

# **“O GOD, WHY?”**

(a Study in Joshua 7)

By Evangelist Ken Lynch

All Scripture quotations are from the  
*1769 King James Version.*

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## Forward

### “O God, Why?”

It is a question that many of us have asked at one time or another. This book is a new and fresh look that is an easy read. Evangelist Ken Lynch has done an excellent job of addressing that question by looking at Joshua and the people of Israel as well as taking a look at Job, who also suffered, but not as a result of sin.

The issue of sin and judgment and the effects on individuals and whole nations is well laid out. There is a reminder of purity and holiness and a challenge for us to obey and depend upon our loving God.

This book would make a good study aid for individuals or Sunday School groups. We truly enjoyed reading “O God, Why?”

Paul & Judy Connor  
York, Pennsylvania



## Introduction

Have you ever gone through an experience in your life when you felt like throwing your up hands and crying out to the Lord and saying, maybe not in so many audible words, but certainly in your heart, something like this: “O God, why?! Why me? Why now? What have I done to deserve this?”

Well, that is exactly what went through the mind of Joshua following Israel’s defeat at Ai; a defeat that was completely unnecessary, if only... It is those “if only’s” that usually get us into trouble. Remember that God had promised total victory to Joshua in chapter one, verse five when He said, *“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.”* Unfortunately, as we shall see, it was man that forsook God, not the other way around.

God had made that same promise earlier to Moses in Deuteronomy 7:17-24, especially in verses twenty-three and twenty-four: *“But the LORD [Jehovah] thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he [God] shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: **there shall no man be able to stand before thee**, until thou have destroyed them.”*

The photo on the cover of this book shows a person in despair, perhaps wondering, “Why me?” While deserts often picture an empty life, mountaintops are often used to represent victory in the Christian life. The path leading to that place of “victory” is a picture of God’s Will for each of His children which, if followed, will lead to a spiritually victorious life. But when the path is left, the way becomes a drudgery and can become extremely difficult. Little joy is experienced on such a journey.



God had laid out His path for His people to follow. Up to this point, as it had been followed, victory was theirs. Only a short time before the events of this chapter, Joshua and the people of Israel had experienced (I almost said “enjoyed”) a truly great victory at the mighty city of Jericho without the loss of a single life (see Joshua, chapter 6). Humanly speaking, that was incredible... *except* that God had promised to deliver these inhabitants into their hands. And that is just what He did at Jericho. There was no need for loss of life then, or at any other time.

Chapter 6 ends with these words, “*So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country.*” But now, right on the heels of that great victory, and while the Lord is still with Joshua, Joshua’s people find themselves in a humiliating defeat causing him to cry out, “O God, ‘Why?’”

In the pages that follow, we will examine some of the contributing factors to the tragic defeat at Ai (where

victory should have been had) as well as both Joshua's response and God's response to his inquiry. We will conclude our study noting some very important lessons that can be gleaned from Joshua's experience which, *if* learned, will hold one in good stead. Read on.

We will also take a brief look at Job as there is an interesting and important comparison to be drawn from the life of Job. Even though Job suffered severely, the Bible makes it clear that it was *not* the result of sin. God allowed, for His own divine reasons, Satan to attack Job. While his suffering was severe, God kept him through it and, in the end, His grace and blessing for Job's faithfulness was made evident.

## Joshua 7

- 1 *But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.*
- 2 *And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.*
- 3 *And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few.*
- 4 *So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.*
- 5 *And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the*

*going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.*

6 *And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.*

7 *And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!*

8 *O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!*

9 *For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*

10 *And the LORD said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*

11 *Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even*

*taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.*

*12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.*

*13 Up, sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith the LORD God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.*

*14 In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which the LORD taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which the LORD shall take shall come by households; and the household which the LORD shall take shall come man by man.*

- 15 *And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, he and all that he hath: because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel.*
- 16 *So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken:*
- 17 *And he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken:*
- 18 *And he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.*
- 19 *And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.*
- 20 *And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done:*

- 21 *When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.*
- 22 *So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it.*
- 23 *And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.*
- 24 *And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.*
- 25 *And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him*

*with stones, and burned them with fire,  
after they had stoned them with stones.*

*26 And they raised over him a great  
heap of stones unto this day. So the  
LORD turned from the fierceness of his  
anger. Wherefore the name of that  
place was called, The valley of Achor,  
unto this day.*



# 1

## ISRAEL'S REBELLION & DEFEAT

### Perverseness

(1) *“But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing for Achan...took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.”*

Verse one begins with the word “But”; a conjunction that ties chapters six and seven together by way of contrast. Indeed, the LORD was with Joshua, for he *had* followed God in total obedience, as far as he was concerned. “But” not so with the people. Notice the first phrase here in verse one: *“But the **children** of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing.”*

Now we know from verse one, as well as verses eighteen and following, that it was really only *one* man, Achan, who had been disobedient. And yet, the whole body, the entire nation, is held accountable as if they had *all* disobeyed. Does that seem fair? Well, there is a reason and a fairly simple one at that. Achan was a part of the body, the nation of Israel. It was to the nation that God had given His instructions through Joshua. Therefore, if one member is found in disobedience, the entire body suffers shares in the consequences.

Nehemiah was a great man of God: a man who loved God, was faithful to God and who served God. He was also a great man of prayer. While he had not even been born at the time of Israel's captivity, and therefore *not* a part of the sin that caused her captivity, yet he prays the following earnest prayer: *"Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy*

*servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned*" (Nehemiah 1:6). Nehemiah recognized that he was a member of the nation that had sinned against God and suffered the dire consequences of that sin. He therefore humbly assumes some of the responsibility.

In a similar vein, the Apostle Paul writes, *"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it [that member], or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it"* (I Corinthians 12:26). In the following verse, he goes on to say that *"Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."* Potentially, all it takes to ruin the testimony of, and disgrace any local church's reputation in the community, is one member who is not right with God and who lives in sin. Unfortunately, too many carnal, worldly "Christians" are under the delusion that they can live any way they wish without the consequences. But choices have consequences as both the entire nation of

Israel and that one man in that nation were about to find out!

In the chapter that we are studying, there are at least ten references to the “children of Israel,” either directly or indirectly through the use of words like “they,” “them,” “their”, etc.

So, the very first contributing factor to the upcoming military defeat is their “perverseness,” their disobedience to the clear instruction, yea, the command, of God. That command involved the *accursed thing*.” Why in the world would taking some pieces of clothing and some money from a defeated enemy be wrong? Was it not true that then, and even to some extent today, there is the practice “*To the victor go the spoils?*” Way back in Genesis, when Abraham and his men defeated the kings who had taken his nephew and family captive, he took of the spoils and gave them to Melchisedec.

Throughout the historical books of the Bible, the spoils of war were seized by the

victor. Look at both Israel and Judah's losses when they were taken into captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively. Why, then, is it wrong in this instance and why is the nation defeated unnecessarily and one man condemned for what was an internationally common practice? The short answer is simply because God said so! Sin is sin because God says so. No other reason is necessary.

But there is more at stake here than just the spoils of war. God had both instructed the people about the need to "keep themselves from the accursed thing" and warned them about the consequences of failing to do so when He spoke about making the whole camp of Israel a curse, and bringing great trouble upon it [the nation].

What we actually have here is an example of the Law of "first fruits." The first use of this phrase is found in Exodus 22:29 where we read, "*Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruit...*" The "firsts" belong to God: firstborn among

their livestock (Exodus 22:30; 34:19-20); firstborn of their own children (Exodus 22:29b); and the first fruits of the land (Exodus 22:29). A special note was made in Deuteronomy 26 about the nation entering the land of promise where the people would “reap that which they had not sown.” They were instructed to take the *first* of all the fruit of the land, put it in a basket and present it to the priest who, in turn would present it to the LORD (Deut. 26: 2-5).

In Numbers 3, God chose the tribe of Levi to take the place of the firstborn of the people. Prior to that, each family had to make a special offering to the LORD to “redeem” their firstborn child, whereas the firstborn of their livestock was offered as a sacrifice to the LORD. Now God said, “*the Levites shall be mine.*” (See also Numbers 8:16.)

As the people of God crossed the Jordan River and entered the land of Canaan, the very first accomplishment in beginning to possess the land would be

the defeat of the great city of Jericho. The *first* engagement. Many more would follow, but Jericho was the first. That is why God, speaking through Joshua, said,

*“And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to **the LORD**: only Rahab the harlot shall live, and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. (18) And ye, in any wise **keep yourselves from the accursed thing**, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it. (19) But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are **consecrated to the LORD**: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.”* (Joshua 5:17-19)

Since Jericho was the first engagement, the spoils became a part of the “first fruits” of the land and belonged to God. When Achan took of the accursed thing he was actually stealing from God! Though it

was only one man who disobeyed God, he, as part of the nation, brought the judgement of God down on the rest of the people. If I were to strike you with my right fist, my left hand, as part of my body, becomes partaker in my body's action of striking your body.

God had told them what to do. As they obeyed God initially, they enjoyed a tremendous victory over Jericho. The sin of Achan took place near the end of the battle, perhaps during "clean-up" operations. In a way, the first word of Chapter 7, "But" brings to mind the sad ending of II Samuel 11 where we read, "*But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD*" (II Samuel 11:27b). Thus was "*the anger kindled against the children of Israel.*" One man sinned, but the rest had to pay.

## **Pride**

2 "*And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside*



*Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai.*

*3 And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few.”*

A second contributing factor in the humiliation of Israel is that of pride. The Bible still says that *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”* (Proverbs 16:18). The Apostle Paul exhorted us all with his challenge, *“Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall”* (II Corinthians 10:12).

It would seem that Israel, and even to some extent Joshua himself, got caught up in a little pride. Proud of what they had accomplished at Jericho, forgetting, if even for a moment, that it was God who had promised to give them victory, if they

obeyed. It was God, not Joshua, who devised one of the world's most unusual battle strategies<sup>1</sup>: that of marching around the city in total silence once a day for six days followed by marching around the city seven times on the seventh day; and that followed by the blowing of trumpets and the shouting of the people!

Now that the victory at Jericho is complete, General Joshua turns to his next conquest, the little village of Ai. He sent up a small reconnaissance team to view the city before he developed his battle strategy. Word came back indicating that, compared to Jericho, the taking of Ai would be a piece of cake. Though it had a wall to protect it, it was just a small village compared to Jericho. It would almost be like taking candy from a kid! By the way, did you ever try taking candy from a kid? Not as easy as one may think.

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<sup>1</sup> Another example of a Divine strategy would be Gideon and his 300 men recorded in Judges 7.

The report came back, “We don’t need the whole army to get this job done. Just send in a battalion or two. Or, as the Bible puts it, *“Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labor thither; for they are but few”* (v. 3). Their thinking was, “Man, if we can take a big city like Jericho, without the loss of a single life, this is going to be easy. Why, just a few men can get the job done.” Already, these men were taking credit for what God had done. How quickly they had forgotten God’s promise to them. How quickly they had forgotten the extremely unusual way in which the city had been taken. No human mind would ever have conceived the idea of marching around a city once a day for nearly a week. They were looking at Jericho as *their* accomplishment, not God’s.

How many times, after experiencing a great spiritual victory, do we find ourselves taking credit for what God did. James reminds us that *“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”*

(James 4:6b). The people of Israel were proud of “their” accomplishments and were about to experience the “resistance of God.”

## **Punishment**

While God takes no pleasure in “punishing” His people, He does so because He *must* and because He loves His children (Deuteronomy 8:5; Job 5:17; Psalm 94:12; Hebrews 12: 5-11). God is loving, but He is also holy and just and therefore can “*by no means clear the guilty*” (Exodus 34:7).

God’s punishment was severe, to be sure, but it was warranted. There are some who think God is too severe in sending people to hell. What is missed is the important point that God does *not* send anyone to hell. In fact, “*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [means anybody] believeth in him should not perish [and go to hell] but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the*

*world; but [rather] that the world through him might be saved”* (John 3:16-17). People go to hell because they refuse to believe in Christ, the only hope of heaven. People go to hell because, instead of receiving Christ, they reject and refuse him (John 1:11-12; 3:18).

In this case, God had already warned the people about their becoming accursed if they disobeyed, as a people. Therefore, having been properly warned about the consequences of disobedience, their punishment was appropriate. This punishment played out in three distinct ways, which we will now examine.

### ***Defeat***

*4 “So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.”*

Instead of the expected easy victory, Israel was shocked beyond belief that Ai had won, and they had been defeated! Whoever would have thought that

possible? But such was the case. Verse four makes the simple statement that the three thousand men “*fled before the men of Ai.*” The word “fled” would also suggest the idea of fear. The same word is used in Proverbs 28:1 where the Bible says that “*The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but [by way of contrast] the righteous are bold as a lion.*” There was no need for *fear* and there was no need for flight *if* they had *all* obeyed the commandment they were given. Now, the nation stands in humiliating defeat.

## ***Death***

*5a “And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down...”*

How tragic this, is, especially when we understand that God had earlier said that no man would be able to stand before them. Yet, here, not only is the enemy still standing, but they are actually killing God’s people and have them, the

Israelites, on the run! Thirty-six men are dead. Perhaps there are now thirty-six weeping widows and only God knows how many fatherless children—all because of one man's sin.

Part of the judgement that fell was on the family of Achan for his entire family suffered death as well. Since Moses had made the following declaration in Deuteronomy 24:16 that "*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin,*" it may be safely assumed that his family, either assisted him in the cover up, or, at the very least, were in some way privy to his actions. Today the legal term would be "accessary after the fact involving a felony" making them as guilty as he was.

Beyond that, we are told in Joshua 22:20 that "*Achan commit[ed] a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? And that man perished not alone in his iniquity.*" Achan, all the members of his immediate family

and thirty-six men died as a result of one man's single act of disobedience.

### ***Discouragement***

*5b "...wherefore the hearts of the people melted and became as water.  
6 And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads."*

Hearts that melted like water suggests a faint-heartedness. Water has no ability to stand; it merely runs along wherever it can find a route; and it always takes the easiest route.

In these two verses, there are three expressions of deeply felt grief to the point of despair. Notice first, Joshua rent his clothes; literally, tore them - both he and the elders who also felt this keen sense of despair. Second, he and the elders fell on their faces, not only a sign of reverence but also a sign of grief.



Third, they put dust upon their heads. While any one of these actions would have signified grief and sorrow, taken collectively, they demonstrate how painfully deep their grief and despair was felt.

This kind of grief and despair was the very thing that the LORD had warned Joshua about in Chapter One when He said, “*be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed*” (1:9). The word *afraid* means “to be affrighted or terrified” and the word *dismayed* means the idea of “confusion; to fear; to beat down and cause discouragement.” In this case, Joshua had allowed himself to become “beat down with discouragement.” And no wonder after the promises made to him earlier (see 1:9). He feels bewildered and betrayed. And that leads to the next section: his request and desire.



## JOSHUA'S REQUEST AND DESIRE

### He Declares His Case Against God

7 *“And Joshua said, ‘Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!’”*

It is at this point in his life that we find this strong, experienced military leader, with clothes that have been torn and dust on his head, on his face before the ark of God, lying there in utter despair crying out to God. It must have been a most pathetic scene, indeed! Notice his cry, his desperate plea, *“Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore...”*—in a literal sense, *“O GOD, Why?”*

He continues his wail before God, *“wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan.”* Wow! Not only does Joshua dare to bring his case against God, he actually has the audacity to blame God! His first assumption is that, somehow, God has failed! *“Why have You done this to us?”* He never even considered the possibility that somewhere, someone in the camp of Israel might have failed; ah, no! He just automatically assumed that, since God had promised him a victory and, instead, they suffered a devastating defeat, it must be God’s fault. Either He forgot about His promise or .... He simply failed and let His people down.

Now, before we are too quick to judge Joshua too harshly, is it not true that we often find ourselves doing the same thing? We too quickly assume that God is at fault, never considering that there just might happen to be some responsibility and

accountability on our own part. Perhaps it has become a part of the fiber of our modern society to blame some else before ourselves.

He then begins to bemoan himself in a most pitiable way, saying, in essence, “If only we had never come to this God-forsaken place - for he is accusing God of forsaking His people—and been content to stay put where we were.” Wait a minute. Joshua *knew* what he was saying to God was wrong. He *knew* the promise and conditions God had laid out for him in Chapter One. He *knew* that to remain on the “other side of Jordan” would have meant to be out of the will of God! Yes, he *knew* all of that. But in a moment of weakness, he was just feeling sorry for himself. Even worse, instead of remaining a strong, spiritual leader, he had become a terrible example to those around him for they, too, knew all that Joshua knew. Instead of remaining fearless, he had become fearful. Rather than remaining strong in character and leadership, he had allowed himself to become dismayed,

discouraged and weak. Showing how contagious this kind of attitude can be, his discouragement affected those around him causing them to become discouraged as well. That explains why the elders fell on their faces before the ark of God, heads covered in dust!

My challenge to you, the reader - and to myself, is this. Whenever God brings what seems to be some kind of calamity or trial into our lives; when things seem as though they could not be more wrong; *never, never* question God with the assumption that He is wrong. Far better to assume that you and I are wrong, but *never* God.

Now, it is one thing to question God with the question, "Why?" with the attitude of truly desiring to know what you have done, if anything, or to find out what lesson God has for you to learn through whatever the experience is. It might be that either 1) God is dealing with you as a result of sin or 2) He is trying to teach you a lesson you may never be able to learn any other way. In the first

case, you need to recognize the sin, confess it, experience His forgiveness and get on with your life for His glory. In the second case, similar to that of both Job and the Apostle Paul (II Corinthians 12:7-10), learn the lessons He is trying to teach and put them into practice.

However, it is quite another matter to question God with the attitude of, “God, how dare you bring this into my life? I thought you said You loved me. If that is so, why this?” To assume that God is wrong, has either forgotten or failed you, is an attack on the very character and nature of God. I suspect that, based on the context, Joshua’s question to God is of the latter. True, he wants to know why, but he is assuming at the same time that God has failed and forsaken him. God had, indeed “forsaken” His people, but He had not failed them. *They* had failed Him.

Wishing he and the children of Israel had stayed behind and remained in Egypt was certainly not the answer. It was a carnal response to a difficult situation

that had been caused by man's failure to comply with God's righteous demands.

## **He Desires to Know the Cause of God's Leaving**

*8 "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies?"*

In his despair, Joshua cries out to God, in essence, saying something to the effect, "God, *Your* reputation is on the line. What am I to say to those who will think *Your* people are cowards when they turned their backs before their enemies? There must be some reason for what has happened. What is it?" It is at this point that Joshua seems to begin to realize that there was something going on that he did not understand. His question, "*O Lord, what shall I say...*" has gone from an accusation, "*O Lord GOD, why?*" to a sincere desire to know 1) what has happened, 2) why has it happened, and 3) where do we go from here?



## He Desires to Know the Condition for God's Return (v.9)

*9 "For the Cananites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?"*

His observation as expressed in verse 9 seems to bring the case before God with a plea, "*and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?*" Joshua seems to have a clear understanding that the events that have just taken place are so monumental that the very name of God could be brought to ridicule and scorn by the wicked Gentile nations they had been told to conquer. You will recall that the residents of Jericho had heard of Joshua and the children of Israel long before they approached the city. The entire city was chained in fear of God's people even before the two spies from Israel became known (Joshua 2:8-12).

Now, with this crushing defeat, what would the rest of the inhabitants of the land think? Perhaps the victory at Jericho was just an aberration, just “one of those things.” Perhaps the rest of the people in the land would think that Israel was not to be feared after all. It is not difficult to see how this one incident had some potentially far reaching results, affecting both the lives of God’s people with discouragement and the lives of the heathen people yet living in the land with a spirit of hope.

Basically, Joshua is saying, “God, obviously, You have left us for Your own reasons, else this would not have befallen us. What will it take for us to have Your return and Your blessing?”

Thank God for His promise that He will *never* leave or forsake us. If we feel forsaken, it is only because we will have forsaken Him and, as a result, fail to sense His presence.

## JEHOVAH'S RESPONSE AND DEMAND

God has heard enough. While truly wanting to know what it will take for the people to once again know the presence of God in their midst, Joshua has, none-the-less, made his case against God. Now God responds with His answer.

In His response to Joshua, God seems to be rather stern, almost harsh. However harsh it may seem, it was a response that was justified. In verse ten, the words of Jehovah are, "*Get thee up...*" In reading these words, I can almost feel an exclamation point! "*Wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*" It is as though God is saying to Joshua, "Get up, man! How dare you lie there on your face wallowing in a pool of self-pity! Get up! You want to know why my presence is no

longer sensed in the camp? Get up and I will tell you why.”

## **The Cause of God’s Leaving**

*10 And the LORD said unto Joshua, ‘Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*

*11a Israel hath sinned...*

God makes no attempt at being gentle here or of “soft-soaping” the matter. He goes right to the point without wasting or mincing words. *“Israel hath sinned.”* Interesting to note the use of the collective word “Israel” when, in fact, it was one man, Achan, who, at this point, had yet to be identified. But that one man was a part of the whole. It is something like a toothache. When one has a bad toothache, while the problem is in the tooth only, the whole body hurts. Achan may have been just a tooth, but that “tooth” affected the

whole body, hence God says, *“Israel hath sinned.”*

Jehovah continues His response by 1) describing their sin and 2) by noting the devastating results of that sin. He says, *“they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff”* (v. 11). Between verses eleven and twelve there are ten references to the body as a whole. Achan will not be singled out until further on in the chapter. For now, it is “Israel,” “they,” “their,” and “the children of Israel”.

There are some strong charges that God lays before Joshua. First, *“They have transgressed my covenant.”* Covenants were to be taken *very* seriously, especially when made with God. The word “transgressed” has the idea of “failing to keep one’s word,” in this case a covenant with God Himself.

The following verses found in Ecclesiastes 5 indicate how serious a matter it is to make a covenant (or vow) with God.

*“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart to be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few”* (v. 2).

*“When thou vowest a vow [or “make a covenant”] unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay”* (v. 4-5).

In fact, Moses devoted an entire chapter in the book of Numbers (Chapter 30) to the importance of making and keeping vows.

Second, God charged Israel with stealing, of taking that which did not belong to them. Remember that the spoils of Jericho were to be presented to God following the principle of “first fruits.” Therefore, God is correct in charging them

with taking that which belonged to Him. The word can also carry the idea of “stealth” – trying to do something secretly. Achan knew exactly what he was doing. While he knew it was wrong, he thought he could get away with it. *“Be sure your sin will find you out”* (Numbers 32:23).

I fear that there may be many professing Christians in churches all across America, and around the world, who are “stealing” from God by taking what does not belong to them, namely, the tithe. (See Malachi 3.) As a believer, my body (both material and immaterial), my talents and gifts, all belong to God. In so much as I refuse to give them to God—as I refuse to present to Him my whole being as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2)—I become guilty of stealing from God that which is His—me! Something to think about, for sure.

Not only was Achan guilty of stealing from God, he was also guilty of stealing from all of the people as well. “How?” you say. By his defiant act of disobedience and rebellion against the known will of God,

Achan actually *stole* the blessing of God from the children of Israel. He *robbed* them of the victory God had intended for them.

Third, the children of Israel are charged with “dissembling.” This word conveys the idea of being untrue, of being found a liar. It is basic “dishonesty.” When a man’s word cannot be trusted, he has lost everything. The Apostle Paul exhorts believers about the importance of honesty, not before God only, but also before men (Romans 12:17; II Corinthians 8:21). Since there is no actual statement in the record beyond this accusation from God, it is possible that Achan lied to someone about where he had obtained these “articles.” Whatever the case, when God said he “dissembled” (or lied), you can be sure that it was so.

Finally, God charges them with being deceitful. God said, “*they have put it even among their own stuff*” (7:11). An attempt was made to try and conceal the stolen items by hiding among their own stuff in



the midst of one of their own tents. How sad it is to, not only steal from God, but to make a foolishly vain attempt to hide it from the One who sees and knows all. The writer of Hebrews says that “*all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*” (Hebrews 4:13b). But do we not find ourselves sometimes guilty of similar actions today? There are many folks today who think that they can cover or hide their sin from God by going through religious rituals like the Mass, Confession, Baptism, Good Works, etc. The sad truth is that absolutely *nothing* can be hid from an all-knowing God. *Nothing* is unknown to Him. *Nothing* takes Him by surprise. Too bad that Achan either did not realize that fact or didn’t care.

### **The Condition for His Return** (v. 12-13)

*12 “Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you*

*any more, except ye destroy the  
accursed from among you*

*13 Up, sanctify the people, and  
say, Sanctify yourselves against  
tomorrow: for thus saith the LORD  
GOD of Israel, There is an accursed  
thing in the midst of thee, O Israel:  
thou canst not stand before thine  
enemies, until ye take away the  
accursed thing from among you.”*

Here, the Lord acknowledges to Joshua that his observation was correct as far as the lack of God’s presence and power was concerned after which He charges the children of Israel with four counts of sin. But before He lays down the conditions for His return, He reviews the pathetic condition of His people (v.12). He makes it unmistakably clear that the reason *“the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies but turned their backs before [them]”* was due to the four counts of sin just mentioned. Believers today need to be reminded of the words of Jesus recorded in John 15: *“Without me, ye can do nothing.”* The Psalmist put it this way in

Psalm 66:18: *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”* Though the believer today can *NEVER* lose their relationship with God through sin, *they CAN* lose their fellowship with Him if it is not dealt with.

He once more reminds them that, because *they* took of the accursed thing, they, themselves, had become a curse. Furthermore, God declares that He will *not* return to His people until they meet His just demands. That condition is very simple, yet profound: ***deal with sin!*** *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (I John 1:9). Until that sin is dealt with, God said that he would not be with them anymore (v. 12b).

Dealing with sin is not always an easy matter nor is it a pleasant one. But, in order to maintain fellowship with God, it is absolutely necessary. There are times when sin needs to be exposed publicly, especially when it has a direct impact publicly. That is the case here. But before the individual is exposed and separated

from the body, the *whole* body needed to sanctify themselves as part of God's condition. The word "sanctify" means "to be regarded and treated as holy and is used of persons consecrated to God".<sup>2</sup> The idea is that of separating from the ordinary and the mundane and unto the Lord. Part of dealing with sin is separating ourselves unto the Lord in sanctification.

### ***The Procedure***

At this point, everything has come to a complete standstill. God has demanded that the people sanctify themselves and prepare for what comes next. That, having been done, God now established a particular procedure to be followed in determining the identity of the guilty party. It is not only important to be active in "doing" God's work; it is of equal importance that it be done God's way.

The people were first taken by tribe; then by family; then by households; and,

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies: William Wilson, MacDonald Publishing Co., McClean, VA n.d., p. 366.

finally, man by man (v. 14). It was the man by man part that would ultimately expose the guilty party. When that happened, God spelled out the necessary sentence. Throughout the entire Bible there is found the principle of “Cause and Effect.” Here is one of many examples. The Cause was the violation of the covenant. The word translated *folly* means “a “crime.”<sup>3</sup> It carries with it the idea of punishment as a result. The Effect was the condemnation of God on the guilty. Remember, the God Who is a God of love and mercy is also a God of righteousness and justice. Too many are willing to acknowledge a loving and merciful God and at the same time deny a just and righteous God. The God of the Bible is either both or He is neither.

In the following verses, the procedure is followed by Joshua, and Achan is, at last, exposed. He was challenged by Joshua to, basically, tell the truth. It would do him no good to lie now or to continue to try and hide his crime and sin.

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<sup>3</sup> See Strong’s Concordance.

Achan realized now that, not only had he done wrong, not only was he responsible for the defeat of the nation and the deaths of thirty-six men, he could no longer conceal his wrongdoing. So he acknowledged what he has done with these words, *I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel...*” (v. 20).

It is also to be noted that all sin is, first and foremost, against God. Sin is sin, if for no other reason, because God said so! A good verse to keep in mind is Genesis 39:9 where, in the midst of a great temptation, young Joseph told Potiphar’s wife, *“How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”* In a similar vein, David cried unto the Lord after his sin with Bathsheba was exposed, *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, have I done this evil in thy sight... (Psalm 51:4).*

It is also interesting to note the steps that took place in Achan’s mind in the commission of this “crime.” Observe his own words, *“When I saw...”* In the course of overtaking the city of Jericho, he saw some expensive clothes and a sizeable

amount of “money” (v. 21) in the gold and silver. These articles would suggest that, although the city was relatively small in size covering only about six acres<sup>4</sup>, it was heavily populated and quite wealthy. I suppose that Achan may have thought, “Why should all this gold and silver go to waste?”, forgetting that it belonged to Jehovah.

One need only remember Eve in the Garden of Eden who “*saw*” that the fruit was pleasant to the *eye*.” And then there is the Apostle John’s warning recorded in I John 2;16: “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*” How many of man’s sinful deeds began with but a glance, a mere look, only God knows.

Then he said, “*I coveted them...*”. Less than forty years had passed since God gave the Ten Commandments through Moses the last, of which, states, “*Thou*

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<sup>4</sup> Unger’s Bible Dictionary, Merrill Unger; Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1980; p. 573.

*shalt not covet.*” The word *covet* literally means “to delight in.” As it was used in Exodus 20, it had specific reference to delighting in that which belonged to another wishing it was yours. And that is exactly what has happened to Achan. He saw, then he coveted and desired to have for his own that which belonged to another, namely Jehovah.

The third step was the final act: “[I] took them.” Here was the final act of appropriating for himself the property of another. Before a thief steals, he first sees, then covets (desires to have). The actual act of stealing then follows. That is one reason why it is so important for a Christian to be very careful about that upon which he gazes. A passing look or glance is one thing. But to gaze upon is quite another. It is the gaze that potentially leads closer to sin. For example: a man may helplessly “see” an immodestly dressed woman walk by him. That passing sight or glance is innocent enough. But the second look, for which the man is totally responsible, can become a



“gaze” that can lead to lust in the heart. Before David sinned with Bathsheba, he first “saw” her in a way he should not have seen her. It was that sight of her that led to his lust for her and his ultimate act of adultery with her.

Having committed the final act, Achan now hurried to hide them in his tent where he thought no one would ever know. The fact that he hid these items in his tent, actually burying them in the ground inside of his tent, is a clear indication that he knew what he was doing and knew it was wrong. He was, no doubt, terrified of being found out. He was confident that he had sufficiently “covered his tracks” forgetting that, while not one single person among the children of Israel knew what he had done, God Almighty knew. No one can get away with sin forever. Oh, there are those who *think* they have gotten away with sin, and maybe even seem as if they have in this life. But there is eternity and there is a God to whom every person will give an account. Yes, there *is* accountability!

His sin and rebellion against God have now been exposed before all the people. How mortifying that must have been for him as well as for his entire family who were somehow involved in his scheme. Joshua sent a team to check out the story. Indeed, they discovered all the evidence right where Achan had told them he had put it. The evidence was brought to Joshua and laid *“before the LORD”* for all to see.

### ***The Punishment***

The verses to the end of the chapter (v. 24-26) relate to the final judgment of God, exercised through the proper civil authorities, on Achan and those who had allowed themselves to be partakers in his scheme. One interesting note here. Even the “stolen” items (the expensive clothing, the gold and silver that were supposed to go to the treasury of the Lord) were destroyed. Was it because these items that were to be “holy unto the Lord” had become tainted with the evil touch of sin and been thus defiled? Perhaps. But the

Bible does not answer that question so we must leave it.

The sad truth is that Achan, and all that related to him (his children, his livestock, even his tent) were condemned and destroyed. Remember that God had made it very clear to Joshua that He would no longer be with His people *until* they had “*destroyed the accursed from among you*” (v. 12). Notice the word “from.” That word denotes the principle of separation. The children of Israel, as it is for us today, were not only to separate themselves *unto* God, they were to separate themselves *from* that which displeased God. In this particular case, it involved the “accursed thing” as well as the “accursed people” involved. Until it was dealt with, the blessing of God would be no more.



**LESSONS TO BE REMEMBERED AND DONE**

Obviously, one cannot read this chapter in the Bible without realizing the importance of obedience to both the Word of God *and* the Will of God. There are some very important lessons to be learned from this incident in the life of Old Testament Israel.

It is good to keep in mind that, while the New Testament Church is *not* a replacement of the nation of Israel, Israel as portrayed in the Old Testament and taken collectively, is a picture, or a type, of the individual believer in the New Testament. As the nation of Israel is God's chosen people, so the individual believer today is "*chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world*".

While it is important to be careful about how to interpret a passage where God speaks to Israel, it needs to be

remembered that, while *particulars* may change, *principles* are timeless. They never change.

Here, then, are four important lessons that can be learned from this passage. These four do not constitute by any means an exhaustive list. They are, however, four major lessons that need to be learned and lived by God's grace and for His glory.

### **The Presence of an All-Knowing God**

It would appear that Achan, as well as his family, seemed completely unaware of the presence of an all-knowing God. After all, no one was around when he took the forbidden items. Who was to know?

The story has often been told of two boys playing outside when, suddenly, one boy looked around to see if anyone was looking. Seeing no one, he hauled off and struck his friend for no apparent reason. What the boy did not know is that his father happened to be looking out the window at that very moment and saw the

whole thing. When confronted, the boy denied hitting his friend until his father told him, "Son, I saw you do it. I was watching from the window!" Does not this story, as well as the incident before us, remind us of how often we forget that the presence of God is a constant. Nothing we do goes by without His knowledge.

Many years ago, Dr. A.W. Tozer challenged God's people about the importance of learning to "practice the presence of God." To realize that at every moment of every day, God's presence is with His people. Even for those who are *not* His people, He still sees and knows everything about them; everything they say; everything they do; every thought that prances across the platform of their mind. All is known to God.

In Psalm 139 we read these words: "*Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [lit. "hades" or the grave], behold thou art there*" (v. 7). There is absolutely no place on earth where an

individual can successfully run from the presence of God. Adam tried it and was found out as was Jonah. Believers today are no exception either.

### **The Power of a Single Sin** (v. 12a)

There are many references scattered through the Bible that demonstrate the powerful effects of a single act of sin.

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 9:18 that *“one sinner destroyeth much good.”*

Jonah is a sad example of how sin affects others. Jonah had no heart for the people to whom God had sent him; so he attempted to flee from the presence of God and decided that it was about time for him to take that Mediterranean cruise he had always dreamed about! He went down to Joppa to board a ship headed toward Tarsus.

But God knew his heart and was not going to let him off that easily. You know the rest of the story - about the storm, the



special fish (or whale) that God had prepared for Jonah.

The point here is this: the storm God sent was unlike any storm those seasoned mariners on board that ship had ever seen before. And the life of every one of them was in danger of being lost...all because of *one man's sin!*

Then there is the example of Abraham who became impatient with God's timetable. God had promised him an heir through whom He would bless the world. But, year after year, no such heir came. Abraham pleaded with God, "*...lo, one born in my house is my heir*" (Genesis 15:3). God basically told him, "No, not this one but one that will come directly from you!" (v. 4) The years continued to tick by until Abraham was about eighty-five years old - and still no heir. Eighty-five is generally considered past the age of being able to father a child. Sarah, herself becoming desperate, gave to her husband her handmaid and encouraged him to give her a child through Hagar. Since Hagar was only a handmaid, any child thus

produced would be considered as hers. This impatience resulted in the birth of Ishmael, son of the flesh, not faith. The angel of the LORD described this young man as one who would *“be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him...”* (Genesis 16:12).

It was not until Abraham was a hundred years old, and Sarah ninety years of age, that Isaac was finally born, a true son of faith. If only... After Isaac was born, a conflict began that has carried down to the very present hour – a hatred for the Jew, both individually and collectively.

Of all the examples, there is one that stands out above them all. It took place in the Garden of Eden. One man ate of the forbidden fruit resulting in the entrance of sin into the world with all of its devastating effects, including the fallen nature of *all* future offspring down to the present day. Yes, it started with Adam, and because of Adam, *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:12, “*Wherefore as by **one man** sin entered into the world...*”

Again, in First Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter, Paul wrote in verse 22, “*For as in Adam all die...*”

Here in Joshua 7, we have yet another example. One man, Achan, sinned and, not only was the blessing of God withheld from the entire nation, but the children of Israel collectively found themselves under the judgment of God! Soldiers unnecessarily lost their lives and many families were disrupted because of one man’s sin.

Each local church is made up of individual believers. Every one of them represents the church body as a whole. In fact, for many people in the community, the only thing they know about a particular church is what they see in its individual members. All it takes to destroy (and sometimes for years to come) the testimony of a local Bible-preaching church is *one* member who falls into sin,

either doctrinally or morally. Particularly in smaller, more rural communities, people have really long memories and they do not easily forget. Once the testimony of a church has been marred by sin, it can take years, even decades, for it to recover. Sometimes it never recovers. All because of one person's sin decades earlier.

### **The Powerlessness of Man Without God**

A third lesson to be learned is the powerlessness of man to accomplish anything of lasting value apart from God. God told Joshua that the children of Israel could not stand, but turned their backs and ran from their enemies expressly because they had tried to do the work with "sin in the camp." Even though the sin was virtually unknown to the vast majority of the people, in fact all but Achan's own family, the effect was the same. Even, apart from Achan's sin, Joshua himself had apparently stepped out in the flesh, without seeking the mind of God first when he sent in the two spies to go in to

the city and bring back a report. It was based on that report that Joshua developed his “battle” plan to take Ai. And so the two-fold matter of sin and self-confidence resulted in a powerless army.

Jesus told His disciples in John 15:4-5, *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the tree cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for **without me ye can do nothing.**”* He was not saying that a man cannot be busy but, rather, that even though busy, it accounts for nothing if done in the arm of the flesh and without the power of God. Without the power of God, all such service becomes “wood, hay and stubble” with no lasting, eternal value. Churches have their programs, their ministries, their “business” but are often lacking in the power of God. Just because a particular ministry may be large in numbers, facilities and ministries does not mean that it is a successful ministry in the eyes

of God. The crying need of our day is not filling buildings with people, but filling people with the Word of God. We need “full” Christians, not full buildings.

On the other hand, Paul’s testimony was, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Philippians 4:13). The problem with this verse in modern practice is that it is often cut short. *“I can do all things,”* period. And that is where the trouble starts.

The statement is qualified, *“through Christ who strengththeneth me.”* It is God, in the person of Christ, who gives the believer strength thus enabling him to be able to “do all things.”

Paul put it this way, *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall”* (I Corinthians 10:12). Beware of the Christian who thinks he has it all together; he’s about to fall.

Proverbs 16:18 makes it clear: *“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”*.

## The Need for Purity

The need for purity cannot be over-emphasized today. God does not demand perfection; He *does* expect purity. In Leviticus 11:44, God said to Israel, “*For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy...*” In the next verse God says it again, “*ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.*”

Lest you find yourself saying (as some do), “Oh, that’s Old Testament. That was under the Law and we are under Grace.” May I remind you, dear friend, that holiness is not “Old Testament.” It is the very nature and character of God and is expected in *all* ages. The Apostle Peter (that’s the New Testament) quoted from Leviticus 11 in the first chapter of his first letter when he wrote, “*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [lifestyle]; Because it is written, ‘Be ye holy; for I am holy’*” (I Peter 1:15-16).

To be holy is simply to be set apart from sin or, as Strong's Concordance puts it, "physically pure, morally blameless." The seraphim in Isaiah 6 cried out, "*Holy! Holy! Holy! Is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory*" (v. 3). God the Father is holy; God the Son is holy; God the Holy Spirit is holy; hence the word "holy" here used three times.

In Joshua 7 that we are studying, God is making it very clear to all the people that there must be purity or there (at that time) can be no divine presence.<sup>5</sup> The accursed thing (and persons) must be dealt with and removed in order for God's presence and power to return. We can

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the Holy Spirit did *not* permanently indwell believers until the Day of Pentecost. When Hebrews 13:5 states that I will never leave nor forsake you, it must be interpreted to be for believers under Grace. It should be further noted that the absence of the Holy Spirit, or His leaving, did not mean the loss of one's salvation or relationship to God.

The Spirit came upon Samson enabling him to do some feat of strength, then left to return later; it was not a permanent indwelling. When David begged God to not take His Holy Spirit from him, it did not mean he lost his salvation. God *did* take the Spirit from Saul, but Saul still belonged to God.



never be perfect until we are glorified, but we *can* be holy. Since holiness is a command of God (I Peter 1:14-15), it is possible for a believer to be holy for he “*can do all things [be holy] through Christ [his enabler].*” In other words, God does not ask, much less command, a child of His to do that which He will not enable him to do by His grace, in His power and for His glory. (See I Corinthians 10:13.)

If God says you are to be holy (Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 1:14-15), you can be holy. If God says you are to be strong, you can be strong (Joshua 1:6,7,9; Ephesians 6:10). If God tells you not to fear (Joshua 1:9; II Timothy 1:7), you do not have to fear. Whatever God desires or demands of you as a child of His, you can do through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

After the sin had been dealt with and done away, Chapter 8 begins anew as God says to Joshua (almost as though it were a refresher course), “*Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have*

*given them into thy hand...*” He even reminds them that the spoils of Ai are theirs for the taking. Now that sin has been dealt with, and the children of Israel are in a right standing with God, they are given a fresh, new start.

And it can be so for the Christian today for the Bible says that *“if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (I John 1:9).

So, the next time some severe trial overtakes you and you are tempted to cry out in despair, much like Joshua, “O God, why?!”, go to Him with a prayerful inquiry to discover what it is He wants you to learn from this experience (like Job). If you find that there is sin in your life that may be the cause, don’t allow yourself to become frustrated with, or angry at, God; deal with your sin. Confess it, forsake it (Proverbs 28:13) and get on with your life. Take God at His word. He said, “If you confess, I will forgive and cleanse you.” To fail to believe Him is to become guilty of

charging God foolishly and of calling Him a liar!

Deal with sin, as David did (Psalm 51), and have the joy and power of God restored to your life.

May God richly bless you as you seek earnestly to live for Him and serve Him.



## The Other Side of the Coin

Our study in this book has so far focused on the life of Joshua and the nation of Israel. However, there is another side to the coin that needs to be addressed as experienced in the life of Job.

In Joshua's case, the difficulties he and the people faced were a direct result of sin in the camp; sin of which he was personally unaware until after God's judgement fell at Ai. In response to Joshua's plea, "O God, why?" God exposed the sin that had brought down His judgment.

But such was not true in the case of Job. The reader may recall that Job's three friends, while well-meaning, assumed that there was sin in Job's life for which God was judging him. Eliphaz said to him, "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen,

that they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (Job 4:6-7).

Bildad made a similar accusation when he said to Job, “Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evil doers” (Job 8:20). And likewise Zophar: “...Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth” (Job 11:6b).

These were the opinions of three men. But what of God’s opinion? Was God indeed punishing Job for some sin as was clearly the case in Joshua 7? Or was there something else?

The answer to that question, requires a look at the first two chapters of the book of Job. It is there that we are told what God’s opinion of just what kind of man he was, both materially and spiritually.

In the material sense, he was the richest man in the known world at that time “so that he was the greatest of all the men of the east” (1:3).

Of his spiritual sense there are *five* important characteristics that are

mentioned. The first four are found in verse one.

1. He was a “perfect man.”
2. He was an “upright” man.
3. He was a “God-fearing” man.
4. He “eschewed” [avoided] evil.
5. He was a man of prayer (1:5).

The word translated “perfect” literally means “complete or unusually pious.”<sup>6</sup> The word “upright” carries with it the idea of being “straight or straight forward.” He was a “straight-shooter” in his dealings with a high degree of honesty and integrity.

As a “God-fearing” man he understood, long before the book of Proverbs was written, the Biblical principle that the “fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). He also understood that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). In Proverbs 16:6 we are told that it is “by the fear of the LORD [that] men depart from evil.” This was exemplified in his life by the fourth description of his

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<sup>6</sup> Strong’s Concordance.

character as one who “eschewed” [or avoided] evil.

In verse 5 of Job 1, we find that Job was a man of prayer; praying “continually” for his children.

This description of Job is further given by God Himself when challenging Satan with the question, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth [avoids] evil?” (Job 1:8).

When Satan responds to God by basically saying, “Is it any wonder? Look at how You have blessed him. You have put a hedge of protection around him. But look, You remove that wall of protection, You lift Your Hand of blessing and turn him over to me and I’ll get him to curse You to Your Face!” God did not hesitate to grant His Divine permission. *However*, with His permission God *also* put limitations on just how far Satan could go by saying, “Behold, all that he *hath* [his material goods, including his family] is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.” In Chapter Two, God



allows Satan to touch Job's body but is forbidden to kill him (2:4-6). And most readers of this little volume know the rest of the story.

We know that there was absolutely *no sin* in Job's life for which he was being punished. God allowed that trial [and it was severe] to enter Job's life for a couple of reasons. First, God was proving a point to Satan that a) Satan did not know everything like he thought he did, b) Satan was still under the control of a higher being than himself, namely, God, c) he could go no further than what God allowed under any circumstances. That should be a blessing and an encouragement to God's people when suffering enters their lives.

Keeping that in mind, it is true that the Psalmist said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." While that verse suggests that unconfessed sin may affect our prayer life, it is not necessarily suggesting punishment per se at that moment. It is when sin remains unconfessed that punishment finally comes.

Secondly, while Job did not understand the “Why” at first, God was teaching him the extremely important lesson of total and complete trust in God, no matter what the circumstances are. In spite of his lack of understanding just what God was doing, he came to the point where he cries to his friends while, at the same time he cries out to God, “Though he *slay* me, *yet will I trust him...*”

Please understand that the true test of one’s trust in God is not when everything is going well and there are no apparent problems in life. My friend, the true test of our trust is during the darkest hours of life; when our world seems to be crumbling all around us and there is no one to help and no hope. Those “dark valleys” of despair and despondency are truly opportunities to demonstrate the degree to which we are willing to let go and trust Him.

Throughout his difficult experiences, Job had no idea of what God was going to do in, through and for him. But this much he *did* know: God was in control. In fact, he said, “...He [God] knoweth the way that

I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). God richly blessed Job in a material way by giving him back twice as much as Satan ripped from him. God also blessed him spiritually with ten additional children. He still had the ten whose lives were taken by Satan, since they were still very much alive in Paradise.

When considering God’s dealings with Job, one must *not* read into it a “*prosperity gospel*” that is so prominent these days. While God does not promise material wealth, He *does* promise that He will care for His own and provide for them “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

I personally went through a very difficult time several years ago with an affliction that *could* have proven fatal. At this point I would like to share with you my own experience as related in an earlier book, *Ministry Memoires*. It is my prayer that you will be blessed and encouraged by God’s wonderful provision and protection for me during that time.

## *Pitiriasis Rubra Polaris*

*“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: **Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.**”*  
**(Habakkuk 3:17-18)**

*“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”*  
**(Job 13:15)**

*“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: **for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”* **(II Corinthians 12:9)**

In these times, many people are rushing madly through life without any real purpose other than to make money and accumulate things. There is a real lack of true happiness and contentment in much of our society today. For the average unsaved person, and even some believers, happiness is based on outer circumstances and surroundings. Things such as how much money I am making, how my portfolio is doing, how I feel, what the weather is like, are all criteria by which some people measure their momentary happiness.

What happens when the weather turns bad, the stock market crashes, “my candidate” loses the election, or my health begins to fail, what then? It has oft been stated that, so long as one has good health, little else matters. But, what happens when one *does* lose his health? Happiness will be transient when based solely on these.

Thankfully, the believer’s happiness does *not* depend on the above circumstances but, rather, on his relationship with Christ and nothing else. It is possible for the true child of God to find peace and, even joy, in the midst of suffering.

Shortly after September 11, 2001, the infamous day of a cowardly terrorist attack on a complacent America, I was stricken with a very serious reaction to Keflex, a common antibiotic. The result was physically debilitating. This condition is called *Pitiriasis Rubra Polaris* and is the rarest form of psoriasis known.

Within a matter of days, my face began to look like something out of a horror movie and my hands looked like that of a five-thousand-year old mummy. Slowly, I lost my ability to play the violin and the musical glasses. Later, I would even be unable to play the vibraharp and the piano.

Walking became difficult and, eventually, I was nearly bedridden for two months. What little

walking I was able to do required the help of a cane and was painfully slow. Every step was sheer agony. The lower half of my body felt as though someone had soaked me in gasoline and set me on fire. The excruciating pain would sometimes last for hours. Nothing could be done to alleviate it; I just had to learn to bear it.

After several months of feeling like I was on fire, a painful, stinging itch set in that was almost as bad. The doctor explained that my skin was reproducing every 48 hours instead of the normal forty-eight days. It was quite embarrassing to see a trail of skin that continuously flaked off. I was literally affected from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet.

It would be eleven months of hobbling around with a cane, seventeen months before I would be able to play the violin again and a full eighteen months before I would be able to play the musical glasses. Through it all, God proved Himself so very faithful.

In early January of 2002, we returned to the ministry of evangelism, after having been laid aside for more than two months. It was not an easy time, but God gave the strength to start preaching again.

Occasionally, I used to joke about being “envious” of those evangelists that did nothing but preach. They had no music to practice, no

equipment to unload, set up and tune every night; just a Bible and a briefcase. Now that I have had a taste of life and ministry without music, I don't joke that way anymore.

There were many weeks where it was difficult to walk or stand. I was very conscious of how dreadful I looked, so I would try to set the congregation at ease by reciting a little poem I heard years ago.

*"I know my face ain't no star,  
But I don't mind it  
'Cause I'm behind it.  
It's those in front that get the jar!"*

Sometimes it would take great effort just to get up to the pulpit to preach. However, once there, the Holy Spirit gave me the strength to proclaim the Word fervently. Most often, the pain seemed to leave while I was preaching only to return after I was done. Then, exhausted, I would find a chair and sit there greeting people. One night, my feet were so swollen, I couldn't even wear my shoes, so I preached in my socks! A dear couple took pity on me, went to a store, and bought me a pair of extra large slippers to wear.

Many a night, after the preaching was over, folks would come up to me and tell me how happy they were to see that I was feeling so much better.

When I told them that I felt as poorly as ever, they seemed surprised since they thought I “preached so well and powerfully.” Over and again, in the midst of my suffering, God would manifest His grace to enable me to effectively minister to others.

The prophet Habakkuk lived in an agricultural society. When you read the above verses, you realize that things could not have been worse for them. People thought that they would surely starve to death, if not this year, then the next. Yet he victoriously cried, “*Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.*”

In Philippians 4:4, the Apostle Paul exhorts the believer to “*Rejoice in the Lord **always**: and again I say, Rejoice.*”

It is easy to “rejoice” when all is well in one’s life. It is another matter entirely to rejoice ***in the midst*** of trials and suffering. The believer’s real source of joy is not in his wealth, not even in his health, but, rather, in his Lord!

The Lord has been very good to us through this time of difficulty. As I write these lines, I am in the nineteenth month of my illness. I have just returned to the musical glasses and about six weeks ago was able to once again tuck that violin under my chin where it belongs.



Though we had to cancel many meetings, God ***provided all our needs according to His riches in glory!*** During the nine weeks that I was homebound, I had to put our motorhome through state inspection, only to find that we needed to replace the four rear tires in order to pass. I was fortunate to get them on sale for a total of \$1,000. The funds were not available, so we had no alternative but to put them on a credit card. You can imagine our joy when the next day's mail brought an unexpected check for that exact amount! How thrilling to realize that that check was in the mail and on its way to us ***before*** we even knew we had a need. Praise the Lord!

Under normal circumstances, the months of December and January are very tight financially. Few meetings are scheduled due to the holidays. However, during the worst part of my illness, when I had to cancel nine weeks of meetings, the Lord provided ***everything*** we needed. Thanks to the generosity of our home church, as well as several other churches and individuals, we had the ***least*** financial pressure that we have ever experienced in more than twenty-five years of itinerant ministry. God has been so good!

It has also been apparent that the Lord has used this illness as a source of blessing to other believers. So many have expressed what a testimony all of this has been to them as a

demonstration of God's grace saying that it gave even more weight to the Word that was preached. For all that God has done, I am thankful!

I can heartily say, along with the Apostle Paul, "*...Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*"

God used the following hymns to minister to my heart in a very special way during my illness.

***Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah***  
(William Williams)

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;  
Hold me with Thy pow'ful hand.  
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through;  
Strong Deliv'rer; Strong Deliv'rer,  
Be Thou still my strength and shield.

## *Day By Day*

(Carolina Sandell Berg)

Day by day and with each passing moment,  
Strength I find to meet my trials here.  
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,  
I've no cause for worry or for fear.  
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure  
Gives unto each day what He deems best,  
Lovingly its part of pain and pleasure,  
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Every day the Lord Himself is near me  
With a special mercy for each hour.  
All my cares He fain would bear and cheer me,  
He whose name is Counselor and Power.  
The protection of His child and treasure  
Is a charge that on Himself He laid.  
"As your days, your strength shall be in measure,"  
This the pledge to me He made.

Help me then in every tribulation  
So to trust Your promises, O Lord,  
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation  
Offered me within Your holy Word.  
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,  
E'er to take, as from a Father's hand,  
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,  
Till I reach the Promised Land.



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