

# Joshua: An Old Testament Type of Jesus

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Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

The name *Joshua* may also be pronounced as *Yeshua* or *Yehoshua*, and means “Yahweh is Salvation”. It is the same name as that of the Messiah, Jesus. Initially, Joshua was the assistant of Moses (Num. 11:28), later on his army commander (Ex. 17:9-10), and ultimately his successor as the leader of Israel (Deut. 1:38).

Joshua played an important role in Israel after they had been delivered from Egypt, thereby preparing him for his future role as leader when they crossed the Jordan to take possession of the Promised Land. His conquests in Canaan rendered proof that he was a special instrument in the hand of the Lord. Joshua was an Old Testament type of Jesus, who was sent by the Father to accomplish a much greater purpose, i.e. to deliver people all over the world from the bondage of sin.

By virtue of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross His disciples are enabled to share in His victory and be filled by His Holy Spirit. They are thus empowered to remain standing against the wiles of the devil, and also to proclaim the gospel of salvation to all nations in a hostile world. While Joshua’s leadership in Israel only brought preliminary and limited benefits to Israel, Jesus’ redemptive work was complete and on a worldwide scale, offering people from all nations the opportunity to become believers in Him and members of His kingdom.

The life and works of Joshua were a mere shadow of that which Israel’s great Saviour would do much later. But from a typological study of his leadership role and achievements we can learn much of that which Jesus Christ accomplished for New Testament believers. In this study, much attention will be given to the manner in which spiritual principles in the book of Joshua were fulfilled after the coming of Christ.

The most significant characteristic of Joshua’s life was that he was filled with the Spirit of God (Num. 27:18). He honoured the Lord and availed himself to Moses with a view to playing an active part in carrying out God’s plan for Israel. For Joshua, Israel’s exodus from Egypt was not only the physical liberation from slavery but also spiritual deliverance from domination by an evil, pagan nation. His objective was that Israel would be enabled to serve the Lord as a free people in their own land. Because Joshua honoured and served the Lord, God had chosen him as a special instrument to perform mighty acts of salvation for His people.

At their deliverance from Egypt, Israel did not play any part in the termination of their bondage – they were only expected to be faithful in obeying God’s instructions on the slaying of the paschal lamb. The Lord delivered Israel by His strong power. This act of salvation is a type of our deliverance from sin – we should only believe in the Lord Jesus and confess our sins to Him. He will then cleanse us by the blood of the Lamb and we will experience how the Lord breaks all the cords of sin and unrighteousness in our lives.

## **Joshua’s leading role in the battle against Amalek**

A continuous aspect of Joshua’s life was that he was involved in a physical battle which only preshadowed the spiritual battle in which all believers are engaged before receiving their full heritage in the Lord. Shortly after Israel had been saved from Egypt, they waged war with the powers of Amalek at Rephidim (meaning Resting Place). Israelites who made slow progress and lagged behind the main group were overtaken and killed by hostile horsemen. The enemy thus infiltrated the camp and attacked those at the back as they were easy targets. Amalek is a type of the devil who attacks the people of God from inside, and as such he depicts the internal sinful nature that must be conquered. Pharaoh is a type of the devil who attacks us from the outside with a view to dominate, enslave and kill us. After the Lord had delivered Israel from Pharaoh by breaking his power over them, they urgently also had to defeat their other foe, Amalek. Joshua was appointed commander of the army for this battle:

“And Moses said to Joshua, Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

But Moses' hands *became* heavy; so they took a stone and put *it* under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. Then the LORD said to Moses, Write this *for* a memorial in the book and recount *it* in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; for he said, Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:9-16).

The war against Amalek was particularly fierce. When Moses held up his hands to bless the army, Joshua and his men prevailed; but when Moses let down his hands, Joshua had to retreat from Amalek. As a solution to this problem, Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses until Amalek was utterly defeated. Aaron, the high priest, personifies prayer, while Hur, meaning white, represents purity and holiness. There is no victory against the flesh without continuous prayer and a commitment of holiness unto the Lord.

It is clearly stated that the war against Amalek does not end at a certain point in time but continues from generation to generation. Every new generation of people are faced with the responsibility to overcome their sinful nature. To every generation this is a continuous struggle because the flesh must be kept in a crucified position by not allowing it to regain lost influence and domination of our lives. The Lord Jesus said: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). After defeating Amalek and entering into the victorious life, we should always be conformed to the death of Christ so as to be able to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Joshua gained this victory but he was dependent on Moses for spiritual involvement in the battle through unbroken intercession. In the present time, Jesus is the Commander of the Lord who gives us victory but it is expected of us to watch, pray and persevere in holiness. If we neglect these duties, Amalek can re-establish his control over us and cause us to backslide.

How does our Joshua, Jesus, deliver us from Amalek (our sinful nature)? This deliverance obviously has nothing to do with a physical confrontation! At Rephidim the secret of spiritual victory was revealed. Moses was commanded by God to strike the rock in Horeb, after which water would flow from it to quench the thirst of the people (Ex. 17:1-6). This rock pointed to the Lord Jesus. Paul said that Israel drank from a spiritual Rock, "and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). When Moses struck the rock it was cleft and a stream of water flowed from it. The water is a type of the Holy Spirit, as confirmed by Jesus Himself: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive" (John 7:37-39).

The cleaving of the rock alludes to the crucifixion of Jesus. On that basis alone can we be born again and also receive the victorious life of Christ. He does not only forgive our sins by virtue of His atoning death, but the cross is also an instrument of death which enables us to mortify the flesh. For this reason Paul glories in the cross of Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to him and he to the world (Gal. 6:14). After the crucifixion of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit was poured out to give us life and life abundantly. He empowers us to lead the victorious life by walking in the Spirit, for then alone will we not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Is Jesus Christ only your Saviour or also your Sanctification?

### **Joshua's close association with Moses at Sinai**

Joshua was always closely involved in the spiritual aspect of his people's salvation, and for this reason he played a supporting role in the leadership of Moses. He truly had a changed heart, and that was the reason why he always thought about God and entertained a spiritual perspective on all matters. When Moses went up to the mountain to be instructed by God on how Israel as His people should conduct their lives, Joshua accompanied him (Ex. 24:13-14; 32:17).

During the absence of Moses and Joshua the people committed idolatry: "Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. And Aaron said to them, Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me. ... And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it

with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Ex. 32:1-4).

Apostatised believers usually become involved in idolatry because they look for an alternative form of religion which is non-offensive, tolerant towards sin, less prescriptive, and socially more acceptable. Idolatry in modern times is not only the reverence of certain gods or images but can also take on the form of addiction to power, earthly riches or misuse of liquor. Such persons serve the wine god (Bacchus), the money god (Mammon), or other similar "gods", though in reality they are their own gods and the masters of their own destiny as they simply do what personally pleases them.

Israel made for themselves a golden calf and worshipped this lifeless object as the god who led them out of Egypt towards a free and uninhibited existence. They found a religious leader without strong principles who was willing to make this golden calf. The same situation prevails in the religious sphere today. Apostate believers who are intent on lowering the standards find theologians who no longer believe in the triune God of the Bible, and then leave it to them to invent another God and another Jesus who are more acceptable to the crowd.

The alternative God is the universal god of all faiths who also reveals himself through other religions and their holy books. The alternative Jesus is the historical Jesus who was not born from a virgin, is not God, did not pay the penalty for our sins on the cross, did not rise from the dead and did not ascend to heaven. These new gods offer humanity the liberty to do as they please without any qualms. All of them can join hands and become one, since none of them have strong, biblical convictions. This is the falling away against which Paul had warned, when people will not endure the sound doctrine of the Bible but heap up for themselves teachers who will turn away their ears from the truth and openly proclaim fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Moses and Joshua strongly denounced Israel's idolatry. This sin provoked the wrath of God, which led to the death of 3 000 Israelites (Ex. 32:28). The question is: how do we act in cases of large-scale apostasy among our own people, and particularly also among pastors and theologians? Do we take sides with the few men of God who express themselves against deception, or do we follow the popular opinion of the majority through whom false, man-made doctrines are condoned? An explicit choice should be made between the truth and the lie. The honour of the Lord is at stake and our future depends on it. Do not, to your own ruin, be carried away by the current of apostasy but rather take a stand against it and defend the integrity of God's Word at all times.

### **Joshua's role as explorer**

At the border of Canaan, Moses sent out twelve spies to explore the land and then report back. Joshua was one of these explorers (Num. 13:17-20). The large majority of the explorers (ten of the twelve) were terrified by the inhabitants of the land and dissuaded Israel from trying to conquer and possess the land. After the 40 days of their explorations they reported as follows to Moses and the nation:

"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan. Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it. But the men who had gone up with him said, We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them" (Num. 13:27-33; NIV).

Joshua and Caleb, however, encouraged the people and tried to restore their trust in the omnipotence of God: "Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them. But the whole assembly

talked about stoning them” (Num. 14:6-10; NIV).

Moses also confirmed what Joshua and Caleb had said: “The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place, Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God” (Deut. 1:30-32).

The large number of Israelites who did not believe that God could give the land of Canaan to them, forfeited God’s promises because of their unbelief. The entire generation of adults who did not trust the Lord, died in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb were the only members of that generation who survived the wilderness wanderings. Members of the next generation, who surrendered themselves anew to the Lord under the leadership of Joshua, were worthy to take possession of the land. The Lord said to the disobedient generation: “Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in” (Num. 14:30). The Lord said to them: “They shall surely die in the wilderness” (Num. 26:65).

Exploring the Promised Land was a serious and very important stage in Israel’s spiritual development since their exodus from Egypt. After their deliverance from Egypt, they passed through an intensive learning-school for 18 months to strengthen their faith and establish them on the way of victory. They did not, however, take these lessons of faith to heart, and still harboured fear and unbelief in their hearts. Forgotten were the blood of the paschal lamb under which they took shelter in Egypt, the Lord’s mighty deeds of salvation at the Red Sea, His miracles in the wilderness, the great victory which Joshua gained over the powers of Amalek, and the year at Sinai where they received the laws and precepts of the Lord.

If Israel would have accepted the Lord’s instruction and adapted their life of faith accordingly, they would by then have been spiritually strong enough and well prepared to accept the ensuing big challenge. With fearful hearts they assessed the situation with regard to the road ahead, and then made a decision. Twelve spies were sent out but their report confronted the nation with a difficult choice. The problems appeared to be very big and insurmountable, and their trust in the Lord’s power was like a faraway dream that might never materialise. Israel’s dwindling faith in the God who does wonders was so low that they even considered stoning the two God-fearing spies who tried to convince the nation towards engaging in the battle against evil forces in the Name of the Lord.

To unbelieving Israel it was preferable to permanently remain in the wilderness, rather than to take possession of their heritage across the Jordan with the help of the Lord. Many of them were even prepared to return to Egypt and again become slaves of Pharaoh. They preferred the easy way out with the least resistance, and because of that they greatly impoverished themselves spiritually – even to the point of becoming unworthy recipients of the promises and blessings of the Lord.

Modern Christianity is in exactly the same situation. We regard ourselves to be Christians who have already been saved from the “Egypt” of our sinful past. As in the case of Israel, many members of Christian churches only have a form of godliness without a testimony of being born again. They are fellow-travellers who mostly act contrary to God’s Word. The others may be saved but are still babes in Christ. Only a small group is spiritually mature because they have a testimony of sanctification after salvation, and are therefore well disposed to accept all the promises of the Lord in faith.

The spiritual problems and lack of insight among the majority of believers cause them to be inherently dependent on religious leaders to show them the way. As in the case of Israel, they also send out people to explore the way ahead and then give appropriate advice to their followers. These explorers are theologians, pastors and Christian authors. They study the Bible, give guidance, formulate doctrines and make suggestions on how to move forward. Some of them became very influential and were even recognised as church fathers, e.g. Augustine, Calvin and Luther.

Under these circumstances the devil has gained considerable influence by deceiving millions of people, robbing them spiritually and leading them on the wrong way. As in the case of Israel, the majority of modern explorers are offering completely wrong counsel to the people. They do not focus on salvation in Christ and therefore regard the land of Canaan, which represents a life of victory over sin, as an unattainable ideal and convince their followers that, being altogether weak, they will never be able to overcome sin and fleshliness in their lives. They must abide by the idea

that they are unalterable sinners and therefore be content with life in the wilderness. They have been delivered from Egypt and should accept their present position as being a final stage. They should not seek after the deeper life as they are not destined for it.

Do you recognise spiritual counsel of this nature, which is not only fatalistic but also promotes disbelief in various biblical promises? Such theologians and church fathers undermine the credibility of the Bible as they are mainly in denial mode. Not all of them deny all biblical doctrines, as some of them do recognise the doctrine of salvation as depicted by Israel's exodus from Egypt. However, they keep to this teaching while denying that there is a further progression to the Promised Land, thereby excluding themselves from various biblical promises. Because of their self-imposed theological limitations the following doctrines and promises in the Bible are denied by many of them, by openly declaring that: there isn't a deeper work of grace leading to a pure heart and filling with the Holy Spirit as all Christians are regarded to be Spirit-filled; there is no such thing as carnal believers who mainly walk according to the flesh; there is no rapture, nor a personal Antichrist or a literal tribulation period of seven years; Israel is no longer God's Chosen People and the restoration of modern Israel is not a biblical phenomenon; the throne of David will not be restored in Jerusalem and neither will there be a millennial reign of peace after the coming of Christ. This group of theological explorers mostly do recognise Jesus Christ as Saviour, but they are not filled with the Holy Spirit, they do not understand the full counsel of God, and are consequently content with the wilderness life with its poverty and limitations. They do not have a clear future expectation.

As the falling away increases, the list of denials become longer and the apostatising more profound. The following are new additions to this list, by which the very foundations of the Christian faith are destroyed (cf. Ps. 11:3): There is no such thing as rebirth since people are saved in ritualistic way during infant baptism; Christ was not born from a virgin; He is not God; His crucifixion was a political act which has no bearing on the forgiveness of sins; He did not rise from the dead and consequently did not ascend to heaven; He is not the only Saviour because there are also various other messiahs such as Buddha, Krishna and Mohammed; there is something good in all faiths; the Bible is not the inspired and inerrant Word of God; there is no heaven or hell and also no devil; and sin is a relative concept, allowing everyone to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong. This group of explorers are of the opinion that it was a mistake for Israel to move out of Egypt and confine themselves to a miserable existence in the wilderness. Their advice is to return to Egypt and to adopt an interfaith religious orientation. This view represents a transition from a little faith to complete unbelief. Apostatising of this nature is the consequence of demonic-inspired deception (1 Tim. 4:1).

Contrary to the large group of deceived people, there is a small group of faithful explorers who give proper counsel from the Word of God. They do everything in their power to promote faith in the omnipotence of God and the truth of His promises. There is indeed a promised land to take hold of, and it amounts to a motion of no confidence in God if we refuse to trust Him and to accept His promises on full salvation and complete sanctification (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23). Why would He promise to us a land (or life) where we can have rest from all our enemies if it were impossible to achieve victories in His Name? We will, to a very large extent, impoverish ourselves spiritually if we do not wait on the Lord to endue us with power from on high.

The two faithful spies were rejected by the people, and they risked being killed. The same situation prevails today. Those who are strongly committed to evangelical principles, including sanctification as a second work of grace, are not popular preachers or counsellors. In their exploration of the spiritual landscape they have become fully aware of the great power of the enemy. But that has not deterred them in their convictions on the best way forward, as they are fully aware of the much greater power of God to fulfil His promises to Israel. He still wants to make all of us more than conquerors.

Who led Israel through the Jordan to the land of promise and victory? One of the two faithful witnesses, i.e. Joshua. We are also followers of Joshua, who is Jesus, on our way to the victorious life. John says the following about Him: "Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev. 1:5-6). Will He promise anything to us and not do it? We must make sure that we listen to the correct counsellors and explorers. Most of them are not faithful, and for that reason they cannot repeat what Paul has said: "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you

the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27; NIV).

### **The land of promise**

The land of Canaan was to Israel the fulfilment of many promises. That which true believers had hoped for would become a wonderful reality there. When we carefully follow Israel's long history it is obvious that apart from the backsliders and unbelievers among them there were two groups of believers. The one group was spiritually shallow and did not serve the Lord with all their heart, while the small core group of believers served the Lord in a true, dedicated and convincing way. This same distinction between carnal and spiritual believers is encountered right through the Bible. The well-known holiness preacher, A.B. Simpson, said in his commentary on Joshua: "Even the most superficial observer must have noticed in the records of Christian experience, and the observation of life, that there are two very distinct types of Christians in the world, in every age; one representing an experience of despondency, anxiety, doubt, inconstancy and frequent declension; a life so unsatisfying as to make one question whether it is really worth all it costs; and the other full of confidence, victory, joy, satisfaction, power and stability" (*Christ in the Bible: Joshua*, by A.B. Simpson).

As far as Christians who were delivered from the bondage of sin are concerned, there also definitely are the further promises on sanctification and victory over the flesh to be pursued. There are, therefore, the first promises on salvation which we have to accept to come over from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. But we should not content ourselves with this experience because it is the express will of God that all His children should also be fully sanctified: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

The grace of the Lord Jesus over us extends beyond salvation: "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1:16; NIV). When we have received salvation as a first work of grace, we are born again but are still like a small child in Christ who has not yet grown up to spiritual maturity. We must grow up to become a perfect man or woman in Christ, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:13-14).

Salvation can also be described as initial sanctification, but that is only a preparatory experience leading to the deeper work of complete sanctification: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*" (1 Thess. 5:23-24). The command towards complete sanctification is not beyond our reach because the Lord does it for everyone who trusts Him for this blessing, and who is prepared to comply with the condition of self-mortification. If we are prepared to fully surrender ourselves to be crucified and die to the world and to sin, we will be imbued with the resurrection life of Jesus Christ.

### **A grave on the way to Canaan**

It was essential for Moses to die before the people could inherit the Promised Land, as he was a type of the law and Israel could not receive the promises through the works of the law. They needed Joshua, a type of Jesus, to lead them in crossing over to the land of promise. Paul reminded the Jews that their sins could only be forgiven by Jesus: "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

When we follow Jesus on the way to our spiritual destination, we must first be delivered from the prescriptive power and condemnation of the law, as well as its inability to justify any man before God. Although the law has set an impossibly high standard to fallen humanity, it nevertheless gave rise to a form of self-justification among the Jews, based upon human efforts towards law observance (cf. Luke 18:11-12).

A completely new form of religion was revealed to Israel with the coming of Christ. They were subsequently not convicted of sin by the law but by the Holy Spirit, and were no longer under the obligation to bring sacrifices to atone for their sins. Jesus Christ fully observed the law, and through His crucifixion He fulfilled all the shadowy sacrifices of the old covenant. Jews, as well as all other people, are convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit, who measures each one against the standard of Christ's sinless life. Any contraventions on our side are forgiven by grace because of the atoning

death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. However, He offers us more than only forgiveness of sins as it is His wish that we will also die to sin by fully identifying with His cross. That is the second work of grace.

The first work of grace is typologically depicted by Israel's deliverance from Egypt when the paschal lamb was slaughtered. The second work of grace is depicted by Israel's entry into the land of promise when, after the burial of Moses, they crossed the Jordan under the guidance of Joshua. The old generation of Israelites died in the wilderness, and only the new generation could be led through the Jordan by Joshua.

The Jordan represents death because it flows into the Dead Sea and ends there. The old man (our old, sinful nature) should also come to its end by dying. Each one of us should make a full surrender to be able to say with Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Later in the same letter he says: "I glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

The responsibility rests on me to continually reckon myself to be dead to sin (Rom. 6:11). I should always regard the old man as crucified, and never allow him the opportunity to get off the cross. I therefore have to maintain my crucified position, since the old Adam is not dead although he is crucified. That is the reason why I should daily identify with the cross of Christ by taking it up and following Him (Luke 9:23). As I develop spiritually I must be united together with Christ in the likeness of His death (Rom. 6:5). If I die with Him I will also live with Him.

### **Renewal of the covenant**

The new generation of Israelites who inherited the land represents the new, reborn person whose heart has been fully changed by the Lord. The old man with his inclination towards sinning cannot inherit these promises. During Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, they acted contemptuously towards God and did not even circumcise their children. Because of their unbelief they were not worthy to inherit the land of Canaan, and that is the reason why the unbelieving generation had to die in the wilderness:

"For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people *who were* men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD; to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. Then Joshua circumcised their sons *whom* He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way" (Jos. 5:6-7).

Directly after crossing the Jordan Joshua arranged for the circumcision of the uncircumcised. But that was only an outward sign of the Abrahamic covenant. The true purpose of the Lord was a spiritual surrender during which the hearts of people are to be circumcised: "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, which you may live" (Deut. 30:6).

The New Testament counterpart of circumcision is the cleansing of people's hearts during a full surrender: "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:9-11; cf. Rom. 2:28-29).

Joshua was a worthy leader to guide Israel towards this full commitment to the Lord. He and Caleb were the two explorers who were rejected by the entire congregation at Kadesh after insisting that Israel should cross over and possess the land in spite of the hostile nations in Canaan. The other ten explorers were just as fearful as the people whom they represented, and insisted that it was an impossible task to conquer the land (Num. 14:1-10; Deut. 1:28-30; 9:1).

A spiritual surrender to the Lord, who saved Israel out of Egypt by His mighty power, was the only way in which Israel could be used by the Lord to take possession of the Promised Land.

### **Followers of the Conqueror**

The new leader of Israel was Joshua. The Lord informed Moses as to who would lead His people to the Promised Land: "Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall go in there. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it" (Deut. 1:38). The Holy Spirit equipped him for

his important mission: "Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him" (Deut. 34:9).

After the death of Moses, the next generation of Israelites crossed the Jordan and renewed their covenant with the Lord. They were faced with a very big problem as they did not know how to conquer and force into submission the enemies who lived in fortified cities. Jericho was the first of these cities which they encountered, and possibly the most securely entrenched one. Israel had never fought against enemies in walled cities and their spears, swords, bows and arrows were not suitable for this type of warfare.

It was here, at Jericho, where they had to learn the important lesson that the battle belongs to the Lord. It was also in this humanly impossible situation when Israel realised that their true leader was not Joshua the son of Nun, but the Commander of the Lord who later came to Israel as Yeshua, the Son of His heavenly Father:

"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, *Are You for us or for our adversaries?* So He said, No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, What does my Lord say to His servant? Then the Commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand *is* holy. And Joshua did so" (Jos. 5:13-15).

We must also remember that, even after being filled with the Holy Spirit, we are merely servants of Christ. We can only be more than conquerors *in* Him. He said: "For without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). He must always receive the glory for every achievement, and we should never seek personal glory for what we have done.

Through supernatural intervention by God the walls of Jericho tumbled, allowing Israel to capture and destroy the city. The same principle still applies today in the spiritual sphere if we wish to conquer evil strongholds in our lives: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

Do you use the spiritual weapons of faith (1 John 5:4-5; Eph. 6:16), prayer (Jas. 5:16; Eph. 6:18), the sword of the Word (Eph. 6:18; Heb. 4:12), the blood of the Lamb (Eph. 1:7; Rev. 12:11), and the word of our testimony (Rev. 12:11)? Have the strongholds of sin been pulled down in your life and do you testify of the fact that the Lord Jesus has saved you? Our testimony should be such that people will give glory to God, and not to us, for what has been achieved in our life (Matt. 5:16).

## Faith

There are two key concepts in the book of Joshua which are at the basis of Israel's victories and the securing of God's promises, i.e. *faith* and *obedience*. We will first review the role of faith.

The Promised Land was conquered by faith. Every step of the way was taken by faith: the Jordan was crossed by faith, the walls of Jericho fell by faith, and likewise every subsequent victory was achieved by faith. Faith does not refer to a supernatural power which may be manipulated by man, but to a firm trust in the Lord that He will do what He has promised.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. ... He who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:1, 6). Faith means that we actively trust the Lord for the fulfilling of His promises, and also immediately accept them in faith. If you trust and receive the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, you will be saved at that very moment. When you accept Him as your Sanctification He will, without any doubt, deliver you from your carnality and fill you with His Holy Spirit.

However, there are also unbiblical forms of faith in which people decide for themselves what they want to have, and then use "faith" in an effort to obtain whatever they desire – but that does not work. A pure faith cannot be equated with human desires, regardless of how good and noble these desires may be. The Lord gives us faith through the Holy Spirit to believe in His Son, and also in all the promises in His Word. When our lives are in agreement with His Word, our desires and ideals will also be in harmony with Scripture: "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we



keep His commandments and do those things which are pleasing in His sight. ... Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 3:22; 5:14).

Israel had firm promises on the land of Canaan. The old generation did not accept these promises of God and died in the wilderness. The new generation of Israelites believed in the promises and acted accordingly. Their hearts were circumcised – they truly believed God – and that made it fitting for God to fulfil His promises to them. The period under the leadership of Joshua was a spiritual highlight in Israel's long history which spans four millennia.

## **Obedience**

When people are fully obedient to God's Word by honouring it in their daily walk, and also by believing it and praying in accordance with it, it will always be well with them. The Lord said to Joshua: "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Jos. 1:7-8).

We should guard against observing only certain commands and neglecting the others. There are not only commands and promises in the Word with regard to salvation, but also to sanctification, vigilance, spiritual warfare, persevering prayer, fruitful service, humility, steadfastness during trials and afflictions, as well as many others. The more obedient we are to these commands, the more we will grow up to spiritual maturity. People who abide by salvation without moving ahead, are running the risk of leading a worthless and unfruitful life, and will consequently appear before the Lord empty-handed, saved as through fire (1 Cor. 3:15).

Unfortunately, there are servants of the Lord who do not use their talents and time in His service, and hence they stagnate spiritually. They leave their talents unused and plan to return them to the Lord one day (Matt. 25:24-26; Luke 19:20-23). These are the people who did not commit themselves to holiness, and therefore did not cross the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Disobedience does not only refer to the neglect of certain commands and promises, but also to actively engaging in sinful acts which are contrary to God's Word. During the capture of Jericho, Achan's actions were in direct conflict with God's Word as he took some of the accursed things and hid them in his tent (Jos. 7:1). Because of this, the blessing of the Lord departed from Israel and they were defeated when they attacked the city Ai (Jos. 7:11-12). Only after Achan and his family members were stoned by the entire Israel, and burnt together with their possessions, the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger and the inhabitants of Ai were defeated.

## **Faithful but not perfect with the Lord**

Despite the promises to Israel on a God-given land which flows with milk and honey, there were a few of the tribes that preferred not to receive their inheritance in the Promised Land, but rather east of the Jordan. They were the tribes of Ruben and Gad, as well as the half tribe of Manasseh. These tribes did join with their brothers in fighting to liberate the Promised Land from pagan occupation, but afterwards returned to their habitation east of the Jordan (Jos. 1:12-18). They fully recognised Joshua as leader and also served in his army without murmuring, but in their personal lives they made other choices.

This is a strange situation, but in its spiritual application it is not an uncommon phenomenon. There are many Christians who fully recognise and proclaim the evangelical gospel of salvation and sanctification, but in their personal lives they do not honour its principles. What they say and what they do are not in harmony. With their lips they testify to the authenticity of the Lord's promises but in practice they find themselves east of the Jordan in a spiritual wilderness.

There may be various reasons for this contradictory situation, e.g. people's importance in their own eyes, excessive love of money, wrong relationships, or other secret sins. Because of this, they do not come to the point where they completely die to themselves (the crossing of the Jordan) and continue with a life of fleshliness in spite of their knowledge of the biblical doctrine on full salvation. Throughout the years, these hypocritical believers have often been admonished with the words: "Preacher, practise what you preach!"

## **Wars in Canaan**

The land which the Lord promised to Israel had to be liberated from evil occupation and then occupied by them. The power and grip of the kingdom of darkness had to be broken in the entire territory before the kingdom of light could be established in its place. In Joshua 12, mention is made of 31 kings who were defeated by Israel and driven from their land. However, this did not comprise all the land that was promised to Israel; consequently, the struggle would continue in Canaan as long as there were still heathen nations. Joshua did not finish his appointed task:

“Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the LORD said to him: You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed” (Jos. 13:1). The territories which he did conquer were allocated to the twelve tribes, but because of the continued existence of evil strongholds the struggle in Canaan against pagan nations persisted.

Apart from the fact that Israel did not conquer and destroy all the evil strongholds, they also made the serious mistake of concluding a covenant with the Gibeonites who were a pagan nation in their midst. These people purposely deceived Joshua by pretending that they came from a far country and wanted to conclude a non-aggression pact with Israel. But they were inhabitants of Canaan who devised a crafty plan to, by means of an oath, refrain Israel from attacking them. They came to Joshua with worn clothes and patched sandals, as well as dry bread and other provisions, having the appearance of people who had come from very far (Jos. 9:3-27).

Joshua did not investigate the matter any further, neither did he ask counsel of the Lord (Jos. 9:14), but assured the Gibeonites that they would not be attacked. Because of this, Israel weakened their own position and also diminished their inheritance. This is yet more evidence on how the Evil One, through changed strategy, often achieves his purpose of undermining God's people. He comes in the guise of an angel of light to deceive unsuspecting believers.

## **Spiritual war**

In New Testament times, we are also involved in a continuous war after we have crossed the Jordan of dying to ourselves and starting with a new life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, the war which we wage in the Canaan of the abundant life takes on a different form and is predominantly against an enemy from the outside. Before that time our struggle was primarily against an enemy within us, i.e. our old, sinful nature which still dominated us after we were saved from Egypt. This foe was intent on confining us spiritually to an inconsistent and unfruitful life of falling and rising again in the wilderness. This life was more often characterised by defeat than by victory.

In the new situation in Canaan, everything has changed. Israel achieved one victory after another because the Lord fought for Israel (Jos. 10:14). But in spite of all their victories Israel did not reach the point in which they captured all the land which the Lord had promised to them (Jos. 13:1-7).

The physical wars which Joshua and his men waged in Canaan were a type of the spiritual battle in which we are engaged against sin in New Testament times. To win this war, we do not need physical but spiritual weapons. Paul says to the Corinthians: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

From this Scripture it is evident that sin originates from wrong thoughts which have not been subjected to the obedience of Christ. These thoughts, or suggestions to commit sin, may influence us from three different sources:

Temptations to sin can, in the first instance, come directly from the devil and his evil spirits. John refers to the devil as the deceiver of the nations (Rev. 12:9; 20:3), while Paul refers to people who departed from the faith, as “giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

Secondly, temptations to sin can influence us from the depraved world in which we live. The whole world with its sinful practices is lying in the sway of the Evil One (1 John 5:19), and for that reason it is characterised by narcissism, competition for status, corruption, double standards, deceit, power struggles and the pursuit of wealth. If we desire and pursue these things, we turn our backs upon the Lord and His kingdom of righteousness: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the

world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

In the third instance, sin may emerge from the uncrucified flesh of a person. Even in the lives of believers, the fallen flesh tries to escape from its crucified position to again assert its control over a person's life. When a believer no longer identifies with the cross of the Lord Jesus on a daily basis, he effectively allows the flesh to again instil sinful desires in him. James says: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15).

We should put on the full spiritual armour of God and resist temptations. The devil can directly tempt us by aiming his fiery darts at us, and also influence us through the depraved world or the sinful flesh, and therefore he is the final enemy who should be overcome. Paul says: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*" (Eph. 6:10-12).

Are you an overcomer in the struggle against sin? If not, you should become skilful in the use of spiritual weapons such as faith, (Eph. 6:16; 1 John 5:5), prayer (Eph. 6:18; Jas. 5:16), the Word (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12), and the blood of the Lamb (Eph. 1:17; Rev. 12:11).

### **The danger of compromise**

As in the case of Joshua and the Gibeonites, the possibility also exists that believers may be deceived into compromising with sin because of their ignorance and naivety. In a way reminiscent of the Gibeonites, the devil often comes in an innocent guise like an angel of light to deceive people into receiving him as an apostle of God who only desires the best for them. The great number of sects, false prophets and false religions in the world are evidence of the success with which the devil has deceived millions of people. The Lord Jesus did not warn us in vain: "Take heed than no one deceives you" (Matt. 24:4).

Deceived people have opened the door to the enemy, invited him in, and opened their hearts to his message of delusion. One of the immediate consequences of this situation is that their minds are blinded to the truth and that they are transformed into devoted advocates of one or other form of the lie. These lies influence the rest of their thinking because "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). Such people lose their spiritual power and insight, and unwittingly promote the ideologies and works of darkness.

### **Not a kingdom now**

Joshua had to conquer a clearly defined land which the Lord had given to Israel (Jos. 1:2). The Chosen People and their land always had to be in a holy state before the Lord, and for that reason all pagan nations were to be driven from the land to ensure that no defiling rituals such as idolatry would be practised there. God's kingdom on earth was represented by Israel, and for that reason they had a theocratic form of government with God as the Head of the nation. Israel's leaders always had to consult the Lord before important decisions were taken. When they wandered away from the Lord they were disciplined.

In a New Testament context, the arrangement with regard to the kingdom of God on earth has completely changed. Because of Israel's extended periods of disobedience towards the Lord, they not only rejected His prophets but eventually also His Son. This situation gave rise to their long international dispersal, against which the Lord had already warned them during the time of Moses: "I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste" (Lev. 26:33).

During this dispensation Israel would not be the representatives of God's kingdom on earth, and consequently there would no longer be a geographic boundary between God's kingdom and the heathen kingdoms on earth. During this time, all believers in the world would find themselves in a hostile world which is predominantly inhabited by unsaved people, and therefore under the power of the devil (1 John 5:19). In the midst of this spiritually dark environment the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ has to be proclaimed to all people on earth, despite the fierce opposition and resistance that it might evoke (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15).

People who are saved during this time, become members of a heavenly kingdom which is not physically revealed on earth: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). During Christ's bodily absence on earth we find ourselves in a hostile territory in which we live as strangers and sojourners (1 Pet. 2:11). Everywhere on earth the truly saved people are a minority (Matt. 7:13-14).

It is, therefore, completely unfitting to proclaim a form of kingdom-now theology in terms of which it is endeavoured to reveal the kingdom of heaven physically on earth. True Christians should rather expect oppression and persecution by the majority of unbelievers and deceived ones. The Lord Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). In our hearts we have the peace of the forgiveness of sins, but as far as our relationship with the external world is concerned, we are in a situation of confrontation. We have to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12).

There is no way in which we, like Israel in the previous dispensation, should exercise a divine mandate to drive pagan nations from certain territories to demonstrate the kingdom of God to the world. We are not allowed to persecute and kill our enemies, but instead we should proclaim the message of salvation to a lost world. We should therefore love our enemies and desire their salvation. We are committed to be the light in a dark world and the salt of a corrupt earth. During the church dispensation, believers and unbelievers are living together like wheat and tares that have been sown in the same field (cf. Matt. 13:24-30). It will only be during harvest time, when the Lord Jesus comes, that the wheat and the tares will be separated to each reach their final destination.

### **A Sabbath-rest for the people of God**

After the Messiah has come, a perfect Sabbath-rest will dawn for Israel and all believers of all time: "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:8-9; NIV). There are many promises on this future time of complete rest in the Messiah:

- The Sabbath-rest for God's people will extend over an entire millennium. It will be the culmination of seven millennia of human history since Adam and Eve, and also the conclusion of a "week" of human history on the present earth. In this week, two days of a thousand years each have elapsed between Adam and Abraham, another two days between Abraham and Christ, and that is presently being followed by two days between the first and second coming of Christ. This will be followed by the seventh day of the Sabbath-rest.
- At the beginning of the seventh thousand years, Jesus Christ will return to the earth as King of kings to physically establish His kingdom on earth (Rev. 19:16; Luke 1:32). He will restore the fallen throne of David, and then rule over the whole world from Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17). Only then will a Christian kingdom, for which many believers wrongly exert themselves during the church dispensation, be revealed on earth. We are working for a kingdom which is still a mystery, but will soon be revealed when the King comes.
- To Israel, it will be a day of perfect rest. The rest in the Lord which has eluded them for so long as a nation during their turbulent history, will be their portion when He comes again and the whole remnant of Israel is reconciled with Him. That will not only be a spiritual rest to them, but also a peaceful existence in the land which the Lord has promised to them. For the first time in their history they will possess the entire land which the Lord has given to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 13:14-15; 15:18). In Ezekiel 45 to 48, the division of the land among the twelve tribes is discussed in detail. That will only happen during the reign of the Messiah.
- Jerusalem will be the hub of the coming reign of peace. This city, which has been involved in so much strife and so many wars throughout the centuries, will be the epitome of peace and tranquillity during the Millennium. The Lord says about Jerusalem: "The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ... Your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night. ... Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders" (Isa. 60:3, 11, 18; cf. Jer. 33:6). "Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home. ... For the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King; He will save us" (Isa. 33:20-22).
- All the nations of the world will share in the rest of the Messiah and often go up to Jerusalem to be instructed by the Lord. All hostilities between nations will come to an end, no money will be

spent on armament and no military training will take place: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4). A true Christian transformation will occur worldwide after the Lord Jesus has come, destroyed His enemies and saved all the survivors. They will serve Him with all their heart: “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts” (Jer. 3:17).

- Together with the praise that will be offered to the Messiah as King of the world, the saved Israel will also be honoured as His special witnesses. Nations will encourage one another in this respect: “The inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also. Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard *that* God *is* with you” (Zech. 8:21-23).
- The secret of this perfect rest and peace in the Lord will not only be the consequence of a worldwide reconciliation with the Messiah, but also of the outpouring of Christ’s judgements at the battle of Armageddon upon all His enemies – which will also include the three major deceivers of humanity, namely the Antichrist, the false prophet and the devil himself: “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 19:19–20:3). That will be the big reason why the nations will, during that time, not walk according to the dictates of their evil hearts.
- At the beginning of the seventh millennium of humanity’s history of salvation, all those who died in Christ will be resurrected and, together with the living saints, they will receive glorified bodies and rule with Christ: “But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. ... Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:5-6).

## Temporary rest

During the reign of Joshua, Israel experienced rest in their hearts and served the Lord. After they had defeated the pagan nations and driven them out, they also had rest from their enemies (Jos. 23:1; 24:31). But Joshua realised that his people’s hearts were not perfect with the Lord as they should be, and that the new generation would again wander away from the Lord and His Word. Before his death he earnestly warned them against such a turn of events:

“Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, *and* lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause *anyone* to swear *by them*; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day. ... Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations; these that remain among you; and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you” (Jos. 23:6-8, 11-13).

Unfortunately, it was only Joshua’s contemporaries who served the Lord, because the next generation lapsed into widespread apostasy: “Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died *when he was* one hundred and ten years old. ... When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the

work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from *among* the gods of the people who *were* all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies” (Judg. 2:8-14).

Israel's long history since this time was dominated by extended periods of apostasy. The Lord often surrendered them to their enemies: during the Assyrian exile of the northern kingdom of ten tribes, as well as the Babylonian exile of Judah and Benjamin's southern kingdom, they were taken captive by their enemies and removed from their land. All these things happened to them because of turning their backs on the Lord and failing to serve Him:

“But this is what I commanded them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you. Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels *and* the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. ... You have forsaken Me, says the LORD, You have gone backward. Therefore I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am weary of relenting!” (Jer. 7:23-24; 15:6).

God was faithful but Israel became unfaithful and turned away from the Lord. If the righteous commits unrighteousness towards the Lord and does not repent from it, he will die in his sin (Ezek. 18:24). This is a biblical principle which also applies to the New Testament dispensation (John 15:4-6). Every new generation of people have to make a choice on their own spiritual life.

### **A self-imposed exile**

Because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord, Israel became involved in endless wars against their enemies. In the Promised Land they were often attacked by pagan nations and at times forced to surrender, all because they failed to defeat and drive away their enemies as the Lord had commanded them to do when they entered the land. Because of this, they did not enjoy the blessing and protection of the Lord. Their spiritual apostasy and blindness eventually caused them to reject the Messiah, Yeshua, thereby forfeiting their divine right to occupy the land which God had promised them. The consequence of this situation was a self-imposed exile which lasted for almost two millennia.

Modern Israel is still involved with continuous conflicts with and wars against their enemies because, as a nation, they have not yet entered the rest of the Messiah. According to biblical prophecies they will, however, accept the Messiah when He comes again (Zech. 12:10; Matt. 23:39) and then only will they enter into the rest of the Lord and have a peaceful existence in their own land during the millennial reign of the Messiah.

The church of Christ should learn from Israel's mistakes. We must clearly understand that Jesus is the Lamb of God who saved us from Egypt, but also the great Conqueror who leads us through the Jordan of dying to the flesh and entering into a life of victory and joy in the Lord. If we have not experienced salvation as the first work of grace, then we are still unsaved slaves of sin. If we are saved but have not yet experienced sanctification and parting from the old life as a second work of grace, we are still in a spiritual wilderness of an unfulfilled life which is characterised by many defeats, as well as a lack of fruitfulness.

If we did cross over to Canaan, but failed to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the spirit and flesh, then we ourselves open the door to the devil to again force us into a life of failure and worldliness because of surrendering to sin. We will then be stripped of our joy and strength to overcome and eventually, in a self-imposed exile, be carried away into a wilderness life of falling and rising again, or even further back into a life of unbelief in Egypt.

Why is there such a high degree of spiritual confusion among Christians worldwide? The answer is obvious: if people are not explicitly called to repentance and rebirth, they are still in Egypt and only have a form of godliness. If they have been called to repentance but not yet to a complete surrender to holiness, they will still be spiritually immature, on a journey to nowhere in the wilderness of confusion, where they will be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph.

4:14). That explains the existence of hundreds of different churches, each with its own doctrines – some of them further from the truth than others. Even many of those who did cross the Jordan do not maintain a perfect walk with the Lord and later again lose their heritage of the fullness life. Then, they again find themselves back in the wilderness together with other carnal believers.

We should clearly understand that there is only one way to the land of promise, and that is under the leadership of Joshua and through the Jordan of dying to self. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the Author of our faith and our holiness, and He leads us through a surrender of self-mortification and full identification with the cross of Christ, thereby becoming conformed to His death. After that, He will fill us with His Holy Spirit to become strong in the Lord and able to put on the full armour of God to remain standing against the wiles of the devil. In Jesus alone we will be able to move forward from victory to victory while growing up to the measure of the fullness of Christ.

### **The free will of man**

In the life of victory we must keep on making decisions on a daily basis, and that applies to all people during their entire life. The decisions and choices which we make, determine the direction of our lives. If we are guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we will not turn away from the Lord's way to the left or to the right, and prosper in whatever we do (Jos. 1:7). It is, therefore, imperative that we have a clear grasp of man's free will, because we are fellow workers of God who should be able to rightly divide the word of truth (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:15). Wrong choices will, to a lesser or larger degree, cause us to deviate from the Lord's way.

The principle of man's free will is clearly depicted in the book of Joshua. The general calling of the Lord to Israel also included a personal calling to every individual, which required that every Israelite had to respond to the Lord's calling. This principle did not only apply to the determining of their basic status as believers and members of God's people, but also to their continued obedience afterwards. Even if they were circumcised covenant children who slew the paschal lamb and were led out of Egypt by God, all of them still had to make moral and spiritual choices on how they wished to conduct their lives. In this regard the Israelites greatly failed, even to the point of denying God. They had experienced all God's great deeds of salvation, "but with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:5).

Israel's extended wanderings through the wilderness were the direct consequence of their spiritual backsliding. The Lord said: "For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation, and said, It *is* a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways. So I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest" (Ps. 95:10-11).

The new generation of Israelites who conquered the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, also had to make choices for themselves as to where their loyalties belonged. Initially, they made the right choice but Joshua was certainly aware of hypocrisy among many of them, as well as the possibility that the next generation might make wrong decisions, leading to apostasy. Joshua respected their right of free choice:

"And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. ... If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good" (Jos. 24:15, 20). Man does have a free choice but he is not free from the consequences of his choices.

The same principle also applies to us, and that is the reason why we, in the light of Israel's wrong choices, are warned not to make the same mistakes: "Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6). Like Israel, it will be of no use for us to hide behind covenant signs as well as a name that we are God's people. Many people indeed argue that they are Christians by virtue of their baptism and confirmation as church members, and now have the liberty to live as they please. They are making a big mistake as the Lord is not satisfied with lip-service to Him – he insists on a changed heart (Mark 7:6-7).

Israel's mistake in the wilderness was that they only rationalised mentally with regard to God's intervention in their liberation from Egypt, arguing that they were God's people. They did not really react spiritually to what He had done for them – they were only circumcised in their flesh and not in

their hearts. Because of this state of affairs, the old generation of nominal believers died in the wilderness, and we should seriously search ourselves lest we fall into the same trap: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest" Heb. 4:1-3).

We must truly believe in the Lord Jesus, while confessing and forsaking all sin, as then alone we will be able to enter His rest. As committed believers in Christ we can, through the guidance of His Holy Spirit, pass through the Jordan of death, and thereby be transformed into victorious Christians who can overcome in the struggle against sin, unrighteousness and temptations. In this life we will find rest for our soul, although the war against evil may at times be very fierce. In this position of victory we will be worthy to inherit the Sabbath-rest of the Millennium.

### Three levels of obedience

In his commentary on Joshua, A.B. Simpson says that there are basically two classes of Christians, e.g. the carnal and spiritual ones. However, he adds to this classification that the spiritual ones may be further subdivided into two groups, depending on the level of obedience and faithfulness which they have achieved. He described the three groups as good, better and best:

"There is in all things, a good, a better and a best. That is especially true in our spiritual life. The story of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers is the good, unfolding Israel's redemption from Egypt, and foreshadowing our salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Deuteronomy and the earlier chapters of Joshua introduce us to the better, Israel's entrance upon the Land of Promise, the type of our sanctification through the Lord Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Ghost. But there is something more than even this, and the later chapters of the Book of Joshua unfold the highest and the best possibilities of our spiritual life. There were choice possessions in the Land of Promise. There were victories to be won, even after all the land was subdued and the thirty-one kings were conquered. Hebron, Kirjath-Sepher, and Timnath-Serah represented something more than ordinary victory, and point us forward to the prizes of Christian life and the special inheritance of glory awaiting the few, even in the sanctified host of God who are willing to be more than conquerors through Him that loved them."

The first step on the Lord's way is to discontinue all forms of sin and rebellion towards Him by repenting from sin. This experience is represented by the journey through the Red Sea, which was the beginning of a new life. After that, the saved person must become conformed to the will of God in all his conduct. That calls for mortification of the self, by which we cross the Jordan towards the Promised Land. After that, the challenge remains to the sanctified believer to do everything which the Lord expects of him, and to overcome in every aspect of his life.

There is, therefore, a starting-point with regard to doing God's will, thereafter a full surrender towards sanctification, and ultimately the possibility of progressing to the level of all the fullness of God. Paul said: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that **good** and **acceptable** and **perfect** will of God" (Rom. 12:2; emphasis added). In this Scripture there is clear reference to three levels of God's will, i.e. His good, acceptable, and perfect will which should be pursued by us.

### His good will

To be able to do God's good will calls for repentance and entering into His will from an unsaved life which was led outside of His will: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

It is, therefore, God's express will that you should be saved. In Acts 17:30 Paul says: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent." Since you have a free choice whether to accept or reject God's command to be saved, you have the liberty to resist and reject it; but then you will have to face the full consequences of your decision. The Lord Jesus said to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:37-38). Everlasting desolation and destruction await those who reject Jesus as Saviour.



Stephen charged the unsaved hypocrites in Israel of having the same unrepentant attitude: “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). Do not resist the Holy Spirit who comes to you with a friendly invitation to confess and forsake your sins, to settle your case with the Lord and to follow and serve Him (John 16:8; Matt. 21:28-32). Without His conviction you cannot be saved, and it is only He who can regenerate you.

Will you start doing the will of the Lord by surrendering yourself to Him? “Our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:3-4).

“And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires [or will] of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (Eph. 2:1-3). Humanity is divided into only two families – the children of God and the children of the devil. If we do the good will of God, the Lord Jesus calls us His family (Mark 3:31-35), and also sons and daughters of our heavenly Father (2 Cor. 6:17-18). The unsaved people, including all who only have a form of godliness, are called children of the devil (John 8:44; Acts 13:10). Do God’s will and become a member of His family! That is His request, desire and command to us.

### **His acceptable will**

A saved person has a biblical command to lead a holy, fruitful and acceptable life. That is the only form of religious worship which is pleasing to the Lord, and He is not satisfied with anything less than that (Rom. 12:1). A marginal Christian life of carnality and unfruitfulness is regarded as unacceptable. Such people will one day appear before Him with empty hands, saved as through fire (1 Cor. 3:1-3, 9-17). Do you do the Lord’s acceptable will with regard to holiness and service to Him?

A sanctified life – spirit, soul and body – is needed to fully comprehend further aspects of God’s will, and to living a life which is acceptable to Him. Has your heart and life been sanctified and do you bear fruit for eternal life, or do you grieve the Holy Spirit by not offering yourself to God as a living and holy sacrifice? Subject yourself to God’s will in this matter, and know that it will be pleasing for Him to equip you for service: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality. ... For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3, 7-8).

We must be cleansed from all filthiness and be holy in all our conduct (1 Pet. 1:15). The emphasising of sexual immorality confirms its widespread prevalence. The fleshly lusts and desires of people are exploited by Satan, and sexual temptations are experienced by most. The whole world is strongly disposed towards sensuality, and the producers of pornographic films and magazines, including those with porn websites, have become very wealthy.

Another very common stumbling-block in the way of a sanctified, Spirit-filled life is liquor abuse. These people’s behaviour is also at variance with God’s will: “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:17-18).

Tobacco, drugs and many other things can also defile you, “for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him” (2 Pet. 2:19; NIV). The solution of bondage to sin is obvious: “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Do not compromise with these sins, but cleanse yourself from all filthiness and offer yourself as a holy sacrifice in the service of the Lord. If you fail to do that, then you do not do His acceptable will and will not experience the blessing of a Spirit-filled life. An inconsistent spiritual life of falling and rising again is not to the honour of God.

### **His perfect will**

A person who has committed himself to sanctification by completely surrendering himself, and who is growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, will inevitably start striving after the perfect will of God for his life. This will, among others, lead to more clarity on your calling, as well as the best way in which it can be performed. Paul says: “I beseech you to lead a life worthy of the calling with which

you were called” (Eph. 4:1). You will have to determine how and where you can best serve the Lord.

We should not be content with rendering intermittent service to the Lord and pleasing Him only on certain occasions; neither should we be satisfied with little fruit if there is a possibility that more can be achieved for the Lord. We should pursue the perfect will of God for our lives to completely fulfil our calling as Christians. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians was: “that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9-10).

The purpose of this prayer for the Colossians was: “... that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12). They should strive to become acquainted with God’s perfect will and also to be doing it – not only His good and acceptable will.

Have you discovered the Lord’s perfect plan for your life? Paul prayed that the Ephesians may gain the same knowledge which alone can lead to deeper levels of dedication: “... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:17-18). He also prayed that the Father: “... would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:16-19).

### **Estrangement from God’s will**

The period of Joshua’s leadership was followed by the Judges’ period of great apostatising in Israel’s spiritual life. At times, under the leadership of a God-fearing judge, the situation improved, only to deteriorate again more than before after his death (Judg. 2:11-23). This pattern of inconsistency and repetitive periods of backsliding is also typical of New Testament Christianity.

The fact that you may do the acceptable and perfect will of God is no guarantee in itself that you will always keep on doing it. As never before, you will experience fierce opposition in your life. The devil will attack you in various ways and try to discourage you from continuing with the Lord’s work. He will tempt you to sin, and also actively try to deceive you by means of false doctrine. It will depend on your steadfastness, honesty, obedience and dedication to the Lord whether you will maintain your position in His perfect will.

Just as we can move forward in our spiritual life to become perfect and complete in all the will of God, we can also move backwards and lose what we had. It is possible to backslide from God’s perfect will without radically abandoning your calling. You will then bear less fruit, no more sixty or hundredfold, but still keep on serving the Lord and doing things that are pleasing to Him. But you will know that everything is not in order in your spiritual life.

Through examining and rededicating yourself you can be completely restored. Conversely, you can become largely uninvolved in God’s work, but still uphold your testimony as a Christian (God’s good will). At one stage, Peter and his fellow disciples decided to abandon their calling and to revert to their former occupation as fishermen. But they had no success with this endeavour, and the Lord Jesus visited them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to reconfirm their calling as fishers of men (John 21:3-17).

The Galatians also moved away from God’s acceptable will when they yielded to spiritual deception. Paul was surprised that backsliding could occur so easily, and pointed out that they were deceived: “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7). This congregation was warned that if they continued along the way of doctrinal defection from the truth, they would completely fall from the grace of Christ (Gal. 5:4).

The Ephesians were also warned that if they did not turn away from humanly motivated works and a self-imposed form of godliness, their lampstand (the symbol of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the church) would be removed from them. Spiritual darkness would then prevail in the church, and members would be followers of men, and no longer of the Lord Jesus.

## How to determine God's will

It is of the greatest importance that we always persevere on the narrow way upon which the Lord Jesus has put us through regeneration, and never deviate from it. The Lord counselled Joshua that His Word should always be the guide of his life, and that he should never deviate from it. If he honoured this principle, he would have a safe journey through life (Jos. 1:5-8). In a disposition of trust in the Lord he would receive power to overcome and would never have to fear any foe or be bogged down by problems. If the Lord was for him, who could be against him? Joshua was given this assurance: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go" (Jos. 1:9). It is equally important to us to have absolute clarity on God's will and to conform to it in all our conduct.

Within the wide framework of God's will we have to determine the finer detail concerning it on a regular basis and observe it. How should I make the decisions through which I give expression to my calling and what should I do if I am faced by a crossroad or a closed door? For these and various other matters I have to gain clarity in terms of God's will. In some cases the answer is clear and obvious, but in other cases one often doubts whether the right decision has been made. The following guidelines are suggested to determine God's will in specific situations:

**The Bible.** The Lord talks to us through His Word and often gives clear instructions that should be followed. In many cases we are only given broad principles which should be observed in the best possible way. But we should also be prepared to take no for an answer and refrain from continuing to read portions of Scripture until we find our own predetermined answer. Start doing what your hand finds to do – the Lord will guide you and give confirmation through His Word.

**Prayer.** We should inquire of God and know Him in all our ways (Prov. 3:6). Do not take one-sided decisions before you have prayed over a matter and acknowledged the Lord. He has promised that those who seek will find (Matt. 7:7). That also applies to our need for wisdom to be able to make decisions in accordance with His will: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God ... and it will be given to him" (Jas. 1:5).

**The Holy Spirit.** God's Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2). He will guide you into all truth (John 16:13), thus enabling you to discern between the truth of God's will and all the dangerous forms of deception. Also in this regard, much prayer and humbling before the Lord is needed in order to arrive at the correct decision and understanding of God's will.

**Circumstances.** The Lord also guides you through circumstances. He says: "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it" (Rev. 3:8). Keep your eyes open to opportunities which are open doors. Also be conscious of circumstances and opportunities which are contrary to the will of the Lord, and avoid them. Do not try to force open a closed door by imposing your own will upon a situation.

**Peace in your heart.** "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). You will experience peace in your mind when you do the right thing according to God's will. The person who does not have this peace of mind will be anxious and will experience an inner struggle. Such a person will then know that whatever he plans or does is not pleasing to God. Let peace always be your judge and do not continue with your plans without it: "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15).

**Common sense.** If you love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, your heart and mind will be sanctified and inclined to the Word of God. Through His Holy Spirit the Lord gives us enlightened eyes of the mind to understand His will and to honour it in the best possible way. He teaches us to use common sense while serving Him (Titus 2: 11-12; 1 Pet. 1:13), but that can only be done in a proper way if we strictly observe Christian principles.

**The desires of your heart.** The Holy Spirit instils noble desires in your heart which are to God's glory, "for it is God who works in you both to will and to work on behalf of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). An indication of God's will may be the desires that He Himself put in your heart. You are obliged to desire the things of the Lord: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2). When your desires are sanctified the Lord will give you an open door to realise them. But be mindful of the fact that temptations to sin will always be there, and you should

continue to resist worldly desires and evil passions.

**The right time.** Do not make hasty and impulsive decisions. The Lord does answer our prayers on His own appointed time: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Be patient and wait on the Lord.

When seeking God's will, we should strictly avoid situations of blindly accepting other people's counsel, particularly when these people (usually self-appointed prophets) allege that the Lord has revealed something about your calling to them which He did not reveal to you. There are many such "prophets" today who would try to influence you in a particular way to suit their own ends. Why would the Lord communicate directly with them on matters related to your future, and not with you? We are not living in Old Testament times when we need mediators to approach the Lord on our behalf. Good advice from Spirit-filled friends may be considered, but can never be the final indication on what you should or shouldn't do. God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is the final authority for harmonising your life.

As Joshua led his people to accept all the Lord's promises on a new life in the Promised Land, far away from Egypt, the Lord Jesus is our Leader who does not only forgive our sins but wants to make us heirs of all the promises on the victorious life. We should follow His guidance without deviating from it to the left or the right, be filled with His Spirit, and never compromise with the world. Then alone will we be securely on the right way leading to the New Jerusalem where we will always walk in the light of His presence. That will be the final rest in Yeshua which has been promised to all believers.