

Entering the Inheritance

Studies in Joshua 1–12

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A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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First Published, 2018

Revision 1, 2020

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This text has been edited from a transcript of four talks given by David Gooding at the CMML Missionary Conference, Greenwood Hills, PA, USA in June 1988.

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Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast

BT1 9YR

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Myrtlefield catalogue no: jos.001/dw

Introduction and Overview

Now let us begin to read. This afternoon we shall read extensively to quieten our spirits before the Lord, and also to lay a foundation for the meditations that we shall have in the ensuing days. First of all, the book of Genesis please, and it is God speaking to Abraham:

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to tell them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness. And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, O Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took him all these, and divided them in the midst . . . And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward they shall come out with great substance. But thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. And in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full. (Gen 15:5-10, 12-16)

With that, we turn to what shall be our main study this week, the book of Joshua, and begin by noting some key passages:

Now it came to pass after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. (Josh 1:1-2) And the priests that bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all Israel passed over on dry ground, until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan. (3:17) And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they pursued them, and they were all fallen by the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all Israel returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not back his hand, wherewith he stretched out the javelin, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. (Josh 8:24-26)

Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD, the God of Israel, in mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of unhewn stones, upon which no man had lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote, in the presence of the children of Israel. And all Israel, and their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger as the homeborn; half of them in front of mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded, that they should bless the people of Israel first of all. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them. (8:30–35)

And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, while they were in the going down of Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died from the hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword. Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel; and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stayed in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel. (10:11–14)

And finally, a passage that will help us to focus the way the New Testament deals with this Old Testament book and applies it to us:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men: Though it be but a man's covenant, yet when it hath been confirmed, no one maketh it void, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. Now this I say; A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more promise: but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise. (Gal 3:13–18)

May the Lord give us good understanding of his holy Word.

Why choose the book of Joshua?

Once more by your kindness it has fallen to me to lead us in our devotions each day, and I have chosen this year that we should meditate together in the Old Testament book of Joshua. I have done it greatly daring, I do admit. For I am persuaded that there isn't a missionary on the face of the earth who doesn't know his Joshua forwards, backwards and sideways; not a missionary who hasn't used it to preach to his Sunday school, to his Bible class, and in particular to the believers. Nonetheless, it seemed to me that sometimes it is the familiar passages of holy Scripture which, coming to us afresh in our times of contemplation and devotion, are calculated to comfort and encourage our hearts in the Lord.

The book of Joshua, of course, has spoken directly to the hearts of God's people all down the centuries. How would it not? For if Joshua is the Hebrew form of that hero's name, in the Greek translation his name becomes Jesus. As early as Justin Martyr, the great Christian apologist, you will find the early Christians reading their book of Joshua, and irresistibly being drawn to make the parallel between Joshua of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New. As any schoolboy knows, Joshua talks of 'Jehovah our Saviour', and so does Jesus. Sophisticated missionaries and servants of the Lord though we may be, who shall tell us that we mustn't indulge ourselves a little, these early mornings and the days that are to come, and let ourselves sit back and thoroughly enjoy the contemplation of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Thus shall we refresh ourselves. Thus shall we prepare ourselves again to go back to the fray and, along with the captain of the host of the Lord, continue our fight against his enemies and ours.

Israel's 'rest'

Joshua of the Old Testament, by the grace and appointment of God, led ancient Israel into their rest. It is a concept we shall meet time and time again in the ancient history. So the land had rest, and God gave his people rest from war. For all that, as we readily recognise, the rest into which Joshua brought his people was but partial and temporary. Perhaps the earliest commentator on the book of Joshua was the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and he comments, in chapters 3 and 4, that if Joshua had really given the people rest then God would not have spoken again centuries later, in Psalm 95, of another rest, saying, 'Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart. And don't be like your predecessors in the wilderness who sinned against God, and God swore that they should not enter into his rest. You who live in this later epoch, to you is the promise given, today if you will enter it, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.'

But Joshua did not completely fulfil the ancient promise given to Abraham and to his seed, and 'there remains a rest for the people of God' (Heb 4:9). And then the writer to the Hebrews adds categorically, 'We which have believed do enter into that rest' (4:3). This week as we gather from our field of service, from labours variegated and abundant and exhausting, who shall blame us if we indulge ourselves a little bit again, and allow our hearts, wearied with toil, and our minds, fretted with thinking, to lie back a moment and sense and feel again the delightful calm of that rest into which our Saviour brings us:

The joy that comes when he is near,
The rest he gives, so free from fear,
The hope in him, so bright and clear,
Is more than tongue can tell.¹

Take off your burden my brother, and with me, enter afresh into the rest of God, that at the end of this week you might rise up again to shoulder the load that God has given you to carry.

Questions of interpretation

It was greatly daring of me to choose Joshua for another reason. All theologians present will know the arguments that fly backwards and forward about the proper interpretation and application of the book. The question we have already alluded to—that rest into which we who have believed do in fact enter—is it now, or does it lie still in the future? Is it the rest that we enjoy here on earth through trust in Christ and ceasing from our work for salvation? Or is it a prospect that lies before us, into which we have not yet entered but which awaits us at the end of the pilgrim road? And when we think of the question thus, we go back to our book of Joshua. What is this business of entering into the inheritance in the land of Canaan? What did it mean for Israel, and what lesson has it exactly for us?

Crossing Jordan, for instance, and entering the promised land—what would you say that is? Popular theology says there's no difficulty. Along with John Bunyan and his Pilgrim's Progress, crossing Jordan means nothing less than passing through death and entering the Father's house above: what a blessed prospect it is! But here comes the sophisticated theologian. 'No, no,' says he, 'crossing Jordan can't mean going to heaven. For this obvious reason, that when Israel crossed the Jordan and entered Canaan, they met Amorites and Jerichoites and Hivites and Jebusites and Perizzites, all of them with ugly faces and long spears and fortified cities. There was endless fighting to do. How could you possibly call it entering into rest and entering into heaven?'

Well, what is it then? Say the sophisticated, 'It's not entering into heaven: it's being seated now with Christ in the heavenlies.' That sounds hopeful, but as Ephesians 6 reminds us, in those very heavenlies we must war with spiritual might and main, contesting every inch of the inheritance against principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness, for which struggle we must take to ourselves the whole armour of God. So, entering Canaan, say the sophisticated, is not heaven at all. Well, if it must be, it must be, and we shall have to fight. And perhaps in Joshua we shall learn how to fight in this great war.

The structure of the book

Yet there remains a little question, doesn't there? If we consider, as all Bible students should, the formal structure of this ancient book of Joshua, we find that it is formed of two parts: chapters 1–12 form the first part, and chapters 13–24 form the second part. Chapter 12 is a

¹ J. E. Hall, 'The love that Jesus had for me.'

summary list of all those many cities that Joshua fought against and destroyed in order that he might bring Israel permanently into rest. Let's look then at the last verse of chapter 11 as the book reaches its first literary climax:

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD spake unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land had rest from war. (Josh 11:23)

We'd better believe the historian. By the time we get to chapters 11 and 12, we have entered into rest: the land had rest from war. So after chapter 12, are we to understand that we've entered into rest? Now I have a real problem because you've confused me. The first bit was our fighting, was it, in the heavenly places against principalities and powers? When we get to chapter 12, the fighting is over and the land has rest. So what then is chapter 13 onwards— heaven? That won't work either, will it? Because curiously, although the land had rest from war by the time you get to chapter 12, when you open chapter 13 and read the remaining chapters, Israel is to be found still engaged chasing the enemy off this part and that part of their inheritance. How is it that after the land had rest from war, they still had to fight?

The two phases

It seems to me that if we would understand the structure of this book and the significance of its formal layout, we must consider two basic things about this history. The first answer to our problem is as follows: that in the conquest in the land of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites there were two phases, distinctly marked in Deuteronomy, in Numbers and in the book of Joshua. There was the first phase when Joshua led the united armies of all the tribes into battle all the way round Palestine to break the back of the enemy resistance. While that first phase was proceeding, no tribe was allowed to settle down. You will remember the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, how they too were obliged to follow Joshua over the Jordan River, and were not permitted to settle down in their inheritance east of Jordan. They must, like all the other tribes, go out with Joshua to war for the obvious reasons.

And when the armies took Jericho, no tribe was allowed to settle there. And when again they took Ai, or any other city, no tribe was allowed to settle. This wasn't the time for settling down. If any tribe had been allowed to hive off and settle in Jericho or Ai or east of Jordan, the armies of Israel would have been depleted, and then would have been no match for the massive forces that were waiting for them behind the ramparts of the fortified Canaanite cities. So there had to be the first phase when Joshua, captain of the host of the Lord, was leading his people, fighting those battles that would break the resistance of the enemy and open the land to Israel. It took a long time and lasted until Joshua was now very old. But at last it was complete and the land had rest from war. That was what Joshua did.

And then, when he was old, there came the second phase of the conquest, when Joshua sent the tribes away without him, each to its own inheritance, and each tribe for itself had to go and fight to take over the cities and the countryside assigned to them. This week, we shall

have time only to concentrate on that first phase of the campaign. It will talk to us not simply about our efforts to enter into our inheritance, it must talk to us of something that lies prior to our efforts to enter the inheritance. It must point us to our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to the enormous battles he fought, that he might break the power of the enemy and open the land for us to go in and inherit.

Historical analogy

This week, then, we shall be largely engaged in thinking about our basic salvation. To test whether we are on the right lines in focusing ourselves like this, let's approach this historical book from another historical angle, and if you can manage to keep awake, I want to draw quite an extensive analogy. It runs like this: you will remember in the book of Genesis, chapter 12, God promised to Abraham to give him seed, and thus Abraham would inherit the land. That promise was renewed to Abraham in Genesis 15: that all the land of Canaan would be given to Abraham and his seed. So first came the problem of how Abraham would be given seed when he and Sarah were already old. You remember the story, how they were asked to wait and wait until at length the promised seed came. And you will remember too, how becoming impatient in the early days, Sarah and Abraham knocked their heads together, which perhaps wasn't wise, and came up with a way of helping God to fulfil his promise. Abraham was persuaded to take Hagar, and from her he begat Ishmael. And when Sarah saw that Hagar was getting a little uppish, because she was with child by Abraham, Sarah persecuted Hagar and Hagar fled with her child yet to be born.

Then God took Hagar and Ishmael, and he put them back into Abraham's dwelling place. What a difficult and trying time it was for Abraham, when that brat of a boy, Ishmael, was born. A wild donkey of a man he was and proved to be; his hand against every man and every man's hand against him, and controlling the young outlaw was difficult enough. Oh, those long years when no promised seed appeared, and all Abraham had was this wild donkey of a boy, son of a slave woman, sharing his tent and home with him. You can imagine the sigh of relief when at long last the promised seed was born. So says Genesis 21, and with that the very next paragraph tells us that, immediately the promised seed was born and came to the time of weaning, God—through the words of Sarah—gave the command, 'Cast out the bond woman and her son, for the bond woman and her son shall not inherit along with the free-born Isaac' (see Gen 21:8–12). It was only shortly after that the promised seed was sacrificed upon an altar on Mount Moriah. Yes, that's the original history, and I've not strayed from serious, solemn, straightforward and pedestrian history.

But, as I proceed with my analogy, listen to what Paul has to say about that very chunk of history. In Galatians 3 Paul takes the history and he stretches it a bit—like you do with limousines here, so it takes a week to pass them on the highway! So does Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians: he takes that bit of history from Abraham and the promise of the seed, to the fulfilment and the promised seed actually coming in the form of Isaac, and he says, 'My brethren, let me stretch that bit of history for you, still keeping to history—we haven't got to typology yet, we'll keep to history! The promise was given to Abraham that he should have the seed, but oh, how many centuries passed before the seed came. And who was he? The

seed was not Isaac, but Isaac's greater son, our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. 'If you will observe,' says Paul, 'that in those intervening centuries, just like God put Hagar and Ishmael in Abraham's tent until the promised seed Isaac came, so did God take Israel while they were waiting for the coming of the promised seed, and God put Moses and the law in their midst, until the promised seed should come.' Then says Paul, with a tremendous sigh of relief, 'The promised seed has come. You're no longer under the law. You are under Christ, and it is common knowledge that when the blessed seed was born, then the law had finished its function as a way of life, that is, as a way of justification; and the promised seed coming to manhood was, like Isaac, only more so, sacrificed upon Mount Calvary.'

A promised inheritance

Paul has taken the earlier history and stretched it to cover the whole of Jewish history, and not until the coming of the Saviour was the promise of the seed finally fulfilled. In that same promise to Abraham in Genesis 15, God promised him not merely a seed, but he promised him an inheritance. Nothing short of the whole land of Canaan with much more besides: one day they would come into that glorious inheritance. In the interval, God said that they would spend some time in Egypt, and so they did. And then God said that he would bring them out with great substance, and so he did. And we rejoice in the story, for he sent Moses to bring the people out of Egypt and teach them the law of God, and teach them the rudiments of redemption. And Moses led them out of Egypt towards their great inheritance that had been promised to them by God via Abraham.

But if Moses could bring them out of Egypt, there was one thing that Moses could not do. Moses could not bring them into their promised inheritance, and he died before they entered in. Poor old Moses; for all his wonder, there were things that Moses could not do, and Israel would have been outside their inheritance still had not God in his wisdom raised up Joshua the Saviour. And what Moses could not do, that Joshua did, and he brought the people finally into their inheritance that God had promised to Abraham. We as Christians listen with both our ears pricked up. It was Joshua, was it, that brought them into their inheritance? Yes and no, says the Epistle to the Hebrews. He brought them in, but the land was never fully subdued, and if Joshua had brought them in, God would not have spoken of another rest centuries later. What rest is that, and who shall bring us into that rest?

And now you see the point of my analogy, don't you? For I'm stretching history too, like Paul. You start with Abraham once more. Justification, yes; and redemption from Egypt, yes; but how would Israel ever come into their full inheritance? Not until the greater than Joshua came, died and went down into his Jordan, and came up again in resurrection life, to lead the people clean over Jordan into their full inheritance. And thus this week we shall be thinking historically of the great acts of our greater than Joshua, even Jesus Christ, our Lord – and how by his coming, he brings us into our inheritance.

The serious matter of God's judgment

As we think of that, we think of a very serious matter. When God promised the inheritance to Abraham, God observed that Israel must be kept waiting for some centuries. Not for four

hundred years would they come into that rest, even into its first phase. Why not? 'For the cup of the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full' (Gen 15:16). The divine wisdom had so ordered it that when the time came for Israel to enter in, the iniquity of the Amorite would have come to its zenith. Then two things would happen. The armies of Israel would come and, as agents of God, they would execute the wrath of God upon that debased and diseased society. And when the wrath of judgment had been executed and the nations of Canaan had been put out, God would give the inheritance to his people Israel.

And therein is a very solemn thought, and God preached it to them through the clear sermons of Moses. As Israel stood on the brink of entry into Canaan, Moses said, 'Now please observe why these Canaanite nations are being thrown out and you are given the land. They have become so abominable in their practices that the very land is spewing them out, and God proposes to give you the land instead. Don't you go and do the same thing. For I'm telling you straight, says God, you may be my chosen people, but when you are in the land, don't imagine that you can misbehave and do as the Canaanites did. If you're thinking that you're my blue-eyed boys and you can do what you like just because you're on my side, I shall teach you a very severe lesson. If you do what the Canaanites do, I shall throw you out as I threw them out.'

When Israel crossed over the Jordan, they hadn't long to wait to find out God was true to his word. Take the incident at Jericho. God said, 'When you attack and enter the walls of Jericho, you shall destroy everything. Everything must be slaughtered, and don't you touch it, for Jericho is now cursed under the judgment of God, and you too will be cursed' (Josh 6:17-18). And a very early heap of stones was erected in the Valley of Achor to remind Israel that they weren't God's blue-eyed boys. If they touched that accursed thing, they would suffer the same judgment as Jericho city (see 7:10-26).

Do you begin to tremble in your shoes? Well, perhaps not you, but I do a little bit. I've read Moses and I say to myself, 'If God is going to be so severe against sin like that, and curse every sin not only of the old heathen Gibeonites and suchlike, but of me, David Gooding, however am I to get into the inheritance?' Tell me, now we're at it, what are the conditions of getting into the inheritance?

You say, 'Mr Preacher, don't bother your head. I wouldn't if I were you. We are a heavenly people. We belong to the church. You don't need to be troubling your head as to inheritance in Canaan.'

No? Well, perhaps you're not as greedy as I am!

An inheritance for us?

I'm aware, of course, that I shall inherit the heavenlies with Christ. But I'm not altogether convinced I ought not to inherit Palestine as well. Are you? Tell me, is the Lord Jesus going to inherit Palestine, or not? You say, 'Of course he'll inherit Palestine: he'll inherit the whole earth.' Perhaps you think that our Lord shouldn't be so interested in earth, but in heavenly things. But listen, 'Ask of me,' says God to the Messiah, 'and I'll give you the uttermost part of the earth as well' (see Ps 2:8). I tell you my brethren, there's not one square inch of territory in heaven nor on earth, but that our Lord shall inherit it all. And I've read in the Bible

somewhere that we're heirs of God and joint heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ, are we not? (see Rom 8:17). On what ground do you suppose and presume that you're going to have this inheritance?

Oh, I thank God we're not dependent on some verses and analogies from the Old Testament to decide that matter. The Epistle to the Galatians is abundantly clear, and so is Romans 4. That promise made to Abraham and all those blessings and that inheritance and that covenant, all come to us on these terms—that Christ was made a curse for us. We had broken God's law and were under its curse, and had failed every test that Moses proposed, and therefore merited destruction as equally as any old Canaanite ever merited it. But the glorious news is this: that in our great Joshua, Jesus Christ, we may enter that inheritance.

For the promise to Abraham and to his seed that he should be heir, not only of Canaan but of the world, was not given to him when he was in circumcision, but before he was circumcised. It was given him by that same promise by which he was justified by faith in Genesis 15. And in that very same breath he was given a covenant that guaranteed him the inheritance. Oh how lovely. We are to think together of our great Joshua who brings us, even us sorry sinners, into the great inheritance.

Three objectives

One small observation more then, and we may go to tea. The first half of the book of Joshua, as we have all perceived, is in three parts and relates to us three objectives that the great Joshua had set before him, and which he actually achieved. What a heart-stirring story it is.

(a) Entering the land

The first objective is made clear in chapter 1, where God says to Joshua, 'Moses, my servant, is dead. Rise up and take Israel over Jordan.' Some objective, wasn't it? If you think it was easy, then think again, my brothers and sisters. Moses led a whole generation out of Egypt and he tried to persuade them to go into Palestine, but when they put their noses across the border from Kadesh-Barnea and found out what Palestine was like, they one and all said, 'No, Moses. You led us to believe this Palestine would be such a wonderful land, and we were expecting such marvellous things, but now we see what it's really like, we wouldn't want that. If we'd known that's what Canaan was likely to be, we wouldn't have come.'

Just imagine that; journeying all through the wilderness, getting to the promised land, putting your nose across the border and deciding that you didn't want to go in after all. Curious, wasn't it? Do you think anybody will journey towards heaven, get his nose across the celestial threshold, have a look in and decide after all that they didn't want to go in? You say, 'No, of course not. Don't be so silly.' Don't you be quite so sure! I mean, how would you know what heaven is going to be like, anyway? Have you sat down and seriously considered it?

Suppose when you got home to heaven God invited you to sit at his table and began the conversation in Leviticus. Could you endure it for very long? And if it turned out to be Ezekiel, would you say, 'I hope he won't talk about those things. I find them a bit of a bore.' You do? Well, if you were to find his word a bore now, ought you to reconsider whether you should

go to heaven, because what if he were to say the same things in heaven as he says in Scripture and we find them a bore? 'No,' you say, 'we love the word of God.' I'm glad to hear it, sorry for that homiletical aberration! But I was going to say that a whole generation with Moses as their leader failed to get into the land of Canaan. But what Moses could not do, that Joshua did.

Did you notice that verse? According to Joshua's instruction, the ark stood in the bed of Jordan and it stayed there until the nation of Israel were clean passed over Jordan. Oh, praise God and shout, 'Hallelujah'; the objective achieved at last! And so it is for us, as our hymn puts it:

Dear dying lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
'Til all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more.²

Oh, what a blessed Saviour we have. If he brings us in now, he shall bring us in eternally.

(b) Establishing the law

There was a second objective, for they were not merely to come into the land. When they had conquered Jericho and Ai, and without waiting to conquer any other city, they got themselves at full speed through the gap in the mountains, and came to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, just like Moses had commanded. Moses was good at commanding things, as I say; he wasn't always good at getting folks to carry them out. But he commanded that when they got into the land they would go to Mount Ebal and Gerizim, and they were to build an altar. They were to collect some stones, and they were to write the law upon the stones. They were to assemble Israel, some of them on one mountain and some of them on the other. They were to recite the blessings of the law, and at each particular blessing the people were to say, 'Amen.' Then they were to recite the curses of the law, and at each particular curse the people were to say, 'Amen.' And what were they doing? They were establishing the law of God in that land of Canaan, scene of man's ultimate rebellion against God.

Oh, my dear friend, let's get it clear; and if my phraseology has misled you, let me make it abundantly clear. Salvation by grace through faith does not mean we live as we like. The aim is that the righteousness of the law shall be fulfilled. The question is how, and to that question we must address ourselves on another occasion. There were stiff enemies to fight in order that the law of God might be established in the land, but for the moment we rejoice in what is written. Stiff as the opposition at Jericho was, and more difficult even at Ai, God commanded Joshua at length to lift up his hand in which the javelin was: a sign to the ambush behind Ai to rise up and capture the city. But more than that glorious symbolic gesture, as the great captain of salvation raised his javelin, he did not withdraw his hand until the last of the opposition on the road to Gerizim and Ebal was eliminated.

² William Cowper (1731–1800), 'There is a fountain filled with blood.'

Oh, thank God for it,

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4 KJV)

(c) Conquering the last enemy

When we come to the final story, it is not only getting them into the land, and not only establishing the law of God in the land, but destroying the very last enemy in the very last city—so that, all enemy opposition having ceased, Israel might be brought at last into their full inheritance and come to their final rest. There is that lovely story that, as God began to deal with the enemies, and the stones rained down from the heavens upon the enemy as they fled, then Joshua, taking courage, stood in the sight of Israel and addressed the living God, and he said, ‘Sun, stand still, and moon, stand still in the Valley of Aijalon’ (Josh 10:12). And thus it was that the sun stood still, and the moon hastened not to go down, until Israel were avenged of all their enemies; and they took those defeated kings and put their feet upon their necks.

With what rejoicing we read the story, and listen to the echo of the New Testament in our hearts as, like Paul, we are persuaded that neither life nor death, nor things present nor things to come, nor principalities, powers, mights and dominions, shall prevail at last (see Rom 8:38–39). And the very last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, and with it his satanic majesty himself, consigned for ever to the lake of fire. Oh, my brothers and sisters, you are more than conquerors through him that loved you. The God of peace and rest shall tread down the old serpent under your foot very shortly. May his name be praised and his Son be exalted in our thinking.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee together for the experience of the ages that thou has recorded for our learning. We thank thee for turning the history also into vivid thought patterns and models for thinking with, that we might grasp with our imaginations what we learn with our intellects, and come thus to a greater appreciation of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Be pleased to use thy word in these coming days to magnify him in our midst, so that we may lay hold of the victory he has won for us, that in our turn we may be loyal to him and be more than conquerors through him that loved us. For his name’s sake. Amen.

[Movement One: Entering the Inheritance](#)

This morning we are to think together of the first move that Joshua made in response to the commission he had received from God to take Israel over the Jordan and into their inheritance. So let us begin by reading some verses that will remind us of those familiar stories that record that great operation. And then alongside of them, let us read some verses from the New Testament that tell us what God has done at that basic level to qualify us also, and to lead us into our inheritance.

And before they were laid down, she [Rahab] came up unto them upon the roof; and she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were beyond Jordan, unto Sihon and to Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death. And the men said unto her, Our life, for yours, if you utter not this our business; and it shall be, when the LORD giveth us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee. (Josh 2:8-14)

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the LORD your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Hivite, and the Perizzite, and the Girgashite, and the Amorite, and the Jebusite. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, for every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, when the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off, even the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand in one heap. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents to pass over Jordan, the priests that bare the ark of the covenant being before the people; and when they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brink of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all its banks all

the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood, and rose up in one heap, a great way off, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan: and those that went down towards the sea of the Arabah, even the Salt Sea, were wholly cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all Israel passed over on dry ground, until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan. (3:9–17)

Lastly, some verses from the Epistle to the Colossians:

Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Col 1:12–18)

May God give us good understanding of his holy Word.

Entering Canaan

When the massed armies of Israel rose up from Shittim and came to a halt within a short distance of the River Jordan, it must have been evident to Israel and to Jericho alike that deeds of tremendous significance were afoot, and so they were. For four hundred long years God had been observing the men of Jericho in particular, and the nations of Canaan in general. Already in the time of Abraham their behaviour had been becoming obnoxious to the living Lord of the earth, but God, who is rich in mercy and long-suffering and not willing that any should perish, told Abraham in that far off day that four hundred years still would be given to the sinners, the Canaanites, before his judgment fell on them.

And if perchance you have ever been troubled by the seeming severity of the judgment of which you read in the book of Joshua, pause again to consider its historical context. Four hundred years of the mercy and long-suffering of God to this ancient, sinful nation, that God waited before he executed his judgment. Now the time of his long-suffering had come to its end. Only days from now, and Jericho must be destroyed. But even so, God is rich in mercy.

A soul saved

Forty years before the judgment fell he preached the gospel to them. With every tramp of every foot of the thousands of Israel, as they marched across that wilderness, God preached the gospel to Canaan. Some, thank God, heard the message. As we listen to Rahab the harlot speaking to the spies she had received, she tells how she had heard of the wonders of the

living God. 'We have heard what your God did in Egypt, and how he brought you out with a high hand and cleared the Red Sea and brought you through. We see it clearly, that your God is the true God. Your God is Lord in heaven above, and on the earth beneath.' Those judgments upon Pharaoh, that vessel of wrath, had not simply been the penalty of his obstinacy. God had made Pharaoh a vessel of wrath so that that vessel of wrath might speak to other Gentiles and lead them to repentance. For God will save men and women, even if he has to use the punishment of the ungodly to induce them to repentance.

What a God we serve: he's determined to save people. He'll save them every way he knows how. Here in that poor, darkened, benighted mind of a harlot woman in Jericho, the light of God's gospel has begun to dawn, and she sees the difference between the idols of Canaan and the true and the living God. What a spectacle you are about to witness again—though you've rejoiced in seeing it many a year—on the eve of judgment, a pagan heart touched by the gospel and turning from idols to serve the living and the true God. If in those days she didn't know how to wait for his Son from heaven, she knows now, for she is at home with the Lord. Forty years of gospel, and some heard it and repented and were saved; for in his judgment, God remembers mercy.

A city lost

But not all were saved. The proud king of Jericho had heard as much as Rahab, and so had her fellow citizens. After the onset of judgment, they battened themselves down within Jericho city and thought they could weather the storm. For Jericho, viewed with human eyes, had two excellent systems of defence. First there was the defence that nature had provided them with, for Jericho stood not far distant from the River Jordan. Though there were fords over the river, it was easy for the Jerichoites to post sentries on the fords and to do what Ehud did in a later age and slit the throat of everybody who tried to come across. Or like Horatio, who kept the bridge for the Romans.

Take Jordan without the fords and it formed a natural defence line for all invading armies coming in from the East. Take Jordan at flood time and the king of Jericho was as confident in his Jordan as the French were in their Maginot Line, until Hitler overturned it. If their first line of defence was nature, because to attempt to cross Jordan at flood time was virtual suicide, then they had the second line of defence which was a man-made defence in the stout and, they thought, impregnable walls of Jericho. And they thought they were safe within nature's and man-made lines of defence. What foolish men; and Rahab could see through the folly of it. 'Your God,' she told the spies, 'is the God of heaven and earth.' If the transcendent Lord of creation determines to invade Palestine, no line of defence will ever keep him out. If he comes to Jordan, nature will draw back before him, for nature itself is no match for nature's Lord. And if once nature's barrier is penetrated, then Jericho's man-made walls must fall.

We would do well to remind our modern secular friends of the same thing. So many men and women think that they can barricade themselves against God, spinning their little philosophies that our world, our universe, is a closed system, and there's no God out there. We can afford to live in our planet as though it were a self-contained flat—get inside, lock the

door, and prevent any disturbance from the outside. Rahab had seen differently. Let's follow her into the house—I promise not to tell anybody that you've been there!—and listen to her conversation.

What a miracle of grace it was, as many a missionary preacher has seen and preached. Rahab belonged to the oldest profession in the world—a woman who had spent her days pursuing pleasure without love; who thought you could have love without loyalty. She becomes a vivid symbolic expression of all her people, who in a deeper sense had thought the same thing. You see, the charge against the Canaanites, as later reiterated in Romans 1, is this: that originally they had known the true God who blessed them with fruitful crops and all the blessings of creature comforts and life. They had known the true God who gave them these gifts, but in that profound and fundamental disloyalty to the God of heaven, they had turned their backs on him and gone in their adulterous fashion to make this world their God; and gone after their endless lovers, as the Jewish prophets would have described them. They were scarce loyal even to their own man-made gods, for their philosophy of life was as Rahab's really. The ultimate in life is your pleasure, your passing pleasure, and they lived in Canaan as though Canaan was their earth, regardless of the creator and the moral demands he made upon them.

They should have loved him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, but fickle in the perversity of the human heart, they had abandoned the love of God, and lived for the world without God, and made pleasure their final ambition. Thus it happened to them, as Paul relates in Romans 1, that when they cared not to retain the knowledge of God but degraded the image of God as the Canaanite idolatry did, then God gave them over to a perverse mind to do those things that are not fitting. Their cruelties by way of child sacrifice were monstrous. The diseases with which they were ridden as a result of their perverse sexual practises were a threat to the gene pool of humanity. Would that somebody might go to our modern Canaanites and tell them exactly the same thing. Where men and women's philosophy is that pleasure, love without loyalty, mere passing gratification, is the ultimate god, and they live in this world as though it were their world, regardless of its owner; ultimately, they will come to the same end as the Canaanites.

True repentance

But you wouldn't doubt the conversion of this woman, would you? We've got the writer to the Hebrews to tell us that she got really converted, even despite that little bit of a fib, or rather, that big whopper she told. 'Never mind,' says James, 'she meant it well. It was all in the interests of her new found faith.' For she saw so vividly that if ever she was to be saved from the impending judgment, it would mean a complete transfer of her loyalties. Conversion is nothing less than that. You say, 'It was treachery of the first order for her to receive those spies and give them comfort and consolation against the king of Jericho and her fellow citizens.' But, ladies and gentlemen, when the judgments of God are at hand it will ultimately be every man for himself. We shan't stand in batches before the great white throne. Then all

loyalties must be tested, and judged in the light of the supreme loyalty, as the human heart will be asked, 'Whom do you love?' And what evidence is there that you love him?

So Rahab decided to take a stand in loyalty against Jericho, and in favour of the living God, the creator. That's repentance, you know, and let us not forget to preach it either. Listen to Peter, a veritable John the Baptist risen from the dead, on the day of Pentecost when he preached his sermon that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead and God had made him both Lord and Christ.

And the crowd came round, pricked in their very hearts. 'What shall we do?' they said to Peter.

'I'll tell you,' said Peter. 'You'll get baptised in the name of Jesus.'

They said, 'Peter, you don't understand. We're convinced by what you said, and we want forgiveness, of course. We're very sincere. But just to stand at this moment away from our society, that would be a cultural difficulty for us — some of us are members of the Sanhedrin. Besides, you should be preaching salvation by faith, not by works. Why can't we just believe on the Lord Jesus and carry on as we were before?'

'No, you won't,' says Peter. 'You tell me you've professed, you tell the living God you have come to repentance. Then, ladies and gentlemen, you will show the genuineness of your repentance by standing clear of the nation that has murdered God's Son. Save yourself from this untoward generation. You cannot be loyal both to the Sanhedrin that murdered Jesus and to Jesus himself.'

We still need to preach, do we not, the need of works to demonstrate the reality of people's repentance?

Assurance of salvation

Now put yourself in the shoes of the good woman. She was prepared to transfer her loyalty and, risking her very life, she received the spies and sent them out another way. But what guarantee had she that that act of hers would bring her salvation? She looked into the eyes of the spies. They were saving their own skin, weren't they? They'd make her any old promise. And when they got back to the camp, what would happen then? Likely enough when they came with the armies of Israel, they'd know the way to her door and her throat would be the first one they'd slit. Could she rely on these men?

She had shown covenant faithfulness, kindness, *hesed* in Hebrew, to them; but would they return covenant faithfulness to her? Where could she find a guarantee of loyalty? She'd not asked that of any of her lovers recently. But now with the judgments of God facing her, this became the supreme question. As for these men and their God, what was their God like? If she could get an oath from these men in the name of their God, would it stand? 'I have showed you covenant kindness [*hesed*]' she said, 'pray, show covenant kindness to me. Swear an oath by your God, the Lord of heaven and earth, and give me a token of truth.' It's nice when people brought up to tell lies start concerning themselves about truth. And they bound the cord in the window and the spies slithered down the rope, and off they went back to the camp.

Do you suppose the days that followed were a little anxious? How many times must she have said to herself, 'Will that oath stand? Will the Lord of heaven and earth honour the oath taken in his name?' Oh, let's trust, my brothers and sisters, thereby do we guilty sinners find our way back to God and discover the security against all judgment.

His oath, his covenant, his blood,
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.³

You worship a merciful God of heaven. To this fickle woman who had yet to learn the true meaning of love, even she knew that love means loyalty. She'd come to know a God who loved her while she was yet a sinner, and though she couldn't yet know it, loved her so much that he'd give his only Son for her, lest she perish. The loyalty of a creator even to a sinful creature.

Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are worthy of Thyself divine!
But the bright glories of Thy grace
Beyond Thine other wonders shine.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?⁴

Not only to save us and pardon us but to swear an oath about our security:

That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have a strong encouragement, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. (Heb 6:18)

The God who cannot lie

The discovery of a God who cannot and will not lie is the beginning not only of security in heaven for us, it's the beginning of the changing of our character. If you promise not to tell them that I said so, there were believers in Crete at one stage that were a little bit difficult. Well, national characteristics take a lot of grace to iron out, don't they? And we'll leave present company out of consideration! But, as one of their own selves said, 'Cretans are always liars. You can't begin to believe them. They'll promise you they'll be at the prayer meeting then they won't turn up. Can't rely on them you know. Slow-bellies they are' (see Titus 1:12 KJV). Well, that's rather strong language. How on earth did they get changed into reliable, loyal, Christian people whom you could trust? They became people whose profession of love was not mere sentiment, the whim of the emotion blowing hot today and cold tomorrow, but a

³ Edward Mote (1797–1874), 'My hope is built on nothing less.'

⁴ Samuel Davies (1723–61), 'Great God of wonders.'

love of God that expressed itself in constant loyalty to God, and his truth and his people. That's conversion, isn't it?

I anticipate a story. When Rahab was eventually delivered, says the text, she was among Israel 'even unto this day' (Josh 6:25), which is an interesting observation. Apparently she hadn't even taken a tourist ticket back to her former haunts. No, she stood with the people of God. What is it that changes people? What is it that changed those difficult characters, the Cretans? Says Paul, 'It's happened through the word of the gospel. The promise that God made of eternal life. A promise made by a God who cannot lie.' We need to discover him. When he talks about judgment on sin he means what he says. He's not like some soft, indulgent parent who says a thousand times a day to the difficult child, 'I'll smack you if you do that again.' And the child manages to do it again four hundred and fifty times before it goes to bed and still doesn't get a smack—though a bachelor oughtn't to talk of those things!

But you see what that is doing to people's character. We need to live not only in a stable physical universe, we need to live in a stable moral society, where truth is truth. How will you build a paradise or an inheritance on any other principle? You need to come to know a God who, when he says he'll judge, he will judge: he does not lie. And oh, thank God, we need to come to know a God who, when he says he pardons and will save and will give us an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away, he cannot lie and he means every comma he says. That is salvation.

Salvation from—or through—death?

The story then turns, not to describe even in this first movement the destruction of Jericho; that belongs to the second objective. The story turns now to talk about the judgments of God from the other point of view as to how they appeared to Israel. For Israel, of course, the crossing of Jordan meant entering into their inheritance, but you may care to notice in advance what presently we shall see, that whereas for Rahab the objective was to be saved from death, God took Israel over Jordan into their inheritance, the consummation of their salvation, by taking them through death. For there are always two sides to a penny—and there are generally two sides to God's truth. The gospel promises us salvation from death, and when we feel ourselves secure, it then explains that we are saved through death. Is it not so?

Then how were Israel saved and brought to the consummation of God's purpose, their introduction into their inheritance? The story of the crossing of Jordan is told us in three major movements, which has sorely troubled some unbelieving and not too perceptive critics. For they imagine the story is all a muddle, whereas, in the manner of Hebrew narrative prose, it is genius. It presents the same story three times over, and brings it to its climax three times over, but the story is seen from three different points of view. The first record of the crossing of Jordan is for a dual purpose, as God explained to Joshua, 'Say to the people, sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you,' and then to Joshua he said, 'This day I will begin to magnify you in the sight of the people' (see Josh 3:5–7).

The second record of the crossing from 4:1–14 concentrates not merely on the fact that Israel came through the waters to the land on the opposite side, but tells the story how, at

God's command, they there erected the stones. Says chapter 4, verse 6: 'That this may be a sign among you.' That's interesting, because that word for sign is the same word that Rahab used, 'Give me a sign, a sign of truth.' I think if she sat by the window, nervously peering through to see how near the armies had got, she would have fingered the old rope a bit. That was the only security she'd got hold of, and as she tugged at one end, she said, 'The other end used to have men on the bottom. I hope they can feel that rope in their hands just now. Do they see this connection between us?' And the great oath of God was a sign—it's nice to have a sign to get hold of. But to Israel, as they were about to enter their inheritance and pass through Jordan, there was given a sign not merely for them but for all consequent generations, an historical sign that forever should remind them of the basis of their entry to the promised land. And finally, the third record of the crossing begins in 4:15, where Joshua commanded the priests to come up and they came up, and once more we are told what the stones were for, as the stones spelt out the implication of it all for the people of Israel. Let us briefly meditate upon those things.

The wonder of the ark in Jordan

First I must ask you to perceive the wonder of what happened. Said Joshua and the officers to the people, 'Rise up when you see the ark move, but leave a space between you and it. Don't go milling around the ark: the ark must go before you and you must be able to have space enough to see it.' Why? This is the biggest wonder of all that happened that day. As the Levites took up the ark in stately procession, Israel verily believed that the Lord of the whole earth sat enthroned between the cherubim of that ark. Would you see a wonder? The Lord of ten myriad galaxies has come to take possession of the land of Canaan. It's his land: he made every blade of grass in it. But if the Lord has come to take possession of Canaan, which is his anyway because he made it, why didn't he come down direct from heaven, direct into Canaan? Why must he go through Jordan?'

He could have come down directly, couldn't he? He could, but Israel would never have got in, for *they* couldn't come down direct from heaven to it. So watch now as he becomes the file leader, the *archēgos* as Hebrews puts it, the captain of their salvation (Heb 2:10 KJV). And with Joshua leading the people and commanding them, and explaining to them what now is happening, the transcendent God comes down to earth and goes into Jordan. You say, 'Lord, don't go down there. It's muddy down there.' But oh, the wonder! When nature saw her creator, nature gave way to make room for nature's Lord. And as we think of it, our minds irresistibly go to later centuries.

Palestine belonged to God's Son, promised to him as the seed of Abraham. He could have come down from heaven direct and taken it without dying. Why didn't he? Because we could never have entered into our inheritance direct. We too were sinners—not only Rahab, but Israel and all of us—ungodly sinners. And if he would become the *archēgos*, the captain of our salvation, and bring the many sons to glory, then it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil (see Heb 2:14).

The prince of this world has had one mighty great defence line all down history. It's called in Hebrews 'the power of death' (2:14). And, says Hebrews, using that power of death he has subjected people to bondage—'them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage' (2:15). Where he has been allowed his way, anybody that professes loyalty to the God of heaven, he will threaten them with death. And multitudes of men and women, because they fear death, give in. Oh, I pray God, if ever conditions come in which I find myself faced with the stake, or the psychiatric hospital, or the torture camp, for loyalty to Christ, may God give me the grace to look death in the face, that I shall not let myself be scared by him who has the power of death.

When the Son of God came down to earth, Satan made a great effort to keep him away and to stop his gospel. Satan knew no better than to put him to death, and they thought they'd seen the last of him. But see the wonder, brothers and sisters, as the blessed transcendent Lord, creator of heaven and earth, became incarnate. He was scarce thirty years old when he went to Jordan and literally stood with sinners in the mud of its river bed. A few years later, stand back if you can, and see the wonder as those holy feet entered the river of death.

Lord of life, to death made subject,
Blessed, yet a curse once made;
Of Thy Father's heart the object,
Yet in depths of anguish laid:
Thee we gaze on,
Thee recall,
Bearing here our sorrows all.⁵

I wish I could tell you that when he stood there the waters kept back, but the record is that they went over his head, for he bore our sins, all sinless himself, in his body. He tasted death's waters, dark, bitter, offensive, and for his lost sheep he went down to the grave. Oh, but hail his victory: death couldn't keep its prey. Jesus my Saviour, Lord of heaven and earth, tore the bars away, and the third day he rose again and went triumphantly to the right hand of God. He destroyed him that had the power of death and took his defence away, and has opened up the way to our great inheritance.

The sign of the stones—his death

See the wonder of it. And see the sign of it, for they were charged that when they came up they should have twelve men bring up twelve stones from the river and put them on the bank, and take another twelve stones and put them down into the river, that these stones should be a sign to Israel in the coming generations. For it could have been that generations who had not personally come through the literal Jordan, some four or five generations on, as they munched their grapes and enjoyed their olives, so to speak, and entered into houses such as

⁵ Richard Holden (1828–86), 'Lord of glory, we adore Thee.'

they'd never known before—their parents hadn't, because they were slaves in Egypt—they could conceivably begin to forget what was the basis of their being in the inheritance at all.

And a little bit of old Rahab could start creeping into the heart. Not you, of course, nor me, but, 'You adulteresses,' says James, 'do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with Christ?' (Jas 4:4). How easy for the believer, enjoying his inheritance, to forget and live for his own enjoyment and presently for his gratification, and forget the Lord and the basis of our inheritance. 'Bring them back generation after generation,' says God to Joshua, 'and show them those stones to remind them that when your fathers came into the land, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth went down into those waters and came up again.'

Wisely, our Lord gave us a token, a sign, and bid us to meet with bread and wine to remember him. You won't say that's a Christian's fetish, will you? There was never anything more practical in Christian life than the Lord's Supper. How shall my disloyal, wayward heart be kept loyal to God? Even the very benefits of the gospel, if I'm not careful, will bring me away from the Lord, as I get singing my hymns purely for my own enjoyment of the tune. I'd better come back and stand by the bread and the wine, by the stones on the further bank, and say, 'Is it true that the ark of the Lord of the whole earth was once down there in those swirling waters?' How would Israel forget it, the basis of their being in the inheritance?

And what's your basis for enjoying your inheritance? 'Oh,' you say, 'I give thanks to the Father every day of the week. He's made us qualified for the inheritance of the saints in light.' We're redeemed, you tell me. I'm delighted to know it, my friend, but by whose blood? Oh, don't you know whose blood it is? By his blood, who is the beginning—for in him were all things made and for him and by him all things consist. This is the Lord of heaven and earth, and we have redemption through his blood. The transcendent living Lord once lay in the waters of death. We shall never forget it, not to the remotest bound of eternity. I think they're going to have twelve standing stones in heaven, so that we shall remember how we got there!

The significance of the stones—our death

In the third story we hear Joshua talking to the priests. 'My brethren,' says he, standing in the bottom of the river, 'come up.' So up they came, and the stones were put there. What for this time? To remind Israel that not only was the living Lord once down there, but they were there too. That would be a difficult concept for some of them to get, wouldn't it? Four generations on, the people would say, 'Yes, well our fathers came through the river you know, but what's that got to do with us?' Our blessed Lord died on Calvary two thousand years ago, but what's that got to do with me?

For us, in a deeper sense than Israel—but it was true even for them if they were a member of the true Israel—being a member of that corporate body meant that when Israel came through Jordan, every descendent came through Jordan too. How did you get into your inheritance? Not being saved merely from dying and death, you were saved *through* death, weren't you? Dead with Christ; buried with Christ; raised with Christ. And what are the implications? 'Well, if you died with Christ, why do you carry on behaving as though you are

living in the world?' says Paul. 'And if you are risen with Christ, come up and set your mind on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.'

Conclusion

Oh, I know you've a lot more fighting to do, we grant you that. But, my brother, my sister, the inheritance that God has given you is actually beyond the reach of death already. That gift of forgiveness, that gift of eternal life, these are the gifts of eternity. Your inheritance is already beyond the wasting effects of death. Then set your affection on things above, not on things in the earth, for you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ appears, who is your life, then shall you appear with him also in glory (see Col 3:2-4).

Movement Two: Establishing the Law

Let us continue our study in the book of Joshua, and read at some length so we may be able to understand the very serious lessons that are now taught us in the second movement of this book. We begin in chapter 6:

And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city. And the city shall be devoted, even it and all that is therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest when you have devoted it, ye take of the devoted thing; so should ye make the camp of Israel accursed, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are holy unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD. (Josh 6:16–19)

And Joshua charged them with an oath at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: with the loss of his firstborn shall he lay the foundation thereof, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it. (6:26)

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the devoted thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the devoted thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. (7:1)

Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now, what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Of a truth I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: when I saw among the spoil a goodly Babylonish mantle, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel; and they laid them down before the LORD. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the mantle, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them up unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all

Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire, and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones, unto this day; and the LORD turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor [the valley of Trouble] unto this day. (7:19–26)

And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people that were in the city were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. And there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Stretch out the javelin that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thy hand. And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city. And the ambush arose quickly out of their place, and they ran as soon as he had stretched out his hand, and entered into the city, and took it; and they hastened and set the city on fire. (8:15–19)

And it came to pass when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they pursued them, and they were all fallen by the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all Israel returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not back his hand wherewith he stretched out the javelin, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. (8:24–26)

And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until the eventide: and at the going down of the sun Joshua commanded, and they took his carcass down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raised thereon a great heap of stones, unto this day. Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD, commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of unhewn stones, upon which no man had lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote, in the presence of the children of Israel. And all Israel, and their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger as the homeborn; half of them in front of mount Gerizim, and half of them in front of mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded, that they should bless the people of Israel first of all. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them. (8:29–35)

The Lord give us good understanding of this solemn part of his holy Word.

Introduction

Throughout the first three movements of the book of Joshua, there are two things that the historian will not allow us to forget. The first of them is that, as Joshua led the armies of the Lord over Jordan and into Canaan, two things were happening simultaneously. Certainly Israel were being led into that inheritance that had long since been promised to them by God through Abraham; but simultaneously with their being led into the inheritance, the judgments of God were to fall on the Canaanite cities, even as God had warned in that very same promise given to Abraham. Therefore, this morning, we shall have an interest in asking ourselves how and on what condition Israel, now into the land across Jordan, would inherit their inheritance? And secondly, how and on what condition would sinners of the Gentiles, like Rahab the harlot, prove the truth of God's promise that in Abraham all the nations of the earth should be blessed?

The second consideration that the historian will not allow us to forget, is that in each of the three movements that Joshua was commissioned to lead, there was a very well defined objective. Yesterday we saw that the first objective given to Joshua was, 'Rise up and lead these people across Jordan.' It was an objective that Moses himself had commanded, but was not able to perform or achieve; but an objective that what Moses could not do, Joshua did. And the first movement comes to its resounding climax as the Holy Spirit records time and yet again that the ark stayed in the bed of Jordan until all the people were passed clean over. Praise God for objective number one achieved.

Moses had commanded that when Israel got into the promised land, they should take themselves to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. There they should build an altar; there they must erect stones; there they must write out the law of God upon those stones, in the sight and reading of all the people; there they were to assemble the tribes, half of them on Mount Gerizim, half of them on Mount Ebal. After assembling the tribes, they were to read in their ears the blessings that would come to them if they kept the law of Moses, and all the people were to answer with one thundering voice, 'Amen, amen.' Then they were to read the curses that would accrue to Israel if they were to break the law of Moses, and once more, as each disobedience had attached to it its appropriate curse, and the people heard the fearful words of the curse of the law of Moses, all the people were to answer with one united, thundering voice, 'Amen, so be it.' And as their voice comes reverberating to us down the centuries, echoing round the hills of Pennsylvania, I imagine your knees begin to wobble a little, or a certain faint feeling appear in the pit of the stomach. Just wait a minute now.

Does the inheritance depend on keeping the law?

If objective number two is the establishment of the law of God in Canaan, let's try and get it clear. Is Joshua saying that the inheritance of Israel, long promised to them by God through Abraham, depends on their keeping of the law? Although we are not Israelites, but more like those sinners the Gentiles, and Rahab in particular, we too have a vested interest in discovering whether Joshua is or is not teaching that the coming of the blessing of Abraham upon the Gentiles is dependent upon those aforesaid Gentiles keeping the law of Moses. What is the truth of the matter?

Perhaps, however, I ought to spend the odd minute and a half convincing you that you have a vested interest in the topic. Of course, I readily recognise that none of you have been Rahabs, but you are sinners of the Gentiles. And there is, as Galatians 3 reminds us, that early promise in the book of Genesis that in Abraham and in his seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. I'm not forgetting that you, being now saved sinners of the Gentiles and belonging to the church, have a heavenly inheritance—'incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you' (1 Pet 1:4)—and yet it seems to me that you have, or should have, a vested interest in this ancient historical promise.

That bit of territory in the Middle East, covenanted by God to Abraham and his seed—have you no vested interest in it? For Galatians 3, if I have read the argument aright, runs something like this. Here is Paul arguing that justification is by faith for 'by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified' (Gal 2:16). But not content to argue that justification is by faith, or rather, not being content simply to argue it on the ground of Genesis 15:6: 'And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness,' Paul adduces certain other arguments. 'Consider, my brethren,' says he in Galatians 3, 'not only the initial thing of justification by faith, but consider all those other blessings that were promised to Abraham. What about, for instance, the inheritance, and what about the covenant, and what about all the promises that were made to Abraham? On what terms were they made?'

The covenant promises

That great inheritance was promised to Abraham in Genesis 15. That day God came to him and said, 'Abraham, you're going to have a son,' and Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. And God said, 'And now, Abraham, you see the land north, south and west? I'm going to give it to you and your seed for an inheritance.' With the alacrity of a genius, Abraham turned round and said, 'Thank you very much, but how do I know that I shall inherit it?' And God made a covenant that day with Abraham, in the old fashioned method of making a covenant. He didn't get out his parchment and sign with black and red ink, nor have it witnessed by a solicitor. The ancient way of making a covenant was to take covenant animals, slaughter them, lay the pieces in two rows and the people who were party to the covenant had to walk between the two rows of the pieces of the victims. If both parties had something to fulfil in order for the covenant to come into operation, then both parties walked between the covenant pieces. If only one party had something to fulfil, then only one party walked through the covenant pieces.

We have our counterparts nowadays. In our country, at least, I don't know how you do it in yours, if you decide to have a little holiday ranch built up in the mountains, you go along to the builder and you say, 'I would like a little holiday ranch; it should have six bedrooms, four bathrooms, and an outside swimming pool; plus I would like a few acres to stretch my elbows in and a garage or two, and a gazebo. Now, would you build me such a holiday ranch?'

And the builder says, 'Yes, of course I would.'

'And what would you charge?'

'Two and a half million pounds.'

You get your architect to specify all the materials and the details, he tells you what the price of it is going to be and you come to your agreement. In our country, when the contract is drawn up, the builder would sign the contract, because he has conditions to fulfil, and then you would sign the contract because you have a condition to fulfil. He builds the house, you pay the money. And if either of you break the terms of the contract, the contract becomes null and void. That's what we call a two-party covenant.

There are other kinds of covenant, of course. There's a covenant that you might call a one-party covenant. In Britain we call it a will. Suppose one of these days you get a long-looking envelope in the post. When you open it it's from solicitors, Grabbem and Makepeace, and they inform you that your unheard of Auntie Matilda has died in the far west, up in the mountains of America, and she's left you a mountain ranch with the aforesaid description, plus a lot of shares and preferential stock and a few ocean-going yachts and possessions in the Bahamas.

You say to the learned solicitor, 'And what have I got to do to come into this inheritance? Do I pay you ten dollars to make sure?'

'No,' he says, 'you don't have to pay me anything. Let me read the will again.' He puts on his glasses and reads it very learnedly. 'No, there's no condition attached: it's all yours if you want it.'

'How can I be sure of that?'

'Well, this is a will, and it's duly witnessed and signed.'

'I wasn't there.'

'That doesn't make any difference.'

'I didn't promise to fulfil any condition.'

'That doesn't make any difference either. Your Aunt Matilda, in the sheer grace of her heart, has left you her estate. She had a will made; it's signed, sealed and settled. If you want the inheritance, you can take it free, gratis and for nothing.'

'Really? Don't I even have to look after her pet poodle? And if I fail to look after her pet poodle should I lose the inheritance?'

'There's nothing here about keeping pet poodles. I'm sure your Aunt Matilda would like you to do that, and if in the gratitude of your heart you decide so to do, well that's marvellous. But there's no legal condition upon it. Of course,' says the solicitor, 'if you don't want it you can reject it. You don't have to take it. But if you want it, it's a free gift.'

So says Paul in the course of his argument. 'My brothers, my sisters, justification is by faith.' And to prove with proof upon proof that justification is by faith, Paul now points out that the inheritance also is by grace, through faith, because of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed, that he should be not merely heir of Palestine but, according to Romans 4:13, that he should be heir of the world.

God's one-party covenant with Abraham

How and when was it made, and according to what kind of a covenant? There is no doubt about it. When the covenant victims were drawn and quartered and laid in two rows, and the parties came to walk through the pieces solemnly to bind themselves to keep that covenant, Abraham did not walk through the pieces. He was, in fact, fast asleep anyway. But on that

solemn day there appeared the furnace and the bright light of it, and a lamp that walked between the pieces, as God Almighty solemnly made a one party covenant of his sovereign grace, pledging utterly on the grounds of faith and grace to give the inheritance to Abraham. 'So not only justification,' says Paul, 'but the inheritance is by grace through faith, and not only to the Jews either, but that the blessings of Abraham might come upon the nations, the scriptures foreseeing how it should be done, preached the gospel before to Abraham saying, 'In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.'

Finally Paul comes to his masterly conclusion by arguing the legal side of the case again. 'The covenant,' he said, 'was made with Abraham and his seed. He said not to seeds as of many, but seed, which is Christ' (Gal 3:16). And here I must trouble you with another legal observation. Imagine your brother George had accompanied you to the solicitor to read the will of your Aunt Matilda. When the solicitor read it, it said she had left the house to you, the garage to you, the cars to you, the launch to you, the Bahamas to you, and all her preferential stocks and shares to you, and you said, 'Thank you very much.'

Then George piped up, 'Where do I come in?'

The solicitor asks, 'Who might you be?'

'Well, I'm George.'

'Oh yes, George. Well what do you want to know?'

'Well, my Aunt Matilda would have left me something, I'm absolutely sure of that. What do I get? Read out now what's coming to me.'

And the solicitor puts his glasses on again and reads. 'George? Sorry, there's no George here.'

'Oh, there must be.'

'Well, there isn't.'

'Then you must correct that, Mr Solicitor, and put my name in.'

'Oh, but you can't do that kind of thing,' says the solicitor. 'Once a covenant is signed, sealed and settled, that's the end of it.'

So the covenant was made to Abraham and to his seed. You mustn't add any other name to the covenant deed. And you weren't Abraham's seed, by any chance, were you? How then will you sinners of the Gentiles inherit what was promised to Abraham and his seed? Now hear the wonderful mystery, how God could preach the gospel aforetime to the very Gentiles, that in Abraham and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. As many of you as have been down in Jordan and have come up the other side. As many of you as have been baptised into Christ, have put on Christ, and you are in Christ. And if you are Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, because you're in him who is Abraham's seed, and you are heirs according to the promise. Oh, praise God for his magnificent and indescribable grace.

An inheritance—but on what conditions?

On what terms, then, do you inherit it? Have I not convinced you that you have, or at least you ought to have, a vested interest in these chapters in Joshua, to ask—with the judgments of God raining down upon Jericho and Ai—on what terms may sinners of the Gentiles like Rahab be saved alive, and with Israel enter into the inheritance? On what terms shall Israel

hold it? As we listen to the blessings and then the curses of Moses' law pronounced on Ebal and Gerizim, will that mean that we could forfeit the inheritance? Some believers have seriously thought so. They have said that justification is by faith, eternal life is by faith; all thereafter is conditional, and if believers do not behave themselves they will not inherit with Christ. Some have taught that during his millennial reign, true believers could be cast out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. For they say that the kingdom is conditional. What is the truth of the matter?

God's judgment on Jericho

And so we come back to our book of Joshua. These are long passages and I shall be able to do no more than stimulate your thinking about them. Have patience with me. When the judgments of God fell upon the city of Jericho, they proved to be extraordinarily severe. More severe than on any other city in the whole of Canaan, for whereas in all those other cities the people were executed, Israel was allowed to take to herself the spoil of her enemies. But in the case of Jericho, a ban, a curse was pronounced upon the city of such severity that the whole city had to be devoted to the Lord. Men, women and children were executed, and even the material riches and wealth of the city, the gold, the silver, the brass, the copper and the valuable clothing, these things too were devoted to the Lord, and put into the treasury.

The ban was of such severity that Israel were warned in the very moment when they were going through the walls into the city to execute the judgments of God, that if Israel themselves dared touch anything and take it to themselves, Israel also would fall under this ban, this curse. The judgment is so severe that we must try this morning to come to terms with it. Let's understand it as clearly as we can. Everything to be devoted to the Lord, not in our modern English sense, but in the old Latin sense of the word *devoveo*, devoted. That is, every person and every thing had to be set aside for the Lord, meaning thereby set aside to the judgments of the Lord, and therefore to be executed by the officially appointed agents of the Lord.

The captain of the Lord's host

As the operation was about to begin, Joshua was in his tent the evening before, when looking up he saw a figure approaching with his drawn sword in his hand. Going forward to the figure, Joshua said, 'Are you for us or are you against us?' and the exalted figure replied, 'Neither, Joshua. As captain of the host of the Lord am I come' (see Josh 5:13-14). Who was that figure? It was he who one day stood in the synagogue in Nazareth and read, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor,' and got as far as the quotation when it talked of the acceptable year of the Lord, and then closed the book. The very next phrase was, as we know, 'The day of vengeance of our God' (Luke 4:17-20, cf. Isa 61:1-2). But here was a point in history when the pre-incarnate Son of God came, captain of the host of the Lord, that would execute the judgment of God, the doubled-edged sword being drawn and in his hand. Terrible judgments though they were, we may come to trust him who taught us God is love, as he takes to himself the divinely given charge, to execute the judgments of God.

Devoted then—set aside to the judgments of God. Severe in this, as I say, that if any Israelite so far forgot himself, or allowed himself to be overcome with covetousness and took anything that was under the curse, he himself became cursed, and under the sentence of being devoted to God. When Jericho was destroyed, Joshua pronounced a curse upon Jericho if anybody should rebuild it. How shall we come to terms with this very severe judgment? Well, not by trying to diminish its severity, nor the holiness of the God who ordained it. But perhaps it will help us to notice where this kind of judgment is mentioned in the New Testament, and in what connection.

The Hebrew word for devoting people in this sense of the judgment of God, is the noun *herem*. The Greek translation of that word is *anathēma* in the noun form, and in the verbal form *anathēmatidzō*. When I mention the word *anathēma* your minds will move quickly to the New Testament. It occurs in 1 Corinthians: ‘If anybody does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema’ (16:22). But the most prominent place of its occurrence in the New Testament is in that epistle to the Galatians from which I have been reading to you. And it may profit us to turn now to that epistle and notice first those two occasions and the context in which this terrible judgment is pronounced.

New Testament parallels

I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel; which is not another *gospel*: only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema. (Gal 1:6–9)

Here then is the place in the New Testament which, pre-eminently above all others, pronounces the exact same kind of judgment as fell upon the city of Jericho. Having observed that, let’s spend another few minutes going through Galatians and ask ourselves whether there are any other parallels between the Epistle to the Galatians and this particular movement in Joshua 5–8. There are, aren’t there? Let me list just a few of them.

When Achan was eventually discovered and his sin brought to light, and he was out there in the middle before the tribes of Israel, Joshua addressed him. ‘Achan,’ he said, ‘why have you troubled us? Did God not strictly warn us that if any one of us, going against his judgment and his curse on Jericho, tried to salvage anything that God himself had cursed in that city, he himself would come under the ban and he would trouble Israel? Achan, why have you troubled us? You bring a curse upon us.’ And there they stoned him with stones until he died (see Josh 7:19–25).

They are solemn words that stand in the early verses of Galatians 1. ‘I marvel,’ says Paul, ‘that you are so soon moved away from the gospel. How can it be, unless it should be that there are those who trouble you’ (Gal 1:6–7). And in chapter 5 he says, ‘I would that they be cut off who trouble you’ (5:12). Already we can begin to see the connection—what were they doing to trouble the believers in those Galatian cities? Well, precisely this, that whereas Paul

had preached that the inheritance was utterly by faith, these were coming along and trying to salvage something out of a system that God had now cursed. They were teaching the believers that in order to inherit and keep hold of their inheritance they must be circumcised and keep the law.

How can it be true? For as Paul himself put it in chapter 3, 'All those who are under the law are under a curse' (3:10). Alright for you, my brother, if you can stand on Mount Gerizim and honestly say to God, 'God, I take your blessings on the ground that I kept all your law.' Let those of us who know we haven't kept it, freely admit that we deserve its curse, whether we are sinners of the Gentiles like Rahab, or a sophisticated Pharisee like the apostle Paul, 'circumcised the eighth day and as to righteousness under the law, blameless' (see Phil 3:5–6)—yet when he woke up he discovered that he was an incorrigible sinner, and under God's curse. So whether it is the harlotry of Rahab or the religiousness of Saul, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and have fallen under the curse of the law. To try and salvage a religious rite like circumcision and bring it into Christianity; and to make justification that the inheritance depends on circumcision and the keeping of the law of Moses, is to do what Achan did and to trouble Israel.

It wasn't only that he troubled Israel, was it? Joshua said to him, 'My dear man, why ever did you do it?' 'Well,' he said, 'I saw this wedge of gold and this silver and that beautiful Babylonish garment, and I was being ever such a good Israelite. When I found them, I coveted, and I tried to stop coveting and I couldn't stop coveting, and sin revived.' 'Yes,' said Joshua, 'and I'll tell you what. You'd better die too.' Oh, it would make your legs shake, wouldn't it, if our inheritance depended on keeping the law. Paul tried it, if Romans 7 is his own confession: 'I was alive, but then the commandment came and it slew me' (vv. 9–11). The person who thinks that he can deserve the inheritance by keeping the law must have some preposterous and unrealistic idea of his own holiness and abilities.

A curse on rebuilding Jericho

When Jericho was destroyed, in the name of God, Joshua uttered a curse on anybody who should rebuild it. Let me tell you a story. Greenwood Hills is not the only place where they hold Christian conferences. They held one in Antioch at one stage. And present at the conference, among other worthy believers, was the apostle Paul, plus the apostle Peter. And as they, for the first day, sat to eat, naturally there were with them a lot of Gentile believers, for Antioch was a church in which the Gentiles predominated. Being Gentiles, they never had been circumcised: all they had done was to repent and trust the Saviour. They had been received into church fellowship as being genuine believers, that the promise of Abraham might come on these Gentiles as well.

And Peter, God bless him, had been content to eat his maple syrup and things, and pancakes and sausages, along with the others of them. And all was going well until certain brethren came down from James, and they said, 'Peter, you're not eating with Gentiles, are you?'

'Well, I was.'

'But Peter, how could you do it? I mean they're not circumcised: they're not heeding the law. You won't eat with them at dinnertime, will you? Because if you do we shall go back and tell James.'

Come dinnertime, Peter found he didn't feel like eating and excused himself and said he thought he'd better go without dinner and go to his bedroom.

'No, you don't,' says Paul, and stood in the doorway in front of everybody. 'No, you don't Peter. What are you doing, and what are you saying? Tell me, Peter, these sinners of the Gentiles here, do they have to be circumcised before you're prepared to eat with them? Do they have to be circumcised before you're prepared to believe that God has saved them? You who have preached so clearly before that we Jewish Christians believe that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved, will you rise up now and refuse to eat with Gentile believers, saved and justified by the grace of God, their hearts purified by faith? Will you rise up and refuse to accept them as genuine believers unless they get circumcised by the law of Moses? Come, come Peter,' he says, 'for if I build again the Jericho that I once destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.'

So then, on what ground did Israel inherit? As far as Joshua is concerned, let me take you back to the paragraph that we did not read in 5:2, which tells us that when Israel got over Jordan, 'The Lord commanded Joshua, and Joshua commanded the people to make sharp knives and circumcise themselves.' 'Oh,' you say, 'Mr Preacher, you've given your case away now. They had to be circumcised to enter the land and get their inheritance. It says so, look.' No, it doesn't: you'd need to be better lawyers than that. When did they circumcise themselves? Before they got into Canaan, or after they got into Canaan? You say, 'What difference does it make?' Oh, it makes a world of difference. You will remember a similar argument that Paul adduces in Romans 4. He says, 'The promise given to Abraham and to his seed that he should be heir of the world, pray tell me, when was it given to Abraham? Was it given to him after he was circumcised, or before he was circumcised?' (see Rom 4:9-13). There's no doubt about that: it is Genesis 15. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness; while he was still uncircumcised, and God promised him the inheritance and gave him the covenant that he should inherit all, in Genesis 15, before he was circumcised.

'Yes,' says Paul, 'he had been justified and he had been given the covenant, and only after that was he given the sign and seal of circumcision, a sign and seal of the righteousness which he had while he was still uncircumcised. Says Paul, 'That is exceedingly important, because it was not merely Abraham and his physical descendants that God had in his view. The inheritance was pledged to the Gentile as well.' How and on what terms? Says Paul, 'That in order that the promise and the covenant should be sure to all the seed, therefore it was of grace.'

So here you see God standing by his original principle when at last the promise is fulfilled and Israel enter on their inheritance. When were they circumcised? Before they go into Canaan? No, indeed they weren't, for the historian spends several verses pointing out that the whole generation that survived the wilderness had not been circumcised. Israel came into their inheritance as uncircumcised as any old sinner of the Gentile, and crossed the Jordan and came up the other side still uncircumcised, and it was only after they were in the

inheritance that they were asked to be circumcised. The legal precedent is exceedingly important in showing on what ground they did inherit.

Having dealt with its history at a higher level, we may now allow ourselves to interpret the thing. For if circumcision as an external rite proclaimed a man's promise to keep God's law, which Israel notably failed to do, circumcision as a sign symbolised something far, far deeper. It symbolised, as Paul says in Philippians 3, that we have no confidence in the flesh: it is not on those terms we inherit. But it symbolises something deeper still. Says Colossians, 'He has made you fit and capable and qualified for your inheritance of the saints in the light' (Phil 1:12). However did he do it? Do you get it under the condition of the law?

You say, 'No.'

Does that mean that you can have the inheritance, and it doesn't matter whether you keep the law or not?

You say, 'No, Mr Preacher.' The righteousness of the law has got to be fulfilled, and they who stand in Canaan and enjoy its fruits must say 'Amen' to the law. They do not demote the law, they establish the law. They hear its curses and they say, 'Amen' to it. How can they do that? See that corpse hanging on that tree down there by the city of Ai? What a sinner he was. The law said he must die, and the man with the outstretched sword led Israel to execute the sinners. See Achan, stoned with stones according to the law? How can you possibly stand and say, 'Amen,' to the curses of God's law?

Oh, now let me tell you a wonderful story. I read it from the Epistle to the Galatians. In order that we might be delivered from the curse of the law, yet the law's curse and the law's standard be upheld, 'he was made a curse for us' (Gal 3:13). Have you ever found your heart breaking on that fearful judgment that fell on Jericho, and you don't know what to say to your unconverted friend about the severity of the judgment of God? Turn him to where that same person, who there as the pre-incarnate Christ wielded the sword of judgment and entered into Calvary, where for our sakes, harlots and all, he was made a curse for us and they hanged him on a tree. He saved us not by keeping the law; he saved us by bearing the curse that we have merited by the breaking of the law, that the blessing of God might come on the Gentiles.

And now that you're free from the curse, does that mean you don't have to keep the law?

You say, 'No, Mr Preacher.'

Well, how do you propose to go about keeping it then?

You say, 'Well, Moses commanded it, and we've done it here on Mount Ebal and Gerizim, establishing the law, but although Moses commanded it, he couldn't give us the power to keep it. But there came a Joshua, thank God for him, and 'what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin . . .'—he does not excuse sin, but condemns it—'that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit' (Rom 8:3–4).

What do you mean by walking after the spirit? And wherein is your secret? I think you'd take me back to Jordan, wouldn't you? You'd take me to those old stones and you'd say, 'Do you know how we came across there? Well, the ark went down there and came up the other side; and once we were down there and we came up the other side.' And Colossians says, 'Would you remember how you were made fit to be partakers in the inheritance? You were

buried with Christ in baptism, in which you were raised through faith in the power of God, having been circumcised with the circumcision of Christ' (Col 2:9–10). So that the roots of your very nature, the roots of your personality that were once rooted in a nature that has come under God's curse, have been cut and the real you has been transferred into ground of a different sort. You are in the spirit, and the spirit is in you.

I like those old stories in Joshua 5, don't you? Give me two minutes. Go without a cup of tea. That will show how much you love the Lord and his word! But I love those stories at the beginning of Joshua, how that they circumcised, and they kept the Passover to remember the grounds of redemption. The manna ceased and that day they ate the old corn and they ate the new corn: parched ears of corn, for after Passover comes the feast of Firstfruits, and they take the firstfruit and they parch it and eat it. Oh lovely thing, this is how they inherited. Circumcised with the circumcision of Christ; redeemed by the blood of the lamb. Eating the very firstfruits—Christ risen and ascended.

So if you walk in the power of the Spirit, then you will agree with God's judgments. And I must leave you with this. When Israel came into that land hitherto filled by worldliness and sinfulness of a shocking degree, how did God save them from that present evil world, with all its iniquity? There were two battles: the conquest of Jericho and the conquest of Ai. At this historical and physical level, they are twins: two sides of one coin as far as military strategy goes. In Jericho it was a question of getting in through the walls and there destroying the enemy. In Ai it was a question of drawing the enemy out of the walls, and there grasping them in a pincer movement and so destroying them.

There were two sides to the story, and if ever the law was to be established on Mount Ebal and Gerizim, both Jericho and Ai must be destroyed. When Jericho came to be destroyed, how was it done? The ark of the Lord of the whole earth led by the captain of the host—not Joshua but his greater captain (Josh 5:12–15—marched round the city. Israel did nothing for the moment but watched as the ark and the presence of God came to judge that wicked city. But the ark had been down under the waters of Jordan, and now arisen. What must its resurrection mean to Jericho, and what must it mean that the Lord of glory, who went down to Calvary and to death, is risen and ascended? Says the Holy Spirit, 'It means this, it is evidence of the judgment of this world, for now has the prince of this world been judged.'

The trumpets blared, and the ark now risen went around the city. On the last day, on the seventh occasion, Joshua said, 'Shout,' and the very walls fell down and Jericho's inhabitants were destroyed. How would we be delivered from the world and all its evil? Ask the Epistle to the Galatians. By circumcision, by legalism? Certainly not. Well, then how? We'll borrow a word from Joshua's address to Achan: 'Give God the glory' (Josh 7:19). Had you found the secret of overcoming the world and being delivered from all its iniquity, you'd give God the glory too, wouldn't you?

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. (Gal 6:14 KJV)

That's Jericho finished. I have agreed with the judgment of God upon the world. But there's another side to the story. Achan sinned and came under that same curse himself, and Israel, being tainted with it, were defeated at Ai, and they had to agree with the judgment of

God upon Achan. 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I, who deserve the similar curse, I am crucified to it.' Oh, wonderful Lord.

When the armies came to execute the wrath of God upon Jericho, the great captain with his sword outstretched led the way, but as Israel came to be delivered from that terrible sin at Ai, how did he do it? The first time Israel came up to Ai they were defeated and they ran away. Says Joshua, 'The way to victory at Ai will be to re-enact, to rehearse, the defeat.' So he took the troops up to Ai and he said, 'When the enemy come out, you run away as though you were defeated.' I think I would have preferred to be in the ambush, the all-victorious ambush, around the other side of the city, wouldn't you? I'd like that role. You'd get a medal for that. You wouldn't get a medal for running away; and admitting yourself defeated and remembering all those past mistakes.

'No, please Joshua, put me in the other lot.'

Says Joshua, 'Wouldn't you prefer to be where I am?'

'Oh, what brigade will you be with? Will you be with the people that give the victory?'

'No,' says Joshua, 'I shall lead the defeated.'

Oh, what grace is it that Joshua, this delightful prototype of Christ, with his javelin in his hand led that band of defeated, sinful Israelites, now repentant, and got them to re-enact the defeat. Oh yes, my long defeat; and he took my side, and in his apparent weakness joined my defeat even so far as the curse of Calvary's cross. Satan thought he'd won forever, but it was another story, for Joshua didn't withdraw the javelin until the enemy found to his surprise that what looked like defeat was the divine strategy of final victory.

By weakness and defeat,
He won a glorious crown,
Trod all our foes beneath his feet,
By being trodden down.⁶

Oh, let's praise him in our heart. Let's praise the divine grace that had mercy on us Gentiles, and has brought us the promise of Abraham, that in Abraham and his seed shall all the nations of the world be blessed.

⁶ Samuel Whitelock Gandy (1780–1851), 'His be the Victor's name.'

Movement Three: Occupying the Inheritance

Today, by the Lord's help, we must attempt to consider the third major movement of the book of Joshua, which completes the first half of the book. Though, if time permits, we will allow ourselves a brief glance before we finish into the second major half of the book. So this morning I would like to begin with a number of readings. First, a short reading from each of the six major movements of the book, that will help us to put some of the details of the third movement into their proper context.

So, from the first movement in the book:

Now therefore, I [Rahab] pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that ye also will deal kindly with my father's house and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death. (Josh 2:12-13)

From the second movement in the book:

But Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all that she had, did Joshua save alive; and she dwelt in the midst of Israel, unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. (6:25)

And from the third movement in the book, the one we shall be considering this morning:

And Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live. (9:15)

From the fourth movement in the book, it is Caleb who speaks:

And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he spake, these forty and five years, from the time that the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war and to go out and to come in. (14:10-11)

And from the fifth movement:

These were the appointed cities for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person unwittingly might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation. (20:9)

Finally, from the sixth movement in the book:

And Phineas the son of Eleazar the priest said unto the children of Reuben, and to the children of Gad, and to the children of Manasseh, This day we know that the LORD is in the midst of us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the LORD: now have ye delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the LORD. (22:31)

In the second place I would like to read with you a passage from Deuteronomy, which will help us to understand the behaviour of the Gibeonites who had heard what Moses had said:

When thou drawest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall become tributary unto thee, and shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: and when the LORD thy God delivereth it into thine hand, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: but the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take for a prey unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee. Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these peoples, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth. (20:10–16)

Then let's read some verses from the third movement itself, where Joshua calls for the Gibeonites:

And he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We are very far from you; when ye dwell among us? Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall never fail to be of you bondmen, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God. And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you; therefore we were sore afraid for our lives because of you, and have done this thing. And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do. And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, unto this day, in the place which he should choose. (9:22–27)

May God give us wisdom to interpret his Word aright.

Objective of third movement

Today we come to study in the main the third great movement in the book of Joshua and our first interest shall be to consider what the objective of that third movement was. You will remember that the objective in the first movement was to get the Israelites over Jordan into

their inheritance, and the record tells us how that objective was gloriously achieved. The ark stood in the bed of the River Jordan until all Israel were passed clean over Jordan. The objective in the second movement was to establish the law of Moses in the land of Canaan. For that purpose, Israel taking the initiative in the attack, positively attacked Jericho first and Ai second. And when they had defeated those two cities, they made their way, forthwith and immediately, without waiting to attack any other city, and came to Ebal and Gerizim and did as Moses commanded, and established the law of Moses in the land: objective number two.

And now we come to the third movement, and the third objective, which was to give Israel the whole of the land to inherit. For that purpose, it was necessary that Israel capture all the cities and strongholds that hitherto were in the possession of the Canaanites. For that purpose also, it was necessary to destroy all the kings of those cities and the inhabitants of those cities. And this, we are told in the third movement, is precisely what Israel did under the leadership of their great Joshua.

The two aspects to each movement

But now we shall notice in the third movement what we have noticed in each of the preceding two. In each of the preceding two movements, there are two major stories. In the first movement the first story is the salvation of Rahab. She was saved from death, or given assurance that she would be, by the oath of the Lord, uttered by the spies. And in the second place in that first movement, was the bringing of Israel into Canaan, and we found that they were saved not, so to speak, from death, but through death. It is vivid picture language, reminding us of our Christian salvation. It is true in the one sense that we are saved from death. It is true in the other sense that we are saved through death.

In the second movement, there were two major cities to be attacked — Jericho and Ai. With Jericho it was a question of penetrating the city's defences, entering through the walls and destroying the occupants. With Ai it was the other way around. To capture Ai you had to draw the king and the people out of their city, and thus destroy them in the open plain. And we found reason to think that the picture language pointed us to the double technique by which God saves us from this present world, with all its evil. 'God forbid,' we read in Galatians, 'that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Gal 6:14), the means by which two things have happened: the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

We shall find the same pattern of things here in the third movement, for now we are told that the cities were taken, and their occupants captured, but the central interest is not the long lists of individual cities that are recorded, but the two major confederacies of kings that came against Joshua. There was the first confederacy of kings who came, strictly speaking, not against Joshua at all but against the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites made peace with Israel, and the rest of the southern cities found that a profoundly disturbing thing. They had armed themselves to the teeth to resist this invasion by the Israelites that for some years they had heard to be threatening. They were all massing their troops ready to attack the Israelites, when they heard that the Gibeonites had made peace and gone over to the other side. It was especially disturbing, says the historian, because Gibeon was a great city, like a royal city, and all the men of Gibeon were about seven feet tall. So the united armies of the first confederacy

came up and attacked not Joshua and Israel, but Gibeon, and in that story what a strange turning of the tables we shall find. The Lord fought, and he fought for Gibeon.

But if the first confederacy tells us of God's exceeding great mercy on the Gibeonites, in the second confederacy we read these words: 'None made peace with Israel save the Gibeonites, for it was the Lord who hardened their hearts that they should come against Israel that he might destroy them, according to all that Moses commanded' (Josh 11:19–20). So there are not only two confederacies, one based on the south and one on the north, but the stories of those confederacies put two sides of a story. The mercy of God to the Gibeonites who deserved nothing but judgment; and the judicial hardening of God, that hardened the hearts of the second confederacy that they came against Israel, foolish men, and thus came to their destruction as Moses had prophesied they would. Consider, my brothers and sisters, the kindness and the severity of God.

The Gibeonites—and problems of interpretation!

Now I shall have to admit right from the start and be honest that the Gibeonites have, down the centuries, had a very bad press. Or rather, the Israelites have gained for themselves a very bad reputation for making peace with the Gibeonites. 'The Gibeonites,' they say, 'were a terrible old crowd, and they came and perpetrated that terrible deceit upon Israel with their mouldy bread and patched clothes and all the rest of it. What consummate liars and deceivers they were.' Yes, of course they ought to have been put to death, and every throat of every man be slit. But that you might have expected of Canaanites. 'The fault, surely,' say the commentators, 'is to be found with Israel, that they made peace with the Gibeonites. They took their bread and, as the text says, "they asked not counsel of the Lord" (Josh 9:14).

Israel at fault?

'That's typically us,' says the exhorter. 'We've just come from some great victory, after days and months of prayer and waiting upon the Lord, and then, flushed with success, we forget to continue to wait upon the Lord in utter dependence. We forget not to rely upon our own wisdom, but going along with the tide of success and independence of the Lord, and without asking him counsel, we go and do something, make an arrangement that proves a disaster and mistake, and the result remains with us perhaps for the rest of our lives. The moral is, don't do what the Israelites did. Always remember to ask counsel of the Lord. Yesterday's success is no reason for proceeding further in our own strength.'

And I have a difficult task this morning, because truth to tell, the lesson that I have just preached in the name of others is a very good lesson. It's true to life, and hence the reason why many commentators have been persuaded that this is what the passage teaches. But my brothers and sisters, as far as I can see, that interpretation runs into very sore difficulties, and I want you at least to allow me to plead the case of the Gibeonites. Perhaps I shall never convince you before we get home to heaven, though there I think I shall, because the Gibeonites will be there to back me up! Nonetheless, allow me to put the difficulty before you.

God fights for the Gibeonites

It is the fact that when the Gibeonites made peace, all the other kings of the southern confederacy came up to attack the Gibeonites, and what happened then? God told Joshua suddenly to raise his troops and attack the confederacy, and when Joshua started he found himself overtaken, because as the confederacy was shattered and they began to flee for their lives to try and get into their cities, the Lord himself rained down stones from heaven upon them; and more were killed by the stones which came down from heaven than there were by all Joshua's armies put together. The Lord fought for the Gibeonites—how will you explain that? Let me try an explanation and see if you agree.

A doubtful explanation

The Lord was intending to destroy the Gibeonites, and would have done so. Alas, his people under Joshua didn't seek counsel of the Lord and they went and saved the Gibeonites, and God highly disapproved. To make matters worse, Israel swore an oath in the name of Jehovah that the Gibeonites would be protected, saved and preserved, and God said, 'What foolish men for swearing an oath in my name. I wanted to destroy them.'

Then the southern confederacy came against them and God said to himself, 'If I leave this to Joshua, the Gibeonites will be defeated. I shall have to do something about it. I wish those Israelites hadn't gone and sworn an oath in my name. They've put me in a very difficult position. I wanted to destroy the Gibeonites, and lo and behold, I am obliged to save them.'

Do you think that was the situation? I should find it very difficult to argue that case, even on earth; I think it would be extraordinarily difficult standing before the throne of the Almighty! God fought for the Gibeonites to honour his oath to let them live. Oh, magnificent grace of God. Let me put it into the context, and you'll see now the reason why we read all those other verses. In this book of Joshua, dark with the judgments of God, and well deserved judgments at that, every single movement of the book records a case of the magnificent grace of God and his mercy to undeserving sinners, and he let them live. In all our exposition of the book, while we must talk of the grave judgments of God, let us magnify the grace of God that let sinners who repented live.

A Scriptural explanation

'So what then is the true interpretation?' you say.

Well, first of all, let's think of the Gibeonites' motivation for what they did. When Joshua at length discovered that they had perpetrated a trick upon him, and had extracted an oath and now were eternally secure because Israel couldn't go back upon the oath, Joshua summoned them to his tent to have a counsel with them. 'Now gentlemen,' he said, 'you're safe now, so you can tell the truth for the first time. Tell me, what made you do this, and perpetrate this trick?' And to his astonishment they started to quote the Bible.

They said, 'We did it according to the Bible, Joshua. You see, it was fully told to your servants what Moses had said' (Josh 9:24). Strange language to hear from Gibeonites. What had Moses said? Well Moses had said to Israel, quite distinctly, 'When you go to war against

a city that is afar off, first you shall offer it peace and preach peace to them that are afar off. And if the city take advantage of your offer of peace and come out to you, you shall save them alive on the condition that they become tributary to you and they become your servants. Of course, if they reject your offer of peace, then you shall destroy the city and the males of the city, but save the rest of the city alive, plus the booty. But,' said Moses, 'that's what you shall do to a city that is afar off. But with those cities that are near at hand, you shall slay and destroy them without mercy' (see Deut 20:10–17). And the Gibeonites had heard it.

Now I'm going to ask you to be very honest. What would you have done if you were a Gibeonite?

You say, 'I would have been honest. I would have gone and told Joshua, "We are a city near to you".'

Would you really? Well, the Gibeonites didn't. They had a council among themselves, and they said, 'Things are getting very grave. This is no myth. Behind Israel is the living God come to execute judgment on our ungodly society. How can we save ourselves?' And the answer they came up with, according to Moses, they said, 'If we can persuade them that we are a city afar off, they would offer us peace.' Hence their lie.

You say, 'They oughtn't to have told lies.'

Well, perhaps they shouldn't, but Rahab told a lie, and the Holy Spirit says that she acted in faith. The Gibeonites told a lie, but they were acting to save their skin. What is more, as you will see from the record, when at first they came to Israel they said, 'Please make peace with us,' and the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, 'Perhaps you dwell among us; then how shall we make a covenant with you?' They said to Joshua, 'we are thy servants' (Josh 9:7–8). Oh, they'd read their book, hadn't they? Because they had seen this, according to what Moses said, that if it were a city afar off, they could have peace on one condition: that they were prepared to come and be servants to the people of God.

And when Joshua said to them, 'How can I make peace with you? It could be perhaps that you are a city near to us?'

They said, 'But Joshua, we are your servants.' Were they sincere, or was that only a ploy? They were sincere, weren't they? For we read that when Joshua finally laid down terms, they said, 'Yes, Joshua, we are quite happy with that. You have saved our lives. We are happy to be your slaves, Joshua.'

'And you must be slaves and servants to the altar of the Lord.'

'Exactly so,' said the Gibeonites, 'and we are happy to spend the rest of our lives on earth, slaves to the people of God and slaves to the altar of the Lord.'

And so they persisted for many, many generations.

They were genuine men, weren't they? Proving by their behaviour that they had genuinely repented. For you see what was involved: when they came as ambassadors to put the case that really they were afar off, they saw vividly the implications of it right from the very start. It meant surrendering every right they ever possessed, surrendering their city and giving it up. Hitherto it had been like a royal city, but if they would have peace they must take the position that it wasn't their city any more. They were afar off. For the rest of their lives they would be servants. You say, 'But the verse says, "Israel didn't enquire of the Lord"' (9:14). And I say, what a merciful providence that was, because if Israel had enquired of the Lord,

Israel would have felt duty bound to destroy them. It was of God's good providence that they were not destroyed.

You say, 'Mr Preacher, you are a very cunning pleader, but I don't agree with your interpretations.'

Alright, you make your own peace with the Gibeonites. I want to examine you. Do you sit there in peace with God? Are you sure of his oath to protect you through time and eternity? How did you manage to make peace with God?

You say, 'That's easily answered. We were genuinely afar off.'

Yes, call to remembrance the time when it was so. Once upon a time, you were far off—alienated from God, strangers from the covenants of Israel, without God, without the Messiah and without hope in the world. Ungodly in your way of life, you were children of wrath, even as the others. So why didn't wrath descend upon your head and destroy you?

You say, 'The difference between me and the other man is that he didn't realise he was afar off and alienated from God. But by God's grace I realised I was and I took that far off position, and owned I was worthy of God's judgment. When I did that there came one, his name was Joshua (Jesus), and he preached peace, not only to them that were near, but to those that were afar off.'

And now you're no more strangers but you are fellow citizens of the saints. Like the Gibeonites, you live amongst the people of God, both now and eternally. Do you begrudge to the Gibeonites what you've gone and done yourself?

But I want to examine you a little bit further. Are you sure that you are as genuine as the Gibeonites were? How did you come to Christ?

You say, 'I heard there was coming wrath, and I said I'll come to Jesus for salvation first. I'll apply to Jesus for salvation, but I'm not quite ready to accept him as Lord, or necessarily to be his servant and slave.'

So you came to Jesus and you received him as Saviour, but you said, 'Now, I want a few years to think over whether I'm prepared to have you as Lord.' Is that how you came?

Let the ancient story remind us there is no salvation on those terms. We would be saved from the coming wrath. It means taking the far off place, and what does that mean?

It means acknowledging I have no rights whatsoever. I give up my city. I give up my possessions. I own myself a bankrupt sinner under the wrath of God. If the sword of his judgment fell, I should have nothing but an eternal hell. If the terms are—and they are, my brothers and sisters—that if you become Christ's, you renounce all you have, right from the start. Yes, you have salvation free and for nothing, but forever after you'll be a slave of Jesus Christ, and you will be a servant of his people and a servant of the altar, the cross of Christ. There is no salvation on any other terms. You can't be redeemed and not redeemed. You say, 'What do you mean?' Well, you haven't forgotten what redemption means, have you? Redemption means to be bought. You can't be bought and not be bought, and if you've been bought you are no longer your own; you are bought with a price.

Defeating the confederacy

But then let's consider the consequent battle. It's a heart-warming story isn't it? For when the other Gentile nations heard that the Gibeonites had got converted and had made peace and were now with Israel, the confederacy turned all their wrath and spite against the Gibeonites. And Israel was sent and put the enemy to flight, and as I say, the Lord himself joined in the battle, not against the Gibeonites, but for them. Oh, what a marvellous oath of God. Permit me the simplicity of enjoying it this morning. As I face eternity, as I face every possible created thing, height, length, depth, breadth, life here, life to come, I can say with confidence, if God is for me, who can be against me?

I love the picture that Colossians 2 conjures up. There we were, dead in the uncircumcision: Gentiles in our hearts. And there was the handwriting against us, all the handwriting that master Moses had piled up, and there were the principalities and powers against us. What chance had our little bankrupt, Gentile, guilty souls? When we were helpless, the very Lord from heaven came to the cross. And as the principalities and powers besieged him with their evil confederacy, God moved in and he stripped principalities and powers, made a show of them openly, triumphed over them in it, and ascended magnificently to the very throne of God. Oh, hallelujah, what a Saviour!

The sun and moon stand still

And talking about that, I love that other miracle; and, because I'm not a scientist, I shall be interested one day to hear the report of the scientists! As the enemy fled, with Joshua's swords and the stones of the Almighty thundering behind them, Joshua felt that there wouldn't be time to get at them and destroy them before they got back into the strongholds of their cities. So he took the altogether unusual step, standing on earth:

Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies. (10:12-13)

Marvellous miracle wasn't it? And all put on to save the Gibeonites, if you please, for God was determined to destroy the very last enemy that had ever come against them, or ever would. What's the point of the miracle? Wherein lies the big miracle? 'Well,' you say, 'can you even believe it? If the sun were to stand still, that would mean that planet earth had stopped on her axis and New York would be destroyed, and the skyscrapers come tumbling down and all that. How could it possibly have been? And what about the astronomical implications of the moon and the sun standing still together? How could it be done?' Therein lies the miracle hitherto unexplained.

But you've missed the biggest miracle, haven't you? As the historian himself says, 'There was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord . . .' That the Lord what? ' . . . hearkened to the voice of a man' (v. 14). So Joshua wasn't fallen out of favour with the Lord for swearing that oath to protect the Gibeonites! For in the process of protecting them, Joshua, who has two

feet on earth, dares address the Almighty and ask for the sun and moon to be stayed until the last enemy is destroyed. And the Lord listens. Do you know there was never a day like that before or after? Yes, it's inspired Scripture that says so; but that was written centuries ago.

That record has been overtaken since then, hasn't it? For there came another day, when another man stood on earth and he saw the people that had trusted him, and he saw their enemies, and he prayed that they might be kept from the evil one. And he said, as he lifted his eyes to heaven, 'Father, glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world was' (John 17:5). Oh, what a day, when God listened to the voice of a man, and glorified the blessed Saviour to shine as the sun in the firmament of heaven forever, and all to protect us. And coming to the end of that prayer he prayed again. 'Father,' he said, 'I desire that they, whom you have given me, be with me where I am that they may behold my glory' (17:24). And at that moment the moon appeared in the sky, didn't it, in full face of the sun. Seated already with Christ in heavenly places, far above all principalities, powers, mights and dominions; and one day you shall be bodily where you already are spiritually. Oh, that old moon, looking at the sun, and the sun flooding it with its glory. And to think that you were once afar off, under the threat of God's judgment, alienated from God and with no hope in the world, and today you are eternally secure and seated with Christ in heavenly places. It's fit to make your lungs burst with joy! You say, 'I'm not in heaven yet, brother, well not bodily.' No, and you've got a lot more fighting to do yet, haven't you?

The last enemies

Some of these rascally old kings fled away and hid themselves in a cave, and Joshua put a stone on the mouth of it until he'd dealt with the others, and then he had them dragged out in the light of the sun. And he brought the people together and he said, 'Put your feet on the necks of these kings' (Josh 10:24); and they came near and timidly they did it. Thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies, and one day the last enemy himself shall be destroyed. There's still a lot of old kings lurking in sundry caves around Pennsylvania, aren't there? Those that used to have dominion over us. But sin shall not have dominion over you, my brother and sister. If it seems to now, it shall not permanently. Rise up and put your foot on its neck, for there is a secret to being delivered, though learning the secret and learning to put it into practise is perhaps a lifetime's job, but it shall be done. Sin shall not reign as a king over you. Come and put your trembling foot on its neck and learn progressively as God gives you deliverance from it. Dominion of sin, ah, dominion of death; we haven't got that yet fully done, have we? The day will come when the last enemy itself shall be destroyed. And the dominion of law—in the sense of command plus penalty plus curse—you've been delivered from it forever. Oh my brother, my sister, wake up and find your freedom.

The second confederacy

It was another story with the other confederacy, for they came and positively attacked Joshua. Now, you will notice that Jericho didn't do that, and Ai didn't do that. Joshua attacked them. But this northern confederacy came and attacked Israel, and met disaster. How did it happen? Well, it was of the Lord, for he hardened their hearts. They'd heard the gospel just like Rahab

had heard the gospel, and they could have been saved like Rahab. They had heard what Moses said about coming judgment, and they could have been saved like the Gibeonites. But they rejected the gospel, and determined to attack and destroy Joshua and Israel. There came a point where God hardened their hearts, and coming finally against Joshua they were destroyed. It can happen to anybody, can't it?

It will happen historically in a very big way. The Acts of the Apostles tells us there was a tremendous confederacy against Joshua, our Jesus Joshua, when he came first, and the heathen raged and the people imagined a vain thing, and they rose up against God and against his anointed; and they put the blessed Lord Jesus on the cross. God answered it by raising him to the very heaven.

And the gospel has gone out, but at the end of this age when men have deliberately, with eyes open, rejected the gospel and refused the love of the truth that they might be saved, God shall send them a strong delusion. They shall believe the lie. The beast shall lead his armies against the coming blessed Saviour, Jesus. What fatuous folly, thinking with his space age equipment to be able to resist the glorious coming of Jesus Christ our Lord. It will spell, for him, instantaneous destruction. Behold the goodness and the severity of God.

The second half of the book of Joshua

I said at the beginning of the lecture that I hoped to talk about the second half of the book. If I could persuade the sun and the moon to stand still, so I would, but I can't! I can briefly report that Joshua then distributed the land to the tribes and the further objectives were achieved; that the two and a half tribes, the tribe of Judah and the tribes of Joseph, in their inheritance set up the tabernacle of meeting in Shiloh. Glorious objective achieved.

With the seven tribes given their inheritance, they set up the cities of refuge, and then the cities for the Levites that there might be men to serve God in the tabernacle they had set up in Shiloh. And then the third objective was this, that the service of God should be maintained down the generations. I can report some success, for Joshua died, but such was the provision that Israel went on serving God all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders that outlived him. Then, alas, things went into decline.

You say, 'It wasn't much of a victory, was it?' Have you read about better days in the churches that you know today? And how, in all the movements of God, people carry on serving the Lord while those who were used of God to lead the movement pass away. And they go on serving until the elders have passed away, and then the thing goes downhill.

I end on a happier note. We have a Joshua. No elder will ever outlive him, thank God, and while he lives, he will have the ultimate victory. Oh, thanks be unto God who, through Jesus Christ our Lord, gives us the victory with him.

About the Author

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