

# **Teaching Joshua**

*Examining Chapters 1–12*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



**MYRTLEFIELD**  
HOUSE  
[www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

# Contents

1	<a href="#">Context, Contents and Thought Flow</a>	3
2	<a href="#">Similarities and Differences; Obstacles and Miracles</a>	19
3	<a href="#">Inheritance; Crossing Jordan—Further Analysis</a>	23
	<a href="#">About the Author</a>	45

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2020

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

This text has been edited from the transcript of talks given by David Gooding in Belfast (N. Ireland) in November 1995.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. You may not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible. Quotations marked KJV are from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press. Other quotations are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust  
PO Box 2216  
Belfast, N Ireland  
BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)  
e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

Myrtlefield catalogue no: jos.008/dw

## Context, Contents & Thought Flow

It's good to see you all. Thank you very much for coming. I'm sure it will prove an enrichment to me. By whatever means you're here, you're very welcome. I'm glad to see you.

### **Purpose and approach**

I am given to understand that what we are to be doing on this occasion is not for me to stand here and preach. We are to work together to attack a book of Scripture and to see if the Lord shows us the meaning of that particular book and how to come at the meaning. In this way we may help each other to check our understandings, to enrich them, to be able to control them, and therefore to control our preaching.

We shall not be starting at the preaching end, the application end, but at the other end—seeking to understand what the book is saying. It is of course a legitimate thing to go to the Bible to get sermons for other people, and some men are given to that! It isn't the highest motive for reading a Bible. These are God's thoughts and if we find in the end that they're quite unpreachable and irrelevant to our congregations, and we can't see how they could be made relevant, never mind. If they're God's words, we try to have the good manners to listen to God when he speaks.

We shall not be coming at it from the attitude of problems. That's another way to come to Scripture. You have a problem, so you come to Scripture to see what answers Scripture may have. That's also permitted and legitimate and good. But it is sometimes even better to allow God to set the topic of conversation, otherwise we have a Bible study that is driven by problem solving. What we shall do in heaven in that event, I don't know, for there won't be any problems to solve, so we won't need to consult the Lord at all perhaps!

The way to grow in our concepts, in our outlook, and begin to develop an outlook as big as eternity, is sometimes to let God set the topic of conversation, whether we can see how it will be practical or not. Some people hold that the only legitimate Bible study is when it's practical, as though God had made the mistake of writing a whole book, great chunks of which are unpractical! However, in the conviction that this is God's inspired word, and that if he opened heaven and spoke to us, he wouldn't say anything different from what he said here, we will try to persist.

### **The book of Joshua**

Now I've chosen the book of Joshua in full knowledge of the fact that you are experts in it. Many of you have already preached many times on the book of Joshua, so that makes life a

bit easier, for you know the detail of the narrative. I've chosen it because I fancy that most of you will have found, like I have often found, that while some parts of it are very preachable, other parts are a bit more difficult, and if one is obliged to preach on them, the preaching becomes a bit arbitrary; and drawing the appropriate lessons from it likewise becomes a bit difficult and arbitrary. Here is an opportunity for us to increase our understanding of the book and of its content, so that we see how each element in the narrative is related to the other elements and how, between them, they build a rationally put together message. Understanding that will help us to come to the way it should be expounded and applied. This is not simply a book from which we can pick here and there and make sermons. It is the Holy Spirit's sermon from beginning to end, and the more we see what the Holy Spirit was saying and the way he designed his sermon, the more authoritative our preaching and application will be. We will not be making up a sermon about Joshua, we will be preaching Joshua—which is the Holy Spirit's own sermon. So in this session, if you can bear it, I shall be speaking quite at length on the matter. On subsequent occasions, if there are any, and that's in your hands, we can proceed in a more co-operative fashion.

### **The historicity of Joshua**

So first of all, on the sheer history of Joshua, let me just mention this volume by David Rohl<sup>1</sup>. The author informs the world that he has no particular faith whatsoever, but he got tired of the approach adopted by the majority of scholars, that much of the Old Testament is simply myth and there's no history behind it. This book is written in the conviction that a great deal of the Old Testament—remember he's not a believer of anything—has solid history behind it. He's an Egyptologist and his thesis is that conventional chronology has thought that the pharaohs were consecutive whereas in fact, particularly in the *Third Intermediate Period*, quite a few of the pharaohs were not consecutive but were contemporary. The result of that is to push things backwards by about three hundred years. That in turn affects the question of who the pharaoh was when the Israelites went down to Egypt, who the pharaoh was that brought up Moses, and who was the pharaoh reigning at the time of the Exodus.

It also of course bears on the date of the conquest that is recorded in the book of Joshua. It has become common in scholarly circles these last thirty years, for the archaeologist to tell the world that there is no archaeological evidence whatsoever in Canaan for the conquest. They say if the story given us in Joshua were true—that Israel, led by Joshua at the head of a united army, invaded and crushed the opposition in Canaan—there would have been evidence of this in the strata of the particular time in history, burnt cities and what have you. And the archaeologists these last thirty years have told the world that there just isn't any evidence whatsoever. The scholars therefore have concluded that the story given us in Joshua is simply myth and an aggrandized version of what scarcely ever happened. At best, it wasn't the united armies of Israel going in, but a few tribes, the so-called Joseph tribes and the Judah tribes, some of which may have straggled from Egypt. A lot of them were already in Canaan and at various times they formed coalitions and fought the neighbours and so forth. On this basis the book of Joshua is seen largely as a sort of literary epic with no historical basis.

---

<sup>1</sup> David Rohl, *A Test of Time*, published 1995.

But according to the new chronology, if it can be proved, and Rohl holds it can be proved, there is evidence galore for the conquest. With the new chronology, the date of the Exodus, and therefore the date of the entry of Israel into Canaan, is now some three hundred years earlier, bringing the conquest back from the Iron Age to the Middle Bronze Age, at which point in Israel there is archaeological evidence galore for the conquest. And some very startling things! For example, many years ago at an archaeological dig at Shechem in Israel, in addition to the great buildings that were uncovered, they also found a colossal stone. The archaeologists put it back on its pedestal, but for these last thirty years they have said, 'Well this is Bronze Age and it's long before Israel ever entered Canaan.' But if the new chronology is correct, this will coincide with Joshua and could well be the stone that Joshua raised—you have the record in the last chapter of Joshua—as a witness to Israel that they had made a covenant that they would serve the Lord. It could be the actual stone.

When I was a youth, in those dim and distant days, Garstang<sup>2</sup> excavated at Jericho and said he'd found the walls of Jericho, and that hit the headlines. Then Kathleen Kenyon<sup>3</sup> did her great dig down the side of Jericho and announced to the world that these walls that Garstang had found had nothing to do with Joshua, because they were three hundred years before Joshua's time, and that there was no evidence whatsoever at Jericho of the conquest. If this new chronology is right, the walls *are* the walls that tumbled down in Joshua's time. And there are many other things like that for other parts of Scripture—for the exodus and for Joseph himself and the palace that Joseph may have occupied in the Goshen area at Avaris. If the scholars deign to take notice of Rohl—they may try to ignore him, but if they take notice of him—this will be fun to behold, for many a textbook will have to be rewritten from the bottom upwards!

### Joshua in Bible history

Now let's come to put the story of Joshua in its Old Testament context. Where does the book of Joshua fit in to the ongoing story of the Old Testament? For that, we take as our base Genesis 15 and the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.' . . . On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.' (vv. 13–16, 18)

So here is this basic covenant that God made with Abraham, that he was going to give him and his offspring the land of Canaan, but not give him actual possession of it at once. His

---

<sup>2</sup> John Garstang (1876-1956), British archaeologist.

<sup>3</sup> British archaeologist (1906-1978).

offspring would be strangers in this other land, that is in Egypt, for four hundred years. They would come out and then they would be brought into their promised inheritance.

The ongoing story of the Old Testament is that the Israelites—Jacob and his family—went down to Egypt, as you know. They prospered under Joseph and were protected, but when Joseph died and difficult conditions arose, they were pressed sorely by some of the Egyptian pharaohs. Eventually, God sent Moses to bring them out. Moses celebrated the Passover, delivered them from the wrath of the avenging angel and brought them through the Red Sea by the power of God. He led them right across the wilderness to the borders of the promised land, right to the point where they were about to enter their inheritance. Then he died and didn't bring them in.

If Moses had been the end of the story, it would have been a disaster: the great covenant would not have been fulfilled. We will see in a minute how significant it was that, when it came to the fulfilment of that great covenant and its great climax—the entering into their inheritance—Moses wasn't allowed to bring them in. The book of Joshua tells us that what Moses couldn't do, Joshua did. So the book of Joshua is the story, in the first place, of the great saviour whom God raised up to complete his covenant and promise, and bring Israel into their inheritance.

### **The theme of inheritance**

So then, the major theme of the book of Joshua is going to be the theme of *inheritance*. That, by any standards, is a vast topic in the Old Testament, but then you will remember that the term *inheritance* is a very widespread term in the New Testament itself. Several of the Epistles talk about it, but one that talks of it at great length is Galatians. So just for the moment, getting our bearings, let's look at Galatians. The Epistle to the Galatians is written to tell us and teach us that justification is by faith, but in the course of teaching us that justification is by faith and not by the law, Paul tells us in chapter 3 of other things that are by faith and not by the law. So it's not a question simply of justification by faith, but the promises, 'Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring' (v. 16); and the covenant, 'a covenant previously ratified by God' (v. 17); and 'the inheritance' (v. 18). Reading that paragraph to the end of chapter 3 will show us this tremendously important thing—that not only justification, but the great promises of God to Abraham, and the covenant that guarantees them and the inheritance—all these are by faith and not by works of the law.

The Epistle to the Galatians was written to correct certain misunderstandings into which the Galatian believers had been misled. Paul therefore has to fight for this basic truth of the gospel, and he summons up many arguments to fight for it. We shall need to see the point of that, and we shall need to grasp those arguments. We shall need to understand what the inheritance is. I was in Egypt recently, talking to our good Christian brothers and sisters there, and I spoke from this book of Joshua and talked about the inheritance at great length. When it came to question time, they nearly felled me with the simple question, 'What is the inheritance?' Well I said, it's 'imperishable, undefiled and unfading' (1 Pet 1:4). They said, 'Doubtless it is that, but what is it?' There wouldn't be a lot of point arguing that it is by faith if we didn't know what it was! So now let's read the passage in Galatians 3.

To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings', referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring', who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made. (vv. 15–19)

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (vv. 22–29)

So now what I want to do just at this moment is to say a word or two about the way Paul is expounding his Old Testament. He starts in Genesis 15, which is the story of Abraham and the covenant. 'To your offspring I give this land' was the promise and elaborated in those chapters all around chapter 15. Then chapter 16 in Genesis is the story of Abraham and Sarah. God had promised a son, and the inheritance was going to be given to Abraham and to his offspring. So we could imagine at breakfast one morning, Sarah saying to Abraham, 'Abraham, dear, I've been thinking about this promise that God made us of offspring, a child.'

'Yes, isn't it marvellous!'

'Well I don't know about that, for God seems to have overlooked one or two things. First of all, I'm barren and I can't have any children, and what's more, it's the Lord that shut up my womb.'

'Oh, I hadn't thought of that.'

'Well I think, that when God promised us that we were going to have a son, he didn't mean I'm going to give you a son just like that. God helps those who help themselves, and what he really means is that it's up to us to do our best somehow to bring it about; and I think God means us to use our own resources.'

'What resources? We haven't got any resources.'

'Yes, we have, we've got Hagar.'

So Abraham took Hagar and when Sarah saw Hagar was pregnant, she made life uncomfortable for her and Hagar ran off into the desert, you may remember. But the angel of the Lord found her and said, 'My dear, this is no place for you in your condition. You must go back.' So Hagar was sent back into Abraham's home and Ishmael was born, and Genesis goes on with the story about Ishmael going to be a wild donkey of a man. Then you come to chapter 21 which tells you that, at long last, the promised offspring came. That is told us in

the first paragraph of chapter 21, and the very next paragraph tells us that Hagar and Ishmael were cast out. That is in the actual record of Genesis. That is the next thing that Scripture tells us: when the promised offspring comes, forthwith Hagar and Ishmael are cast out. So that you could say that the angel of the Lord put Hagar and Ishmael back into Abraham's home until the promised offspring came, whereupon Hagar and Ishmael were cast out.

As you see from the story itself, even before you come to the New Testament, Hagar and Ishmael were Abraham and Sarah's effort by their own power and strength and wisdom, to bring about the fulfilment of God's promise. And God of course wouldn't have it. He came to Abraham and Sarah eventually and said, 'When I promised to give you a son, I promised to give you a son. Thank you, but I don't want Ishmael. He's a nice lad, I'll bless him, but I don't want him. I wasn't telling you to do your best. I was telling you, by a word of promise, that I was going to give you a son and I'm going to do it.' God left them until they were pretty decrepit—not only was Sarah barren, but Abraham now was aged and decrepit—so that when the son came, it would be seen that it was a miracle of God's power, an absolute gift of God. That is the Genesis story.

Now you see what Paul is doing in chapter 3 of Galatians. This is Paul expounding Old Testament, and sometimes people think that Paul gets carried away with his ideas and indulges in typology—which no genuine theologian ought to do! But when in Galatians 3 Paul talks about these things, we're back to Genesis 15 once more. This isn't typology. This is history. Paul is not taking this as a 'type' of something. This is history. We're coming back to the actual historical thing that God promised them: offspring; and through that offspring, the inheritance. The inheritance would be to Abraham and to his offspring—so here's where Galatians starts—that offspring is Christ.

'What then is the law?' says somebody. Now look at what Paul says about the law in verse 19, 'It was added because of transgressions until, . . .'. So it's just like the first run-through in history: Hagar and Ishmael were in Abraham's home *until* the promised offspring came. If you start with Abraham again you will eventually come to Christ, who is the promised offspring that God all the time had in mind when he made this promise to Abraham. Sure, Isaac was a fulfilment of that promise. If there had been no Isaac, there would have been no Jesus: Jesus is the offspring of Abraham in the same sense that Isaac was. But, says Paul, the ultimate thing God had in mind in this bit of history was this: the similarity between Hagar and the law, because law is the same principle as this. Hagar and Ishmael were Abraham and Sarah doing their best to produce and bring about the fulfilment of the promise. The law, when it is misused, has the same effect—man trying to keep the law in order to achieve the promise. It was added for the sake of transgression. Paul gives many reasons for why the law was added: it was added to drive men to see that they were sinners and could never merit either salvation or justification or the inheritance, by keeping the law. A very necessary lesson, therefore, but it was never meant to be more than temporary. It was added until the promised offspring should come.

Now he has come, this opens up the true way by which we become heirs. How do we become heirs? Galatians is a very long legal argument about it. To sum up the vital point, we become heirs by receiving Christ. Look at the verses again.



for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:26–29)

If Christ is the offspring and I'm put in him, then I too am an heir according to the promise. This matter of the inheritance, therefore, is exceedingly important. It goes right back to the basis of our gospel.

How do we get into this great inheritance? Just as you have this kind of thing that Paul expounds in Galatians, what we shall find with the book of Joshua is as follows. Here's Abraham once more, promised an inheritance. 'It's not going to be yet,' says God. 'Your offspring will be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and after four hundred years, I'll bring them out.' Then here comes Moses, and he gets them out of Egypt and he gets them through the Red Sea, and he gets them through the desert, and then he cannot bring them in, and the promised inheritance is Joshua. Now you extend that; start with Abraham again—how do we get this inheritance? Here comes the law. The law would never bring you into your inheritance. Neither Moses personally, nor the law that he promulgated, can bring you into the inheritance. It is of course Jesus for, as you know, 'Jesus' is simply the Greek form of the Hebrew name 'Joshua'.

### **Covenant fulfilled**

So whatever the detail turns out to be, the book of Joshua is going to be the history of how God fulfilled the covenant to Abraham at the first level, and eventually brought Abraham's offspring into their promised inheritance—not through Moses but through Joshua. When we expand that, it's going to be, 'How did God fulfil this promise of the inheritance to Abraham?' It's not going to be through Moses. It's going to be through Jesus. So in the book of Joshua, we're dealing with the absolute fundamentals of our faith. What do I mean by that? We shall have to be prepared to see that the book of Joshua is not simply an exhortation to us to be good Christians and to fight our way through into a deeper enjoyment of our inheritance. The second half of Joshua is that, but the first half of Joshua is not an exhortation to us, 'Now, look here, you've been saved. Now struggle and get on into your inheritance.' The first half of the book of Joshua is the great story of our mighty Saviour and deliverer, Jesus himself, who did what Moses couldn't do and brings us into our inheritance. In other words, Joshua is very much a gospel book. So then this book will mean that we need to know how the New Testament interprets this question of inheritance, what is the inheritance? And then it will have us preaching how we get into the inheritance, and how it is related to our Christian gospel.

### **Contents and thought flow**

That's by way of a brief outline. So now let us turn to the actual book itself and begin the hard work of making ourselves a table of contents, so mapping out the book now for its contents. There are all sorts of ways of making a table of contents of a book. For a narrative book like

Joshua, it raises the question of how to divide it up. You often find that different expositors have different ways of dividing up a book and the question arises then in the end—how valid is your analysis? Is it your way that you invented of remembering the contents of Joshua, so that it doesn't matter how you do it? Some people, when they go for their groceries, and have got to get the tea, the butter, the sugar, the milk and the cabbage, try to remember it like that. Some translate it into numbers: one, two, three, four, five; and some list them in groups—the milk shop, the grocery shop, etc. It doesn't matter how you do it, as long as you remember it. Is that what an analysis of a Bible book is?

Well it very often is, but the more profitable way is to list the contents, trying to see where the thread of the story is going. Is it one long, uninterrupted thread all the way through, or is it a number of incidents that start and come to their climax, and then another incident that comes, starts and goes through to its climax? Where do the minor climaxes come? Where do the major climaxes come? So that we shall then be following the *thought flow*, as I would call it. That is a very important thing. In studying holy Scripture, after one has determined what the words mean, perhaps thought flow is the next most important thing. What goes with what? What follows on? Where does the story start? Where does it finish? Determining that is very important, so let's have a go. It's better seeing it by actually doing it. So when we turn to the book of Joshua, chapter 1 reads as follows.

### Tracing the first objective

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'. (vv. 1–2)

That comes to the point very quickly, doesn't it? The first major thing in the book of Joshua is that Moses is dead, and here is God's command to Joshua. Then Joshua is given some words of encouragement, and an important caution about following the law that Moses commanded. And then in verse 10, Joshua commands the people to make preparations. Why? 'Because within three days, you are to pass over this Jordan.' You can't miss the point, can you? You're now going to go over Jordan. And then he has a word with the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and reminds them of their promise that they're not to stay on the east side of Jordan. They are to go over in the vanguard and fight with their brothers and cross over Jordan. And they say, 'Yes, of course. That's what we promised Moses and that is what we will do.' So chapter 1 is the command 'go over Jordan'.

Chapter 2, you might think at first sight, is going to talk about something else—a couple of chaps that went into Jericho, spied out the land and landed up in a harlot's house. But when we begin chapter 3, we read that Joshua rose up early in the morning and they set out from Shittim and came to Jordan. And now in chapters 3 and 4, at great length and in great detail, we have this story of how they actually crossed over Jordan. Chapter 1 announces the programme, 'rise, go over Jordan'; chapters 3 and 4 tell you how that command was carried out. So important is the crossing of Jordan that the story is told three times over: we will see why that is important, but just notice the fact at this moment. In chapter 3, Joshua gets up early in the morning, they're going to cross over Jordan and they make ready the ark of the

covenant; and in verse 9, Joshua briefs the people on what they've got to do when they see the ark moving. And we're told that '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' (v. 17).

Do you notice the phraseology? The priests stood firmly until the people had finished passing over the Jordan. Tremendous accomplishment. Not content with that, now the story is told you the second time. 'When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan' (4:1), the Lord spoke to Joshua about these matters of the stones—some taken down and put in the riverbed, and some taken from the riverbed and put on the banks on the western side of the river—and that's what they did.

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. For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste. And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people. (4:9–11)

That's the second time the story is told and comes to its climax once more—the priests stood in the midst of the Jordan, until everything was done that Moses told them to do, and they finished passing over.

And you might think, 'Well now we've heard the story,' but no. There are three different aspects of the story, each of them coming right to the climax. You can't miss the climax, not in Joshua 3 and 4! It's told you three times over, 'the priests stood in the river until all the people finished passing over'. Tremendous triumph that was. Here comes the third time, verse 15 of chapter 4: 'the LORD said to Joshua, "Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan.'" So that's what they did. And verse 19: 'The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month,' and so on. And when the children asked their fathers, 'What are these stones about?' the fathers were to tell them:

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 for ever. (vv. 22–24)

Three times over, the great climax. So in my simplicity, I want to argue that chapter 1 is the command to pass over Jordan. Chapter 2 is the story of Rahab. Then chapters 3 and 4 are the crossing of the Jordan—told three times, coming each time up to the climax, 'until all the people finished passing over'.

Now just let's notice why it is important to try and get the thought flow. There's the command to pass over in chapter 1 and then the actual triumphant accomplishment of the command in chapters 3 and 4. So what is the point of the Rahab story? The men were sent as spies to spy out the land. Forty years before them, twelve spies had been sent and they went right through the land and came back with a report of the land, so why did they need any

more spies to go? Well you'll notice that in this story, these two spies don't go all through the land. They went into Jericho and when they got back, they told Joshua what they had found out about Jericho. That was very important military information, because Joshua as commander had got the armies on the east bank of the Jordan. It was going to be a difficult enough job to get the armies across Jordan when it was in flood. On the opposite side was a city armed to its teeth. If, when Joshua got the Israelites halfway across the Jordan, floundering around in the river, the king of Jericho had decided to come out and attack them, that would have been a very difficult situation. Joshua needed to know what the Jerichoites were likely to do. The spies were able to tell him that the king of Jericho was not intending to come out, obviously not—the place was securely shut up. And they were able to report on the psychological condition of the inhabitants of Jericho—their heart has melted away, they're not thinking of attacking. They're thinking that they'll barricade themselves into their city and thus protect themselves, and the Israelite army won't be able to get at them. That to Joshua was very important military information.

So we haven't got round to any spiritual lessons. We're just looking at a table of contents and asking, what is the thought flow between these and what is this story doing? It's doing a lot of things, of course, but one of the things on the surface of it is the intelligence report as to the state of Jericho, physically and psychologically, in preparation for saying, 'Right, now we lead the army across.' We're on the ground floor, but asking how the narrative holds together. And we notice here, in the second account of the crossing, what is said.

For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste. (4:10)

So we could write at the bottom, 'Objective one, cross Jordan'; and, 'Objective achieved, as Moses commanded'.

Now that will prove very quickly to us to be very significant. 'Moses, my servant, is dead,' says God. 'Get over Jordan.' This is the great objective, get over Jordan. Moses could never do it. Joshua did. Moses commanded it. There's a thing about Moses; he's good at telling you what to do, but not always good at doing it himself! But what Moses couldn't do, Joshua did. And if you weren't careful you'd start thinking in New Testament terms at that point, wouldn't you? What the law couldn't do, God has done through Christ (see Rom 8:3–4). That's the first big objective then, and the first climax is that the objective is achieved. Tremendous triumph.

It's an innocent comment to make, but if the Israelites were ever going to enjoy their inheritance, they'd better get over Jordan and get into it. I've heard many a preacher tell the believers from the book of Joshua that they ought to go in and possess their possessions, and strive hard and fight hard. Yes, but you can't possess your possessions until you get into them. You need to tell people first how they get into the inheritance and then how they can enjoy it. So here is objective one and the objective was achieved.

## Tracing the second objective

Let's look on in the narrative. There's an interesting verse at the beginning of chapter 5.

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. (v. 1)

At that time, the Lord gave Joshua sundry instructions about preparations they had to make now that they were over on the west bank of Jordan. They were not immediately to start attacking Jericho city. There were preparations to make: first of all, circumcision (v. 7), and keeping the Passover (v. 10), and then there comes this great vision.

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. (vv. 13–15)

I'm just going to write over these verses 'Preparations', because they come now before the story of the taking of Jericho. Jericho occupies chapter 6. Then in chapters 7–8, from Jericho they attempt to take Ai and are driven back because of Achan's sin. So Achan's sin has then to be dealt with, and when it is dealt with, in chapter 8, they take Ai.

Notice how these two stories are connected. When God was sending them against Jericho, he warned them not to take any of the spoil. Jericho was to be put under a curse, a ban, a *cherem* in Hebrew. They weren't to take anything. If they took anything, they would bring the curse upon themselves; but one chap did, and brought Israel under the curse. They had to deal with it. They discovered it when they went from Jericho and made their first attempt on Ai, and the king of Ai came out and chased them away. From a military point of view that was exceedingly scary, for Joshua had now got the army across to the west side of Jordan. Here were all these great Canaanite cities, some of them very civilized, many of them heavily armed. To be defeated by a little place like Ai, and all the other cities would hear about it, was potentially a very serious occasion militarily. But the sin was dealt with and then you have the great success at Ai.

But notice now in the story what we're told in verse 30, immediately after the destruction of Ai, 'At that time Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal'. It's a very interesting little bit of history. Instead of being told that from Ai they were to go on to another city and conquer that and destroy it, and so on with other cities, they went up through the passes to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. We're not even told that he destroyed any cities on the way. We're not even told he had to journey there. We're just told the bald fact that at that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, in fulfilment of a command Moses had given (see Deut 27). And so we read:

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 afterwards 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. (8:31–35)

When all that was done—and several times over we see ‘as Moses commanded’—we now have a little literary problem. Where would you make a break in the narrative? In the first objective we started with God’s command to Joshua to get over Jordan. We saw why he sent the spies to Jericho, and then the fulfilment of the command and the tremendous climax, three times over, that all the people finished passing over Jordan. Tremendous triumph. Now we come to this. Where is the climax of this story? We saw the preparations to go over, and the visit from the commander of the Lord’s army to take charge of the fighting, and Jericho is taken. Why can’t you end with Jericho, and put a big line under here? If you’re asking, ‘Where does the thought flow go?’ well we’re told that Israel were warned that the city was under a curse. They must not take anything, and if they took anything, the curse would come on them. Well then they went up to Ai and were defeated and when they asked God why, God said, ‘Because somebody among you has taken of the spoil and brought the curse on Israel, and before you proceed, you must judge yourself.’ So they did that and then Ai was captured. You can’t separate these two cities, because the very storyline joins them. Right, so will we put a big line under Ai and say that’s the climax?

If you were preaching it, would you say, ‘Well tonight I must get up to Ai. When we’ve got the king of Ai hanged, I shall thump the desk and say, “There we are. At last we’ve done it. Thank the Lord. Victory won. Next week we shall deal with an altogether different subject.”’ But where is the thought flow and where is the climax? At what point do you thump the desk and say, ‘Now that’s the end of the story’? Should it be at Jericho, or should it be after Ai? Or where? So we look around and ask ourselves, ‘What about these verses at the end of chapter 8—are they meant to start a new section of the book?’

Well, let’s see how the story goes on.

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. (9:1–2)

When the priests stood in Jordan, that must have been a little bit nerve-wracking, with the water piled up by the sides as they watched all the rest of the people going over. This chapter

now takes up a similar theme. The kings here were impressed when they heard that Israel had come across Jordan. That was a mighty thing and the kings who heard of it were pretty alarmed. Now they heard another thing. Not only had Israel crossed Jordan but they had taken Jericho and Ai and had proceeded right to the heart of the country, up by Shechem and Nablus, and held this great ceremony. When the kings heard of that, they thought, 'It's time to act now.' Unlike Jericho that tried to save itself by getting behind its barricades, this lot decided to mount a campaign. So from a military point of view, this begins a new section.

So we're collecting evidence on this matter of thought flow. It's important because it tells us what the writer is thinking, where the story is going and the 'so what?' of the story. So after Ai, what happened next? And it's told as though they did it before they did anything else, and it must have been some colossal objective they'd set their heart on. What was the objective? Well now we're beginning to notice a developing pattern. First objective, commanded by God and commanded by Moses, was to get the people of Israel across into their inheritance. That meant taking them across Jordan, which was an enormous operation and a vast triumph when they achieved it. What was the next big objective? Well, once again to do what Moses commanded. What was that? To establish the law of God in Canaan. It'd been a long time since that had been done in Canaan. Not waiting for any other conquest, this thing burning in their hearts, this they must do. Moses commanded them to do it. They gathered the nation, they built an altar, they wrote out the law (a summary, presumably), the people are gathered, and the Levites are there. They pronounce the blessings on Israel for those who keep the commandment, and the people shout, 'Amen.' And then they pronounce the curses, for those who break it, and likewise the people respond, 'Amen.' That must have been a colossal occasion, the actual establishment of the law of God in that hitherto corrupt and evil society. That was objective number two.

### **Tracing the third objective**

So as we go in to chapter 9, what is this going to be about then? Let's proceed and do a table of contents once more and check upon ourselves. When one is making out a table of contents in this order, trying to follow the thought flow and where the climax lies, one must keep an open mind and be critical, and not let it solidify like concrete too soon. Make sure that we're getting the thought flow: it's going to affect our understanding of the book and the way we preach it. If this is the great climax to Jericho and Ai, then when we preach Jericho and Ai, we've got it in our minds what we're aiming at. We want to get the congregation to see that this is the objective and how the objective is achieved. We're not justified by the law: we don't get into the inheritance by keeping the law. But what the law couldn't do, God does, 'that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us' (Rom 8:4). And what do you have to do to get the righteousness of the law fulfilled?

#### *A southern confederacy*

Anyway, let's start up this third passage. Once more you notice the kings are mentioned and their reaction, because it sets the military scene. Those verses are very important: they're setting the scene for you. Just as that was only a verse or two, so this is only a verse or two. The very proportions of the narrative are patterned. Anyway, then came the Gibeonites.

They're the chaps who deceived Israel, you may remember, and Israel made a covenant with them. When that is over, chapter 10 tells us that the southern confederacy of kings joined together.

As soon as Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard how Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were among them, he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were warriors. So Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, to Piram king of Jarmuth, to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, 'Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon. For it has made peace with Joshua and with the people of Israel.' (vv. 1–4)

So now the kings have noted two things. The Israelites have captured Jericho and Ai and now, disaster, Gibeon has made a treaty with Israel. Gibeon was a big city, like a royal city, and the southern kings have now become even more concerned. If one of the big cities like Gibeon has gone over to the other side willingly — they've not been besieged, they've not been attacked, they've just gone over of their own accord and made a treaty with Israel — well these kings will do their best to stop it. And so they came, as you notice, not against the Israelites but against the Gibeonites. And when these southern kings formed the confederacy and came up against the Gibeonites, God sent Joshua to fight for the Gibeonites and to drive the enemy away. God himself fought against the southern confederacy, rained down great stones from heaven on them, and they were driven away and Joshua smote those cities.

At the end of chapter 10, you get a list of the southern cities that Joshua fought against and overcame, and not only the cities but the kings of those cities. If you get out your atlas, you'll see that these cities are all in the south of the country.

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. Then Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal. (vv. 40–43)

So we're still down in the south. It's been the southern confederacy and their kings and all their cities, and so their attack on the Gibeonites ends in failure. Joshua beats the lot of them.

### *A northern confederacy*

What next? Chapter 11 begins:

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, . . . 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. (vv. 1–5)

Now you'll notice the difference. In chapter 10 the kings came to fight with the Gibeonites, because they thought the Gibeonites were traitors. Now in chapter 11, we read of a northern confederacy, so from the point of view of the military operation, these two are distinctive. It would be important to see that and look at it on a map to see where you are. Incidentally, if you follow Rohl and you are convinced by him, he will have pictures of the more recent digs at Hazor; and with the new chronology and the new period, he will point out to you the damage that Joshua did at Hazor. Whereas Yadin<sup>4</sup>, who began the dig at Hazor some fifteen or twenty years ago I suppose now, wrote that, 'No, Joshua's account is not right. The account in Judges is true, but there's no evidence at Hazor for any conquest by Joshua.' Now if Rohl is right, Yadin is proved wrong and there is ample evidence of Joshua at Hazor.

Hazor was an exceedingly important place and a very civilized and advanced place technologically, with its chariots of iron. But these are the northern confederacy. Whereas the southern cities came against Gibeon, these came against Joshua — the first cities that we're told of that actually came against the Israelites. And the Lord said, 'Don't worry about them.' Joshua came and fought them, took Hazor and destroyed it. Then in verse 15 we read,

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.

There was not a city that made peace with Israel except the inhabitants of Gibeon. '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' (v. 20). So cities and their kings destroyed, and three times over we read that it was as the Lord commanded Moses.

I would argue that we must be somewhere near the intended thought flow of the book, because you see the pattern of it arising in front of your eyes. It agrees with the military circumstances. In the previous objective there is the reconnoitring of Jericho, because it was militarily important if you were going to cross the river and take the army across, to see that they weren't going to come and attack you. Then they take Jericho and Ai, the two things are connected, and you come to what I would say is the climax, which is the establishment of the law as Moses commanded. And when you come across to the third objective, the Gibeonites come over to Israel, which provokes the southern confederacy to come against the Gibeonites. When Joshua wipes out the southern confederacy, the northern kings begin to hear of this and the leading city, Hazor, assembles a northern confederacy. They come against Joshua and he eliminates them. It was as the Lord commanded Joshua. With that, you come to halfway through the book, for in chapter 12, you have a long, long list of all the kings that got destroyed. You'll see what a very big change comes over the narrative at chapter 13, 'Now Joshua was old and advanced in years' (v. 1).

---

<sup>4</sup> Yigael Yadin (1917-1984) was an Israeli archaeologist and military leader.

## Reviewing the thought flow

So I'm going to say that, in the book of Joshua, the first half ends here. The later chapters are going to be something else. If that is so, we could afford for a moment just to look back at these three things and see what's happening in the conquest. When Joshua brought Israel into their inheritance, there were three major objectives commanded by Moses and actually performed by Joshua. Three objectives, because that observation is now determining the way we understand what's going on and the way we will preach it. If Joshua was going to bring Israel into their inheritance, he had to achieve these three objectives. Number one was to get them across Jordan into their inheritance. They'll never enjoy it unless they get into it. He did it as the Lord commanded Moses.

When they got into their inheritance, they were to establish the law of God in Canaan. He couldn't get through up to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim unless he dealt militarily with these two cities, Jericho and Ai. He daren't go by them and risk their coming behind him or something like that. He had to deal with them first, then be free to get up.

And then the kings get alarmed because the Gibeonites defect and come over to Israel. They attack the Gibeonites with their southern confederacy. Joshua eliminates them. The northerners come and get wiped out, and all their cities. It was of the Lord, as the Lord commanded Joshua. Thus the third objective was to put down all rule and authority and power. Ah, I've read that somewhere else too!

### *The spiritual dimension*

So we've looked at it at the sheer level of history. We've thought of the military matters involved and how that hangs together as a military account of the conquest. But when we start thinking of the objectives, they are spiritual objectives and already it is a fulfilling of what Moses commanded. And look how they're beginning to turn our minds to what the New Testament will say of our Lord and the great objectives he has.

How do we get into the inheritance? Not by keeping the law, but once we are in, then the righteous requirement of the law is to be fulfilled. What Moses couldn't do, Joshua did. What the law couldn't do, God in Christ has done in order that the righteous requirement of the law be fulfilled.

We don't end up simply there. We end here, at what is the climax of the first half of the book—the putting down of all rule and authority. If you were preaching that and dared to use that terminology, of course your congregation might jump to conclusions! When and how will our Lord put down all thrones or dominions, principalities or powers, and when does he put down all authority? Let's have some volunteers.

AUDIENCE (1): At the cross. AUDIENCE (2): When he returns.

You're of the mind that it happens when he returns? Well you've got a lot of Scripture on your side. '... when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor 15:24–25). That's at the second coming, isn't it? Both are true of course. What is worth observing for now is the extent of the great gospel that Joshua is preaching to you. They went into the inheritance before all rule and authority were put down.

## Similarities and Differences; Obstacles and Miracles

So we have the basic notion in our head about what could be the thought flow, and we've seen what could be the major climaxes on the way. Now let's look at how they are related to one another. If we're right in thinking that there are three great objectives that Moses commanded and Joshua carried out, let's look at some of the other features. In each of these sections, there is one major obstacle—perhaps more, but there's certainly one major obstacle. In each of these sections, there is a major miracle.

Now it is interesting to notice that Israel had to do a lot of the fighting. God could have left them down in Kadesh-barnea in a three-star hotel and said, 'Now stay here. There's a beautiful oasis down here, so you stay here for a while. I've got a job of work to do, clearing out Canaan and disinfecting the place, ready for your coming in. The hotel rooms are not ready yet: the Canaanites have not got out. I must go and get them out. And when I've got the whole place emptied and disinfecting, I'll come for you and bring you in.' That would have been nice, but God didn't do it that way: he made the Israelites fight. There are some very big problems and interesting matters attached to that—the whole question of God's judgment on the Canaanites and big moral questions.

But we saw also that there were certain things where God intervened himself and Israel didn't have to do anything. Doubtless when they fought, he gave strength to their elbows and encouraged them, but they had to do the fighting. But in each case there were certain things where God did a miracle and Israel didn't have to do anything at all. The splitting of the waters of Jordan was the first big miracle, dealing with that obstacle. And what that is going to talk to us about, we shall have to explore later. The second obstacle was the walls of Jericho, and the miracle, the walls came down. That wasn't through Israel's fighting. This is something God did, without which Israel would never have conquered Jericho. The third obstacle we could simply describe as 'the kings', and you'll know what I mean. And the miracle was stones from heaven, and the sun and moon standing still.

### **Differential diagnosis**

That brings us to an exercise in what I call 'differential diagnosis'. I stole the term from the medics: us lesser mortals are allowed to do that sometimes! When you have a series of things that have something in common—like this succession of obstacles and miracles—it's not the similarity that in the end is going to be the major thing. It's going to be the differences between them that are all-important. I use the illustration of a doctor who is presented with three men seeking his help with their sore throats. And he looks at the one and he says, 'The trouble with you is, you've been at a football match and shouted your head off. The cure for you is to go

home and shut up for a couple of days.’ He looks at the next one and says, ‘You’ve got a sore throat, yes, but that’s laryngitis. You must have some antibiotics.’ They’re both sore throats, but the treatment is different because the cause is different. He looks at the third one and says, ‘Oh, I shall have to take a biopsy,’ for he fears the man has got cancer and antibiotics wouldn’t be any good for that. So for the three sore throats, if you’re going to treat them, you must now understand the differences, the differential diagnosis and therefore the treatment’s going to be different.

Three obstacles, wherein do they differ? And three miracles, well, are they just the bare fact that there was a miracle? Does it not matter what, just that God did a miracle? How do the miracles pertain to the context? You can see a difference at once. The first obstacle was the river Jordan. We’ve been thinking a lot tonight about military things, but the Jordan was an obstacle put there by nature. It wasn’t put there by the Canaanites. This is a thing that normally the sappers, the army engineers, would have had to deal with, if God hadn’t done a miracle. An obstacle put there by nature, Jordan in flood, and the danger would be in trying to take an army of some thousands across the Jordan. If you know the Jordan Valley, it has this scrub about waist height, the *Pride of Jordan* as it was called, and it would be difficult for an army to march through it at any time. But with the Jordan in flood and the water over all the scrub so that you can’t see where the brink of the river is, the difficulty would be enormous. And if you thought the enemy might come out when you were trying to negotiate the river, it would be a very serious military obstacle. But it’s an obstacle put there by nature and we shall have to consider the way God dealt with that obstacle from nature. It was not by God sitting up on his throne and saying, ‘waters divide’, but by another method.

The obstacle at Jericho was of course man-made and you will notice in these stories, the historian has chosen to tell in detail about military things, each time a different military tactic. One, getting across your river. Here, how did you get into the city, for the Jerichoites barricaded themselves around with their walls and thought they were safe; they wouldn’t come out, so how did you get in? That was the big obstacle and God overcame it by a miracle and the way the miracle was performed was strange—this ark going around the place. Unusual military tactics, if you see what I mean. It was the only city where they used that tactic, as far as we’re told. They didn’t do it any other place, so why was it done with Jericho? And then Ai is told you at length. In Jericho, it’s a question of how did you get in? Here it was how did you get them out? And they developed this military thing—a *feint*, as it is called. When the king came out against them, they made as though they were defeated and ran off, and that drew the enemy out and they put an ambush behind.

You think that’s very simple military stuff, but in those days they were very important tactics. So you see the difference, different tactics, even at the military level. We haven’t got within light-years of expounding it. This is a military thing, understanding what’s going on. Here the southern confederacy, when they came against Gibeon, Joshua marched all night. That’s another tactic that some generals have used, the long march, when the enemy isn’t expecting you to arrive. Some generals in the ancient world used that to great effect. The speed with which they moved their armies when no one was expecting them and they arrived before the enemies were ready for them. The miracle here was not in how you defeat them, but how you polished them up, so to speak. For they all ran off, so how did you get over the wiping-

up operation? And it is in this connection that the great miracle happened. How did that great miracle of the sun and the moon happen here? Notice how the writer is recording it. This is very interesting, militarily.

Next we see the southern kings attacking the Gibeonites and Israel might have said, 'Well that's none of our business: let them attack the Gibeonites.' But God told the Israelites, 'Go and protect the Gibeonites.' God fought for the Gibeonites actually. Here, however, these northern kings, they don't come against one of their own cities: they come against Israel. They were the first lot to do that; so from a military point of view, you see the differences.

Then of course, we shall be interested in the moral and spiritual things at stake, and then how that applies to our understanding and preaching. At any rate, if I was to go on studying it myself, I would do that kind of thing so as to understand the stories. How they cohere from all sorts of points of view, geographically and then militarily, how they make sense and what the differences are and then, morally, what lessons was God teaching Israel and then how that will apply to us; how the objectives are different each time and how the military campaign relates to the objective that is achieved. I haven't told you much, but this is the way I would go about it.

### **The importance of thought flow for practical application**

If there are three major parts in this first half of the book and they have their objectives, what would you think the thought flow of the second half of the book is? That would be a question to work at in the interim, wouldn't it? Now it may seem to some of you tedious to do this kind of stuff, but it is basic to a proper understanding and then exposition. Let me tell you one thing to illustrate what I mean. Sometimes when we haven't yet seen the way the book itself is laid out and what is the connection of thought, we can take a story and apply it and it can seem to be quite right and yet it is way off the mark.

That has been notoriously done with this story of the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites dressed up in old clothes, with mouldy bread and shoes worn out and all this kind of palaver, and came to Joshua and company and said, 'Make a covenant with us to let us live.' And the Israelites 'did not ask counsel from the LORD', the text says (9:14), and they thought these people came from a long way off, which is what they said they did, and so they made a covenant with them that they could live. And when they had made the covenant, they found out that they weren't from a far-distant country: they came from next door. When they found that out, some were for saying, 'Well let's slaughter them,' but Joshua said, 'Sorry, you've sworn an oath in the name of God: you mustn't slaughter them.' So they had to put up with them for the next centuries.

Now listen to the preachers. Israel had just come from their great success at Jericho, with the help of the Lord; and at Ai, well they had a little bit of stumbling at Ai, but they got over that and were triumphant now, and they had a great prayer meeting about this. Now they were flushed with success and they fell into that trap: they felt they could do it themselves and they didn't have a prayer meeting about this next thing. They didn't consult the Lord. They just went ahead, it seemed the right thing to do and, losing that sense of dependence on the Lord, they made an agreement with these Gibeonites that they never could get out of for the rest of their lives and for many generations after that, and what abysmal trouble that was.

And the lesson is, now do be careful, particularly when you've been successful in the wars of the Lord and you're riding high, then you may forget to pray and consult the Lord, and make decisions off your own bat. They'll seem right, but in the end they'll land you in a lot of trouble that you won't be able to get out of, maybe for the rest of your life.

Well, as an application, that seems right, doesn't it? Except you'll have a job to make that fit into Joshua! The first thing to notice is that when the kings attacked these Gibeonites, God fought for the Gibeonites and saved them. That raises a very big question: did he want to save them? Moses had laid it down that when they came into the land, they were to destroy all the cities, except those cities that were afar off: they could offer them peace on certain conditions, if they came out. For the cities which were near at hand, they were not to offer peace—they were to destroy them. So these Gibeonites cheated and they persuaded the Israelites they came from afar off, so the Israelites let them live. They really came from near at hand. They should have been slaughtered and Israel's mistake was to swear an oath in the name of God to save them. But when the enemy came up to attack them, God fought for the Gibeonites. Now tell me this, did God really want to save them, or did God sit up on his throne and say, 'Now look at what my stupid people, Israel, have gone and done. I wanted those people destroyed. I didn't want to save them, and these stupid Israelites have gone and sworn an oath in my name to let them live and now I can't destroy them. I shall have to save them.' How will that be? It couldn't be right really, could it?

Well anyway, I put it to you that the danger is that we start with a moralistic interpretation of the passage: it is so easy to do. What is this story about? Were they right? Preach they were right and exhort people to follow them. Were they wrong? Preach people to avoid what they did. That's a moralistic interpretation, but sometimes that moralistic interpretation is not what the Holy Spirit is talking about at all. Why is this great miracle done in order to beat the enemies that were attacking the Gibeonites and how is that relevant? That's the kind of question we have to ask.

Now finally, if this is a sketch then of Joshua, the great captain of their salvation that brought them into their inheritance, we shall have to ask ultimately what aspects of salvation these three things stand for.

## Inheritance; Crossing Jordan – Further Analysis

We are currently studying the book of Joshua and some of you are here for the first time, so let me briefly recap what we attempted to do in our last session together and what our presuppositions of our study are. We are studying Joshua as a book of the Old Testament, believing it is the inspired word of God. We are not oblivious to the fact that this word of God ought to have an affect upon ourselves, ought to change us and, for those of you who have such responsibilities, to be the subject of eventual sermons. While that is so, we are coming to it in the first instance not looking to how we may apply it practically, but trying to understand the book as it stands, as the word of God, in the conviction that God has not written something that isn't practical. And if this is God's sermon, then we apply ourselves in the first instance to the book as it stands and try to see what it means, so that then we may be eventually guided as to how it should be applied.

### **Résumé**

To that end, we thought of it first in its context in the whole of the Old Testament, historically. We began by remembering the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15, that he would give Abraham and his offspring the land of Canaan for their inheritance. He would not give them that land at once. They would be strangers for a while in the land and then his family clan would go down to Egypt, and there they would be for four hundred years or so and eventually afflicted. Then he would bring them out and he would bring them back to this land and give it to them for an inheritance. In the course of the ongoing history of the Old Testament that is what happened. Joseph was sold into Egypt, and the whole family clan eventually decamped to Egypt. Their family developed into virtually a nation there, and was there for several hundred years. Then came the oppressing pharaohs and God sent Moses to deliver his people out of Egypt, which he did via the Passover and the Red Sea and the building of the tabernacle and so forth, until eventually the nation, having been delivered out of Egypt, came to the borders of their promised inheritance.

At that point, Moses was not allowed to take them into their inheritance. Quite apart from the difficulty of the tribes themselves, even the second generation who were due to go into the land, Moses was not able to take them in because of his failure, in that he rebelled against the Lord on a certain occasion in the wilderness. At that dramatic point, we therefore observed that the great purpose and plan of God to give Israel this land as their inheritance would have fallen down completely if it had depended upon Moses. The marvellous gospel story of the book of Joshua is that what Moses couldn't do, that Joshua did. Joshua therefore, the captain of Israel's salvation, was the one given them by God to take them into their inheritance, thus

fulfilling the immediate programme of God for his people. Now that puts the book in its biblical and historical setting and we noticed therefore that it was a question of bringing Israel into the promised inheritance.

### **God's judgment on Canaan**

We noticed that bringing Israel into their promised inheritance concurred with another situation of which God had forewarned Abraham. God, speaking to Abraham, said, 'Your nation will be in this foreign land for four hundred years or so and will be mightily oppressed. After that, I'll bring you out and bring you into Canaan. Not yet though, because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete' (see Gen 15:13–16). So the timing of the bringing of Israel into their inheritance was affected by this question of God's judgment that God foresaw would one day fall upon the Canaanites. Now that is a thing that we do well to remember when we come to understand what is happening in the book and also, when we come to apply its lessons to ourselves. From time to time, we shall need to recur to that observation that the entry into the inheritance coincided with God's judgment on that sinful, evil and unrepentant civilization.

In that connection, God didn't take Israel to a nice oasis like Kadesh-barnea and say, 'I'm going to leave you here for the next ten years or so. I've just got to go ahead to Canaan and do a job of disinfecting the land of this evil civilization and, when I've disinfecting it and got rid of all the Canaanites, I'll come back for you and bring you in.' God didn't do that. When God executed his judgment upon that evil civilization in Canaan, he made Israel join with him. That also is a thing that we shall have to consider when we try to understand what is happening here, and at what level or levels we shall apply the lesson of the book of Joshua to our own day and age, and perhaps also to the future that lies ahead.

### **Perspectives on 'inheritance'**

That simple observation nonetheless, that the major theme of the book of Joshua is bringing Israel into their inheritance, raised in our minds a very elementary question and, if you won't be offended by my repeating it, it raised the question of what the meaning for us is, in New Testament times, of this concept of inheritance. For this concept of inheritance that begins in Genesis and comes to full flowering in the book of Joshua, is a theme that develops throughout the Old Testament. By the time you come to the Psalms, the psalmist is already using the idea of inheritance as a metaphor. 'The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance' (Ps 16:6). 'The lines' meaning the surveyors' lines as the inheritance was surveyed out and given to the tribes. You can imagine the situation where each tribe is looking on to see which bit they're going to get—whether the nice green patch there or an old rocky part. And if it so happened that the surveyors surveyed a nice bit of rock with very little earth on it and gave it you, your godly grace was tested somewhat as to whether you felt like writing a psalm full of poetry and saying, 'The lines have fallen for me in very pleasant places.'

Now you see that the idea of inheritance is already, in the Psalms, being used by the poets as not merely a physical thing, but beyond it to the inheritance which God has given to the psalmist. And when you come to the book of Daniel, who spent his life outside the land in



Gentile situations, and now, as a very elderly man, being given a vision of the future, almost the last words of the prophetic angel to Daniel is, 'But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place [‘in thy lot’ KJV] at the end of the days’ (12:13). That also is a word connected with the parcelling out of the land: people got their ‘lot’. The idea of inheritance in the Old Testament is likewise one of the crucial ideas in the book of Ruth. This family headed by Elimelech and his generation had their inheritance but, famine intervening, Elimelech found he couldn’t make a go of it and he decamped to Moab with his wife and two sons, and the sons married Moabite girls. And the whole question of that story now is the grief of the widow Naomi, who not only lost her husband and her two sons, but was unable herself to manage the inheritance and, horror of horrors, the thing that she feared most of all was that the name of her dead husband would die out from his inheritance.

For a Jew of the time, keeping the name on the inheritance was an exceedingly important thing. You’ll remember the lovely story of Ahab and Naboth. That sinner Ahab, who was bad enough left to himself, but when he got Jezebel at his elbow, he was ten times worse. He had taken up gardening in a big way and it so happened that Naboth’s vineyard was unfortunately located just where Ahab wanted to develop a choice bit of his garden. So he went along to him but Naboth refused to sell. He said, ‘I’m not interested in money. This is my family’s God-given inheritance. I wouldn’t sell it for millions’ (see 1 Kgs 21:3). Well he ended up dead over that—Jezebel’s diplomacy, as it’s so-called.

There are interesting ideas running through Old Testament, based on this notion of inheritance that was given to Israel and how the more godly in Israel regarded it as a very sacred thing, not to be bartered for anything if they could help it. Therefore, they had their rules that if some man fell into poverty and couldn’t manage his estate, he could sell it; but then his next of kin, if he had the money, had the right of redemption and the duty of redemption to buy it back, so that the inheritance did not forever fall out of the family.

### **Inheritance for us?**

Those are very big ideas in the Old Testament. What I put to the assembled throng on the last occasion was that when they reassembled here, they were going to tell me briefly what the New Testament means when it talks about *our* inheritance. It does so very frequently, for example in Romans 4, and the whole of Galatians nearly, but particularly chapters 3 and 4; and Ephesians marvels that we are coheirs with the saints of God and so forth; and Peter talks about our being born again to a living hope, ‘to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you’ (1 Pet 1:4). So I cease at this point and ask you to help us in our thinking so that we will have some concept in our heads about what our Christian inheritance is.

As we learn lessons from Joshua and what inheritance meant at that stage, and what Joshua had to do to bring the people of God into their inheritance, and then in the second part of the book, how the people of God themselves grasped hold of their inheritance and developed it, we will need to ask ourselves what lessons there are for us. We have an inheritance, if only we could think what it is! We have an inheritance and there might be hints here and there for us from this book. So if I ask what you mean by your Christian inheritance, what would you say?

AUDIENCE: Is it God himself?

DWG: God himself? That's a good idea. Can you embroider that a bit?

AUDIENCE: In Exodus 19:4, the Lord God speaks to the people and he says, 'You've seen what I've done to Pharaoh. I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.' Obviously they were heading to the promised land, but he had to redirect their thinking.

DWG: Yes. One of the psalmists, talking of these things says, 'The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot' (Ps 16:5).

AUDIENCE: And there's what the Lord said to Abraham, 'I am your shield; your reward shall be very great' (Gen 15:1).

DWG: Great reward, yes, and the converse is also true, 'the LORD's portion is his people' (Deut 32:9).

AUDIENCE: Yes.

DWG: And in Ephesians, Paul prays, 'having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know . . . what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints' (Eph 1:18).

Don't be afraid to say the obvious. I told them that last summer when I was attempting to talk on the book of Joshua in Egypt, and they were very kind and said it was interesting, but the question they had was, 'But what is our inheritance?' And I said, 'Well it's imperishable, undefiled and unfading,' and they said, 'Well obviously. Thank the Lord for that—that it won't fade away is marvellous, but what is it anyway?' So what should I have said to that question to start with?

AUDIENCE: It could be what is sometimes loosely called 'the Christian life', otherwise known as living in the Spirit, eternal life, kingdom of God.

DWG: In the here and now? Our present inheritance? Talking to husbands and wives, Peter says you should treat each other properly as heirs together of the grace of life (1 Pet 3:7), our present inheritance. Is everybody agreed that our inheritance is present then?

AUDIENCE: No. Peter says it's kept in heaven for us, so there must be a sense in which we're going to enter into the fullness of it.

DWG: I see, so it's future?

AUDIENCE: In a sense, yes, and present.

DWG: Both? The man's greedy! Both?

AUDIENCE: It must be both if it's being kept for you.

AUDIENCE: In God's economy, there is no past, present or future.

DWG: So it's eternal?

AUDIENCE: Perhaps.

AUDIENCE: Does it not have to be both? If you are being kept for it by grace; and with the assurance that you're going to gain something, you can have the enjoyment of it now.

DWG: So now?

AUDIENCE: Yes, now—and then.

DWG: Yes, so when the young ruler says to the Lord, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ (Luke 18:18), you would say to yourself, ‘But you can have eternal life now, if you bow to the conditions and inherit it now’?

AUDIENCE: Yes, the quality now and the quantity in the future.

DWG: Well, gentlemen, what do you think?

AUDIENCE: There’s another side. It seems to me that we don’t entirely lose sight of the physical and material when we come to the New Testament. Romans 4 talks about the promise to Abraham and extends it from the territory we’re looking at in Joshua, to mean the whole world. ‘The meek shall inherit the earth’ (see Matt 5:5), so there is a physical, material side. So can we be too quick to spiritualize it all the way?

AUDIENCE: On the other hand, I generally regard what God has in store as being more to do with what he will make me to be, or what he has already started perhaps. We don’t yet know what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we will be like him (1 John 3:2). And the new Jerusalem is itself a shining glory of God.

AUDIENCE: It seems so much to be a possession that you go on and say, ‘Now that’s ours,’ but it’s what God makes me in his glorious process.

DWG: If I were to take an analogy and change the word ‘inheritance’ to ‘heredity’, and you would say, ‘These gentlemen sitting here, each one has his own portion’, I’m not sure they’d all be satisfied with it, but they look reasonable inheritances to me. But our inheritance is ourselves, what we inherit—the portion that God has given us physically, through our heredity, our genes, through our talents, through our energies.

AUDIENCE: And that glorified.

DWG: And then our character glorified, yes. So it’s more than our external possessions?

AUDIENCE: Yes. It’s more what God had in mind when he first made man. What was the ultimate goal he had. What became of his plan?

DWG: I see, yes. Hold on to that. And what would you say if I asked you, does Christ have an inheritance? It is said in Romans that we’re ‘heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ’ (Rom 8:17). So what does he inherit?

AUDIENCE: Us. And the whole thing.

Thank you for those comments and contributions. Perhaps we all know and have not recently thought about it. Perhaps we can sharpen our wits a bit and our thinking. It is a major theological term in the New Testament and one that has many facets and many levels of meaning. Just to remind you of what has been an argument in some circles in times past. When people have tried to apply the book of Joshua to Christian experience, some have said, ‘Well entering your inheritance is going to heaven,’ and they have quoted Peter—an inheritance

imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for us. And others have said very learnedly, 'No, it can't be that, because when Joshua got the people into their inheritance, they had a lot of fighting to do. When we get home to heaven we shan't have any fighting to do. Therefore, the better analogy would be to take Joshua's entry into the inheritance with what Paul is talking of in Ephesians when he says that we have been seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). But yet, according to Ephesians 6, there is warfare to be done in the heavenly places!

Like our friend here, I'm very greedy: I want to have both—to enjoy it now but also to have it to look forward to. It is perhaps a little bit more complicated than that, and thank God. If the inheritance were very simple, it would lose its attraction. I hope it is as complicated as God can make it: it will be rich!

### **Contents and thought flow**

Having observed the very big contours in which we study this book, then we came down to looking at the book in itself, and we decided to try and get our fingers round the contents of the book. Not just to make a list of contents for contents' sake, but to see what goes with what, to follow the thought flow, to watch for the minor and major climaxes through the book. The end of chapter 11 tells us that, 'the land had rest from war', and chapter 12 gives a long list of the cities and the kings that Joshua destroyed. That divides the book into two parts. The next chapter tells you that now Joshua is old and called Israel and said, 'There's much land to be possessed even after I've gone and this is what you will have to do when I'm gone.' And then in subsequent chapters we are told how the land was actually distributed and so forth. So there are two major parts: the first is how the land was conquered, the second is how it was distributed. They are two quite separate operations historically, though doubtless some of it overlapped.

So we took the first half and began to try to follow the thought flow—what the major stories are, what goes with what, where one story begins and where it ends. And on that we noticed that the very first words to Joshua were, 'Moses is dead. Now get up, Joshua, and cross Jordan and take the people with you' (see 1:2). This was the command actually to enter, to get their feet physically across Jordan, into their inheritance. So had that next story about Rahab anything to do with that?' Superficially even, yes, because Joshua sent spies out before he committed his troops to cross that river that was now in flood. That was a military device. They weren't looking to see what kind of a land it was. They knew that from the spies that had gone in forty years before. Now just two spies were sent in, not to reconnoitre the whole land, but to give Joshua a report on the psychological state of the people in Jericho and whether the king was preparing to attack them as they tried to cross Jordan. The spies reported that there was great panic in the city and they were fortifying it: Jericho was shut-up as for a siege. That was important military information. Of course there's far more to the story of Rahab than that, but even superficially, you see the flow of the thing.

They've got to go over Jordan and there are three major descriptions for the crossing of Jordan. We noticed that the thing which is repeated was that they did it 'as Moses commanded': twice, if not three times over, the phrase occurs. So they got across and the first

great story therefore comes to its climax—they actually got across and everything was done as Moses commanded. With them now safely across, we notice that chapter 5 begins by saying that when all the neighbouring kings heard what had happened, they became panic stricken. The attack upon Jericho doesn't start at once. There is a chapter of preliminaries: the circumcision of those that had not been circumcised in the wilderness, the keeping of the Passover, the cessation of the manna and eating the old corn of the land at Passover time, and then the tremendous vision of the commander of the Lord's army who had come to control the execution of the judgments of God. When Joshua saw him and said, 'Are you for us or against us?' he said, 'Neither.' When God rises up to judge, he is absolutely impartial. He's not for one side or another and this was the captain of the Lord's army, come to lead the armies of Israel in the execution of the judgments of God. The importance of those preliminaries, therefore, is self-evident. Even if we don't understand them, they're going to be very important.

Now there comes the actual destruction of Jericho and, thirdly, the assault upon Ai. That turns out to be a long story, much more complicated than the capture of Jericho. The first time they assaulted Ai, they were repulsed and it was discovered that was because of Achan's sin. So this is not a separate story from the Jericho one, because the sin was that Achan had taken some of the spoils from Jericho in defiance of the curse that God had pronounced upon the city. He did that nonetheless and so that had to be dealt with and Israel had to clear themselves of the curse before they could find victory in Ai. That being done, they went up and sacked Ai. And we said to ourselves, 'Well now they've sacked Ai, so is that the climax?' We then found that there were some verses at the end of chapter 8, six verses indeed, and they announced, not the attack on the next city in the list, but another one of these things that fulfilled what Moses had commanded.

Moses had commanded—it's explicit in Deuteronomy 11—that when they got into the land, they were to go up through the land to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and there build an altar and write the law, assemble the people, pronounce the blessings of the law, and the people were to say, 'Amen'; and to pronounce the curses, and the people were to say, 'Amen'. So that great ceremony that happened at those two mountains is how they fulfilled Moses' command about crossing Jordan, twice to three times mentioned—another great objective that Moses had commanded that they now achieved.

### **The Gibeonites and the southern kings**

Now we come to a different story—the whole story of the Gibeonites, the people that Moses had said should be destroyed, because they lived near at hand and they weren't from a city afar off. They came and deceived the Israelites and made out they came from afar off and the Israelites, Joshua indeed, made a covenant with them and discovered too late that they came from just round the corner. They were from near at hand, yet they made a covenant that they couldn't break and so the Gibeonites were allowed to live on, under the terms that Moses had imposed. They became servants to the Israelites and servants to the altar.

The next story runs on, you can't break it, because when the kings of the south heard that Gibeon had made peace with Israel, they came to attack the Gibeonites, not Israel, and the Gibeonites sent an urgent message to Joshua, 'Come quickly and save us.' Joshua, at God's

command, brought the army on a forced march and dealt with the enemy. This is the story of the defeat of those kings and the saving of the Gibeonites; and that opened the way to a whole lot of cities in the south that Joshua then destroyed, along with their kings, the southern confederacy virtually annihilated.

Then chapters 11 and 12 deal with the northern confederacy. When they heard what was happening down south, they gathered together and came to attack Joshua himself and his armies. They were the first lot of enemy, according to the book of Joshua, that actually came to attack Israel. This was the northern confederacy and they were dealt with, and then Joshua mopped up the rest of the country, much of it in the south and elsewhere, the remaining country and all the kings taken. And with that we come to the first major climax, 'the land had rest from war', even though you're going to read of war in the next section. But in one sense the land had rest from war here, and because that is a major climax in the book, then comes a list of names of kings and cities that Joshua destroyed.

### Three objectives

As we went through the text, we decided that there were three major objectives in this first half—the crossing of Jordan, the establishment of the law of God in Canaan, and the elimination of all the kings (i.e. putting down all rule and authority), so that finally the land would have rest. Three major objectives, and once more the oft-repeated phrase 'as Moses commanded', coming at the end of these three major sections is an exceedingly significant thing that we must notice when we're expounding the various sections. It was doing what Moses commanded, what God commanded through Moses. And some of us, the more fanciful kind, when they heard that on the last occasion, were tempted to think of some verses in the New Testament.

For God has done what the law [Moses], weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son . . . he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. (Rom 8:3–4)

For if the inheritance comes by the law [Moses], it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. (Gal 3:18)

So you'll notice the pattern that is developing through this first half of Joshua. Moses couldn't do it, God provided Joshua to do it—to bring God's people into their inheritance. That didn't mean that they could now say goodbye to Moses as being of no use. They had to achieve the objectives that Moses had set.

I want now to move on tonight and, with your help, to begin to examine a little bit more closely this first big objective—the crossing of Jordan and what it means. But first we have to remember that it's one of the three major objectives and if, in our reading of the book, we can get these major objectives in our mind—not only what happened then, but the lessons they have for us nowadays—that will be a very big thing in the book. With the fact that there are three major objectives we can't just say simplistically that the great objective was to bring them into their inheritance. We've got to do a little bit of thinking, because now it's going to be the differences between the three elements that are more significant than the similarities. God

sometimes repeats the same thing word for word. When he observes that we're very slow on the uptake, he'll repeat a thing three times. He doesn't always waste a lot of space doing that.

### **Three objectives, three obstacles and three miracles**

So what's the difference between the three major objectives? We've noticed, to help us on our way, that there are not only three major objectives, there are three major obstacles to actually getting the people into their inheritance, and you can't enjoy the inheritance unless you're in it. Joshua had to get them in first, and that meant getting them across Jordan. But Jordan in flood was a very dangerous thing, and a very serious barrier to a commander with an army of foot soldiers, opposite a city that was armed to the teeth. So here was the first big obstacle. Then the obstacle to getting the law established in the shadow of Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, were the two cities of Jericho and Ai. Unless they got rid of those cities, they couldn't have proceeded north, because Jericho could have come out of their city in the meantime and attacked them from the rear. So these cities had to be got rid of before they could achieve this. You see how the thought flow is going to develop.

Now we notice that there are three major miracles. The first miracle is the waters of Jordan standing still, to make a passage for the Israelites to go through on the dry ground. The second miracle is the falling down of the walls of Jericho. The final miracles are first of all the raining of very great stones down from heaven upon the fleeing enemy, and then the miracle of the standing still of the sun and the moon. Why just those miracles? Why not miracles all the way, every turn of the road? It would be fun, wouldn't it, if we had miracles every day, but then they'd almost cease to be miracles: they'd be ordinary things.

But that raises an interesting point. When they came to get their inheritance, Israel had to fight and doubtless when they fought in obedience to God, they were helped by God. But a big distinction is made between that on the one hand and these miracles which Israel could not have done. Fight as hard as they liked, they couldn't have done it. In each case there is one set of miracles: we shall want to know how they cohere. Why didn't God rain stones out of heaven on Jericho city and bash it down? The Israelites wouldn't have had to fight then, would they? A sizeable enough meteor coming down from aloft on the top of Jericho might have blotted it out in one go.

And as far as the military operations go, you'll notice how they are all different. Getting them across Jordan was a job for the sappers, the army engineers, if God hadn't intervened with a miracle. At Jericho, how did you get into a city with mighty thick walls? They took the ark around the city seven days. That's an interesting tactic. Why didn't they take the ark around Ai? It worked at Jericho, why didn't it work there? Even at the low level of military tactics, why did God sometimes do a miracle and not others, and how will you account for the variety of the tactics involved, even at the military level?

And then it will have its meaning at the spiritual level. Here was a question of, first of all, a forced march overnight, bringing Joshua against the enemy when they didn't expect it; and then as the enemy were fleeing, God rained down stones from heaven. This was a mopping-up operation. It's not enough to beat the enemy if the majority of them manage to run off and live to fight another day. So this is a mopping-up operation in military terms and that is why Joshua commanded the sun and the moon to stand still—not to win the victory for the battle

was already over. So even from a military point of view, these are different things. I mention that so that we don't make too rash a generalization: we must bear in mind the differences.

## **Crossing the Jordan**

That said, this one is going to be easy to describe—'they crossed the Jordan'. What is the significance of crossing the Jordan? What is the nature of the miracle that God did? And if you are afraid of being fanciful in your application, start with the history. Something very simple and obvious, the obstacles in the second section—Jericho and then Ai—were man-made obstacles: you were fighting against the enemy. But not at Jordan. The Jordan was a natural barrier, something nature had put there. And so the Jerichoites were quite content to say, 'Well they'll not come across that Jordan very easily anyway and if they do, our city is barricaded,' so there were two things that they were relying on. How Israel dealt with the man-made fortifications of Jericho we see in the second section, but here it's how Israel faced the barrier put there by nature.

AUDIENCE: Is it the new birth you're talking about?

DWG: The new birth? You mean that if you want to enter your inheritance, you cannot do it apart from a miracle that's more than nature? You're born physically. If that won't get you into your inheritance, you must be born spiritually? Hold on to that insight!

AUDIENCE: We are by nature in trouble anyway, aren't we?

DWG: Yes. And what was the actual miracle that God used to get them across?

AUDIENCE: Something that God did entirely on his own.

DWG: Yes. In other words, he didn't say, 'Swim hard and I'll give you strength and support you as you swim.' God didn't say that. The miracle was not him giving them some strength, it was his actual intervention. Let's look at the context for a moment. Let's come to what Rahab had seen.

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 . . . 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. (2:8–11)

## **Rahab**

Here is a story of a woman's conversion from paganism. This is gospel at that level. She is coming to discover who the God of Israel is, as distinct from all the idols of the surrounding nations and of Jericho. He's the God that dried up the Red Sea. He's the God therefore, not only of heaven, but of earth. When people come to see that, they're halfway to getting



converted, aren't they? There's that famous description of conversion in 1 Thessalonians where Paul says,

you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1:9–10)

Rahab got saved. She believed she had discovered the true God of the universe, God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Nothing would keep him out of Canaan if he decided to come in, river or no river. There was no barrier in nature that would keep God out if he decided to come in. Israel had been faced with the Red Sea. God disposed of that and he's coming in. Nature cannot give him any obstacle, nor can human barricades.

She got converted and when the spies left her, at their command she put the red sash in the window; and there she waited and looked over the battlements, because she had a house on the wall with the window facing outside. She waited for the armies of God to come. She knew they were coming to destroy Jericho, with Joshua at the head of them. And she had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for Joshua, commander of the army of the Lord, to come and execute the judgments of God on that city and those nations. And according to the oath that had been sworn to her in the name of God, when he came to destroy the city, Joshua would deliver her from the coming wrath. Her conversion is a genuine story — she's not a cardboard character out of some historical comic or something — she actually got converted and turned from her paganism to the living God.

### **The crossing**

If you look at the story of the actual crossing, it's in three bits. Let me try and convince you of that! In chapter 3, Joshua rose up in the morning and they moved to the Jordan and lodged there before they passed over. After 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' (v. 3). But they are to leave a space so that they can see where the ark is going 'for you have not passed this way before' (v. 4). This is going to be supernatural.

'Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you"' (v. 5). If you were preaching it, you would say, 'Now, congregation, please, get ready. I know you're blasé, you've heard about space missions to Jupiter a few billion miles away, and that is marvellous, but I hope you haven't exhausted all your store of wonder, because now I'm going to tell you a wonder you'll scarce believe. You must be prepared in your hearts to see and visualize a wonder.' If you don't get it across to the congregation, you haven't got it across, have you!

Then in verse 7 we read that, 'The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you."' That's the second thing you have to get hold of. God is going to do wonders and secondly, God is going to provoke Israel's faith in Joshua. 'You believe in God, well believe in Joshua also then' (cf. John 14:1).

And Joshua said to the people of Israel, 'Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God.' 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.' (3:9–11)

### **The 'wonder' of the ark in Jordan**

We notice the phrase 'the Lord of all the earth'. We saw it with Rahab and now we get it twice more in verses 11 and 13.

And when the soles of the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off from flowing, and the waters coming down from above shall stand in one heap. 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 towards 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. (3:13–17)

That, taken literally, is how Israel got through Jordan. What is the wonder? Well here's what you've got to believe about the God of ten billion galaxies, God in heaven above and God of our whole planet. When Israel was going into Jordan, he himself came down and went through the River Jordan before them. If you look at 1 Chronicles 15, you have the story there of how David brought up the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem and, no wonder the people got excited: the ark is described with the cherubim on which God, the Lord, sits enthroned. When Israel massed into the streets and watched that ark and its procession coming into the streets of Jerusalem, Israel firmly believed that the almighty God of the universe had enthroned himself on that ark. It was God who was coming. It was the coming of the Lord. They believed that literally. This isn't me. I've not got round to interpreting it yet, or applying it typologically! I'm just reporting to you the historical fact of what Israel believed!

And so it was here. The miracle was that to get Israel through this barrier of nature, the high Lord of heaven and earth came down, presenced himself on that ark, went before them into Jordan and, when the waters of Jordan saw their creator, they blushed and parted asunder to let their creator through.

#### *Why through Jordan?*

I could have done a better miracle than that. I could have started off by saying that if the Lord was coming down from heaven to earth to get his people through, why didn't he just veer a little bit to the west and come down on the west side of Jordan instead of the east? Then he wouldn't have had to cross it. It would have been more convenient and direct, and he needn't

have gone to all that trouble of himself going through Jordan. Now we come to think about it, he could have spoken the word from heaven and the Jordan would have parted across, or he could have sent an east wind, like he did when Israel came out of Egypt and he blew the east wind for three days long and the Red Sea parted. Well he could have done it anyhow he liked, but the story is that, to get Israel through the barrier of nature in front of them, God himself came down and went through it. Do you know of any similar stories from the New Testament? That is a wonder that not even Michael the archangel will ever get over.

Militarily speaking, to cross the Jordan would have been a very hazardous occupation with foot soldiers and no bridges. The Jordan plain was bad enough, but it's full of tangled scrub, and now with the Jordan in flood, overflowing its banks in all directions, you couldn't see where the banks were. With the swirling waters and the tangled mass of plants, to get a few hundred thousand soldiers going through that and slipping and sliding all over the place, there could have been panic and disaster: folks trampling on top of each other and some being drowned, and so on. The danger therefore was of death through nature. And to get us into our inheritance, I'm telling you about the New Testament story that there is an inheritance imperishable, undefiled and unfading, reserved in heaven for you. But how are you going to get to heaven, how do you suppose you're going to get in? Your first big barrier to face is not Satan and his army. The barrier is death. So how do we mortals get into an inheritance like that? Well, listen to the context in Peter.

He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you. (1 Pet 1:3-4)

### *The first account*

That is the story. Since the children were partakers of flesh and blood, as Hebrews puts it, 'he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death' (2:14). If you want a wonder, stand and watch the blessed Lord, the ark of the covenant, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwelled bodily, and you'll see him going out in front of his people, and his feet meeting the verge and going down to the bottom of Jordan's river, standing in the mud, so that the rest of us might pass through unscathed.

Well that's how I would read it anyhow. I don't know how you'd read it. How do you normally preach it? What else do you say?

AUDIENCE: Is there a sense in which the waters of Jordan somehow represent God's punishment or wrath, because of sin? Whenever the Lord was baptized in the River Jordan, he went down under. It almost is a picture, and it's another barrier to the inheritance.

DWG: Oh, surely. Yes, that is so. Jordan by dint of its historical use by John the Baptist becomes, for instance, the great river of the baptism of repentance, and the confession of sin and therefore the judgment of God and death itself, 'so death spread to all men because all sinned' (Rom 5:12). With that great barrier, both spiritual and physical, how could we ever hope for an inheritance? And the story is of the Lord of heaven and earth come down and going on in

front and into Jordan and right down to the bottom of Jordan. That, in metaphorical terms, is the story of our great gospel.

And the first telling of the story comes to its great climax:

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. (3:17)

You sense the subdued excitement of the historian. It was achieved: the whole nation finished passing over the Jordan. Marvellous. And you think the story's at an end. No, it isn't. He's going to tell the story twice more. It's a way Hebrews have, of course.

#### *The second account*

The second description of the story comes in the next chapter. You've been given a hint there's going to be a second bit, because at 3:12 Joshua said, 'Now therefore take twelve men from the tribes of Israel, from each tribe a man.' But it doesn't say what for, so it keeps you guessing. Now you're going to hear what for. When all the nation had passed over Jordan, Joshua, on God's instructions, commanded these men.

'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.' . . . '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.' (4:3, 6-7)

So this is the same story and the same climax, that the priests stood there until all the people had passed over, but now there's this different slant, as the historian fastens on one particular feature of the crossing. Not only that the ark of the Lord went down, but these twelve men, one for each tribe, were told that when they got to the bed of the river, they were each to take a big stone up and put it on the west bank of the river. There those stones were to stay for all generations to come, that when their children and descendants would ask them, 'What are these stones here for, Dad?' Dad would reply, 'This is how we came into Canaan: the ark of the Lord went before us and stood in the bottom of the river. We weren't there, but our ancestors picked up these stones actually out of the bottom of that river and there they are, look. People actually stood down there and they're now up here on the bank.'

That's point number one of this section, a memorial. Why, at the historical level, do you think that was important? If you were writing the story, why would you make a whole second description, make a real meal of it? You've already got them all across. Why do you turn back and tell the story again and fasten on this feature?

AUDIENCE: People have short memories.

DWG: But what would it matter, so long as they were in? So long as they're enjoying the land, what does it matter how they got in? If it was your ancestors, hundreds of years ago, you can

imagine the teenager saying, 'We weren't there. It doesn't mean anything to us, Dad, you harking on this history stuff.'

AUDIENCE: Is the point that you wouldn't speak like that if you were conscious of the foundation of your inheritance?

DWG: That's right. Israel were never to forget how the nation came into their inheritance. If the nation lost that sense of how they got in, how worldly they could become. They'd become like just old Canaanites, who got it simply by their own sword and effort and cleverness and idolatry and gods galore, deifying sex, deifying war, deifying a storm-god, deifying I don't know who. It doesn't matter if it was hundreds of years ago, the point remains the same.

AUDIENCE: It reminds me of the breaking of bread, because that's the same thing.

DWG: That is indeed the same thing. On peril of your life do you let a church forget the breaking of bread—if you forget how you got into the inheritance. These were the directions before they crossed: 'You shall do this.' And you will immediately point out that it was just before the Lord was crucified, he gave directions on how we were to remember and never forget. Clustering round the story of the breaking of bread are these tremendous theological facts of our salvation. If our Lord died for our sins, he must have been sinless, else it would have been useless. If one man could die for the sins of the world, he must have been more than man. He must have been God. Try to tell a genuine believer who remembers Calvary, to deny the deity of the Lord Jesus, he will instinctively feel that cannot be, because if Jesus wasn't the Son of God, then there is no redemption. And our subsequent devotion and our enjoyment of our inheritance, right from the start, is the story of how God came down from heaven and stood in the depths of Jordan to let his people into their inheritance, and the ark came out the other side of course.

Oh, but that isn't all. The second description has another one or two details.

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 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. (4:8–9)

Two lots of stones then. Peace be to all critics who think this is a doublet! It isn't a doublet. Israel were to remember not only that God came down and stood there and brought them through, and they brought up the stones from the Jordan. They were to look back and say, 'Do you know, our ancestors were down there once? Down there, where now the waters roll over the top. They were down there once to get into the land. When the ark was there, they had to be there too. Does that suggest any remote parallel in the New Testament?

Some people dispute as to which stones these were and it's a long-suggested thing that there was only one lot of stones and that verse 9 is a repetition of what verse 8 has told you. But we need to distinguish the two verses. In verse 8 it was the Israelites, the twelve men, who took up the stones from the bed of the river and put them on the west bank. The twelve men

did that. In verse 9 it was Joshua who put these other stones in the bed of the river. Why they did that is explained in verse 10:

For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the LORD commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste.

It was to celebrate that the ark had been down there; the feet of the priests had been down there all the while, until all the people had finished passing over. The one set of stones said, 'Look we came through and we emerged. Here we are on the bank.' The other set of stones said, 'But remember that the ark was down there all the time, until all the people had passed over.' That in a prototype is true to the New Testament fact. If you were talking about how you get into your inheritance, you will begin by saying that the Lord of the whole earth became incarnate and went through Jordan for us. He died for us and in his resurrection, we are raised. The other side of that coin is to remember that once we were down in Jordan with him. We died with Christ. There were two sides to the thing. The ark went down and the people passed over and, 'Look there, we came through it and we're on the other side, and here are the stones to show that we're on the other side, victorious.' And the other thing is to look back and say, 'Yes, but when it all happened, we were down there.'

AUDIENCE: Are you suggesting baptism?

DWG: Well, how not! They are the twin sides of the New Testament, whether you take them in the symbols of bread and wine—that is Christ given for us; or baptism—as our dying with Christ. He died for us, we died with him. That's a great mystery. In Galatians, Paul says, 'I have been crucified with Christ.' Do you see the wonder of it? We talk so glibly about it yet in one great sense, I died with Christ. Your Christian gospel is an absolutely fantastic affair you know. You can believe it. The great God of the universe, upholding all things by the word of his power, for my sake went down into death; and I was planted in the likeness of his death and I died with him. I can understand how some people don't believe the gospel, because of the sheer, immense wonder of it!

The chapter says that they passed over—we were told that enough times!

And when all the people had finished passing over, the ark of the LORD and the priests passed over before the people. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh passed over armed before the people of Israel, as Moses had told them. About 40,000 ready for war passed over before the LORD for battle, to the plains of Jericho. 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. (vv. 11–14)

What a way to end a sermon! That's what God had promised, didn't he? 'Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you' (3:7). To see this vast miracle happen not only magnified God, but magnified Joshua. That was going to be the secret of a lot of things. If he was going to lead them into the tough campaigning and the fight against the enemy, it was absolutely vital for that warrior

force that they should come to have absolute trust in Joshua. Therefore God himself did this mighty miracle. The God of heaven and earth came down and let it be seen before the people that Joshua was his high command and that he was doing it through Joshua — that the people might trust Joshua and follow him wherever he went into the battle. I'm almost preaching you New Testament!

AUDIENCE: Is it pushing it too far to take the picture of the ark in the bed of the river as representing God in the world until everybody has been safely delivered?

DWG: Well we delight to sing it, don't we?

Dear, dying Lamb, Thy precious blood  
 Shall never lose its pow'r,  
 Til all the ransomed church of God  
 Be saved to sin no more.<sup>5</sup>

I'm glad you raised that. We shall find constantly as we go through that just when you think you've tied down the meaning of one of these stories to one level, you'll find it has another level!

We've been happily talking here tonight about Christ's death at Calvary for us, so he has conquered death. Does that mean we're all immortal? You say, 'We're in our inheritance already.' So we are, but in spite of being in the heavenlies, we are still subject to corruption and a grave. But there's coming a day when this will be fulfilled at the higher level and every redeemed child of God will, on that same basis, be brought through into our eternal inheritance. If that were true, you'd shout for joy, wouldn't you!

AUDIENCE: Can I ask you about the stones in the river? If they are a reminder that the Lord was down in there and that's the point of them, is there another reminder that the Lord was down in there with the marks in his hands and his side?

DWG: Oh, surely, yes. I know some people nowadays (and I speak as a decrepit, curmudgeonly old-age pensioner!) who say that the Lord's Supper is too mournful. But one can't help noticing that the great orchestra of heaven tunes to the theme in that new song: 'for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God' (Rev 5:9). It will be the foundation of the joys of heaven and you won't catch anybody there saying that it's too mournful to think of that too much. There's no more expensive coin in human experience than suffering, and the jewels of heaven have been forged at Calvary. The wealth of it, to be an heir to the product of that suffering, how would you put a price on it? The sheer wealth of it, and if we forget it, we shall not enjoy our inheritance. Heaven would cease to be heaven really, if we could forget Calvary. Of all the glorious and the marvellous things that God would do for you in an endless eternity, none will be bigger and none will tell out God's heart to you more than did Calvary. And if you want to motivate people to follow Joshua and fight, listen to what motivated Paul: 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20).

---

<sup>5</sup> William Cowper (1731-1800), 'There is a Fountain' (1772).

*The third account*

But we haven't finished the story: there's a third part of this, which goes from verses 15–24. Why on earth is there a third part? What would you sense is missing in your exposition of this crossing of Jordan, so that now you'd say, 'We can't let the people home yet: we must have this third section, because it does round it off'? You notice verses 15–16:

And the LORD said to Joshua, 'Command the priests bearing the ark of the testimony to come up out of the Jordan.'

The imperceptive might say, 'But you've told us in verse 11 that they came up; why do you now tell us as though it hadn't happened?' But that's a Hebrew way of telling a story. You tell it to one climax, then you go back, not all the way, but part of the way, to fix on some other aspect of it that otherwise you hadn't commented much on. And now you tell the story again emphasizing that aspect of it, right to its end. And then you come back and you fasten on another thing and tell the story right to its end. That's a very humble way of telling a story.

AUDIENCE: Does this speak of 'resurrection' — the emphasis on the emergence?

DWG: Yes, that's right. The text itself will preach you the lesson. That's the wonderful thing about the word of God. It doesn't leave you to preach, it preaches itself. The priests came up: the emergence; and then the effect: the waters of Jordan returned to their place (v. 18). The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month. And then our attention is again drawn to the twelve stones. We get this repeated — what point is it making?

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 for ever. (vv. 21–24)

What is the significance of these verses? What are they saying? They're not surely meant to just be repeating the same aspect of the sign that the second description gave in verses 6 and 7. They're not just repeating that, are they?

AUDIENCE: In verse 24, is that giving us two reasons that were being drawn out—that everyone might know the hand of the Lord Almighty?

DWG: Yes, this is Israel's testimony to the world, is it not?

AUDIENCE: And then the rest of it is their own personal experience?

DWG: Yes. In the historical aspect Joshua contrasts his generation with the younger set that were now with him, so there's a comparison that 'The Lord, your God, dried up the waters of Jordan from before *you*, until *you* were passed over, as the Lord God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before *us*.' There were a few left of that first generation. Here he's broadening the focus. God did this not merely for our (Israel's) benefit, to get us into our inheritance, but



so that 'all the peoples of the earth' may know the hand of the Lord is mighty, and that they too may fear him.

That's Israel's testimony to the world at large. And you see that that is not just idle talk. When the spies came to Rahab, she'd foxed the authorities with her funny story and they'd gone chasing over the mountains to find these spies and the gate was shut. Rahab came up on the roof where the spies were hiding, covered up with some reeds and things, and she then began her story. She'd been converted. 'We've come to know that your God is the God of gods in heaven above and on earth beneath. We heard how he dried up the Red Sea.' That led to her conversion.

Now a similar thing of similar magnitude is happening to this generation, as they come into the inheritance, as happened to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. And if you're thinking in terms of your proto-typology, you would want to say that there's only one death of Christ, and the death of Christ was like the Passover for us that delivered us from the wrath of God and delivered us from the power of the Pharaoh. That same death of Christ, here in prototype, brings us into our inheritance. It's the one death of Christ, but now both those aspects had for their purpose, among other things, the advertising of God through his people, throughout the world—'that the world may know'.

I know that we have to be culturally attuned and we have to seek the right approach, under the Lord's guidance, to each person before us, or each audience that's in front of us. If you're on Mars Hill, you have a different approach from if you're in the synagogue. That said, it's the great gospel through which God makes known his power. And as believers, we have experienced the death of Christ for us and our death with him, and that he's begotten us again to a living hope through Christ's resurrection from the dead, to an imperishable and unfading inheritance. That is our message to the world. That is the gospel.

#### *History not typology!*

If we're anywhere near right in expounding this and then applying it, you will remember that we started, not with typology—please let me point that out—but with the military operation and with Rahab's literal conversion. Not a 'type' of a conversion, an actual conversion, how that she'd heard how God dried up the Red Sea and had come to the conclusion he was God of heaven above and earth beneath. And then for the operation of getting Israel through the Jordan, the great miracle turned out to be precisely that. The God of the whole earth came down to deal with this natural barrier of a very literal river that could have been the death of hundreds of Joshua's troops.

That's where we started and we allowed ourselves to think of the wonder of those times, back in 1300 BC—or 1500 BC some people say nowadays—when the God of the whole earth came down from his heaven to take his people through Jordan. To see it even in the method he used then is an amazing thing. Then we turned to the New Testament and thought we saw parallels. There is nothing fanciful there, for the New Testament is true that to get us into our inheritance, that barrier of nature—the barrier of death, sin, the law of sin and death—had to be met and was met by the Lord of heaven and earth coming down and going through death for us. Otherwise, the present reality matches the prototype, but has got much more detail in it than the prototype. And then we saw the rationale of there being three descriptions of the

crossing. They're not just repeating each other. Three different aspects of that crossing and how it fulfilled the objective Moses set before them.

### **Salvation and judgment**

Now there remains a question before we pass on to other things. How would you preach the first eleven verses of chapter 2? Would you say that's just putting in the necessary background of the story up until now? Or is it more than that?

AUDIENCE: We talked a lot last time about the psychological state of the people in the city, and I was wondering about that. Here they were, they had put man-made barriers around themselves as well as the natural barrier outside; and fear seems to be the major psychological state. You don't have to go too far in the New Testament before you read about people 'who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery' (Heb 2:15). Is there anything in that, in terms of exposing the condition of the people, before you come to talking about the great answer? It's not just then a natural barrier of death, but there's also all the psychological context.

DWG: If you ask what these spies were doing, as I said, they were not there to spy out the whole land from Dan to Beersheba, were they? They didn't come back with loads of grapes saying, 'The land is a good land.' They weren't there for that purpose. They were there to reconnoitre the psychological state of Jericho and assess whether, when Joshua got the half of the people across the river in that difficult situation, they would come out and attack. And when you listen to the people in Jericho—there were those who were hostile of course and would have executed the spies on the spot—but we are told that they were securely shut up because of the siege.

What they feared was the siege because, we must not forget, the context is that God has now come, the armies of God are assembled on the borders, and they've come to execute the judgment of God on this evil civilization. That you should have a study of what their psychological state would be is very natural. Under the looming judgment, the marvellous story is that one woman gets saved. Before you hear of any actual judgment falling, first there is a story of salvation. That is magnificent, and you couldn't resist telling how she got saved and what salvation meant for her. It's a magnificent story.

When you talk of judgment, some feel that there must be something wrong with the Old Testament. How could you ever believe that the God of heaven and the God of Jesus could send the Israelites in to slit the throats of all these folks? It cannot be inspired. It must be that these Israelites, like wild savages out of the wilderness, came into Canaan and found a civilization that they didn't understand and, like the Huns and the Goths, sacked them. So these barbarians sacked these cities and thought it was their gods that told them to do it. We can't believe that it was the God of heaven that told them to do it.

I don't know how you deal with that problem. I don't know that I can, but if I'm pushed to it I would say that these judgments were terrible, but don't let that consideration blind our eyes to the fact that these judgments were temporal judgments. Literal, physical, temporal judgments—what happened to the people after death is another story. But these temporal

judgments remind us that there is coming an eternal judgment, compared with which this is a very small thing.

Secondly, we would do well to remember the sinfulness of those civilizations. Among other things, they were given to child sacrifice to their gods, burning infants and older children to their gods. What would you have God to do with a civilization like it? And if God took exception to their putting their infants through the fires to Molech, what do you suppose God is going to say to modern people who, in these last twenty years, have killed millions of unborn children in the womb? They were also given to sexual perversion: it was all tied up with their religion. And if sexual perversion, as we know it now, has been responsible for the ravages of AIDS, what would it have been like then? What would you have God do?

This is a story of the judgment of God being poured out. In one sense the book of Joshua—if we take it at one level—is a prototype of the coming of the Son of God with the armies of heaven, to inflict the vengeance of God on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel (see 2 Thess 1:5–8). He shall come with the armies of heaven to execute judgment, the New Testament Epistles tell you quite straight. The wonder of this salvation is that here's a Gentile woman under the message of God's judgment. She'd heard it forty years before, when they had come out of Egypt. The judgments that fell on Pharaoh were in the end a mercy, for God made Pharaoh a vessel of wrath—that is, a vessel to advertise God's wrath against sinners if they will not repent and continue to defy him. And in God's mercy, that had led to Rahab's conversion.

And God is merciful: it was four hundred years since he had told Abraham that one day he would have to judge these people, but not immediately. Now when he's about to judge, look at the mercy of this. What kind of a woman was she in that perverted society? She was a prostitute whose profession was to offer pleasure without love and love, so-called, without loyalty. This world wants love: it doesn't like the judgment of God. But what is love? Love that's traded for money, do you call that love? And the sacrifice of infants to the gods, is that love too? And all the perversities; are they love as well?

Listen to a woman pleading for her life. Rahab says to the spies, 'I have come to believe that your God is the true God of heaven above and of earth beneath. Now show me a kindness. I've been loyal to you: you owe your life to me. Save me and my family, and let them live. Save them alive.' And the spies said, 'Yes, we'll do that'. But just their say-so wasn't enough. She'd had men galore in that house and while they were there, they'd said all sorts of sweet nothings and made endless promises, and when she shut the door on them and they went out into the night, she never heard of them again. How could she be sure that these men that she'd protected at the risk of her life would not forget about her, and when the invading armies came she would perish with the rest?

She only knew one thing to do. She's decided that their God is the true God: 'Give me a sure sign, and swear an oath in the name of your God' (see 2:12). Here is an individual soul facing the judgment of God and the horribleness of life, now reaching out to discover the living God and trying to find some loyalty in this universe. And a God of love, who will ever be loyal to his creatures, gives his servants the authority to swear their oath in his name that she shall be saved. That's magnificent you know. That's what true love is: a question of loyalty.

When the actual judgment fell, twice over in that section (ch. 6), references are made to Rahab. As the walls of Jericho were coming down, the spies were dispatched to go and save Rahab and all who were in her house. It wasn't just one woman—anybody in her house. She was brought out and incorporated into the Israel of God, and became the ancestress of Messiah. If I had a woman like that in my ancestry, I would keep it dark and I wouldn't have Burke's Peerage announce it to the world! Yet in the New Testament, as the blessed Lord comes into the world, he has it announced that amongst his ancestresses was this woman.

That's the God of heaven. That's the true God. Salvation for Israel in prototype here, but it's salvation for the Gentile as well. She had placed the sign of the scarlet cord in the window. Now, as she looks out on the armies coming, she's got nothing to cling to but the word of God and God's oath and promise. Fellow believers, what else have we got anyway in this world? If there is the Lord of heaven and earth, is he actually loyal to us? Or is that a childhood myth told us by our mums to help us to sleep in the dark?

That's a magnificent preface to this story of God's dealings with Israel and with Canaan.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019)** was Professor of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.