 14:14-16; Joshua 2:9-11, 24; 5:1; 6:27.” To take the hornet symbolically seems to be the most reasonable interpretation of the text. On the other hand, it would not be beyond God’s style of operation to use some insects to defeat His enemies.

The whole point of Joshua’s inspired speech is to drive home the fact that Israel had no reason to boast as if their astounding victories had been the result of their own skill and bravery. Every battle they had won was won against overwhelming odds. “You did not do it with your own sword and bow.” Added to this God gave them “a land on which [they] did not toil and cities [they] did not build; and [they] live[d] in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that [they] did not plant.” After a military campaign like they had carried out, the land ought to have been a place of ruin and scorched earth, but it was not. Joshua’s words are basically a variation on what Moses had said earlier: “When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you — a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant — then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”³

All this provided them with enough evidence of God’s faithfulness to face the future with confidence. Lack of faith in the future is usually caused by forgetfulness of the past. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”⁴If we do not remember what He was to us yesterday, He will have no significance for us today or tomorrow.

Joshua’s revealing statement in V. 14 comes as a shocker. Do the words “Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD” mean that the people were still practicing idolatry, either overtly or in secret? We could hardly imagine that God would have unleashed His

1. Ex. 23:28; Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12
2. Rev. 9:7-11
3. Deut. 6:10-12
4. Heb. 13:8

power against the tribes of Canaan in the way He did, if His own people still clung to their idols. Bible scholars have voiced different opinions on the subject. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* suggests that the “requirement ... seems to imply that some were suspected of a strong hankering for, or concealed practice of, idolatry, whether in the form of Zabaism, the fire-worship of their Chaldean ancestors, the scarabaei of Egypt, or the grosser superstitions of the Canaanites.” *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*, however, states: “This appeal does not presuppose any gross idolatry on the part of the existing generation, which would have been at variance with the rest of the book, in which Israel is represented as only serving Jehovah during the lifetime of Joshua. If the people had been in possession of idols, they would have given them up to Joshua to be destroyed, as they promised to comply with his demand (Vv. 16 ff.). But even if the Israelites were not addicted to gross idolatry in the worship of idols, they were not altogether free from idolatry either in Egypt or in the desert.” It seems difficult though to disregard the literal meaning of Joshua’s words “throw away.” How could they throw away what they did not possess? If this only refers to an emotional attachment to idols, the language ought to have brought out the difference. On the other hand there is no evidence of any fetish burning carried out upon the conclusion of this covenant with God. There are indications that idol worship was practiced in periods of Israel’s history where no historical record exists. Amos, for instance, comments on Israel’s history by saying: “Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god— which you made for yourselves.”¹A footnote in the NIV adds: “Or lifted up Sakkuth your king | and Kaiwan your idols, | your star-gods; Septuagint lifted up the shrine of Molech | and the star of your god Rephan, | their idols.”

Whatever Israel’s condition at that time, Joshua’s words drive home to us the necessity of choice. God’s election of a people or a person remains without effect without a choice in response. It is only the exchange of vows that constitutes a relationship of intimacy. We do not become “elect” without responding to God’s election. No slave can be the property of two masters and serving God is a form of slavery, even if it is incomparably lighter than service to God’s enemy.

The basic tenet of idolatry is manipulation. Mankind believes that idols can be pacified by offerings and consequently protection can be bought. The fact that a demon hides behind every idol is often not understood and demons are trained to take over control of human life. Yet, the idolater believes that he remains in control and Satan often allows him to think so until it is too late and a point of no return is reached. Idolatry, therefore, suits our human nature perfectly. We can practice it and remain convinced that we are running the show. Surrender to God, however, involves an unconditional capitulation. It means putting the control of our life into the hands of God and turning the key to every lock and nook over to Him. Whether Joshua meant to emphasize this spiritual aspect or not, is not clear, but for us, who are not involved in idol statutes, we must know what is involved when we say that we are on the Lord’s side. Joshua’s statement: “But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” has stood throughout the ages as the epitome of a pledge of allegiance. This is the rock upon which personal lives and families are built to endure. It is of the utmost importance that we say a strong “no” to self and Satan, as we say a strong “yes” to God.

From a perspective of Christian convictions, the choice Joshua put before the people seems ridiculous. To return to the place Abraham left in obedience to God’s call would mean setting the clock back about half a millennium. To adopt the idols of the Amorites would mean siding with the losers. Israel’s victory had come about through miraculous divine interventions. Serving the defeated idols would mean a choice of death over life. Yet that is what Israel would eventually do in ages to come and the Promised Land would vomit them up as it had the original inhabitants. It does not take much spiritual insight to understand the issue of the choice. But it is important to let the choice ring loud and clear as Joshua made it sound here: “But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

We note that Joshua’s decision was not merely a personal choice. “Me and my household” involved his wife and children. When God called Abraham, He said: “I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”²The fulfillment of God’s promises for us and those for whom we are responsible will depend on the assumption of our authority over those who share

1. Amos 5:25,26
2. Gen. 18:19

our name. This involves our modeling justice and righteousness for them. Joshua's statement expressed his way of modeling righteousness before the whole nation. Joshua understood that Israel's devotion to the Lord had to rest on their own free will. His words were backed up by the whole of his life. The man born blind, whom Jesus had healed, understood that the manifestation of God's power depended on the integrity of that person. He testified before the Pharisees who questioned him: "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."¹ Joshua had made the choice for God when he was still Moses' servant. He had seen fellowship with God embodied in Moses and this had wetted his appetite. We read: "The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent."² The Israelites must have understood that a man who dried up the River Jordan so Israel could enter Canaan, who made the walls of Jericho crumble and who ordered the sun to stand still, had the right to say "I serve the Lord."

The Hebrew word rendered "far be it from us," or "God forbid" is *chaliylah*, which means literally: "a profaned thing." The idea is that the thought would be inconceivable.

The Hebrew verb rendered "to serve" is *'abad*, which has the meaning of "hard labor," sometimes even "slavery," as in the verse: "The Egyptians soon became alarmed and decided to make their slavery more bitter still."³ This meaning of "serve" is particularly true in regard to idolatry. In the context of serving God, Jesus says: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."⁴ But the apostle Paul, knowing the craftiness of human nature, balances this with the statement: "I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."⁵ Although God does not treat us as slaves, we do well to consider ourselves to be slaves so that our carnal nature will not be able to dominate our motives.

We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the people in Joshua's day when they pledged to serve the Lord. They had personally experienced the miracles of God's presence that led to their victory. That generation cannot be blamed for the apostasy of the following generations as is recorded in the Book of Judges. Part of Joshua's warning "You are not able to serve the LORD" may have been directed to these people's children and grandchildren. It is also true that faithfulness to the Lord is not caused by one's strength of character, but by the faithfulness of God. We can only serve God dependably by putting our trust in His promises. In the words of Jude, it is God "who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy." When we finally find ourselves in His glorious presence, we will only be able to boast in the Lord.

The Pulpit Commentary observes here: "Joshua was stating nothing but a plain fact, which his own higher conception of the law had taught him, that the law was too 'holy, just, and good' for it to be possible that Israel should keep it. He had forebodings of coming failure, when he looked on one side at the law with its stern morality and rigorous provisions, and the undisciplined, untamed people that he saw around him. True and faithful to the last, he set before them the law in all its majesty and fullness, the nature of its requirements, and the unsuspected dangers that lay in their weak and wayward hearts. No doubt he had a dim presentiment of the truth, to teach which, to St. Paul, required a miracle and three years' wrestling in Arabia, that by the deeds of the law 'shall no flesh be justified in God's sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin' (... Romans 3:20). As yet the Spirit of God had barely begun to unveil the figure of the Deliv-

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1. John 9:30-33
 2. Ex. 33:11
 3. Ex. 1:12,13 (*New Living Translation*)
 4. John 15:15
 5. Rom. 6:19-22

erer who was to declare at once God's righteousness and His forgiveness. Yet none the less did Joshua do his duty, and strove to brace up the Israelites to theirs, not by disguising the nature of the undertaking to which they were pledging themselves, but by causing them to be penetrated with a sense of its awfulness and of the solemn responsibilities which it entailed."

Joshua was right in saying: "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." In a way we always witness against ourselves when we declare that we will serve the Lord. Accepting God's pardon of sin carries with it an implicit acknowledgment of sin. We cannot be pardoned if there is nothing to be pardoned.

V. 23 is a repeat of V.14. We ask the question again whether there were any gods to be thrown away or whether Joshua referred here to a symbolic matter. Since there is no record of any fetish burning, we must assume that an abjuring of idols is meant.

Vv. 25– 27 record the ratification of a covenant between the people of Israel and God. There are a few strange expressions in these verses that deserve a closer look. The essence of what happened is clear: Joshua drew up a contract to endorse in behalf of the people like a modern-day lawyer would do for a client. The details of the contract are not mentioned.

The Hebrew word used is *karath*, which literally means: "to make an alliance by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces." We find a description of this in the covenant God made with Abraham, when He promised him the possession of Canaan. We read: "[God] also said to [Abraham, 'I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.' But Abram said, 'O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?'] So the LORD said to him, 'Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.' Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.' When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.'

"¹We may assume that a same kind of ritual was performed at this occasion.

The historical significance of the place is important. It was at Shechem that Abraham had built his first altar and Jacob had buried the idols and jewelry his family had brought back from Mesopotamia.²The place was in the valley between Mount Ebal and Gerizim upon which the blessings and curses of the law had been proclaimed. We read that Joshua "drew up for them decrees and laws." Since this cannot mean that new stipulations were added to the Law of Moses, we understand it to mean that the existing law was ratified. The Book of the Law of God may have been a copy Joshua had made of the original, as Moses had ordered the future king to do. We read: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees."³Added to this, a large stone was placed at the spot where the covenant was being rectified as a memorial to the importance of the occasion. Joshua pronounced the strange words: "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God." We must not conclude from this that Joshua or the people believed that stones have ears or that the stone contained a spirit that could hear what had been said, as animists believe. We must place Joshua's words in the same category as Jesus' answers to the Pharisees when they objected to the Hosannas at Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem: "I tell you...if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."⁴Stones do not have ears and they cannot shout, but the point of what is meant is clear

1. Gen. 15:7-18
2. See Gen. 12:6,7; 35:2-4.
3. Deut. 17:18,19

enough.

In a poetical sense, the whole place where this ratification of the covenant was done rang with the sound of blessings and curses. The various tribes of Israel had stood on Mount Gerizim to pronounce the blessing and on Mount Ebal to pronounce the curse and the human voices had echoed from one mountain to the other until the sound bounced back and forth. Thus man and mountain had become one. The stones on which the law had been copied were also on the spot. The whole area, from the tops of the mountains to the base of the valley in between vibrated with the sound of the words God had first spoken.

We find an even deeper symbolism in the fact that the Word of God bounced back from the human heart that had turned to stone. God promised by mouth of Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."¹ And Jeremiah said: " 'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.' "² It was to this condition of the human heart Joshua referred when he said: "You are not able to serve the LORD." It is only through the divine heart transplant the Holy Spirit performs in us that we will be able to obey both the letter and the spirit of God's law. Without this experience the stone within us will testify against us on the Day of Judgment.

d. The settlement in the land (24:28-33)

28 Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

29 After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten.

30 And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

31 Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel.

32 And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.

33 And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.

The Book of Joshua concludes with the report of a series of funerals. The most significant of these is the internment of Joseph's bones. The ceremony of Joseph's burial was the fulfillment of the wish Joseph had uttered on his deathbed. We read: "And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.' "³ Some 400 years later, when the exodus finally came, we read: "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.' "⁴ Although we do not read this in the Genesis record, we assume that at the time of Joseph's death the political climate in Egypt had shifted from favorable for Israel to hostile. The clouds of oppression must have gathered over the people who had arrived in Egypt because of the famine that threatened their lives. When Jacob died, there had been no problem for his family to return briefly to Canaan to bury his body. But at Joseph's death this was, evidently, no longer an option. As Israel's day in Egypt turned into a dark night of slavery, Joseph saw God's light shine in the distance and he prophesied about the day his bones would be placed next to those of his father in the cave Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor.

4. Luke 19:40

1. Ezek. 36:26

2. Jer. 31:33

3. Gen. 50:25

4. Ex. 13:19

For centuries the only plot Israel had possessed in the land God had promised to Abraham and his offspring was a tomb. The bones of the patriarchs had been the seed of God's promise. The seed had to be buried in order to germinate and produce fruit. "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."¹ Jesus spoke these words in the context of His own death and resurrection, saying: "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." Those words link the Book of Joshua, the book that records the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, to the even greater promise to those who identify with Jesus' death and resurrection.

Joseph's internment is framed in the death of Joshua, the commander-in-chief, and Eleazar, the high priest. These three funerals stand as a sober reminder of the transient character of human life. Death seems to have the last word in the Book of Joshua, as if to indicate that even this great victory is not final. These three memorial services seem to say to us that this cannot be the end; if it were even the standing still of the sun over Gibeon would have been in vain.

The three people who were buried together depict different aspects of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Joseph, the ruler and provider, the savior of the world, Joshua, the conqueror and hero and Eleazar, the high priest, together are the pieces of a mosaic that form the picture of Christ. Their burials point to that greatest of all Sabbaths, when the lifeless body of Jesus rested in a tomb. John, in Revelation heard a voice that said: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."² God literally rested from His work in the death and burial of Jesus Christ. This is not the usual interpretation of the words in Hebrews: "There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."³ But it is true that the only path to victory for us is in the identification with Jesus' death and burial. There cannot be any resurrection life without it.

If the message of the Book of Joshua has any meaning for us, we must consider ourselves to be one with our Lord in His death. In Paul's words: "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."⁴

The real Sabbath is the day of resurrection. We live today in Saturday, but Sunday is coming! Actually, today is Sunday!

Toccoa Falls, GA. 5/11/05

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1. John 12:24
 2. Rev. 14:13
 3. Heb. 4:10
 4. Rom. 6:5-13