

A NATION POSSESSES - LIFE IN THE LAND

Study 1

Ai and ACHAN

Read Joshua chapters 7 & 8

It would have been wonderful for Joshua and the people of Israel if every expedition had gone as smoothly as the conquest of Jericho. God intended that this should be so, for if you remember, He had promised that every place that their feet trod upon should be theirs. He was not deluding His people when He promised this. We call Canaan the "Promised Land" for no other reason than that God had given His word that it should belong to the seed of Abraham. In our study we are going to see how God's purpose was not immediately realised because of the failure of some of His people. There is something terribly sad about the story of Achan, and it should be a lesson to us all.

Notice three things about **verses 1-5**. They are important in the story.

1. DISOBEDIENCE. Achan disobeyed the Lord. The 'devoted' treasures of Jericho, which belonged only to the Lord as the spoils of victory, Achan took and hid in his tent. Joshua and the people knew nothing of this. Only the Lord knew and it brought out His anger. This teaches us the serious lesson that we cannot do what we like with those things in our lives which belong to the Lord Jesus. We may deceive other Christians, but we cannot deceive the Lord. He knows all about us just as He knew about Achan. Obedience to His Word is essential if we are going to please God.

2. DECEPTION. The conquest of Jericho seems to have made the people of Israel too self-confident. When the men saw Ai, they were sure that a small army could overthrow it, so just three thousand men went up to conquer. This teaches us that we can easily be deceived regarding the strength of the enemy. Notice, too, that there is no mention of them seeking the Lord's guidance as Joshua did before attacking Jericho. Then, there was sin in the camp which needed to be rooted out and put right first.

3. DEFEAT. The expedition ended in failure and disaster. The army was defeated, thirty-six men were killed and the people were reduced to fearfulness. Achan's selfishness and sin had resulted in sad disorder. This teaches us, as Christians, an important lesson. We can never successfully deal with Satan and achieve victory in Christian living if there is known sin in our lives. Here, one act of sinful disobedience produced a defeated nation. Is there some sin in your life, hidden in your mind and heart, which is robbing you of victory?

Three more steps take us to the sad ending of this story.

1. Prayer and confession of Joshua.

As the leader of the people, he is beside himself with concern. Notice **verses 7-9** - it appears that in these verses Joshua was blaming God for defeat. Why had God brought the people over Jordan to meet defeat at the hand of their enemies? What would the surrounding nations say when they heard about such defeats? Weakness would only encourage the enemy! Joshua tears his clothes and cries out to the Lord.

There are times when prayer is out of place. God tells Joshua to stop praying and to **ACT**. Prayer is invalid when there is sin in the camp. **PURGE** out the sin and **PRAYER** will be answered. Remember this in your Christian life. Progress stops when sin is unchecked. "***If I regard iniquity in my heart the Lord will not hear***" (**Psalm 66: 18**), is what the psalmist said. The story of Ai illustrates the fact that victory is only possible when God has His way with us.

2. Penetration uncovers the guilt of Achan.

I have used this word, not only because it begins with a "p" but because it expresses the deep insight that God has into all man's ways. When Achan buried the goods in his tent he thought no one would ever find out. He also selfishly thought that he could please himself and only he would be affected by his actions. Little did he realise that God's 'all-seeing eye' witnessed what he had done. Nothing is hidden from God. (**Hebrews 4: 12-13**) Neither did he realise that his sin would rob the nation of victory. Not one of us can live without our life affecting others. Just as every stone dropped into a pool will cause ripples to disturb its surface, so our every action as Christians will reach out and affect other people. We cannot live just to please ourselves, as if no one else existed.

3. Punishment. **Verses 16-26.**

Once Joshua had the matter in hand he saw it through to the end. Achan and his family were taken and, before all Israel, were stoned to death. We look back and perhaps say what a harsh penalty was exacted. In our day there is a very lax attitude taken towards evil, and the penalties exacted very rarely match the crimes committed. In studying the history of Israel we are made to realise that their God was a holy God. If Israel wanted His blessing they must deal with their sins. The heap of stones in the Valley of Achor was a reminder that Israel's victory only came when they were right with their God. Let us learn this lesson and see that we put it into practice.

Chapter 8 tells us of a restored nation that went on to victory. God's long-suffering and kindness allowed them to fight a second time - and win!

Study 2

WILY WORKERS

Read Joshua chapters 9 & 10

Joshua and the children of Israel had no time to relax in their progress of conquest in Canaan. The people of the land soon realised that they were a force to be reckoned with. Jericho and Ai had fought single-handed against Israel. The nations of the South of Canaan now join forces to attack Israel. (**verses 1 & 2**) These nations often had differences and were known to fight bitterly among themselves. But here was a common enemy and they laid aside their quarrels to fight together. From now on a united force met Israel. But, in this study we are going to consider in particular some people who defeated Israel without weapons of war. They won by cunning ways what they would have lost by open conflict. **Chapter 9: 3-27** tells the story of Gibeon's strategy. Israel as a nation was forbidden to make league or alliance with any other nation in the land. **Exodus 23: 31-33** makes this clear. There was always the danger of becoming involved in the religious and social life of godless nations, so the only safe way was to obey God's command and drive them out completely. Many times in its history this nation which should have been great among the nations of the world, failed and fell because of this very thing.

After Ai, Joshua and the people returned to Gilgal. They had not been there very long before they had a visit from some strange people. They claimed to belong to a people who lived beyond Canaan. They gave every appearance of having travelled a long distance; worn-out garments, tattered sacks, well-worn sandals and stale food; these things easily deceived Joshua and the people. They also recounted how that they had heard of the triumphs of the armies of Israel on the other side of the Jordan. Having heard of this they had travelled a great distance to make a league with Israel and become their servants. Any doubt that Joshua may have had was dispelled by the outward appearance of these people.

Notice **9: 14** - **"The men of Israel took some of their provisions but they did not ask counsel of the Lord"**. To take tokens of their food displayed signs of friendship. Joshua's mistake lay in the fact that he did not ask for the Lord's guidance. The position was questionable in that it involved a command of the Lord. Once peace had been made with them and promises given that their nation would be allowed to live, nothing could be done. Israel had committed themselves by oath. There is a very important principle for us here. If we have situations to deal with in which the commandments of God are involved, our reaction must be to obey. This is the only sure way in Christian living. Yet it is possible that, like Israel, we meet situations where we are not sure; where the way is not clear, what can we do? There is one safe rule which we should take to heart; if in doubt, wait! **Proverbs 3: 5-6** gives clear guidance on this and have been a blessing to many Christians in such situations.

Three days after the league was made the truth came out - they were Gibeonites, near neighbours of Israel.

Joshua is concerned and the people of Israel become angry, but nothing can be done. They become the slaves of Israel, although they are not taken into the nation. Quite loyally they offer their services to Israel and are accepted by Joshua. What a picture this is to us of the way in which Satan works. He does not always display himself as a **"roaring lion"**, (**1 Peter 5: 8**), but often, in his strategies to defeat us, he behaves as an **"angel of light"**, (**2 Corinthians 11: 14**). When it is a question of conflict we are on our guard and are prepared to do battle. When it is a question of cunning we are often deceived and lose ground. At all times the motto for the Christian is: **"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."** (**Matthew 26: 41**)

Chapter 10 is very interesting. Notice that Gibeon was a great city - one of the 'royal cities'. (**verse 2**) It did not suit the surrounding kings to hear that such a city had made peace with the enemy. So five kings form a confederation to fight against Gibeon, because of her treachery. Here is a tricky situation. Will Joshua leave them to fend for themselves? We see here how binding a Jewish oath was. Joshua goes to the aid of the Gibeonites, but **verse 8** reveals to us that the Lord assures him that all will be well. The kings will be defeated and the Gibeonites will be delivered. God approved of the faithfulness of Joshua and the people to their oath and the leagues they had made with Gibeon.

We see the defeat of the five kings as the conquering people move on to possess the land. (**10: 16-27**) As you study this portion notice the incident of how the sun stood still. (**verses 12 - 15**) If darkness had descended the victory would have been incomplete. So daylight stayed until the victory was won. The Lord responded to the voice of a man, as He fought for Israel. We can truly say that God's grace and kindness is far greater than the failures of His people.

Study 3

CLAIMING THE VICTORY

Read Joshua chapters 11 & 12

In this lesson we are going to look at the extension of the conquest of Joshua and the people of Israel taking in the whole of the promised territory. In the record which we have from **Chapter 10: 28 to 12: 24**, the scope of the conquest is seen and we have a description of how victory was claimed. It was literally true that no enemy could stand against the nation while God was moving with them. They actually possessed their inheritance. As you study this record I wonder if you will apply it to your own life as a Christian and ask yourself if you are enjoying in everyday experience the wonderful blessings which belong to life in the Lord Jesus Christ. These great things do not come to us all at once. Like Joshua and the people we have to move forward and claim them for ourselves.

Let us look at the stages of campaign which led to the full possession of Canaan -

1. Conquest of Southern Palestine, **chapter 10: 28-39.**
2. Review of the Campaign, **chapter 10: 40-43.**
3. Defeat of Northern Confederation, **chapter 11: 1-15.**
4. Review of Conquest of Palestine, **chapter 11: 16-23.**
5. Overcoming the Kings, **chapter 12.**

If you have maps in your Bible you can find the places named on them. You will then see that the Southern and Northern campaigns were separate. This is interesting because later on, after Solomon died, the nation became completely divided into Israel as the Northern Kingdom and Judah as the Southern Kingdom - ten tribes in the North and two tribes in the South. Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom and Jerusalem the capital in the South. This is just a little geography which is useful to bear in mind as you study the history of the nation of Israel.

You will notice that Joshua and the people conquered cities and villages; they also dealt with giants and kings. Then there came a day when all was conquered and war ceased. **Chapter 11: 23** summarises the victory. The **"whole land"** is taken and the **"inheritance"** is divided among the tribes. It is then that **"the land rested from war"**. The rapid progress of Israel's armies left some strongholds untouched as we shall see later on in the book. Some of these became 'thorns in the flesh' to the nation as they settled down to enjoy their inheritance. We can learn two main lessons from the idea of the tremendous victories which were gained in Canaan.

1. It was as a **UNITED** force that Israel moved forward. Go through these chapters and note how many times the phrase **"Joshua . . . and all Israel with him"** occurs. All the time the people were campaigning and fighting, JOSHUA was WITH THEM. They needed him as their leader and guide. There is no doubt that Joshua was greatly respected by the nation who followed him, for God made sure of that. (**4: 14**) Just as they had followed Moses, so now they followed Joshua. Thus linked to a good leader they won the day. This is nowhere more true than in the Christian life. United to Jesus, our 'Joshua', we can be assured of victory and can claim our spiritual possessions in Him. When the Lord Jesus sent out His followers, He gave them the assurance of His leadership and companionship. **"All authority has been given to me in Heaven and on earth . . . I am with you always!" - Matthew 28: 18-20.** When the early Christians went out on the Day of Pentecost the flag of victory was flying high, because they knew that Christ, their Captain, was with them. Just as Joshua and Israel went out to conquer, so the early Church conquered in their witness for the Lord. Their secret was that Christ was with them! So today, the sure knowledge that the Lord Jesus is always with us should make us brave and strong in overcoming trials and temptations. Even when we seem alone, as Paul did in **2 Timothy 4: 16**, we shall with Paul in **verse 17** be able to say: **"the Lord stood with me and strengthened me"**.

2. It was as **UNITED TOGETHER** that the land was possessed, The people not only needed a leader. but needed each other. Notice again **"Joshua and all the people"**. As long as they stood together they claimed the

victory. It was, in fact, not long afterwards that divisions began to come in. The Book of Judges is a sad story of defeat because there was no leadership and no unity. **"There was no KING in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes."** (**Judges 21: 25**) You and I need the fellowship of other Christians if we are going to fully enjoy the blessings of Christ. It is still true of the Church today that "United we stand - divided we fall." In the battles that are waged against Satan and his powers, we can help one another and encourage one another to be strong and go forward to win. In **Philippians 1: 27** Paul speaks about **"striving together for the faith of the gospel"**. We sing sometimes, and I wonder how true it is: 'Like a mighty army moves the Church of God.' One of the great secrets of Israel's victory was good leadership and good comradeship. Think about these two points carefully.

Study 4

CALEB



Joshua chapter 14

We are going to consider in this lesson one of the finest characters in the Bible. **Chapter 13** begins a new section in Joshua - the scene is not now conquest, but distribution of the land to the various tribes. Notice **13: 1** carefully. Joshua is getting on in years. The strain of campaigning was beginning to tell on him. It is interesting to notice that the Lord tells how that there is much more land to be possessed. What had already been conquered was to be divided by lot among the tribes, then they must continue to obtain the rest of the unpossessed territory. This point is worth noting. However much we obtain of spiritual enjoyment in our Christian lives, there is always more to be possessed. We shall have all that Christ has to give us until at the end of the journey of life, we enter Heaven. We shall have 'arrived' then, not before.

One point that we have not touched on. There were some of the tribes, the Reubenites, the Gadites and half the tribe of Manasseh, who decided they wanted their possessions the other side of Jordan. Moses divided the various conquered territories to these tribes. We have the details in **13: 7-32**. You can read about this in **Numbers 32: 32-42**. The "Promised Land" seemed to have no attractions for these people. They were content with the progress they had made and wanted to go no further. I always feel that these tribes are a picture of Christians who do not want to enter into the very best things of the Christian life. Just as the two and one-half tribes had been saved from Egypt, so as Christians they are really saved. Their sins have been forgiven, they are going to Heaven, but that is about as far as it goes. Such Christians usually want the best of both worlds. They never really surrender their lives to Christ. He is SAVIOUR but not LORD! Make sure that your Christian life is better than this. To find real joy in Christian living means that you have to go all the way with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joshua now begins to **DIVIDE the inheritance** of the land between the rest of the tribes. (**14: 1-5**) It

is just at this stage that he is confronted with Caleb, the son of Jephunneh. In looking at Caleb's life the outstanding thing about it is evident at once. He wants to get every bit of blessing he can find in the "Promised Land". Notice that he reminds Joshua of his courage in the past. When all the people were scared to death because of the evil report of the spies, Caleb stood up like a man and said that victory was possible. At forty years of age he showed himself to be a man of courage and action. **"I wholly followed the Lord." (14: 8)** The foundation which Caleb laid for his life was one of trust and confidence in his God. When others were giving up he was resolute and was completely committed to the Lord. This is tremendous and is a challenge to our half-heartedness. Can you say that you wholly follow the Lord?

Forty-five years had passed since the day when Caleb **DECLARED his faith** in God. What difference had these years made to this man? We can listen to what he has to say: **"As yet I am as strong this day as I was on the day that Moses sent me: just as my strength was then, so is my strength now..." (14: 11)** Through all the years Caleb had been proving God, walking with Him, trusting Him, fighting for Him. Instead of growing weaker he grew stronger. He was committed to one pathway only: wholly following the Lord. In this way of life he became strong, and he teaches us a valuable lesson. Committed Christians grow stronger every day. Just as an athlete grows more proficient through constant training, so the Christian can become more experienced and effective as time goes by. Paul could say: **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4: 13)** Caleb was not boasting when he declared his ability, he was humbly stating facts which glorified his God.

Now he **DEMANDS the possessions** promised by Moses. **"Give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day." (14: 12)** Note the absolute certainty with which Caleb states that he will drive out the enemy. **"It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said." (verse 12)** What answer has Joshua to such a great warrior? He could only bless him and give him Hebron for an inheritance. **(verse 13)** To the strong man was given the right to possess. Obviously God knew He could trust Caleb to master and enjoy his inheritance.

There is an important lesson to learn here, too. The Lord Jesus said: **"For to every one who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance" (Matthew 25: 29)** What did He mean? In the Christian life the more we have of the great riches of the life that Jesus gives, the more we shall find we are capable of receiving. God never gives more to those who are not interested in what they have. Strength and satisfaction only come through whole-hearted dedication to the Lord. Some Israelites frittered away their inheritance and eventually became slaves when they should have been masters! Not Caleb! Let us follow his example by completely following the Lord.

Questions

Study 1 AI and ACHAN

1. Why was Canaan called the "Promised Land"?
2. What important difference was there between the preparations made for the attack on Jericho and that of Ai?
3. What were the serious consequences of Achan's sin?
4. a) When is prayer involved?
b) What has to be done if prayer is to be answered?
5. Why, as Christians, can we not live just to please ourselves?

Study 2 WILY WORKERS

1. Why were the Israelites forbidden to make a league with other nations in Canaan?
2. What great mistake did Joshua make when he made peace with Gibeon?
3. How can we best deal with the cunning of Satan?
4. What miraculous intervention did God make in **chapter 10**, and why?
5. a) What should our first reaction be to the commandments of God?
b) What should we do when in doubt?

Study 3 CLAIMING THIS VICTORY

1. What was to happen to Israel after the death of Solomon?
2. What was true of Israel as long as God moved with them?
3. What essential thing did God do for Joshua in **chapter 4**?
4. Why was the early Church so confident as they went out to preach the gospel?
5. Why do we need the fellowship of other Christians in our Christian warfare?

Study 4 CALEB

1. Of whom are the two and one-half tribes who stayed beyond Jordan a picture?
2. What did Caleb do which made him such an outstanding man?
3. Why was it that Caleb became stronger as the years went by?
4. What statement of the Lord Jesus is illustrated in the life of Caleb?
5. What is the most important thing you have personally learned so far from these studies in Joshua?