

How long will you neglect to go and possess the land?

The Israelites moved their base from Gilgal to Shiloh, some 10 miles to the north of Bethel (1). They set up the tabernacle at Shiloh which became the centre for the worship of God until the time of Samuel (cp. 1 Samuel 1:1–28; 3:21). The land was subdued before the Israelites (1) but the seven tribes who had not received their full inheritance were content to remain as they were. Joshua rebuked them, saying, ‘*How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers has given you?*’ (2–3). He told them to send three men from each of their tribes to survey their inheritance which would then be divided out by the casting of lots (4–10).

Dale Ralph Davis comments: ‘Verse 3 reflects the tension of much believing experience, ancient Israelite and contemporary Christian. Yahweh has promised the land and yet it must be possessed. It is Yahweh’s gift and yet it does not cancel human responsibility. Yahweh’s promises are not intended as sedatives but as stimulants. God does not want us to swallow his promises but to seize them ... God’s gifts are not meant to tame but to arouse God’s people’ (JOSHUA – NO FALLING WORDS, page 142).

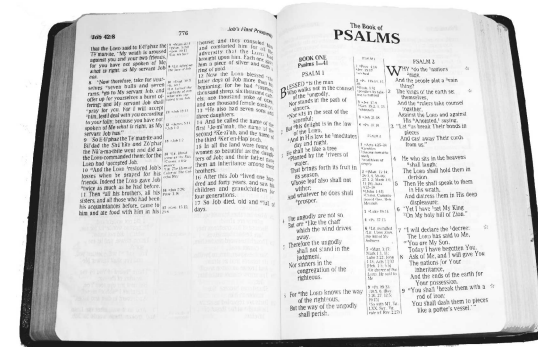
Peter informs us that God’s *divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness* and that we have *exceedingly great and precious promises*. He then goes on to write, *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, etc.* (2 Peter 1:3–8).

God has given us a rich inheritance in Christ. Some of this inheritance is reserved in heaven for us, but there is much to enjoy now. **Are you possessing all that God has given to you to enjoy now? If not, could it be that you have sunk into a lazy, contented state of spiritual stagnation?**

Notes for 30 and 31 January are included in the notes for February

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God’s holy Word simply explained and applied



January 2016

Bible readings from Joshua chapters 1 to 18

Dear Friends

I am grateful to the Lord for giving me the strength to continue to revise and improve Pilgrim Bible Notes. I would commend to you my book of Bible readings entitled 'Pilgrims under Pressure' (published by Evangelical Press — available July 2016 (God willing)).

We are living in uncertain and difficult times. Great Britain and the western world have turned away from God and his holy Word. Christians face hostility and contempt for their love of God's truth and many have lost their jobs or seen their businesses closed because they affirm God's laws concerning marriage. Advances in technology have enhanced communication but have also made access to pornography much easier. Our young people face difficulties that were unknown to us and are bombarded with filth and many are bullied when they seek to honour God. We must be vigilant to guard our hearts in these evils times (Proverbs 4:23).

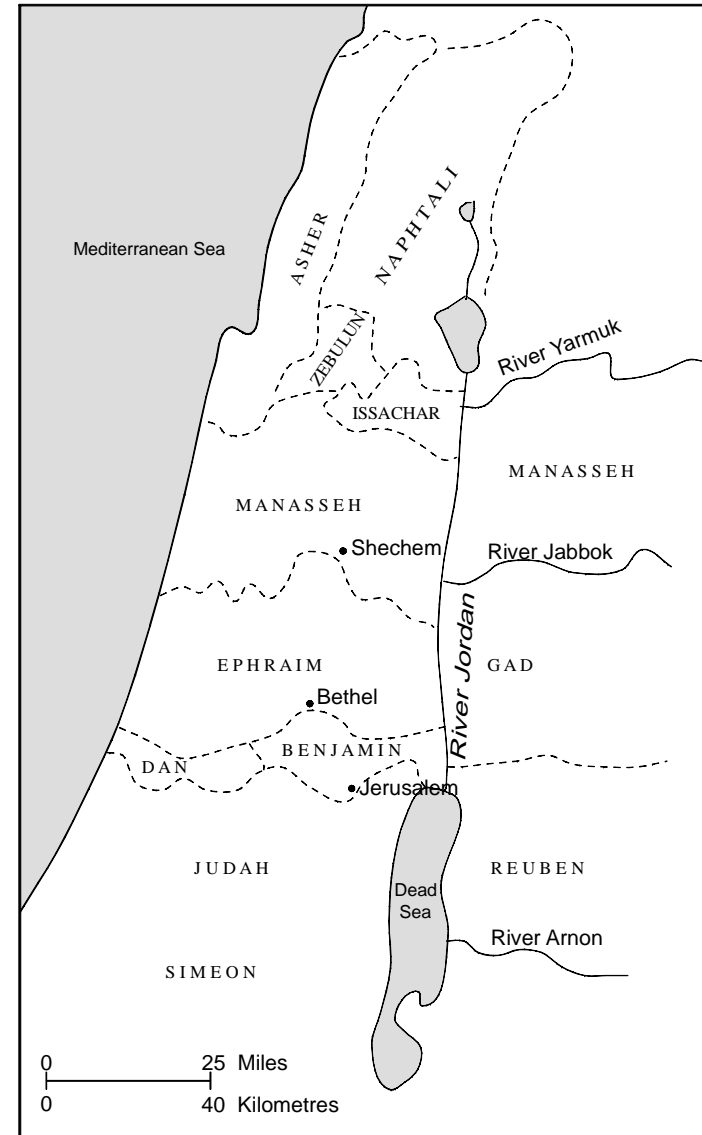
The fact of God's sovereignty gives us great assurance and comfort and many are still coming to faith in Christ. It is also a joy to read of thousands of Muslims coming to faith in Christ throughout the Middle East.

Let us be encouraged to persevere with joy and walk with the Lord so that we shine as a light in the darkness and ignorance that surround us (Proverbs 4:18-19; Matthew 5:14-16). I pray that you will be encouraged and helped as you use these Bible reading notes throughout the year.

Yours sincerely in Christ

Alec Taylor.

Territory allocated to the tribes of Israel



They ... did not utterly drive them out

This chapter deals with land allocated to Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh who settled west of the Jordan. Zelophehad of the tribe of Manasseh had died in the wilderness leaving five daughters but no sons. Moses had promised the daughters an inheritance (Numbers 27) and they now came to Joshua to claim it (3–6).

So far, so good, but there were soon to be rumblings of discontent among the tribes of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). They claimed that they did not have enough land to sustain them. Manasseh's population a few years earlier had been 52,700 and Ephraim's 32,500 (Numbers 26:34–37). A glance at the map on the next page shows that they had by far the greatest allocation. Judah (76,500) and Simeon (22,200 – Numbers 26:14,26) shared a far smaller area, though they had 12,500 more people. Moreover, Keil in his commentary points out that Ephraim and Manasseh had land that was rich and fertile enough to provide sufficient food for the whole of Israel. Why were they so discontented when they should have been satisfied?

- Israel's disobedience to God's command to drive out the Canaanites – *They put the Canaanites to forced labour, but did not utterly drive them out* (12–13; cp. 16:10; Numbers 33:52,55). God's will had been made very clear to them but they chose to ignore it! They preferred to use the Canaanites as forced labour so that they could enjoy an easy lifestyle at the expense of slave labour.

- Unbelief in God's promises. They acknowledged God's blessing, but were not satisfied. Joshua (himself from the tribe of Ephraim, 1 Chronicles 7:27) rebuked them. He pointed out that they were strong enough to drive out the well-equipped Canaanites from their mountain strongholds (15–18).

If you are discontented with your lot, could it be that there are areas of disobedience or unbelief in your life?

- All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless stated otherwise; they are printed in italics. **If you have a different translation of the Bible, you will still be able to use these notes.**

- The number in brackets eg. (6) refers to the verse number in the passage that we are reading; (23:16) refers us to another chapter and verse in the book of the Bible from which we are reading. When we read from Matthew, this would be Matthew chapter 23, verse 16.

- Where verses from other books of the Bible are brought to our attention, the name of the book is also indicated in the brackets eg. (Psalm 19:1).

- Where I ask you to compare another verse of Scripture, I prefix the reference with cp. (eg. cp. Psalm 1:1). I prefer this to the more common abbreviation cf. which relates to the obsolete word 'confer'.

The word 'Lord' in the Old Testament

The Hebrew words translated '*Lord*' are:

- 'Adon' which is used with reference to men (Genesis 42:33; 45:8–9), and with reference to God (Joshua 3:11,13; Psalm 8:1).
- 'Adonai' literally 'my Lord' (Exodus 4:10; Psalm 68:19).
- 'Yahweh' ('Jehovah'), the sacred name for God, considered by many Jews as too sacred to utter. They regularly used 'Adonai' in its place. 'Yah' is a contracted form of 'Yahweh' (Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). The word '*Alleluia*' or '*Hallelujah*' (Revelation 19:1–6) means 'Praise Yah'.

Dale Ralph Davis writes with reference to Exodus 3:12,14: 'In light of verse 12, God does not here stress his being or existence so much as his presence and "Yahweh" captures and summarizes that thought – **he is the God who will be present to be all that his people need him to be.** "Yahweh" means the God who is present to help ... "Yahweh" is a personal name, while "the LORD" is a title ... there's a devotional warmth in a personal name that a title can't convey' (THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE MUCK OF LIFE – PSALMS 1–12, page 8).

NB. Our Bible translators have made it possible for us to recognise when 'Yahweh' is used in the Old Testament. 'Yahweh' is printed '*LORD*', whereas 'Adon' or 'Adonai' are printed '*Lord*'.

JOSHUA

27 JANUARY

Joshua 15:13–19

Give me also springs of water

The Lord appointed Joshua to succeed Moses and to lead Israel into the promised land (Numbers 27:18–23). Joshua was born in Egypt and he led the Israelites into battle soon after they began their journey to Canaan (Exodus 17:8–13). His military training prepared him well for the task of leading the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan. More important by far was the spiritual training that he received at the side of Moses (Exodus 24:13; 33:11). He was one of the twelve spies who were sent to view Canaan. Though ten of the spies gave a very discouraging account of the task before them, Joshua and Caleb were faithful to God and they challenged and encouraged the people to trust in the Lord and to go in and possess the land (Numbers 14:6–10). ‘Joshua’ is the same word as ‘Jesus’ (which comes from the Greek) and his name means ‘Jehovah saves’ or ‘Jehovah is salvation.’

Themes in the Book

1. God’s faithfulness to his covenant in bringing the people into the land, and in driving out the Canaanites (23:3).
2. The beginning of Israel’s failure to possess the land (17:13; 18:3).
3. Those who are the Lord’s must live in faith, holiness, obedience and love to God (23:6–11). There are warnings against covetousness (7:11,21), prayerlessness (9:14), compromising disobedience (16:10; 17:13) and failure to possess what God has given (18:2–3).
4. God brought Israel into Canaan to give them rest from their enemies (1:13, 15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). Those who had died in the wilderness failed to obtain this rest (Psalm 95:11) which foreshadows the ‘rest’ of faith enjoyed by the Christian (Hebrews 4:1–11).

Outline of the Book

1. Canaan Entered – 1:1 to 5:12.
2. Canaan Conquered – 5:13 to 12:24.
3. Canaan Divided – 13:1 to 24:33.

Caleb had to drive three giants out of Hebron in order to enjoy his inheritance (13–14). He probably knew that his nephew Othniel, wanted to marry Achsah his daughter, but he wanted Othniel to prove his faith and courage. He issued a challenge: He would give the hand of Achsah in marriage to the man who attacked and conquered Debir (Kirjath Sepher). Othniel rose to Caleb’s challenge and won Achsah to be his bride (16–17). The Lord later honoured him by raising him up as the first judge of Israel after the death of Joshua (Judges 3:9–11).

Achsah was also prepared to follow in her father’s footsteps. Caleb had requested, ‘*Give me this mountain*’ (14:12). Achsah was aware that Othniel’s land was parched and she asked her father, ‘*Give me a blessing ... give me also springs of water.*’ Caleb gave more than she asked for, giving her both upper and lower springs (19). **Our heavenly Father delights in us and often gives us far more than we ask for. Haven’t you proved this in your own life?**

Achsah saw her need for water to survive. The Bible also speaks of ‘spiritual water’ which brings satisfaction and peace. Are you thirsting for God? Perhaps you do not know him and you long to have eternal life, springs of ‘spiritual’ water? The Lord Jesus said, ‘*Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life*’ (John 4:14).

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink and live.
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream,
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived
And now I live in him.*

(Horatius Bonar)

Give me this mountain

Caleb was outstanding for his courage and for his trust in God. With Joshua, he had stood alone when the unbelieving, cowardly spies convinced the Israelites that it would be impossible to conquer Canaan (Numbers 13:26 to 14:10). Here we meet Caleb forty-five years later. He was now an old man of eighty-five years, but physically strong and as faithful as ever (10–11). What made him such a great man?

- He had *wholly followed the LORD* (8–9,14). He was wholehearted in his obedience to God and was prepared to stand alone; an example of this was when he and Joshua stood firm in rising to the challenge of possessing the promised land (Numbers 14:6–10). Do you wholly follow the LORD, whatever the personal cost?
- He patiently trusted in the promises of God who had promised him that he would enter Canaan and have an inheritance there. He had waited for forty-five years for this promise to be fulfilled (9,12).
- He acknowledged the sovereignty of God over his life: *'The LORD has kept me alive'* (10). He knew that his times were in God's hands (cp. Psalm 31:15). It is wonderful to know that we will never die until it is God's time to take us. Where will he take us? He will take us to be with Christ in glory which is far better (Philippians 1:21–23)!
- He was ready to face great challenges to his faith, even in old age. He said to Joshua, *'Give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day'* (12). It was the mountain area where Hebron and other walled cities were situated. Moreover, there were fearsome giants (the Anakim) to be conquered. He was bold, but he was not presumptuous. He did not take God for granted but said, *'It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said'* (12).

After Caleb had secured his inheritance, *the land had rest from war* (15). **Are you struggling with difficulties that appear like mountains or giants? Be like Caleb and you will triumph in Christ!**

For further reading:

Joshua – No Falling Words by Dale Ralph Davis (Christian Focus)

Strong and Courageous – Joshua simply explained by John Currid (Welwyn Commentary Series published by Evangelical Press).

Dale Ralph Davis writes, 'As you read and study Joshua, try to keep asking yourself the question: What is the writer *preaching about* when he tells me this story? He is not telling you the story only to inform you (although that is part of it); he has a message to proclaim, a God to press upon you (JOSHUA – NO FALLING WORDS, Page 12).

I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you

Moses was the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets (see Deuteronomy 34:10–12). He had led the Israelites for forty years and God appointed Joshua to succeed him as leader (Numbers 27:18–23). The death of Moses was not a signal for the Israelites to be paralysed by grief or inertia. *The Lord spoke to Joshua ... saying, ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them — the children of Israel’* (1–2).

The new leader faced the daunting task of leading the Israelites into the promised land. They had to cross the swollen River Jordan which was in flood, and on the other side, they had to conquer fortified cities. Moses had encouraged Joshua before he succeeded him to the leadership of Israel (Deuteronomy 31:3–8) and now the Lord encouraged him, giving him some precious promises. God would give him a great land stretching from the Euphrates in the east to the Great Sea (the Mediterranean Sea) in the west; he would be invincible (2–9). The Lord encouraged him, *‘Be strong and of good courage’* (6–7,9). What was the basis of Joshua’s confidence? It was not his own military skills or strength but the promise of God’s presence: *‘As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you’* (5; cp. verses 9 and 17; 3:7,10; 23:10). This promise is applied to Christians in the book of Hebrews.

Where does our strength lie? Certainly not in ourselves; we are painfully aware of our weaknesses. **It lies in the same God whose presence is with us wherever we may go, just as it was with Joshua and the Israelites.** God is with us at home, at work and in our leisure times. He is with us in difficult and distressing times. God is with us and for us, blessed be his name! The Christian life is not easy and we sometimes ponder the future with apprehension. Our faith may well be severely tried but we know that God will never leave us nor forsake us, *so we may boldly say, ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’* (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Their inheritance was by lot

The distribution of the land was determined by the casting of lots; *their inheritance was by lot* (2; cp. 18:6,8,10; 19:51). The Levites were not given any tribal territory because they had been set apart to serve God (13:14, 33). They were, however, given cities to dwell in and adjacent land for their property and livestock (3–4).

Casting lots was a common method of finding guidance in Bible times (eg. Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1; Jonah 1:7). Lots were also used for gambling; the Roman soldiers cast lots for the tunic of the Lord Jesus (John 19:23–24). The sovereignty of God is recognised even in the casting of lots: *The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the LORD* (Proverbs 16:33).

The casting of lots in gambling lotteries is an affront to God’s sovereignty and is an evidence of the sin of covetousness. Should we cast lots today to help in our decision making? There is nothing in Scripture which forbids it but I would urge much caution to any who are tempted to obtain guidance and help by casting lots. The early believers prayerfully cast lots to determine the successor to the apostolic office of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:24–26). This is the only instance in the New Testament of the use of lots by Christians. What are the basic principles to follow in making our choices?

- Any choice that will lead us into sin is wrong.
- If we are not obeying God’s Word (his revealed will) we must not expect him to guide us in other matters; first things first!
- We must always seek God’s help in prayer (Acts 13:1–3; James 1:5–6).
- We must trust in God at all times (Proverbs 3:5–6) and beware of confusing our own desires with his will.

God has given us his Word to guide us and the Holy Spirit to direct us (Psalm 119:105; Romans 8:14). We can be confident that he will work all things together for good to those who love and obey him.

There remains very much land yet to be possessed

Israel was not to bask in past success and victory because there was still much to be accomplished. God told Joshua, *‘There remains very much land yet to be possessed’* (1). The Israelites had won many great battles, but they had not yet possessed all the land. Moses had already allocated land to the 2½ tribes who remained on the east of the Jordan (8–35). The death of the soothsayer, Balaam, is recorded in this chapter (22). He wanted to die the death of the righteous and to have an end like his. (Numbers 23:10); this was not to be because of his wickedness (2 Peter 2:15). The Lord now instructed Joshua to divide the land on the west of Jordan between the remaining 9½ tribes (7).

Joshua was very old but God did not pension him off (1). *There remains very much land yet to be possessed.* There is a very important lesson here – we are never too old to serve the Lord! Satan may tempt you to write yourself off but do not listen to him. Our advancing years may bring bodily weakness and frailty so that we are no longer able to hold positions once held. We need to recognise this and have the grace to step down and to take a back seat. **There is still a work for Jesus that we can do in our advancing years, however.** The prayers, encouragement and wise counsel of a godly man or woman are precious, whatever their age. God promises that the righteous *shall still bear fruit in their old age* (Psalm 92:12–14). How wonderful!

Allocation of Land

I have not included in our readings the lists of the cities allocated as an inheritance to the tribes of Israel. These lists are found in Joshua 13:8-35 (land east of Jordan); 15:1–12, 20–63; 16:1–10; 18:11–28; 19:1–51; 21:4–42. Read these passages at your leisure – you will need a good Bible atlas to get the most out of them.

You shall meditate in it day and night

We are repeating yesterday’s reading in order to focus on an important commandment given by God to Joshua: *‘This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it’* (8)

‘This Book of the Law’ (8) refers to the book of Deuteronomy (cp. Deuteronomy 31:9,11,24,26). God told Joshua, *‘You shall meditate in it day and night.’* Those who are godly delight in God’s Word and meditate in it continually (Psalm 1:2). The Hebrew word used here for *‘meditate’* means ‘to mutter.’ We see the connection in the beginning of verse 8 – *‘This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate* (i.e. ‘mutter’ or ‘murmur’) *in it day and night’*. This meditation is not the vain, repetitive muttering of Hindu mantras and letting the mind go blank. Christian meditation is the musing over God’s Word, having it in our hearts and upon our lips. We use our minds to think through the teaching of God’s Word; that Word on our mouths will lead us to worship God and to witness for him.

The Lord told Joshua that he was to *‘be strong and very courageous’* to obey his word (7). Obedience to God’s Word always requires courage. We must not compromise his truth, whatever the cost to ourselves. We will hardly be obedient to God’s Word if we are ignorant of its teaching. We live at a time when many professing Christians are content to drift along without any desire to know God’s Word and obey it. These are desperate times with challenges facing us that are just as daunting as those faced by Joshua, yet many want to be entertained in church rather than to worship God reverently and seriously. Others are worldly and lukewarm in their love for the Lord.

Do you meditate on your Bible readings each day, repeating the verses, muttering them to yourself and thinking much about them? Do you meditate on the sermons that you hear preached? Do you observe (obey) all the Word of God? The pattern for Joshua’s success (8) is the pattern for our success in the Christian life.

You will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land

Today's reading gives an account of Joshua's response to the promises that God had given him. He instructed his officers to tell the people, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you will cross over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you' (11). The river Jordan was in flood at that particular time (3:15) and the fortress city of Jericho with its huge walls lay on the other side of the river. Joshua was strong in faith, being certain that God would enable them to cross the swollen river and to possess the land. He also acted immediately on God's command to cross Jordan, giving the Israelites three days to prepare for the crossing (2,11). When the Lord challenges us from his Word, we too must be decisive in our obedience to him.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh had settled in the lush pasture lands on the east of the Jordan. They had promised Moses that they would fight with the Israelites until the land west of the Jordan was possessed (see Numbers chapter 32). The men from these tribes were reminded by Joshua of their obligation (13–15). They were not allowed to opt out of their responsibilities to God's people and they pledged themselves to obey Joshua. They joined the other tribes in preparing for military action; had they not done so they would have discouraged them (16–18). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'One can detect here implications for the doctrine and practice of the church — unity among God's people is no idle luxury (JOSHUA – NO FALLING WORDS, Page 21).

There is all manner of work to be done in every church. Do not excuse yourself by claiming that you have very little ability. You may not be a preacher or a Sunday school teacher, but there are other ministries such as hospitality and caring. There is also the vital but hidden ministry of prayer. **Do not leave needs unmet because of laziness or lack of commitment.** Are you prepared to echo the promise of the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh and to say to God, 'All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go' (16)?

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts

Joshua made war a long time with all those kings (18). We can calculate that this was about seven years in all (Caleb was forty years old when he was sent with the other eleven spies to spy out Canaan. This was followed by thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering before he entered the promised land at the age of seventy-eight. After the conquests in Canaan he came to Joshua concerning his inheritance at the age of eighty-five, 14:7,10).

The Canaanites persisted in their wars against Israel because *it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might utterly destroy them* (20). God is absolutely sovereign over all the universe (Psalm 93:1; 97:1; 99:1). His purposes cannot be thwarted or frustrated (Isaiah 14:27); the hearts of kings are in his hands to turn them as he wills (Proverbs 21:1; cp. Exodus 4:21). God has the prerogative to soften or to harden hearts (Romans 9:18). **While this truth is a solemn warning to impenitent sinners, it is also an encouragement to us.** God has the power to open hearts to the gospel (Acts 16:14). Let us pray that the Lord will be pleased to open the hearts of loved ones and friends who are lost.

God also gave Joshua victory over the Anakim who were giants (Goliath belonged to this race). They had caused much fear in the hearts of the unbelieving spies sent by Moses to view Canaan. The spies had reported that they felt like 'grasshoppers' in the sight of the Anakim (Numbers 13:33). These Anakim were destroyed by Joshua and his 'grasshoppers' (21–22). The presence and smile of God upon us makes all the difference in our lives. Let us worship the sovereign, almighty God and encourage ourselves in him.

Joshua chapter 12

This chapter gives a summary of Israel's conquests under Moses on the east of the Jordan (1–6) and of Joshua's conquests over thirty-one kings in Canaan (7–24). Joshua 13 and the following chapters concentrate on the division of the land among the tribes of Israel.

He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded

We now turn to the conquest of northern Canaan. Joshua's success in his campaigns in the south alarmed the kings of the cities of the north. Jabin, king of Hazor, gathered together a massive army in alliance with the other kings (see map on page 17). This army mustered for battle at the waters of Merom, a stream which flowed south-east into the Sea of Galilee. They were well equipped with chariots and cavalry, whereas Israel only had foot soldiers (1–5).

The Lord again reassured Joshua, *'Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel'* (6). He also told Joshua that the Israelites should cripple their horses and burn their chariots (6). Though God had promised to give the victory, Joshua had to lead his army into battle against the huge army of their enemies. The sovereignty of God was not an excuse for inactivity but an encouragement to fight. God did not permit the Israelites to keep the horses and chariots lest they depend on these for victory rather than himself (cp. Psalm 20:7; Isaiah 31:1). A surprise attack by the Israelites left Jabin and his army in disarray and God gave his people a great victory (7–14). Israel did not owe her success in battle to superior might but to the Lord. *And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel* (8).

It may be repeating the obvious, but the principle must be stated again: God honours those who obey him. Look at the description of Joshua's obedience. *He left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded* (15). Total obedience – nothing left undone! Partial obedience to God's will is not good enough. If we hold back from complete obedience we disobey God (cp. 1 Samuel 15:1–3, 18–23). The Lord will only be with us and grant us victory and joy as we leave nothing undone of all that he commands us. We will not be 'more than conquerors' if we are careless and sloppy in our lives. **Have you been leaving undone some of God's commands to you? If you have, repent of your disobedience and ask the Lord to give you grace and help to obey his Word.**

Especially Jericho

The spies were sent into Canaan before the Israelites prepared to cross the river. God had promised Joshua that he would give Israel the land of Canaan (1:2–5). Why then did he use these spies? Was he lacking in faith? Not at all! Their report would have been a great encouragement to Joshua (24) but there was another more important reason for their visit to Jericho. God had someone in that city, chosen in his eternal purpose, whom he was determined to save. *'Especially Jericho'* (1). It was there that the Lord wonderfully stepped into the dark and tragic life of Rahab the prostitute.

There was nothing in Rahab's life to commend her to God or to man. She was cheap, even by the wicked standards of Jericho, but she was precious to God. A. W. Pink writes, 'By her choice, she was given up to the vilest of sins, but by the divine choice she was predestined to be delivered from the miry pit and washed whiter than snow by the precious blood of Christ, and given a place in his own family.'

Rahab did not have the privilege of Sabbath day worship in Jericho; there was no instruction available from the Word of God. She had, however, heard of the greatness of the Lord (9–11) and she was brought out of heathen darkness. Her faith is mentioned in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:31). **If God can save a Rahab, he can save anyone! His grace is such, that it reaches the most unlikely people.** Let us be encouraged and persevere in prayer for those on our hearts, who are as yet, lost. Let us rejoice in God's free and sovereign grace as we recall the way in which he brought the spies to the house of Rahab, and how he brought those into our lives who were able to point us to himself.

*On such love, my soul, still ponder,
Love so great, so rich and free;
Say while lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such grace to me?
Hallelujah!
Grace shall reign eternally.*

(John Kent)

*That they may know that, as I was with Moses,
so I will be with you*

Joshua was an early riser (1; cp. 6:12; 7:16; 8:10). He was eager to get on with God's work and not waste time lazing in bed. It is important to cultivate a habit of rising early enough to pray before we begin our day. We may fail in this respect if we keep late nights and do not have sufficient sleep. The Lord Jesus was also an early riser and disciplined in prayer (Mark 1:35).

Humanly speaking, there could not have been a worse time for crossing the Jordan which was in flood at this time of the year (15). The people set out to cross the Jordan after three days (1–2; cp. 1:11). They were led by the priests who were carrying *the ark of the covenant* which was the symbol of God's presence among his people; it is mentioned 17 times in this chapter and the next. The priests were separated from the people by a gap of two thousand cubits; this is approximately 975 yards or 900 metres (a cubit = 45 centimetres).

The people were commanded to sanctify themselves in anticipation of the wonders that God would do among them the following day (4–5). Christians are described as those who are '*sanctified*' (1 Corinthians 6:11) but many do not live as if they belong to a holy God. **If we desire the blessing of God in our lives we must be sanctified (set apart) to God.** We show this by dealing with sin as it rises in our lives, and by seeking to lead a godly life.

God promised Joshua, '*This day I will begin to magnify ('exalt') you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that as I was with Moses, so I will be with you*' (7). It was essential that the new leader felt secure in his God-given task to lead the people of Israel to conquer Canaan. It was also necessary that the Israelites should see that the hand of God was upon him as their leader. We are told later, '*On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they had feared Moses, all the days of his life*' (4:14). God who parted the Red Sea when Moses was their leader, was to demonstrate that he was the same God who would part the waters of the river Jordan.

Put your feet on the necks of these kings

Joshua heard that the five defeated kings had been found hiding in a cave at Makkedah. He commanded that large stones be rolled against the mouth of the cave to imprison them and a guard set. Nothing was to delay or distract the Israelites in their pursuit of the fleeing enemy (16–17).

Joshua had the five kings brought out of the cave to be executed after his victory was complete. He first instructed his army commanders, '*Put your feet on the necks of these kings*' (24). Joshua then explained to them the symbolism of this act. They were not to fear, but to be strong and courageous because God would do the same to all of their enemies (25).

We are engaged in spiritual warfare against indwelling sin and Satan. We too can put our feet on the necks of these evil 'kings'. Look at these promises: '*For sin shall not have dominion over you*' (Romans 6:14) and '*the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly*' (Romans 16:20). **We do not have to spend our Christian lives grovelling in defeat!** There is much opposition to the gospel and Christians are to expect trials and tribulation (Acts 14:22), but the Bible promises that *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:37). When the Lord Jesus comes again, he will *put all enemies under his feet* (1 Corinthians 15:25)

Verses 28 to 43 describe the conquest of the southern territory. Joshua and his army were invincible *because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel* (42). Joshua and his army then returned to Gilgal – mission accomplished. The utter destruction of the Canaanites may appear to be cruel but God the righteous Judge was punishing them for their vile practices. It is a frightening thing to see the slide of Britain and many countries in the western world into similar wicked deeds. We are ripe for divine judgment. How we need to pray urgently and strive to make the gospel known to our godless generation.

The LORD heeded the voice of a man

Gibeon was a royal city which was much stronger than Ai; it also had a superior army. The news of the destruction of Ai and of Gibeon's covenant of peace with Israel greatly alarmed the king of Jerusalem. He saw this as an act of treachery which would give the Israelites a strategic military advantage. He joined with four other kings to attack Gibeon. The Gibeonites called upon Israel to help them as they were entitled under the terms of the covenant (1–6). Joshua was honour-bound to help them, despite their deception. The Lord reassured Joshua that he would give him victory. He then marched with his army through the night from Gilgal to Gibeon to launch a surprise attack on the armies of the kings (7–9; see map, page 17).

God miraculously intervened to give Joshua a great victory. – *So the LORD routed them before Israel* (10). He rained great hailstones down upon the Amorite armies and more were killed by these than by the pursuing Israelites (11). The second miracle was the extension of daylight so that victory could be completed. Dale Ralph Davis suggests that Joshua prayed for the extension of the night so that the continued darkness would add to the confusion of the Amorites. Notice that the word '*down*' is in italics in your Bible meaning that it is not found in the original Hebrew; the moon is also mentioned (13).

Unbelievers limit God in their thinking and refuse to believe that such a miracle was possible. **God made the earth and the sun – all things are possible with our great Creator!** Whatever happened, extended darkness of the night or added daylight, it was a great miracle in response to Joshua's prayer – '*The LORD heeded the voice of a man*' (14). Dale Ralph Davis asks, 'Doesn't this view of prayer rebuke both the flippancy and tedium with which we approach the Great King? Ought we not catch our breath to think that the God who is seated on high (Psalm. 113:5) stoops down and bends his ear to lips of dust and ashes? "*When he calls, I will answer him*" (Psalm 91:15); who ever heard of a God like that?' (JOSHUA – NO FALLING WORDS, page 86).

By this you shall know that the living God is among you

Joshua summoned the Israelites to hear what God had to say to them (9). He told them that the miracle that they were about to see would confirm that the living God was among them (10). Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'The river Israel faced that springtime was no placid stream but a raging torrent, probably a mile wide and covering a mass of tangled brush and jungle growth' (JOSHUA – NO FALLING WORDS, Page 38). The living God who would part the raging waters of the Jordan for them to cross over would certainly drive out the inhabitants of Canaan. God would get them into the land by a miraculous display of his power and he would also give them the land.

The ark of the covenant is called '*the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth*' (11,13). The God of Israel is also the God who made the world by his almighty power. He is the God who reigns supreme over men and nature. Our *help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth* (Psalm 121:2). God is the heavenly Father of every Christian, but he is also *the Lord of all the earth*. We should have a sense of awe before God and we should be reverent in our worship.

The Lord parted the Jordan as the priests, who bore the ark, stepped into its flooded waters; the people walked over a dry river bed into the land of Canaan (15–17). The Israelites had witnessed an outstanding miracle which God had wrought on their behalf. They were reassured that God was able to keep his promise to drive out the Canaanites: '*By this you shall know that the living God is among you*' (10–13).

God may not divide rivers for us to cross, but he graciously gives tokens of his presence among us. He answers prayer and transforms lives through his mighty power. Do you believe this? Do you expect God to answer prayer? If every Christian really believed that God answered prayer, the prayer meetings of our churches would be packed. **As you now come to the Lord in prayer, remember that you are coming to the Lord of all the earth who is the living God. Worship him and bring your requests to him with expectant faith.**

What do these stones mean to you?

The Lord gave Joshua further instructions after the people had crossed the Jordan. Twelve men, one from each tribe, were to carry stones from the middle of the river bed where the priests were standing. The stones were to be set up as a *sign* and *memorial* in Gilgal, one for each tribe (1–7,20; cp. 3:12). John Currid comments ‘a physical sign ... represents a spiritual reality. In other words, a symbol is a visual representation of an invisible reality’ (STRONG AND COURAGEOUS, pages 57–58). Joshua then set up twelve other stones in the midst of the river bed where the priests had been standing (9).

An army of forty thousand crossed the Jordan to the plains of Jericho (13). The waters returned once the crossing was complete and the priests with the ark of the covenant left the river (18). They crossed the Jordan exactly forty years from the day of the first Passover (19; cp. Exodus 12:2–3). God had promised Joshua that he would begin to magnify him in the sight of Israel that day (3:7). This promise was fulfilled after the River Jordan had been miraculously parted (14).

What was the significance of the memorial stones set up at Gilgal? Israel’s children would ask, ‘*What do these stones mean to you?*’ (6,21). Parents were to tell them about the miracle wrought by God so that they might fear the Lord and also that other nations would know that God is mighty in strength (6–7, 21–24). Christian parents must spend time with their children and teach them the Word of God. A godly example and patient, loving teaching is vital for their spiritual well-being. There are many wicked people around us who are seeking to deceive and bewitch our young folk. If we are able to talk to our children about almost any subject under the sun but unable to speak to them about spiritual things, there must be something wrong with us.

People no longer ask, ‘What do these stones mean?’ but if they asked you, ‘Why do you take bread and wine at the Lord’s Table?’ or ‘What does Christ mean to you?’, would you be able to tell them?

But they did not ask counsel of the LORD

Joshua’s victory at Ai so troubled the Canaanites, that they formed an alliance to fight against Israel. The inhabitants of Gibeon which was about six miles north-west of Jerusalem were Hivites who did not join this alliance. They resorted to deception to save themselves from destruction and sent a delegation to Joshua at Gilgal. They claimed to have travelled from a distant country having disguised themselves as travellers with worn-out garments (the adjective ‘*worn-out*’ is found four times in verses 4 and 5 (ESV).and requested that Israel make a covenant with them (1–13). Joshua and the leaders were suspicious knowing that God had forbidden them to make any covenant with the Hivites (7–8; cp. Deuteronomy 7:1–2). The Gibeonites knew about this and perhaps found out also that Israel was permitted to make covenants (treaties) with nations outside of Canaan (24; cp. Deuteronomy 20:10–15).

The deception succeeded and Joshua was tricked into making a covenant with them. Israel’s leaders could not go back on their word when a solemn oath had been made in the name of the Lord, even though their own people were angry with them (16–20). To violate their covenant would bring the curse of God (19; cp. 2 Samuel 21:1–2). The rulers of Israel made the Gibeonites slaves to cut wood and to carry water for the house of the Lord (21–27).

There is a most important lesson here. Joshua was tricked into disobeying God’s command concerning the destruction of all the Canaanites. Why? The answer is found in verse 14: *But they did not ask counsel of the LORD*. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by outward appearances nor by pious talk (9–10). **We must not allow ourselves to be hurried into making hasty decisions but rather seek the direction and guidance of God in all of our decision-making.** The peril of prayerlessness is quite clear. We have been warned. Let us take to heart this lesson from the Word of God.

The blessings and the cursings

As soon as Ai was defeated, the Israelites journeyed into the heart of enemy territory to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, some thirty miles to the north of Ai. *Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal* and sacrifices were offered to God (30–31). He took large stones and washed them with lime and wrote on them God’s law (32; cp. Deuteronomy 27:2). Joshua also saw the worship of God as a priority and halted his campaign of conquest to draw aside to meet with God. **We must never be too busy to give ourselves to worship, prayer and the reading of Scripture.** Notice that children were also included in the events at Gerizim and Ebal (35). We must instruct our young ones and have them with us in our church services.

Joshua led the Israelites in a solemn and impressive ceremony in which they affirmed their allegiance to God and his covenant. He read to them the law of God with the blessings for obedience and the warnings of cursing for disobedience. Six of the tribes stood on Mount Gerizim and said, ‘Amen’ to the promises of blessing. The other six tribes stood on Mount Ebal and said their ‘Amen’ to the warnings of the curses. Moses had commanded that the Israelites do this when they arrived in Canaan. Joshua was careful to do exactly as God had commanded (35; cp. Deuteronomy 11:26–32; 27:1 to 28:68).

Joshua *read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law* (34). The Israelites were reminded at the outset of their entry into Canaan that obedience to God brings his blessing, disobedience brings his curse. John Currid comments, ‘This ceremony underscores the truth that the Word of God is at the heart of Israel’s existence. It is to be Israel’s first priority. And all Israel, every person, whether native or sojourner, is to participate in the renewal ritual’ (STRONG AND COURAGEOUS, page 111). J. C. Ryle observed, ‘The godliest families are Bible-reading families. The holiest men and women are Bible-reading people. These are simple facts that cannot be denied’ (EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON MARK, 12:18–27, page 258 – published by Banner of Truth).

I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you

The miracle of the crossing of the Jordan was not only a great encouragement to the Israelites; it also filled the Canaanite kings with fear (1). God gave circumcision to Abraham and his descendants as a sign of his covenant with them (Genesis 17:7–14). We are not told why the practice of circumcision ceased during the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan. Some believe that the Lord did not permit it because of Israel’s sin (6; cp. Numbers 14:29–35). A new generation had now arrived in the promised land and God commanded that this important practice be renewed (1–6). ‘*The second time*’ (2) does not mean that the men had been circumcised in the past. It represents a fresh start with God.

Only those who had obeyed God by submitting to circumcision were permitted to keep the feast of the Passover (Exodus 12:48). Israel’s new beginning also brought with it the observance of this feast (10). Obedience to God’s commandments brings his blessings. God said to Joshua, ‘*This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you*’ (9). The name ‘*Gilgal*’ means ‘rolling’ and would always serve as a reminder of this. What was ‘*the reproach of Egypt*’? It may have been the taunts of the Egyptians who could have claimed that God had forsaken the Israelites because of their long years of wandering in the wilderness (Exodus 32:12). God had brought them home to a better place! Another blessing was experienced, when the day after the Passover, the people ate the produce of the land. The Lord then stopped providing the manna because there was an abundance of food in Canaan (10–12).

Are you obeying God’s commands? Have you been baptized? Do you faithfully come to the Lord’s table to remember his death for us? These ordinances are not optional extras, but are commanded by God. **Do you need to make a fresh start because you have been neglecting to obey the Lord?**

What does my Lord say to his servant?

Joshua was granted a special visitation of God to prepare him to lead Israel against Jericho (13–15). Like Moses at the burning bush, Joshua was commanded to remove the sandals from off his feet because he was standing on holy ground. The Lord not only appeared to Joshua to encourage him, but also to give him instructions for the conquest of Jericho (6:2–5).

The invisible God cannot be seen, but he has shown himself through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18). Jesus said, *‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’* (John 14:9). Most evangelical scholars agree that the Person who appeared to Joshua was the Lord Jesus. He appeared to Joshua as a man with a sword drawn in his hand. Joshua did not at first recognise his Visitor and asked him whether he was for Israel or for their enemies. The Visitor replied that he had come to him *‘as Commander of the army of the LORD’*. God and all his mighty angels were on Israel’s side. Joshua was overwhelmed with awe and fell on his face to the earth and worshipped. Reverence before God is fast disappearing from many of our churches. We should be joyful in our worship but always humble in our approach to God.

We too have very powerful enemies, even Satan and his wicked angels (Ephesians 6:11–12; 1 Peter 5:8). We too have the *‘Commander of the army of the LORD’* on our side with all the angels of heaven to protect us (cp. Psalm 34:7; Hebrews 1:13–14). We are never alone in our battles. *We are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:37). **It is important to note however, that Joshua’s success lay in his submission and obedience to the will of God.** He asked, *‘What does my Lord say to his servant?’* (14). When we stray from God’s Word we will come to grief. Are you listening for God’s voice as you read his Word? Do you expect him to speak to you? Are you prepared to obey his voice?

I am listening, Lord, for thee.

What hast thou to say to me?

(Frances R. Havergal)

So they left the city open

Joshua followed God’s instructions for the conquest of Ai and the plan worked perfectly. The main body of the Israelite army pretended to be defeated and fled from the men of Ai to draw them away from their city. The men of Ai and their allies from Bethel followed Joshua in hot pursuit and left their cities defenceless. *So they left the city open* (17). Joshua’s thirty thousand troops lying in ambush behind Ai took the city and set it on fire (3–4,19). Joshua then turned his supposedly ‘fleeing’ troops against their enemies. The men of Ai and Bethel were then trapped in the pincer-movement set up by Israel’s army and destroyed.

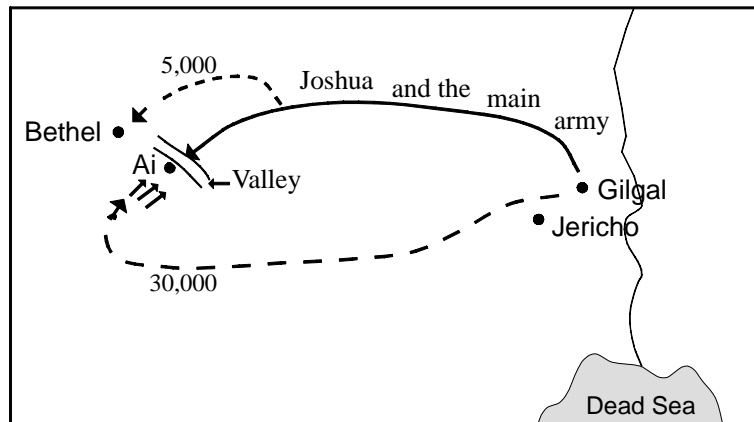
The king of Ai had enjoyed one victory over Israel and he was too self-confident and careless. **There is a spiritual lesson for us here. We are often most vulnerable after spiritual victories.** As we rejoice, we are prone to leave ‘the city of our soul’ wide open. Satan may then attack with devastating results. We must always be vigilant (1 Peter 5:8). The king of Ai was captured and hanged on a tree (23,29). This signified that he was under the curse of God (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). **Sin brings God’s curse upon us, but the Lord Jesus died on a tree to save sinners. He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:10–14). Have you asked him to save you?**

The destruction of Jericho, Ai and Bethel and the slaughter of the women and children may seem out of keeping with the love and goodness of God. We must remember that Israel was an instrument of judgment in the hands of God. The Canaanite nations had sunk into such depths of wickedness that there was nothing left but for their destruction. In a similar situation, God sent the flood to destroy the earth (Genesis 6:5–7,11–13). God is absolutely holy and just and will surely punish sinners. Hell is a terrible reality in the teaching of the Lord Jesus (eg. Matthew 5:29–30; 10:28; 13:40–42; 25:41,46). We must not be arrogant and imagine that we are wiser or more merciful than God – we are not! When we see God’s majesty and justice in all its beauty and splendour, we cease to question, but fall down before him and worship.

Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed

After the execution of Achan, God turned away his anger from Israel (7:26). He went on to give Joshua:

- A word of encouragement: *'Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed'* (1; cp. 1:9). Israel had sinned but God is gracious and he did not cast them off. If we have failed God and have sincerely repented of our sin, we must trust in God, that he has forgiven us, and be encouraged to make a new start.
- A word of instruction; the battle plans were different from those for the taking of Jericho. They were to set an ambush in order to take the city (2).
- A word of promise; they would have complete success over Ai and this time they would be allowed to keep the spoil for themselves (2). Matthew Henry comments, 'Observe, how Achan, who caught at forbidden spoil, lost that, and life, and all; but the rest of the people, who had conscientiously refrained from the accursed thing, were quickly recompensed for their obedience with the spoil of Ai ... no man shall lose by his self-denial; let God have his dues first, and then all will be clean to us and sure.' How true! **We must beware of impatience and wait upon God for the fulfilment of his promises.**

The Battle at Ai*I have given Jericho into your hand*

Jericho was a fortress city with massive walls some thirty feet in height and with houses built on top of them (cp. 2:15). Archaeologists have discovered that the city had an outer wall which was 6 feet thick; there was a gap of fifteen feet and then an inner wall which was twelve feet thick. Jericho overlooked the plain of Jordan and was at the entrance of a mountain pass which allowed entrance into Canaan. Its conquest was essential to Joshua's military campaign in Canaan.

How was Jericho to be taken? God instructed the Israelite army to march around the city once a day for six days (3). Soldiers headed the procession followed by seven priests with trumpets made from rams' horns. There were then four priests carrying the ark of the covenant and behind them the remaining soldiers. They marched in silence except for the trumpet blasts (3–14). They marched around Jericho seven times on the seventh day. On the seventh time round, at a given signal, they all shouted, and the huge walls collapsed (15–16,20).

The strategy for taking Jericho would appear foolish to human reason, but *the foolishness of God is wiser than men* (1 Corinthians 1:25–29). Joshua believed God's promise, *'I have given Jericho into your hand'* (2). *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down* (Hebrews 11:30). We must not battle against Satan with worldly methods *for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds* (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Many people despise the preaching of the gospel and seek to win souls by entertaining them. Such an attitude is the product of unbelief in the Word of God and the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. Some may consider preaching to be a foolish and outdated method of communicating the gospel but God uses this 'foolish method' to save souls (1 Corinthians 1:21–23). **Pray earnestly that the preaching of God's Word at your church next Lord's Day will be in the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for the triumph of the gospel in your neighbourhood so that the strongholds of Satan will collapse.**

Keep yourselves from the accursed things

There are dangers even in victory and the Lord gave Israel two warnings through Joshua:

- ‘*Keep yourselves from the accursed things*’ (18–19). The word ‘*accursed*’ can be translated ‘devoted’ (cp. Leviticus 27:28–29). Jericho itself was accursed, or ‘devoted’ to the Lord – ‘*and the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction*’ (verse 17 ESV). God had given Jericho into the hands of the Israelites and they were to consecrate the city to him. Everything in the city was to be destroyed except the silver, gold and vessels of bronze and iron. These were to be set aside and put into treasury of the house of the Lord (24). The people were firmly warned against taking anything devoted to the Lord. To do so would ‘*make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it*’ (18).
- The city of Jericho was not to be rebuilt (that is as a fortified city, 26); it was given to the tribe of Benjamin to occupy, 18:21). Joshua’s curse was fulfilled some five hundred years later during the reign of wicked Ahab (cp. 1 Kings 16:34). **God’s Word is full of warnings as well as encouragements. Let us take them seriously because we ignore them at our peril (Matthew 7:26–27; 1 Corinthians 10:11–12).**

Rahab and her family were saved after the conquest of Jericho just as the spies had promised. The Lord was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout that area of the world (17,22–25). She obeyed the instructions of the spies. She tied a length of scarlet cord in the window through which she let them down to make their escape from Jericho. They also told her that if she brought her relatives into her house, they too would be saved if they remained inside (2:17–21). Her faith in God is seen in her obedience to their instructions. The scarlet cord is a type of the precious blood of Christ through which sinners are justified and saved (Romans 5:1,9; Ephesians 1:7). Are you trusting in Christ alone to save you through his blood shed for sinners?

I saw ... I coveted ... and took

Achan must have been shocked and horrified when his sin was exposed. He had been very foolish to imagine that he could hide his sin from God. His family must have been aware of his wicked deed. He could hardly have hidden the loot beneath his tent floor without them knowing and they were punished with him. Sin brings terrible wages and the judgment of God (Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

How did Achan fall into sin? He confessed, ‘*I saw ... I coveted ... and took*’ (21). Achan must have committed that sin many times in his mind before he ever *took* those things that belonged to God’s treasury. The path of falling into temptation and sin is often similar to Achan’s experience. Eve *saw ... that it was pleasant to the eyes, a tree desirable ... she took* (Genesis 3:6). David *saw ... inquired ... and took* (2 Samuel 11:2–3). We cannot always be blamed for what we see but we sin when we turn what we see into an occasion for sinful thoughts (cp. Matthew 5:27–28).

Achan could have repented of his sin before he was found out, but it was only after his deed was discovered that he confessed his guilt. Satan promises so much when he tempts us but sin brings only misery. Achan never did enjoy the benefit of his theft; it was hidden in the ground and he forfeited his life (21, 24–26). Eve’s fall brought the most dreadful misery to her (Genesis 3:16). David’s sin brought him unhappiness and grief for the rest of his life (2 Samuel 12:9–12).

We must kill sinful desires as soon as they appear (see Colossians 3:5). We do have the help of the Holy Spirit as we seek to put to death evil thoughts (Romans 8:13). **We must never feed wrong desires by feasting our eyes on unwholesome things.** This means strictly controlling the things that we watch on television and internet, avoiding those things which parade bad language, violence and immorality. We must take care in our choice of books and magazines to read. We should pray often, ‘*Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things*’ (Psalm 119:37).

Neither will I be with you anymore, unless ...

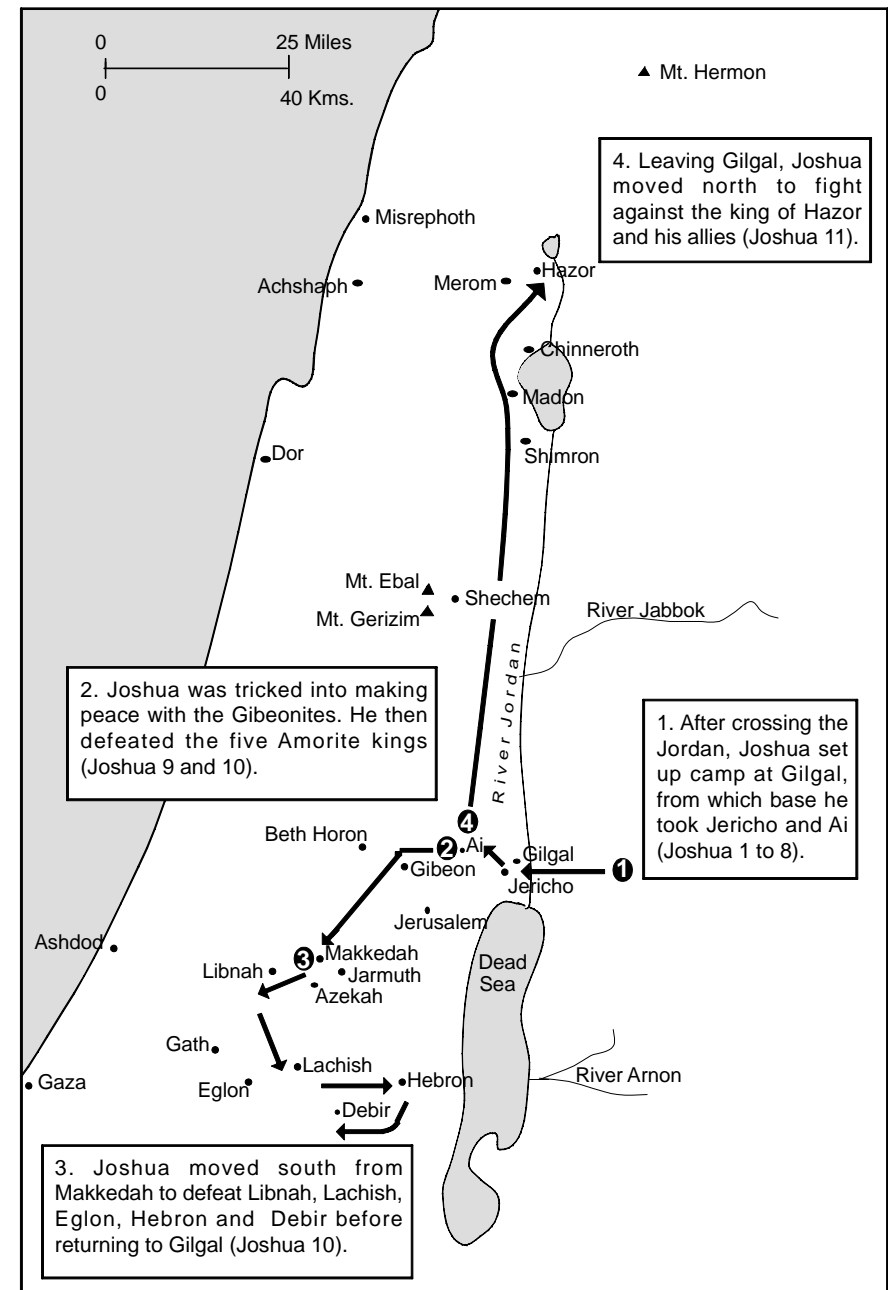
The Lord gave Joshua a decisive response to his questions. He first told him to get up from lying on his face. Israel had sinned and transgressed God's covenant. They had stolen some of the accursed ('devoted') things and were guilty of deception (10–11). The accursed things had brought defeat to Israel and God warned Joshua, '*Neither will I be with you any more, unless you destroy the accursed thing from among you*' (12). God will withdraw his presence from us if we sin against him (cp. Hosea 5:15).

This principle was evident when Israel fell into sin in the days of Eli. He died after hearing news of Israel's defeat at the hand of the Philistines, and the death of his two wicked sons. One of his daughters-in-law then died in childbirth. She named her newborn son, '*Ichabod*', which means 'no glory'. Her last words were, '*The glory has departed from Israel*' (1 Samuel 4:21). Many a thriving church has seen its glory depart and has withered and died because it tolerated sin in its fellowship.

Joshua had sought God in prayer and that was right and necessary, but it was now time for action. The Lord told him to '*get up*' for the second time (10, 13). The people were to '*sanctify*' themselves (13). This meant that they had to separate themselves from the everyday cares and duties of life to humble themselves before God and to examine their own hearts. The Lord would reveal the guilty party (probably by the casting of lots, 14–15; cp. 18:10).

We may pray for revival but it is not necessary to wait for revival to sort out all of our problems. It may sound very spiritual to say, 'Let us pray about it,' but that is not good enough when we know that there are wrong things which must be put right. Prayer must go with action and there must be an ongoing work of reformation in our lives and in the church. **We must be determined to please the Lord and to deal with sin in a decisive manner.** There is no easy or painless pathway to the enjoyment of God's presence and his blessing.

The Conquest of Canaan



Doomed (devoted) by the LORD to destruction

We continue to look at the verses in yesterday's reading because it may raise a problem in your mind. Jericho is described as being '*doomed (devoted) to destruction*' (17). Every person, young and old, was to be destroyed without mercy. How could God give such a command to Joshua? John Currid very helpfully deals with this problem. He points out that God 'has an absolute right to exercise his power in any way he wills. It is God's desire, pleasure and purpose for Israel to inherit Canaan.' He goes on to say that the Canaanites were not innocent and refers us to Leviticus chapter 18 which describes the wicked behaviour of the Canaanites: 'they practise child sacrifice, incest, adultery, temple prostitution and various other abominations. Therefore, we see God's justice going forth against the Canaanites in the book of Joshua because they rejected God and his law. Israel acts as an instrument of God's judgement on the Canaanites.'

Currid also points out that the Canaanite nations were to be destroyed in order to protect Israel from being in danger of falling into their evil ways (STRONG AND COURAGEOUS, page 86–87). We must refrain from questioning the ways of God (Romans 9:14–23).

We must also remember that the people of Jericho like Rahab were aware of God's greatness and power (2:11) but they did not turn from their evil ways. Rahab trusted in God and was spared; here we see the grace of God in the midst of judgment.

Much of the western world despises the teaching of the Bible and vigorously promotes all manner of wickedness. Dare we say that God will be unjust to cast the wicked from his holy presence on the day of judgment? **All this challenges to make the gospel known and to seek to win the lost to Christ.** Let us *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Hebrews 12:28) and shine as lights *in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation* (Philippians 2:15).

Joshua ... fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD

There is a great contrast between Israel's experience at Jericho and their disarray and defeat at Ai. The defeat was all the more bitter for Joshua because the spies sent to Ai had suggested that the city would be easily conquered (2–5). Chapter 6 ends with the statement that '*the LORD was with Joshua*', but chapter seven opens by informing us that '*the anger of the LORD burned against the children of Israel*'. The situation dramatically turned from the hearts of the Canaanites being melted to the hearts of the people of Israel melting (5; cp 5:1).

Joshua was in a state of shock and dismay at the defeat of Israel. The grief-stricken leader *tore his clothes, and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD* (6). He instinctively turned to the Lord when he was in distress and trouble; do you? Notice also that he humbled himself before God and persisted in prayer until the evening. His question to the Lord in verse 7 is an echo of the words of unbelieving Israel during the wilderness journey (Exodus 16:2–3; Numbers 14:2–4). The bewildered leader was also concerned for the honour of God (8–9).

Joshua was not aware of Achan's sin, hence his perplexity at the defeat of the Israelites. Achan had wilfully sinned in stealing things which were '*accursed*' ('devoted'). Some of them should have been destroyed and others consecrated to the treasury of the Lord's house (1,11–12; cp. 6:18–19). The name '*Achan*' means 'trouble' and this man certainly brought trouble to Israel. **There is a very solemn lesson here – sin is not a private matter! If we are wilfully disobedient to the Lord, we will not only bring trouble upon ourselves, but we will also blight our church.** A situation of blessing can quickly be turned into a loss of the presence and joy of the Lord because of sin. Let us search our own hearts and repent of any sin that is revealed there. May we be a blessing to our church rather than a cause of trouble.