



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



JOSHUA 1 - 6

## Joshua 1

***1:1-5 - "After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you."***

Moses has died. This ends a forty year ministry of the greatest servant of God up to this moment in history. The death of Moses marks the end of one stage of the plan of God for His people and the beginning of the next stage. As long as Moses led the nation, they could not enter the Promised Land because of the Lord's discipline for Moses for his sin in striking the rock (Christ) in his frustration to bring forth water for the people and ruining the spiritual symbolism of the death of Christ as a once for all death for sin. Now that Moses had died, God's judgment upon the wilderness generation of Israel is finished and the new generation is ready to enter the Promised Land. They would not enter the land leaderless however. The end of the ministry of Moses as leader signals the beginning of the leadership of Joshua. He had been for years the faithful personal assistant of Moses. He had successfully led the army of Israel in their initial battles against Amalek, Og, and Sihon. Joshua was also one of the 12 spies sent to investigate the land of Canaan, and along with Caleb, one of only two that returned with a report that encouraged the people to trust God to take the land.

All leadership transitions from well established successful leaders are challenging. People begin to identify with their leaders and find it difficult to accept and follow new leaders. What is interesting in the opening of the book of Joshua, the Lord addresses the challenge of this leadership transition, not by giving a message of encouragement to the people, but by addressing Joshua directly. The Lord insures a smooth transition in the leadership of the nation by speaking directly to Joshua to confirm beyond question or doubt that he is the man chosen by the Lord to lead Israel into the Promised Land. In other words, the most important issue to address in this leadership transition is the heart of the new leader. God wants the man He has chosen to know with conviction the calling upon his own life. If Joshua's heart understands the spiritual mantle of responsibility that has been placed upon his shoulders, then he will lead the people the way he should. The people will recognize God's hand upon him as he leads. He won't need to convince or campaign for their support.

The loss of Moses is unavoidable, and while we can say that a leader of the quality and significance of Moses can not really be replaced, at the same time we can say that Israel, under the leadership of Joshua will continue to be blessed with all they actually need from their leadership. Moses is gone, but the Lord remains. The critical issue is whether the Lord will be with Joshua to bless his leadership like the Lord blessed the leadership of Moses. These following words from the Lord are His personal assurance to Joshua of His commitment to the leadership of Joshua. "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you." When the Lord promises to be with Joshua in the future just as He was with Moses in the past it is an assurance that the key to the ministry of Moses will be the key to the ministry of Joshua. As we have rehearsed before, it was not the dynamic personality of Moses that made him a great leader. It was not his intelligence, his speaking skills, or any other natural ability or quality that was the key to his leadership accomplishments. It was because he was called by God to that responsibility and because God remained with him everyday and every step of the way that Moses was able to accomplish what he did. The Lord here assures Joshua, who saw all of that first hand, that He would be as involved in his leadership as He was involved in the leadership of Moses.

The Lord also gives Joshua an amazing promise based upon His presence with him. "No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life." The promise anticipates the huge responsibility ahead of Joshua. He is charged with leading the people of God into a well fortified land against nations that have no intention of giving up their homes to Israel. Among their opponents they will encounter the sons of Anak who will be particularly intimidating by their gigantic size. The Lord wanted Joshua's heart to be anchored to this promise before he took a single step into Canaan. This was a promise of invincibility. Joshua would never encounter an opponent that he should fear. The implication of this word from the Lord was that the determining factor in every battle ahead was not how Joshua measured up to his opponents, but how the Lord measured up to them. Only an opponent that was stronger than the Lord could threaten him as long as Joshua was following the Lord.

***1:6-9 - "Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."***

Success in life is more than a Christian concern. Walk into any book store and ask to see the self-help section. There is a never-ending supply of books written and purchased that purport to make the reader a success in life if they only follow the formula of the writer. Of course, the way one measures success has everything to do with how success is to be measured. Am I a success if I earn a certain amount of money during the course of my life? Am I a success if I develop my physique to a particular level, or if I accomplish all the goals I set for myself? The answer is that, yes, I would be a success, but only in natural terms as measured by natural standards.

In this word from the Lord to Joshua, the Lord gives him (and us) a single secret to true success in life. The difference between this and the messages of the thousands of success books on the shelves is that this principle, if followed, will produce success for Joshua and Israel as the Lord defines it. One of the most important things we can learn is that our lives are only as successful as the Lord says they are and if they are filled with what the Lord identifies as success. The single key to true success in life is based upon a relationship, not an accomplishment.

Joshua's future success was dependent upon his continuing relationship with the Lord as nurtured by Joshua's own relationship with the Scriptures. If Joshua would not turn aside from keeping the Word of God, then he was promised success wherever he went in the future. The make-or-break point for Joshua would be whether he turned from the Word of God. The Lord gave Joshua a simple and practical instruction to protect his heart from that danger. The Lord told Joshua to meditate on "this Book of the Law" day and night. The implication of the instruction is that meditation is a necessary component to maintain a right heart relationship with the Lord through His Word. We can boil this down further and draw this conclusion. Any believer will be a success in life if they learn and maintain the spiritual habit of meditating on the Scriptures.

The meditation in view here is not the Eastern mystical variety. The goal in Biblical meditation is not to empty the mind like the Eastern religions teach. The goal is just the opposite; to fill the mind. Biblical meditation is aimed at internal

transformation through the renewal of the mind (Romans 12:1-2). This is achieved by replacing our own way of thinking with the new way of thinking we learn from God's Word. Joshua's meditation was to take specific portions of the Scriptures written by Moses and to think about them throughout his day and night. He was to dwell on those portions, chewing on them, asking questions about them, praying over them, and making them the focal point of his daily thought life. As Joshua followed that pattern day after day, the Lord would little by little make him more and more into the person that God wanted him to be. All of his future decisions and actions would be subtly, but powerfully influenced by what he was learning from God's Word.

***1:12-15 - "And to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise."***

Joshua reminds tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh of the commitment they had made to the Lord and to Moses. They had asked to settle in the land across the Jordan River. That land had already been conquered and the danger was that those two and a half tribes would lose their motivation to enter Canaan and fight along side their brothers whose land had not yet been conquered. What was necessary was for these tribes to have and maintain a big picture perspective and the integrity to keep their oath when there was no longer any personal benefit at stake. If they saw the work ahead only from the perspective of "what's in it for me" they would quickly lose motivation and drift back to their own homes across Jordan. This same issue is at the core of the continuing success of the church's response to the Great Commission. We who know the Lord have already reaped the personal benefit of receiving the message of the Gospel of salvation. It would be easy for us to be satisfied with our own salvation and rest content at home with our blessing. The mission of the church as a whole is to take the Gospel to every tribe, tongue, people and nation. In order for the church to maintain motivation for this mission we must hold in our hearts the big picture perspective of the Lord's great purpose for those who are still lost. Our work is not finished until everyone for whom Christ died has heard the message of salvation.

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## Joshua 2

***2:1-6 - "And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof."***

As the two spies sent out by Joshua enter the city of Jericho they wisely sought out the house of a woman of known to have a bad moral reputation in the city. By lodging in the house of a prostitute, they would draw less attention because of the typical visits from men. However, someone from the city noticed the men and recognized that they were not residents of the city. They reported to the king of Jericho that men of Israel had lodged at Rahab's house. We might wonder why the Lord did not keep the identity of the two spies hidden since they were there representing the people of God. What we should recognize is that the Lord allowed them to be identified for His greater purpose. The purpose of the Lord in their discovery would create a test for Rahab that would lead to her salvation.

As soon as the king received word of the presence of the men, he sent to have them arrested. The arrival of the messengers from the king placed Rahab in dilemma. She was expected to expose the men in her home and turn them over to the authorities. This response would have made her a local hero and would have been the expected actions of a loyal citizen of Jericho. However, Rahab had already been deeply affected by the news that preceded the arrival of the spies from Israel. The entire city had heard through the grapevine about the events involving Israel. The name of the Lord in His powerful works on behalf of Israel had impacted her heart. She had already arrived at a spiritually discerning conclusion of the meaning of these events. They meant that the Lord was God and that Jericho had no hope of resisting the will and power of God.

Rahab's heart was already identifying with the Lord even before she had shown any outward indication of a new allegiance. What we see displayed in Rahab's heart and then her actions on behalf of the two spies is the evidence of a true salvation. Rahab had heard enough information about the Lord to respond with a believing heart in a saving way. This was the sovereign grace of God at work to save one of His chosen ones. No one else in the entire city of Jericho would respond in this way except Rahab and her family who believed her report and

obeyed her instructions. It is because this is a work of God's salvation in her heart that we interpret Rahab's actions as faithful and heroic rather than as treason to her city and people. Certainly, if there were a museum today representing the interests of the people of Jericho, Rahab would not be honored as a hero there. Her choice did betray the interests of Jericho, but at the same time she honored the Lord and chose to give her allegiance to Him.

We see in this allegiance dilemma a picture of what follows for every true believer when they are saved by the Lord. Prior to our salvation we all gave our allegiance to whatever group to which we were naturally tied. When the Lord saved us He also called for the full allegiance of our hearts. We belong completely to Him. His interests are to become our interests. We all will find ourselves in a circumstances of conflicting allegiance in which the world around us expects us to choose what they would choose. A decision to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord may require us to betray the world. The Lord designs some situations for all of us in which we cannot honor both the world and Him and we must choose which one we will follow.

Rahab made the right choice. Yet, her choice also placed her in a very delicate position. If she were to honor the Lord and protect the spies, how could she keep them from the messengers of the king? In order to safeguard the spies Rahab did two things. First she acted in wisdom and hid the spies on her rooftop. Second she acted with courage and lied to the king's messengers with an elaborate false story that not only turned them from her house, but led them on a wild goose chase away from the city. The choice Rahab made to lie to the messengers is a controversial and debatable issue for Christian teachers. Some believe that it is always wrong and evil for a believer to lie under any circumstance. They conclude that Rahab sinned in this lie and that God preserved her and the spies in spite of her evil actions. I disagree with that assessment. Rahab is mentioned twice in the New Testament in a very favorable way. Nowhere in the Bible are her actions condemned. She is instead commended for her faith. "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies." (Hebrews 11:31).

In order to safeguard the spies it was necessary for her to lie. This is one of the exceptional cases in the Bible as we saw in a similar situation of the Hebrew midwives lying to Pharaoh to protect the lives of the Hebrew infant boys (Exodus 1:15-21). In that case, their lie to Pharaoh was also necessary and the Lord commended and even blessed their actions. It is true that the Lord calls His people to be people of truth. We are never to lie simply to avoid personal discomfort or for personal advantage as is the case in 99% of all lying. However, the Lord gives us these exceptional cases to teach us that when an innocent life is threatened and can only be preserved by a lie to a wicked person or authority, that He does not hold the person that lies to protect the innocent guilty of sin in such cases.



***2:8-11, 24 - "Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has 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 you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath... And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us."***

What the spies discovered in their mission was more valuable than any military information regarding their opponents. They found out from the report of Rahab that the Lord had already begun the work of the conquest of Canaan even before Israel had crossed the Jordan River. The Lord had already been working in the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of Canaan. The report of the Lord's work on behalf of Israel was already circulating among the people of Canaan. They had heard of the miracle of the Red Sea crossing which had happened forty years before this. They had heard the accounts of the great victories by Israel over the kings of the Amorites. Hearing these things had a dramatic impact on the hearts of the rest of the Canaanites. Their hearts melted. This means that all their courage to fight and resist Israel in battle had drained out of them. They were already a defeated people before the first blow had been struck in battle. Every successful leader of an army can testify that there are two essential components for an army preparing for battle. One, the army must be physically ready to fight, and two, the army must be mentally ready. The famous speeches by leaders to their army before a battle are intended to stir the courage of the army knowing that victory and defeat depend as much on the heart of the army as on their weapons. The Lord had softened the resistance of Jericho by melting the hearts of the people of the city through the testimony of the Lord's mighty deeds for Israel.

**2:18-21 - "Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear." And she said, "According to your words, so be it." Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window."**

The spies made a solemn agreement with Rahab to insure her safety as well as her family when they returned to conquer Jericho. Her commitment to protect them would be repaid with their promise to protect her on that day. In order to be able to keep their promise during the conquest of the city, the spies instructed Rahab to provide a clear sign marking her home by tying a red cord in the window of her home. That window could be seen from outside the wall of the city. The red cord was a symbolic sign as well as a practical marker. It indicated the covenant bond that the Lord had made with Rahab, not just the agreement between her and the spies. The promise of protection was given to her to benefit all who would obey their instructions and remain in her house on the day Israel conquered Jericho.

In this way, Rahab's house became a place of covenant safety like the homes of the Israelites on the night of the first Passover. When the Lord sent an angel in the tenth and final plague judgment upon Egypt, only the people that remained in the homes of the Israelites marked by the blood of the Passover lamb were safe. All other homes in Egypt were devastated by the loss of their firstborn sons. Rahab's scarlet cord was a similar sign of salvation to the blood of the Passover lamb. The promise of safety given to Rahab also extended to all to whom she chose to share the message. Her family would be saved from the coming judgment just like she was if they believed her message and obeyed. "But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." (Joshua 6:25).

This is similar to the extended promise Paul made to the Philippian jailer in the book of Acts. "Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God." (Acts 16:30-34). This promise does not mean that your family will be saved on the basis of your faith. Each person must believe the message for themselves. It does mean though that God

does not limit the impact of the message that saved you to only you. As you are bold to proclaim the same message to your family, He will save those who believe just like He saved you. It is an encouraging account of the influence of the Lord through our lives to those of our family.

### **Questions from Joshua 1:**

**Question:** Joshua 1:1 - NASB reads "spoke to Joshua". There are other instances noting God speaking to Moses. Under the New Covenant, Matthew 3:17 and 17:5 notes God speaking but it seems like unique circumstances involving Jesus - His baptism and the Transfiguration and then again in John 12:28. Is it characteristic of God to speak to us believers in the New Covenant with an audible voice or is it more of a "sense" where we feel like it is the Lord (Holy Spirit) speaking to our hearts?

**Answer:** It is characteristic for God to speak to His people in the New Covenant, however I would say that it would be very rare for Him to speak in an audible voice. This passage from the teaching of Jesus indicates that the Lord does speak to His people. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27). If we are one of the sheep that belong to the Lord then we should expect the Great Shepherd to speak to us. There is no specific method of speaking identified in the passage, and we are safe to conclude that His normal method of speaking to us is internally (in our hearts) in a way that can only be heard by the person to whom He is speaking. I have never heard the audible voice of God, and I don't know of any trustworthy believers that have heard the audible voice of God either. This does not mean that He cannot or will not speak in such an exceptional way, but that it would be extremely rare for Him to do so. I do not trust most all of the fantastic stories I have heard from certain preachers that claim this experience on a regular basis. Of course, if He were to speak in an audible voice it would still be necessary to discern what was said according to the Scriptures to insure that it was truly God that had spoken.

**Question:** Joshua 1:11 - Was it common for the Israelites to have a time of spiritual preparation before each major event or battle and how would that relate to us today?

**Answer:** Yes, we have seen examples and will see several more examples of spiritual preparation of the people before a battle or major event. For instance, when the Lord first appeared on Mount Sinai in the view of all the people, He required a three day preparation for them. "the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people." (Exodus 19:10-11). Later in Joshua we will read of a special consecration the Lord required of the people before they were allowed to enter and possess the Promised Land.

The most important parallel of this principle in the life of a New Covenant believer is seen in the necessity of water baptism. Even after experiencing salvation, the Lord requires His New Covenant people to be set apart in a special consecration ceremony by being washed in the waters of baptism. Your question seems to be more concerned though with possible ongoing expressions of this pattern. I think it is a healthy thing for believers to approach important events of their lives with an increased awareness of the need for spiritual purity and commitment and to take steps to examine themselves and address any deficiencies discovered. As an example, before entering into marriage, it would be a good practice for believers to spend some extra time in prayer, asking to Lord to prepare their hearts for the new life ahead. In any big life change like this, or when facing any serious personal trial or trouble it is never a bad idea to do a kind of spiritual checkup to make sure our hearts are clean and committed before God.

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### Joshua 3

***3:2-4 - "At the end of three days the officers went through the camp and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before."***

The time had come for Israel to cross over into the Promised Land of Canaan. They had learned from the forty year wilderness journey the principle that the people of God do not set their own course in life, but rather follow the course that the Lord sets for them. The issue is one of leadership. Are we in charge of determining the direction for our own lives, or is the Lord in charge? Israel was trained in a very practical, though spiritual way in this principle throughout all of their journey until this point. The one great responsibility Israel shared in common in all of their travels was to follow the visible pillar of cloud and fire that led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Israel never had to figure out where to go next or how long to stay in each place. They only had to keep their attention on the pillar of cloud and fire. When the pillar lifted and moved, Israel was to follow wherever it went. When the pillar stopped, Israel stopped. Now, however, for the first time in forty years the pillar of cloud and fire was not visible to lead them. Instead, the Lord called their attention to another visible representation of His presence with the people.

The Lord commanded that the journey into the Promised Land would be led by the ark of the covenant. The people were commanded to watch for the ark. When the ark set out, carried by the Levitical priests, then the 12 tribes were to set out and follow it wherever it went. The ark was the piece of furniture that occupied the innermost room of God's house, the tabernacle. It was a wooden box covered

in gold, and covered with a solid gold lid called the mercy seat. Upon the lid were two representations of the special angels of God known as cherubim. Inside the ark were stored three items; the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments, the almond rod of Aaron's that had blossomed, and a jar of manna. The ark was a symbol that God gave to His people to represent His throne. It was from directly above the ark that the Lord would meet with Moses and speak with him during the wilderness journey.

The symbolism of the ark representing the throne of God explains the boundary the Lord commanded for the people as they followed the ark into Canaan. They were to maintain a distance of 2000 cubits from the ark at all times and never come closer to it than that. This was a reminder of the awesome holiness of God and the sinful condition of the people. The implication was that if any of the people other than the Levitical priests came closer than 2000 cubits to the ark, they would suffer the consequences of God's judgment. Without a blood sacrifice to cover their sins, anyone that approached close to the ark would face the holiness of God and be held immediately accountable for their own violations of His holiness.

They were also told to watch the ark as they maintained their distance in order to know the way that they should go since they had not passed this way before. The Lord was emphasizing to them that He was not turning them loose in the Promised Land to go when, where, and how they wanted, but that He would lead them in every step of the conquest and possession of Canaan just like He had led them every step through the wilderness. The same principle applies to our lives today. The Lord knows better than we do where we are heading next in our lives. We would be wise to look to Him on His throne before striking out in whatever direction may seem best to us at the moment. By looking to the ark and waiting for and following the ark the Lord was training His people to bring their direction under His authority and to follow His lead.

***3:10-11 - "And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan."***

Israel has finally reached the long awaited day. This day would mark the beginning of the fulfillment of a promise the Lord had made to Abraham hundreds of years before to give this land to his descendants. The Lord's actions on this day are a testimony to His faithfulness to His promises. What the Lord promises, He always brings to pass. But the promise of God was more than to bring them into the land. He had promised that they would take possession of the land and make it their own. There was a barrier standing between Israel and the fulfillment of God's promise. It was not just the natural barrier of the Jordan River that they faced, but the barrier of the seven nations of Canaan that inhabited the land. The

land that God had promised to Abraham was currently their home, and they had no intention of simply leaving or allowing Israel to come from them. These seven nations represented seven great challenges ahead of Israel.

The challenge of these Canaanite nations shows again the critical importance of Israel following the Lord closely. Left to themselves, Israel would never be able to successfully conquer these seven nations. It was the Lord Who would have to go before them and drive out the seven nations by His power. In doing so, the Lord would demonstrate seven times in a perfect demonstration of His sovereignty that He is the living God (in contrast to the dead idols that the Canaanite nations worshipped). Israel was following the Lord of all the earth into Canaan. Though He was only known in accurate revelation to Israel, He was about to make Himself more fully known to the nations by exerting His power and authority over them. The Canaanite nations did not acknowledge that He was Lord over them, but as they fell before His holy nation, Israel, they would learn that their so-called gods were of no value against Yahweh.

***3:14-17 - "So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan."***

Israel's crossing into the Promised Land was no easy task. Even at the most favorable time of year, the Jordan River would be a difficult crossing for an entire nation of men, women, and children of all ages. The Lord had designed the timing of their arrival at the Jordan to cross it at what seemed to be the worst possible time of year. This was the time of harvest when the river was overflowing its banks and was at its deepest and widest dimensions. From a natural perspective it would be easy to conclude that the Lord had chosen the wrong time for them to cross the river. It was the most challenging time, but it was not the wrong time. The Lord chose the naturally worst time for Israel to cross in order to magnify the accomplishment in their eyes of the miracle to come.

The Lord commanded the Levitical priests carrying the ark of the covenant to go stand in the water of the Jordan River. The moment the feet of the Levites carrying the ark stood in the river the Lord caused the waters of the Jordan to rise up in a heap as though they had been instantly stopped by a dam. The

priests bearing the ark stood there until the riverbed became as dry ground and all of the nation crossed over into Canaan. This miracle was meant to remind Israel of a similar miracle of God forty years before when the Lord had caused the waters of the Red Sea to rise in heaps and He provided a way across the sea for His people. The similarities were a miraculous crossing on of impassable water on dry ground by the people of God, the heaping of the waters, the symbols of God's authority as the focal point (the staff of Moses and the ark of the covenant). The big difference between the miracle of the Red Sea and the miracle of the Jordan was Israel's orientation to their enemies. In the Red Sea crossing the Lord also defeated Pharaoh and his chariots causing them to be drowned in the returning waters of the sea. In the Jordan miracle, the enemies of Israel were still ahead of them in the seven Canaanite nations. The point that the Lord was making to Israel was that He was the same God Who had so utterly defeated and even greater enemy than the Canaanites when He drowned Pharaoh. This was a strong encouragement to Israel that they should trust Him in all the challenges to come in their future battles.

### **Questions from Joshua 2:**

**Question:** Joshua 2:22 - Joshua told the people they would leave within three days but the spies were supposed to hide for three days. How could they have made it to Jericho and then hide for three days and get back in time to leave with Joshua?

**Answer:** The question is asking how Joshua 2:22 fits with Joshua 1:11. "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'" (Joshua 1:11). "They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned, and the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing." (Joshua 2:22). The answer is that the spies were able to return to Joshua by the end of the third day. Joshua most likely sent out the two spies early on the day when he announced the three day preparation to cross into the land. He probably chose the three days to both give time for the nation to prepare and for the spies to accomplish their mission. The spies could easily have traveled to Jericho in that first day. Before the first day ended the spies escaped Jericho with Rahab's help and went into the nearby hills to hide. The first day of their hiding was the first day of their mission. They then left the hills and returned to Joshua at Shittim before the end of the third day.

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## Joshua 4

***4:1-3 - "When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, "Take twelve men from the people, from each tribe a man, and command them, saying, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests' feet stood firmly, and bring them over with you and lay them down in the place where you lodge tonight.'"***

This chapter describes the same event from chapter 3 of the crossing of the Jordan River and the first entrance into the Promised Land by Israel, and expands on it with greater detail. In chapter 3 Joshua was instructed to choose 12 men from the tribes of Israel, and now we learn why the Lord had Joshua select them. One man from each of the tribes was chosen to go to the place in the riverbed where the Levitical priests stood holding the ark of the covenant and to carry a stone from that spot to the west bank of the river. There, on the Promised Land side of the river, Joshua was to take the twelve stones from the river and make a memorial from them. There is important symbolism of the larger purpose of God for His people pictured here.

The specific wording describing the action of the 12 men with the stones is subtle, but spiritually meaningful. The twelve men were to "lay them down" in the Promised Land. The phrase is literally, "cause them to rest." The 12 men were causing the 12 stones to rest by carrying them into the Promised Land and setting them down there. Entering the Promised Land is identified with entering the rest of God in the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 4:1). Joshua is the same name in Hebrew as Jesus. It is the name Yashua, and Joshua is a spiritual type of Christ. He is the one chosen to lead the people of God into the Promised Land. The 12 stones correspond to the 12 tribes of Israel. The stones represent the people of God. This imagery is pointing toward the plan of God in the New Covenant to make His people living stones in what He is building. "you yourselves like living stones..." (I Peter 2:5). The symbolism of this event is that through the work of Christ, the people of God will finally enter the Promised Land and rest in the salvation that He has accomplished for them.



***4:6-9 - "that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever. And the people of Israel did just as Joshua commanded and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, just as the LORD told Joshua. And they carried them over with them to the place where they lodged and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day."***

There is an interpretation difficulty in this section. The wording in our translation allows for two possible conclusions about what took place that day. The key wording is, "Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day." The wording allows for the possibility that two memorials were established that day from stones. The phrase that Joshua set up 12 stones in the midst of the Jordan seems to indicate that he set them up in the river. Some Bible commentators have taken it this way and believe there were two memorials. They take the passage to mean that one memorial was established on the west bank of the Jordan out of stones taken from the midst of the river, and a second memorial was established in the river by Joshua using a second group of 12 stones. The actual wording in the original text does not rule out that interpretation, but neither does it require it. Our interpretation must be made then on the basis of the context of the passage.

I believe the way the passage is meant to be understood is that there was only one single memorial established that day. The Lord had commanded Joshua at the beginning of the chapter (Joshua 1:1-3) to establish a memorial on the west bank of the Jordan, and He never even mentioned a second memorial. The wording can be understood to indicate that Joshua took the 12 stones that had been in the midst of the Jordan in the place where the priests of the Lord had stood holding the ark of the covenant. At the end of the chapter only the one memorial on the west bank of the river is mentioned.

***4:14 - "On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel, and they stood in awe of him just as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life."***

This was a time of leadership transition for Israel. They had followed Moses for the previous forty years, but now, at the death of Moses, the Lord had called Joshua to take the lead. The Lord had spoken to Joshua, and given him a strong encouragement about his leadership by intentionally comparing him with Moses (Joshua 1:5). The Lord's encouragement was aimed at the heart of Joshua so

that he would not wonder whether the Lord would bless his leadership the way He had blessed the leadership of Moses. The Lord assured Joshua that He would be with him "just as" He had been with Moses. This word from the Lord was sufficient to strengthen the heart of a man of faith like Joshua for the task ahead.

However, Israel would need more than the Lord's word to fully embrace the leadership of Joshua. The previous generation of Israel had failed repeatedly in the wilderness years to respond to godly leadership as the Lord intended. They often struggled to follow Moses, and complained about him, even though there was no question that Moses had been chosen by the Lord to lead them. This current generation did not have the bad track record of rebellion that the previous generation did, but the Lord still wisely moved to eliminate any reason they may have to question the leadership of Joshua. This was a critical time for Israel as they entered the Promised Land and it was important for them to respect Joshua and to recognize him as God's choice to be their leader. The Lord used the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River to confirm for all Israel that Joshua was His chosen leader. Joshua did not cause the miracle, but the implication was that the Lord did this miracle through the leadership of Joshua, and would not have done it through any other leader. This all points forward to God's special purpose in Christ. God accomplished salvation through Christ and through no one else.

***4:19-23 - "The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."***

The crossing of the Jordan River into the Promised Land took place on the tenth day of the first month of the calendar year. This date was significant for another great event from history and the correspondence between these two events is no accidental. This was the same day forty years before that the Lord had commanded Israel to choose a lamb for the Passover (Exodus 12:2-3). The connection is that both the Passover lamb and crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land are symbols of the Lord's salvation.

The Lord wanted these 12 stones to serve a continuing purpose as memorial stones for future generations. He had Joshua set up these stones to attract the attention of the future children born to Israel as they passed this way. The stones were intended to generate spiritual curiosity in them leading them to ask their

fathers regarding the meaning of the stones. This implies that the fathers were responsible for the spiritual training and instruction of their own children. The Lord intended each father in Israel to be prepared to answer the curious question of his own children when they saw these stones.

The stones also were meant to be a testimony to the nations. The story of the miracle God had done on behalf of Israel in the crossing of Jordan was not a story to be exclusively shared only among Israelites. The Lord wanted the story to be told by Israel to the nations. This is a preview of God's long range purpose in the Gospel of Christ. What God has done in saving us is for us, but it is not only for us, but for all He will save from among the nations. Not everyone from the nations will believe, but God wants everyone from the nations to hear the message proclaimed (Matthew 28:18-20).

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## Joshua 5

***5:1-7 - "As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time." So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; the LORD swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way."***

Israel has now crossed the Jordan River. Ahead is a military challenge to conquer the Amorite and Canaanite nations throughout the land. The battles ahead will not be decided by which nation has the most soldiers or the best weapons. While the battles will be fought by human armies, the Lord's involvement for the purpose of fulfilling His promise will be a far greater factor in the war for Canaan than any natural elements. As soon as Israel crossed the river, the hearts of the inhabitants of the land melted. This means that they lost

their courage and the will to put up a strong resistance to Israel's invasion of the land. Their hearts were affected in this way by hearing the report of the miracle of the Jordan River crossing. It had become obvious that this was not a nation like other nations. The Lord's power exercised on behalf of Israel in holding back the waters of the Jordan convinced the Canaanites that they could not possibly hope to win against them. Even though the Canaanites had their own gods which they worshipped, and to whom they prayed, none of their "gods" had ever managed to do anything remotely close to this awesome display of power by Yahweh. The Lord's work to influence the hearts of the Canaanites through this report both softened up their ability to resist Israel and gave testimony to the truth of the superiority of the Lord to the gods of Canaan.

When the crossing was complete, the Lord gave a command to Joshua that would be a test of faith and obedience for Israel. The Lord instructed Joshua to circumcise the sons of Israel before moving further into the Promised Land. The timing and circumstances of this command were a test of faith for Israel. Since the Canaanites had just lost the heart to fight, this was a perfect time to launch the war for the conquest of Canaan. It made the most sense for Israel to strike while their enemies were disheartened by the report of the miracle of the Jordan River. Rather than having Israel take advantage of this opportunity, His command to undergo circumcision would actually put the army of Israel at a dangerous disadvantage and create a window of serious vulnerability. Remember when the entire city of Shechem was defeated by two sons of Jacob because the men of Shechem were recovering from circumcision and were not able to fight (Genesis 34:25). By having Israel circumcised now, the Lord was making the army of Israel vulnerable to any enemy that might attack them over the next few days. Israel's obedience in this displayed their faith that the Lord would watch over them and guard them while they were unable to defend themselves.

The command of the Lord for their circumcision included an interesting detail on the method of circumcision. They were to make flint knives for the circumcisions. This detail was intended to connect for our understanding a mysterious event from the life of Moses with this situation for Israel. When the Lord had called Moses to return to Egypt to deliver the people from their slavery, He first interrupted the plan by confronting Moses in an encounter that required obedience with the threat of serious judgment if ignored. "At a lodging place on the way the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" So he let him alone. It was then that she said, "A bridegroom of blood," because of the circumcision." (Exodus 4:24-26). In our study through Genesis we saw that Moses had failed to follow the Lord in one key requirement of the covenant. Moses had not circumcised his sons. The Lord called Moses into leadership, but before he could lead, he was held accountable to the high standard of covenant faithfulness. Since Moses was

temporarily incapacitated by the hand of the Lord's discipline, his wife took a flint knife and circumcised their son.

This event reveals the necessity of circumcision for Israel before they can move forward with the conquest of Canaan. Their fathers had been circumcised at the beginning of the wilderness journey, but the generation alive now had been allowed to grow up in the wilderness without ever being circumcised. Until they were, the Lord would not allow them to move forward from this place. In the war to come, Israel would be used by the Lord as His instrument of judgment upon the ungodly nations of Canaan. It was necessary for Israel to complete their own obedience before they could represent the holy Lord Who would lead them into battle. This would be similar to a believer today who has heard and believed the gospel of salvation and lived for years as a Christian, but who has never obeyed the Lord by being baptized in water. Circumcision and baptism are similar signs for their respective covenants. Both symbolize the entrance into covenant relationship with the Lord. The Lord would not allow Israel to continue into the Promised Land without the sign that they were in covenant relationship with the Lord.

***5:10-12 - "While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year."***

While recuperating from their circumcision, Israel remained at Gilgal. There they celebrated the Passover. The next day after the Passover, in one of those perfect timing of the Lord moments, Israel ate from the produce of the Promised Land. The next morning they woke up to find that the Lord had caused the manna to cease. For forty years now, Israel had been blessed with this consistent miracle of bread from heaven, every morning from Sunday through Friday. The Passover was the feast the Lord had appointed to remind them of their deliverance by the Lord from their slavery in Egypt to Pharaoh. By eating the produce of Canaan, Israel had now tasted the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to not just deliver them out of Egypt, but into a new Promised Land. By causing the manna to cease, the Lord confirmed to them that the time was now at hand for the fulfillment of all that God had long ago promised to their father, Abraham.

There was also another element to the end of the manna that would serve to keep Israel on track with the necessity to follow the Lord forward from this point. The end of the manna signaled that there would be no turning back to Egypt or even the wilderness. The direction to move forward into the Promised Land was an all or nothing situation. If Israel were to attempt to turn back to the wilderness, or even remain where they were, they would eventually starve because the easy

supply of daily manna was no longer provided for them. The only food supply available sufficient enough to feed a nation of their size lay ahead of them as they would conquer and settle the cities of Canaan. In this way, the Lord would drive Israel forward with the additional motivation of the need to eat. We need to recognize that the Lord will at times use natural circumstances and real need to direct us and move us forward from a place in which we might otherwise be inclined to remain.

***5:13-15 - "When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so."***

The first battle that the Lord had planned for Israel in the conquest of Canaan was at the city of Jericho. In this section, Joshua is "by Jericho." We are not given any explanation of why he was by Jericho, or what he was doing there, but it is likely that as the leader and commander of the army of Israel that he was evaluating the opposition for himself. While there, Joshua has an important encounter with a mysterious person. He is surprised by a man standing in front of him with his sword drawn. A man would ordinarily only draw his sword with the intent of using it to attack. Joshua shows no fear in this encounter, but wisely wants to clarify the man's intentions. He asks him whether he is on the side of Israel or the side of their enemies. The man's answer is unexpected and identifies him as no mere man. His answer also carries a key spiritual principle that Joshua and all believers must learn as we follow the Lord.

The man identifies himself to Joshua as, "the commander of the army of the LORD." This immediately indicates to Joshua that the "man" is no man at all. There are only two options in understanding who it is that is speaking to Joshua in this passage. This is either an angel of the Lord, or the angel of the Lord. The difference is subtle but theologically important. An angel of the Lord would be an angel sent by the Lord to represent Him. The angel of the Lord is the Lord Himself Who has appeared as an angel. This would be what theologians identify as a theophany, or an appearance of the Lord. I believe that this second possibility is what took place that day. As with the other few appearances of the Lord earlier in the Bible, such as the Lord appearing in the Garden of Eden, or the Lord visiting Abraham, these appearances can also be described as a Christophany, or preincarnate appearance of Christ. This is Jesus appearing to Joshua in His role as the commander of the army of the Lord. Just like the Lord appeared to Moses on Sinai before leading Israel further into the wilderness, the Lord now appears to Joshua before leading Israel further into the Promised Land.

The Lord's answer to Joshua's question is startling at first. He does not answer and say that He has come for Israel. When Joshua asks whether he is for them or for their adversaries, the Lord answers, "No!" With this answer, the Lord is not denying His commitment to Israel or His protection over them. He is, however, making it very clear what this coming war for Canaan is all about. The battles ahead will not be the story of Israel's plan to conquer Canaan for their own purpose. In that sense of conflicting human agendas, the Lord is declaring that He has come to carry out His own agenda, not Israel's. The distinction between these two perspectives is huge for Joshua as the leader of God's holy nation. It is the same difference all believers must understand in order to keep in step with the Lord as He moves forward in accomplishing His purpose in history. The Lord is the commander, not us. We have been drafted into His army. He works to accomplish His own will, not our will. It is His plan that He will bless, not our plan. It is necessary for Joshua to be very clear about Who is in charge and that he is a commander under the Lord's greater command. Joshua's instant response of appropriate worship signals that he gets it, and is ready and willing to report to His heavenly commander for his marching orders.

#### **Questions from Joshua 4**

**Question:** Did the ark of the covenant cross the Jordan before or after the people? I couldn't figure that out it was confusing.

**Answer:** The answer is actually both, so your confusion is understandable. I'll try to clarify. The crossing of the Jordan River began with the Levitical priests carrying the ark of the covenant entering the river ahead of the people. The ark went into the river before anyone was allowed to cross the river. Then, as the priests carrying the ark stepped into the water, the Lord did the miracle of holding the water back so that the people could cross. For the duration of the crossing the priests holding the ark remained in the riverbed until all the people finished the crossing. Then, when the priests stepped out of the riverbed onto the bank of the Promised Land, the Lord released the water of the river. So, the ark was first into the Jordan, and last out of the Jordan.

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## Joshua 6

***6:2-5 - "And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once. Thus shall you do for six days. Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people shall go up, everyone straight before him."***

I have read several commentaries on the book of Joshua which approach the battle of Jericho as though it was an account of the exploits of Joshua as a brilliant military general. Joshua has been compared to Napoleon, Hannibal, and other great military tacticians from famous battles in history. In drawing those comparisons the commentators completely miss the real point of this story in the Bible. The assault on Jericho by the army of Israel is not the story of superior numbers, weapons, or tactics by Joshua and Israel leading to their victory. Yes, it is true that Joshua can properly be described as a general over Israel in the sense that he does issue the commands they must follow in the battle and leads them into that battle. However, for us to credit Joshua for the victory we would have to claim that it was his plan that was followed. Did Joshua outfox the leaders of Jericho with brilliant military strategy? The answer is a clear and strong, no!

There was a strategy implemented here, but it was not born in the tactical imagination of Joshua. The story of this battle starts this way, "And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand..." Chapter six begins where chapter five leaves off. Remember that the previous chapter ended with the appearance of the Lord Jesus in a preincarnate form to Joshua. The Lord identified Himself to Joshua as the commander of the army of the Lord. These first verses of chapter six contain the marching orders for Israel that are issued by the Lord to Joshua and Israel. The strategy is the Lord's strategy, not Joshua's. To call it a strategy is even stretching the concept. What the Lord commands Joshua for the people to carry out makes no natural sense from a military perspective. They are to march silently around the city once a day for six days with only the sound of trumpets. Then on the seventh day they were to repeat this circling march a total of seven times. After the final circuit around the city there was to be a final loud trumpet blast and a unified great shout from all the people. Everything they were to do up until this point is spiritually significant, but it would have no military affect on Jericho. Yet, when they trust and obey the Lord's command, He would respond on the seventh day with a miracle, by causing the fortified wall of the city to fall down flat.



The real story of Jericho is not a military story of brilliant tactics which won the day, but of God's sovereignty and the faith of Joshua and Israel to follow with complete obedience for seven days instructions that made no natural sense to them. As the book of Hebrews looks back on this event, it is identified as one of the exceptional shining moments of true faith. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days." (Hebrews 11:30). The passage tells us that the walls of Jericho fell down by faith. Does this mean that the faith of the people actually knocked down the walls as though faith were a powerful force for believers to harness? No, it was not the faith of the people that caused the walls to fall. It was the power of God that made the walls fall. The relationship between God's power and the faith of the people is not to be overlooked though. It was God's power that accomplished the miracle, but, God would not have done this miracle unless the people believed His Word and obeyed. Therefore we can say, that no faith at Jericho would have resulted in no miracle of Jericho.

***6:21-25 - "Then they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. But to the two men who had spied out the land, Joshua said, "Go into the prostitute's house and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, as you swore to her." So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her. And they brought all her relatives and put them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and everything in it. Only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho."***

This passage addresses what is one of the more difficult to grasp principles in the Scriptures. We have tackled this principle in an earlier study in the Law, but it is necessary to revisit it here. The Lord commanded a severe standard for all that was found within the city of Jericho. Men, women, children, oxen, sheep and donkeys were all to be executed in the conquest of the city and no prisoners were to be spared. This is very discomfoting to read. It is supposed to make the reader uncomfortable. We can do what many do when they come to these portions in their Old Testament readings and hurry past it in a rush to find a more pleasant passage to read, but in doing so, we will miss the deep value of one of the harder lessons of the Lord.

The first thing we have to consider is that according to the standards of our culture today, this command of the Lord would be considered barbaric and Israel would be considered horrible people for their actions that day. Is that how we are meant to read this account? The reason the execution of an entire city seems so wrong to us today is that we have not grasped the depth of the seriousness of sin

and the necessity of the severity of God's judgment upon the wickedness of man. We must remember that the inhabitants of Canaan were given over to every form of wickedness including sacrificing their own children to their gods as just one example. The Lord had given the nations of Canaan hundreds of years of merciful space to repent and turn from their wicked ways, but instead these nations only became worse and worse over time.

The Lord's judgment upon Jericho was a deserved and necessary cleansing of the Promised Land in preparation for the settlement of His holy nation. The Lord had warned Israel about this day in the Law. "But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God." (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). This is similar to the unpopular, but equally real judgment that awaits the wicked at the end of their lives. Hell is a severe eternal judgment. It is also deserved and necessary as was this judgment upon Jericho.

There was one notable exception to this execution of judgment upon the inhabitants of Jericho. Rahab and her family were spared on this day as the Lord remembered her kindness to the two Hebrew spies. She had marked her house with the scarlet cord in the outside window. We read in the earlier account, that her house was actually built into the wall of the city. Since the Lord had promised her safety if she remained in her home during the battle, we can conclude that when the Lord caused the wall of Jericho to fall, that He preserved the one portion of the wall that contained her house. Leaving Rahab alive was no threat for the spiritual integrity of Israel because Rahab had already shown her faith in the God of Israel. Her actions are identified for us as true faith. "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies." (Hebrews 11:31). Not only did the Lord reward Rahab's faith with safety for herself and her family that day, He also gave her the rare privilege of being included in the family line of both king David and Jesus. She is named in the genealogy of Jesus as the great great grandmother of David. "and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king." (Matthew 1:5-6).

***6:26 - "Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. "At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates."***

Joshua leads victorious Israel in taking an oath regarding Jericho and future generations. No one from Israel is ever to rebuild the city. It is to remain in

devastation throughout the generations to come. There is nothing in the text that indicates Jericho is the worst among the wicked cities of Canaan, but it will serve as a perpetual symbol of the Lord's superiority over the false gods of Canaan and His judgment upon the inhabitants given over to wickedness on into the future. Because it was the first city of Canaan conquered in Israel's war for the Promised Land, it is chosen to remain forever destroyed. The oath taken will bind everyone in Israel that was alive that day, but it will also bind anyone from future generations of Israel that will ever decide to rebuild the city. The principle here does apply to our lives. When it is the Lord that works in the midst of one generation to establish a spiritual boundary, future generations are not free to ignore or disregard those boundaries. It is commonplace today, even within the church to view the spiritual standards of previous generations as though they were archaic and useless for our lives today. I often wonder how the apostles from the book of Acts would react if they walked into the average church on Sunday morning.

There was a particular curse connected to the violation of the oath to never rebuild Jericho. The curse here is not magical, but is the judgment of God upon the life of the oath breaker. Anyone rebuilding Jericho would experience the severe cost in his own family. Generations later, an Israelite named Hiel set about to rebuild Jericho. He discovered that the ancient curse was no idle threat. "In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun." (1 Kings 16:34). The lesson is that the Lord is faithful to His own word, both in blessing and cursing. What He says He will do, He always does, even though generations of time have passed between the promise given and the promise fulfilled.