



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 7 - 13

Joshua 7

7:6-11 - "Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord GOD, why have you brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it and will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will you do for your great name?" The LORD said to Joshua, "Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings."

The glorious victory that Israel won over Jericho was now quickly forgotten in the defeat at Ai. From the description leading up to this battle it seems that Israel had quickly become overconfident due to the overwhelming nature of the Jericho conquest. Jericho was a stronger, more fortified city than Ai, and Israel had defeated them, apparently without a single casualty from their own soldiers. Now, Joshua's scouts suggested they would only need to send 2-3000 men to conquer Ai. Rather than seek the Lord for His next marching orders, Joshua took the advice of the scouts and sent a small army of 3000 to Ai. Israel lost this battle for Ai and 36 men of Israel died in the attack. However, the core reason for their defeat was not that they brought too few soldiers for the fight, or that they used the wrong strategy for the battle. The reason for their defeat was as spiritual as their previous victory at Jericho had been.

When Israel was defeated at Ai, the reaction of Joshua reveals that even though he was well prepared for leadership, that the Lord still had leadership lessons to teach him. Joshua actually misunderstood the reason for their defeat at first. This indicates to us that the men God chooses and prepares for leadership are not perfect and will themselves grow in the course of their leadership. Just as Moses had grown as he led, Joshua would grow through this challenging test. Joshua's first reaction was to tear his clothes in a sign of mourning and prostrate himself before the ark of the Lord. He cried out to the Lord along with the other elders with the classic prayer of confused leaders, "O Lord God, why...?"

There is nothing wrong with asking the Lord why a certain event has happened, but there are two different ways to ask the Lord why, and there are two different heart attitudes that go with the different ways of asking the question. Keep in mind that people usually only ask the Lord why, when they are in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances. People rarely ask the Lord why in the midst of circumstances of great blessing. One way to ask the Lord why, is a confused but

trusting question seeking to understand the hidden purpose of God. This question starts with a conviction that the present difficulty is somehow necessary and that the difficulty is either deserved, or required for the plan of God. The other way of asking the Lord why is based on an unhealthy heart perspective that presumes that the difficulty is not deserved and either a mistake by God or an unfair act by Him.

Joshua's prayer is flavored with too much of the second type. We know this because as he cried out for God to answer with an explanation, Joshua also implied that God had only brought Israel over the Jordan River in order to destroy them. Joshua actually knew better than to say this to God and probably blurted this out in frustration, but it is the same kind of attitude that believers tend to adopt when things go unexpectedly bad in their life circumstances. Rather than trusting that there must be a good, if hidden reason why they were defeated, Joshua objected to the Lord's motive in bringing them into the Promised Land at all.

The Lord did answer Joshua's prayer, but not the way Joshua expected Him to answer. The Lord's answer was direct and corrected Joshua's erring heart attitude and perspective. The Lord commanded Joshua to get up from where he lay before the ark of the covenant. The Lord also asked Joshua a piercing question. When the Lord asked him why he had fallen on his face, it was not an effort by the Lord to learn unknown information. The Lord knew exactly why Joshua was laying there, but He also knew something Joshua did not yet understand. His reason for this prayer of complaint was based on misplaced blame. In essence, the Lord rebuked Joshua by telling him, "Why are you laying there complaining about Me? I am not the problem here!" The Lord's next words to Joshua open his eyes to see what he was missing. The true reason for Israel's defeat at Ai was that Israel had sinned before the battle began. Some in Israel had violated the strict rule the Lord had given to them in the conquest of Jericho. The Lord had forbidden them to take any of the gold or silver of Jericho for themselves, but that it was all to be given to the treasuries of the Lord. Because some in Israel had stolen what belonged to the Lord, lied and hidden it for themselves, the Lord had not blessed them with victory at Ai as He had at Jericho. Their defeat was a well deserved judgment of the Lord.

7:14-18 - "In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the LORD takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the LORD takes shall come near by households. And the household that the LORD takes shall come near man by man. And he who is taken with the devoted things shall be burned with fire, he and all that he has, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done an outrageous thing in Israel." So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near tribe by tribe, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clans of Judah, and the clan of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought near the clan of the Zerahites man by man, and Zabdi was taken. And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken."

One man, Achan, had taken some of the gold, silver, and clothing for himself from the spoils of Jericho. He took the things he wanted from Jericho and brought them back to his family home. He buried the stolen items in the floor of his tent. Achan had imagined that he was shrewd for taking these things for himself and that he would be able to successfully hide his crime from the community around him. In doing so, Achan exposed just what a low concept of God he held in his heart. He was about to learn the hard way that nothing is or can be hidden from God. "And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13). The Lord commanded Joshua to bring the entire nation near to Him tribe by tribe. This meant that each tribe was to present themselves before the Lord at the tabernacle. A lot was cast which would identify one of the twelve tribes. The casting of lots was to the casual observer a random method of making a decision based upon chance. In Israel, the lot was neither random, nor based on chance. The Lord ordained it as a practical way to demonstrate to Israel that He was sovereign and in charge of even apparently random events. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." (Proverbs 16:33). The Lord caused the series of lots cast to identify the tribe of Judah, the clan of the Zerahites, the family of Abdi, and the man Achan. The sin of Achan was never hidden from the Lord and now it was exposed to the entire nation.

7:24-26 - "And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why did you bring trouble on us? The LORD brings trouble on you today." And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore, to this day the name of that place is called the Valley of Achor."

The Lord's judged Achan for his sin of violating the command of the Lord, stealing what belonged to the Lord, lying about it, hiding the stolen things, and causing the defeat of Israel and the deaths of 36 other men. The Lord's judgment was severe but just. Achan was to be executed by stoning. This death penalty seems harsh to some because Achan had responded in the right way when he was identified as the culprit and Joshua had called upon him to give glory to God by confessing. We should understand from this a key principle of sin and judgment. When we confess our sin unto the Lord, we are forgiven, but forgiveness does not automatically wipe out all consequences. We should be thankful that the Lord does remove the greatest consequence to our sin when we repent. We do not receive the eternal judgment that we deserve. However, if the Lord removed all consequences, people would not learn about the destructive cost of sin. I think it is likely that because he confessed, Achan was not lost in eternity. He did lose everything in this life because of his sin though.

What is even more difficult to understand is why Achan's household was judged along with him. His sons and daughters and livestock and even his tent were stoned and then burned with fire. This is one of the most severe judgments of the Lord in all of the Bible. It has confused many who view the children of Achan as innocent victims. Since no further details are included in the passage, we cannot know with certainty, but given the description of the event we can say this is probable. Achan had buried the stolen and forbidden goods in his family tent. The tent was open inside to everyone in the family. For Achan to bury these things in the tent, his family would have been there watching him do so. His sinful actions placed them in a very difficult position. Either they could be loyal to their father and say nothing to anyone about what he had stolen, or they could be loyal to the Lord and tell one of the elders of Israel what their father had hidden in the tent. When the sons and daughters of Achan said nothing about their father's sin, they were as disloyal to the Lord as their father.

There is another spiritual principle of sin that is displayed in this judgment that helps us to understand why the Lord included not just the sons and daughters, but even the livestock and his tent in the judgment. The principle is that serious sins affect more than ourselves. People want to believe that they can sin and in doing so they are "only hurting themselves." Sin does not work that way. We do not have the power to set boundaries around our sin and determine for ourselves

how much it will adversely affect our lives and everything we touch. This is the same basic lesson the Lord has been teaching His people about sin ever since the Garden of Eden. When Adam sinned, what was affected by his sin? Did Adam's sin only cause him some personal internal problems? Or did Adam's sin affect him, his family, his home, and everything he touched? The Lord chose to make Achan an object lesson to reinforce this principle for future generations. Just like He had Israel raise a monument of stones on the shore of the Jordan River to always remind Israel of the Lord's faithfulness to His promise, now Israel raised a monument of stones over Achan to serve as a permanent warning of the severe consequences of sin.

Questions from Joshua 6:

Question: In Our present day, what is the nation that stands for Jericho?

Answer: There is no single nation today that Jericho would represent as a symbol. Instead, we should recognize that Jericho is a symbol for the unbelieving world. Jericho was a strong city in rebellion against the Lord and His ways just like the entire unbelieving world today. The Lord led His army in battle against Jericho. In the same way the Lord today leads the army of His church in a spiritual battle against the world. Our weapons are not natural swords, but the sword of the Gospel of salvation. The world is strong in their resistance of the truth, but the Lord has called the church to carry His message to every nation (Matthew 28:18-20).

Question: In Joshua 6 you explain that the city of Jericho was destroyed for their hundreds of years of becoming more and more evil, including offering their children to their gods. How would what the people in the United States do, be different (less evil) regarding offering their children (unborn) to their gods in sacrifice? In the U.S. we have the gods such as, "another child would cost too much money", or "take too much time", or "I have the right to choose", or "it'd be too incontinent", etc. etc. It seems like all these things are false idols that we've (our society) has deemed more precious than the human made in the image of God. This hit me last night and I got very disturbed about it.

Answer: If we were to do a straight down the line comparison of the moral condition and behavior of the society of Jericho with the current society of the United States we would find that Jericho was in a worse condition and practiced as a whole society worse behaviors. However, our nation cannot afford to pat ourselves on the back by comparing favorably with Jericho. There is no question in my mind that God is not at all pleased by the deaths of millions of children by abortion, as well as the many other evil acts allowed and in some cases even encouraged. We certainly deserve God's judgment.

Joshua 8

8:1-2 - "And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear and do not be dismayed. Take all the fighting men with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, his city, and his land. And you shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and its king. Only its spoil and its livestock you shall take as plunder for yourselves. Lay an ambush against the city, behind it."

In the last verse of chapter seven we are told that the Lord turned from His burning anger. His anger had been inflamed because of the blatant disregard of His prohibition by Achan and his family. When Achan stole some of the things in the conquest of Jericho that the Lord had commanded to be placed in His treasury, the holiness of the nation was compromised and all the people had come under the judgment of the Lord. When the Lord exposed Achan's hidden sin and Joshua carried out the Lord's severe judgment upon the household of Achan, the justice of God was satisfied and the Lord once again showed His favor to Israel. The same basic lesson the Lord has taught ever since the Garden of Eden is being taught here as well. Obedience to God produces holiness in His people which God blesses. Disobedience produces sin which God curses.

Now that Israel is restored in its relationship with the Lord, He is gracious to encourage the heart of Israel's leader. The recent defeat in the first battle of Ai was a disheartening and discouraging experience for Joshua. The military experiences of Joshua had been consistently favorable until now. He had led Israel at the Lord's direction in glorious victories over Amalek years before, over the Amorite kings in recent months, and over Jericho in their first battle for the Promised Land. The recent unexpected defeat at Ai had demolished their national sense of invulnerability. We saw from Joshua's response to the Lord last chapter how his own perspective had been shaken by that defeat to the extent of even questioning the Lord's purpose in bringing them to this point. Even though Joshua was struggling, this experience was a necessary corrective. Joshua now knew at an even deeper level that all their previous victories were not based upon the superiority of Israel to their enemies, but only upon the blessing of the Lord. They won their battles because the Lord was with them to bless them. The very first time they went into battle without the Lord's blessing they lost.

Now, the Lord speaks to Joshua's heart and gives him a needed word of encouragement. As He will do hundreds of times more in future situations, the Lord speaks to His people and exhorts them, "Do not fear..." Fear and faith are polar opposites in Joshua's heart perspective in this circumstance. Joshua now, for the first time, has a real reason to be afraid of moving forward due to the defeat by Ai, but the Lord urges him to not indulge in fear and dismay, but to trust Him and move forward under His command. The Lord further encourages Joshua by describing the next battle as a certain victory for Israel before the battle is even fought. The implication of the Lord's word is that the outcome of the

battle is not an uncertain matter of chance or probability, but it already settled in the plan of God. Israel's only responsibility is simple. They only have to follow the Lord's instructions in obedience and trust. If they do so, they cannot lose the battle in front of them. The battles we all face in our own life are far different in outer physical circumstance, but the spiritual principles are identical. If we trust and obey the Lord we will be blessed by Him.

What is interesting about the battle for Ai is that the Lord does not direct Israel to use the same approach in battle as He did for Jericho. Israel is not to march around the city silently for seven days and shout together on the seventh day. The walls of Ai will not fall over in front of Israel as they did at Jericho. Instead, the Lord directs Joshua to divide the army of Israel into two forces and to lay an ambush for Ai. One force was to camp behind Ai in secret, while the second force was to approach the city directly, but then pretend to retreat in fear from the city. This is a classic military tactic that has been used countless times in famous battles throughout history since that time. One city is defeated with an awesome miracle (Jericho), while the other is defeated with a much more ordinary tactical approach (Ai). What are we to understand from this change in approach between Jericho and Ai? We should see that the Lord does not always work the exact same way in every situation of our lives. In certain special circumstances He may work with a miraculous display of His power, while in others He may use much more ordinary means to accomplish the same purpose. We should not try to anticipate which way the Lord may work next. Our job is simply to trust and obey. If He chooses to do a miracle on our behalf, praise God! If He chooses to have us do more of the work to get the job done, praise God!

8:18, 26 - "Then the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the javelin that was in his hand toward the city... But Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had devoted all the inhabitants of Ai to destruction."

Even though I have described this battle as distinct from the miracle of Jericho, that does not mean that the Lord was not involved in the battle, or that there was not a spiritual element in the battle. The Lord gave a command for Joshua to participate in the battle in a spiritually symbolic way. Joshua was to stretch out the javelin in his hand toward Ai. The javelin symbolized the Lord's authority in this military endeavor. Joshua understood this command to involve more than a momentary raising of the javelin toward the city. He took the Lord's instructions to mean that as long as he held out the javelin, the army of Israel would prevail. Throughout the battle, Joshua faithfully kept the javelin stretched out toward Ai until the battle was finished. This pattern is a spiritual echo of an earlier battle between Israel and Amalek (Exodus 17). The roles were different in that battle. Then, Moses held the staff of the Lord in his hand and extended it over the battlefield, while Joshua led the army of Israel in victory over Amalek. As long as Moses held up the staff over the battle, Israel prevailed. This pattern is followed

with intentional similarity here. The Lord is showing in the similarity that Israel's victory is in the Lord's authority, not their own strength. The Lord also establishes the credibility of Joshua in the eyes of the people of Israel again in the same way He did at the crossing of the Jordan River by repeating with Joshua a similar work that He had previously done through Moses.

8:30-35 - "At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, "an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings.

And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them."

Once the battle for Ai was concluded, we might expect Israel to follow up their great victories over Jericho and Ai by heading directly for the next great city of Canaan to conquer. In war, there is a momentum factor to consider as one army gains strength and enthusiasm from victory that carries over to the next battle. However, Joshua does not lead Israel immediately into battle after Ai. Instead, he leads Israel north to Mount Ebal and Gerizim. Their journey to these mountains is a break in the conquest of the Promised Land for a necessary spiritual reorientation. The first defeat at Ai due to the sin of Achan had reminded Joshua of earlier instructions of the Lord before they had entered the land. While they were still in the wilderness, the Lord had spoken to Israel through Moses and given clear instructions on their first priority once they entered the land. They had so far neglected to fulfill the Lord's instruction, but Joshua would now lead Israel to complete their obedience to the Lord insuring their future success in the battles yet to come. The instructions of the Lord are found in the book of Deuteronomy.

"And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you. And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I

command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; you shall build an altar to the LORD your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God," (Deuteronomy 27:2-6).

"That day Moses charged the people, saying, "When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali." (Deuteronomy 27:11-13).

Israel was to make a permanent monument from large stones and coat them with plaster. On these plastered stones they were to write the words of the Law of God. This monument signified that Israel's conquest and possession of the Promised Land was based upon their obedient response to the Law of God. It was God's Word and their relationship to it that distinguished them from the nations of Canaan which they dispossessed. The Lord also commanded them to establish this permanent monument to the Law on Mount Ebal. They were also to build an altar there on the same mountain and offer burnt offerings there to the Lord. There were two mountains in this location near to each other. Mount Ebal was directly across a narrow valley from Mount Gerizim. In the same instructions from the Lord, the entire nation was to divide into two groups of six tribes each. Six of the tribes were to stand on Mount Ebal and six of the tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim. From there, the Levites were to declare the blessings of the Law from Mount Gerizim, while the Levites also declared the curses of the Law from Mount Ebal.

This ceremony involved the entire nation in a dramatic enactment to drive home to every heart that the Lord would greatly bless Israel if they obeyed His Law, and that He would greatly curse Israel if they rebelled and disobeyed His Law. They were divided into two groups of tribes because the Lord was demonstrating that there are only two possible responses to His Law. There is only obedience or disobedience; blessing or cursing. There is no third, neutral option available to the people of God. There is no middle ground of somewhat obedient and somewhat disobedient. The Lord has called His people to be fully obedient and here He was demonstrating the all or nothing seriousness of that call.

What we should notice is that of the two mountains, the Lord commanded the monument of the Law and the altar for burnt offerings to be established on Mount Ebal. That was the mountain representing the curse, not the blessing. The reason the Lord wanted the monument and the altar on Ebal was because He was showing His people that they would break His Law and that they deserved His curse. However, by having the altar, which symbolically points forward to the cross of Christ, built on the same mountain of the curse, the Lord was also displaying His provision of salvation. Yes, the people would fail to keep the Law

of God as they should. Yes, they would rebel and break every single law of God written on these plastered stones. They would be perfect failures. Yet, God had provided a perfect salvation. The perfect sacrifice of God was offered at the exact same spot that testified of the failures of His people. God's mercy would triumph over the deserved judgment of His people.

Questions from Joshua 7:

Question: 7:7 - In the New Covenant, Jesus death opened up the way for us to pray directly to God. So does God allow only particular people like Joshua and ones like him that He purposes in the Old Testament to pray to Him and hear His answer?

Answer: No, prayer was also available to anyone in the Old Testament that was in covenant relationship with God. It only seems like a few from the Old Testament had the privilege of prayer because the Scriptures highlight their prayers and God's answers to their prayers. However, anyone from the covenant people of Israel could pray and hope for God's answer. Of course, this principle of the shared covenant privilege of prayer does not exclude the special calling the Lord gave to key individuals such as Abraham, Moses, and Joshua. Along with their special calling, the Lord established a special relationship with those men. Their prayers had greater significance because the Lord was working through their prayers to accomplish His special kingdom purpose.

Joshua 9

9:1-7- *"As soon as all the kings who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard of this, they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel. But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us. But the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?"*

Word of Israel's victories at Jericho and Ai have spread. These accounts follow the earlier report of crossing of the Red Sea by Israel and their defeat of the Amorite kings, Og and Bashan. It has become clear now to the Canaanite kings

that Israel has every intention of conquering all their lands. In a move born of their shared desperation, the kings of six of the seven nations inhabiting the Promised Land band together in an alliance to fight the growing Israelite threat. Ordinarily, these six nations were at odds with one another, but their shared fear of Israel motivated them to lay aside their differences. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. The people of God should not be surprised to see the world form alliances in its opposition to the Lord's purpose through His people.

The seventh of the nations of Canaan did not join this new alliance to fight against Israel. The people of Gibeon also heard the report of the defeat of Jericho and Ai, but they drew a different conclusion than the other six nations. They shrewdly reasoned that the God who brought Israel across the Red Sea and gave Israel victory over Jericho and Ai was too great for them to fight and defeat in battle. They chose a completely different solution to the threat against their nation. Rather than fight an un-winnable war, they reasoned that forming an alliance with this enemy would insure their own survival. The men of Gibeon understood that Israel was not inclined to make an alliance with them. In order to gain the trust of Israel they would have to resort to deception and cunning. If they could present themselves as representing a nation far away, outside the boundaries of Canaan, then they hoped to gain a covenant agreement from Israel. This plan really depended upon Israel's commitment to a covenant, and whether they would honor such an agreement once it was revealed that it was formed out of a deception. In our modern society, this plan might not work because the deceived party could simply claim that it was a fraudulent covenant and set it aside. However, in the ancient world, covenants were much more serious and were binding even in such cases.

There is a lesson for Israel here and for us as well. The world stands in opposition to the plan and purpose of God as it is to be carried out by the people of God. The world's first reaction is to fight against God's purpose. If the world recognizes that it cannot win its losing battle, it will resort to any means at its disposal to survive. The world is not above joining forces with the church and even the message of the church to accomplish its own ends. It would be similar to a politician that enlists the support of the church for his election effort, though he does not personally believe or support what the church stands for.

9:14-15 - "So the men took some of their provisions, but did not ask counsel from the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them."

The act of the Gibeonites was effective in deceiving even the leaders of Israel including Joshua. All of Israel was convinced that they were a delegation from a distant nation and that it was in their best interest to establish a covenant of peace with them. They made the covenant of peace with Gibeon and by doing so were bound by covenant to never attack them or fight against them. By making

this covenant with Gibeon, Israel directly violated another greater covenant agreement. The Lord had previously commanded Israel to form no covenant with any of the seven nations of Canaan. "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). The Gibeonites were of the Hivite nation against which God specifically had warned them to not make any covenant. The Lord had given Israel this warning for their own good. Any covenant they might form with one of these seven nations would eventually and inevitably lead to Israel being influenced in an unhealthy way by the spiritual corruption of that nation.

In this case, because the delegation from Gibeon did not identify themselves truthfully, we might tend to excuse the decision to enter into a covenant with them. However, the Lord did not excuse this decision. Even though the truth of their identity was hidden, the leaders of Israel could have and should have known better. Their first instinct was to be suspicious of their true identity. That suspicion should not have been ignored. Joshua and the leaders of Israel made one mistake in this decision process, and it is a mistake believers commonly repeat today in matters of critical importance. What Joshua should have done is stop, after meeting the delegation from Gibeon, and go to the Lord to ask His counsel. What we don't see Joshua do in this situation is visit the tabernacle of the Lord. We don't see him stop to pray. We don't see him cry out to the Lord to show him what he should do in this situation. Joshua did discuss the situation with the other leaders of Israel, but he never discussed it with the Lord. The implication of this brief description of their failure to seek the Lord's counsel, is that the Lord would have given them His counsel if only they had bothered to ask Him. This should remind us of these passages from both the Old and New Testaments.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." (James 1:5)

How many big mistakes might we avoid if we would remember to stop before making the decision, and ask the Lord what we should do? The Biblical implication is that the Lord wants to give us the benefit of His counsel. He will give it generously, as James describes it, but we must ask. We must acknowledge Him.

9:18-21 - "But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders. But all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them. This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them." And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them."

Even though making this covenant with the Gibeonites violated the Lord's command, it would be an even greater violation for Israel to disregard the covenant once it was established. Once the covenant was made, Israel was locked into it as a holy obligation. The Lord would honor the provisions of their covenant and would hold Israel accountable to keep their obligation even in future generations. Hundreds of years after this event, Israel would be judged by the Lord for the actions of King Saul when he put the Gibeonites to death in violation of this covenant. "Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death." (II Samuel 21:1). There is a spiritual principle displayed here that instructs our hearts regarding the significance of even human covenants in the eyes of the Lord.

An example of how this principle applies today is the failure by some Christians to take the covenant of marriage as seriously as the Lord does. It is becoming more commonplace for believers to excuse their sinful desire for a divorce from an unhappy marriage by rationalizing that they made a big mistake to have ever entered into the marriage. They reason that God would not want them to compound the first mistake by remaining unhappy for the rest of their lives. Without Biblical grounds, many end their marriages which God formed. In doing so, they willfully ignore the clear declaration of the Lord. "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:6). The issue is that some things are more significant than our present happiness. Integrity and faithfulness to a covenant vow are among the greatest commitments we will ever make and keep in our lives.

The Lord will hold accountable those that disregard this principle. At the same time, the Lord will pour out special blessing upon the one, "who swears to his own hurt and does not change;" (Psalm 15:4). The meaning is that some commitments must be honored, even if it hurts us to honor them. Better in such cases to be hurt, but faithful and true, than comfortable and a covenant breaker.

Joshua 10

10:5-9 - "Then the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon, gathered their forces and went up with all their armies and encamped against Gibeon and made war against it. And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Do not relax your hand from your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country are gathered against us." So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands. Not a man of them shall stand before you." So Joshua came upon them suddenly, having marched up all night from Gilgal."

An alliance of five Amorite kings now join forces to attack, not Israel directly, but the city of Gibeon which had just entered into a covenant with Israel. The Gibeonites were viewed as traitors by their neighboring nations because they had joined with Israel rather than join the alliance against Israel. In this case the nation that supported Israel was hated as much as Israel itself by their enemies. When the Gibeonites came under attack they sent word to Joshua to appeal to him to bring the army of Israel to their defense. This circumstance represents a test for the leadership of Joshua. It was ultimately Joshua's decision and responsibility that Israel had entered into a covenant with Gibeon. The failure to check with the Lord first, before making this national alliance was Joshua's failure. When the true identity of the Gibeonites was revealed the people naturally blamed the leaders for the decision and Joshua was the leader of the leaders.

The test that this development presented was an easy way out of a predicament for Joshua. It would have been easy for Joshua to rationalize not responding to Gibeon's appeal for help. He could have decided to not send any help for them by claiming they did not deserve to be helped because they had deceived them as to their true identity. Joshua could have claimed that the attack of the five Amorite kings on Gibeon was the Lord's judgment upon Gibeon for their deception, and God's merciful intervention to release them from a bad covenant through Gibeon's destruction. Joshua did not fail this test by following any of these natural inclinations. Joshua's faithfulness to hold to his integrity will be rewarded by a great victory over the allied Amorite forces.

Joshua did not even hesitate to respond. He immediately mustered the army of Israel to march to the rescue of Gibeon. Joshua did not even waste a single day in responding to their plea for help. He personally led the army in an all night march to Gibeon from Gilgal, which was at least a ten hour march. What is particularly interesting about Joshua's response in this is that he did not first stop and ask the Lord whether to go help Gibeon. It was his failure to stop and ask the

Lord regarding the delegation from Gibeon that led to Israel entering into the covenant in the first place. We might expect Joshua to try to correct that mistake by making doubly sure to ask the Lord in this situation. He did not first ask the Lord, but instead received the blessing of a clear word from the Lord as he was already in motion to answer the call for help. The Lord spoke to Joshua a strong word of encouragement about the battle ahead after he had already decided to go to Gibeon.

It was wrong for Joshua to not first seek the Lord before forming the covenant, but it was not wrong in this second case to not first seek the Lord before responding to the appeal of Gibeon. The difference is in the context. He should have asked the Lord before making any covenant with any other nation which would obligate Israel to aid that nation. However, once that covenant was formed, Israel was then under a holy obligation to honor the covenant including fighting to defend their covenant partners. Joshua did not need to first ask the Lord in this case because the covenant represented the Lord's will and direction for him. A parallel example would be to marriage for a believer today. It would be good and wise for a believer to first ask the Lord whether or not they should marry a particular person. This is especially applicable when it is not entirely clear whether the other person has a healthy relationship with the Lord. Once the decision is made and a marriage is formed with that person it is no longer necessary to stop and ask the Lord whether He wants you to remain faithful to the person you married. The covenant of marriage, once it is established between two people, represents the Lord's will for faithfulness to that person from that point forward. Because Joshua immediately responded in covenant faithfulness to fulfill Israel's covenant obligation toward Gibeon, the Lord spoke to Joshua on the way and gave him assurance of His involvement and blessing in the coming battle.

10:10-14 - "And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. And as they fled before Israel, while they were going down the ascent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword. At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon." And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day. There has been no day like it before or since, when the LORD obeyed the voice of a man, for the LORD fought for Israel."

The extent of the Lord's involvement in this battle with the five allied Amorite kings was great. The Lord was present and involved in far more than spiritual encouragement. The Lord Who had appeared to Joshua when they first entered the Promised Land and revealed Himself as the commander of the army of the Lord (Joshua 5:13-15) now shows His commitment to Israel's victory by a miraculous intervention in the battle. There are actually two miracles the Lord does in this key battle which will solidify Israel's conquest of the southern region of the Promised Land. We are not given this specific background to the story, but it seems likely that this battle against the massed armies of the five Amorite kings was one that Israel would not have won without the Lord's direct miraculous intervention. Even before the first miracle, the Lord turned the tide of the battle by throwing the Amorite armies into a panic, and causing them to flee before Israel in the battle. We could call this spiritual psychological warfare. The Lord influenced the minds and hearts of the opposing army to cause them to become suddenly disheartened in the battle and flee.

The first miracle occurred as the armies fled down a descent from the higher ground of the battle site. As the Amorites fled, the Lord caused a hail storm of great proportion to rain hail upon them. This was not a coincidental hail storm that just happened to occur at this key moment and place. This was a God designed and ordered event in which He marshaled to serve His purpose, what are commonly called the forces of nature, but are actually the forces of His own creation. The hailstones that fell from the sky were large enough to kill the fleeing soldiers. The miracle was in that this was a perfect storm. It came at the key moment of the turning of the battle, it fell with full fury directly upon the army opposing Israel, and no soldier of the Lord's army was hit by any of this hail even though they followed close behind and were pursuing the fleeing Amorites, and the hail killed more of the enemy than the army of Israel did.

The second miracle is more famous than the miracle of the hail storm, and is rightly identified as one of the greatest miracles in the Bible. Joshua spoke to the Lord and the Lord honored the words of Joshua. The Lord caused the sun and moon to stop in the sky so that the length of the day was miraculously extended. We are not told the exact amount of time of this miracle, but the text tells us that the sun did not set for "about a whole day." That could either mean a full 24 hour day, or a full day's worth of light for the sake of the battle. I lean toward the second interpretation which would mean the daylight for this key battle was extended around an additional 12 hours. It is also unclear whether the Lord literally stopped the sun and the moon for that time, or stopped the rotation of the earth which would be observed the same by Joshua and Israel. Either option would require an enormous expression of the Lord's power in the accomplishment of the miracle. Many commentaries on this chapter will offer various ways to avoid the scientific difficulties of either event, but the Bible shows no hesitation in this account to portray this as a miraculous work of God's great power. The wording at the end of the description emphasizes the unusual nature of this event and day. This truly was the longest day in the history of the world.

We should notice the focus of this account is as much on Joshua as it is on the Lord. Yes, it was the Lord who did the miracle. It was the Lord's power and not Joshua's that lengthened the day. Yet, Joshua's role in this development is not insignificant. He dared to speak to the Lord about something outrageously great. Joshua's faith was both deep and strong to speak to the Lord about stopping the sun in the sky with a real expectation that the Lord would do so. This is that kind of special mountain moving faith with which Jesus urged His disciples to trust God. "And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mark 11:22-24).

10:24-25 - "And when they brought those kings out to Joshua, Joshua summoned all the men of Israel and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near; put your feet on the necks of these kings." Then they came near and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight."

Following the victory over the Amorites, Joshua had the five kings of the enemy alliance brought before all the men of Israel. He then ordered something that might seem unnecessarily arrogant to us at first glance. Joshua had the war chiefs of Israel come forward in front of all the assembled men of Israel. The war chiefs were instructed to place their feet on the necks of the five captured kings. As the war chiefs obeyed, Joshua issued a call to all of Israel that echoed the Lord's own word of encouragement to him (Joshua 1:6-7). Joshua urged Israel to not be afraid or be dismayed but to be strong and courageous because the Lord

would cause them to dominate their future enemies just as they saw with these five kings. Before the battle, the prospect of fighting against such a large and strong alliance must have challenged the courage of the men of Israel. The Lord gave Joshua the wisdom to give his men a dramatic object lesson of the faithfulness of the Lord to cause them to prevail even over such a strong enemy. This is also a powerful prophetic display of the ultimate victory of Christ. "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." (I Corinthians 15:25).

10:40-42 - "So Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon. And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel."

As we have seen in many previous events, Israel's history is not one of consistent and perfect obedience. The people of God often fell short of God's standard. There are, though, praise worthy moments of exceptional response to the call of God which Israel enjoyed in short bursts. This is one of those exceptional moments. Joshua devoted to destruction all that the Lord had commanded in this entire region. They cleansed the land in preparation for the new thing the Lord planned in the settlement of the holy nation. In this completed obedience, Israel did not compromise with the fallen and corrupted nations around them as they had before this and they would again at a later time. Joshua's perfect obedience was matched step by step by the Lord's perfect faithfulness to fight for Israel. The lesson for us is simple. When we obey the Lord we can expect the Lord to fight for us in our battles.

Joshua 11

11:1-6 - "When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of this, he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were in the northern hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the lowland, and in Naphoth-dor on the west, to the Canaanites in the east and the west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Hermon in the land of Mizpah. And they came out with all their troops, a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. And all these kings joined their forces and came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to fight with Israel. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for tomorrow at this time I will give over all of them, slain, to Israel. You shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire."

The great battle with the armies of the five kings described in chapter 10 was the end of what has come to be known as the Southern Campaign for the possession of the Promised Land. Having defeated those kings, the news of Israel's conquest of the southern region of Canaan has now traveled to the northern region. The kings of the northern region react with alarm at the news of the defeat of the southern kings, as they correctly recognize that they are the next target for Israel's campaign. Jabin, the king of the great northern city of Hazor sends word to the neighboring kings and draws them together in a great coalition of the northern nations. They combine their armies in what is described in this passage as "a great horde, in number like the sand that is on the seashore." The Jewish historian, Josephus describes this combined army as greater than 300,000 in number. This would be the largest army Israel would face in the conquest of the Promised Land.

In addition to the sheer numbers of the combined armies, this force is intimidating in its armament. They entered the battle against Israel with thousands of chariots. At this time in history chariots were the most devastating weapon of war and were similar in impact on the battlefield of tanks in today's warfare. Between the hundreds of thousands of foot soldiers and the thousands of chariots they were facing, there was plenty of natural reason for Joshua and Israel to be shaken at the prospect of fighting such an overwhelming force. The gathering of this mighty army must have been intimidating to Israel, especially so soon after they had defeated the five southern nations. Rather than the freedom to rest and enjoy the victory in the south, Israel must immediately go to war against an even greater and more challenging enemy. However, the Lord was at work in this challenge. By stirring the northern kings to join with each other to attack Israel, the Lord has effectively gathered all of Israel's enemies in one location so that they can deal a single great finishing blow to the resistance to their conquest of the Promised Land.

The Lord immediately addresses Joshua with a strong word of encouragement to equip his heart against any temptation to fear their enemies. The Lord gives Joshua a direct command to not fear the army which they now face. The Lord does not even concern Himself with the size or power of the massed armies of the northern Canaanites. He dismisses their threat to Israel with a promise of total victory which He gives to Joshua. In a single day the Lord will bring about the defeat of this great army and they will all lie conquered and slain before Israel. We can learn from this development. We need not interpret the amassed resistance of our enemies as a signal of our inevitable defeat. The Lord may be at work even in the gathering of enemy forces to set them up for a greater and more glorious victory.

The Lord gives Israel a special instruction for this battle. After the victory is won, Israel is to hamstring the captured horses of the enemy army and burn their chariots with fire. This seems like a strange command at first glance. These thousands of horses and chariots are valuable and powerful implements of warfare. Would it not make more sense for Israel to capture these and incorporate them into their own army? With these thousands of chariots as part of their army, Israel could proudly claim to be the greatest army in the world! This is exactly the temptation from which the Lord spares Israel. He does not allow them to capture and use the chariots of the enemy because Israel is not to trust in chariots for future battles, but in the Lord alone. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm 20:7).

11:15 - "Just as the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses."

Joshua's obedience to the Lord's commands is exemplary in the conquest. The testimony that he left nothing undone of all that the Lord had commanded Moses is a record of faithfulness and uncompromising obedience. In this, Joshua is a type of Christ and a spiritual role model that we are to seek to emulate. Of course, Joshua was not perfect, and we have already seen in the first defeat at Ai that he failed to seek the Lord before sending Israel into their first defeat. However, here, his obedience is so thorough that we are reminded of Jesus. He described His own record of obedience to His Father in this way, "I always do the things that are pleasing to him." (John 8:29). His perfect obedience is the standard we are called to follow. None of us are perfect and none of us will have a record, even as Christians of perfect obedience, but we are to strive to become more and more obedient following His example. More than simply obedient, Joshua was an awesome example of a man that received an assignment from the Lord and appropriately made that assignment the focus of his life. He finished the job that the Lord had given him to do. Paul's testimony at the end of his life has a similar ring of accomplishment to it. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (II Timothy 4:7). A significant spiritual life

is more than an absence of great failure in sin. It is measured by understanding and fulfilling the Lord's assignment for our lives as Joshua did.

11:18-20 - "Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the people of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. They took them all in battle. For it was the LORD's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the LORD commanded Moses."

In the circumstances of the great battle of this day between Israel and the alliance of northern Canaanite kings, we are given an insight into an unseen, but influential spiritual element in the battle. The Lord was at work in the hearts of these kings. He hardened their hearts as He had previously done with Pharaoh in the development of the Ten Plagues on Egypt. The hardening of their hearts describes an internal influence of the Lord by the Holy Spirit to strengthen the resolve of these kings to attack Israel. The Lord hardened their hearts so that His planned judgment against them would be fully executed in this battle. We see in this once again, that the Lord is the sovereign God over all the nations, and not just God over Israel alone. He is in charge of both the nations that recognize Him and honor Him, and the nations that reject Him and disregard Him. He is working among all the nations to fulfill His own plan for history.

11:21-22 - "And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel. Joshua devoted them to destruction with their cities. There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did some remain."

As the conquest of all of the Promised Land continued following the defeat of the allied northern kings, Israel next encountered a special challenge. The Anakim that populated the hill country presented an intimidating factor in a different way than the vast numbers of the northern alliance. The Anakim were fearsome because of their individual size and strength, more than their combined numbers. The Anakim were descendants of Anak, who was one of the ancient Nephilim. This passage from the days before the Flood describes the problem presented by the Nephilim. "The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown." (Genesis 6:4). This passage from Numbers informs us that while the Flood wiped out the Nephilim of those days, that there was a later appearance of the Nephilim and that they settled in Canaan. "And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them." (Numbers 13:33).

When the twelve spies were sent to scout out the Promised Land, ten of them returned with this fearful report of the presence of Nephilim (physical giants) in the Promised Land, and they had attempted to talk Israel into turning back from the plan to enter the land and settle it out of fear of these giants in the land. Up until this point, all the enemies Israel had faced in Canaan were great in number, but normal in stature. Now, it was time to face and defeat the giants in the land. What is noticeable is that neither Joshua nor Israel even flinches now at the prospect of doing battle with these giants. The Lord's commitment to Israel and blessing in every battle has strengthened their faith for this significant challenge. They are spiritually equipped to face and defeat the giants, and they completely defeat them just as the Lord had promised. Only in what would become the Philistine kingdoms were some of the descendants of the giants left alive. One of the descendants of Anak will later play an important role in a famous one on one battle generations to come as David faces Goliath of Gath in battle.

Questions from Joshua 10

Question: Joshua 10: Was there any type of sacrificial system in place at this time for the daily sins committed?

Answer: Yes, the full sacrificial system of the tabernacle was in place at this time and had been since the tabernacle was finished by Moses. The tabernacle traveled with the camp of Israel as the Lord led them from place to place in their conquest of the Promised Land.

Question: Joshua 10:13 - "Is this not written in the Book of Jasher?" What is this book of Jasher?

Answer: We cannot be 100% certain because there are no copies of the book of Jasher that still exist. Bible scholars believe that it was probably an early collection of songs written to praise the Lord for His great works in the wilderness years and the early conquest of the Promised Land.

Joshua 12

12:1, 24 - "Now these are the kings of the land whom the people of Israel defeated and took possession of their land beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise, from the Valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon, with all the Arabah eastward: the king of Tirzah, one: in all, thirty-one kings."

Chapter 12 gives us little in the way of new information, and instead reviews and rehearses the conquest of the Promised Land up until this point. Verses 1-6 describe the victories over the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan River. That territory was conquered when Moses was still alive, and

before Israel had crossed the Jordan. Verses 7-24 detail the conquest of 31 kings of the land and their territories under the leadership of Joshua on the west side of Jordan after Israel had crossed the river. The campaign began in the south and Israel extended their control northward throughout the land starting in Jericho and ending in Tirzah.

There is not as much detail given on the northern campaign because the biggest part of the conquest of the northern territories was accomplished in the single battle described in chapter 11. However, Josephus mentions in his history of this time period that the entire conquest of the Promised Land took five years to complete. This chapter ends the main story of the conquest. The land now lies under the control of Israel and every major enemy has been defeated. The rest of the book of Joshua will shift focus from conquest to the division and settlement of the land by the nine and one half tribes of Israel that will settle west of the Jordan River. Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh would return to the eastern side of the Jordan and settle the Trans-Jordan territories. There will be some continuing battles in the land because there are pockets of resistance scattered throughout the land, but the conquest as a whole is now complete. Israel controls the land and will now begin to settle it as their own.

The main underlying theme of chapter 12 is the faithfulness of God against all natural expectations. Hundreds of years before, the Lord had given a promise to Abraham to give this land to his descendants. Since that time, the twelve tribes that descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob grew into a nation of people too numerous to consider moving from one land to another. They also were enslaved by Egypt, greatest nation on earth at that time, and had no reasonable chance to be released from their captivity. The Lord not only brought Israel out of Egypt against all expectations, He also led them through an inhospitable wilderness for forty years without sufficient provision of food and water available there. Then He brought them into Canaan, the exact land He had promised to Abraham, and in spite of the fierce opposition of the allied armies of the land, and in spite of even the resistance of real giants, and caused Israel to defeat every foe. The Lord kept His promise and gave this land to Abraham's descendants exactly as He had said He would.

Joshua 13

13:1-6 - "Now Joshua was old and advanced in years, and the LORD said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to possess. This is the land that yet remains: all the regions of the Philistines, and all those of the Geshurites (from the Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron, it is counted as Canaanite; there are five rulers of the Philistines, those of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron), and those of the Avvim, in the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, to Aphek, to the boundary of the Amorites, and the land of the Gebalites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrise, from Baal-gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, all the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth-maim, even all the Sidonians. I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel. Only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you."

Chapter 13 opens with a fast forward in time to the end of the early conquest campaign for Canaan. The time elapsed since Israel crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land at the beginning of the book of Joshua until now is most likely around seven years. Joshua is now somewhere in his late eighties in age. The Lord spoke to Joshua at this time and pointed out his age as well as the remaining work to be accomplished for the completion of the conquest of the land. The Lord identified Joshua's age, not because he was unaware of it, but to emphasize to him the practical reality of his situation. Even with the Lord's blessing upon his life, Joshua would not go on living forever. His lifespan was finite, and there was a specific assignment from the Lord that must be accomplished before he drew his last breath. Joshua was intended by the Lord to accomplish two primary goals in his leadership of Israel. He was to conquer the land by eliminating the strongholds of enemy opposition, and he was to divide the land among the twelve tribes of Israel according to the Lord's purpose for each tribe. By this time the conquest was mostly accomplished in terms of the defeat of the great Canaanite strongholds, however, the Lord's word to Joshua here revealed that he would not live long enough to see the conquest through to its final end.

Even after the main city strongholds of the Canaanites were defeated, there remained much of the land to possess, and numerous pockets of enemies to face. This word from the Lord revealed that the work of conquest would continue beyond the days of Joshua, and as we discover in the later history of Israel the fullness of the boundaries of the kingdom of Israel were not established until the reign of King David, hundreds of years from this point. Joshua's responsibility in the plan of God now shifts in light of where his own life stands in the big picture from one of leading the conquest effort to the oversight of the tribal distribution of the territories of the Promised Land. The Lord's plan was for Joshua to identify which territory each tribe was responsible to settle, and then to end the unified

army of Israel and leave each tribe to finish the work of conquering and settling their own allocated region. The wisdom of this plan would set in motion two principles. Each tribe would be motivated to complete the work of conquest and settlement in their own territory because they would most benefit from clearing their own portion of the land. At the same time, any tribe which failed to trust and obey the Lord in finishing this assignment would not hinder the other tribes from settling their own portion. The tribes that failed to complete the work would only suffer the consequences that they set in motion for themselves.

This is a similar principle for how God still works in His kingdom today. Together all the tribes were responsible for the overall work of possessing the land, but the success or failure of that assignment would vary from tribe to tribe and region to region. In a similar way, the Lord has given a great overall assignment to the church as a whole in relationship to the world. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). All churches are together responsible to the Lord for responding to His call to fulfill the Great Commission by taking the gospel to all the nations. The relative success or failure of that commission varies greatly however, from church to church and from generation to generation. One church may be full committed to that assignment as a high priority and both trusts and obeys the Lord in it with great fruit being the result. Another church may virtually ignore their assigned part in that commission by failing to either trust or obey the Lord with little or no fruit the result. The obedient church will not be judged for the failures of the disobedient one. We see this pattern displayed in the seven letters sent by the Lord Jesus to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the early chapters of the book of Revelation. The same principle applies to individual Christians. The Lord has given the great assignment to the entire church, but each believer and each church are responsible to take the Lord's assignment to heart and make it a life priority.

One of the interesting details from this passage is that the Philistine territories are mentioned by name for the first time. As the history of Israel develops, the Philistines will be mentioned again and again and play a large part in the lives of God's people. Here we see with certainty, that the Lord originally intended for the territories of the Philistines to be conquered and made part of the kingdom of Israel. However, it will not be until King David that the Philistine problem will finally be resolved. For generations to come, Israel will be troubled by leaving the Philistines unconquered. Israel's failure to finish this part of the conquest will become as a permanent and irritating thorn in their side. In a similar way, when we come to know the Lord, He intends for us to bring every area of our lives under the authority of the Lord. Our lives are to be conquered for the Lord in every aspect. Those believers who leave a critical area or two of their lives the same as it was before salvation will have to learn the hard way the consequences of leaving worldly patterns and influences in place. I have seen the walk of sincere believers undermined by leaving one bad habit unconquered such as drunkenness, drug abuse, pornography, fornication, or lying. The Lord's

purpose is for the conquest of every area of our lives (sanctification) to be carried forward until all is under submission to His authority.

In verse six, the Lord reminded Joshua of His previous promise. "I myself will drive them out from before the people of Israel." This word was meant as an encouragement to both Joshua and Israel that in spite of Joshua's advancing age, that the Lord's power and commitment to the conquest had not diminished. The Lord was as committed to the end of the task as He was to its beginning. However, this word of encouragement did not mean that Israel could afford to relax and let God do all the work apart from their own participation. The Lord would complete the work of conquering Canaan, but He would do so through Israel, not apart from Israel. The distinction in these two perspectives is huge. Israel was not to think that the Lord had promised to drive out the Canaanites, therefore they could simply go on an extended vacation until He finished His job. Instead, the Lord would continue and complete the conquest by stirring each tribe to take the conquest and settlement of their own territory as a holy commission from the Lord that would be accomplished by the Lord working with and through His people. This principle is carried forward in our lives today. "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12-13). It is the Lord's assignment and the Lord's work, but that does not mean that we do not work as well. We are called to work, but all our work is to be energized by a greater working of God within our spirit. We work out our salvation because He is working powerfully within us to stir us to make the right choices and to extend every holy effort in our assignments from Him.

13:13 - "Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, but Geshur and Maacath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day."

This is a description that we will encounter again in the next several chapters detailing the distribution and settlement of the land. The main point is that Israel did not perfectly complete the conquest of Canaan at this time. Their obedience was imperfect and partial. The result was that some of the original inhabitants of the land survived and continued to trouble Israel. They would only have themselves to blame for this development. The reality of their response did not match the standard of the high calling of God. This is exactly where most of us live as believers. We live in the tension between God's high calling and our imperfect response to His call. This description is not meant to discourage us, but it is meant to make us aware of the reality that our lives are made more difficult than they need to be by our own failure to trust and obey the Lord as we should.