

# Commentary on Joshua

## Bible Study Notes and Comments

by David E. Pratte



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# Comments on the Book of Joshua

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Notes to the reader: To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). You can find study questions to accompany these notes at [www.gospelway.com/classbooks](http://www.gospelway.com/classbooks). The abbreviation “**b/c/v**” means “book, chapter, and verse.” Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

# Joshua 1

## Introduction

Introductory questions:

### **Author**

Joshua (some parts may have been added by some later inspired writer)

### **Period of Bible History**

Conquest of Canaan (click on the link to find a timeline of Bible periods: [www.gospelway.com/commentary](http://www.gospelway.com/commentary)).

### **Theme**

God enables Israel to inherit the promised land of Canaan.

### **Main characters**

Joshua, the Israelites

### **Background of Joshua's life:**

- \* Led Israel in battle against Amalek (Exo. 17:9-14)
- \* Served as Moses' personal minister, accompanying him on Mt. Sinai (Exo. 24:13; 32:17; 33:11)
- \* Jealous that others prophesied besides Moses (Num. 11:28)
- \* Sent into Canaan as one of 12 spies. Only he and Caleb said Israel could conquer Canaan, so only those two were allowed to enter (Num. 13&14; 26:65; 32:12).
- \* Appointed as Moses' successor as leader of the nation (Num. 27:15-23; Deut. 31:7,8; 34:9). "Joshua" (Hebrew) means Jehovah Savior and is equivalent to Greek "Jesus."

### **Recommended Reference Work**

*In the Days of the Judges*, Bob and Sandra Waldron, 1992

### **Introductory notes**

Note the relationship between this book and God's promise to Abraham.

God had promised three major blessings to Abraham's descendants: 1) a great nation, 2) possession of Canaan, and 3) a blessing on all nations (salvation through Jesus) to come on all nations through His descendants -- Gen. 12:2,3,7; 15:5-8,18-21; 13:15,17; 18:18; 22:17,18; 24:7; 26:3,4,24; 28:3,4; 32:12.

Israel had become a great nation while in Egyptian captivity, fulfilling the first promise. By God's mercy Moses had led them out of Egypt and given them the law. He led them to Canaan the first time, but they refused to enter. God punished them by making them wander forty years in the wilderness. Moses led them through that wandering, but because he himself later sinned he was not allowed to enter the land.

He led the people to capture the land east of Jordan, and divided it between the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. He died in sight of the land west of Jordan, and Joshua was appointed to lead the people into the land.

This book reveals the fulfillment of the second promise to Abraham – the land promise. Note 11:23; 21:43-45; 23:14. As such, Joshua is a symbol of Jesus, who leads us to the eternal promised land (Heb. 4:5-16).

### **Facts about the land of Canaan (see a map)**

The following is a summary of information from the Waldron's notes:

Canaan is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea on the west and on the east the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and Dead Sea (although the 2½ tribes did inherit territory east of Jordan).

From north to south it stretches from mountainous regions north of the Sea of Galilee to the desert area south of the Dead Sea.

Dan was generally considered the northernmost city and Beersheeba the southernmost, a distance of 150 miles between them. East to west the area is about 30 miles across in the north and 55 miles in the south. The whole territory is smaller than nearly each of the states of the USA.

When Israel inherited the land it was very fertile and productive, as indicated by the fruit found there by the 12 spies. However, due to the people's unfaithfulness God later brought curses on the land as He had promised to do, so that today it is generally dry and unproductive.

The main bodies of water are the Sea, the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and the Dead Sea.

Near the Sea on the west is a coastal plain. This plain is the area of Phoenicia north of Mt. Carmel. South of the mountain for a ways is the Plain of Sharon. The area south of that is Philistia.

Between this coastal plain and the Jordan valley is the Hill Country, a ridge of mountains running almost the length of the country. The Jordan valley separates these mountains from a plateau east of Jordan which stretches to the Arabian desert.

This is the territory that God had promised to give Israel. However, He said that keeping the land and prospering in it would depend on their faithfulness to Him. As a result, they actually held more or less of the land at various times.

### ***Peoples of the land***

God named the peoples of the land that He promised to give the Israelites as follows: Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Girgashites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites (Exodus 3:17; Deut. 7:1; etc.). These were really tribes living in different areas of the land. The strongest of them were the Amorites, Canaanites, and Hittites. Most of these tribes inhabited the land west of Jordan. But the Amorites lived predominately just east of Jordan.

Still further east from the Amorites lived the Ammonites. South of the Amorites lived the Moabites and then the Edomites. These peoples were distant relatives of Israel as descendants of Lot and Esau. God commanded Israel to seek to be peaceable with these nations and did not promise to give their lands to Israel (though they often attacked Israel resulting in war).

These are the lands and the peoples we will discuss at some length in the book of Joshua as Israel wars against them to take their lands in fulfillment of God's promise.

God commanded Israel, not just to take the lands of these people, but to utterly destroy them and their idols. They were to make no marriages with these people. Otherwise, they would be influenced by these people to commit idolatry with their gods (Deut. 7; 9:1-6). We will see Israel's partial fulfillment of this command resulting in exactly the problems God predicted.

### ***Outline of the book***

#### **A. Israel Enters Canaan (Joshua 1-5)**

\* Joshua appointed to replace Moses to lead Israel into Canaan — Num. 27:18-23; 34:17; Deut. 1:38; 3:21,28; 31:3,7,14,23; 34:9; Josh. 1

\* Two spies sent into Jericho spared from capture by Rahab (Josh. 2)

\* Israel allowed to miraculously cross the Jordan River on dry ground; memorial of 12 stones (Josh. 3&4; note 3:14-17; 4:1-9)

\* Circumcision of males (ch. 5)

#### **B. Israel Conquers Canaan (Joshua 6-12)**

\* Conquest of Jericho — (Josh. 6; note 6:1-5,20-23)

\* Sin of Achan & defeat of Ai (Josh. 7&8; note 7:16-26)

\* Alliance with Gibeonites (Josh. 9)

\* Southern conquest; sun standing still (Josh. 10; note 10:9-13)

\* Northern conquest (Josh. 11)

### **C. Israel Divides Canaan (Joshua 13-24)**

\* Division of the land among the tribes (Josh. 13-22), including appointing the cities of refuge (ch. 20)

\* Joshua's final discourses (Josh. 23,24)

## Part 1. Israel Enters Canaan – Joshua 1-5

### Joshua 1

#### I. Joshua Appointed to Lead the People – Joshua 1

##### 1:1-9 - Command to Joshua to Lead the People

###### **1: 1-4 - Joshua to take Moses' place**

Before Moses died, Joshua had been appointed by God to take Moses' place (see references above). After Moses died, God spoke to Joshua and gave him the charge to lead Israel into the land. He promised the whole land to Israel, just as it had been promised to Moses and as far back as Abraham.

The area is here described as extending from the wilderness and Lebanon to the Euphrates River, including all the land of the Hittites, then to the Great Sea (Mediterranean) on the west. Joshua may, at this time, have been standing on an elevated place viewing the land as Moses had done before he died. Lebanon was the area along the Mediterranean directly north of Israel. The Euphrates was further north but to the east from there.

The Hittites lived throughout much of this region. Of the nations who lived in the area, sometimes one or the other is named specifically as though referring to the whole area. Perhaps the Hittites were the dominant tribe at that time west of Jordan. Or perhaps they just stood as representative of all the tribes.

In any case, God's promise is clearly that Israel will eventually control all this territory. They did not control this full extent in Joshua's lifetime. Only in the kingdoms of David and Solomon did Israel control the full extent of territory God predicted.

###### **1: 5-9 - God's promise to be with Joshua**

God promised that He would be with Joshua as He had been with Moses. He would not leave nor forsake him. The result would be that no one would be able to stand before him throughout his whole life – i.e., no one could withstand or successfully oppose him in the work he did for the Lord.

Because of God's protection and provision, Joshua would succeed in bringing Israel into the promised land. God gave him this task and assured him it could be done. This would fulfill the promise to Abraham and the fathers to give this land to them (see notes above).

However, the promise was conditional. There were things Joshua would need to do to be successful. Remember, Israel had attempted to do this once before but failed because of **fear** [Num. 13:31,33; 14:6-9]. So three times God told Joshua to “**be strong and of good courage**” (v6,7,9).

###### **We too face hardship in serving God.**

God's people have always had great responsibilities to work for Him. We do not have the same challenges or charge that God gave Joshua. But we do have a charge from God and we will face challenges. We get discouraged and fearful, thinking we cannot succeed. Nothing should be of greater encouragement, when we face these responsibilities, than the assurance that God will help us accomplish them.

Luke 6:22,23; Psalms 27:1-3,14 – We face persecution and opposition from evildoers.

Psalms 46:1,2; 23:4 -- We face tasks of obedience and service that we must accomplish for the Lord. Often we face hardships and difficulties in accomplishing this work: illness, death, family problems, financial hardship, temptation to sin, etc. It takes great courage to face these and continue serving God. [John 14:27; Psa. 49:5; 91:5ff; 112:7,8; Heb. 11:23]

Ephesians 6:19,20; Acts 4:10-13,18-20,29-31 – We are responsible to teach others the gospel. Many oppose these efforts. [Acts 13:46; 9:27,29; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 18:9; I Thess. 2:2,4; Gal. 2:12; Phil. 1:14]

As with Joshua, we need encouragement and assurance that we too can succeed in God's work. God gave Joshua three things to help him be successful. These same things give us success in our duties in God's service.

### **God gave a Goal, and assured Joshua he could reach it – vv 6,8**

The goal was to lead the people into the land. God promised Joshua he could definitely achieve this goal. Hope of success in achieving a great goal gives great motivation to be strong and courageous.

Revelation 2:10 – Do not fear persecution, but be faithful till death and you'll receive a crown of life. So a great goal can produce great courage.

Hebrews 11:32-38 – God's people in the Old Testament showed great courage. Why? V16 – They looked for a better country.

Just as Joshua was brave to lead the people into the promised land, so God has offered us the promised land of eternal life, and He has assured us we can successfully reach it. This ought to make us strong and brave.

[2 Chron. 15:7,8; Matt. 10:32,33; Rev.21:8; 2 Cor. 5:6,8; Isa. 35:2-4]

### **God gave guidance and instruction – vv 7-9**

God instructed Joshua what to do and how to do it. He told him to observe the law as revealed by Moses, study it diligently and obey it without moving away from it to the right or to the left. How would this also give us courage and lead to success?

Everyone needs wisdom in order to reach a goal successfully. It is much easier to be brave when you have received proper guidance and instruction.

Jeremiah 1:7-9 – Like Joshua, Jeremiah was afraid to speak for God. God said to be not afraid because he would be speaking God's word. When we know what God's will is, and we really trust that He is always right, this gives us courage and guides us to success.

We often speak of people who act out of the "courage of their convictions." It is hard to act courageously when we're not sure what is the right thing to do. So if we know what God has commanded us to do, and we really believe His way is best, this makes us strong and courageous. We are much more likely to be successful.

It follows that sometimes people fail in God's work because of lack of study. If we have the commands, but we don't know what they say, of course we will not succeed.

When we reject God's way, or don't know God's way, sooner or later the result will be fear and failure. If we want courage and success in serving God, we must study His word and be convicted it is best. [Prov. 1:25-33; 3:19-26; I Chron. 22:13; Josh. 23:6-10]

### **God promised to be with Joshua – vv 5,9**

It is much easier to be brave and successful when you have someone strong and wise on your side to help you. Just as God promised to be with Joshua in his physical battles, so He has promised to be with us in our spiritual battles.

Romans 8:31 – If God is for us, who can be against us?

Psalms 23:4 – Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me.

1 Samuel 17:9-11 – Goliath, a ten-foot-tall giant challenged Israel to fight and all Israel was afraid. But David fought him without armor, only a sling and stones. Where did David get the courage? How did he succeed? Vv 36,45,47 – God was on David's side. The battle was the Lord's.

2 Chronicles 32:7,8 – When Assyria besieged Jerusalem, Hezekiah encouraged the people to be strong and of good courage, because God was with them. Why did God's presence give

strength? Because of His **power**. All the enemy had was the arm of flesh, but we have Jehovah to help fight for us.

It follows that people often fail in God's work, because we lack faith in God.

Matthew 14:25,28-31 — Jesus came to His apostles walking on the water. Peter began walking to Jesus, but became afraid and began to sink. Why? Lack of faith. Jesus was with him, but he looked at the waves instead of at Jesus. So we lose courage and fail when we look at how great our problems are and take our eyes off how great our God is.

2 Kings 6:14-17 — The Syrian army surrounded Elisha and his servant was afraid. Elisha said to fear not because he had more on his side than the enemy did on theirs. The servant's eyes were opened and he saw the mountain full of horses and fiery chariots defended Elisha.

[Psa. 31:13-15; Matt. 8:23ff; 2 Chron. 15:1-8; Psa. 27:11-14; 31:23f; 46:1,2; Isa. 41:10-13; 43:1-5; Heb. 13:5,6; Josh 23:6-10]

Joshua could be brave and successful in God's work if he kept his eye on the goal, studied and followed God's word diligently, and trusted in God to be with him. We can succeed in our work for God in the same way.

## 1:10-18 - Preparation to Cross the River

### **1: 10,11 - The people warned to prepare**

Having received instructions and encouragement from the Lord, Joshua began to prepare the people to cross the Jordan into Canaan.

He commanded the officers to instruct the people in the camp to prepare provisions (food) and be ready in three days to cross the Jordan and go in to possess the land.

### **1: 12-15 - Reminder to Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh**

Two and one half tribes had received their inheritance already on the east side of Jordan. When Israel had conquered this land, they had found it such good land for raising flocks that they asked to receive their inheritance there.

Moses had agreed on condition that they must agree to leave their families behind and go into Canaan with the other tribes when they went to fight to take the land. After the other tribes had taken their lands, then the 2½ tribes could return to their families and live in the land they had received.

It would not have been fair for all the tribes to have fought for the land these tribes received, if they had then refused to fight to help the other tribes take their territories. The 2½ tribes had agreed to this arrangement. See Num. 32. Here Joshua reminds them of this agreement.

### **1: 16-18 - The people's agreement to follow Joshua**

Not only did the 2½ tribes agree to keep their word, but they also gave their promise of allegiance to Joshua. They promised to do as he commanded and go where he would send them.

They promised that they would follow him just as they had followed Moses. They expressed their desire for God to be with him as He had been with Moses. And they said anyone who would not follow but rebelled against him would be put to death. In this they encouraged him to be strong even as God had encouraged him.

No doubt this was well intended. However, assurance that they would follow as they had followed Moses would not mean much, frankly. They had not done a very good job of following Moses at times. They had followed him in the battles to capture the area east of Jordan. But they had rebelled time and again throughout their history.

In any case, they clearly here meant to give assurance to Joshua of their intent to fully follow and obey him. This was a good start. If such determination could continue, they would have had a successful labor for the Lord.



## Joshua 2

### II. Two Spies Sent into Jericho (Josh. 2)

#### 2:1-11 - The Spies Hidden by Rahab

##### **2: 1-3 - The spies sent**

Joshua had encamped the people in a place here called Acacia Grove (cf. 3:1; Num. 25:1). Before sending the army into the land, Joshua determined to send spies to view the land. This was reminiscent of his own duty as a spy when the twelve spies were sent by Moses the first time Israel approached to take the land.

The first significant city they were to confront was Jericho, so that is where Joshua sent the spies. (See *map*.)

##### **Rahab the harlot receives the spies**

The spies went into the city and there were received by a woman named Rahab who was a harlot or prostitute. Some claim the Hebrew word does not necessarily mean a prostitute, but the Greek words in the references in Hebrews and James surely confirm that she was a prostitute. She had been a wicked woman, but she here demonstrated faith in God. For her faith she is mentioned elsewhere as an example for us. See Heb. 11:31; James 2:25.

We are not told how the spies found her nor what about her background may have led her to have a heart different from others in Jericho. Waldron suggests that the spies knew they would be recognized as foreigners, so they may have deliberately chosen to visit a harlot, thinking the people would believe they were there for immoral purposes rather than as spies.

In any case, she received the spies into her home. But the king of the city heard that spies had been sent into the city by Israel and apparently he knew that Rahab had received them. He sent messengers to her to tell him where the spies were, since they were spies sent to view the land.

Interestingly, Matthew 1:5 lists a Rahab in the lineage of Jesus. However, Young's concordance lists this as a different woman than this harlot in Jericho. The Rahab in Jesus' lineage was the mother of the Boaz who later married Ruth, great grandmother of King David. That would perhaps have put her later in history than the Rahab here in Joshua 2. However, one wonders why that Rahab is mentioned in Jesus' lineage, when the only other women named were Tamar, Ruth, and Mary (Bathsheba is also mentioned but not named).

##### **2: 4-7 - Rahab hides the spies**

Rahab admitted to the king that they men had come to her, but she said she had no knowledge of where they were from. She said they left in the dark as the gate was being shut. So she did not know where they had gone, but the king's men might overtake them if they quickly pursued them.

However, this was not just deception but was an outright lie. She did know where they were from and she knew they had not left at all. In fact they were still on her roof where she had hidden them among some stalks of flax on her roof.

Acting on this misinformation, the king's men went by way of the road to the Jordan, hoping to overtake the spies. As soon as the pursuers had gone, the gate was shut, presumably as a safety precaution.

##### **Was Rahab's lie justified?**

While Rahab had come to believe in God, she apparently was still willing to violate a basic command of God's law. She clearly told a lie. Yet God later identifies her by name as a woman who acted by faith and was blessed for her faith – Heb. 11:31; James 2:25. How can her conduct be justified?

There are only two possible explanations I can think of: Either (1) Lying was justified when necessary to save life (as in wartime), or (2) Her lie was not justified but God saved her for her faith despite her lie.

Note that she is not commended in either of the New Testament passages for having told a lie. Hebrews 11:31 commends her for her faith in receiving the spies in peace. James 2:25 commends her for her faith in receiving the spies and sending them (the spies) out another way (so they could avoid their enemies). Neither one says her lie was justified, nor do they say that the lie was an act of faith.

Remember that she had been a wicked woman, who had only recently come to believe in the true God. She might not yet know lying was a violation of the law of her new God, yet she was rewarded for her faith in hiding the spies and sending them away safely. This would require great faith, and for that God commended her and rewarded her, not for her lie. Remember, other great servants of God also committed sins. They are not rewarded for their sins but for their acts of faith. Rahab had been a prostitute too and that is even mentioned in the New Testament references to her faith. Is that here justified? Not at all. To truly please God, she must repent of that and learn to do better. Why not say the same of her lie?

And even if her act may have been justified under the Old Testament, that would not prove it would be justified today. The Old Testament allowed many acts of war not allowed today.

### ***2: 8-11 - Rahab's explanation***

Rahab went up on her roof that night, before the spies went to sleep, and explained to them why she had helped them. She said she knew that God had given the land to the Israelites, and that the people of the land were in mortal terror of the Israelites.

The people had heard about God's dealings with Israel in leading them across the Red Sea on dry land and leading them to victory over the kingdoms of Sihon and Og on the east side of Jordan. She explained that hearing these things had caused the hearts of the people of Jericho to melt in fear. They had no courage left. As a result she was convinced that the God of heaven and earth was with Israel.

This demonstrates the purpose of miracles, such as the crossing of the Red Sea. They occurred to give people evidence to believe in God's existence and that certain people were from Him. The military victories confirmed His power to defeat Israel's enemies.

This explains why Rahab had acted as she did: she had come to believe in the God of Israel as the true God. Other people, of course, had heard the same stories, but they did not believe as she did. No doubt these people worshipped many gods and had simply been convinced that this was a very powerful god. Yet that would not lead most of them to be willing to work on behalf of Israel against their own people. Rahab's faith was unusual and God rewarded her for it.

## **2:12-24 - The Spies' Agreement with Rahab**

### ***2: 12-14 - Rahab's request***

Having explained why she believed in God's intent to bless Israel, Rahab offered an agreement with the spies. Since she had shown them kindness, she asked them to show her kindness and spare her family (father, mother, brothers, and sisters) and all they had from death. She asked them to swear and give a token of this agreement.

The men agreed to spare her life for theirs if she would not tell others about their purpose in being in the city. If so, they promised God would deal kindly with her when He had given them the land.

This raises another issue. God had commanded Israel to slay all the inhabitants of the land (see introductory notes on the people of the land). Yet here the spies were agreeing to do otherwise before the people even attempted to enter. This would appear to be justified in this case, however, on grounds of the reason God gave for the command. He had said to slay the people else they would lead Israel into idolatry. In this case, however, Rahab had become a believer.

Later such people would be called proselytes. Proselytes, in effect, became Jews by conversion. Presumably such believers should have been spared, not killed. In that case, the spies agreement was justified.

### ***2: 15,16 - The men escape***

Rahab's house was on the wall of the city with a window looking over or through the wall. So they would not have to go out through the city gate which would be guarded, she let through the window and down the wall by a rope.

She told them to go to the mountains to escape and hide there three days. The pursuers had gone toward the Jordan. By going the other way, the spies could hide in the mountains and then, when the pursuers had given up, they could cross the Jordan to Israel.

### ***2: 17-21 - Conditions of the agreement***

The spies first gave her a sign and made clear the conditions she must meet to be spared. First, she must tie a scarlet cord in the window through which they had escaped. Then they must be sure everyone who would be saved was in her house. They would not guarantee the safety of anyone outside the house, but they would be responsible if anyone in the house was killed. And third, she must not tell anyone about their business in being there. If she did not keep these conditions, they would be free from their oath to her. Rahab agreed and sent them away.

Note that, in order for people besides Rahab to be saved, they too would almost surely need faith. Why would they agree to be in the house on the wall when Israel attacked, unless they were convinced they could be saved there?

### ***Rahab as an illustration of our salvation***

This story is used to illustrate our salvation in Heb. 11:31 and James 2:25. So consider some lessons we can learn.

(1) We too must have faith to be saved (see the context of both Heb. 11 and James 2). (2) Our faith also must show itself by meeting conditions – we are saved by faith that works, not by faith only – James 2:25 in context. Failure to keep any of these conditions would lead to death. The conditions faith requires of us include baptism. Those who argue that faith need not do anything need to reckon with the illustration of Rahab.

(3) Specifically, faith often requires that people be in a certain place or relationship in order to be saved. Rahab's family had to be in the house to be saved. We must be in the church to be saved (Acts 2:47; 20:28; Eph. 5:23,25). The house did not save Rahab's family, but they had to be there to be among the saved. Likewise, the church does not save us, but we must be there to be among the saved.

### ***2: 22-24 - The spies' escape***

As Rahab had advised, the spies fled to the mountains and stayed there three days till the pursuers had returned. Then they left the mountains, crossed the Jordan and reported to Joshua all that had happened.

Their conclusion, based on what they had seen and no doubt especially on what Rahab had told them, was that the people of the land were fearful and fainthearted. Surely God would deliver the land to the Israelites. Note how their report differed from that of the ten spies the first time Israel had approached the land.

## Joshua 3

### III. Israel Crosses the Jordan River – Joshua 3,4

#### The Crossing on Dry Ground - Joshua 3

##### **3: 1-4 - The ark to lead the people**

Having received the spies' report, early in the morning the people left their camp and approached the Jordan. Before crossing it, however, they camped there a while. After three days the officers of the people gave the people their instructions (this could be three days after they had left camp or perhaps three days after some other event – this is not clear to me).

The people were instructed to follow the ark of the covenant. The priests and Levites would bear the ark, as God had commanded them to do (Numbers 4:15; Exodus 25:14). But in this case the ark would go before the people and they would follow it, with a space of 2000 cubits (3000 feet – over half a mile) between the ark and the people. The only explanation for this arrangement was that this would show them what way to travel. The people would not know what way to travel otherwise, since they had never passed that way before.

Of course, the whole way was new to them, so they would not know the way to travel without guidance. But God could have chosen some other way to guide them. In particular, there would have been no obvious reason for such a large space between the people and the ark. God chose this way by His Divine wisdom, and the people would obey if they trusted Him. As the story shows, the ark was to pass first into the river and cause it to dry up so the people could pass on dry land. Perhaps this is why God wanted such a large space of separation between it and the people.

In a similar sense, we all need God's guidance every day of our lives. Each of us has one and only one life in which to live to please God and receive His blessing of eternal life. If we wish to pass successfully, we too need to follow His guidance, for we have never passed through life before. He guides us through His word. We may think we know better than what His word says, or we may think we don't need His word but can go on our own. Then we get into trouble. If we trust Him, we will realize that He is the only One who really knows what life is about and the best way to live it. So we will obey His will in faith. [Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13]

##### **3: 5-8 - Instructions for crossing the river**

Joshua then instructed the people to sanctify themselves, since God would do wonders (miracles) among them. To sanctify is to make holy or set apart. This was done in various ways, depending of God's specific commands. This account does not tell us exactly what was involved in this case, so we do not know the specifics. It may have involved simply dedication of heart or attitude, or it may have involved other specifics simply not listed here. (See 7:13; Ex. 19:10,11.)

Joshua then instructed the priests who carried the ark to begin the march. They were to precede the people, as just described in vv 3,4, so they were to take up the ark and begin.

The Lord instructed Joshua (at that moment or earlier) that God was going to do a miracle. As with all miracles this would confirm that God was working through a man of His choosing, so the people would know to believe the words of that man. (See Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31.)

God had already called Joshua to take Moses' place as leader and the people had promised to follow him (chap. 1). But great faith would be required of the people and of Joshua. The previous generation had approached the land before and had turned back due to lack of faith. So God

here gave miraculous confirmation so the people would have faith to know God was working through Joshua as He had worked through Moses.

The miracle God had planned would require the priests bearing the ark to walk into the waters of the Jordan and stand there. Further instructions will follow in the next verses.

This would especially take faith because, as we will see later, the Jordan was at flood stage at this time. Walking out into a river of any size at any time would take some faith, but especially when it was flooding. Near the city of Jericho, the Jordan is about to enter the Dead Sea. It is at its largest size of any point. Crossing it here at flood stage would be especially dangerous and difficult. Perhaps the inhabitants thought the army of Israel could not cross at all at that time. In any case, Joshua told the priests to have the faith to carry the ark into the river.

### ***3: 9-13 - The miracle predicted***

Joshua then called the people together and described the miracle that God was about to perform. He said that it would confirm to the people that God would keep His promise to give them the land. Miracles not only served to confirm that God was working through a specific inspired man, but they also gave the people evidence to believe in God Himself. They should know that He is the true God and they should follow Him in faith. Note that He is here called the Lord of all the earth. He was not just the Lord of one nation or one part of the world, but the Lord of the whole earth.

Joshua said that the priests would carry the ark before them (as described above – vv 3,4,6) and would cross the Jordan before the people. But when the feet of the priests carrying the ark stood in the river, God would cause the water to be stopped upstream from them. The river would be blocked, so the water would stand up in a heap and would cease to flow downstream.

We are not told what would block the river, but clearly it would be an act of God. And it was surely a miracle in that Joshua knew ahead of time that it would happen and when it would happen. It would happen at the very time that the priests would walk into the river. Perhaps it was also miraculous in that the water may have been held in a way that was impossible by natural means, as the Red Sea had been held when Israel had crossed it. But in any case, the fact that it happened when Joshua said so would prove that God was working through Joshua. Note the crossing of the Jordan was a sign that Joshua was God's appointed leader just as the crossing of the Red Sea had been a sign the Moses was God's appointed leader.

Joshua also told each of the twelve tribes to appoint a man for a special job. We are not here told what that job was, but it will be revealed in the next chapter. As Israel crossed the river, these twelve men would have a special job to do.

### ***3:14-17 - The people cross the Jordan***

So as Joshua commanded, the people began to march as led by the priests. When the priests carrying the ark stepped into the river, the waters rose in a heap upstream at a town named Adam, near Zaretan. The water flowing toward the Salt or Dead Sea was cut off, and the people crossed the river on dry ground across from Jericho.

The priests then stood with the ark in the middle of the river bed until all the people crossed. As long as they stayed in the river, the water continued to be held back so the people could cross.

V15 tells us, as mentioned in previous notes, that this happened at the time of harvest when Jordan was a flood stage. This miracle may have been hard enough any time, but especially so when the river was flooded.

This would also take faith on the part of the people to cross the river. They might wonder if, at any moment, the water would start to come again with them in the middle of the river. They needed faith that God would allow them to cross safely.

The miracle that resulted thereby confirmed God's power and the people's faith in Him. He had done a miracle to allow them to cross the river. It would also confirm the people's faith in Joshua as God's spokesman, since the miracle had occurred at his word.

And finally, the miracle would no doubt become known to the people of Jericho and the other people of the land. This would cause them to further fear Israel and her God even more than they were already frightened. They had already heard of the crossing of the Red Sea (2:10). Knowing that Israel had likewise miraculously crossed the Jordan to enter their own land would further demoralize the Canaanites.

## Joshua 4

### The Memorial Stones - Joshua 4

#### **4: 1-3 - Men commanded to get stones from the river**

When all the people had crossed the Jordan safely God spoke to Joshua with instructions about the memorials they were to make. Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe. Actually, these are almost surely the men Joshua had already mentioned in 3:12. Here God gave instructions what the men were to do.

These men were to go to the place in the river where the feet of the priests stood. There each man was to take a stone from the riverbed and carry it to the place where Israel would camp that night.

Later instructions would tell what purpose the stones would serve. But at this point it is important that these stones came from the very riverbed itself. Clearly it would be hard or impossible to obtain them normally. But with the river dried up by God's power, it was easy to obtain them.

#### **4: 4-7 - Purpose of the stones explained**

Joshua then told each of the twelve men to carry his stone on his shoulder and cross to the west side of the river ahead of the priests with the ark. The water remained held back so long as the priests and the ark stayed in the river, so the men had to get the stones and carry them to land before the priests left the river.

The stones would be a memorial sign to future generations to remember the crossing of the river. When future generations asked about the stones, the people would explain how the waters of the river were cut off so the ark (and the people) were enabled to cross over on dry ground. The stones would be a memorial to the people forever.

Note that God wants people to remember His great acts, and He has often authorized memorials whereby we can remember them. People tend to forget what God has done, if they are not reminded. Especially God's miracles were done to convince the people to believe in God. Future generations would not see the miracle, but the stones would remind them and would remind the parents to teach the children. We too need to remember to teach our children about God's great works of the past.

Note the use of the word "forever." This illustrates that this Old Testament word simply means for a long indefinite period of time. Are the stones still there? Not likely. And if they were, they would be so worn away we could not tell which stones they were, so they could not serve the desired purpose for us. "Forever" in the Old Testament does not mean a thing that never ends even into all eternity.

#### **Observations about memorials**

Memorials in the Old Testament often consisted of stones or piles of stones. See Exodus 20; Genesis 31:43-53; Joshua 24:25-27; 1 Samuel 7:11,12. The 10 Commands were written on stones as a memorial to God's law. They were not the whole law, nor even necessarily the most important laws. They were a visible memorial to remind people of the law.

God's memorials today under the New Testament include the Lord's supper, which is a memorial feast reminding us of Jesus' death. Also the Bible is a written book reminding us, not just of God's law, but of His great miracles. We cannot see miracles today, even as Israel could not continue to see the Jordan dried up. But we have the memorial of them in the Bible (John 20:30,31).

#### **4: 8,9 - Two memorials of stone**

The men did as Joshua commanded. Each of them took a stone from the midst of Jordan and carried it to the camp. There they laid them down, probably in a pile or heap.

But Joshua set up a second memorial. This one also consisted of twelve stones, but it was set up in the midst of the Jordan River. This was also in the place where the priests had stood while holding the ark.

This cannot be the same pile of stones that the twelve men took from the riverbed. Those stones were removed from the riverbed and placed on the ground in the camp as a memorial. These stones Joshua set up (v9) were stones still in the riverbed.

This would serve as a further confirmation that God had held back the river. How could one make a pile of stones in the middle of a river? It would again normally be difficult or impossible in that day. But it was easy while the river was dried up.

The writer comments that, whenever the book was written (probably near the time of Joshua's death) the pile of stones was still there. No doubt the river eventually wore them away, but they would have stood for many generations as a testimony to God's miracle.

So the people had two stone memorials of this event. One pile on land consisted of stones that had been removed from the river. The other pile consisted of stones piled up in the midst of the river. Both memorials served the same purpose.

#### ***4: 10,11 - The crossing completed***

The priests continued standing in the midst of the river, holding that ark as long as it was necessary for the water to be held back. Everything God had commanded had to be finished before they came out of the water. So the people hurried across, the stone memorials were accomplished as needed. And the priests had to stay in the riverbed the whole time.

#### ***4: 12-14 - The men of the 2½ tribes lead the people into the land***

The men of the tribes that settled east of Jordan had promised to go with Israel into the land (see on 1:12-18). Joshua had reminded them of this commitment, and they fulfilled it. They were apparently the first to cross over into the new land.

About 40,000 men of war crossed before God to the plains of Jericho prepared for battle. Based on the numbers of men counted in Numbers 26, this must have been the count of the men from the 2½ tribes. There were far more men than this even in those tribes, let alone all the tribes combined. The census counted all men age 20 and up, but doubtless many of them were not able to serve as soldiers. So presumably this was the number from the 2½ tribes who were able to fight.

The miracle the people saw at the river served to exalt Joshua in the sight of the people. They realized he was truly from God, so they listened to him as they had Moses before him. This was the purpose of miracles. See on 3:7.

#### ***4: 15-18 - The priests leave the river***

The priests had to stay in the riverbed until everyone had crossed and nothing more needed to be done in the river. This was all accomplished now, so God gave the command to Joshua to tell the priests to come up out of the river.

As soon as this command was obeyed, when the priests' feet touched dry ground, immediately the waters of the Jordan returned to their place as they had been before, still overflowing the banks as before.

So the water stood off immediately when the priests' feet touched it and then came back immediately when their feet left it. All this happened by God's command, proving clearly to the people that it was a miracle by God's power.

#### ***4: 19-24 - The memorial stones set up in Gilgal***

The people completed crossing the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month of the year. They camped in an area that was known as Gilgal (see *map*). This was near Jericho, but obviously quite close to the river. See 5:9.



There Joshua took the stones the twelve men had carried up out of the river, and he set them up as a memorial as God had commanded. Again the people were told the purpose of the stones. When future generations saw the stones and asked about them, the people were to tell them these were put there as a memorial of the time the people crossed the Jordan on dry ground.

The people would thereby be reminded that God had dried up the Jordan River, just as He had enabled the people to cross the Red Sea on dry ground. The purpose of the memorial was to remind them of the miracle. And the purpose of the miracle was to prove to them the power of God, so they would respect and fear Him forever.

This demonstrates the two purposes of miracles. They served to convince people to believe in God and that the God of the Bible is the true God. They also serve to convince people to recognize men through whom God works as being really from God – Joshua in this case – because they are the ones through whom God’s power was demonstrated. Of course, still a third purpose (not referred to here) is to convince us to believe that the Bible is the word of God, since this is the book which records these miracles and was written by these inspired men.

## Joshua 5

### IV. Circumcision of Males (5:1-12)

#### **5: 1 - Fear among the people of the land**

When Israel had approached Canaan the first time forty years earlier, they had refused to enter because they feared the people of the land. But this time we are told that the people of the land feared Israel.

Rahab had told the spies that the people feared, because they had heard about the crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of the people east of the Jordan (cf. 2:10,11). Now, in addition, the kings and the people west of Jordan heard how God had enabled the people to miraculously cross the Jordan. This led them to fear even further. The account says their hearts melted and they had no spirit in them – i.e., no courage to resist.

This demonstrates a further purpose for miracles. They produce faith in God among those, like Israel and Rahab, who have hearts honest and willing to trust in God. But even those who resist God's will are affected. Their conviction that they are right is weakened. They may not be converted to follow the Lord and may not cease resisting truth, but they are at least weakened in their stand for error.

#### **5: 2-7 - Command to circumcise the males**

God told Joshua to make flint knives and use them to circumcise all the males among Israel. Joshua did so at a place then called the hill of foreskins.

The reason this was needed is that the younger generation had not been circumcised. Those who had left Egypt had been circumcised. But that generation had died on the way due to their disobedience in not entering Canaan at their first opportunity. They had refused to enter the land and so were consumed during the years of wandering.

The younger generation – the children who were born as Israel traveled in the wilderness after they left Egypt – had not been circumcised. They still needed this to be done, so it was done at this time.

Circumcision was the sign of being a descendant of Abraham and an heir of the promise to Abraham. See Gen. 17; Exodus 4:25; 12:43-48; Lev. 12:3. It was clearly required by God both before and after the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai.

So one wonders why it had not been done previously to this younger generation. V7 says they did not do it while traveling. Surely it would have been inconvenient. But it was done to males eight days old, so it seems it could have been done at that age without serious problem.

It may be that God simply did not insist on the practice in these difficult circumstances. However, the older generation clearly had rebelled against God and had been rejected by Him. Perhaps in their rebellion they simply did not keep other basic commands, including circumcision. Moses had been among them, and one would think that he would teach them the truth. Perhaps, however, God had not bothered to lead Moses to insist on this, since God had rejected that generation anyway.

#### **5:8,9 - The people rest after the circumcision**

Circumcision is a painful procedure at any age, but baby boys can heal rather quickly. And they cannot do anything for themselves in the meanwhile anyway, so no great loss is caused if the procedure is done at that age. However, when grown men are circumcised, they are incapacitated for work for several days, and they surely are not fit for war. So God had these men stay in camp for several days till they were healed.

One wonders why God waited till this time to have this done. They were near their enemies and were basically defenseless for several days (though the enemies would not likely know this). Had this been done east of Jordan it would have been safer. There their enemies were already

defeated, and any enemies from west of Jordan would have had to cross the river to attack. God's reasons for waiting are not stated. Perhaps it was a test of faith to see if Israel would obey even when facing danger.

Then God said that He had rolled away from them the reproach of Egypt, so the place was named Gilgal (meaning "rolling"). Other passages refer to Gilgal. It is not clear whether they are the same or different locations. 4:19,20 had referred to it by this name, but apparently that account was written after the name had been given here at this event recorded in chap. 5.

What was the reproach of Egypt? I am not sure. Being uncircumcised was surely a reproach, especially for descendants of Abraham (cf. Gen. 34:14). And this reproach was removed when they were circumcised. They were about to eat the Passover, and the males had to be circumcised in order to eat it (Ex. 12:43-48).

But what had this to do with Egypt? Perhaps the point was that this generation was obedient to God unlike the previous generation had been. Perhaps God had viewed the previous generation with reproach as He had viewed the Egyptians. Or perhaps their failure to enter the land had brought the reproach of the people of Egypt on them (cf. Zeph. 2:8). In any case, this generation had kept God's word, so He had given them a renewal of the covenant of circumcision. This indicated they were truly His people, thereby removing the reproach that had been on their parents' generation.

### **5:10-12 - The Passover kept**

At Gilgal Israel also kept the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the year. This is what God had commanded as recorded in Ex. 12:6. God had instituted the Passover as a memorial to the time He had slain the firstborn of the Egyptian sons but had "passed over" the firstborn of the Israelites, sparing them because they had put blood on their doors.

Israel was to keep this memorial every year. They had kept it sometimes (Num. 9:5), but it is not clear if they had kept it regularly as God commanded. Perhaps they had neglected this in their rebellion, even as they had neglected circumcision. Now they were returning to God's service, so they kept circumcision then the Passover. They had to be circumcised first in order to take the Passover properly (see above).

### **The food of the land and the end of the manna**

Following the Passover was to be a feast of seven days in which bread had to be unleavened. After this celebration of the Passover, Israel ate bread unleavened along with parched grain and other foods. But what was special about this was that for the first time they had eaten the fruit of the land of Canaan. Until this they had been outside the land. Now they had entered and intended to obey God's command to take the land. They enjoyed eating the fruit of the land as God had promised them.

Since they had then come into the land, the manna ceased. The manna had provided their need for food throughout the forty years of wandering in the wilderness (cf. Exodus 16, especially v35). But now that they were in the promised land, they were able to eat the fruit of this land and did not need the manna. So it ceased.

Note that God never continues miracles after their purpose has been completed. But the purpose of all miracles was completed when the Scriptures were completed, so they ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-11).

For further information about the duration of miracles, see our articles on miracles and direct revelation today at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

## Part 2: Israel Conquers Canaan (Joshua 5:13-chap. 12)

### I. Conquest of Jericho — (Josh. 5:13-chap.6)

#### 5:13-15 - The Commander of the Army of the Lord

##### *5:13-15 - The Commander's appearance*

Joshua stood by Jericho, apparently across from it looking at the place where they must fight their first battle. Jericho was a major fortified city standing between them and taking the land.

As he so stood he saw what appeared to be a man standing opposite him having His sword drawn in His hand. Joshua approached him and asked if he was for the Israelite army or for their enemies. Perhaps he was asking which army the man was a member of, since the man answered “No” – i.e., he was not actually a member of either army. Instead He explained that He was the Commander of the army of the Lord who had come. Obviously He was on Joshua's side, but was a member of the Lord's army, not either of the human armies.

Joshua fell on his face and worshipped and asked what the Lord wanted to say to him. He viewed himself as a servant and correctly concluded that this One had appeared with a message for him. Joshua was about to enter into the first battle that he had actually directed as the highest leader of the people (though he had led many times subject to Moses). God had been guiding and instructing Joshua in many ways since he took command of the Israelites. So he was looking for God's further guidance, especially regarding taking Jericho.

The Commander of the Lord's army told him to take off his sandals, since he was standing on holy ground. Joshua obeyed. This, of course, is the same thing God had told Moses when He had appeared to him in the burning bush to call him to lead Israel from Egypt (Exodus 3:5). This event, so clearly similar to what happened with Moses, was another evidence that God was really using Joshua to lead the people. God wanted both Joshua and the people to know that Joshua was the appointed leader whom all should follow.

Two facts would indicate that this was not just a man but was actually God appearing in the form of a man: (1) the fact Joshua actually worshipped Him, and (2) the instruction to take off his sandals as Moses had been instructed when in the presence of God at the burning bush. It would seem that God here appeared in the form of a man, just as He had appeared in the bush to Moses. For other examples consider Gen. 18:1-33; 32:24-30; Ex. 3:2ff (see also Num. 22:31-35; Gen. 16:7-13; 21:17; 22:11-18; 24:7,40; 31:11; 48:15,16; Judges 6:11-24; 13:3-23; etc.

But what was the purpose of this visit of the Commander of the Lord's army? One purpose would surely be to confirm that Joshua was the leader God had chosen to lead Israel into battle, even as God's appearance to Moses confirmed that Moses was to lead God's people. This served the purpose of all miracles. Another purpose would be to give encouragement and strength to Joshua as he faced his first battle as leader of God's people. He would need assurance that God would be with Him (see on 1:5-9).

But another purpose of the meeting appears to me to be to give Joshua instructions about how to approach the upcoming battle. Joshua asked the Commander what He had to say to Joshua. He needed instruction and was evidently expecting to receive them. Chapter 5, however, records no such instructions. If we ignore the chapter division that men inserted, however, chap. 6 begins almost immediately giving the instructions of God for taking Jericho. It appears to me that the message from God in 6:2-5 is the message given by this Commander to Joshua. He appeared in 5:13-15, but what He told Joshua is actually recorded in chap. 6.

## Joshua 6

### **6:1-5 - Instructions for taking Jericho**

Jericho feared the Israelites so that they sought security behind their walls. They were shut in so that no one could go in or out of the city. This was typical of walled cities that were besieged, but Jericho was especially sure to do so because of their fear of Israel.

God then gave Joshua instructions for how they would defeat the city despite the wall. These were most likely the instructions given by the Commander of the Lord's host in 5:13-15.

God began by saying that He had given Jericho with its king and powerful defenders all into Joshua's hand. Note that this was a gift from God (cf. v16). We will see how it was given as the story proceeds. But God clearly states that it was a gift. The people did not, by their deeds or actions, deserve or merit to receive the gift. They did not labor so hard as to earn the defeat of the city.

The Israelite men of war were commanded to march around Jericho once each day for six days. This, of course, would be a foolish way to capture a city, except for the fact that God said to do it. Hebrews 11:30 says the walls fell down by faith. The people were required to have enough trust in God to destroy the walls that they were willing to seek the victory according to His will. But this still required obedience.

Furthermore, seven priests were to carry seven trumpets made from rams' horns before the ark (the ark was to be carried among the soldiers as they marched about the city). As they had marched one time each day for six days, on the seventh day they were to march seven times and the priests were to blow the trumpets.

Then on the seventh day, after the city had been encircled seven times, the priests were to blow the trumpets and all the people were to shout. Then God promised the wall would fall down flat, and all the people could march directly into the city.

This did require faith. But it also constituted a miraculous sign. Clearly such a means of causing a wall to fall is impossible by natural law. It could happen only by the supernatural power of God. As such, it would serve the purpose of all miracles. It would confirm the existence and power of God as the true God, and it would confirm to Israel and to the people of the land that Joshua was truly a leader sent from God. The people should then respect him and follow his commands.

As a matter of interest, note that in so marching, Israel must have done "work" on the Sabbath day. They marched once each day for six days then seven times on the seventh day. No matter what day of the week they began, they must have marched on the Sabbath. Of course, this was done by God's express command, so it was not a sin. But we can learn that God never intended the Sabbath to forbid all work of all kinds.

### **6:6-10 - Joshua instructs the people**

Joshua then gave the commands of God to the people to follow in marching. These instructions were as described in vv 3-5, but some additional information is given.

For one thing, we are told that not only did the seven priests with the trumpets precede the ark but so did many of the soldiers. However, there was also a rear guard marching after the ark.

Further, the priests continued blowing the trumpets as they marched around the city (v9,13). But the people were not to shout or make any noise with their voices until the command was given to shout. This would be on the seventh day after the seventh circuit of the city. They would shout at the time when Joshua commanded them to shout.

Note how specific and clear the instructions were. Faith was required, but so was obedience. Suppose Israel had disobeyed the rules. Would they have received the benefit? Clearly the faith that God blessed was obedient faith, and without the obedience they would never have taken the city.

## **The fall of Jericho illustrates our salvation by faith.**

Note that the walls of Jericho fell by “faith,” but Israel had to act to receive the blessing (Hebrews 11:30). Yet God said He **gave** Jericho to Israel (Josh 6:2). In salvation some say that, since it is a gift, there is nothing to do to receive it. So they conclude that baptism is not necessary to salvation. But God’s gifts are often conditional. We must act, but our actions are inadequate to **earn or merit** the result. The action required does not earn the blessing God offers, but it constitutes a test of faith to see whether or not we will obey even when God’s command makes little human sense.

Israel received Jericho as a gift from God “by faith,” but they still had to obey to receive it. So Ephesians 2:8,9 says salvation is a gift from God “by faith.” This does not prove there is nothing to do. It just proves that our actions do not **earn** the gift, so we cannot boast.

Salvation by grace through faith does not exclude baptism. It requires it.

For further information, see our articles on the importance of baptism and salvation by faith only or by obedient faith at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

### **6:11-14 - Israel marches as commanded**

So Joshua had the people with the ark encircle the city as God commanded. On the first day, they marched with the ark once around the city. Then they returned to camp.

Then on the next day they got up early in the morning and took the ark and circled the city again. The priests blew the horns as they marched, as God had commanded. They did the same thing each day for six days.

### **6:15-19 - The seventh day**

On the seventh day Joshua and the people arose early about dawn and marched around the city seven times, as God had commanded. On that day, when the priests blew the trumpets, Joshua for the first time commanded the people to shout, since God had given the city to them (cf. v2).

### **Instructions regarding the plunder**

Joshua told the people not to keep any of the spoils of the city for themselves. Everything was doomed either to be destroyed or else to be given to the service of God. The people were all to be slain except for Rahab’s family, because she had believed in God and had helped the spies (chap. 2). All the silver, gold, and vessels of bronze or iron were to be given to the Lord by placing them into the treasury of the Lord. If the people kept anything for themselves, they would bring a curse upon the camp.

It is likely that these instructions had been given to Israel earlier and were just recorded here (although Joshua could have been repeating them at this time).

At cities captured later the people were allowed to keep spoils for themselves. Why was Jericho an exception? Probably this was because it was the first city captured, so God’s law of the firstfruits prevailed. The firstborn son in each family and the firstfruits of each crop belonged to God (Ex. 23:19; 34:26). Most likely God made a similar rule regarding Jericho to remind the people this was so.

Some have questioned the justice of God in destroying all the people of the city. But this is what God had commanded from the beginning. See the introduction to the book. God commanded Israel, not just to take the lands of these people, but to utterly destroy them and their idols. Otherwise, the Israelites would be influenced by these people to commit idolatry with their gods (Deut. 7:1-6; 9:1-5; 20:10-18). These nations had been wicked for many years, but earlier they had not been wicked enough for God to demand their complete destruction (Gen. 15:16). So He waited in justice. But now their iniquity was “full.” God had determined that they had become so corrupt that the only way to remove their evil influence was to slay them all. We will later see that Israel only partially fulfilled this command, resulting in exactly the problems God predicted.

### ***6:20-23 - Destruction of the city***

As God had commanded, after the people had circled the city for the seventh time, the priests sounded the trumpets and the people shouted. The walls fell down flat, then each man went straight before him to take the city. They then utterly destroyed every living thing in the city, people and animals, as God had commanded.

However, Rahab and her family were spared as the spies had agreed with her. Joshua had told the spies to go to her house and bring out everyone who was with her there (see on chap. 2). It sounds as though somehow this was done before the wall fell. Her house was on the wall, so it does not seem that it could have survived the fall of the wall. In any case, by whatever means, the Israelites spared her and everyone with her in the house.

### ***6:24-27 - The city burnt and the spoils given to God***

The city itself was then burned with fire. But the silver, gold, and vessels of bronze and iron were put into the treasury for caring for the house of God (the tabernacle). As God had commanded, the people were to take none of the spoils (but note on chap. 7).

Rahab and family were spared, as the messengers had promised. When the book of Joshua was written, Rahab continued even then to live in Israel.

### ***Curse on any who would rebuild the city***

Joshua then pronounced a curse on any man who would rebuild the city of Jericho. Specifically, his firstborn would die when the foundation of the city was laid, and his youngest would die when the gates were set up.

This curse was exactly fulfilled many years later, as recorded in 1 Kings 16:34. A man named Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. His firstborn Abiram died when the foundation was laid, and his youngest son Segub died when the gates were set up.

Joshua was highly respected in his day among the people, because God was with him. This event also proves that he was a prophet, for his prediction came true. His miracles and fulfilled prophecies proved that God spoke through him, which is the purpose of these miraculous gifts.

## Joshua 7

### II. Sin of Achan & Defeat of Ai (Josh. 7&8)

#### Sin of Achan - Joshua 7

Israel had defeated Jericho by God's command and were ready to move on to the next city, which was Ai. Fresh from an overwhelming victory, they were ready for another easy victory. However, problems were waiting that they did not expect.

#### **7:1 - Introduction to Achan**

The account begins by telling about Achan's sin. The sin is described later in much more detail. We are told about it before the account of the attack on Ai, so we understand what happened. However, Israel at this point knew nothing about why the problem would occur.

Achan of the tribe of Judah had sinned in taking some of the spoils of Jericho. This had been expressly forbidden. All was to be destroyed or given to the tabernacle treasury. Achan's sin brought trouble to the whole nation.

One wonders why the passage says "the children of Israel" sinned and God was angry with them (cf. v11). Only one man sinned and the others knew nothing about it. Does this mean He held them all guilty, or is it just an expression for the fact that sin was found in their midst and they were all about to suffer for it? (See further notes below.)

#### **7:2-5 - Defeat at Ai**

The next town to be taken in Israel's path was Ai, apparently a relatively small city. We are told that it was beside Beth Aven, east of Bethel. But it was west and a little north from Jericho (see *map*).

As he had done at Jericho, Joshua sent spies to determine what means should be taken to capture Ai. The spies returned with a confident report that the city was so small that only two or three thousand men would be needed, so there was no need to trouble the whole army.

So three thousand went up against Ai, but the people of Ai defeated them. Israel fled and 36 men were struck down. They fled as far as Shebarim (location unknown). The result was great discouragement among the Israelites.

One wonders whether Joshua and Israel made mistakes here, perhaps even sinning. First, they seem almost overconfident. Fresh from such a great and easy victory over a strongly fortified city at Jericho, perhaps they thought Ai would be no problem at all.

Furthermore, Joshua had carefully sought God's guidance each step of the way till now. But here there is no mention of any prayer or consultation with God about His will. Surely had they consulted Him first, as they had been doing, He would have guided them. See on 9:14. Surely this guidance would have included a warning about Achan's sin, and this would in turn have avoided the whole defeat. One wonders whether or not this is the sense in which v1 mean Israel had sinned. Or perhaps this was just poor judgment on their part.

In any case, we learn here that times of prosperity can be a source of trouble to God's people as surely as can times of hardship. When we suffer, we tend to be discouraged and lose faith. When all goes well, we tend to be self-confident and fail to appreciate our need to trust God. Blessings and troubles can both be a cause of downfall, if we do not use them properly.

#### **7:6-9 - Joshua's plea to God**

Joshua grieved deeply over the defeat. He tore his clothes and put dust on his head as customary signs of grief. He fell before the ark until evening, along with the elders of Israel.

Then he raised his complaint to God why this great loss had occurred. He asked whether God had brought Israel into the land only to have them destroyed at the hands of their enemies. He thought they would have been better off had they simply stayed on the east side of Jordan.



Then he wondered what would happen when the people of the land heard that Israel had fled in battle and from such an apparently weak enemy. He thought the enemies might surround Israel, now that they were in the land, and destroy them. This would not only be tragic for the people, but it would also bring reproach on God's name.

If Joshua had not consulted God before the attack, he surely did here! Troubles can humble us to see our need for God, when we might not see that need when all goes well.

Yet Joshua seems almost to be complaining and murmuring against God, much like the nation had done in the wilderness whenever things did not go well. His faith seems to be shaken and perhaps worse. The account does not directly say he sinned here, but God is about to respond to him forcefully in the following verses. In any case, had Joshua gone to God for guidance before the attack, surely the defeat at least could have been avoided.

### ***7:10-12 - God's explanation of the problem***

God's response commanded Joshua to get up and asked why he was lying on his face. The response seems to imply that Joshua should have known better than to think God had in any way failed. We need to learn this lesson too. When things do not go well, it is not God's fault. Don't blame Him. Usually people are to blame to some extent, or perhaps it is Satan. But God is not to blame.

In this case God explained that Israel had sinned, as described in v1. They had transgressed the covenant by taking some of the devoted spoils of Jericho and keeping it for themselves, which God had forbidden in 6:17-19. God calls this stealing and deception. And it was stealing from God at that!

God said this was the reason Israel was defeated by their enemies. The sin had doomed them to destruction. And what was more, they would continue to be defeated unless they dealt with the sin and removed the devoted property. God would not be with them as long as they harbored sinners among themselves.

### ***Lessons about sin***

Clearly we learn here the dangers of sin and disobedience to God's covenant. God cannot bless those who sin against Him. He may continue to send the common blessings that He sends on all mankind, but He extends no special protection and blessing that He offers to His people.

Furthermore, we must learn that sins we commit create problems for other people too. Israel in general had not stolen the devoted things. That was done by just one man. People today often think, "It's my life. It's no one else's business what I do. If what I do brings consequences, that's my problem. It's my own personal business." But sooner or later sin creates problems for other people too. It may be a bad influence leading other people also to justify their sins. It may cause suffering and hardship on our loved ones. But if nothing else, it hinders God's ability to bless those with whom we associate.

Furthermore, we see here that, when God's people learn about sin among the members of the group, they are responsible to deal with it. They must not simply ignore it, or God will not bless them. God cannot fellowship those in sin, including those who justify sin in others. God said He would not dwell among the nation until they dealt with the problem. We must take care to avoid sin in the camp. See also 2 John 9-11; Ephesians 5:11; Proverbs 17:15; 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1; 1 Timothy 5:22; Psalms 1:1,2; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Romans 1:32; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20.

Other lessons to be learned include the fact that we cannot hide from God. He knows our sins and will surely punish if we do not repent (see notes below for more on these points.)

### ***7:13-15 - God's instructions for dealing with the problem***

If Israel had not known before what the problem was and what to do about it, they surely learned here! God told Joshua to inform the people and warn them about the problem. They were to sanctify themselves in preparation for the next day – make themselves holy (see on 3:5). He was to tell them, as God had told him, that the problem was sin in the camp. There was de-

voted property among them, and they could not prosper in their battles until they removed those spoils.

God then told Joshua how to handle the matter the next day. He was to have the people come before them so God could indicate what tribe, then what family, household, and finally what man was guilty. This one was to be taken out, along with the devoted spoils, and be burned along with all his family, because of his sin against God and the terrible influence he had.

### **Lessons about dealing with sin**

One wonders how Achan spent that night! Surely he knew he was guilty. Presumably he did not believe the people could find out and punish him. But he surely knew that he was guilty, even if no one else was.

God had commanded the people to sanctify themselves. Surely Achan knew he needed to make himself holy, and God's command showed that required eliminating the devoted things. If he had come at that point confessing his deed, one wonders if the punishment would have been less severe. Perhaps God delayed till the next day to give him time to make correction. In any case, Achan made no correction, so his punishment was clearly justified when it did come. If we want mercy, we need to confess our errors and make correction while we have the opportunity.

Furthermore, this demonstrates the need for God's people to take disciplinary action against sin among the group. It is not enough for others just to refuse to commit the same sin, nor is it enough to speak against it. If speaking does not lead to repentance, the group must take action against sin. The New Testament likewise requires that God's church must discipline those who sin and do not repent. If we fail, then we become the sinners. See 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

### ***7:16-19 - Achan's guilt demonstrated***

On the next day, Joshua did as God had commanded. He brought each tribe forth and Judah was taken. Then the family and household were indicated. Finally Achan was demonstrated to be the guilty man.

Joshua then commanded Achan to make confession, telling what he had done without hiding it. In this way he would honor and glorify God. It always glorifies God when we admit He is right and just, even if we must do so by admitting we are wrong. This would demonstrate that God had not failed the people (as Joshua, and no doubt other people, thought he had). Rather, there was justifiable reason for what God had done.

We are not here told exactly what method was used by God to indicate which tribe, family, etc., was chosen. Similar events occurred elsewhere, as in 1 Samuel 14:38-42 (cf. 10:19-22). In 1 Samuel 14 we are told that the method used was casting lots (cf. Acts 1:24-26). Perhaps in other cases other methods were used. In any case, the point is that this was a revelation from God.

Achan probably thought, as many people think today, that they can hide from God. They think people cannot find out what they did, so no one can know. But God knows all things. No sin can escape Him, so we should be sure that our sin will be found out and punished – Num. 23:23. See Proverbs 3:19; Psalm 139:1-4,6-12; 147:4,5; John 16:30; Matthew 10:29-31; 6:8,32; 1 Kings 8:39; Romans 11:33,34; Isaiah 55:8,9.

### ***7:20-23 - Achan's confession; the devoted things discovered***

Seeing that he was caught, Achan finally confessed openly his sin. Specifically, he identified the devoted things he had stolen to be a Babylonian garment, 200 shekels of silver (perhaps five pounds) and 50 shekels of gold. He said he coveted and took them and hid them in the dirt in the midst of his tent.

Joshua sent messengers to Achan's tent. There they found the items, exactly as Achan had admitted. They brought them and laid them in the presence of Joshua, the Lord, and all Israel.

Covetousness is greed: an overly strong desire for things that leads us to be willing to obtain them in an unauthorized or improper way. In this case, it was improper to take any of the spoils from Jericho, but Achan's covetousness led him to keep them. See other verses about greed and over-emphasis on material things: Matthew 6:19-33; 16:24-27; Romans 8:5-8; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; John 6:27,63; Luke 12:15-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Colossians 3:1,2.

Greed is especially strange in that it leads us to desire and take that which we cannot really even use. What good did that Babylonian garment do Achan while buried in the dirt under his tent? Could he wear it without people asking where he got it? Could he sell it or give it as a gift? How could he even use the silver or gold without arousing questions? Perhaps he thought he could take these things with him and later use them in some way. But the guilt and hiding in the meanwhile were surely not worth it.

And how much better everyone would have been had he obeyed God's command to begin with!

### **7:24-26 - Achan's death**

Joshua then commanded Israel to take those devoted things, Achan himself, and all his family and his possessions to a valley called the valley of Achor (location unknown). There Israel stoned him, as God had commanded, then they burned them with fire and raised a great heap of stones over them. That heap still existed when the book was written. This satisfied God's justice and His anger was taken away.

Joshua said Achan had troubled Israel, so the Lord would trouble Him. "Achan" means "trouble," so he was rightly named. "Achor" also means "troubling." Presumably this name was given to the valley after this event. So the place of punishment became a symbol and a memorial to the trouble caused by sin.

Again the event shows God's determination that sin must be removed from among His people. We are responsible to deal with it, even though we did not commit it.

One wonders why Achan's sons and daughters were also slain. God had commanded that the sons were not to be put to death for the sin of the father – Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; (Ezek. 18:20). On the other hand, in Numbers 16:25-35 the families of Dathan and Abiram died with them for their sin, and this is what God had commanded to be done in Achan's case (7:15). I can only conclude that Achan's family was aware of his sin and would not stand against him or in some other way God knew they too were worthy of punishment.

## Joshua 8

### Defeat of Ai - Joshua 8

#### **8:1,2 - God's promise regarding Ai**

Since Israel had eliminated sin from its midst, God was ready to bless the nation again. He promised Joshua that there was no longer any reason for fear. The previous defeat at Ai may have given Joshua and the people great reason to be fearful and hesitant. But God here affirmed that, since the reason for the first defeat had been eliminated, He would give Ai and everything pertaining to it into Joshua's hand.

This time, however, they were not to send just two or three thousand men. They were to take the whole army against the city. God then promised that they would defeat Ai and its king as surely as they had defeated Jericho and its king.

He further added that this time the spoils would belong to the people. At Jericho the spoils had belonged to God, perhaps because it was the firstfruits of the land captured by Israel as earlier explained. It was this command that Achan had violated that led to defeat at Ai the first time. Whatever the reason for the change, God clearly said that the spoils of this city belonged to the people.

God gave some further instruction, however, about how the battle should be conducted. He said they were to lay an ambush behind the city. We will see how this worked as the story proceeds.

Note that, unlike the first attack on Ai, this time we are expressly told that Joshua was consulting God and God was instructing him regarding the conduct of the battle. Had Joshua so consulted God before the first attack on Ai, the previous defeat could have been avoided.

#### **8:3-8 - Plan of the battle**

Further details are given here for the plan of the ambush. Joshua sent soldiers away by night to an area behind the city. They were to stay hidden but close to the city, ready to attack at Joshua's command.

Joshua would take other men and would attack the city like it had been attacked at the previous defeat. When the men of Ai came out to fight, Joshua and his men would then flee again as they had done the first time. This would draw the men of Ai away from the protection of their city. But this time as Israel fled, the men of ambush would enter the city and capture it and set it on fire.

This is what God commanded, so Joshua so commanded the people. He assured them this time they would be successful, because they had God's blessings and assurance of success.

#### **8:9-12 - The army moved into position**

So Joshua sent them away, presumably referring to the 30,000 soldiers of v3. They placed an ambush on the west side of Ai, between Ai and Bethel. Presumably they went by night so the people of Ai would not know they had moved into ambush.

Joshua, however, stayed in the camp among the people. Then early the next morning, he and all the rest of the people went to the north of Ai and made camp there, with a valley between them and Ai.

We are then told about a group of 5000 men who were set in ambush between Bethel and Ai on the west side of Ai. This is somewhat confusing. This is where the 30,000 of vv 3-9 were sent. Why send these 5000 there?

I can think of only four possibilities. (1) Joshua decided the 30,000 were not enough, so he later sent still more. (2) He wanted two groups in the same area, perhaps to move in from slightly different directions, at different times, or to accomplish different goals. (3) The 30,000 were the whole group that would attack the city, including the 5000. The whole 30,000 had the

plan explained to them, then 5000 were chosen to set the ambush. This latter explanation, however, does not seem to fit the language. Besides, the whole army was to attack Ai (vv 1,3), and that would include far more than 30,000 men (in Numbers 26:51 the men of war numbered over 600,000). (4) We will learn later that the men of Bethel joined the men of Ai in this battle. Perhaps the 5000 were to attack Bethel as the 30,000 attacked Ai. Or perhaps there is some other alternative I do not understand

### **8:13-17 - The battle begins**

After all the soldiers were in position, those on the west and those on the north, Joshua moved with his men into the valley at night. When the king of Ai saw this, he aroused his soldiers early the following morning for a battle in the plain. But he was still unaware of the ambush.

As planned, Joshua's men acted as though they were beaten, so they fled toward the wilderness. The people of Ai "took the bait" and followed them, clearly thinking they could defeat Israel like they had the first time. In fact, all the men of the city and of Bethel joined in the pursuit of Israel, so no one was left in the city at all. They left the city "open" – either undefended or perhaps even with the gates open.

Note that the men of Bethel joined in the pursuit. Perhaps they had been already in Ai with a treaty or agreement of some kind to join in the defense of Ai. They probably knew they were next, if Ai fell. So they had already entered Ai to join together in the fight.

### **8:18-23 - The fall of Ai**

God then commanded Joshua to stretch out his spear toward Ai. He promised He would then give the city to Joshua and Israel. So Joshua stretched out his spear as God had commanded.

Note the similarity between this and other events. Moses stretched forth his rod to begin various plagues on Egypt (Ex. 8:6,16). Later Moses held out the staff so the Red Sea would open to Israel (Ex. 14:16). In Joshua's first battle against the Amalekites, he was victorious so long as Moses held up his hands with his staff (Ex. 17:8-16). This was simply a symbol God assigned to show that the result was occurring by the power of God through the appointed leader.

In this case, when the men in ambush saw Joshua stretch forth his spear, they left their hiding places and ran into the city to set it on fire. Having done that, they left the city to attack the people of Ai from the rear. When the army that had been fleeing with Joshua saw the smoke of the city, they turned back to also attack the enemy. The men of Ai also saw the smoke of the city and realized what had happened. They were encircled by the enemy with nowhere to flee.

The result was that the soldiers of Ai were all slain except the king, who was brought to Joshua.

### **8:24-29 - The outcome of the battle**

Israel's victory was complete. They slew all the soldiers who came to fight against them. Then they entered the city and destroyed everyone there, men and women, as God had commanded. 12,000 people were slain in all.

We are told that Joshua did not draw back the hand with which he held the spear till all the people were consumed. This seems to have been a sign to the men of Israel to continue the attack (see on v18). It was similar to Moses' holding up his hands in the battle against Amalek (see reference above), but in that case Moses' hands also determined who prevailed in the battle.

The people then took the spoils of the city for themselves, just as God had said they could (see v2). The city itself was burned and made a desolate heap. This continued even till the time the book was written.

The king of Ai was captured in the battle and hung on a tree. At evening Joshua commanded the king's body to be taken down. It was then cast into the entrance gate of the city and covered with a great heap of stones. That heap also remained until the time the book was written.

Nothing more is said about further battles in the central part of Canaan, though presumably there were others. Jericho and Ai must have been the major battles. After that whatever opposition Israel faced must have been relatively little, so we are told nothing about it.

### An Altar Built and the Law Read - 8:30-35

#### **8:30-32 - The altar**

The story then describes a period of worship and study of the law that Israel conducted at two mountains in central Canaan: Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. These are twin peaks found near Shechem (see *map*). This was the place where God promised Abraham that He would give him the land of Canaan. Abraham built an altar there (Gen. 12:6,7). Since the Israelites had now entered the land in fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham at Shechem, it was appropriate for God to choose this as the place for the people to spend a special time of worship.

While Israel had still been east of Jordan, God had commanded Moses what to do to remind the people of God's law. See Deut. 27:1-13.

First they were to build an altar on Mt. Ebal made of whole stones that had not been engraved by man with any tool. See Deut. 27:2-8 (cf. Ex. 20:25). They were to offer sacrifices to God on the altar, and they were to plaster the stones with plaster and write God's law on them. This is exactly what Joshua had the people do as recorded here, exactly as Moses had commanded them.

No doubt this was to remind the people of God's law, and to impress deeply on their minds that God had given them this land. Since it was given them by God's blessing, they should serve Him faithfully in the land.

#### **8:33-35 - The reading of the blessings and the curse**

Moses had commanded them to read the blessings and the curses after they entered the land. Six tribes were named who should stand on Mt. Gerizim to receive the record of the blessing and six were to stand on Mt. Ebal to receive the record of the curses. See Deut. 11:26-32; 27:11-14.

The blessing was the record of God's goodness that He would bring on the people if they would serve Him faithfully. See Deut. 28:1-14. The curse was the record of God's punishments that He would bring on the land if they did not serve Him. See Deut. 27:15-26; 28:15-68.

This is what Joshua had read to the people here, exactly as Moses had commanded. Furthermore, the whole law was read to the people, with no exceptions. The assembly that heard this was all the people, including men, women, children, and strangers among them. All were to hear the whole law read.

Note that the people had been given the land because God had promised it to their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.). But whether or not they remained in the land would depend on the nation itself, whether or not they were faithful to God's covenant. This was made clear in the law that was read to them, even in the blessings and the curse. See Deut. 4:25-27,40; 5:33; 28:36,37; 29:22-28. They were reminded of this even as they were taking possession of the land.

## Joshua 9

### Alliance with Gibeonites (Josh. 9)

#### **9:1,2 - An alliance against Israel**

This story begins by describing a plan determined by the inhabitants of Canaan. They decided that they would gather together to fight against Israel. There is strength in unity. Israel had proved they could defeat individual cities, so other people united to fight them.

This may not refer to any one specific alliance but simply to a general plan that the peoples of the land decided to follow. There was no war with the people of some of these areas till considerably later. This would indicate that this was just a general plan.

This story appears to be then set aside for a while as the account tells about the alliance Joshua made with the Gibeonites.

#### **9:3-6 - The Gibeonites' deceit**

Gibeon was a city actually located just southwest of Ai and north of Jerusalem (see *map*). V17 shows that the Gibeonite people actually inhabited a group of four cities in that area. So these people really lived quite close to the location of Israel's great victories. These people had heard of the victories of Israel and knew they were among Israel's next victims. They realized they were powerless to defend themselves, so they decided to work by deceit.

They pretended they were messengers sent from a far distant country. They put on old patched clothes and sandals, carried old sacks, old food, and old wineskins. They came to Israel while they were still camped in Gilgal. There they asked Israel to make a peace treaty with them. They knew Israel would destroy anyone who lived in the land, so they pretended to be from a far country so Israel would make peace with them. Then they would try to hold Israel to their agreement.

The Waldrons hold the view that this Gilgal is not the one in the Jordan lowlands where Israel camped when they first crossed into Israel. They claim that Israel would have moved further into the land by this time. So this Gilgal would be one higher in the mountains.

#### **9:7-13 - Israel questions the Gibeonites**

Joshua and the people were suspicious of the Gibeonites, thinking they might actually be of the land of Canaan, in which case Israel should defeat them.

God had commanded them not to make covenants with the people of the land (Deut. 7:1-6,16; 9:1-5; 20:10-18; Ex. 23:31-33; 34:11,12). Note especially Deut. 20:10-18, which expressly allowed Israel to make covenants with people who lived far from Canaan. But people who lived in the land, Israel was commanded to destroy. So they wanted to make sure these people were not of the land.

But the Gibeonites continued their lie. They said they were from a far country and there they had heard of Israel's great victories against the nations east of the Jordan. They claimed to have heard of the God Israel worshipped, and they wanted to join in alliance with Israel.

They used their old clothes and provisions as proof. They said their elders had told them to take these with them and they were all new when they left home. But in the great travel and long time that had passed, these had become old.

Of course, Israel should have suspected that such would not necessarily be true. But they were new at making war and dealing with crafty enemies. Their greatest error is yet to be described in the following verses.

#### **9:14-17 - Israel makes the covenant**

Israel then made a covenant of peace with them, even swearing to them that they would not kill them. But we are told that they did not ask counsel of the Lord. This was a terrible mistake.

It appears that Israel had made this same mistake at their first attack of Ai. In this case there can be no doubt, for we are plainly told that they did not consult the Lord. Had they done so, He would no doubt have told them the truth and they would have destroyed the Gibeonites.

Three days after making the covenant, however, Israel learned the truth. They heard that these people actually lived quite nearby. So Israel continued their journey and came to the cities where these people lived. They included Gibeon, Chephirah, Beeroth, and Kirjath Jearim (see *map*).

Imagine Israel's anger and shame at having accepted such a deceit!

### **9:18-21 - Israel decides to make the Gibeonites slaves**

Having learned of the Gibeonites deceit, Israel still determined not to harm them but to honor their treaty. The congregation complained against the rulers about the matter, but the rulers explained that they had made an oath in the name of God. They concluded that they could not hurt the Gibeonites because of that oath lest wrath come upon them.

Nevertheless, they determined they would make the Gibeonites into slaves. They would be woodcutters and water carriers for all the congregation. The Gibeonites had offered to be Israel's servants (v11). Israel had promised not to kill them, but Gibeon offered to be servants, so that's what was done.

### **9:22-27 - Gibeon confronted for their deceit**

Joshua then called the Gibeonites and asked why they had deceived Israel saying they were from far away when actually they lived very close. Gibeon explained, as already discussed, that they knew God had promised to give Israel the land and had commanded them to kill everyone in the land. They feared for their lives, so they plotted this deceit.

Joshua then explained to the Gibeonites that they would be Israel's slaves, as the rulers had decided. They would be woodcutters and water carriers for the house of God (v23), for the altar in the place God would choose (v27). This appears to mean they would perform these tasks for the priests and Levites at the tabernacle and later the temple.

Gibeon agreed to this arrangement. They had offered to be servants and this at least spared their lives. This was what was done, and in this way the Gibeonites' lives were spared. At the time the book was written, the Gibeonites still served in that capacity.

### **Later information about the Gibeonites**

After Saul became king, in his zeal for destroying Israel's enemies, he had attempted to slay the Gibeonites – 2 Sam. 21:1-9. Because this was a violation of Israel's oath with the Gibeonites in Joshua's day, Israel suffered later during David's rulership. When David inquired of God about this, God explained this was because of Saul's attempt to kill the Gibeonites. Seven of Saul's offspring were then given to the Gibeonites to kill as punishment for Saul's sin.

Later references show that, for many generations the tabernacle and/or a place of worship was located at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4; 1 Chron. 16:39). Later, a group called the Nethinim were still working as servants to those who worked in the tabernacle and the temple. It is believed that these were the Gibeonites. See 1 Chron. 9:2; Ezra 2:43,58; Neh. 10:28.

### **Why was this covenant binding?**

The above passages, especially the case of Saul, demonstrate that God enforced the oath Israel had made to Gibeon. Even though the Gibeonites had lied and deceived, and even though He had commanded Israel to make no covenants with the people of the land, God upheld this covenant and punished Saul for not keeping it!

I have serious difficulties understanding why an oath made under these circumstances was binding. First, the oath was unknowingly a violation of God's law, and second it was made only because of false pretenses and lies from the Gibeonites. Why should they be rewarded for their lie by granting them protection? Why should Israel be allowed to continue in violation of God's



law under such circumstances? I honestly cannot answer, yet clearly God did hold them to the oath.

Some things to consider are:

1) Israel had failed to consult God before making the oath. Perhaps keeping the oath served as a punishment to them for their failure to consult God.

2) Gibeon did appear to have faith in God. They clearly believed God would empower Israel to defeat them, regardless of any effort on their part. And they appear later to have served faithfully in the tabernacle and temple. God had said to kill the inhabitants so they would not lead Israel into idolatry. Clearly the Gibeonites did not lead Israel into idolatry. Perhaps their faith made them an exception to the rule that the people of the land should be slain, even as Rahab's faith had made her an exception.

3) The oath Israel made was not just to the Gibeonites but also before God. That said they swore by God. Such an oath was bound, not just by the people but by God himself. This was the specific reason offered by the leaders of Israel why they had to keep the oath. Could it be that, had Israel simply made a promise to Gibeon but then found out that the Gibeonites had lied, Israel could have freed themselves from the oath to Gibeon? But having made the oath before God, and knowing God was faithful not deceitful, perhaps that is why they had to keep it.

### **Lessons to consider:**

1) Always be sure we consult God's will before making any commitment. Be sure the commitment is in harmony with God's will.

2) Do not lightly enter into any commitment, but especially commitments made to God.

3) Check out the commitment carefully to be sure what you are getting into before making it.

4) Attach conditions to any commitment such that, if it turns out that the information on which you have based the commitment is untrue, then you are free from the commitment.

These principles are especially important for commitments of major importance and long duration, such as marriage, etc.

## Joshua 10

### Southern conquest – Joshua 10

#### 10:1-27 - Defeat of the Alliance of Five Kings

##### **10:1-4 - The alliance of southern kings**

The king of Jerusalem was named Adoni-Zedek. He heard how Israel had defeated Jericho and Ai, then Gibeon had made peace with Israel. This caused him great fear. Not only had Jericho and Ai been defeated, but Gibeon was a great city, greater than Ai, having many valiant soldiers. Yet they had surrendered without a fight. Jerusalem was sure to be one of the next cities Israel attacked (see *map*).

So Adoni-Zedek sought to make an alliance with the kings of other cities near him: Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish, and Debir king of Eglon (see *map*). Hebron was due south of Jerusalem, and Jarmuth was southwest but fairly close. Lachish and Eglon were further away to the west and southwest. This would make an alliance of five kings. This plan of making alliances had been decided on according to 9:1,2.

Since each of these cities had a king, it is clear that these kings were not rulers of great nations as we might think of kings today. The cities were apparently independent from one another, but each had its own king. They might usually act separately, but when faced with a common foe they would join forces for mutual protection as in this case.

The plan of this alliance, however, was not to attack Israel but to attack Gibeon for having made a treaty with Israel! We are not told their reasoning behind this idea. On the one hand it would appear to be a mistake, since they would be turning their forces against other Canaanites instead of fighting Israel. Why waste their resources fighting those who were not the invaders? Perhaps they did not expect Israel to defend Gibeon. Perhaps they reasoned that attacking Gibeon would force them to break their treaty and join the Canaanites in fighting Israel. Or at least it might prevent other cities from making peace with Israel.

##### **10:5-8 - Israel agrees to protect Gibeon**

So as agreed, these five kings brought their armies to fight against Gibeon. But the men of Gibeon explained to Joshua what was happening and appealed to him to protect them. Joshua brought his army from Gilgal to fight.

One wonders why Joshua would do this. He had agreed not to kill the Gibeonites, but if the Canaanites killed them that would eliminate the Gibeonites. The oath had been made under circumstances of deceit and lying by Gibeon, so why were the Israelites bound to defend them? Perhaps that was part of the agreement. Perhaps they had agreed, not just to not harm them themselves, but to protect them from others. Yet I wonder why they would make such an agreement regarding people whom they believed to be far away from them.

On the other hand, perhaps Joshua went because he thought this would be a good time to attack the Canaanite kings. He may have correctly concluded that they would not be expecting Israel to attack. They would be fighting with Gibeon and would not be prepared for an attack at the same time from Israel. In any case this is what Joshua decided to do.

And apparently God agreed with this plan, for He offered His blessing on it. He promised Joshua that Israel would be able to defeat this army. It could not stand before them, but God had delivered them to Israel. Note that in this case Joshua apparently did consult God before attacking.

### **10:9-11 - The kings flee before Israel**

Joshua added another element of surprise. He marched Israel all night in order to arrive at the battle before the kings were expecting them. They were able to take the Canaanite armies by surprise.

The result was a great slaughter of the Canaanites at Gibeon, so the Canaanite armies fled. Israel chased them down the road to Beth Horon as far as Azekah and Makkedah (see *map*). A town named Beth Horon is located west and a little north not far from Gibeon. Azekah and Makkedah are southwest and some distance from Gibeon. Perhaps there is another Beth Horon southwest of Gibeon. Or perhaps the road to Beth Horon leads west down the hillsides then splits or joins another road. So the Canaanites began fleeing west down the road to Beth Horon then turn and fled south. Or perhaps the armies simply separated and went separate directions.

God also worked with the Israelite armies. He caused great hailstones to fall on the Canaanites, so that more of them died from the hailstones than from Israel's soldiers.

### **10:12-14 - The sun and moon stand still**

As Israel was victorious, Joshua did not want their enemies to escape. If night came, the enemies might successfully scatter and find hiding places. So Joshua called upon God to stop the progress of time. He prayed for the sun to stand still over Gibeon as at high noon, and the moon to stand still in the valley of Aijalon. The Aijalon was a valley extending from Gibeon west and north to the plain of Sharon.

The point is that the earth would in effect stop spinning on its axis. This would stop the progress of time. The account says that this continued for a whole day. The sun stood still in the heavens and did not go down. In other words, the one day was lengthened till it took the duration of an additional day – two days' time, but the sun and moon moved only as much as in one day. This enabled Israel to take vengeance on the Canaanites.

Clearly this was miraculous. The account says nothing like it ever happened before or since. The Lord heeded Joshua's request, because He fought for Israel. This was impossible by natural law, yet it happened by the supernatural power of God. If the earth spun on its axis, then the day would not be extended. But if it did not spin, many other things would go wrong. Clearly God suspended natural law to produce the needed result.

This event appears to be referred to also in Habakkuk 3:11. It is also said to be recorded in the book of Jasher. This book is also referred to in 2 Samuel 1:18. We are not told exactly what book this is. It is apparently not included in the Bible, therefore God saw fit not to have it preserved for us today. Like other books sometimes referred to, it may have been an uninspired record which simply confirms the Bible record. Or it may have been inspired but was not needed since it simply duplicated what is contained in these other inspired books. In any case, whatever it contained, it is not necessary to our salvation. If it was necessary, God would have seen to it that it was preserved. See Psalm 119:152,160; Isaiah 40:8; 30:8; John 12:48; 2 John 2; 1 Peter 1:23-25; 2 Peter 1:12-15; 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

### **10:15-20 - The victory completed**

Joshua and Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal. But the kings of the five cities hid themselves in a cave near Makkedah (see *map* and notes above). This was told to Joshua, but he did not want to take the time to deal with these kings yet. He told his soldiers to simply place large stones over the cave opening and place guards there, so the kings could not escape. Then his men were to continue pursuing the Canaanite armies to destroy as many as they could before the enemy escaped to fortified cities.

(I'm not quite sure the significance of Israel's return to Gilgal. They had left it suddenly when they heard of the attack on Gibeon. Perhaps they returned for supplies or for the rest of the people or perhaps even for a brief rest after their all night march and two days worth of

fighting. In any case they did not stay long but continued the pursuit of the fleeing armies. We next find Israel camped at Makkedah – v21.)

The result was a great victory for Israel. A great number of Canaanites were slaughtered, till finally some escaped to enter fortified cities. Apparently the meaning here is that Joshua knew they would seek to return to fortified cities, and some finally managed to do so. But he wanted as many killed as possible before they escaped.

### **10:21-27 - The death of the five kings**

Israel then camped at Makkedah, where the five kings had hidden in the cave. Israel arrived there safely. Their enemies had been so defeated and scattered that no one attacked Israel or attempted to hinder their movement.

At Makkedah the people went to the cave where the kings were hiding and brought them out. Joshua then called the leaders of the Israelite army to place their feet on the necks of these kings. This represented the complete defeat of these kings and their subjugation to Israel. Joshua said that the Israelites should be strong and courageous in the continued battles ahead, because God would give them victory over all their other enemies, just as he had with these five kings.

The five kings were then hung on five trees. Their bodies were left there till sundown, then they were removed and thrown back in the cave. The opening to the cave was then covered again with rocks. The rocks and cave remained there even when this book was written. Clearly this would be another memorial to Israel's great victory.

### **10:28-43 - Capture of All of Southern Canaan**

The rest of the chapter simply lists city after city in southern Canaan as Israel defeated them one by one. The pattern was consistently the same. Israel would attack a city and defeat it. The people there would be utterly destroyed, including the king (if any). Apparently the defeat of the five-king alliance so demoralized the other cities that only few and minor attempts were made to form further alliances. Israel was able to simply go from one to another capturing them.

See a **map** for the location of the various cities.

### **10:28-39 - Cities captured**

#### **Makkedah**

The five kings had been in a cave near Makkedah. Israel then proceeded to Makkedah and captured it, killing the king and all the people. Makkedah was west and somewhat south from Jerusalem.

#### **Libnah**

Libnah was a short distance southwest from Makkedah. Israel captured it and kill all its people and its king.

#### **Lachish**

Lachish had been one of the cities that had joined the five-king alliance. Their king and army had already been defeated, but here the city itself was captured and the remaining people were slain. Lachish was further south from Libnah.

#### **Gezer**

As Israel fought Lachish, Hiram king of Gezer came to help defend them. This minor attempt at an alliance was also defeated. The king of Gezer and all his people were also slain. Gezer was located a considerable distance north of Lachish, north even of Makkedah.

#### **Eglon**

The next city attacked was Eglon. This city too had joined the five-king alliance. They were attacked and that city taken and all the people slain. Eglon was west and somewhat south from Lachish.

## Hebron

Next came Hebron, another city from the five-king alliance. Israel attacked it, captured it, and killed all its people and its king. Apparently by this time they had appointed another king to replace the one Israel had killed at Makkedah. Hebron was a significant distance east from Eglon.

## Debir

The last city specifically named is Debir. Israel also attacked it, captured it, and killed all its people. Debir was located west and somewhat south from Hebron.

No doubt other smaller cities were captured along the way. The ones named were surely the largest and most significant ones. But in the process Israel took all the land. V37 even states that, in the capture of Hebron other cities were also captured.

### ***10:40-43 - Complete victory in the south***

This completed Israel's defeat of the Canaanites in the southern regions. They had conquered all the mountain, lowland, and wilderness areas in the south, utterly slaying all the people. As a result, Israel had captured all the land from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and the area of Goshen as far as Gibeon. All their kings were defeated and all their territory captured by the power of God fighting for Israel.

Kadesh Barnea was located very far south, a great distance from any city named thus far. This is the place Israel had camped many years previously when they sent the 12 spies into the land and then refused to enter (Num. 13). The great distances involved here show that other cities were also defeated, but by defeating the main cities Israel took control of the whole area.

Gaza was located at the Mediterranean Sea west from the Dead Sea. The only Goshen I know was the area in Egypt where Israel had lived during Joseph's rule. This is not likely the place referred to here; presumably it is an area in Canaan. The Waldrons say Goshen was an area in southern Judah. Gibeon, of course, was the city where this great series of battles had begun.

Having captured all this territory, Joshua and Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal.

The Waldrons point out that some of these same cities are said to be captured in Judges (1:10-12). If Israel captured them all in Joshua's day, no doubt they did not leave people to populate and defend them. The dividing of the land came later. So perhaps people from surrounding territories returned to these cities to repopulate them, so they had to be taken again later. Or the Waldrons suggest that perhaps not all these cities were actually taken at this exact point in the record but that eventually they were captured. In that case, this chapter would be a summary of the victories, but not necessarily an exact chronological record.

## Joshua 11

### Northern conquest – Joshua 11

#### **11:1-3 - The alliance formed**

The southern alliance against Israel had failed. The inhabitants living in the north surely knew they were next. They had only three choices: (1) they could attempt to make peace with Israel, which would not work because God had forbidden it; (2) they could wait for Israel to attack them one by one; or (3) they could join an alliance so Israel would have to fight them together. They chose the latter approach as the only sensible one.

This alliance was initiated by Jabin king of Hazor. He sought to form an alliance with Jobab king of Madon, the king of Shimron, and the king of Achshaph. See a *map* for the location of these cities. Hazor is located in the far north near the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee (Chinneroth). Madon is thought to have been located just west of the Sea of Galilee. Achshaph was probably further west from Madon, considerably closer to the Mediterranean, and Shimron was south from Achshaph.

Also invited to the alliance were other kings from the north, in the mountains, in the plain south of the Sea of Chinneroth (Galilee), in the lowland, and in the heights of Dor. Dor was located on the Mediterranean west of the lower end of the Sea of Galilee.

Also included were Canaanites in the east and in the west, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite in the mountains, and the Hivite below Hermon in the land of Mizpah. Hermon was a great mountain at the extreme north of the land where the Jordan River began. Mizpah sounds to be an area near Hermon, but I am unable to determine its exact location.

This was a huge alliance including great numbers of soldiers from many different lands. One would think the Israelites were clearly outnumbered.

#### **11:4,5 - The alliance gathers**

All these inhabitants from all these areas met to fight against Israel. Their number was so great that they were like sand by the seashore – in other words, they could not be counted. They had many horses and chariots. These would be a great advantage in strength and mobility in fighting in those days. We have no indication that Israel had either horses or chariots.

It would appear that Israel was so greatly outnumbered that their defeat would be inevitable. But such large aggregates of armies often have difficulty working together. They may be numerous, but are hard to coordinate into a working unit. More important, Israel had God on their side.

These kings and their armies assembled at the waters of Merom to make a camp in preparation for the battle against Israel. Merom was just southwest of Hazor, still considerably north of the Sea of Galilee. Meeting here would have required a long march for Israel.

#### **11:6-9 - The battle**

God again assured Joshua that Israel would be victorious. Despite the incredibly large number of enemies and their horses, God assured Joshua not to be afraid. God said the enemy would all be slain before Israel the next day. Israel should hamstring their horses and burn their chariots. To hamstring a horse was to partially disable it, making it unsuitable for use in warfare but still suitable for use in farming.

So at God's assurance, Joshua led Israel to attack the next day suddenly, when apparently the enemy was not prepared. Few details are given of this battle, but Israel was completely victorious. The enemy fled to Greater Sidon, to the Brook Misrephoth, and to the Valley of Mizpah eastward. All of the enemy were killed, and Israel hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots as God had said.

Sidon was an ancient city far up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Greater Sidon may mean the general area around that city. The Brook Misrephoth refers to an area on the Mediterranean almost due west for Merom. Again Mispah is unknown.

### ***11:10-15 - Capture of Hazor and surrounding cities***

Having defeated the coalition of armies, Israel then proceeded to take the cities of the area as they had in the south. They began with Hazor, the city of king Jabin who had led the alliance against Israel. They killed the king and all the people of the city, leaving no survivors, and burned the city. Hazor was later rebuilt (see Judges 4:2; 1 Kings 9:15).

Joshua then led Israel to capture the other cities in the area, killing their kings and all their inhabitants. They took the spoils for themselves, including the livestock, but they killed all the people. In doing this, they obeyed God's command to them through Moses, exactly as God wanted, leaving nothing undone.

We are told that, except for Hazor, they did not burn the cities that stood on mounds. Cities in that day were often built on mounds, so they were harder for defenders to attack. Also as centuries passed, people tended to build their cities higher and higher.

It seems that Israel burned only the most offending of cities, leaving the others for their own future occupation. This had the disadvantage, however of leaving the cities temporarily uninhabited. Perhaps this explains why some of them had to be recaptured later, as inhabitants from surrounding areas moved back in after Israel had left.

### ***11:16-20 - Completion of the capture of the land***

This was the end of the major battles Israel needed to fight. They had overcome the greatest armies from the greatest cities. This was followed by a long period of war against the surrounding cities and their kings. We are told few specifics, since apparently the ensuing battles were not sufficiently important for us to be given details.

We are also not told exactly how long this took. Calculations based on Joshua 14:7-10 would imply that in all the capture of the land took six or seven years.

The result was that Israel captured and killed all the kings of the area, the mountain country, all the South, all the land of Goshen, the lowland, and the Jordan plain, the mountains of Israel and its lowlands. This included from Mount Halak and the ascent to Seir, even as far as Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon.

Many of these are general areas. The Waldrons say Goshen was an area in southern Judah. Hymel says Mt. Halak was south of Beersheeba, and Baal-Gad was at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Seir was Edom to the south of the Dead Sea and Mt. Hermon was a mountain far north of the Sea of Galilee. The point is that this is a very broad area including essentially all of the land of Canaan. This would take a long time.

Of all the cities and people in the land, the only one that made a covenant with Israel was Gibeon, and they had done so by deceit. All the other people fought against Israel and were destroyed. The account says they fought because God moved them to fight. He had determined to destroy them as He had commanded Moses, so He moved them to fight against Israel. Again, this was not cruelty on God's part but justice. These people were so abominably corrupt that they deserved destruction.

### ***11:21-23 - Destruction of the Anakim***

The account ends with the destruction of the Anakim. These were fierce fighters, many of them giants. They lived in the mountains around Hebron, Debir, Anab and the mountains of Judah and Israel. Hebron was an area captured in chap. 10, a city just west of the Dead Sea. Debir was southwest from Hebron and had also been captured in 10:38,39. Anab was a short distance south of Debir.

The account states that Anakim were scattered throughout the region, but they were all destroyed, leaving none in the land of Israel. They remained only in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod, areas

where we will later see that the Philistines maintained control. They are located relatively near the Mediterranean Sea.

This seems perhaps to not necessarily mean that this was done following the war with the northern alliance, since many of these lived in areas previously captured. Rather it appears to be a summary of how the Anakim had been defeated throughout this period of war.

The Anakim were such large, fierce fighters that the sight of them had unnerved the ten tribes the first time Israel had approached Canaan to capture it (Num. 13:28,33; Deut. 1:28; 2:10,11,21). Perhaps this is why here we are told that Israel successfully overwhelmed and defeated them. We will read more about them in Joshua chaps. 14,15. One wonders if Goliath and similar giants later were descendants of these people, since they came from the areas of the Philistines where the Anakim were left.

Note that, as early as the writings of Joshua, a distinction is made between Judah and Israel (v21). They were not separate nations by any means, but they identified different regions which finally resulted in different nations many years later in the reign of the kings.

The account of battles ends by telling us that Israel had completed their task of taking the land. They captured it all as God had commanded them through Moses. Joshua gave it to the tribes for their inheritance, and the land had peace from war. This is a summary statement, since the land had not yet been divided to the tribes.



## Joshua 12

### ***12:1-24 - List of kings defeated***

This chapter simply lists the kings defeated by the Israelites, including the cities or territories they ruled.

#### **Sihon king of Hesbon**

First, the kings east of Jordan are listed. Sihon, king of the Amorites, lived in Heshbon (see **map**). He ruled half of Gilead, from Aroer on the Arnon to the river Jabbok. He apparently also controlled territory in the Jordan plain from the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) to the Dead Sea.

This territory had been captured by Israel under Moses' leadership.

#### **Og, king of Bashan**

Moses also led Israel to defeat Og, king of Bashan. He also ruled half of Gilead in the north, from the territory of Sihon to Mt. Hermon north of the Sea of Galilee.

All this territory east of Jordan was captured under Moses' leadership and given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh.

#### **Territory west of Jordan captured under Joshua.**

The territory west of the Jordan was captured under the leadership of Joshua, as described in this book to this point. The kings defeated are listed as a summary here. The territory included from the Valley of Lebanon all the way to hills near Seir (Edom).

Altogether 31 kings were defeated.

## Joshua 13

### Part 3. Israel Divides Canaan (Joshua 13-24)

#### I. Division of the land among the tribes (Josh. 13-22)

##### A. Inheritance of the Tribes East of Jordan

###### **13:1-6 - God commands Joshua to divide the land**

Israel had conquered the land, but Joshua was growing old and the land had not yet been divided among the tribes. God spoke to Joshua, described the land, and commanded him to divide it by lot among the tribes as God had commanded.

It appears that not all the inhabitants of the land had even yet been driven out. Surely the Israelites had not yet moved into their territories. Yet God had Joshua divide the territories up to the tribes based on their faith that God would yet drive out the inhabitants before them.

###### **13:7-14 - The land east of Jordan as given to the 2½ tribes**

The land west of Jordan was to be divided among 9 ½ of the tribes, because the territory east of Jordan had been given to the 2 ½ tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh. This included the territories captured from Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan. This territory is here described, naming cities and areas included.

The Geshurites and Maachathites had not been driven out from among Israel but remained in their territories even when this was written.

This land east of Jordan had not only been captured but had been divided among the 2 ½ tribes. However, the Levites did not inherit land as a tribe. They were given individual cities scattered throughout the territories of the other tribes. This was because their inheritance was the service they did to God among the tribes.

###### **13:15-23 - The territory assigned to Reuben**

Reuben's inheritance is described, naming cities and boundaries. As the inheritance of each tribe is described in the following chapters, the territories are difficult to know exactly today, though of course it was clear to the Israelites when it occurred.

In general, their inheritance included territory taken from Sihon king of Heshbon. It stretched from the Arnon river north along the Dead Sea till it reached the Jordan River. See *map*.

The record tells again that the Israelites had slain Balaam, son of Beor, who had been hired by Balak to prophesy against Israel. See Num. 22-25.

###### **13:24-28 - The inheritance of Gad**

Gad's inheritance is described. It was the territory north of Reuben, including the rest of the region captured from Sihon king of Heshbon. It included much of the land of Gilead along the Jordan river as far north as the Sea of Galilee (Chinnereth). See *map*.

###### **13:29-33 - The inheritance of the half tribe of Manasseh**

The half tribe of Manasseh also inherited east of Jordan. Their inheritance was generally the territory captured from Og king of Bashan. This was north of Gad's inheritance, including the rest of Gilead. See *map*.

Again we are told that Levi did not receive a territory, since they had received cities scattered throughout the land.

## Joshua 14

### B. Inheritance of Caleb - Joshua 14

#### **14:1-5 - Arrangements for dividing the land to the 9½ tribes**

The previous chapter recorded the area given to the 2 ½ tribes who inherited east of Jordan. Now begins the account of the remaining 9 ½ tribes that inherited west of Jordan. This inheritance was supervised by Joshua and the high priest Eleazar along with the heads of the various tribes.

The territory would be divided into 10 areas, then the areas would be assigned to the various tribes by lot, as God had instructed through Moses (Num. 26:55). The Levites would not receive a territory, as discussed in the previous chapter. They received cities scattered throughout the territories of the other tribes, so they could lead in spiritual service (Num. 35:2-8).

One might expect that would leave only eleven tribes to inherit territory. However, Joseph received the birthright, including a double portion of territory. This was accomplished, according to the instructions of Jacob, by giving territory to each of Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. The effect was to make a total of 12 tribes to inherit, because Joseph's descendants counted as two tribes. See on Gen. 48:1-22 (esp. v5); 1 Chron. 5:1.

#### **14:6-9 - Caleb requests his inheritance**

Caleb was the son of Jephunneh of the tribe of Judah. He came to Joshua, along with other people of the tribe of Judah, to request that he be given the inheritance Moses had promised him. See Num. 13,14.

When Israel had first approached Canaan at Kadesh Barnea, Moses had sent 12 spies into the land. Ten of them had brought back bad reports saying the people could not take the land. This had discouraged the people, leading them to refuse to go into the land. As a result, God had said the older generation would not be allowed to enter at all, but would wander in the wilderness forty years till they died.

The other two spies, however, had maintained their faith in God and had urged the people to enter. Those two were Joshua and Caleb. God had said they would be the only two of the older generation to enter the land. Obviously Joshua entered as Moses' successor and leader of the nation. Caleb also had entered, as God had promised, and now he was requesting to be given the inheritance promised him. See Num. 14:23,24; Deut. 1:36.

#### **14:10-15 - Caleb's descendants given Hebron**

Caleb had been 40 years old as a faithful spy at Kadesh Barnea (v7). Forty-five years had passed since then, making Caleb 85 years old. Yet he was still strong and active. He believed he could lead his people to capture the territory of his inheritance from the people of the land. So he requested to be given a territory among the same region where he had traveled when he spied out the land.

The territory they had spied had been inhabited by the Anakim, the giants, as discussed in 11:21. These were the giants whose appearance had so discouraged the Israelites. One of the cities the Anakim had inhabited was Hebron, and that was the territory Joshua said Caleb could have. It had formerly been named Kirjath Arba, after Arba who was the greatest leader of the Anakim.

We are not told here, but chap. 15 records the actual taking of the city of Hebron by Caleb and his descendants (15:13ff). The chronology is somewhat confusing, however. Joshua 11:21 had said that Joshua had driven the Anakim out of Hebron when they had defeated the armies that attacked them. It is unclear whether that was a summary statement which included the later victory by Caleb. Or perhaps the event recorded here in chap. 14 had actually occurred earlier, and Caleb had been the leader who actually won the victory in chap. 11. Or perhaps the best ex-

planation is that the Anakim had been defeated and driven from Hebron earlier as recorded in chap. 11 but had returned afterward as Israel fought elsewhere. So now Caleb's family had to fight to defeat them again, but this time it did not require the whole army to win the victory.

The land is again said to have peace from war. The occasional battles to capture or re-capture various areas are apparently not viewed as an exception. The point is that the major warfare required to take the land was now over. There was no doubt in anyone's mind who now controlled the territory. It belonged to Israel and any future battles were simply to remove other people living in their territory. The war itself was over.

## Joshua 15

### C. The Inheritance of the Tribe of Judah - Joshua 15

#### **15:1-12 - The borders of Judah**

As with the tribes east of Jordan, I will not attempt to give a technical description of Judah's territory. As before, in fact it is difficult to determine the exact location of many places named on the boundaries after so many years have passed.

In general, Judah's territory stretched from the Dead Sea on the east to the Mediterranean Sea on the west. The northern border stretched westward from the northern tip of the Dead Sea, where the Jordan entered the Sea. It passed Jerusalem and went west to the sea. On the south, Judah's territory stretched to Edom and the wilderness of Zin south of Canaan.

#### **15:13-19 - Caleb captures his inheritance**

As recorded in 14:6-15, Joshua had agreed that Caleb could receive Hebron as his inheritance. This had formerly been named Kirjath-Arba, after the great Anakim leader named Arba, father of Anak.

Caleb and his family were successful in capturing Hebron, driving out in the process three Anak warriors named Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi. This would be no small feat, since these men were giants and great warriors that had so frightened Israel's spies when they first came to Canaan. See notes on chap. 14. As discussed in chap. 14, the chronology here is not clear, but the most likely explanation is that Israel had earlier defeated Hebron driving out the Anakim, but more had returned and had to be driven out at this time by Caleb.

Caleb and his family then went to another nearby city named Kirjath Sepher. This was later renamed Debir. This city too was captured according to chap. 10:38,39. So again some people must have returned in the meanwhile.

Caleb offered to give his daughter Achsah as wife to whomever would attack and capture Debir. This challenge was taken up by Othniel, Caleb's nephew (son of Caleb's brother Kenaz). He attacked and captured Debir, so Caleb gave him his daughter Achsah as promised.

After the victory, Achsah and Othniel agreed to ask Caleb to also give them a field including springs for water. This request was made and Caleb agreed giving her upper and lower springs.

This event is also recorded in Judges 1:11-15. It is obviously the same story, so it cannot have happened both times. Perhaps the story occurred in Joshua's day as recorded in Joshua 15 but is included in Judges 1 for completeness to explain in some detail the victories of Judah and to introduce Othniel who later became a judge. (Or vice-versa, it may have occurred later as recorded in Judges 1, but for completeness it was recorded in the book of Joshua by the one who later wrote the story. But it would seem that would make Caleb a very old man here, since Joshua had already died.)

This same Othniel, Caleb's nephew, later became a judge of Israel as recorded in Judges 3:7-11.

This event is also discussed in Judges 1:11-15 (see notes there).

#### **15:20-63 - The cities given to Judah**

The record then names the cities included in the territory given to Judah. Some of these had been named in the battles Israel fought in capturing the land. Others are named later in subsequent events in Israel's history.

Perhaps the most significant is that the people were not able to drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem. Even at that time Jerusalem was a great stronghold. When the record was written, Jerusalem still had not been taken. It was later captured by David as recorded in 2 Sam. 5:6-9.

## Joshua 16

### D. The Inheritance of the Tribe of Ephraim - Joshua 16

#### ***16:1-4 - Joseph's sons next to inherit***

The two tribes coming from Joseph were next to inherit. Again, we will not attempt to describe the territory specifically.

The southern boundary of their inheritance stretched from the Jordan at Jericho west past Bethel to the sea.

#### ***16:5-10 - Inheritance of Ephraim***

The territory of Ephraim went north from the southern border described above. Some of their cities were actually within the territory given to Manasseh (cf. 17:8,9).

However, Canaanites continued to live in Gezer. Ephraim did not drive them out, as God had commanded them to do, but instead made them forced laborers. Already trouble was brewing as Israel disobeyed God's command to completely destroy all the people of the land.

## Joshua 17

### E. The Inheritance of Manasseh - Chap. 17

#### ***17:1-6 - Inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad***

Half the tribe of Manasseh had already received their inheritance east of Jordan. That inheritance went to the descendants of Manasseh's firstborn Machir. This chapter records how the rest of the sons of Manasseh received their inheritance.

Zelophehad was a great grandson of Machir. He had no sons to inherit after him. God had arranged for his daughters to inherit in his place, as discussed in Num. 27:1-11 and chap. 36. Here these daughters came to Eleazar the high priest, Joshua, and the rulers to remind him about their inheritance.

The territory given to the descendants of Manasseh west of Jordan was then divided into ten sections, and the daughters of Zelophehad received their inheritance among the sons who inherited.

#### ***17:7-13 - The territory given to Manasseh***

Like Ephraim's territory, Manasseh's extended from the Jordan westward, but Manasseh's territory was north of Ephraim's. They were separated by the brook Kanah. Manasseh's territory extended to the Mediterranean Sea on the west.

On the north it extended to the plain of Jezreel at Megiddo. The tribes of Issachar and Asher were north of Ephraim. Again we are told that some towns inhabited by Ephraimites were actually in Manasseh's territory. Likewise, Manasseh was given some towns that were actually in the territories of Issachar and Asher.

And again, as with Ephraim, Manasseh was unable to drive out the Canaanites from some of the cities in their territory. When Manasseh was strong, they put the Canaanites to slave labor, but never drove them out completely.

#### ***17:14-18 - The complaint of the sons of Joseph***

Some people from the descendants of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) later came to Joshua and complained about the amount of territory given them. They said they were a great people and should be given more territory. Actually, they had been given a very large territory right in the midst of the land, and in addition half of the tribe of Manasseh had land east of Jordan.

Joshua responded by pointing out that, if they were such a great people, then they should be able to make room for themselves within the territory given them. He suggested first that they should clear the forests in the territory they had and make room to live there.

The people complained that this was not enough room and they could not drive out the inhabitants in the valley of Jezreel because they were strong and had chariots made of iron. This begins to show the real problem. Israel lacked room because they had not destroyed all the people of the land!

Joshua replied that a great people, as they claimed to be, could handle this situation. He claimed they had been given more than one lot, but it was their duty to clear it of forest and Canaanites. Here the failure of the people to destroy all the people of the land was already becoming a problem. The people complained about lack of room, but they lacked room because they had not obeyed God and driven out all the people of the land.

## Joshua 18

### F. Division of the Land for Other Tribes

#### ***18:1-3 - Remaining tribes admonished to choose their possession***

Israel met and set up the tabernacle at Shiloh. Shiloh was in the territory of Ephraim north of Jerusalem and even north from the city Israel had captured at Ai. The tabernacle is mentioned later as being at Shiloh. Apparently it remained there for quite some time. See Judges 18:31; 21:19; 1 Sam. 1:3; 3:21; 14:3; Jer. 7:12; Psa. 78:60.

At this point five tribes had obtained the land of their inheritance: 2½ on the east side and 2½ on the west side. The remaining seven tribes needed to receive their inheritance and settle there. The land was subdued before Israel in the sense they clearly had control of it, but still the tribes needed to move into their inheritance.

Joshua called the people together and remonstrated against them for procrastinating. They were neglecting to possess the land God had given them.

#### ***18:4-10 - Men sent to divide up the land***

Joshua proposed that each of the tribes appoint three men to survey the land (this appears to me to refer to the seven tribes that remained to inherit territory, though perhaps it refers to all twelve tribes). This group would examine the land and divide it up into seven parcels of land. Then Joshua would cast lots to determine what territory would be given to which tribes.

The territories would not include the areas that had already been assigned to tribes east and west of Jordan. Nor would it include any territory for the Levites, since they would inherit cities but not a territory.

As Joshua had instructed, the men traveled through the land writing down the cities. Then they divided up the area into seven territories. Then Joshua cast lots to determine which of these territories would be assigned to which tribes.

#### ***18: 11-28 - Territory assigned to Benjamin***

The first tribe whose territory is then described was Benjamin. They received a region between what had been assigned to Judah and Ephraim. It bordered at the Jordan north of the Dead Sea and stretched to the west between Judah and Ephraim's territories.

Again, we will not attempt to determine specific boundaries, but this was the general area they received.

The account then names the above cities as being given to Benjamin.



## Joshua 19

### ***19:1-9 - The inheritance of Simeon***

The inheritance of the tribe of Simeon is described next. Their inheritance was taken out of the territory of the tribe of Judah, because the territory given to Judah was more than they needed. So Simeon was given a number of cities found in Judah's territory.

### ***19:10-16 - The inheritance of Zebulun***

The next territory described was given to the tribe of Zebulun. Again we will not attempt to determine specific boundaries. However, in general Zebulun's territory was centrally located north of Manasseh's territory (the Manasseh west of Jordan). It was surrounded by Assher to the west, Issachar to the southeast, and Naphtali to the northeast.

### ***19:17-23 - The inheritance of Issachar***

Next came the territory given to Issachar. They received next to Zebulun, but southeast from them. Issachar held a region along the Jordan river, north of the valley of Jezreel but south of the Sea of Galilee. They were surrounded by Manasseh to the south, Zebulun to the northwest and Naphtali to the north.

### ***19:24-31 - The inheritance of Asher***

Asher's territory was along the Mediterranean Sea. It extended north from Manasseh and northwest from Mt. Carmel all along the sea as far north as the city of Tyre. It had Manasseh to its south, Zebulun to its southeast, and Naphtali to its east.

### ***19:32-39 - The inheritance of Naphtali***

Next came Naphtali. They inherited along the west coast of the Sea of Galilee and northward from there between the Jordan river to their east and Asher to their west. Issachar was to their south and Zebulun to their southwest.

### ***19:40-48 - The inheritance of Dan***

The last tribe to be given its territory was Dan. Dan received territory also extending to the Mediterranean Sea, but west of Ephraim and Benjamin. They had Judah to their south and Manasseh to their north.

Later Dan also took some territory in the far north of Canaan along the Jordan River near Mt. Hermon. This was previously called Leshem, but people of Dan captured it. So their territory, like Manasseh's was divided into two separate areas.

### ***19:49-51 - Joshua's inheritance***

Caleb had been a faithful spy and was given his own special inheritance in Israel as one of the only two people from the older generation to enter Canaan. The same was true for Joshua, so he too was given his own inheritance. He was given a city named Timnath Serah in Ephraim.

All these divisions of territory were agreed upon by the people under the leadership of Eleazar the priest and Joshua.

## Joshua 20

### G. Appointment of Cities of Refuge

#### **20:1-6 - God commands Joshua to appoint cities of refuge**

In Num. 35 God had instructed Moses about the cities of refuge. They were to be cities where a manslayer could flee if he had accidentally killed another person. These cities are discussed further in Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:22-25; Deut. 19:1-13.

According to Num. 35, if anyone accidentally killed another person, he could flee to the city of refuge. Eventually his case would be tried. If a person killed a man by striking him with an iron implement or with a stone or a wooden weapon in his hand, then he would be considered a murderer, and murderers must be put to death. The same would apply if he shoved the man because he hated him, or if he were to lie in wait and throw something at him and kill him. Or it would apply if he just struck the man with his hand because he hates him. All such cases were considered murder.

The sentence of death would be carried out by the avenger of blood. See Num. 35:21,24,27; Deut. 19:6,12. The avenger of blood was a near kinsman (see NKJV footnote). If he found the murderer outside the city of refuge, he could kill him.

On the other hand, suppose a man suddenly pushed a man without any hatred toward him, or suppose he threw something without lying in wait, or suppose he threw a stone without seeing the man, yet the man was not an enemy and there was no intent to harm. These cases were considered “accidental” (cf. Ex. 21:12-14). The congregation must make a judgment in the case to determine whether or not the man was guilty of murder.

If the death was determined to be accidental, then the congregation should return him to the city of refuge to deliver or save him from death at the hand of the avenger of blood. He must remain in that city, not going outside the city limits till the death of the anointed high priest.

If the manslayer were to venture outside the city limits, and if the avenger of blood caught him there, the avenger could kill him without himself being guilty of murder. The manslayer would then be responsible for his own death, since he should have stayed in the city.

When the high priest died, however, the manslayer would be free to leave the city of refuge and return to his home without danger.

#### **20:7-9 - The cities appointed**

There were to be three cities on each side of the Jordan, a total of six altogether. They were scattered throughout the territory Israel held so that, no matter where a man killed another man, he could flee to a city that was relatively close. So three were on the west of Jordan and three on the east, spaced out across the land.

The three appointed on the west were Kedesh in Galilee, in the mountains of Naphtali, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba (Hebron) in the mountains of Judah. The three east of Jordan were assigned Bezer in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh. (See *map*.)-

## Joshua 21

### H. Cities Appointed for the Levites

#### **21:1-3 - The Levites request their land**

All the tribes had received their lands of inheritance, and the cities of refuge had been appointed. One more group of people needed to receive their possession: the Levites. The heads of the Levite houses came before Eleazar and Joshua to request to be given the cities that God had commanded Moses to be given to them.

This was also discussed in Num. 35. The Levites were not to inherit a territory as a tribe, as did other tribes. Instead they were to receive cities scattered throughout the land. This was to include common land around each city.

The common lands would extend outward from the cities themselves. These lands were for the grazing of the Levites' herds, cattle, and all animals. The Levites were to be given 48 cities altogether, of which six would be cities of refuge where the manslayer could flee (as described in chap 20).

Tribes with larger land holdings would be required to give a larger number of cities to the Levites, and tribes with smaller land holdings would give fewer cities.

#### **21:4-8 - The number of cities assigned by family**

The Levites were divided into three families according to the sons of Levi. The Kohathites, descendants of Kohath, included the descendants of Aaron who would include the priests. The descendants of Aaron were to be given thirteen cities in Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The other Kohathites were to be given ten cities in Ephraim, Dan, and the half tribe of Manasseh west of Jordan.

The descendants of Gershom, the Gershomites, were to be given 13 cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and from the half-tribe of Manasseh east of Jordan.

Then the descendants of Merari, the Merarites, were to be given 12 cities from Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

#### **21:9-42 - The cities named**

These verses name the 48 cities given to the Levites. Again, we will not try to specifically identify them and their location.

The only point of particular interest is the fact that Hebron was appointed a city for the Levites, but it had already been given to Caleb. The text explains that the city with its common lands was given to the Levites, but Caleb was given the fields around the city along with the villages that surrounded it.

#### **21:43-45 - Fulfillment of the land promise**

God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would make their descendants a great nation, give them the land of Canaan, and through their descendants would come a great blessing on all nations (salvation through Jesus) – see Gen. 12:2,3,7; 15:5-8,18-21; 13:15,17; 18:18; 22:17,18; 24:7; 26:3,4,24; 28:3,4; 32:12.

This passage of Joshua expressly states that God did fulfill that promise. See also on 23:14; cf. 11:23. Specifically, the account says that God gave Israel all the land that He had sworn to their fathers to give. They took possession of the land and dwelt in it.

In the land, He gave them rest. Their enemies could not withstand them, but the Lord delivered their enemies into their hands. Again, nothing failed of anything good that God had promised to do for Israel. It all came to pass. There is no disputing such plain language.

God gave them the land because of the promises He had made to their fathers. So the passage states. But their keeping the land depended on their own willingness to be faithful (see

23:11-16). They turned out not to be faithful, so they lost the land eventually. But for now they had it as God had promised.

Amazingly, there are those who say that Israel never received all the land God promised to give. So they claim this promise to Abraham must still be fulfilled sometime yet in the future. They also claim that God still has great blessings for the physical descendants of Israel. This plainly contradicts this passage and many others. It simply is a false claim and as such it denies the accuracy of Scripture, specifically the accuracy of Joshua.

For further information, see our articles on premillennialism at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

At this point, God had fulfilled two of these three major promises to Abraham regarding his descendants. The people became a great nation in Egypt. That first promise was fulfilled by the time Moses led them out of Egypt. Now the second promise had been fulfilled as God had led them into the land and subdued it before them.

The only promise remaining to be fulfilled was the promise of a great blessing to come upon all nations. That was fulfilled many years later when Jesus came to die for all men's sins. Meanwhile, until that promise was fulfilled, God worked with the nation of Israel, trying to keep them faithful. This becomes the story of the rest of the Old Testament until the birth of Jesus.

## Joshua 22

### I. Tribes East of Jordan Sent Home Build an Altar - Joshua 22

#### ***The eastern tribes sent to their inheritance –22:1-5***

During Moses' lifetime, Israel had captured the land east of Jordan. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh had been granted permission to settle this land for their inheritance. However before they could return home to settle their own land, God had required them to go with the other tribes to help capture the land west of Jordan. Joshua had required these 2½ tribes to keep this agreement. See notes on Num. 32; Joshua 1:12-18.

At the present point in the account, Israel had captured the territory west of Jordan and had been given their designated inheritances. The 2½ tribes had fulfilled their agreement. Joshua here called these tribes to him and praised them for completing the task they had agreed to do. He plainly stated that they had obeyed God's command, so now they should return home to care for their own inheritance.

Before they left, however, Joshua admonished them to obey God's commands, hold fast to them, and serve God with all their heart and soul. These tribes would face special challenges being east of the river. They would be somewhat remote from the rest of Israel. They would be closest in contact with other nations surrounding Israel on the east. This would create military difficulties and could create problems spiritually. They might be tempted to feel isolated from the worship of God and contact with surrounding nations might lead them to be tempted to participate in false worship. So Joshua gave them this special admonition to be faithful.

#### ***22:6-9 - Joshua's blessing on the 2½ tribes***

Before sending them to their inheritance Joshua pronounced a blessing on them. He said that they had gained many spoils in the victory over the nations of the land. They would return with livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron, and much clothing. These should be divided with the people of their tribes.

So the soldiers departed to go to their inheritance.

#### ***22:10-14 - The 2½ tribes build an altar***

Having reached the river Jordan, the men of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh built an altar. It was great and impressive. I am not clear which side of the river it occupied, east or west. The account says it was on the children of Israel's side, which sounds west.

This was reported to the tribes west of Jordan, and they became greatly concerned about it. We will see that they feared that the tribes east of Jordan intended to worship God separately apart from the tribes west of Jordan. So all Israel gathered together to go to war against the 2½ tribes.

Before attacking, however, they had the good sense to send a delegation to discuss the matter with the 2½ tribes. They sent Phinehas, son of Eleazar the high priest, and with him they sent a chief ruler from each of the 9½ tribes west of Jordan – a total of ten rulers.

#### ***22:15-20 - The admonition from the 9½ tribes***

The delegation from the western tribes warned the eastern tribes not to change the pattern of worship that God had ordained. They warned that building the altar would be rebelling and turning away from God.

To illustrate their concern they referred to recent instances known to all the people in which Israelites had sinned against God. In the matter of Peor the people had worshipped idols and had committed fornication. As a result, many were killed by God in a plague (Num. 25). Achan also had sinned by taking things that had been devoted to God in the fall of Jericho. He was slain (Joshua 7).

But beside their concern for the tribes east of Jordan, the other tribes were concerned that God would be angry with them for not opposing such a departure. They said if the 2½ tribes rebelled, then God would be angry the next day with the whole nation. They evidently remembered the lesson learned from the case of Achan. One man sinned, but the whole nation could not prosper until they punished him. Likewise, they were implying that the nation would be responsible to punish the eastern tribes for their sin or God would hold the whole nation accountable.

They said that they would be willing to give the eastern tribes land where they could settle west of Jordan, if they would at least worship properly. This would be better than taking the inheritance they wanted east of Jordan, if this led them to worship improperly.

Note that they here state plainly their concern. By dwelling in a land so far from the tabernacle of the Lord, the eastern tribes might worship at a separate altar than the one the Lord had designated. They had built another altar, and Israel's concern was that the eastern tribes would not come to the altar at the tabernacle to offer their worship as God had required. So they said for the eastern tribes to move in among the western tribes if necessary to avoid this sin. Note that the sin, which here concerned Israel, did later occur when the northern tribes of Israel separated from the southern tribes of Judah.

### ***22:21-29 - The explanation of the eastern tribes***

The tribes from east of Jordan then responded and explained their purpose in building the altar. They said that they knew it would be wrong to use the altar to worship away from the altar God had designated for offering their various sacrifices. They said if they were to do such a thing as that, then the other tribes would be right in attacking them and God Himself ought to punish them.

But they said their real reason was in essence the very opposite. First, they affirmed several times that they had no intention to use the altar as a place to offer sacrifice of any kind. Instead, the altar was to serve as a reminder to future generations that the eastern tribes were part of Israel and they should be included in the worship of God at His designated place. They feared that future generations might conclude that, since these tribes live east of Jordan, they were not part of Israel's worship to God. People might want to exclude them from worshipping at the true altar. So they built this altar as a witness to remind future generations that they too were servants of God and should worship at the altar in Israel.

### ***22:30-34 - Israel accepts the explanation of the eastern tribes***

Phinehas and the leaders of the western tribes were glad to hear this explanation from the eastern tribes. They rejoiced that the eastern tribes had not committed treachery against God. In so doing, they had avoided God's displeasure from coming on the nation.

They then returned to the western tribes and explained the purpose of the altar as intended by the eastern tribes. This brought joy to all the people of the western tribes, so they realized they did not need to go to war against their own people.

The Reubenites and Gadites then named the altar "Witness," because that was its purpose: a witness to all the tribes that the eastern tribes recognized the God of Israel as the true God.

### ***Lessons to be learned from this event***

1) We must worship God in the way He has commanded. Unauthorized worship is unacceptable, even if it is not specifically condemned in Scripture.

2) People in the congregation must be rebuked and opposed when they sin. If God's people do not rebuke the sin, even if we do not participate in it, God holds us accountable.

3) Before disciplining those who we think might be guilty of sin, we must communicate with them to be sure we understand what has been done and why. We may find that people have not done what we thought they did.

4) If people are not guilty of sin, we should have unity and rejoice in the peace that results.

## Joshua 23

### II. Joshua's final discourses (Josh. 23,24)

#### A. Joshua's Warning to the People - Chap. 23

##### ***23:1-5 - Joshua begins his farewell address***

These events happened a long time later after God had given Israel rest from wars with the surrounding nations, after Joshua was old. He later died at age 110 (24:29); however, Joshua had been said to be old as far back as 13:1. We are not told how long had passed since the land was conquered nor how long it was from the time of this message till Joshua died. However, at least some considerable time must have passed since Israel had divided the land till Joshua gave this parting message.

He called all Israel, along with their leaders, and rehearsed how he had led them into the land. He said that God had fought for them, so they had captured the land and had divided it among them from the Jordan to the Great Sea (Mediterranean). He promised that God would continue to expel the other nations from the land so that Israel could completely possess it for themselves alone (Ex. 23:30). Later in the message he attached conditions to this.

However, this is not to deny that the land had all been given to them. He clearly stated that it had been all given to them and he would repeat this again (21:43-45; 23:14). So the land was theirs. There was no doubt that they possessed it, but there were still people of other nations living in it in certain areas where Israel had not driven them out. And several tribes had yet to move in and take physical possession of their lands (see notes on Judges 1.)

##### ***23:6-10 - Warning to keep God's law and be faithful to Him***

Joshua's final admonition to Israel contains some of the same instructions that the book began with in reciting God's instructions to him when he began to lead the nation (1:5-9). He warned the people to have the courage to do all that God taught in Moses' law, not turning from it to the right or the left.

They were not to in any way compromise with the gods of the people remaining among them. They not only were not to bow in worship to those gods nor swear by them, they were not even to mention them. Instead they were to hold fast and be faithful to the true God.

He reminded them that by God's power they had driven out all the nations from the land; no one had been able to withstand them successfully. God had promised that one of them could chase a thousand, because God was fighting for them as He had promised to do. This promise was being repeated from Deut. 28:7; Lev. 26:8. The point is that by God's power they would be victorious, and their enemies could not defeat them.

##### ***23:11-13 - Warning of consequences for being influenced by the nations***

Whereas Joshua promised God would continue to drive out the inhabitants if Israel was faithful, he here warned that this promise was conditional. If they did not remain true in loving God but allowed themselves to grow attached to the people in sin, God would not continue to drive out the people of the land.

If they clung to the people of the nations, associating with them and making permanent bonds with them such as intermarriage, these people would cause Israel to sin. They would be like a trap or scourge and thorns in their eyes. God would not continue to remove the people of other nations from the land. On the contrary, the Israelites themselves would be removed from the land.

Note the clearly conditional nature of the land promise. God had given them the land in fulfillment of His promise to the fathers. He was willing even to remove the remnant of the people of the nations from the land. But whether or not He did that and whether or not Israel would re-

main in the land would depend on their faithfulness in obedience to Him. Receiving the land was unconditional. Keeping it was conditional. See Lev. 26:14-33; Deut. 28:15-68.

The record of Israel's history after this point, of course, shows they were not faithful and were therefore eventually removed from the land as God promised here and elsewhere.

### ***23:14-16 - Final warning for disobedience***

Joshua then again affirmed that God had kept His promises to Israel. He had done everything He promised to do. Nothing had failed. Cf. 21:44,45. As mentioned before, this absolutely disproves the claims of modern premillennialists. They claim the land promise was not completely fulfilled, so it must be fulfilled when Jesus returns. Joshua absolutely denies their claim. Israel received all God had promised.

For further information, see our articles on premillennialism at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

But then Joshua repeated the conditional nature of keeping the land. They had received it. But whether or not they kept it depended on their future obedience. As surely as God had blessed them in giving them the land, He would just as surely punish them in the future if they did not keep His covenant. His anger would burn against them and they would be destroyed from off the land if they worshipped and served idols.



## Joshua 24

### B. Joshua's Parting Speech and Death - Chap. 24

#### ***24:1-4 - Joshua begins a record of Israel's history***

Joshua's time to die drew near. He sought to give a final admonition to the people before his death. So he called the people to him along with all their officers and judges. They met at Shechem. Shechem was located the middle of Canaan between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. This was the area where Joshua had the people hear the blessings and the cursings from the law in 8:30-35.

Joshua spoke as a prophet for God and revealed to the people a message from God. He began by summarizing the history of God's dealings with Israel. This became a common approach for dealing with the nation (cf. Acts 7).

He began with Terah, father of Abraham and Nahor. Terah had lived beyond the river (Euphrates) and there had served other gods. This implies that Abraham also served other gods, but perhaps not necessarily.

In any case, Abraham surely became a follower of the true God. God called him and he followed God's command to move into Canaan. There God gave to Abraham his son Isaac and to Isaac his sons Esau and Jacob. To Esau God gave the land of Seir or Edom, but Jacob and his descendants went down into Egypt where they became slaves.

#### ***24:5-8 - The exodus from Egypt***

God then described how He had sent Moses and Aaron and brought plagues on Egypt, so as to compel them to let Israel leave. Then he brought Israel to the Red Sea, pursued by the Egyptians. There the people cried to the Lord and He separated Israel from the Egyptians by darkness and eventually caused the Egyptians to drown in the sea.

Israel had seen God's great miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea, yet they had sinned against God and been compelled to wander in the wilderness. Finally God brought them to the land east of Jordan. The Amorites fought with them, but God gave Israel victory so they could possess the land.

All this history was clearly known to the Israelites, yet God reviewed it to remind them of His great blessings to them.

#### ***24:9-13 - Further events in the conquest of the land***

God then described how Balak, king of Moab, had called Balaam to bring a curse upon Israel so Moab could defeat Israel. However, God did not heed Balaam's desires but instead made him pronounce blessings on Israel. So God delivered Israel from Balaam's intentions.

Then God brought Israel into the promised land itself, west of Jordan. There the people of Jericho and other people of the land fought against Israel, but God gave Israel the victory. He fought for Israel, even sending the hornet to demoralize their enemies before Israel physically attacked them. This is not mentioned directly elsewhere in Joshua, but it had been predicted in Ex. 23:27,28; Deut. 7:20. Here Joshua confirmed that it had happened. So ultimately the victory was not achieved by the power of Israel's weapons but by God's power.

The land was then given by God to Israel. They were enabled to live in cities they had not built and eat crops they had not planted. God richly blessed them by bringing them into the land and giving them the fruits of other people's labors. They had not done the work to build up the land, and in many ways they had not done the work to conquer it (God had). Though they were required to meet conditions which involved work and even hard work, yet they had not earned the blessings God gave. This is the essence of grace.

### **24:14,15 - Challenge to serve God**

Having described God's goodness and blessings to Israel, Joshua challenged them to fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth. They should put away all other gods and serve the Lord.

He identified the gods they should put away as: (1) The gods their fathers served on the other side of the river (vv 14,15). This appears to refer to the gods served by Terah and the family when they lived across the Euphrates before God called Abraham (as described also in v2). (2) The gods of Egypt that some served when they were there. (3) The gods of the Amorites who dwelt in and around Canaan. All these gods were false gods, had not blessed Israel, and should not be served. They should serve the true God, the God of Abraham, who had brought them out of Egypt and into Canaan.

They ought to serve the true God, so Joshua challenged them to make up their minds to do so. If they would not serve God, then which of these other gods would they serve? This appears to contrast God to these false gods, to help Israel see that the other gods were surely a poor choice.

Finally, Joshua stated the choice he and his family had made. They would serve the true God. Of course, this was the choice he was urging all Israel to make.

Note that people do have the power to choose for themselves religiously. We are not robots having no power to choose for ourselves. Nor are we predestined by unconditional election, so God has made the choice for us and we can do nothing except follow the compulsion where His Spirit leads us, as Calvinism teaches. Rather, we are creatures with the power to choose for ourselves, because God has granted us that power. We may choose incorrectly, but God will allow us to make that choice. He will ultimately punish us for such a wrong choice, but He will grant us the freedom now to make it. See also Genesis 2:16,17; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15; 11:25; 1 Kings 18:21; Psalm 119:30.

For further information about man's power to choose, see our articles about individual responsibility in salvation and about election (predestination) at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

However, as parents, we are responsible to make the best choice for ourselves and then teach it to our children. We cannot, of course, ultimately decide for them. When they are on their own, they will exercise their power to choose for themselves. But we can forbid all evil in our own homes, whether the evil of idolatrous worship or any other evil acts. And we can insist that those subject to us learn about the true God and be urged in every possible way to serve Him. This was the choice Joshua made for his family. See Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Titus 2:4; Genesis 18:19.

### **24:16-18 - The people affirm their desire to serve the Lord**

The people responded to Joshua's challenge, as he had hoped they would, by committing themselves to serve the true God. They sought to put far from them the service of other gods or the forsaking of the true God.

They recognized the Lord as the God who had brought them from slavery in Egypt, had done great miracles before them, and had cared for them and met their needs as they had traveled through the wilderness. Furthermore, God had driven out before them the people of the land and had given the land to them. So they ought to serve the Lord as the true God.

This is exactly what Joshua had taught them. It was the correct response, and it was the response Joshua sought. The people recognized God's blessings to them and their obligation to serve Him, not other gods. We should do the same.

### **24:19-24 - The people promise to serve the Lord and put away other gods**

When the people stated their commitment to serve the true God, Joshua warned them of the seriousness of the commitment. He went so far as to tell them they could not serve Him, because

His requirements were so high. He is a holy God, who requires holiness of His people. He is a jealous God, who would not forgive their sins and unfaithfulness. If they left Him to serve other Gods, He would consume and destroy them, despite all the good He had done them in the past.

Surely these statements are hyperbole – exaggeration for purpose of making a point, like verses such as Luke 14:26ff. Surely God is willing to forgive. The animal sacrifices they had then could not effectively remove sin (Heb. 10:1-17), but they offered forgiveness and actually obtained it provisionally until Jesus' death gave the permanent forgiveness (Heb. 9:15). God is a God of love who had done many wonderful things for them and now has sent His Son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. So, He is a holy and jealous God, but He is also willing to forgive and surely He wanted them to serve Him. So Joshua must have been making a point so they would realize their need to commit themselves truly to His service.

Clearly the people did not believe serving God was impossible, for they proceeded to affirm their determination to serve God despite Joshua's statement. And Joshua himself surely did not mean that serving God was impossible, for He then accepted their choice.

He reinforced their commitment by calling upon witnesses to ratify it, much like legal contracts today may require witnesses to verify the transaction. But in this case the witnesses were the people themselves. Joshua called on them to serve as witnesses that they really intended to make this commitment. Of course, the point of all this was to solemnly emphasize the seriousness of this decision, so they would realize they should not back out or violate it.

The people then persisted in the commitment. They agreed that they were witnesses to one another's commitment. They affirmed that the Lord would be their God and they would obey His voice. So Joshua called upon them to put away other gods.

### ***24:25-28 - The covenant recorded and witnessed by a stone***

This agreement made by the people is here called a covenant or solemn agreement. In reality it was just a renewal of the covenant the people had made with God when the law had been given at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:1-8). But it is here called a covenant, a statute, and an ordinance.

Joshua recorded it in the Book of the Law of God. This is the term used for the Book Moses had written (see Deut. 31:24-26 and cf. Ex. 24:1-8 above). This shows that Joshua continued to write by inspiration in that Book.

Joshua then took a large stone and set it by an oak near the sanctuary. He said the stone would serve as a witness to the people's covenant, because it had heard what the Lord had spoken. Of course, it had not literally heard, but it had been there and now served the purpose of a permanent witness that the people had committed themselves to serve God. If they thought to deny Him, the stone would testify of their covenant.

Joshua then let the people return to their homes.

Note again how stones were used as witnesses to confirm commitments. See notes on chap. 4 for a similar example and notes there about other examples. This helps us see why God chose to write the 10 Commands on tables of stone. This was the formal way in that day of confirming a covenant, at least among Israel.

Note also that this verse implies that the sanctuary of the Lord was at this time at Shechem, whereas earlier (and again later) it was at Shiloh (see on 18:1-10, etc.). Note on the map that Shiloh and Shechem were quite close to one another. Perhaps the covenant was made at Shechem, but the stone was then moved the short distance to Shiloh and set up by the sanctuary there.

### ***24:29-31 - The death of Joshua***

After this Joshua died at the age of 110 years old. He was buried at the edge (border) of his inheritance at Timnath Serah in Ephraim on the north side of Mt. Gaash. This inheritance had been given him as recorded in 19:50.

Israel had served the Lord all the days of Joshua and of the leaders (elders) who outlived him but had been alive to see all that the Lord had done for Israel in bringing them into the land. This shows that the generation who made the covenant was willing to keep it. In doing so they were at least better than the previous generation.

The implication is that the people did not remain faithful in following generations. This is borne out in the book of Judges.

Here again we read the death of a great man of God. Death is the common lot of all mankind, no matter how good. Yet it is sad when we read of it. Joshua had done great work for God and for the people. He had led them into the land, defeated the enemies, and led them in faithfulness throughout his lifetime. In a sense even Moses had not accomplished that.

### **24:32,33 - The burial of Joseph and the death of Eleazar**

Other interesting notes about great men of God are recorded to close the book.

Joseph had made the people of Israel swear that they would take his bones with them when they left Egypt to go back to Canaan (see Gen. 50:25). Heb. 11:22 speaks of this as an act of faith, because it showed that Joseph was convinced the people would really return to receive the land as God had promised. Exodus 13:19 had recorded that the people did take his bones with them when they left.

Here we are told that his bones were not only brought into Canaan but were buried in Shechem in a plot of ground which had been bought by Jacob from the father of Shechem as recorded in Gen. 33:19. This area was included in the territory that Joseph's son Ephraim had inherited.

Finally, we are told of the death of Eleazar the high priest. Just as Joshua had succeeded Moses, so Eleazar had succeeded his father Aaron as high priest. See on Num. 20:22-29. He had served during Joshua's period as leader. Here we are told also of his death. He was buried in a plot land belonging to his son Phinehas also in the mountains of Ephraim.

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