

THE CONQUEST OF THE PROMISED LAND
A Devotional Study of Joshua
by Max Frazier, Jr.

I would like to share with you some thoughts from one of my favorite Old Testament books. The Book of Joshua was written by the man who succeeded Moses as the leader of the people of Israel. It relates the events of the conquest of the land promised to these people by God. It is not a definitive account, but is a record of the major events of that conquest. The book closes with the land being divided to the various tribes.

The name, Joshua, means "God is salvation." Throughout this book, Joshua is depicted as a man of prayer, courage, dependence upon God, faith, leadership, enthusiasm, and fidelity. He ranks second only to David as being one of the greatest military leaders Israel has ever had.

The theme of the Book of Joshua is "the conquest of the promised land." I have chosen as the key verse of the book, Joshua 1:9, which states, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." What a fantastic promise is made to us in that verse.

"Don't be afraid!" That is what God told Joshua. In fact, the Bible tells us 365 times that we are not to be afraid. (I find it more than a coincidence that God gives us one command not to fear for each day of the year. I believe that God knew that being fearful would be one of the great problems mankind would face everyday.)

A study was conducted concerning those things which caused people to become afraid. The results of that study were interesting. Only twenty percent of our worries or fears are legitimate. That means that eighty percent are either unreal or things over which we have no control. Someone has said, "Worry (which really is at the heart of many of our fears) is assuming responsibility God never intended you to have." The late Corrie ten Boom, a survivor of the Nazi holocaust, wrote, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength."

God can set us free from fear, but He does not always set us free from the difficulties nor the problems which might become a catalyst for fear. Joshua faced many uncertainties:

1. The death of Moses: Would the people accept him as the new leader?
2. A flooded Jordan: How would they get across?
3. Jericho and beyond: How would they defeat the giants which were in the land?
4. His age: Joshua was well past the age of 80. Could he bridge the generation gap?

Joshua was afraid, so God had to give him a pep talk in being strong and courageous. Tomorrow we will begin to examine those truths which God shared with this great leader.

Friends, give your fears to God today. He knows your heart and your situation. He is asking you to be strong and courageous, and you can do this with His help.

A REMEDY FOR FEAR

Joshua 1:1-3

The Book of Joshua opens with these words: "After the death of Moses the Lord's servant, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant." In order for Israel to experience the blessings of the promised land, in order for their fears and worries to be erased, a death had to occur before the blessings could be given.

The death of Moses represented the last remnant of the old order. Moses was under a sentence of death because of his disobedience to God by striking the rock instead of speaking to the rock. As long as Moses lived, Israel could never experience the blessings of the promised land. William Lasor, in his book titled, Great Personalities of the Bible, wrote: God expects each generation to get up on its own feet and face its own problems. God does not want us to stand around saying, 'Well, now, look at Moses. There was a great man! We will never have another man like Moses!'...Moses is dead. Great man that he was, he is dead. Get up and face

the problems of your day and your age! Arise, go over this Jordan. Do not long for the past. Do the work of the present, and God says, 'I will be with you.'

You and I cling to our old sinful natures, don't we? In First Corinthians 15:31, Paul makes an unusual statement when he proclaims, "I die daily." Why was this so necessary in order for Paul to be set free from his fears and worries? Paul realized that he lived in a body which had to be daily yielded to God in order that he might experience the spiritual blessings of God.

One of the greatest remedies for anxiety and worry and fear is obedience to the command for us to move forward spiritually. We are to be crucified daily so that we might truly live. The song writer captured the importance of this thought of dying to self and to sin when he wrote: We cannot be channels of blessing If our lives are not free from known sin; We will barriers be and a hindrance To those we are trying to win.

As we begin a new year, a new millennium, God would challenge each of us to move forward spiritually so that we might walk in the fullness of obedience to God's will.

Secondly, we are to move forward steadily. God states these words to Joshua in verse 3, Everywhere you go, you will be on land I have given you. In Exodus 23, God had told Moses that, when they got to the Promised Land, God would drive the enemy out little by little so that the people might more carefully appropriate what God had given to them.

One of the words of wisdom which I received as a teenager was from a dear saint of God who said, "Max, don't ask God for more until you already are faithful in what He has given to you." I wish I could state that I have always followed those words of wisdom. But, at times, I have been in such a hurry that I have relied more on what I could do than on what God has done. I am daily reminded of those words of the chorus: In His time, in His time, He makes all things beautiful in His time. Lord, please show me every day as You're teaching me Your ways, that You do just what You say in Your time.

Lord, as we close our study today, we ask that you would help each of us as the family of the Village Schools, to move forward not only spiritually, but also steadily in this coming year. Not that we would receive any praise or glory, but that You would be honored and praised. We give You thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

THE PROMISES OF THE WORD

Joshua 1:7-9

It was a frightening responsibility which God was entrusting to Joshua. He was aware of the nature of these people God was placing under his leadership. For forty years he had witnessed their mood swings, from complete surrender to God to complete rebellion against God. He had seen how they had treated Moses. He had witnessed their words of scorn and contempt for his leadership.

I believe Joshua was fearful. In fact, I think Joshua might have been terrified at the prospects lying before him. I know I would have been. Yet God reassured Joshua of His continued presence. He could be strong and courageous because God was with him.

How was Joshua to know this presence of God? I believe it was to come through the daily meditations upon the Word of God. We read in verses 7 through 9 these words: Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you: do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

As we read and meditate and reflect upon the Word of God we become increasingly more aware of who God is. We begin to share an intimacy with Him that excites our hearts. We don't need to be Bible scholars to appreciate Scripture; we just need to be faithful, consistent Bible students.

T.B. Maston said, The Christians who have turned the world upside down have been men and women with a vision in their hearts and the Bible in their hands. One only has to think of such giants as Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Carey, Jonathan Edwards, D.L. Moody, and Billy Graham to realize the significance of these saints came only because of their devotion to the Word of God.

It has been said that "some Christians drink deeply at the fountain of God's Word; others only gargle." It is time for us to become intoxicated with the Word of God! The times demand this of us if we are to dare hope to make an impact upon our world for Christ.

CROSSING YOUR JORDANS

Joshua 3:1-5

Today, we begin with chapter 3, one of the most exciting miracles which God performed for Israel prior to their entrance into the Promised Land. Within the text I notice at least three key ideas which, when implemented by each of us, will allow us to more successfully cross those Jordans which lie in front of us.

We begin by noticing that Israel had been in the wilderness for forty years. God had provided for her every need - manna from heaven, water from the rock, protection from the enemies - but the wilderness was NOT the land of promise. Ahead lay the land flowing with milk and honey, the land promised to Abraham and his seed forever.

But, in order to get to that promised land of blessings, they had to cross the Jordan. Now the river was at flood stage which meant that it was over a mile wide and six to twelve feet deep with many swift rapids. The Jordan represented a seemingly insurmountable barrier to reaching God's best.

Friends, the Jordan represents those things in our lives which prevent us from fully appropriating God's best for us. They represent those things which we might consider to be impossible. Every time I read this chapter I am reminded of that little chorus I learned so many years ago in Sunday school:

Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?

Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?

God specializes in things thought impossible,

He does the things others cannot do.

Our Jordans should not be the cause of fear, but should become opportunities for trusting the Lord.

The very first step in a successful crossing of the Jordan is following God's guidance. We read in verses 3 and 4, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before..."

Joshua cautioned Israel that they were to follow the ark as they crossed the flooded Jordan River. They were not to attempt to cross it in their own strength or planning, either through the construction of bridges or the discovery of fords. They had to follow the Lord. And Joshua gave them the reason: they had not been here before. With the exception of the two spies from the present and the two spies from the past, Caleb and Joshua himself, not one person knew what lay across that Jordan River. They were going to have to trust the Lord.

Whether it is a new day or a new week or a new year or a new millennium, we must follow after God. We do not know anything about the future, but God does. We have never been here before, but God has. He knows the way. We just need to follow him.

MORE THOUGHTS ON CROSSING YOUR JORDANS

Joshua 3:5

In our last study, we began to focus our attention upon some key ideas which we might observe within this third chapter of Joshua that would enable us to successfully cross those Jordan River experiences which will occur during this coming year.

We noticed first, in verses 3 and 4, the need for Israel to follow the guidance from the Lord. They were not to try to accomplish a crossing in their own strength or through their own devices. Neither should we, but we should

place our full confidence and trust into the hands of the Lord.

The final two thoughts are found in verse 5, which reads: Then Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you." The second command from God to Israel was that they consecrate themselves. Here was the command that Israel should examine their souls and their relationships with God. It was a time to confess any known sin. It was a time to enter into a right relationship with the One who had promised the land to them.

Before God will give deliverance and blessing, He needs clean vessels. He needs vessels yielded in obedience to Him. Paul proclaimed in 2 Corinthians 7:1, Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. Paul also admonished Timothy with these words: If a man cleanses himself from the latter (wickedness, mentioned in verse 19), he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2 Timothy 2:21).

God never fills us as long as we are experimenting to see how far and how fast we can travel with the world!

Finally, the people were to get excited about what God was going to do. The Christian life is to be an exciting one. God does not call us to a lifetime of boredom and mediocrity. He desires that His servants experience the blessings and joys of life. We serve a God who, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

So, what lies ahead in the coming year as we face those impossible Jordans? I really don't know, but I can share with you some precious thoughts from Isaiah's pen which underscores God's truths from Joshua 3. Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (Isaiah 43:1-3). God is more than able to see you through.

MEMORIAL STONES

Joshua 4

By faith Israel had crossed the Jordan. Now you would have expected them to rush on toward Jericho. After all God had promised them victory there. But no, God first leads them to a little, insignificant place called Gilgal. This would become a place of waiting for them.

Why wait? Why not charge straight into the battle? I have found that God gives us waiting time to renew us, to recharge our spiritual batteries, to give us new insights. So many of us, after crossing our Jordans, rush to our Jerichos, but God desires to first call us to Gilgal. Yes, the Jerichos are more exciting because this is where the action lies; while the Gilgals are more difficult because it is hard to wait on God.

It has been said that the outstanding characteristics of the great New England preacher Phillips Brooks (perhaps best known for his Christmas song titled, "O Little Town of Bethlehem") were poise and imperturbability. His intimate friends, however, knew that at times he suffered moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw him pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What is the trouble, Dr. Brooks?" asked the friend. "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!"

One of the things which God asked Joshua and the people of Israel to do here at Gilgal was to build a monument to commemorate God's bringing them across the Jordan River in a miraculous way. Memorial stones. Places of remembrance. We all need them to help us to never forget the workings of God in our lives. Your memorial stone may be at a summer camp where you came to know the Lord Jesus. It may be an altar in a church where you surrendered your life in service for the Lord. It also might be a college campus or just a place under a tree somewhere. It might also be the memories of a significant experience while studying the Scriptures through a class at the Village Schools. But at that place, wherever it might be, you had an unforgettable encounter with God. There may not be any physical monument there, as Israel created at Gilgal, but there is a mental monument.

And it is good when those times come and discouragement sets in, to go back and to be refreshed with what happened in the past. We can never return to that experience, even as God never again dried up the Jordan River for Israel. But we can draw strength and hope for the present by remembering that the God of yesterday is

still the God of today and tomorrow.

MORE LESSONS LEARNED AT GILGAL

Joshua 5

Let us take a walk into Jericho. We hear reports that Israel had been successful in crossing the flood swollen Jordan. We have heard how Israel's God had dried up the waters of the Jordan and it reminds us of the reports we have heard about the Red Sea. The order is given to make the city secure. Panic has struck. We observe that the people hope that their gods will protect them in the coming attack, but they are not so confident. They seem to be a doomed people.

Now the camp of Israel knew the fears within Jericho. There is an old military tactic which states that you "get them while they are down." We might have expected Israel to rush toward Jericho to take advantage of the situation. But God has sent them instead to Gilgal - a place of remembrance, a place of memorial as we noticed in our last study.

Here, in this fifth chapter, let us observe some more lessons which God desires Israel to learn in order for them to become successful in their receiving the gift of the Promised Land.

We read in verse 2 these words, At that time the Lord said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again." Now this seems like a very unreasonable request of God. He was really asking Joshua to disable his army for a period of time. Now you might be saying, "Why was this circumcision so important?" In order for us to appreciate the significance, we must travel back into the book of Genesis and chapter 17. There God commands that Abraham be circumcised as an outward act of obedience displaying the faith Abraham had in God's promises. Circumcision was the outward sign of a complete yielding to God. It was the outward manifestation of a clean heart. Its purpose was to show a people separated unto God.

For forty years, Israel was under punishment for their sins at Kadesh in refusing to enter into the Promised Land. Now, Israel was in that land but could not enjoy its riches until they made a complete break with their sin. Their uncircumcised state reminded them of their sinful past. In verse 9, after the circumcision had occurred, God stated, Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. What did God mean? "The reproach of Egypt" was at the center of Israel's sinful way of life. They had worshipped Egypt's god - the golden calf. They had desired Egypt's way of life instead of the goodness of the Promised Land. They had a constant desire to go back to the old way when the going got tough. Yet, now with their circumcision, they were stating to God that they were willing to break with the past and to trust God for the future.

If we are to be successful in our Christian walk, we, too, must be willing to make a complete break with sin, to realize all of God's forgiveness. You and I are not adequate in ourselves to deal with sin. We make excuses for them, cover them up, overlook them, and even ignore them. I like the statement attributed to Billy Sunday about sin. This is what that great baseball player turned evangelist said about his fight against sin: I'm against sin. I'll kick it as long as I've got a foot, and I'll fight it as long as I've got a fist. I'll butt it as long as I've got a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. When I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition.

I like that statement and that attitude.

STILL MORE LESSONS LEARNED AT GILGAL

Joshua 5:10

So far, in our brief study of this marvelous chapter, we have observed that God has used the time Israel has spent at Gilgal to remind them of His powerful and miraculous presence (the memorial stones), and to cause the reproach of Egypt to be removed from them (through the act of circumcision). Now the way for their fellowship with God was reopened.

We read in verse 10, On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. This is the only the third Passover which the people of Israel had celebrated. Of course we all remember that very first instance, there in Egypt on the night in which the angel of death went throughout the land killing the firstborn among the Egyptians. It was Israel's hour of deliverance. The

second occurrence came a year later, there at the foot of Mount Sinai, just as Israel was preparing for the journey into the Promised Land. We read about this time in Numbers 9:5. But, then came the sins of the refusal to enter into the Promised Land, and Israel spent the next thirty-eight years or so living out of fellowship with God because of sin.

Now, they are prepared for the restoration of that fellowship once again. Sins have been confessed and forgiven. The Passover has been observed by a new generation who is eager for God's precious gift to them.

One of the things which I observed in verse 10, which describes this time of Passover celebration, is its location. It is on the plains in front of Jericho. This is not a place of ease, but a place of distress. Sometimes the places of greatest intimacy with God are those places and times of deepest affliction and distress. God desires that we enjoy our fellowship with Him anywhere.

Just ask Peter, "Peter, where can you experience the fellowship with God?", and he might reply, "In prison while awaiting my death." We read, in Acts 12, that Peter had such fellowship with God that he could actually sleep the night before his impending death.

Just ask Paul, "Paul, where can you experience the fellowship with God?", and he might also reply, "In prison after being falsely accused and beaten." We read, in Acts 16, that Paul and his traveling companion Silas, actually sang praises to God there in that jail cell in Philippi.

Just ask Daniel, "Daniel, where can you experience the fellowship with God?", and he might reply, "In a lions' den." We read, in Daniel 6, that Daniel experienced the very presence of God while there in that place of death.

One more example. Ask Shadrach and his two friends, "Where can you experience the fellowship with God?", and they will reply, "Even while in a furnace of fire."

Friends, wherever we are, God is present. Therefore, wherever we are, God desires to fellowship with us. Remember these familiar words from David, Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies. Yes, in the presence of those enemies of discouragement, despair, and even doubt.

VICTORY AT JERICHO **Joshua 6:2-5**

We begin our study in Joshua this week with one of the most familiar stories in all of the Bible - the conquest of the city of Jericho.

There is an old spiritual which proclaims that "Joshua fi't the battle of Jericho...and the walls came tumblin' down." You probably sang that song with your high school choir while growing up. I know I did. It was a fun song to sing. But I think there are some things wrong with the premise of that song.

First, I am not sure that Joshua was the one who fought the battle. He was a participant as were his men. But the real combatant was God. This was His fight. And the battle was won not through might or power, but through the Spirit of God. The battle belonged to the Lord.

Let's look at this thought for a moment or two. God had given Joshua some very unusual commands. I am sure that the following thoughts went through the mind of Joshua: Why the marching and not the fighting? Why the silence and not the shouting? Why the waiting? Why use seven days instead of one day?

I am sure that as Israel marched during those days, the people on the walls of Jericho, whose hearts were already filled with fear, might have begun to jeer and to call the Israelites names and may have even thought that Israel was afraid of them.

I am sure that even Israel was unsure as to what to expect. The silence was hard, and yet the success of the mission depended upon their absolute and unquestioned obedience to the plan of God. Perhaps on the first day they handled it with the thought that it was a plan to intimidate those in Jericho; but as the days dragged on, they had to begin to wonder themselves.

How we need to remember that our ways are not God's ways. Our puny plans may not be His almighty plans. I am sure that they asked themselves why Joshua would ask them to take thirteen trips around the city. I believe it took that long for everyone to realize it was utterly impossible for them to conquer Jericho. They finally realized

that they could not do it. They came to understand that only God could.

One of the lessons which God has been teaching me is that as long as I think I can handle a problem and do it alone, I miss out on the infinite resources of God. Sometimes God has to take me around a problem thirteen times until I come to recognize that in my own strength, I am not able to conquer it. It is when I come to that realization that I can finally achieve victory.

Well, so much for the song that it was Joshua who fought the battle at Jericho. It was God who was doing the fighting and He accomplished His purposes through the obedience of His people.

MORE THOUGHTS ON JERICO **Joshua 6:8-21**

Yesterday we began our brief look at this most famous of battles recorded for us in the Bible. We even mentioned that familiar song which states that "Joshua fi't the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumblin' down." Now, we mentioned that really this song is in error because the battle was not really Joshua's but God's. It really was His plan that Israel was to follow.

The second problem with this familiar song is the phrase "and the walls came tumblin' down." I don't think that the walls tumbled down. I think they fell down flat just like someone pushing down a wall of dominoes. And great was their collapse. With their means of protection removed, the people of Jericho were easily vanquished.

This astonishing victory was not the result of military genius or strategic planning. It came as Joshua and the people were obedient to the will and desires of God. As they were marching, even though they did not know what was going to happen, they knew God was in their midst. Every night, as they returned to Gilgal, they saw the monument of stones and were reminded of the mighty presence of God.

We would do well to remember that wherever we go, we do not go alone. Our Lord goes with us. Remember the truth of those powerful words of Paul to the Roman believers: Since God is for us, who can be against us?"

A few years ago, Pastor Richard Halverson, Chaplain of the United States Senate, wrote these words. Listen to them carefully for they contain a powerful message for you and for me this day.

Walking by faith means walking not by sight. Does this mean that one walks blindly? No more than the pilot of a 747 flies blind when he is being talked into a landing by the control tower. No more than when a pilot believes his instruments rather than the seat of his pants. One of the hard lessons a pilot learns is to trust his instruments when they disagree with his feelings. He is in much greater danger by depending on his feelings than by depending upon his instruments. Ceiling zero - visibility zero - very poor conditions to fly by sight....But the aircraft lands safely when the pilot listens to the word from the control tower and obeys it.

To walk by faith is to heed the Word of God...to read it, to know it, to learn it, to obey it. It isn't those who walk by faith that louse up their lives....Rather, it is those who walk by sight! Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world, he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12)

What a tremendous lesson God was teaching Israel there at Jericho. They were to always walk by faith and not by sight. They were to trust God and not their own senses. What a tremendous lesson we each must learn every day of our lives.

DEFEAT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE - WHY? **Joshua 7:1-5**

Oh, what rejoicing there must have been within the camp of Israel when they saw those walls of Jericho come falling down. You can almost picture the excitement written upon their faces as they entered the city.

Ten miles west of Jericho was another walled city which needed conquering. The city was named Ai. Joshua sent out a scouting party to look over the situation and the report was that a small army was needed there. A few thousand troops, three thousand to be exact, were sent on this mission. But instead of victory, the army experienced a humiliating defeat right in the presence of all of Israel. The thrill of victory had become the agony of defeat. Why did this happen?

A lot of things went wrong at Ai. First, there was the cocky attitude on the part of Israel's army. Ai looked so small compared to Jericho. They thought taking it would be easy. They had failed to give God the credit for the victory at Jericho. After the battle was over they applauded themselves. Dependence upon God had become accolades for themselves.

How easy it is for us to praise ourselves when something goes right: We make that big sale; we preach a powerful sermon; we even lead someone to Christ. We ponder, "How did I do that?" And so we try to duplicate that effort over again, usually failing as did Israel.

Oh the consequences of the sin of self-confidence. I believe that the sin of pride or the sin of self-confidence has been instrumental in destroying more Christian lives than any other particular sin. I have observed church programs to fail miserably. I have seen financial drives fail disastrously. I have witnessed people, whose intentions were great, attempt something profound for God only to become discouraged and fail in their effort. In each case, the problem was not with the program, or the financial drive, or the people themselves. The problem was that each was attempted in the strength of the flesh rather than in the strength of the Lord.

Tomorrow we will continue to focus on some of the other problems which led to this shocking defeat at Ai.

MORE THOUGHTS ON WHY WE EXPERIENCE DEFEAT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Joshua 7:6-15

The joys of Jericho, dear Village Line friends, had been replaced with the sorrows of thirty-six funerals in the camp of Israel, and the agonies which go with a defeat in warfare. According to our text here in Joshua 7, General Joshua even questioned the purposes of God thinking that God had caused the defeat. Despair was high. Thoughts were even entertained about whether they should recross the Jordan River.

So, why all this agony? Why the defeat? As we observed in our last study together, one of the causes was the sin of self-confidence or pride. The army leaders thought that surely, after the great victory at Jericho, the city of Ai would be a piece of cake. They had forgotten who the real victor was at Jericho, namely God.

The second problem was the lack of prayer. This problem necessarily flowed out of the first. When we become self-assured, then we don't need God. There is no time for prayer or consultation with Him because we feel there is no need. How wrong can we be!

If only Joshua had prayed, he would have known the dangers which lay under Achan's tent. I believe that Joshua was caught up in the pride and self-confidence of the hour. But the saddest part of all was that Joshua did not know God was no longer with them. Joshua felt that everything was as it should be.

Failure to pray always makes us insensitive to sin. Samson, after having finally told a nagging Delilah about his hair, awakens from his sleep and the Bible says that he did not know that his strength had departed from him (see Judges 16:20).

When we march forward without prayer we are asking for trouble.

THE PROBLEM WITH ACHAN

Joshua 7:16-26

Ever been a part of a group which got into trouble? Oh, you were not the one who did wrong, but you got punished because you were with the person who did cause the trouble. You might have missed a recess during a school day. You might have lost your driving privileges from your parents. As hard as you tried to convince your teacher or your parents that you were not responsible for the trouble, you were just an innocent by-stander, you still were punished.

Now you know how Israel must have felt when God told them that there was a person in the camp who had broken God's commandments and had taken some of the materials possessions of Jericho about which God had said that all should be destroyed. Thirty-six of your friends had died because of this one man. Moreover, God had said that He would no longer be with you in your conquest of this Promised Land because of this one person. "But Lord, He is just one man. Why punish all of us?"

Achan had sinned greatly. His problem began with his eyes. He saw, then he coveted, then he took, and then he hid those things which God had said were to be destroyed. His sin is so common. No, I don't mean we are all thieves. But, how often have we covered up our sins. And, like Achan, at times we think we have done a pretty good job of that. Achan had probably gone with the army to Ai and had participated in the battle just as if nothing was wrong. Nobody knew - except God. Nothing can be hidden from Him.

I have often wondered how Achan must have felt that day when all of Israel marched before Joshua. One by one the field of the potentially guilty were eliminated until only one remained - Achan. Now he was caught! His confession, though real, was forced from him. Repentance present? Probably not! Yet the lesson is ever certain: Be sure your sins will find you out.

And how we need to remember that sin affects more than just me. Sin in the life of one person can be the one thing preventing God from blessing a group. Remember those words of Paul to the Corinthians: Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" (1 Corinthians 5:6) Paul was proclaiming what Israel had experienced at Ai, that one person who chooses to live in disobedience to God can affect the lives of others. The writer of Hebrews warns us with these words: See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled (Hebrews 12:15)

THE CONQUEST OF AI Joshua 8:1-29

Welcome to another exciting study in God's Word, particularly in the Book of Joshua. You might remember that we ended our last study with Israel in a particular fix. The joys of the victory at Jericho had faded into the realities of defeat and an awareness of the presence of sin in the camp. Thirty-six soldiers had perished in the battle and the entire family of Achan had paid the consequences for their sins. Truly, chapter seven of Joshua is a classic reminder of the truth that the wages of sin is death.

There is an old proverb which states, "It is always darkest before the dawn." There seems to be a lot of biblical truth in that statement. We can see it proven here in chapter eight of Joshua. How brilliantly the opening words of this chapter come to us, Now the Lord said to Joshua. It is a hint that, as far as God was concerned, everything was back to normal.

I believe that in verse one we observe three key things that brought Joshua and Israel to the place of victory at Ai. Often, in our Christian life, the conquest of the "little things" is more difficult than the conquest of the "big things", so there is much to learn.

First, in verse one I see the reality of sins forgiven. God proclaims to Joshua, Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. This is the second time that God had spoken these words to Joshua. You might remember that the first time was in chapter one and verse nine. There, Joshua faced the fears of the unknown. Here God spoke tenderly to Joshua because he was facing the fear of failure, the fear of heartache, the fear of discouragement.

Place yourself in Joshua's shoes. You have experienced the agony of defeat. You have experienced the rebuke of God for the sins of pride and the lack of prayer. You have participated in the burial of thirty-six innocent men and had shared in the public execution of the guilty. I believe the sin of Achan brought back too many memories to Joshua. He remembered the golden calf at Sinai. He remembered the open rebellion at Kadesh. He remembered the constant backsliding of Israel. Is it any wonder that he was full of fear and discouragement? How many more Achans would he find? Could he be certain that God would restore the people back into His fellowship? How many times does God receive backsliders back?

Fear of failure is a great deterrent to progress. Someone has written that fear of failure is the father of failure. At times, when I am tempted to resign to the pressures of failure, I am drawn back to the life of one of my great heroes in American history. Perhaps it is because he and I share the same birthdate, that I have become a student of his life. But, here was a man who--failed at business not once but twice, was defeated for the legislature of his state twice, was defeated on five separate occasions in his bid to enter the United States Congress, and was even defeated as a vice-presidential candidate. And yet, in 1860, Abraham Lincoln, never giving in to a fear of failure, was elected to the presidency in one of the most strategic moments in our history. His life reminds me that men who try something and fail are infinitely better than those who try nothing and succeed.

HOW COMPLETE IS GOD'S FORGIVENESS? Joshua 8:1

In my twenty-eight years of Christian ministry, twenty-six of those years being in a pastoral role, I found that the subject of God's forgiveness was one of the most difficult for us to grasp. Perhaps it is because we have a hard time giving and receiving forgiveness ourselves. But I discovered that here was an area, which instead of bringing victory, often brought a crushing defeat. And I knew that Satan was at work twisting and distorting the Word of God to bring discouragement into the lives of God's people.

Today, I would like to share with you the fruits of my study of God's Word with regard to the matters of His forgiveness. One of the most troubling areas concerns the fact of recurring sin. How many of you have said, like I have said, "This sin is the same one that I committed yesterday, and last week and last month and last year." We begin to even consider that God is nothing more than a garbage dump upon which we can deposit our trash. Do we take advantage of God?

Remember that great verse in 1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The key word, when it comes to matters of recurring sin, is just. Why is the Father just? When we sin, what do we have between us and the Father? (This is the truth the Devil does not want us to remember). The Father is just because we have a Mediator, an attorney, if you will, who tells God not to lay the sin to our charge. So, when God looks down, what does He see? The answer is found in 2 Corinthians 5:21 which states, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus, in fact says, "Father, this is one of Your children. See, he is covered with My righteousness."

I am reminded of the following true story. A Scottish physician, noted for his skill and also for his piety, died. When his books were examined, it was discovered that several accounts had written across them in red ink the words, "Forgiven, too poor to pay." His wife who was also Scottish, but who had less piety, felt differently about the unpaid bills. She said, "These bills must be paid," and proceeded to sue for the money. The judge examined the accounts and turning to the departed physician's wife, inquired, "Is this handwriting in red ink that of your husband?" She replied in the affirmative. "Then," said he, "there is no tribunal in the land that can obtain the money in the case of any account on which he has written the "Forgiven."

Village Line friends, what a great and significant truth. We are covered by the blood of the Lord Jesus. And, we have Him as our great Mediator. But, let me give a caution here. The reality of this truth should not give us the license to do as we please just because we are covered with the blood of the Lamb. Paul, in Romans 6, reminds us that we are to live a life totally dedicated to Christ and not to yield to the desires of the flesh.

But, dear friend, don't become discouraged when you commit the same sin over again. God is simply reminding you that this is an area of your life which has not been totally surrendered to Him. In His grace, He is waiting for you.

MORE GOOD NEWS ABOUT GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Joshua 8:1

You remember, in our last study, that our thoughts were directed toward those sins which we have called the recurring sins, you know, those which we are prone to commit over again. And yet, we discovered, in 1 John 1:9, the truth that God is a just God. He will forgive us because He sees us covered with the blood of His Son, who just happens to be our Mediator, our Attorney.

But, I have found that there is a second area of sin of which Satan loves to remind us in order to bring the discouragement of failure into our lives. That is those sins which we cannot remember. Are those sins ever forgiven by God? Again, let us return to 1 John 1:9. There, John admonishes us to confess our sins, that is those sins of which the Holy Spirit has made us aware. The Holy Spirit gives us knowledge of sin. We are utterly dependent upon God to make us aware of those sins that need to be confessed. Not one of us has ever convicted ourselves of sin. Instead we rationalize and even make excuses for our sins. The Holy Spirit tells us the truth about our condition in the eyes of the Father.

So, I pray to God, when my spirit is convicted by the Holy Spirit, and confess those sins to God. But what about those sins which I cannot remember, and I am sure that they are many. Well, what does 1 John 1:9 tell us: That God will forgive us all our sin; there is no balance of sin left after He has forgiven us. After confessions, we are as clean as Christ. There is an old philosophical syllogism which states: First, we are as clean as the one who cleanses us; second, Christ cleanses us; third, therefore we are as clean as He is.

My Mother had scrupulous standards of cleanliness. She believed that cleanliness was next to godliness, so she scrubbed us pink to make us saints. I can remember her cleaning my ears. I thought she was looking for gold. But when she was finished, I was clean by her standards. So it is with God. We have to be that clean because God doesn't grade on a curve. God has only one standard and only one person has ever made it. That was the whole purpose of Christ becoming man, that we, whose righteousness was as filthy rags, might be brought into fellowship with a holy God.

Finally, what about those sins of the past, which we know are forgiven, but whose memories still haunt us? What has God done with our sins? Let me share with you three verses which have encouraged my heart in this matter. The first is Psalm 103:12, which states, As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Now, friends, I have no idea at all where this place is, but it is there that God has dumped our sins. And as one dear saint told me, He has placed a no fishing sign there.

The second verse is Isaiah 38:17, which states, You have cast all my sins behind Your back. This truth becomes more real because I have never found a verse in the Bible that states that God ever turns around to see what is behind Him. We could say that with our sins, out of sight is out of mind. The third verse is Isaiah 43:25, which states, I am the one who wipes out your transgression for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins. Cannot get more honest than that.

So, if God has forgotten about our sins, who brings them to our minds? You are right, it is the devil. Our prayer, when those troubling thoughts of past forgiven sins come to our minds, should be that we might resist the devil so that he would flee from us.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE JOSHUA 8:1 **Joshua 8:1**

Well, Village Line friends, we have spent considerable time reflecting upon God's command to Joshua to not be afraid or to be discouraged because of the failures of the past. God is a God of forgiveness, and when He forgives, we must go forward.

But, you might remember that I shared with you that I had found three truths in this great verse. The first, as we have seen all week, is that we do not need to become discouraged. The second truth is found in those words, Take the whole army with you....Joshua and Israel had to learn that it was costly to leave the path of blessing. Now, instead of a few being involved, all were required. To backslide is costly. The longer people stay off the path, the harder it is to get back on. I liken it to getting off an exercise program; once off, it is so very difficult to resume once again.

Now you might be asking me, just what is backsliding? I define it to simply live in disobedience to God; to live our lives the way we want to live; to not be willing to pay the price to fully follow Christ. It is a lack of commitment, an apathetic attitude.

Let me share an illustration which I think captures the reality of backsliding. A notorious gambler came to the altar during a revival meeting. After the meeting, the minister told him to bring all of his gambling equipment to the next meeting and build a fire with them. "You'll have to excuse me, preacher, but I just can't do that." "Why not?" inquired the minister. "You've been converted, haven't you?" "Sure, I'm converted," said the gambler, "but that don't make me foolish. Suppose I throw all that stuff away and then I backslide; that would leave me in a fine predicament, wouldn't it?"

Backsliding is when we say, "Lord, I want to be a Christian, just not a committed one." Because Israel had chosen to backslide into disobedience, it would now take all of the people in order for the nation to get back onto the right road.

Finally, we read in verse 1, go up and attack Ai. Here was God's command to regroup for the battle at hand. Get back into the fight. Don't quit because of a setback. Don't quit because you yielded to sin. Remember God has promised you the victory.

Let me close today's chat with some precious words from Jeremiah's pen. He writes, "Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land - against the kings of Judah and its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you, but will not overcome you, for I am with

you and will rescue you," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 1:18-19). Friends, there will be problems and trials, but they will not overcome us. There will be setbacks into sin, but we can choose to not let sin defeat us.

A RENEWAL OF A COMMITMENT TO GOD Joshua 8:30-35

I praise God for the eternal truths which He has been teaching us. Oh the depths of God's truths. And oh the victories we can experience when we walk in the fullness of those truths. We can be like Israel in their great victory over Ai. What an awareness of the presence of God with them and of their need to daily draw upon His strength.

This great chapter closes with a time of renewal. One of the final commands of Moses, given to us in Deuteronomy, was the setting up of an altar on Mount Ebal after Israel had crossed the Jordan. Moses did not specify how soon, after the crossing of the Jordan, the altar should be set up, but the spirit of the command declared that there should be no delay.

After the conquest of Ai, the heartland of the Promised Land was now open to Israel. Joshua could have reasoned that more conquests were needed before going the two days journey north to build the altar on Mount Ebal. It was dangerous to take this twenty to thirty mile journey into the heart of enemy territory.

But, before they could proceed with the conquests and the settlement of the lands, there needed to be a renewal of their covenant with God. They needed the affirmation of their relationship to Him. They needed reminded of the One they were indeed serving.

They needed a recommitment to the Word of God. Yes, there had been a recommitment to the covenant with God at Gilgal, but that was not enough. There needed to be a recommitment to obeying all of God's laws.

Many times, in our own ministries, we can so easily get caught up in our work that we fail to take the time to renew our hearts before God. Our busyness in ministry, or in our profession, or in our recreation, or in our family time, prevents us from enjoying fellowship with the One who has called us to serve Him with all of our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength.

As an individual, I need those moments everyday of quiet reflection. And I also need those moments every week, of corporate worship. Each is so important if I am going to be effective for the Lord. Renewal of the covenant is something each one of us should take more seriously.

A SUMMIT STRATEGY AGAINST GOD Joshua 9:1-2

We begin another study into the exciting book of Joshua. God has been at work doing some incredible miracles among the people of God. And these facts have not gone unnoticed by the pagan Canaanites in the surrounding countryside. Friends, God never does His work in secret. Neither should you and I. Jesus admonished us that we were to be lights in the world and that we were not to let anything hide the influence of our light.

So, with the threat of the Israelites becoming more of a reality, the Canaanite nations gather together for a summit. The topic of discussion: How to conquer Israel? Yes, they all recognized that Israel was a threat to their existence. Yet they had a reason for some measure of optimism. Israel had suffered a defeat at Ai. They reasoned that had occurred because the Israelites were outnumbered. So, if they could just band their forces together, then victory might be assured.

Now there is a lesson in these two brief verses. These pagan Canaanite leaders had to make a decision concerning God. These people had a knowledge about God. They had observed His incredible acts. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan River by the people of God, the stunning victory at Jericho, and the crushing defeat of Ai after a momentary setback, were topics of discussion around the Canaanite summit table. Certainly these people were faced with a decision: to submit to God or to resist Him.

In a way, they were in a similar situation as was Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Yet we remember his response, Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? (Exodus 5:2). Pharaoh had a choice and said "no" to God.

I am also reminded of the words of Paul in Romans 1, as he portrays the actions of the world. He states that the world knew about God, but refused to honor Him. They were not thankful for God's goodnesses to them. They began speculating foolishly and their minds became senseless and darkened because any refusal to accept the truth will lead to the inability to distinguish between good and evil. These people thought they were wise, but in reality they were very foolish because they worshipped idols instead of the living God. They knew God, but resisted Him.

So many people are like these Canaanite leaders. They so easily turn their back upon God and trust in their own merits toward salvation. How dangerous it is to refuse to submit to God. As we shall see, in our study in chapter ten later this week, the decision of these leaders to trust themselves rather than to submit to God, would be a fatal one.

THE PERIL OF DECEIT **Joshua 9:3-15**

Satan is a very subtle enemy. If he cannot defeat you using the direct method of attack, he will use the indirect method of deceit. He will come as the wolf in sheep's clothing. He will come as the angel of light bringing the message of darkness.

In our last study together, we had observed the summit meeting of the Canaanite leaders as they began to strategize and make plans for dealing with the people of God. Included in that summit were the leaders of the community of Gibeon. But, as the plans began to unfold, these leaders became uncomfortable. They had reached the conclusion that fighting was not the answer, so they withdrew from the alliance and formed their own strategy.

They hastily prepared and sent a delegation to Joshua asking for the terms of peace. Now they realized that the only way that they could gain an audience with Israel's military leader, was to deceive him into thinking they were something they were not. So they created the impression that they had come from a far country to make a covenant of peace with Israel. Dry, stale bread and cracked and dried wineskins were given to the delegation. They were not to mention Jericho or Ai in their negotiations. So they came to Joshua, presented their story, and the covenant of peace was signed.

Now there are two lessons for us in this story. First, we must be careful that we not be deceived by those who quote the Word of God out of context. The leaders of Gibeon knew that God had permitted Israel to sign covenants of peace with those people who lived outside of the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:10-12). Yet they failed to quote God's warnings that Israel not sign any agreement with the nations living within the land (Exodus 23:31-33).

Friends, Satan knows his Bible well. In fact, I believe he has it all memorized and he will use it against you. Remember how he used the Scriptures in the temptations of our Lord. We are to test everyone who comes to us quoting the Bible. I am reminded of the admonition of the Apostle John when he wrote: Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1).

In order to guard against this misuse of Scripture by our adversary, we must do two things. First, we must study it carefully. Many of you have taken classes here at the Village Schools. Our purpose is to help you to study carefully the Word of God so that you will know its truths and not be deceived by Satan. Second, we must let the Bible speak for itself. We should never come to the Bible seeking to prove our own presuppositions. But we must let God speak to us through His Word.

The second lesson is that we can be deceived by using circumstances to interpret the Scriptures rather than evaluating our circumstances in the light of Scripture. Everything seemed so right to Joshua. The Gibeonites seemed so honest and sincere. But the circumstances were wrong. And tomorrow we will discover the serious mistake which Joshua made. Join us then, will you?

THE DANGERS OF A LACK OF PRAYER **Joshua 9:14**

Verse 14 contains one of those powerful truth statements. But they (meaning Joshua and the leaders of Israel) did not inquire of the Lord. They should have asked God for His guidance into this matter with those who were seeking to enter into a covenant of peace with them. Joshua should have prayed about it. Joshua should have remembered what had happened after the victory at Jericho when he failed to consult God before sending his army to defeat at Ai.

Without the counsel of God, the Israelites were blinded to the fabricated story the Gibeonites had told them. Their story had seemed so authentic, at least the props seemed so. Once again, Joshua is caught up in the excitement of the moment. Once again he fails to consult God. So, once again, Israel is faced with a crisis.

How easy it is, after great victories, to rely upon our own strength and counsel instead of upon God. How often do I say, "Oh, I know the answer to this problem. I don't need to bother God about this one." Or, I will say, "I believe I can handle this small crisis. God has other, more important matters to take care of." And, what made this situation all the more critical and dangerous for Joshua and Israel was the fact that these people came quoting Scripture to them as we saw in our last study.

I reminded of the sad story of an unnamed prophet who was sent by God to declare God's judgments upon the evil king of Israel named Jeroboam. The prophet went to Bethel, delivered his message, and started home as he had been told, for God had commanded him not to eat or to drink while he was in the Northern Kingdom. Yet, a false prophet deceived him with a supposed message from God. The unnamed prophet took a meal at this man's house and later perished because of his disobedience. If only he had prayed before he took that fateful journey he would have known that the invitation came from the lips of a deceitful prophet.

I need to be daily reminded of the importance of prayer. I need to be daily reminded that it is not my will but God's which is to be done. I need to be reminded daily that it is only through my prayer communion with God that I can come to know the truth of my situation and of God's desires for me at that moment.

A THRILLING VICTORY **Joshua 10**

Friends, have you ever had a decision which you made come back to haunt you later? If you have, then you know how Joshua and the people of Israel must have felt when they were informed by the leaders of Gibeon that they were under attack by the Canaanite armies and that, because of the covenant of peace which they had just signed, Israel had a responsibility to come to their rescue.

Uh, oh! Now Joshua knew that he had made a serious mistake. But a promise was a promise and Joshua knew that he had to honor that treaty which he had signed. Yes, he had been deceived by these people. But, he had not consulted God before pledging the military forces of God's people to these people should they need it.

One thing which I have always recognized as a strength in Joshua is his belief that two wrongs do not make a right. He could have said, "Too bad, Gibeon. I signed that treaty under false pretenses because you tricked me. That makes it null and void. You are on your own. Good luck." The world might even have said that Joshua was justified in responding in a manner like that. But, is that what God would want. Or, to use the modern question: What would Jesus do?

Well, Joshua knew what God wanted done. The people of Israel represented God to the nations surrounding them. Any disavowal of the treaty now would cast aspersions upon the character of God. So, Joshua gathered his leaders and prepared to defend the city of Gibeon. And, I believe, God honored that decision by not only giving Israel an outstanding victory, but also allowing them to share in one of the most incredible miracles in all of Scripture: the standing still of the sun and the moon.

What excitement for Israel! Everywhere they went they experienced the thrills of victory. No city, no matter how fortified, and no king, no matter how powerful, were able to stand against them. Why this series of victories recorded for us in this chapter. The text tells us it was because Israel was completely obedient unto the Lord.

Obedience is such a simple little word. We all know what it means. But for many of us it is such a difficult word to model. For when we obey we are submitting ourselves to another. We are voluntarily surrendering the control of our lives to someone else. It makes no difference whether it is a child to a parent, an employee to his employer, or a believer to God, it is soon discovered that the only way to achieve success is through obedience. God was pleased to bless Israel with victory after victory because they obeyed. And, if we obey His word and seek to live according to His will, He will do the same for us.

MORE BATTLES TO FIGHT

Joshua 11

It must have seemed to Joshua and the armies of Israel, that there was no end to the battles which had to be fought before the land was conquered. First, there had been Jericho, followed by Ai. Then it was the battle at Gibeon, followed by victories at Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir (all recorded for us in chapter ten).

I believe that one of the greatest temptations for Joshua and his troops was to relax and to enjoy the fruits of the Promised Land before the enemy had been entirely defeated. They had been fighting for quite some time, and I am sure, after the great victories which they had just experienced in southern Canaan, that someone did not say something like this, "Let's quit all this battle stuff and let's settle down and enjoy ourselves for awhile. We deserve some rest and relaxation." Oh the dangers when we relax when God says we should be fighting. Oh the dangers when we engage in compromise when God says we should be engaged in conflict.

Now, Joshua became aware of a coalition of forces which threatened them from the northern regions of the Promised Land. This would not be an easy task because Joshua and his forces would be greatly outnumbered. But, they also remembered that God was on their side. And, although the numbers were against them there at the waters of Merom, Joshua and his army were nevertheless successful. It was because the Lord was fighting for them.

God is never the author of defeat. God has never known defeat. Paul assured the Romans that what Joshua had proven centuries previously was still true: Since God is for us, who can stand against us? No one in Canaan and no one in our lives either. Now these victories did not come automatically. They came only as Joshua was obedient to the will and plan of God. Like Joshua of old, I can be more than a conqueror if I fully obey the Lord.

Finally, verse 23 records that the land had rest from war. What a great thought - rest from battle. The Lord knows how weary the battle can become so He planned for a time of rest for Israel. The land was not totally conquered yet, but the big battles were over.

So it is in my life. God provides that time of "rest from battle." Oh, I still know that there are enemies to fight, but I praise God for those times of retreat from the battlefield. There my soul is refreshed in the Lord and I am ready for new battles and new victories.

IT TAKES TIME TO SOLVE SOME PROBLEMS

Joshua 12

As we begin another study in the Book of Joshua, our attention will turn from wars and fightings to the settlement of the land. God did not want the people just to conquer the nations which had inhabited the Promised Land; He wanted His people to make this land their home, to live in it, to raise their families in it, to make their livelihood from the land. This was the land which He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob centuries before. Now it was to become a reality.

This chapter summarizes the various kingdom-states which had been conquered by Joshua and the people of Israel. They numbered thirty-three in all. We have no exact biblical record as to how long this whole process of conquest took, but many Bible scholars have estimated that it could have taken as much as twelve to sixteen years.

Yet this chapter is a record of God's faithfulness to His promises made to Israel and of Israel's obedience to the will of God. One by one the great kings and cities of Canaan fell before God and Israel. It was a long process, but in God's time the land was conquered.

So it is with our problems. We may not resolve all of them immediately. In fact, haven't you found as I have, that most of our problems take time to resolve. I find that my greatest danger is in losing heart in the process. You see, I am one of those people whose patience is very thin. I want instant resolutions.

The resolution of everyday problems is very similar to Israel's conquering of the Promised Land. Each day that Israel followed carefully God's plan, they came closer to conquering that city or that king. And, after many years of carefully following God's plans, the list of thirty-three kings and cities was completed. The king of Jericho - one; the king of Ai - one; the king of Jerusalem - one, etc.

If I am going to experience victories over my problems, I, too, must carefully follow those instructions which have been given to me within God's Word. Soon I can then add the name of that particular problem to the list of those which God has given victory over: the king of pride - one; the king of sibling rivalry - one; the king of hatred - one; the king of impatience - one. And the list can go on and on.

AN INHERITANCE **Joshua 13**

I suppose it is the secret dream of most people to receive a sizable inheritance from a family member. We have a fascination in those stories which we read of a person who inherits a great deal of money from a Great Uncle Harry whom he has never known.

The central feature of Joshua 13 is that of receiving an inheritance. In fact, this will be the theme for most of the remaining chapters of this great book. I would like to have us notice two truths which God has shown me from this particular chapter.

First, I read in verse 14 these words: But to the tribe of Levi he (that is Joshua) gave no inheritance, since the offerings made by fire to the Lord, the God of Israel, are their inheritance, as he promised them. The tribe of Levi received no inheritance because the Lord was their inheritance. I wonder how satisfying that was to them. All around, their friends in the other tribes were receiving estates. They were securing properties which had their names on them. But, as Levites, they were not receiving any lands. They were not obtaining any estates. They were told that their inheritance was the Lord.

It is difficult for those who are in many ministries today to see their peers in other professions advancing in the material things of this world. It is especially hard for their children. I remember my college days when I knew several students who had grown up on the mission fields around the world and who had not had the material things many of the rest of us did. They really struggled with feelings of discouragement over this fact.

And yet, their inheritance is the Lord. I believe that there are blessings which are given specially to those who have sacrificed the things of this world to proclaim the gospel of Christ. One only has to think of the great pioneering missionary statesmen, like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and David Livingstone, who gave up the security of vocation for the cause of Christ. In a very real way, their inheritance, their legacy is dependent upon God.

I see a second truth within this chapter. It is reflected in the desires of the two and a half tribes to receive their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River. Now friends, that land was never given by God to Abraham. It was not part of the Promised Land. Yet, these people were willing to settle for God's second best because it was a place of convenience and ease. The battles had been won there already. Yet, as one studies the history of these tribes, they suffered one defeat after another because they were living outside the boundaries of God's inheritance, because they had settled for God's second best.

Sadly, I must admit, I am afraid that on occasion, I also have settled for God's second best because it seemed to be the easier road at the time. God's second best is just that: it is His second best. How we must focus upon God's best...the Promised Land.

SECURING YOUR INHERITANCE **Joshua 14**

Perhaps there is no greater man of courage in the Bible than Caleb. He was a man of integrity and a man who held fast to his convictions even though being in the minority. We are first introduced to this outstanding man in the book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14. Caleb was one of the twelve spies Moses had sent from Kadesh-barnea into the Promised Land to see what it was like. Upon their return, Caleb joined with Joshua in giving a minority report. Yet, he never wavered from his commitment to God even in the face of overwhelming odds. I imagine that there must have been great pressure upon both Joshua and Caleb to compromise and to join with the majority. They might have reasoned among themselves that so many people could not all be wrong.

But Caleb was not afraid to claim the promises of God in the face of opposition. In fact, there is an interesting observation which comes from Numbers 13 and verse 30. We might have assumed that it had been Joshua who was the vocal one, taking the stand for God's will. But it was Caleb. Caleb was the more bold and courageous one. He was more willing to face difficult situations head on. Remember the number of occasions we have seen already in this book of Joshua where God has commanded his servant to not be afraid. Those words were never

said to Caleb.

Now, being eighty-five years of age and have endured the hardships of the wilderness and those years of conquest, Caleb is ready for his inheritance. We might think that, at his age, he would desire a portion of the land already taken. But not Caleb. He was never a man who desired that which was easy. So Hebron, the land of the giants, was his choice. But wait a minute, there was also something else about this place called Hebron which attracted Caleb. This was the place where Abraham had pitched his tent. This was the place where God had spoken face to face with Abraham and had promised this very land to Abraham and his descendants. Hebron was the place of communion and intimate fellowship with God. And I believe this is what Caleb aspired to for those forty-five years of wandering and conquest.

The answer as to what motivated Caleb is found in verse 12: he was confident of the Lord's help. Caleb knew that he was incapable of defeating the giants in his own strength. But, he also knew that with God all things were possible.

How we need to learn the lessons of Caleb. We often try so hard to work through difficulties in our own strength. Yet, seldom do we succeed. Paul reminded us that our ability to do anything is dependent upon the strength we get from the Lord. Caleb knew that and so should we.

LOOKING FOR THE EASY ROAD **Joshua 17**

In our last study we observed the confident assurance which Caleb had in God's presence and help in the conquest of Hebron. Chapters fifteen and sixteen of Joshua describe more allocations of the land to the various tribes, particularly to Judah and to Ephraim. There are two verses in these chapters which cause us to understand that all is not going well with the complete conquest of the land by the individual tribes.

We read in Joshua 15:63 that Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem. And, in Joshua 16:10, the statement is made that the people of Ephraim could not dislodge the Canaanites who were living in Gezer. Although the later served in slavery to the Ephraimites, the very continued existence of the Canaanites marked an area of disobedience on the part of Ephraim, for God had commanded each of the tribal groups to totally destroy those nations which inhabited the land.

As I read those verses, I am reminded of my need for total obedience to the will of God. As one writer has put it: partial obedience to God is disobedience to God.

Now, let us turn our attention to the inheritance which was given to that part of the tribe of Manasseh who had chosen to live on the west side of the Jordan River. After receiving their allotment, the tribal leaders go to Joshua and complain that they needed more land (see verse 14). Joshua agreed with them, but he did not go back and redistribute the lands already conquered. Instead, he told them to go into the surrounding forested hillsides and conquer the cities there (see verse 15).

But the families of Manasseh replied that it would be too much work as the cities were well fortified. The task was too hard. Their attitude was "We can't do it!" And so, they did not proceed into the hill country even after Joshua reassured them that God would enable them to drive out the enemy.

"I can't do it. We can't do it. It is too hard. We have not done it before." How many times do we respond to ministry opportunities with those words, the very same words which the leaders of Manasseh used with Joshua. Why are we always looking for the easy road? Why do we always want everything to be quick and simple? If anything of significance is to be accomplished for God, then it will take lots of work.

But, as Joshua encouraged the families of Manasseh, so God encourages us. With His help and His promises, let us press forward to seize each opportunity for Him.

POSSESSING YOUR POSSESSIONS **Joshua 18-19**

As we have been discovering in our study through the book of Joshua, the theme has been declared so many times and in so many ways that we are to claim by faith the possessions which are ours because we are children of God.

Israel has now been in the land and should have been ready to settle down in their inheritance from the Lord. As soon as the order comes down from God to begin to occupy, the tribe of Judah, being the largest begins to occupy the territory which was promised to them. Then, the second largest tribe, Ephraim, claims its territory. Even the two and a half tribes return to their inheritance across the Jordan River.

But all is not well. Behold, there are seven tribes which just are not sure yet what they want nor where they belong. There seems to be some apprehension on their part in claiming their possessions. This was very disconcerting to Joshua. So, he assembled their leaders and inquired as to why they were delayed in taking possession of the lands yet to be conquered.

Oh the folly of a half-completed task. How often do we stop a ministry before it is completed. The reasons (excuses) are many: the task is too large; we are too tired; all of our enthusiasm is gone; our vision is clouded. Joshua challenged the leadership of these tribes to complete the task. So, too, we need to be encouraged today to complete those opportunities which God has given to us.

I am reminded of that great promise given to us by the Apostle Paul in the book of Philippians. There he wrote: being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

CITIES OF REFUGE **Joshua 20**

We begin today by examining a concept which God had given to Israel but which is very foreign to us. I am speaking with regard to the six cities of refuge which are described in Joshua 20.

The cities of refuge, three located on the east side of the Jordan River and three on the west side, were designated havens or safe places for those who had taken another person's life accidentally. They would always carry within themselves the guilt pangs associated with the accident. There would be those flashback episodes, those thoughts of "if I could do it over again." But within the walls of those cities they would not have to live in fear of the revenge from the family members of the deceased.

Because God looks upon the heart, He knows the motivations for our every action. And because He knows those motivations He can provide a shelter of protection when we are falsely accused. Many times I return to that powerful truth recorded for us in Proverbs 18:10, The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous (that is you and me) run into it and they are saved.

But these cities of refuge also remind me of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only place where I can go to find forgiveness and to be set free from my sin. He is my great High Priest. He is my refuge. Remember these words of encouragement from the psalmist: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust" (Psalm 91:2). Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies; I take refuge in Thee (Psalm 143:9). One of my favorite texts describing our safety in God is Deuteronomy 33:27 which reads, The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

The cities of refuge picture a person who has killed someone. "Where shall I go? How shall I escape?" are the cries from that person's lips. But is this not the picture of a person when he sees himself as a sinner. Remember Isaiah's words when he saw the living God, Woe is me, for I am ruined! (Isaiah 6:5). We are like that Philippian jailer when confronted by God, "What must I do to be saved?"

Friends, we need to be ever pointing people to Jesus. Tradition states that once a year people were sent out in Israel to repair the roads and to clear the stones and to see to it that the signs were legible that pointed to the cities of refuge. I wonder how clearly I am pointing people to Jesus? He is a city of refuge for all who will come unto Him.

AN ALTAR THAT ALMOST COST A WAR **Joshua 22**

Have you ever done anything out of a spirit of innocence and had it backfire on you? Or you did something and your motivations were called into question? Have you ever been misunderstood? If you ever have, and I am sure that if you are like me this has happened more often than we care to remember, then you can identify with the scene in this chapter.

The big part of the conquest is now completed. Those two and a half tribes who had chosen their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River now bid their leave from Joshua and the rest of Israel. They have completed their vows to help in the conquest of the land. Now it was time to return to their families who were living on the opposite side.

As these men approached the Jordan River, they bent down and gathered some boulders and made an altar there on the banks of the River. This memorial altar nearly created a disaster for Israel.

When the rest of Israel saw this altar of stones, the scenes at Peor (the adulterous affairs caused by Balaam) and at Achor (the thievery and cover-up of Achan) came to their minds. They remembered how God had judged the entire nation for these sins. And the leaders recognized their identity with these tribes who they believed were erring. They realized their responsibilities so as to avert the judgment of God. Their memories of the past encouraged them to tear down the altar of the present.

Our memories do serve a purpose to help us to keep our lives focused on God. And we are responsible for the actions of our brothers. For this alertness, the leaders of Israel are to be commended.

But these leaders of Israel acted with prudence rather than with anger. The easiest thing to have done would have been "to shoot first and to ask questions later," to have invaded Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh and to have destroyed them for suspected idolatry. But these leaders sought answers before sending in the army. They sought an explanation before giving condemnation.

It seems today we are too eager to condemn. A brother or sister does something we don't like and we are quick to grab the stones to throw. We dismiss attempts to seek for answers and explanations until after the stoning has occurred. By then it is too late. How much more prudent to seek out our suspected erring brother or sister and to share with them. Doing so may eliminate many heartaches and a great deal of pain to the body. Yes, it does take more time, but it really is time well spent.

GOD WANTS TO BLESS YOU **Joshua 23**

In Psalm 40 and verse 5, David declares, Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders which Thou hast done, and Thy thoughts toward us; There is none to compare with Thee; If I would declare and speak of them, they would be too numerous to count.

In 1897, a man by the name of Johnson Oatman read this verse and then sat down and wrote the following words which have been sung by countless Christians since.

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,

Do not get discouraged thinking all is lost.

Count your many blessings name them one by one,

And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

The more one studies Scripture, the more one becomes aware of the fact that God wants to bless us. God wants to bless you! God wants to bless me! What does the word "bless" really mean? According to the dictionary, it means "To wish good to, to make happy and successful." This word, which is used over 400 times in the Old Testament alone, has some interesting qualities associated with it. Let me share just a couple with you today.

First, God is the one who possesses and dispenses all blessings. Listen to these words from Jacob as recorded in Genesis 49:25, From the God of your father who helps you, and by the Almighty who blesses you with blessings of heaven above. All blessings are God's to give. Remember those words of the Doxology: Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. What a great biblical truth.

Second, the first act of God upon man was to bless him. We read in Genesis 1:28, God blessed them and said to them, "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." God did not instruct man. God did not discipline man. It does not even say that God loved the man. But, God's very first act upon man was to bless him.

God's potential is always for blessing. I get excited every time I read verse 14 of this chapter. Joshua has gathered his people around him to share with them the final thoughts from his heart. He knows that his days are soon over, and yet he has one final challenge for Israel. Listen to these great words: Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.

In other words, Joshua was reminding the people that it was God's desire that His people be prosperous. He truly wanted to bless them.

But, God did not just bless Israel. He has promised to bless us as well. Paul wrote to the Ephesian believers, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). God's blessings are there for us. It is His desire. But how can a person become blessable? That will be our focus for our next study.

HOW TO BECOME BLESSABLE **Joshua 23:15-16**

Yesterday we began our study of Joshua 23. Our focus was upon the concept of blessing. We stated that according to the Scriptures, God is the One who possesses and dispenses all blessings, and that His very first act upon man, after his creation, was to bestow a blessing upon him. It truly is God's desire to bless each one of us.

But how does a person receive God's blessings? I am reminded of a statement Dr. Warren Wiersbe made at a pastor's conference I attended many years ago. He stated that too often we pray for God's blessings when we should have prayed that we might become blessable. How does a person become blessable? I believe the answer is found in verses 15 and 16. Let's read those verses together: But just as every good promise of the Lord your God has come true, so the Lord will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.

These appear to be pretty harsh words from Joshua, hardly fitting for a farewell address we might add. Yet, Joshua understood that in order for a person to become blessable, he had to first become obedient to the will of God. And Joshua knew the history of these people. For them, as it usually is for us if we are truly honest with ourselves, it is always easier to disobey than to obey. It just seems that disobedience comes naturally. Have you ever read a book written by such an authority as Dr. James Dobson giving you instruction on how to teach your child to disobey? Of course not! Children don't need instruction in disobedience. What they do need instruction in is obedience.

Friends, if we are going to experience the blessings of God, then we have to be a person that God can bless. That means that we must practice obedience before Him. I am reminded of the words of that great hymn we used to sing when I was growing up. The chorus went like this: Trust and obey for there's no other way, To be happy (might we use the word blessed) in Jesus, But to trust and obey.

Are you blessable today? Are you walking in obedience to God? If you are, then be alert to the blessings of God which He will shower upon you today.

CHOICES **Joshua 24**

Today we arrive at the final study in our series from the book of Joshua. I trust that your heart has been challenged as mine has with the truths which God has brought to our minds.

This closing chapter of Joshua relates Joshua's final challenge to Israel and then his death. Joshua was now 110 years of age. Perhaps, he is the final person in Israel who could remember the days of slavery in Egypt which had occurred over sixty years ago. Yes, he had seen God perform more miraculous things than even he could remember. Joshua's success was based upon his being faithful to God. He had truly heeded those words given to him before he had led Israel across the Jordan River.

Perhaps, among the most well known words of Joshua, are these, recorded in verse 15 of this closing chapter. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve,

whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Wow! What a testimony!

Joshua knew that choices are an inevitable part of life. Everyday you and I make countless choices: what to eat and what to wear, which report to work on first at work, what classes to attend or not to attend, to drive carefully or recklessly, and the list goes on and on. Some choices we almost make unconsciously, while others are pondered and prayed over carefully.

But the greatest choice that I can ever make on a daily basis is that of serving the Lord. Although it is God's desire for me to serve Him, He never forces that upon me. It was the Apostle Paul who wrote that we can either yield our bodies to serve sin or to serve unrighteousness (see Romans 6). And the decision I made yesterday has little weight on the decision I make today. Each day must be a new surrendering to God. Each day must be a new conscious choice to walk with Him.

Father, I want to thank You for these weeks of study which I have been privileged to share with so many through the Village Line. You have challenged us with many truths, like the one today on making choices. How we pray for Your wisdom to be given to us so that we might choose wisely. Give us courage to choose the right instead of the easy. Give us discipline to choose daily instead of procrastinating. May we say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Thank You for Your blessings. We give You all the praise and glory through Jesus Christ. Amen.