

Joshua

Introduction

The Bible opens up with the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The next book we meet is the book of Joshua. It is named after the man who followed on from Moses in leading God's people, the Jews, into the land of Canaan after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. He was originally called Hoshea (Salvation) but Moses called him Yeshua or Joshua (God saves). That was the very name given to our Saviour at his birth - Yeshua in Aramaic or Jesus as we have it, for "He shall save His people from their sins. In the one case, a deliverer from earthly enemies, and in the other a saviour from sin and hell and Satan.

Who was this man Joshua? What was he like? How did God use him in leading the Israelites? What does God still say to us today through this book? These are the questions I hope to answer as we work our way through this part of the Bible.

When the Israelites were led out of Egypt by Moses, a young man from the tribe of Ephraim was part of that vast throng. He soon showed his ability as a soldier, leading a force of men that drove back the Amalakites at a place called Rephadim (Exodus chapter 17). That was Joshua. Later on he served as a spy to look over the land of Canaan. When he came back he gave a confident report on the land because he looked for victory under God's protection. He became the constant companion and supporter of Moses in all the wilderness journeys. Shortly before the death of Moses with the land of Canaan in sight, Joshua was appointed as his successor, being about 70 years old.

His temperament, his training and his experience were all brought together under God into a dynamic force that equipped him to lead his people into the Promised Land. Now you may not have all the ability or personality of Joshua. Neither do I, but God can mould and equip us for His service, taking us as we are and fashioning us for the battles that lie ahead as we serve Him.

What do we find in the Book of Joshua? It records the invasion of the land of Canaan by Israel just over three thousand years ago. It details the various military campaigns whereby the land was eventually subdued and shared out among the 12 tribes. But what are the lessons in all of this? The story of the Passover Lamb and the escape from Egypt are clear pictures for us in the book of Exodus. They speak plainly of the sacrificial death of Our Lord Jesus Christ for our sins, and our deliverance from a master far more cruel than the Egyptian Pharaoh, even Satan himself. The wilderness journeys illustrate the trials and difficulties of God's people as they travel through life.

What, then, are we to make of the crossing of the Jordan and the capture of the land of Canaan? Some have said it is an illustration of crossing over from this life to the next and entering heaven. Are we really to expect all sorts of battles and wars in the heavenly realm? The Book of Revelation describes heaven as a place filled with God's glory, where only righteousness, joy and peace are to be found. The land of Canaan, or the Promised Land, does not seem to point to that interpretation. Something else is plainly intended.

God promised great blessing and prosperity to the Israelites if they would drive out their enemies and all their evil practices and beliefs. The land would be purged of all that was harmful to their spiritual well-being and become a fit dwelling place for the people of God. Canaan, then, speaks to us of living disciplined, holy, God-fearing lives so as to have the smile of God upon us. It is a foretaste or preview of that better land, that far country, where there will be no evil and no enemies. It is in heaven that the Christian believer enters a perfect rest, the eternal sabbath, enjoying the presence of the Lord in an unbroken and everlasting way. Is that what you long for? Do you have that assurance concerning your eternal future?

It may be that right now you feel like the Israelites did in Egypt. You are a slave, a prisoner, held down with heaviness and fear. There seems no escaping from everything that surrounds you, or the sinfulness that is within you. You feel beaten and crushed like those Hebrew slaves in Egypt. You long for someone to come along and lead you out of it all and set you free. You cry out for a modern-day Moses or Joshua to lead you to freedom and victory. You long to drive out all the enemies that seem to encircle you, but have no plan of action and no power.

There is hope and there is help. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is ready to deliver all those who call upon Him and believe in Him. He died on the Cross of Calvary 2000 years ago, not because it was a tragic mistake, but because He came into the world to save sinners. He is the final, complete sacrifice for our sins. Now God commands us to turn from our sins and believe in His only begotten Son. The Lord Jesus rose from the dead and is alive for evermore. If you trust in him as your Saviour and sin-bearer, He will live in you by His Holy Spirit and strengthen you to fight against evil, not only in your own heart but everywhere by prayer and His Word, the Bible.

Just as Joshua led his people to victory all those years ago, our captain and leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, leads His army to triumph and eternal peace. Will you share in it? The apostle Paul once said to a suicidal prison officer, frightened out of his wits in an earthquake, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." He did, and his life was completely remade and redirected. In your need and desperation you also can find forgiveness and peace. You can be led out of your slavery and misery by the One Who is mighty to save, the One Who is far more powerful and wise than either Moses or Joshua. He will deliver you from sin and its power as well as its consequences. He will strengthen you against your enemies and give you victory over the last great enemy, death itself.

So as we begin this series on Joshua, I invite you to look through the opening chapters in readiness for our studies together. Pray that God will speak to you through His Word and meet with you through a look at the book of Joshua. It is such an important book, linking -up with the five books of Moses and the revelation of God's mercy to mankind, and to one man, Abraham, and to one people, the Jewish nation. We will see their early days of being settled in Canaan, and learn that God's promise to them concerning a homeland was to be gloriously fulfilled in the events of the book of Joshua.

I wonder what God will be saying to you from this part of Scripture? I look forward to sharing with you God's message from the Book of Joshua. Please don't think that events from just over the 3000 years ago can't speak to our age of the jumbo jet and the Internet. As men and women we remain basically the same in whatever age we live. "Whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our instruction and comfort. (Romans 15: 4). The book of Joshua still speaks to us today.

Joshua chapter 1

We are going to look at the first chapter of Joshua. We will see what God is saying to us through it. We find that God comes to Joshua after Moses has died and tells him to lead the children of Israel over the River Jordan and into Canaan. He promises the land to them, even every place on which they set their foot. More than that, God assures Joshua that no enemy will be able to overcome him. The Lord then commands Joshua to be courageous, to walk in the ways of God's Word and to take comfort from the fact of His presence being with him.

Joshua then proceeds to tell the leaders of Israel to make preparations with their people, for within three days they would be crossing the Jordan and entering the land promised to them by God. A small section of the people from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Mannaseh were to settle on the eastern side of the river, so their soldiers were to go over first, leaving their families behind. They were to return to them once the fighting was over. This arrangement was readily accepted by the eastern tribes who recognised Joshua as being God's appointed leader for the whole nation. That is a summary of what we find in Joshua chapter one.

We now need to look at part of this chapter more closely and draw out lessons for ourselves at the present time. Three things stand out in this chapter: The Command of God, The Presence of God, and the Word of God. They are all to be found in verses 5 to 9.

We could speak about this at length and ask which comes first in our consideration. It could be argued that the Word of God should be first Because how else do we learn of the Presence of God or His Command to us? That is true, but sometimes a person experiences the Presence of God that leads him to search the Word of God. For some it is the other way round completely, being brought into the Presence of God through prayerfully reading the Word of God. That is the way to know God's will for us, His command to us, not waiting for a mystical voice, a dream, a vision, or a so-called prophetic message.

The first thing that strikes us in this chapter is the importance of the Command of God, for it is given no less than three times. Here it is: "Be strong and of a good courage", or "be very courageous". You will find that in verses 6, 7 and 9. The Lord must have considered this very important for Joshua to say it three times over. It is obviously a command of supreme importance for his servant

It may be that the word "command" sounds strange to you. Perhaps you would have preferred "advice" or "encouragement", but that is not what is set down here. God is commanding Joshua to be strong and courageous for this is warfare and the enemy's facing the Israelites were many and threatening. Can you imagine an officer saying to his men before a battle, "I and advise you to be brave", or, "I warmly encourage you to stand your ground", or, "It might be preferable not to show any fear in the fighting". It is just unimaginable! The order or command will be "Every man will stay at his post", or, "No one will retreat", or, "The enemy must be engaged with determination".

So here in Joshua Chapter 1, God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous. Every General, every Field-Marshal takes his orders from higher-up the chain of command. Joshua, though leader of all Israel, is being given his orders. If you are a Christian, as part of the army of the Lord Jesus Christ you are given orders also; you are under the Command of God. Many Christians today do not like the sound of that. They want to please themselves instead of pleasing Him who loved them and died for them. You and I need to acknowledge and be subject to the Command of God.

You might be thinking, "Why did Joshua need a command like this? He was a soldier of some experience, wasn't he?" That is true, but he had never been in a position like this before. Moses had always been there, close to God, knowing what to do. Now, they leaders would be coming to Joshua and asking, "What are we to tell the people?" Everyone would be looking to Joshua and expert doing him to be like Moses was. That was what made him afraid.

There are many things that will make you and me fearful, even as Christians. Are you facing a new challenge or threat, or problem? Perhaps it is some new work for God in preaching, or teaching all witnessing. Perhaps you are having a rough time in your family or at work because of your Christian faith. It may be that you have to make a decision to break away from friends or someone close to you because it is harming your Christian life. What ever it is, God commands you to be strong and courageous, and if He commands it will not be something unreasonable. He will be with you in the situation and carry you through. That is our look at the Command of God.

The next thing we see in this chapter is the Presence of God. This is what undergirds the Command of God and makes it acceptable, or bearable, or even better to be welcomed. In verse 5 we read that God said to Joshua, "As I was with Moses so I will be with you. I will not fail you nor for forsake you". Could there be a better assurance?

One here is the Lord of heaven and earth saying to His servant Joshua that the same companionship, care and support that Moses was given would now be supplied to him.

Moses never lacked the presence of God as he struggled to bring the Israelites through the wilderness, despite all the discouragements of the journey and the incessant grumbling of the people. The same fatherly care and love would be afforded to Joshua. He would never be failed, nor forsaken by his God.

We are some times let down by people; they fail us, they walk out on us, they bitterly disappoint us. God will not do that to you if you are His child. The promises given to Joshua can be claimed by you today. Say to God in prayer, "Heavenly Father, you promised to be with Joshua always, never failing him nor leaving him. Be with me today and every day in all I have to face, for I am fearful and feel very much alone at times." Pray that sincerely and He will hear you.

It doesn't matter where you are on wherever you have to go, because, in verse 9, Joshua was promised that God would be with him wherever he journeyed. The Lord is not limited to one place. By His Spirit He is everywhere. His children are never out of His sight or out of His presence.

This brings us on to our third lesson in this chapter concerning the Word of God. You may forget God's Command from time to time. You may not always feel that the Presence of God is with you, yet the Word of God is always at hand if you have a Bible. If you do not have a Bible or a portion of the Scriptures in your home, someone living near you or someone in a nearby church may be able to help you. If this is not possible then write to this programme and we will send you a New Testament. You need to take up the Word of God and read it daily so as to be strong in your faith.

Notice carefully what is shared in verses 7 and 8. God instructs Joshua to be brave and strong in keeping to His holy law. You may have thought that Joshua was to be strong simply as a military governor or political figure. That was only part of the picture. Here is the major part in these verses. Joshua was going to have to be strong in keeping God's law, not turning from it to the right hand or the left hand and seeking to do it, living it out each day. That was the way he would prosper and have good success.

This does not mean that reading the Bible and seeking to put it into practice will mean you go from rags to riches automatically. For some it may mean that, because they stop wasteful and harmful ways of living through drink, drugs and gambling. What it will mean is that you will prosper and advance spiritually, growing closer to God and knowing strength and victory in your Christian life. That is far better than simply having spare money in your purse or pocket.

Look again though this chapter and consider these questions: Have you obeyed the command of God to repent and believe on His Son the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know something of the presence of God in your heart and life? Are you reading and obeying the Word of God so as to know the blessing of God on all you do?

Joshua

Chapter 2

In this chapter we learn of the two spies sent out by Joshua to look over the land in general, but in particular to report on the city of Jericho. That fortress was strategically important lying as it did at the entrance of the mountain passes which led to the hills of Judea and the interior of the land of Canaan.

The Israelites had now come down from the high plateau of Moab that today is in the country of Jordan and they were encamped about fifteen kilometres back from the river Jordan. The Jordan flows from the Sea of Galilee through a fifteen kilometre wide rift valley about 250 metres below sea level.

Joshua, under the guidance of God, had avoided attacking Canaan through the country to the south known as the Negev. There was a string of fortresses throughout that region which he decided to outflank. His strategy was to push into central Canaan, then strike southwards and northwards in quick succession. So you can see that the capture of Jericho was vital to the whole campaign.

The spies were led in the goodness of God to a house where they were welcomed and not betrayed. It belonged to a woman who was probably linked in some way to the vile practice of temple prostitution. That was one of the evils of the Canaanite worship of Baal. Men and women served as prostitutes receiving offerings for Baal and hoping to please him by sexual activity. All this gives some idea of the depravity of the Canaanites and why God's people were to have no part in their way of life.

It is important for us to have this background information so as to be clear in our mind that God's Holy nature will in no way tolerate wickedness or turn a blind eye to it. This one aspect of Canaanite life was but a small part of a whole mass of corrupt, evil and cruel practices which are laid out for us in the book of Leviticus chapter 18.

It was in the house of this woman that the two spies learned that fear had gripped the inhabitants of the city because they had heard about the miraculous experiences and victories of the Israelites since leaving Egypt. It is always a good thing when unbelievers are subdued and humbled when they see God's power at work in the lives of Christians today.

Rahab hid these two men on the flat roof of her house, covering them with stalks of flax that were laid out to dry. The fibres were used to spin and weave linen, a very cool fabric for those high temperatures in the Middle East. Rahab deliberately misled the King's servants by sending them out of the city eastwards to the Jordan. Had her faith been stronger or more mature, she would no doubt not have needed to resort to lying in order to protect the men. However, it was a difficult situation as the King had ordered her to produce the two Israelite visitors.

Rahab then went up to the spies on her roof, confessed her faith in God and his mighty power and pleaded for mercy in the impending attack, not only for herself but also for her family. If you have known God's forgiveness, do you not also desire it for your loved ones? Pray for them and live a Christian life before them.

She was assured of safety when the city was attacked, and letting the men down from the window by a scarlet cord, she was advised to show it in her window as a sign for protection in the battle. The spies then fled to the hills roughly a mile to the west of Jericho where there are many caves. After the hue and cry had died down they safely crossed the Jordan again and returned to their camp. The triumphant message they brought to Joshua was, "Truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land." How much sense of triumph and victory is there in your life, or do you go down under the attacks of Satan and the pressures of the world around you?

Now I want to look with you at two great object lessons in Joshua chapter 2. First we have a place - Jericho and then a person - Rahab.

Jericho was the great obstacle confronting the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land. It was the barrier in front of their entrance into the place of blessing afforded them by God. Jericho is a picture of the world hindering the people of God from entering the place of service and fellowship with Him, and from entering the place of rest and enjoying a foretaste of the eternal rest in the heavenly presence of God. You can read about that in Hebrews chapter 4 and Revelation chapter 14 verse 13.

Jericho is a picture of all that stops us in this life from enjoying what God has made available to His children. You and I have to fight to enter the "Promised Land". There is conflict and opposition to be faced before we can begin to experience God's promised blessings. The New Testament describes the Christian as a soldier who uses spiritual weapons against spiritual enemies. Do not expect to receive blessing and growth into maturity without waging constant warfare against your own corruptions and the many temptations thrown up by Satan. Reading a well-written devotional book, or having some kind of special experience at a meeting, isn't going to do it either.

Remember, Jericho was a city over which hung the judgement of God. It was NOT the sort of place where you would want to stay when the hand of God fell on it. It was a place marked out for destruction. So it is with this present sinful world. Are you a part of it? Do you like all that it has to offer? Are you captivated by its pleasures, its profits and its pursuits? Do you want them to go on for ever, uninterrupted and never ending? If so, you are inside the walls of Jericho and you will perish when God judges the world. Look up Ephesians chapter 5 verses 3 -7 and you will see there a whole list of things marked out for judgement by God.

Jericho is not a place to be entered and enjoyed. It is not a place to linger. Jericho was going to be destroyed. There was to be no compromise, no treaty signed, no agreement to live and let live. That is the tragic failure of many Christians and we all need to guard against it. It is a painful case of some of Christ and some of the world. Partly with the people of God and partly with what goes on in Jericho. That is why so often our testimony has insufficient cutting edge. That explains the weakness of our witness before others. If you are a child of God you don't belong to Jericho.

The same can be equally true for churches. You may know of a church that seems to embrace the world and its ideas instead of being engaged in spiritual warfare against it. Instead of having a clear-cut testimony and straightforward preaching from the Bible, it wants to be not too different from the world around. Its preaching disturbs no one; its standards are not too demanding. You can relax in a fun-loving, entertaining atmosphere and generally come and go as you please. That is not the way Jericho will be taken. Rather, in time, Jericho will subdue such a church. Hardly a voice or weapon will be raised against the tide of compromise that will soon sweep over that church.

So much for the PLACE that has occupied our attention. Now we shall look at the PERSON - Rahab. We know nothing about her before this incident except that she had been born and brought up in pagan darkness, superstition and evil. That was how it was in Canaan as well as in Jericho. That is how it is now all across the world, except for the light of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That may be exactly how it is with you, born and brought up in a modern day Jericho. For Rahab the wonder was that in spite of all the ignorance and darkness, a ray of light had broken into her gloom. God had given to her an understanding of who He was and what He had accomplished by his mighty deeds for His people, the Israelites. News had reached Jericho, probably through traders or travellers, about the deliverance from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea, and the astonishing defeat of the powerful kings to the east of the Jordan. Listening friend, has the message of the Bible broken into your darkness yet?

Now when this news came it caused fear because those kings were powerful. But there is something else in the words of Rahab that show how God had dealt mercifully with her in

spite of her sinful life. Her faith and conviction were such that she said to the two spies: "The Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and in the earth beneath." That may seem very ordinary to you and me, but probably no-one else in Canaan believed that. Throughout the land it was the commonly held belief that Baal was lord above and on earth, the storm god and the god of fertility. Moreover, different tribal groups gave him different names. Baal had not rescued the Israelites from Egypt, that much was certain for the Canaanites.

Remember that there were no Old Testament scriptures in Jericho, no prophets, no Sabbath day, no Passover feast and yet Rahab had come to understand exactly who the Lord God was. Was it by chance? By intuition? By meditation? No! We have the answer in the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 11 verse 25, where the Lord Jesus prays to His heavenly Father, thanking Him because He had hidden spiritual truths from the wise and learned but had revealed them to ordinary people, to people who had faith like a little child. You will recall that when Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, the Saviour said to him that he was blessed because no man had revealed that truth to him, but it was God the Father in heaven. That's Matthew chapter 16 verse 17.

It seems that Rahab did not know a lot, but she knew enough. She believed with great certainty in the Living God, and trusted Him for deliverance. A little faith is still a genuine faith. Our Lord in his teaching spoke of having faith as a grain of mustard seed - something tiny, but which will grow in time. Certainly Rahab is regarded as being genuine in the Bible for she is mentioned honourably, not only in our Saviour's family tree in Matthew chapter one, but also in Hebrews 11 verse 31 and James 2 verses 25.

Perhaps you are asking, "Do I have a genuine, saving faith, even though it is small and weak?" Well, what kind of faith is it? Is it faith that trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation? Is it faith that admits to being a sinner who has broken God's law and stands in need of a saviour? If it is then that is saving faith. If you do not have such faith, then pray that God will give you His gift of faith and enable you to believe in that simple way. In Jericho, all around Rahab, people heard the news but did not believe as she did although they had the opportunity. Be like Rahab today and "seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near."

Joshua

Chapter 3

In the third chapter of Joshua we come to the crossing of the river Jordan. This was to be a great and memorable sign to the Israelites as great as the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. Just as that earlier miracle showed God's hand granting them freedom from slavery and their Egyptian oppressors, so this crossing of the Jordan was the demonstration of God's favour and power enabling them to enter upon their promised territory - with their enemies driven before them.

We can divide the Chapter into two sections: "Waiting at the Jordan" and "Crossing the river". The first section goes from verse 1 to verse 13 and the second from verse 14 to verse 17.

We look first at "Waiting at the Jordan". As the Chapter opens we see the whole host of Israel moving down towards the banks of the Jordan where they wait for three days. Remember that the book of Numbers tells us that the fighting men numbered six hundred and one thousand, seven hundred and thirty. How many more women and children there would be. It has been suggested that two and a half million people is a reasonable estimate. It probably is! To the people of Jericho about five miles away they would appear as a living carpet moving down towards the Jordan.

In verse 3 we read that the people were told to follow the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord their God as it was carried by the priests. This was after spending three days contemplating the Jordan in full flood, a formidable barrier. Their utter helplessness and dependence on God was being brought home to them. Have you learned that lesson yet? It is the most important one of all if you are to know the mercy and blessing of God.

The Ark of the Covenant was a sacred box or chest, containing among other things the Ten Commandments on two tablets of stone. That was the foundation of God's dealings with them. He showed them mercy, but they had the obligation of honouring and keeping his law. Yet the Ark had the blood of sacrifice sprinkled on it by the High Priest when he prayed for their forgiveness. And so they were being reminded that the God of mercy and judgement was going ahead of them into the Jordan and Canaan. If you are a Christian believer remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, goes before you, having kept the law perfectly and shedding His blood to pay for your sins. He takes you through each difficulty in your path and has overcome Satan already.

Next, the people are told, in verse 4, to leave a space of 2000 cubits between themselves and the Ark. The cubit was an ancient measurement, the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger. So 2000 cubits is approximately 800 metres. That would give a clear view of the great miracle that was to come and allow the people to stand in amazement, adoring the power of their God. Also that distance between the people and the Ark said something else. It spoke of dignity, and respect, and was a warning against undue familiarity with that most sacred emblem of the presence of the mighty God. Only priests from the tribe of Levi were allowed to carry it, covered by its sacred cloth. You and I need to remember that God our Father is the one true God, the Lord of heaven and earth. Unspeakable glory and power belong to Him.

Note carefully Joshua's command to the people in verse 5: "Sanctify (or consecrate) yourselves". That means, "make yourselves clean, pure, set apart to God, and spiritually prepared for this great and wondrous event that is going to take place." The Israelites were not involved in something that was their own undertaking. It was a holy war that lay ahead of them in which the Lord would do great wonders for them.

So it is with us who are the Lord's people. We are in unceasing conflict and the battle is the Lord's. The weapons we use are spiritual: God's Word and prayer. That is all we have, but they are mighty in the pulling down of evil strongholds. Therefore, you and I

must sanctify ourselves. We long for God to do great things, but we have to be spiritually prepared. We must put away the sin and corruption and that weakens us spiritually, and, as Hebrews 12 verse 1 says, "Throw off everything that hinders." In 2 Corinthians 7 verse 1, Paul urges us to "Purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

The great need in the church is for godliness. We long to see conversions - people soundly saved, and great obstacles overcome. Why do we not see these things? Because we have not sanctified ourselves in readiness. God has promised mercy to His people if they will only humble themselves before Him, seek Him in prayer and turn from wrongdoing: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." That's 2 Chronicles 7 verse 14. Our Saviour predicted that in the last times there would be an upsurge in lawlessness that would cause the love of many to grow cold (Matthew 24 verse 12).

God assured Joshua in verse 7 of Joshua chapter 3 that He would set His seal of approval on him as the chosen leader by parting the waters of the River Jordan before them. The Israelites would know beyond all doubt that he was God's chosen successor to Moses.

So it is with our Lord Jesus Christ. His resurrection from the dead was God's message to the world that this was indeed His Son, His Messiah, the Saviour whom He had sent into the world. In Romans 1 verse 4 we read about the Lord Jesus: "Who through the Spirit was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead." What a word of encouragement that is!

In verses 9 to 11 of Joshua chapter 3, Joshua gives God's message to the people, telling them what the Lord is going to do for them. He is going before them to drive out seven tribes that inhabit Canaan. In these words is vital teaching that we need to learn or learn again according to our spiritual state.

In verses 10 and 11 a great sign is given to the people. Joshua brought God's message to the Israelites. This message was that the going of the Ark ahead of the nation into Canaan was the assurance of victory. The ultimate outcome of the coming conflict was certain. God had promised the land to His people and His promises are certain. This is a reminder to us that God has promised to drive back the devil and all his influence that hinders victory in our lives. In Romans 6 verse 14 we are told that "Sin shall not be your master". It is only in heaven that we shall be free from Satan's presence, but we remember that our Saviour has destroyed all Satan's works and that he has no power over us if we are cleansed by the precious blood of Christ shed for us on the cross.

Note carefully the name of God in verses 11 and 13. He is described as "The Lord of all the earth." That is a significant description because of the prevailing belief at the time. Each tribe and nation among Israel's enemies had a very localised idea of a god specific to that area or group of people. Whether it were Baal, Dagon, Chemosh or Molech. The Hebrew people might have been tempted to think that the God who had been with them in the wilderness was no match for some local god in Canaan, but here we read He is "Lord of ALL the earth". There is NO place that is not under His sovereign will. Today there is no place where the Gospel cannot bring light and freedom.

Do remember that our Saviour exercises the same power today. By His death he has destroyed the devil who keeps people in slavery through fear of death and the fear of false gods.

We now come to the second section in Joshua Chapter 3: "Crossing The River", which goes from verse 14 to verse 17. Now the three days of preparation are over and the people must go forward in faith to claim the land and subdue their enemies. We cannot sit around meditating. There is work for God to be done: chairs and hymn books set out; someone to be picked up in the car to take to a meeting or walk along with; leaflets to be distributed; gifts to be gathered and sent off for the Lords work. We are to be faithful in

our attendance at the services, and there will be personal battles to be waged against self-interest or inner corruption. And so the list could go on!

The priests moved on, approaching the swollen Jordan. In complete faith they never faltered and at the exact moment their feet touched the waters they receded. Only the presence and power of God could account for such a marvel. It is worth noting that the River Jordan overflows each springtime as the snows of Mount Hermon melt and the water level rises in the Sea of Galilee. Added to that, the latter rains come, and whereas the river is normally 30 metres wide or less in summer, it becomes a wide, swiftly flowing torrent in April and May. The few fording places lie well under water. It seems that God chose the most unpromising and unlikely time for the Israelites to cross. Yet it was the right time for in it God would display His mighty power.

You may have seen such things yourselves. Someone you thought could never be brought to saving faith has been converted. A gift came in for some project when it looked as though it would have to be abandoned. Permission to build was withheld, then miraculously some official granted it. There is an old chorus we could well do to re-learn that says:

"Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specialises in things thought impossible. He can do just what none other can do."

About 30 kilometres upstream from where the Israelites were to cross, near to a town called Adam, verse 16 tells us that the waters heaped up. What happened exactly? We may never know for sure, but we think back to the time when God caused an east wind to drive back the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape the pursuing armies of Pharaoh. Did God likewise use a natural event with supernatural timing? Landslides in the area of Adam have been known to occur and cause the Jordan to be dammed up. One was in the year 1266, one in 1909 and another in 1927. Just say it was such an event. The timing could not have been arranged more perfectly!

The priests did not falter in their stride, and as they reached the river the waters went back. God's timing was perfect. He knew what He had planned for His people and He knows the end from the beginning where YOUR life is concerned. Can you say and believe with the Psalmist, in Psalm 31 verse 15: "My times are in your hands"?

And so this staggering number of people, with all their animals, crossed the Jordan. As the priests carrying Ark went before them, the Lord opened up the way, and they entered Canaan opposite the great city of Jericho where God was to give them a famous victory. This reminds us that as Christians our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus, has gone ahead of us, overcoming our enemies - sin and death and hell. We can now enter upon our heritage, our privileges as children of God through faith in Him.

Keep in living fellowship with Him each day as you pray and as you read the Bible. Enter the Land of Promise, Rest and Victory, living for Him in newness of life (Romans 6 verse 4), alive to God and to righteousness (Romans 6 verse 11). May the Lord give you grace to do so.

Joshua

Chapter 4

In this fourth chapter of Joshua we enter upon a crucial phase in the history of the Israelites. We travel with them as, for the first time, they set foot on the soil of the Promised Land. The wilderness is behind them and they now enter upon what God promised them so long before.

At God's instruction, two important memorials are set up. One was a heap of twelve stones set up at Gilgal, the place where they first camped in Canaan. The other was a similar memorial placed in the River Jordan at the place where the priests stood while the people passed over. These were stones of considerable size for we read in Joshua 4 verse 5 that men carried them on their shoulders to pile them up at Gilgal. Gilgal was about seven and a half kilometres west of the Jordan and about two kilometres from Jericho. It was plainly intended that these memorials were meant to be an enduring reminder to all who passed that way, or gathered there in national assembly. From verse 9 we learn that this river bed memorial was intended to be permanent.

This great event elevated Joshua in the eyes of the people, for God was plainly marking him out as the worthy successor of Moses. As he passed on God's commands to the priests and as they stepped on dry land, the waters returned and the Jordan was again in full flood. The story of this miraculous crossing was to be told and retold down the ages to speak of the mighty, delivering hand of God. That is a summary of what we find in Joshua chapter 4.

Now we need to look into it more closely and draw out some practical lessons from its events. These lessons will revolve around the idea of two memorials and the leading question to be asked by successive generations of children: "What do these stones mean to you?" It is the same today with a war memorial or a gravestone when a child asks its parents what it all means.

The first thing we discover is that in both instances, twelve stones were used. One man from each of the tribes was to take a stone and build up the memorial pile. This was to remind them in future days that they had come through the River Jordan as a united people. As a complete nation they had been brought into the land to dispossess the evil nations who lived there. It is true that two and a half tribes decided to stay on the eastern side of the river, but that did not alter their identity. They were still part of the nation and their tribes were represented in those memorials.

Just as all Israel came to the river bank and passed over and climbed up the other side, so all God's people have passed from death to life because of what the Lord Jesus has done for them. All of God's children have been taken from the kingdom of Satan and brought into the kingdom of God's dear Son. You'll find that in the letter to the Colossians chapter 1 verse 13. Every true believer now stands in the "Promised Land" of resurrection life, the new life in Christ, by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. That is why every fellow believer should be precious to you. We are in the highest sense one nation under God. Are you part of it?

When the Lord Jesus died the whole of His church was identified with Him in his death, resurrection and ascension. Every believer died with Him. Paul says in Galatians 2 verse 20, "I am crucified with Christ." Every believer was raised with Christ and God now sees us, without exception, seated with Christ in the heavenly realm. You will find this in Ephesians 2 verses 5 and 6. So, God's people, His nation, is entire, it is complete in Christ.

It is not without significance that in Revelation chapter 21 we read of the Heavenly City, the new Jerusalem, having twelve gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Besides that, the city has the names of the twelve apostles on its twelve foundations. The number twelve is associated with Israel and the church, the people of God.

If you are a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you belong to God's people. You have crossed the river and you are on resurrection ground now. Your new life in Christ means that for you eternity has begun. You already have the first taste of Heaven. You have begun to take possession of your heritage. The enemies are there, but God is driving them back. All things are yours in Christ and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Colossians 3 verse 3) All this is implicit in the twelve stones that made up the memorial pile.

The second great lesson to be discovered from Joshua chapter 4 is the very principle of keeping a memorial. In verse 7, Joshua told the people to answer their children plainly when they asked the meaning of the stones. They were to instruct them concerning the great deliverance when God stopped the flood waters of Jordan before the Ark of the Covenant. They were to look back upon that astonishing event and bring home the wonder of it to the next generation. The place might be forgotten in the passage of time, but with the stones at Gilgal and in the river bed the memory would be jogged time and again as the people passed by. The stones were a lasting memorial and were an aid to faith.

We, too, need memorials and the Lord has given to us means by which we can be reminded of all that He has done for us. To the Jewish people He gave the various memorial feasts the most important of which was the Passover reminding them of their deliverance from Egypt. Two memorials have been given to His church by the Lord. The first we call "The Lord's Supper" or "The Breaking of Bread" or "The Communion". The second is Believers Baptism. Each time we partake of the bread and wine we do so in remembrance of the Lord Jesus and His death for us on the cross. This is what He has commanded us to do. Each time we see a believer baptised it is a reminder that we have been crucified with Christ, have been buried with Him, and have been raised up to new life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These memorials bring home to us as believers that we should no longer live for ourselves but for Him Who died for us and rose again. In the eyes of God we have been crucified to the world and the world to us. In other words, as far as this world is concerned we are dead and we should no longer live for it, or for our own interests. We have been bought with a price, a costly sacrifice, and we are no longer our own.

Are you reminded of these things when you attend a service of Believer's Baptism or The Lord's Supper? If you are a true believer in Christ you certainly will! If such things do not move you or stir any memories, is it because you are a stranger to all that they signify? Memorials are so important in arousing our memories of the mighty acts of God on our behalf. (See verse 24)

Another lesson from this chapter is that memorials should lead to a response in us as we consider all that God has so gloriously done for us. In Joshua 4 verse 23 Joshua links the crossing of the Jordan with the passage through the Red Sea some forty years earlier. That powerful display in rescuing the Israelites when they were trapped on the sea shore was to deliver them from captivity and cruel slavery. This holding back of the Jordan was to bring the people to what had been promised them - the land of Canaan. In between were so many glorious instances of God's provision and protection as they journeyed through the wilderness. It was all the story of God's merciful dealings with His covenant people.

Ultimately these events were to be remembered and praised so that all people might know just how mighty the Lord is. He is the unchanging God, and this wonderful damming of the River Jordan for the people of Israel is a reminder to you now, wherever you are listening, that He is a mighty God. There is none like Him in heaven or on earth. Humble yourself under His mighty hand, for He is merciful to all who call on Him for salvation.

We discover a further response here in verse 24. It is "that you might fear the Lord your God for ever." Remember, this was spoken to Israel, God's people. All around us we see

corruption, violence, immorality, unfaithfulness, lying, cheating, disrespect, dishonesty, cruelty and greed. We see godlessness on every hand. We long to see all these things checked, for people to fear God and His laws and for a respect for Christian standards. Truly, we can say, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

For people to turn to God and to fear Him we need a strong, compelling and effective Christian witness that is maintained in every walk of life. We need a consistent, spiritual impact from a prayerful, Bible-believing and God-fearing church. Sadly, the world looks down on the visible church because so often so-called Christian leaders speak with no authority or conviction. They make clear what they do not believe in the Bible rather than proclaiming boldly the gospel of Christ. They condone or ignore behaviour that the Bible clearly condemns. Sadly, too, there are many Christians who are self-interested, asking "What's in it for me?" Rather than saying like Paul, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" There are those who want to be entertained or excited rather than meeting for prayer or getting down to earnest study of the Bible.

The root of the problem is that such people do not fear the Lord, they are not holding Him in true reverence, and they are not living in obedience to His commands. We used to hear in the past of men and women who were known as "God-fearing". They were known for their consistent daily walk in Christian standards and practice. They were prayerful in the home. They were honest and upright. They were regularly found in the house of God. They truly feared the Lord.

Proverbs 1 verse 7 says that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge". Have you made that beginning yet? In all that we have discovered from Joshua chapter 4, may it lead you above all else to "Fear the Lord forever".

This time we discover together lessons we can learn from Joshua chapter 5. In this chapter the people of Israel make spiritual preparation for their attack on the city of Jericho. They have crossed over the River Jordan. They are now in the Promised Land, but many enemies have to be faced. God has promised them victory, but many battles must be fought. To be ready for these conflicts the people of God have to be spiritually fit as well as ready for battle in the military sense.

In this chapter stress is laid on two religious observances that were very significant to the Israelites. They are circumcision and the Feast of Passover. We will look at the significance of these later in our talk. In this chapter we are also told that after they had celebrated Passover in their camp at Gilgal, the manna with which God had fed them during their wilderness journeys ceased. The need for it had ended for they had the produce of the land of Canaan for their food.

The chapter closes with a visitation to Joshua of an angelic being who described himself as "the commander of the armies of the Lord". He appeared for the encouragement of Joshua before his first great challenge, the attack on Jericho.

So, in this chapter we have four significant things to consider:

1. The rite of circumcision;
2. The Feast of Passover;
3. The manna; and
4. The Commander of the Lord's armies.

Here, again, we will learn the fundamental secrets of success or victory in spiritual warfare. We will discover how we may enjoy the heritage that the Lord Jesus Christ has won for us.

First then, we find in the opening verses of Joshua 5 that God commands Joshua that there must be a general circumcision of all the males of Israel. We need to go back in time to understand why this was so important at this point in Israel's history. About seven hundred years before this God had spoken to Abraham and established circumcision as the mark in the flesh that there was a covenant relationship between Abraham and the Lord. Of course, it was God who initiated the covenant or solemn undertaking to be merciful. Part of God's covenant was the promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. You can read about this in Genesis chapter 17.

During the wilderness journeys, circumcision had not been observed. Now the infant nation of Israel was learning to exercise its faith and to re-establish its obligations under the covenant. The spiritual significance of circumcision would be known to them. More than once Moses had spoken of "circumcising the heart". In other words the physical act was meant to be a symbol of their separation to God as a people and the taking away of anything that hindered their love for Him.

The New Testament teaches that, in a spiritual sense, all believers are "circumcised" in Christ. This is not a literal circumcision for that is unique to the Jews. Paul teaches about this in Colossians 2 verse 11 where he says that our spiritual circumcision is "putting off the sinful nature". In Philippians 3 verse 3 he further points out that the marks of true spiritual circumcision are to worship God in a genuine spiritual way, to rejoice in Christ Jesus and to have no confidence in your own achievements.

Is this true of you? What are you relying on where your relationship with God is concerned? A good family name? A religious upbringing? Attendance at church? Singing in the choir? Teaching in the Sunday School? It all has to go. It all has to be cut away. You are nothing and you have nothing apart from Christ and His righteousness. Once you rely on that you are set apart to God and then you can serve Him in a right way from the heart because your sins have been dealt with at the cross.

Now we must move on and consider the significance of The Passover. The original Passover could never be repeated. That lay back in the history of Israel when they were delivered from slavery in Egypt. This feast commemorated the time when the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites because, at God's command, they had sacrificed a pure lamb and sprinkled its blood on their door-posts. In doing this their firstborn sons were spared from God's judgement. Because of their unbelief during their wanderings in the wilderness, the last time the Israelites had celebrated Passover was at Mount Sinai. It had not been observed for forty years while they were under the judgement of God. Now that they had set themselves apart to God again and observed the practice of circumcision they could celebrate the feast once more. There was no longer a spiritual barrier.

All this illustrates what happens when Christians meet for the Lord's Supper or Communion service. It too is held in commemoration of something that cannot be repeated - the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for our sins. His death for us on the cross was a once for all act, never to be repeated. In 1 Corinthians 11 we read of the way in which believers are to approach this solemn time of remembrance when we "proclaim the Lord's death" as the Lamb of God Who has taken away our sins. As we come we are to examine ourselves, and even judge ourselves before we partake of the bread and wine. This means that we approach the Lord's Table having confessed our wrongdoing and renounced evil. We approach as unworthy sinners who are simply looking to the death of the Lord Jesus as the basis of our acceptance with God. As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7: "Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us".

The next item of importance in Joshua chapter 5 is the ceasing of the supply of manna with which God had fed them during all their wilderness wanderings. Now they had the corn of their new land with which to feed themselves. There was no break in God's provision. The supernatural manna gave way to the ordinary and regular. In the Christian life there are times when God carries us along and help comes unexpectedly from one quarter or another. At other times we are provided for through our own effort or that of others.

As a Christian your strength will come and you will be nourished spiritually as you feed on the Word of God and as you keep in fellowship with Him and with His people. This does not happen in some supernatural, effortless way, but by diligent use of all that God puts at your disposal. The Israelites now in the Promised Land would be fed by ploughing, sowing, tending and harvesting all that the Lord provided for them. So it is with you and me.

We come now to the fourth significant thing in Joshua chapter 5. In verses 13 to 15. Here we see "The Commander of the Lord's armies". Who was he and why did he appear? It must have been an anxious time for Joshua. Between Gilgal and Jericho lay some seven kilometres of palm groves, then the open ground in front of the city walls. What was to be done? How exactly should the city be attacked? These and many other questions must have spun around in his mind. Suddenly he looked up and saw a warrior opposite him with his sword drawn. When confusion and pressures crowd in upon us, WE need to look up. By faith we shall see that we are not alone in the battle.

But who was this person? A vision or reality? A friend or an enemy? Joshua approached and asked whether he were for the Israelites or their enemies. A remarkable answer was given: he was someone far above that approaching earthly conflict, and yet he was bound-up in it. He said, "As commander of the army of the Lord I have now come". Joshua could only fall down on his face and worship and await his command. Here was

someone in human form, neither man nor angel. That much is plain because he received Joshua's worship without rebuking him.

During His earthly ministry, one and another fell down before the Lord Jesus Christ and not one was rebuked for doing so. In Hebrews 2 verse 10 He is described - in the King James Version - as "The Captain of our salvation". In Revelation 19 verses 13 and 14 we read that one whose name is "The Word of God" will lead out the armies of heaven. This is the name given to the Lord Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel of John.

Here in Joshua chapter 5 everything seems to point to an appearance of this same person to Joshua. He encourages Joshua beyond measure, reminding him of those unseen forces, the angel hosts who would be locked in conflict with the opposing hosts of darkness that energised the enemies of the Children of Israel.

Ephesians 6 verse 12 teaches that evil spiritual enemies stand against you as a Christian. That is why you need spiritual weapons and spiritual armour if you are to have victory in your Christian life. Remember that your Saviour was tempted in all points as you are but He overcame. He has triumphed over Satan and reigns Lord over all. Be encouraged to know that like Joshua, you have a mighty Captain directing you. You may face many Jerichos, spiritual battles against indifference, ungodliness, pleasures, uncleanness and self-interest. How are they to be defeated? Only as you walk humbly and spiritually in utter dependence upon your Captain. How are great victories to be won in the Christian life? It is "By my Spirit, says the Lord" in Zechariah 4 verse 6.

In the final verse of Joshua 5 we see that Joshua is told to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Joshua was in the presence of God as Moses was before the burning bush. As we come into the presence of a holy God we must cast off all impurity and seek to be clean instruments in the hand of God. Then we shall be led out to victory as He goes ahead of us. Isn't that what you want to see?

Joshua

Chapter 6

In this sixth chapter of Joshua we come to one of the best known stories in the Bible, the battle of Jericho. If it were set in modern times we would call it a victory without a shot being fired. By the mighty hand of God the city was taken when its walls collapsed and its defences were thrown wide open.

Looking through the chapter we learn of the unusual campaign strategy that was given to Joshua by the Lord. All the armed men were to form a procession with the priests and the Ark of the Covenant following, and behind them the remainder of the Israelites. Each day they were to encircle Jericho once. That was to be done for six days, but on the seventh day they were to go round Jericho seven times.

When all that was completed, Joshua was to instruct the people, when the trumpets sounded, to give a mighty shout. When they did that the walls collapsed, the Israelites entered, destroying all before them, except the household of Rahab according to their promise. The city was burnt, vessels made of metal were saved to be put into the house of the Lord, and the city was pronounced accursed, a place never to be built again.

That gives us a brief summary of what we find in Joshua chapter 6. Now we need to look at it in more detail. There are four items we need to consider and they all begin with the letter "C" to assist our memory.

The first thing is the CITY, Jericho itself. There it stood as a barrier to the progress of the children of Israel and it had to be taken. By modern standards the city was small, as excavations have shown. It measures roughly 400 by 200 metres and stands on the packed ruins of earlier settlements that are about 20 metres thick. It stood about fifteen hundred metres from the mountains of Judea to the west. That way lay the central passes into the heart of the land of Canaan.

From the walls of the city the massive crowd of Israelites would easily be seen. One circuit around Jericho could soon be completed. But how was the city to be taken? The captain of the Lord's armies had nothing to say to Joshua about making scaling ladders, or building a bank of earth to get over the walls. It certainly was a formidable obstacle.

You and I face Jericho in one form or another if we are in the army of the Lord. Something blocks our way into our inheritance, our true freedom as sons and daughters of the living God. Maybe you feel as though you are always on the borders of Canaan, but you never seem to enter the land fully. Look again at the city of Jericho that bars your way. Is it some habit? Some pastime? Some friendship or relationship? Some business entanglement? You know what it is and it constantly stops you enjoying a rich, full Christian life and effective service for the Lord.

Don't be satisfied with camping on the very edge of the Promised Land. Don't let your particular Jericho seem to rise up to the clouds like some impossible problem. There is One who will give you strength to put things right and break from these hindrances. He is the very same God who told the Israelites that the city would not stand in their way.

We grieve over many other strongholds that seem to stand in the way of the Christian church and mock her efforts. The powerful drug and drink empires, the vast machinery of pornography in its many forms, the sneering cynicism of those whose trust is in science or their personal wealth. Even in the church we see apathy, unbelief and materialism. All these confront us, but when God's people have conquered Jericho and are moving into the heart of the Promised Land, then their strength gathers and other strongholds collapse. When the church is pure, Bible-believing and prayerful, then the enemies of the cross are driven back.

So much for the city, now we need to look at the CIRCUITS. The children of Israel were told to make a circuit or go around Jericho once each day for six days, then seven times on the seventh day. That was a total of thirteen circuits in all.

How foolish it must have appeared to many within the ranks and in the tents. No battering ram against the gates, no arrows against defenders on the walls, no giant catapults hurling boulders. Just the men of war going silently around the city ahead of seven priests blowing on rams' horns, followed by four priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant, with a rearguard of soldiers following.

The instruction given by the Lord concerning these circuits required faith, patience and obedience. That included Joshua as well as the people. He was a soldier. He knew about battle strategies, methods of attack and defence. But, more importantly, he knew how to obey. He knew how to believe also, for after all had he not met with God's commander, as we discovered in chapter 5? Did he recognise the significance of the number seven, always associated with divine activity? Seven priests with rams' horns, seven circuits on the seventh day. God was surely going to act!

How are we to obtain victory over seemingly invincible enemies? It will certainly not be with weapons forged by our earthly wisdom. It will be like Jericho all over again, those thirteen circuits. We are to do as God tells us in His Word. We are to work in the ways that He marks out for us. It will mean doing things that, may seem as foolish and as ineffective as the circuits will have appeared to the Israelites.

What weapons do we have? Only those that the Lord has given us. In Act 6 verse 4 the apostles declared that they would give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. It doesn't sound very exciting does it? Yet a few verses later we read that the Word of God spread or increased and many more people became Christian believers.

For you to be strong as an individual Christian it will mean simple things. Break off contact with anything sinful, seek God in prayer and hear Him speak to you through the Scriptures. You will become stronger in your Christian life, casting down one stronghold after another. The same lesson applies to the Christian church as a whole. It is not a matter of image, or public relations, or hitting it off with the world, glamorous buildings and high powered advertising. It is a matter of the thirteen circuits, simply doing in faith what God has told us to do. That is to live for Him, to worship Him, to proclaim His Word faithfully in prayerful dependence upon his blessing. It may look weak, but it draws down power!

Looking further in Joshua chapter 6 we discover the CIRCUMSTANCES. What exactly were the circumstances of the attack on the city of Jericho? It was not a massed assault on the walls, but simply a mighty shout followed by entrance into the city through the breaches in the walls. Further guide-lines were given over what they found in the city itself. Only destruction awaited the inhabitants and their possessions. Metal which could be purged through fire was to be set aside for future use in Israel. Pretty well everything else was tainted and defiled through the worship of the false God Baal and the evil lifestyle it brought.

These circumstances speak of the principles in our holy warfare against evil. One is □proclamation□ and the other is □separation□. When the people of Israel gave that mighty shout as the trumpets of the priests sounded out they were proclaiming something. They were letting it be known that they were on the victory side. After all, you don't shout if you have lost the battle and you are being led away in long lines of prisoners.

It may well have been that roughly two and a half million people giving one colossal roar of triumph set up some kind of acoustic shock wave. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility and god could have used that to break down the walls. It may have been something for which we have no scientific explanation. The thing is the mighty shout preceded the crumbling of Jericho's walls.

So it will be when God works in and through His people. There has to be that clear, strong proclamation, declaring the victory over sin and Satan. What is needed is for God's people to declare His Word boldly and without apology. Did anyone apologise for the noise they were about to create outside the walls of Jericho? I should think not!

That proclamation needs to be done in a united way, just as everyone on that distant day joined voice to voice in the triumphant shout. Sadly today people hear contradictory messages from the churches. There needs to be a return to proclaiming the historic Christian message concerning sin, salvation through the death of Christ and the necessity for the new birth if anyone is to become a child of God.

In the circumstances of that attack on Jericho there was also the principle of separation. The people were to keep themselves separate from anything that would harm or defile them. They were not to go looting through the city. The whole place was to be purged. God had decreed that it was an accursed place. At the end of Joshua 6 it makes clear that anyone attempting to rebuild Jericho would bring sorrow on himself and his family. We read of a tragic fulfilment of this in a man called Hiel in 1 Kings 16 verse 34.

So it is for God's people today. As they face the strongholds of evil it is not for them to look at what the world has, to be envious, to be covetous, to reach out and take what is on offer. That is how many a Christian and many a church has been defiled and lost its spiritual power and testimony. Be careful over what you watch on television and what you read by way of magazines and books. Be careful over the company you keep and how you spend your leisure time, and where you spend your money. Are you partaking of the accursed thing over which the Israelites were warned? "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you." You will find that quoted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:17.

Our final point of consideration, and very briefly is CERTAINTY. Look at the certainty of assurance given to Joshua in verse 2. The Lord told him, "I have given Jericho into your hand and its king and its warriors." In verse 16 he in turn inspired the people when he told them to shout, for the Lord had given them the city. It was theirs to claim.

We need to conduct our spiritual warfare with certainty also. We need to remember that our Lord Jesus has conquered Satan. He has been judged and cast out (John 12:31 and 16:11). His power has been destroyed (Hebrews 2:14). Christ has triumphed over him and his forces (Colossians 2:15). One day he will be cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:10).

This is the way we can labour and battle with certainty. The outcome is not in doubt. We know how it will turn out, just as the Israelites were told: "The city is yours." So take heart and face whatever Jericho you have to with confidence. The Lord promises you victory!

Joshua

Chapter 7

This time we come to the seventh chapter of Joshua. It has much to teach us about the present state of the Christian church. What happened on that distant day is being repeated in many churches all over the world. We need to take note of the lessons taught by this chapter in Joshua.

We learn first about the sin of a man called Achan. The city of Jericho had been taken by the Israelites and God had forbidden the people to take for themselves anything found there. Achan, however, disobeyed and did keep some of the spoils of war for himself. He kept his misdeed a secret, but not for long. When the Israelites sent a small force up one of the mountain passes to take a city called Ai, they received a terrible shock. Their nerve suddenly failed and they fled before their enemies, leaving thirty-six of their comrades dead as they retreated.

Joshua was devastated by the news and earnestly pleaded with God and was told that there was sin in the camp. All the people were assembled and Achan was discovered and was put to death together with his household. This was done to take away the judgement his sin had brought upon the people.

Many difficult issues are raised by the events of this chapter so we need to consider them carefully. Leaving aside the sin of Achan for the moment, and we will return to it later, we discover that when Joshua sent spies to spy out Ai and its strength, they came back full of PRIDE. They knew that Ai had to be dealt with because it lay so near to the mountain pass that led into the central highlands, a route they would have to take so as to possess the Promised Land. The modern road going from Jericho to Bethel goes along that same route.

The spies returned and in verse three of this chapter we see how self-confident they were. A small force would deal with the city, "For only a few men are there". Remember, this is just after the victory of Jericho. The Ark of the Covenant had gone ahead of them, showing it was God's presence that assured their safety. Now, in next to no time, they are talking about a few soldiers finishing off Ai. Where was their sense of dependence on God? Where was their sense of subordination to Joshua? They should just have been giving him a report not advising him on how to attack Ai.

Our most dangerous times spiritually are just after some spiritual victory. With God's help we manage to do something in church and we begin to think what a good job we made of it. We witness to someone and we think that they couldn't possibly withstand such a clear testimony. We overcome some temptation and start to believe that it is by our own power we did it. How powerful is the temptation to pride and how readily Satan uses it to bring us down so that we are defeated like those soldiers at Ai!

Lying alongside the sin of pride we find PRESUMPTION, not only in the men but also in Joshua himself. In verse 2 we find him sending the spies out, but there is no mention of him waiting on God to know what to do. We need to be careful as Christians of not running ahead of the Lord instead of waiting upon Him in prayer and testing everything by His Word.

See also the presumption of Joshua's men. As I mentioned just now, when they returned it was not simply with a report, but also with advice on how many troops to send to save using all his forces. Imagine in a modern army someone coming to a general with aerial photographs and starting to tell him what his next move should be! And yet we are guilty of that sometimes. We argue against God. We dare to suggest what He should or should not be doing, in our thoughts about Him.

Both Joshua and his men needed to wait for God's orders. We find that they are given at the beginning of chapter 8. With confidence they could go up and succeed. With presumption they would fail.

Also in chapter 7 of Joshua we see the tragedy of PURSUIT, in verse 5. About three thousand men were chased from the gates of Ai. That means they didn't even wait to see how many were coming out of the city after them! Their nerve failed them and they ran away. They had gone up to Ai in their own strength and wisdom. God was not blessing and empowering them so when the real test came they broke and fled and were cut down by the enemy as they went.

It is recorded tragically that "their hearts melted and became like water". What a striking expression that is, showing that there was no fighting spirit within them. They were simply relying on their own confidence. Sadly, this is often seen among Christians today. So many are confident and complacent. Everything is going well. They know little of life's hardships and its rough edges. Then when Satan attacks and moves in on them, they are unprepared and fall into sin or self-pity and unhappiness. If we are not making much headway against the forces of evil it is because we are not strong in the Lord and so we are easily pursued by the enemy.

Thank God, things began to change, as we discover in verses 6 to 9. We see that there is a return to PRAYER. Sorrow and humility before God are evident as Joshua tears his clothes, falls on his face before the Ark, the symbol of God's presence among them, and puts dust on his head, as do all the elders of Israel. They all know that something is seriously wrong and they want it put right. After the success of Jericho God was clearly no longer with them because He had allowed victory to pass to their enemies at Ai.

Notice that Joshua lay face down on the ground until the evening. That was when the sin offering, the sacrificial lamb, was offered to the Lord. Not until then did Joshua feel able to speak. You and I can only come into the presence of God on the basis of the perfect sacrifice for sin - the death of our Lord Jesus. There is no other way. We have no right in his presence apart from that.

Joshua pours out his complaint. He is somewhat hasty and impetuous in what he says, but behind it all is the desire for God's honour and glory. He does not want the Canaanites to be able to mock and say God could not give any more victories and so blaspheme His name. When you and I pray do we have the same kind of concern, or do we pray selfishly thinking only of ourselves?

God speaks to Joshua and we are brought face to face with a PRINCIPLE in verse 11. It is precisely this: "Israel has sinned, they have violated my covenant". God makes it clear to Joshua (in verses 11 and 12) that there could be no victory for the Israelites because they were tainted by sin and under God's displeasure. Verse 13 applies this principle further: there would be no blessing, no victory until the evil was put away from them.

This principle searches us out today whether as individuals or as churches. God is clearly displeased with His people where they are seeing no victories and only seem to be retreating; where the world mocks and sees none of its ranks thinned by conversion and becoming followers of Christ, you have this principle at work. How we need to be pleading with God over this in our churches and seeking to put right whatever is wrong or unbiblical in our homes or in our church fellowships.

Note where God is specific. It is over PROPERTY. In verse 11 of Joshua chapter 7 His charge against them is this: "They have stolen and deceived and hidden it." There had been a breaking of a clear commandment, given in the wilderness and just before the battle of Jericho that no item was to be kept for personal gain. Metal objects were to be put in the Lord's treasury; all else was to be burned. No defilement by the evil ways of Canaan was to cling to them.

This commandment had been broken as we discover in verse 21, involving clothing, silver and gold. The tenth commandment given by God to the people through Moses prohibits

coveting or longing for things we do not own. Achan had broken first of all that law which then led to his outright disobedience to the covenant commands that God gave them before the battle. How easily one evil leads to another! In this case it involved property. So many have gone astray over this, especially in this materialistic age. Things, goods, possessions have taken hold of people. They will lie, cheat, steal and even kill to get hold of things they want. Things have begun to matter more than people, yet goods and possessions will soon pass away. We leave them all behind when we leave this life. Beware of the snare of property, whether your own or someone else's.

The final and tragic element we discover in this chapter is PUNISHMENT. We read in verses 14 to 18 how that eventually Achan was found out or taken. This would be by lot or the drawing out of the sacred stones called the Urim and Thummin from the breastplate of the high priest. One stone would indicate 'No' and the other 'Yes'. Eventually from all the different tribes and families Achan was singled out.

He confessed to his disobedience and theft and all who were with him were put to death by stoning, a communal form of punishment. All he possessed was destroyed by fire and over that tragic family a memorial pile of stones was heaped. The place was named the Valley of Achan meaning "Trouble", for he had brought great trouble on Israel by his disobedience. You will recall that they were beaten at the battle for the small city of Ai.

This all seems very harsh. Some would say God never ordered it, but it is plainly recorded so in the Scriptures. It even says that once it was all dealt with, "The Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger." What, then, are the lessons we can discover from this issue of punishment?

One is, of course, the holiness of God and His absolute standards. He was openly defied and disobeyed, provoking His anger. We cannot sin against God and go unpunished or escape chastening circumstances. Is God speaking to you about something just now? Put it right with Him.

Another lesson is the unity of God's people and corporate guilt. Achan acted as a selfish individual, yet drew his family into his secret and harmed the whole of Israel. He probably did not connect the death of thirty-six of his comrades with his own wrongdoing. He had brought ruin and disaster on his fellow Israelites because God could no longer bless their exploits in battle.

Among the people of God today sin needs to be dealt with. Not by stoning, but by bringing God's Word to bear on the situation. Sadly, wrongdoing is to be found even in the fellowship of God's people. There are beliefs and practices that dishonour Him and grieve His Holy Spirit. But when sin is confessed and put away He will turn to us in mercy and favour again. Our services will be full of the presence of the Lord and sinners will be converted while Christian believers will be made glad. Are you praying for this? Are you putting things right where they are wrong?

Joshua

Chapter 8

Today we come to the eighth chapter of Joshua that makes more encouraging reading than chapter 7. In this chapter the clouds of defeat and of God's judgement because of the sin of Achan lift and God now gives them victory as once again they attack Ai.

When the king of Ai sees the Israelites facing his city he rushes out at them and they flee as they did on the previous occasion. This was only a trick, however, to draw out the enemy. At Joshua's signal another force lying in ambush behind Ai rushes into the undefended city and it is soon taken and destroyed as God had commanded.

The final part of Joshua chapter 8 deals with a great religious gathering where the law given to Moses is read out to all the people. This was to remind them of the basis of all that they did. They were bound to God by solemn covenant and bound to the law He had given them.

This chapter, then, can be divided into two sections that we can entitle "WARFARE" and "WORSHIP". Let us look first at "Warfare" and see what lessons we can discover.

In verse one God gives Joshua encouragement for the battle and assures him of victory. This follows on from the final verse of chapter 7 where we learn that the Lord "turned from the fierceness of His anger" over the sin of Achan. The barrier was removed. The hindrance to receiving God's favour had been dealt with, costly and painful though it was. The first lesson we learn from this is that God is to be feared because of His holiness, but that with Him there is also forgiveness.

You may be facing a battle. Like the Israelites at Ai, you have experienced defeat and feel you can't tackle it again. Check carefully - is there some wrongdoing that has grieved the Lord? Have you gone against the plain teaching of His Word? Go to Him in prayer and ask forgiveness and where possible try to put things right. Turn from the evil you have been doing and break off a wrong relationship before it becomes permanent. The Word of God does not, however, countenance the breaking up of a marriage. You must struggle on with that if your partner is not a believer and pray for grace for your difficulties.

Once you put things right with the Lord you will be in a strong relationship with Him and be able to go against the next stronghold of evil, just like Joshua and the people did against Ai.

This may be a word for a church fellowship. There can be no victory, no advance for the cause of Christ, while sin is allowed to be untouched in the company of God's people. Maybe you have an Achan in your midst, or even a few of them. Someone may be dealing dishonestly and it is known outside the church. Perhaps some flirtation or affair is going on and it proceeds unchecked. Some individual or other is controlling weaker members of the fellowship, lording it over them. These are the kinds of things that hinder blessing, because God is displeased. They must be put right, so that the fight against evil can be pursued without distraction.

Another vital lesson for us is in the second verse where clear directions are given for the conduct of the campaign against Ai. Remember that Joshua had first moved against that city without awaiting God's guidance. Now he has it. Here we learn that God's work and warfare must be done in His way if we are to know blessing and success. How do you know if the way you do God's work, the way you evangelise or order your life is the proper way, the best way? It is only as it is done according to His Word. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 10 verse 4. Much of the weakness and ineffectiveness in personal Christian life and modern church life stems

from not learning this lesson. The second verse of Joshua 8 teaches us that safety and strength lie in going God's way, guided and instructed by Him.

We need to measure our churches, our organisations, our approach to problems in the light of God's instructions. We need to ask, "Is this the biblical way to do it? Are we going about this problem according to the Scriptures? Am I fighting my spiritual battles according to God's Word?" All too often in the modern religious scene we ask questions like: "Does it work?" "Does it get results?" Even worse is the attitude that almost gives the impression that the question asked was, "Can we get away with it?"

Be certain of this. We are not wiser than God. Nor are we stronger than He is. He undoubtedly knows what is best and His Word always gives safe guidance for our battles, just as it did for the attack on Ai.

Another principle we discover in God's instructions in verse two is that God is faithful and will provide for our needs. Now that the people are cleansed of evil and ready for the next battle, God rewards their obedience. The spoils of Ai were to be theirs. They were learning that putting God first and seeking His honour above everything else would not put them at a disadvantage. So it is with us today. Put God first in everything and trust Him for everything and He will supply our need. Look up Philippians 4 verse 19.

The Lord Jesus said exactly the same. He taught us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all these things will be added to us. (Matthew 6:33) This is not a blank cheque for greed of course. Our Lord was talking about daily necessities, not fabulous wealth and luxuries. The apostle Paul taught that God will supply our need (not our greed!) according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19)

As you read on through this chapter you discover that success attended their attack. They went against Ai, the obstacle that stood in their way to further gains, and God enabled them to overcome because they carried out His clear instructions. So may it be for you as you mount an attack on whatever evil or problem hinders your entrance upon blessing and liberty and deeper fellowship with God. These things are your promised inheritance as a Christian, just as Canaan was for the Israelites.

The second element in Joshua chapter 8 is WORSHIP. You can read about this in verses 30 to 35. After the battle, the Israelites assembled in the green valley of Shechem. On the north lay the barren slopes of mount Ebal, on the south the fruitful Mount Gerizim. Rocky ledges at the lower slopes formed a natural setting for groups to assemble in ranks, facing each other. On these slopes took place a communal yet moving act of worship and dedication, serving as a prelude to their entry into the heart of Canaan. In Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 we read about the instructions given to the nation concerning this. Huge stones were to be set up on Mount Ebal. They were to be plastered over and then the law written upon them as a perpetual reminder of their covenant obligations.

Something else was to be done, impressive and memorable to ear and eye. Six of the tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people and six of them on Mount Ebal to pronounce a curse. The Levites were then to read out a list of the blessings and cursings. These curses were condemnations on evil practices. After each the people were to say "Amen". It was a way of confirming their beliefs and submission to the law of God. It is rather like the Ten Commandments or a list of Christian virtues being read out in a service and we say "Amen" to each one, showing that we submit to them and accept them for ourselves and our church. Nothing, however, could compare with or capture the majestic atmosphere of that great gathering.

Before the reading of the law a preliminary step had to be taken. An altar was built with no stonemason's work upon it to draw attention to man. On that altar both burnt offerings and peace offerings were to be sacrificed. The burnt offering was a sacrifice where the animal was wholly consumed in the flames, with nothing remaining. In the

peace offering part was eaten by the worshippers, part by the priest and the remainder was consumed in the flames.

What is the significance of these offerings before the reading of the Law of the Covenant? These Old Testament offerings are pictures of the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus. The whole burnt offering speaks of the total sacrifice of our Saviour for our sin, with nothing held back. He was utterly consumed by the wrath of God against sin when He died on the cross. The price for our sins was paid completely at Calvary. Have you trusted in the Saviour and in His perfect, complete sacrifice for human sin? If not, do so, even now as you listen to "Discovery".

The peace offering spoke of fellowship between the worshippers and God, with no barrier of sin coming between. Do you have that kind of fellowship with Him because of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? Remember that if you confess your sin and don't try to hide it or pretend that you haven't sinned, then God in His great mercy will forgive and you can have fellowship with Him and with other believers.

If you are a Christian it does not mean that you must have no regard for God's Law as something from the distant past. Our Lord Himself honoured and kept the commandments and said we also should do it and teach it. Look at Matthew 5 verse 19. Paul, in Romans 7 verse 14 said that the Law is "good and spiritual."

On that memorable day at Shechem the people affirmed the Law of God, they said "Amen" to it, but only on the basis of the sacrifices. Is this how you seek to serve God? Do you seek to keep His commandments, not in order to be saved but because you are already saved, through the shed blood of Christ?

In this study we have to record, sadly, another instance of failure so soon after victory and blessing. In the previous chapter we discovered that the Israelites succeeded in the battle for Ai because Joshua waited upon God and obeyed his instructions. The great gathering at Shechem set a high spiritual tone for the people as they worshipped and affirmed their commitment to God's laws. Now shortly after there is disappointing failure and compromise.

This is a lesson for all of us: there is never so dangerous a time for us as when we have just been on a spiritual high or received some particular blessing. It is then that Satan will strike when we are not so careful or watchful.

This is what happened to the Israelites. Various tribal groups in Canaan were starting to join together to oppose these invaders from Egypt. However, one small group of cities, in the centre of the country did not want to get involved in the forthcoming battle. The leaders of this group were from Gibeon, a city about six miles west of Jerusalem, and about twenty miles west of where the Israelites were encamped.

The Gibeonites hit upon a plan of deception to fool Joshua's armies. They would pretend to be ambassadors from a far country seeking a peace treaty with the Hebrew nation. They put on old clothes and shoes, took patched wineskins and old sacks, and carried with them bread that was going mouldy. Sad to say, the trick succeeded. Joshua and the leaders believed their story and made a peace treaty with them. Joshua did not consult the high priest to receive guidance from the Lord and so ended up with Canaanites who were really their near neighbours bound to them by a peace treaty. When the truth was discovered the Israelites had to let them live, but they made them servants to the whole community.

How we need to guard against the Gibeonites of our day. What care needs to be exercised over those who would deceive and come among us, whether in church life or our own spiritual life. Much damage has been done by those who pretended to be what they were not. Much harm has been done in the lives of Christians who have admitted Satan in one form or another because he came seemingly as a friend with no apparent threat.

We read in verse 4 that the Gibeonites worked cunningly or craftily. So it is with Satan. Paul gave a warning when he said in 2 Corinthians 2 verse 11, "We are not unaware of his schemes." In other words, Satan has a whole armoury of tricks and deceptions. Sometimes he "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" as Peter describes him in 1 Peter 5 verse 8. Often enough he appears as an angel of light, so pleasant and so acceptable as we read in 2 Corinthians 11 verse 14. He is cunning in his intent to deceive God's people, just as the Gibeonites were. Beware, then, of the deceitfulness of sin as the writer warns in Hebrews 3 verse 13.

Note, first, how they deceived by their appearance. They made it appear that they were ambassadors from afar, probably in good quality clothing that they had deliberately damaged to make it look as though they had travelled many kilometres. They took old sacks for their provisions. They used asses instead of horses to appear non-threatening non-military.

Appearances can be so deceptive and have often proved ruinous to the testimony of the Christian church. In her early years of vicious persecution under the Roman Emperors, multitudes gave their lives rather than deny their Lord. In those days, however, you could be certain that no hypocrites, no make-believe Christians would join the ranks of the persecuted. That all changed when early in the 4th. century the Emperor Constantine declared himself a Christian and official persecution ceased. There was a

union between church and state and pagan beliefs and festivals were given Christian names. An alliance was formed between living faith and heathen religion. Friendship between the church and the world became established. Truth and falsehood became intermingled.

The sad thing was that the church, though gaining acceptance and status, being protected by the authorities, became weaker spiritually. All sorts of people were accepted into the church as true Christian believers. They looked alright, just as the Gibeonites did. To human appearance all was well. Yet in a short time those false believers became powerful, influential figures whose words were listened to and whose actions were copied.

The Church today needs to be on its guard against Gibeonites who come into it under false pretences. There needs to be discernment and a looking for true repentance and sincere faith in the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist said to those seeking baptism in the River Jordan that they should "produce fruit in keeping with repentance." That's in Luke 3 verse 8. There should be some evidence of a change of heart and life. If not it will spell trouble with unspiritual attitudes manifesting themselves and an unwillingness to submit to the teaching of Scripture.

Those Gibeonites deceived partly by their appearance. People do the same today. They manage to look like Christians because they attend church, sing hymns with appreciation, carry their Bible listen attentively, put money into the offering, but their heart is not right with God. They have never submitted to Him, never owned up to being a guilty sinner who has no claim on the mercy of God. They look humble enough like the Gibeonite deceivers, but inside their heart it is a very different story. If that is your condition and you have entered the camp of God's people deceitfully, put it right with God. Own up to Him and confess your need of the Saviour.

Just as appearances can be deceptive, so can words. In verses 8 and 9 of Joshua 9 these Gibeonites seemed to be saying all the right things. They spoke so humbly, calling themselves servants of Joshua and the Israelites. Much damage has been done by false disciples in the church. Like the Gibeonites, the long term effects of their presence can be so destructive. They look nice, respectable people and some rise to positions of great eminence and influence in the church. People take notice of their teaching in conferences and study groups. Their books and articles are read and widely quoted. Yet they are not true to the Word of God and they mislead many by their smooth, reasonable-sounding statements. Be watchful against them and keep close to the Scriptures. In 1 John 4 verse 1 we are warned to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Also these Gibeonites spoke reverently of God. In verse 9 they claimed to have come because of the greatness of the name of the Lord God, and because of His power over Israel's enemies. There are those today who lead in prayer and call upon God's Name, but they are false representatives of Him because of what they believe when pressed to declare it.

It is also interesting to observe in what the Gibeonites said that they cunningly left out certain things. They said nothing of the crossing of the Jordan, the taking of Jericho or the recent defeat of Ai. That would have given them away, revealing that they were from nearby, not from a distant place as they claimed. So it is with false teachers. It is not so much what they say, but what they don't say that is revealing.

You should always ask these questions: does the preacher stress the necessity of repentance and saving faith in Christ? Does he make clear that Christ died in the place of sinners as their substitute on the cross? Does he emphasise the need of the new birth to enter the Kingdom of God? Does he impress on you the value of all the Scriptures as the Word of God? So many truths are omitted these days and we need to recover them for the health and blessing of the Church. So, beware of Gibeonites who mislead by their preaching.

Up to now we have been discovering the effect of deceptions on the church at large. But what about the individual believers? Satan can come to you in many forms and like those Gibeonites he can flatter and deceive. Many and varied are his temptations that will harm and hinder you. Joshua and his leaders said in so many words, "Oh well, there's no harm in them. They seem alright, not like the people of Canaan." The tragedy was that they were the people of Canaan!

One "Gibeonite" or another will come to you and you may be tempted to say, "There's no harm in it. It looks alright to me." It may be certain TV programmes or films, a hobby a sporting pursuit, a book or magazine. It may be a friend, a close relationship or some business dealing. You have to be watchful as our Saviour warned in Mark 14 verse 38: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." Do not let anything control you or deaden your spiritual life.

How then did Joshua and the leaders of Israel fall into this trap? What lesson can we discover from their mistake? We read in verses 14 and 15 that they did not seek guidance from God and so made a treaty with the Gibeonites thus allowing them to live. That is where we all go wrong from time to time. Like Joshua we judge by appearances and speech, but we do not use the acid test of God's Word. In previous chapters of Joshua we find the expression "And the Lord said to Joshua", but not in this instance. They failed to enquire of the Lord.

Do not trust in your own judgement. Seek God in prayer and study his Word constantly. Paul told his friends in Philippi that he was praying that they might increase in discernment or sound judgement as well as love and knowledge. That's in Philippians 1 verse 9.

Let us make that our prayer for ourselves, and not be taken in by "Gibeonites".

Joshua

Chapter 10

In Joshua chapter 10 we learn of a fierce and united opposition to the city of Gibeon because it had joined up with Joshua and the Israelites. The forces against God's people were led by Adonizedek the king of Jerusalem. He not only wanted to punish Gibeon for its defection to Joshua, but also to stop the Israelites spreading into the centre and south of the country.

This king Adonizedek sent to the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon and their combines forces took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it. The besieged inhabitants managed to alert Joshua to their plight and the Israelite forces marched up from Gilgal in the Jordan valley.

Joshua, assured by God of Victory in the conflict, sent his troops against the enemy forces and they fled before the Israelites a distance of some fifteen kilometres. As they scrambled down the rocky pass leading from Beth-horon God poured down great hailstones on them and many were killed in their flight westwards.

At this point Joshua asked for an unheard of favour from God. He called upon the Lord for the day to be prolonged so that the enemy might not escape into the darkness. God graciously heard his cry, working in his sovereign, mysterious power. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day until Israel's enemies were completely defeated. The kings who had united against Joshua and God's people were eventually put to death.

In the rest of Joshua chapter 10 we are told how Joshua conquered the remaining cities in the south of Canaan. Complete destruction was visited on those cities "as the Lord God of Israel commanded."

What spiritual lessons can we discover from these events that will instruct us as God's people today? First we see "Satanic Opposition" against the people of God and any connected with them there is always the hatred of Satan and his forces. The king of Jerusalem feared greatly when he saw the success of Joshua against other cities enabling the Israelites to take possession of the Promised Land. Satan never likes to see God's children enjoying their heritage, entering upon what is theirs by right.

If you are a Christian, you will remember those early days when you began to realise how blessed you were. The fact of being reconciled to God by the death of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, fellowship with your Lord, these and many other blessings were enjoyed. There was a freshness in those early experiences. You began to find delight in prayer, reading God's Word and fellowship with other believers.

It is this that makes Satan troubled and afraid, for he begins to see success and enjoyment among God's people and he is determined to hinder it if he can. Very soon you will have found that ridicule and rejection met your witness for Christ. Distracting thoughts will have hampered your prayer and the reading of the Scriptures. You may have been let down or disappointed by people in Christian circles. All these are ways in which Satan wages war on the Christian believer. He is fighting back to stop you enjoying your spiritual inheritance and privileges.

Thankfully, this is not the whole picture for in this chapter we also have "Divine Provision". If the battle were left to Joshua alone or to us in our human strength, it would soon be over. Thank God, we are NOT left alone. Our Saviour warned us that in the world we would have troubles of every kind, but that we should take heart because He has overcome the world. You'll find that in John chapter 16 verse 33.

All through this chapter we see the presence of God with His people. He enabled them to be victorious in the conflict, although the opposition was considerable and determined. In verse 8 we have the Lord assuring Joshua that his enemies were given into his hand and not a man would stand against him. In verse 10 we read of the Lord troubling or unnerving them before Israel. In verse 11 we discover that great hailstones poured down on the enemy at God's direction. The greatest miracle is recorded in verses 12 to 14 where we read of the prolonging of the day so that victory might be complete. It is all summed up at the end of verse 14 with the words: "Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!" And surely we can say, "If God be for us, who can be against us!" It is only by the power of God that we can be conquerors over the enemy and against sin.

We discover now the third lesson that this chapter has for us as we consider our spiritual battle as believers. We have thought about "Satanic Opposition" and "Divine Provision", but we cannot minimise or overlook the third, indispensable lesson, which is "Total Warfare". By that we mean full commitment to the destruction of the enemy, holding back nothing in our efforts.

In conflicts between nations there may be limited warfare because a short-term gain is in view. The whole of the armed forces are not committed and a token show of strength is sufficient. Total warfare is quite different for everything is committed, manpower and materials, so as to gain the victory.

In Joshua 10 we see total warfare, no half-measures, no playing about making mock attacks or playing for time. The Israelites go all out against their corrupt and heathen Canaanites foes. Some might think that they were too harsh and ruthless in their relentless pursuit and destruction of the enemy, but this reveals a failure to understand the nature of the conflict. God was determined that His people would not learn the vile ways of the Canaanites and so they had to be rooted out of the land that He had given to them as an inheritance. The Israelites were to be the instrument of God's judgement against those heathen kingdoms. Their destruction was to be absolute so that there would be nothing remaining to defile the infant nation. Therefore when you read of the utter destruction of the people of Canaan, remember it was done "As the lord God of Israel commanded" (verse 40) and not by way of spiteful vengeance on the part of Joshua or his soldiers.

You and I are engaged in total warfare against evil, whether within ourselves, our churches or in the world around us. We cannot, we dare not, have an easygoing attitude to this. We are to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3). We are to use spiritual weapons in our warfare (2 Corinthians 10:4). We are to put on spiritual armour (Ephesians 6:10-17). We are to put to death our spiritual enemies, whatever belongs to the earthly nature and the misdeeds of the body. (Colossians 3:5 and Romans 8:13)

If the Israelites had allowed the Canaanites to regroup and re-equip do you think they would have shown any mercy to them? It was asking for cruelty and disaster, let alone moral and spiritual corruption, to let them go. And do you imagine that Satan will give you an easy time if you slacken the pressure? He is always prowling around "like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour". (! Peter 5:8) The only way to defeat him is to watch and pray - to be alert - as our Saviour taught us in Mark 14:38. Above all else it is a matter of waging total warfare as we have been discovering.

At one stage in the hostilities five captured kings were brought out of a cave and the Israelite captains were allowed to put their feet on their necks. This was a symbol of the complete conquest of their enemies, and this is what 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." What an encouragement this must have been to those men!

What encouragements do we have in our battle against evil and corruptions? First, we have a Saviour Who has conquered and triumphed over Satan and his minions at the

cross. (Colossians 2:15) At this point may I say that if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, then you are not going to get anywhere in your struggles against temptations and wrongdoing. By yourself you are powerless to overcome but with Christ as your Saviour from sin's penalty, and with His Holy Spirit in you, you can win spiritual battles. Turn to Him in repentance and believing faith and you can know this power today.

The Lord Jesus Christ was tempted in every way just as we are, yet He did not sin and so He is able to help us when we are tempted. (Hebrews 2:18) On the cross He dealt with our sin, so we need not fear any condemnation by God if we are trusting in that sacrifice for sinners. We are also promised that Satan will be put under our feet soon enough and that our Lord Himself will make all His enemies His footstool. (Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 10:13).

The Israelites under Joshua and with God's deliverance saw victory after victory. If you belong to Christ then you have a victorious leader and you are on the winning side. Keep fighting to the end and the crown will be yours.

Joshua

Chapter 11

We now come to the eleventh chapter of the book of Joshua. The Children of Israel, under Joshua's leadership, have swept through the southern parts of Canaan subduing all opposition. The enemies of God's people in the north do not take this passively. Under the leadership of Jabin, the king of Hazor, a powerful city in northern Galilee, they start to gather their armies. Jabin summoned the surrounding tribes to unite in one massive army to finish off the Israelites. Apart from the Gibeonites who, as we discovered in a previous programme, were tied to the Israelites by a treaty, no-one sought peace with the Jewish people.

We read that Joshua was encouraged by God with a promise of victory. He said: "Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them over to Israel, slain." So Joshua marched north and launched a sudden attack. A rout followed with the enemy fleeing in all directions from the Israelites. The city of Hazor was taken and destroyed along with many others. Only those places built on the ruins of earlier cities were spared to be inhabited later by the Israelites. Unlike the restrictions applied at the battle of Jericho, spoil and cattle were taken by the victorious army. The population was put to the sword and no-one was spared for they were under the judgement of God for their depravity and idolatry. The chapter ends with a sigh of relief as it records that the land rested from war.

So much for our outline of Joshua chapter 11. Now we shall discover what God is saying to us through this episode of conflict and intense hostility. You might be tempted to read this as just a piece of dramatic history. It IS that, but it is much more than that. There are lessons of spiritual significance to be learned.

First, in verses 1 to 5, we see "Daunting Opposition". This vast united force encamped at the waters of Merom. This was a vast cluster of springs six miles south west of Hazor where troops and horses could be refreshed. The Jewish historian Josephus writes of three hundred thousand infantry, one hundred thousand horses and twenty thousand iron clad chariots. What could the Israelites do against such an army? Surely all was lost? Thank God, it was not, for His sure purposes had promised the land of Canaan as the inheritance of His people. That in no way minimises the forces arrayed against them, nor their determination to be rid of the Israelites.

In this we have a picture of our Christian life. We may have some great victory or success in God's service and feel elated, just a Joshua will have done after his successful drive through the southern areas of Canaan. Such joy will soon be attacked and our feeling of elation challenged. Great forces are arrayed against the Christian in the form of Satan and his allies. Now we should not exaggerate his power, but neither should we minimise it. Our Saviour defeated him at Calvary, but he is still around, able to make trouble, though not able to claim as his own any true Christian believer. If you are a Christian you belong to the One Who died for you, and so sin shall have no dominion over you as we read in Romans 6 verse 14.

How encouraging, then, to see in this chapter that despite a daunting opposition, there is "Divine Assurance". We see this in verses 6 to 9. In the midst of Joshua's common sense preparations and watchfulness God gave him that word of encouragement, "Do not be afraid of them." So it must be with us. We have to be on our guard, watching in prayer, well armed with God's word - the Sword of the Spirit - being aware of present day threats to our faith. If we do this then we may expect God's help just when we need it.

Joshua was given clear, precise instructions regarding what to do with the Canaanite horses and chariots. The horses were to be hamstrung, or have a tendon cut not to cripple them, but so that they could still be ridden, but not able to charge or pull the chariots. Remember, this was God's instruction. He did not order the horses to be killed.

The chariots, a terrifying weapon of war, were to be burned. This was so that Israel would not start to use them and so put their trust in chariots rather than in the Lord their God Who was their Deliverance.

There were to be no hailstones or prolonging of the day as there had been on a previous occasion. Those miracles had been granted to encourage them to trust in God and to rouse them to further efforts in their fight against the enemy. That is how it was at the beginning of the attack on Satan's kingdom after the Lord Jesus' ascension back to heaven. As we read in the Acts, the attack was pressed forward with a stream of miracles in the ministry of the apostles. These miracles gradually diminished but we still have spiritual weapons that are mighty for the breaking down of Satan's strongholds. We have the Word of God, we have prayer and we have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In our ongoing battle these are the weapons we rely on and on God's blessing. We do not depend, as it were, on the weapons of the Canaanites in order to do battle against them.

The weapons of our warfare are spiritual, not of the flesh. We must not borrow from the world weapons that we are not entitled to use. One weakness of modern Christianity is looking to see what brings success in the world and feebly borrowing their ideas trusting in these for success in the battle. That is nothing more nor less than seizing Canaanite horses and chariots and it will fail!

Next, in Joshua chapter 11, we read of "Decisive Conquests". This is in verses 10 to 17. Joshua utterly destroyed the city of Hazor and completely despoiled the others, while leaving them ready for occupation. There were to be no more pitched battles, just localised mopping-up operations. The enemy had been utterly crushed by the power of God and the success granted to Joshua.

So it is in our warfare. The great pitched battle has been fought and decided by Christ at the cross. We read in Hebrews 2 verses 14 and 15: "He 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." Further skirmishes will continue wherever companies of believers are found in different parts of the world, but the final outcome is certain. Our Saviour has overcome sin, death, hell and Satan by His complete obedience to His Father's will, by His sacrifice for sins at Calvary, and by His resurrection from the dead.

Let us take heart and be confident of decisive conquests as we wage warfare on our own sinfulness and as we pray for the success of God's work in our fellowships and around the world.

We discover more encouragement in this eleventh chapter of Joshua as we read in verses 18 to 22 of a "Determined Campaign". Joshua did not sit back after his victorious sweep through the northern parts of Canaan. He went on in his warfare giving his enemies no rest. There had to be a follow-up to those decisive conquests. Every available city and its surrounding area had to be appropriated. Even the dreaded giants, the Anakim, who had so terrified the spies sent to look over the land were vanquished at last.

Our Christian warfare has to be just as determined as that. The victory we have in our Saviour has to be appropriated and followed-up right to the very end. We may be called on to face the giants of sorrow, despair, loneliness or discouragement. There may be onslaughts to be faced towards the end of our battling when we are advanced in years and Christian maturity. The Lord, however, has promised to keep us all along the way. We read in Isaiah 46 verse 4:

"Even to your old age and grey hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."

The enjoying of our heritage as children of God will need such a determined campaign because of the nature of the opposition. In verse 19 we read that not a single city made peace with the children of Israel. Do not imagine for one moment that Satan will make a

truce with you if you leave him alone. He will simply bide his time until you are weak and unsuspecting.

More than that, we read in verse 20 that it was the Lord who hardened the hearts of the enemy to come out against the Israelites and then be destroyed by them. God was dealing with them in judgement withholding his softening mercies from their hearts. They simply went on in their evil ways and gave them up to a progressive hardening and confirmed them in it. The same thing happened to Pharaoh in Egypt as he progressively resisted the evidences of God's power on the behalf of His people. Take a warning from this and do not be careless with God's patience and kindness. He has said that His Spirit will not always strive with man and a day of judgement is coming. But we also read in the Scriptures that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Have you come in repentance to God placing your trust in Christ as your Saviour?

Finally, at the end of all the battles, we see a "Divided Inheritance". We read in verse 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."

Each Christian has his or her own portion from God's good hand. This is not according to merit but as the Lord sees fit. Where we are placed, the abilities or opportunities we possess, the fellowship in which we serve, these are the sharing out of the land for us. We read this in Romans chapter 12 verses 6 to 8:

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do so cheerfully."

So fight on in prayer and faith to overcome and claim your inheritance as a child of God. Every inch of soil has to be claimed, but remember that the great victory has already been won by our Saviour.

Joshua

Chapter 14

We come now to our final study in the book of Joshua as we discover together the lessons to be learned in chapter 14. After chapter 11 the book is chiefly concerned with the division of the land of Canaan among the various tribes of the Children of Israel. That goes on until the end of chapter 22 and then in the remaining chapters Joshua challenges both the leaders and the whole nation to be faithful to God so that they will know His blessing and be successful. That is how it is to be with us today, since God never changes. In Joshua chapter 14 we see an example of such faithfulness in one man, Caleb. We are going to look at Caleb and this principle of being faithful and see what it means for our everyday lives.

In this chapter we learn how the land was distributed among the tribes by the drawing of lots, probably by drawing out of a bag a stone with some mark or number on it, or possibly a broken piece of pottery marked in a similar manner. That would designate the area for each particular tribe. The tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, had no such portion for they belonged to God and He was their portion. However, they were allocated towns and their suburbs in which to live so as to sustain themselves and their families. God did not intend that those who served in the Tabernacle or later the Temple, should be distracted by land and possessions beyond their simplest needs.

In verse 6 we read that the people of Judah came to Joshua, and Caleb their senior warrior and leader spoke to him concerning what was to be allocated to him. He reminded Joshua of what God had said over forty years earlier at a place called Kadesh Barnea. That was the place where the Israelites rested while twelve spies entered Canaan and then brought back a report to Moses. Ten of them were full of fear, but two of them, Joshua and Caleb, were full of faith. God said at that time that of all the adults in that company, only Joshua and Caleb would enter the land and enjoy it as a reward for their faith in Him.

So Caleb goes on to remind Joshua of how God has kept him until his eighty-fifth year, still strong and active. Now he asks Joshua for the hill country containing the city of Hebron. That was where the Anakim lived, those impressive looking people who had earlier struck fear into the hearts of the ten spies. So Hebron was given to Caleb and he appears to have defeated the Anakim for the chapter closes with the words: "Then the land had rest from war."

Let's look more closely now at this grand old warrior, Caleb, and discover what spiritual lessons we can draw from his example. He is a living example of that vital principle of following the Lord faithfully. Joshua, too, was a faithful follower but then we might be tempted to say, 'Ah, but he was a great leader who was cut out for eminent service. He was exceptional and you would expect him to tower above the rest'. That is precisely why it is good to look at this man Caleb because we read very little about him in the Scriptures. He was faithfully getting on with serving his Lord and doing his duty. He was doing this throughout all those years and he is hardly mentioned!

There have been thousands like him, men and women who down the years have laboured on faithfully, giving loyal service to the Lord in a quiet, unassuming way. Their effort and sacrifice have been known only to a few, but God does not forget their work and their labour of love. (Hebrews 6:10) These things are seen by His eye which is in every place. His records are always kept up to date. Be encouraged if you are Christian working quietly for the Lord for He knows all that you are doing.

In Joshua chapter 14 we note that Caleb had a "Threefold Testimony". In verse 8 we discover "his own testimony", "I followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly." He was not boasting or exaggerating. He was simply stating what the course of his life had been. He spoke out of experience and conviction.

What about you? Can you give a word of personal testimony? Can you speak of definite experience of the Lord in YOUR life? Not so much about what happened in your home, or in the life of godly parents or a friend, but in your "own" experience. Can you say with simple conviction, like Caleb, "I have wholly followed the Lord"? Can you speak of a personal experience of meeting with the Lord, turning from your sin, trusting in the death of Christ for your salvation, and going on to live for Him?

It is important not only to speak of a past experience, but also a continuing experience of following the Lord. That is what Caleb was able to do. He said in verse 10: "the Lord has kept me alive." He acknowledged that it was God who had preserved him and enabled him to continue in service. Can you do the same? Are you able to acknowledge the debt you owe to God, not only for His saving grace, but also for His keeping grace? The apostle Paul did when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians: "By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect." (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Besides Caleb's own testimony we have in verse 10 the testimony of Moses concerning the faithfulness of this man of God. How important it is to have the "confirming testimony" of others. The words of Moses to Caleb were that a portion of the land of Canaan would belong to him and his family because, "You have wholly followed the Lord your God." The point here is that Moses was able to say this to his face. It was an honest declaration and recognition of the godly life and service of this faithful man.

What could be said to your face and mine concerning our Christian walk? Could the people in your family, who may not be Christian believers, say to you, 'Well, I don't go along with your beliefs, but I've got to admit, you certainly follow God wholeheartedly'. Could your friends at work say, 'I've no time for your religion, but you certainly take it seriously and it shows in the standard of your work'?

When it comes to church life and service do you have a faithful testimony there? When the pastor or elders speak with you are they able to say to you, "We've been watching how you have gone on with the Lord and we believe you are making progress and growing in Christian character"? Can they testify that you are seriously following the Lord because they have observed your faithful attendance, your prayerful concern for the work of the church, and your growth in love for the things concerning Christ and His people?

It may be that you feel a call to teach in Sunday School, or preach God's Word, or be actively involved in evangelism at home or abroad. That needs to be tested and confirmed by the testimony of others as they talk and pray with you. Can they say to your face, as Moses did to Caleb, "You have been truly following the Lord", and, "We agree with your convictions and believe that God is calling you out into a further step of service and commitment to His work"?

Some people feel hurt and resentful if they don't hear such a testimony from others. Yet it may be the case that they feel led towards something, but no one else sees it that way. It could be that they are not ready for that step they are considering. Do not others in the fellowship have eyes and ears also? Can they not make an informed spiritual judgement? In a soundly based, Bible-believing fellowship it will generally be the case that the testimony of others in these matters will be the right one.

There have been cases where someone has looked at some aspect of Christian work and been drawn to it because it looked exciting or enjoyable or would satisfy their ego? We need to hear the testimony of others confirming what we are considering. Sadly, many movements and organisations have been set up by people who "felt led" to do so, yet never submitted to the acid test of faithful testimony by others.

Be assured of this that our life must be able to pass the honest and faithful scrutiny of fellow believers who are themselves spiritual, who can verify that, like Caleb, we are wholly following the Lord our God.

The third thing we discover about Caleb's life and service for God is the "Testimony of History". We read in verse 14 of Joshua chapter 14 that his possession of the city of Hebron continued with his family because "He followed the Lord God of Israel wholeheartedly." It is recorded in Scripture because it was recorded in the history of the people of God.

Clearly the life, work and service of Caleb was widely known and not disputed. A firm place was found for it in the chronicles of the Israelites. What will be said of you and me after we are gone? In years to come will someone say of us, "They wholly followed the Lord; they were always in their place on the Lord's Day; they were faithful workers in all they did; they showed love to their fellow Christians and to all. They followed the Lord faithfully"?

Christian parents will a son or daughter recall you in these terms, "My mother was faithful to the Lord. She brought us up strictly yet lovingly in the fear of the Lord and taught us to believe in Him and walk in His ways"? Will you be remembered as a father with affection in words such as these, "My Dad followed the Lord closely. He read God's Word, endeavoured to live by it and taught it faithfully to others"?

It is in ways like this that history will remember us as it did with Caleb. By God's grace may it be true of you and me that the testimony that is recorded will be, "He completely followed the Lord." My closing appeal to you is that you cling to the Lord with purpose of heart, having believed in Him and turned to Him. May God bless to you these studies from His Word in the book of Joshua.