

# The Book of Joshua

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## The Second in a Series of Studies by the Editor

**KEYWORDS:** power, circumcision, promise, Passover, Jericho, trust, obedience, Achan, Ai, disaster, temptation, punishment, victory, altar, Gebeonites, deceit, grace

### 5:1-12 Yet More Meetings!

#### Meetings No. 3 and 4 (1-9, 10-12)!!

This chapter seems to commence a new section of the book, linked by similar headings (5:1; 9:1,2; 10:1,2; 11:1-3). In this case 5-12 are a major section of the book with 5-8 a sub-section. Nevertheless, this is closely linked to the preceding section by the 'church meeting' motif. This shows the consummate artistry of the author of the book.

The interesting thing about the first verse and its reference to the fact that the Amorites' 'hearts sank and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites' is that Joshua, at this point, could not have fully known this. Indeed, as we shall see in 15-18, he seems quite uncertain as to the way ahead. So we have been let into something that the Israelites don't know yet . . . They must have felt incredibly vulnerable. We, however, know a greater power was at work.

This makes what happens next remarkable. In response to the LORD's command (1,7a,8) they undertake a painful medical operation on all the male population: such as to make them incapable of military service for at least a few days (8)! This might be 'jeopardising everything'.<sup>1</sup> And why 'flint knives' (2)? After all, Joshua was living in the Bronze Age.

The answer to these puzzles lies in the past. An ancient custom was being revived: the experience of the founder of the nation (see Gen. 17:11) repeated in his descendants. In this way the original meaning and significance of circumcision was highlighted. It referred to those who were graciously chosen by God as his people.

To unravel this further, we need to be introduced to two Hebrew words: *am* and *goy*. Both these words mean 'people' but they tend to be used in two slightly different ways. The latter word is usually adopted to refer to 'pagan' nations. The former word tends to refer to Israel as the people of God. In this chapter Israel entered the wilderness an *am* (4) but died a *goy* (6). This generation, too, remain a *goy* (8) until after their circumcision.

Verses 4,5 are variously understood. The allusion is to Num. 14:28-32, but it is not clear whether the neglect to administer the rite was the result of disobedience or at the direction of God. In the light of the previous paragraph the latter seems more likely. Circumcision had been withdrawn from a people who were now a *goy*. Verse 6a seems to favour this interpretation.

The latter part of verse 6 is slightly obscured by the NIV translation of two identical phrases, by 'the LORD had sworn' and 'he had solemnly promised'. The former is the better rendering. Thus, God is as faithful to his oath to provide an inheritance to Israel as he is faithful to his oath to deny access to those who had 'not obeyed the LORD'. In a nutshell, this is the fundamental theological perspective of this book.

But now . . . (and this is the point of this section), a new generation are given the gracious opportunity to enter into covenant with the LORD (7). By their obedience the reproach under which they had lain since the apostasy of the previous generation is removed.<sup>2</sup>

In this context the Passover can now be celebrated (10), since circumcision was a precondition (Ex. 12:48a). Indeed, the ultimate object of the Passover, to free a people from bondage and enable them to enjoy the full blessings of the land of promise, begins to be fulfilled here. With what joy the people must have enjoyed the 'produce of Canaan' and tucked into the 'unleavened bread and roasted grain'. What a whoop of delight must have gone up when they realized there was 'no longer any manna' nor any need for it (11,12).

Significantly, all this is enjoyed without a military campaign. What was important was not so much military strategy but that the people were in a right relationship with the LORD. Already in a land where the inhabitants are 'fighting shy' Israel is enjoying the riches of the land. This is not, of course, the whole story . . . but it is the story at this point and it is a point that must not be missed.

Finally, we ought to note a point made by Davis. He says that 'we must beware of thinking that God is only in the earthquake, wind and fire; of thinking that manna not grain is God's food. Most of God's gifts to his people are not dazzling or gaudy but wrapped in simple brown paper. Quiet provisions of safety on the highway, health of children, picking up a paycheck, supper with the family – all in an ordinary day's work for our God.'<sup>3</sup>

### 5:13-15 Not the Person to Meet on a Dark Night!

Don't blink or you will miss one of my favourite bits in the book of Joshua. Yet the unexpectedness of its appearance and content should, perhaps, alert us to the fact that the author is playing another of his 'tricks' to draw attention to the story.

Completely 'out of the blue' Joshua is found alone 'near Jericho' (13). In fact, the Hebrew text uses a word that usually means in or on. Perhaps this is intended to conjure up a picture of Joshua right underneath the walls as they tower in all their impressive might above him! If so, his reconnaissance

must have brought home to him the intractable nature of the problem (see 6:1). And, as he 'looked up' (at the walls?) he spotted a fellow soldier, armed for battle: 'a man . . . with a drawn sword'.

If this was frightening, the words the man uttered were even more astonishing: I am 'commander of the army of the LORD' (14). Joshua's response indicates he was quick to grasp that this was an appearance of God himself since 'he fell face down to the ground in reverence'.<sup>4</sup> That he had got it right is confirmed by the man's response where (in a clear echo of Moses' experience of the burning bush, Ex. 3:5) Joshua is commanded to 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy' (16).

In this context, Joshua's questions are interesting. To ask, 'Are you for us or our enemies?' (13) was understandable under the walls of Jericho. The answer, however, is something of a surprise: 'Neither' (14). Joshua will eventually get an answer (6:2) but there are more important issues on God's agenda. The first is surely this: the worship of God for who he is, is at the heart of a relationship with one who doesn't simply take sides. The presence of God with his people can (as the sequel in chapters 7 and 8 will show) unleash his power against them! This is what it means for him to be 'with' them. Thus, in answer to the question 'What message does my Lord have for his servant?' (Joshua is still apparently hankering after guidance) the reply simply restates the reality of God's holiness.

At the same time there was plenty to encourage Joshua. The anxious general was met by a fellow-soldier and one who was 'commander of the army of the LORD' (14). He had the hosts of heaven at his disposal. Perhaps, this was a reminder that he has 'not come to take sides but take over'.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, before ever the campaign proper takes place and after Israel has recommitted itself to the LORD, its leader is reminded (in an awesome and unforgettable way) that there is one ready to fight . . . but only for his holiness and on behalf of a holy people.

## **6:1-27 The LORD 'fight the Battle of Jericho'!**

Now for the story we have all been waiting for! This is, of course, one of the great tales of the Bible, one many of us have known from childhood. Yet, by now, we may expect a few surprises from the author: familiarity may, perhaps, blind us to the rather peculiar way the story is told. Indeed most of the chapter seems occupied with rather secondary and background material.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt of the challenge Israel faced (1)! Jericho was a frontier town, a key Canaanite city and a powerful fortress. It was probably regarded as impregnable: especially now it was bolted and barred.<sup>6</sup>

But such was to leave the LORD out of account: always a hazardous business! Despite its 'king and mighty men' (2) the LORD's work was as good as 'done and dusted': note the 'I have delivered' which stresses it is his work and, from his perspective, can be spoken of in the past tense!

Meanwhile, however, it did not appear like it! Moreover, the LORD proceeded to give the most bizarre instructions to Joshua (2-5): but then God's sense is not always 'common sense'.

The next part of the story is interesting. Joshua passes on an expanded version of the LORD's instructions (6-11) but it is far from clear that he explained to the people what they could expect: nor that they would be required to repeat the process.

In the circumstances, it is difficult not to admire the people. Day after day (12-14) they silently go about this strange and apparently purposeless ritual. While it might have been faintly disquieting to the inhabitants of Jericho, the impact of the journey is more likely to have discouraged the Israelites. Quite apart from the words of scorn that doubtless echoed from the wall of Jericho, there would have been the rather unpleasant items that besieged people tend to throw over the walls at passing pedestrians! Above all, the sheer folly to overcome a well-equipped and defended city by a group of nomads who could only stretch to rams' horns (the best rendering of 'trumpets') must have become apparent . . . and drawn barbed comment. On the seventh day, this must have appeared even more so as time and again the people traipsed around the walls: despite Joshua's now cheering words (15-19).

But, before we read what happened, we need to note the rather strange way the story has been told. Verse 6-13, describe the first day . . . then everything speeds up and five further days are dismissed in a single verse (14). Then, just when we expect the denouement, the author records another speech: another of his 'delaying tactics'. Yet that is surely the point. For the author, these verses are the most important in the chapter. The outcome of the battle is certain: described with the utmost, matter-of-fact brevity (20). If Jericho is not taken it will not be the LORD's failure: but the absence of humble trust in the people and faithful obedience to his instructions.

And surely this is the point that is re-emphasized in the final verses (22-27): the interweaving of the sacking and defeat of Jericho with the deliverance of Rahab and her family.<sup>7</sup> For this story is a triumph not simply of Joshua or the people's faith but of hers too. But it was not Joshua who 'fit the battle of Jericho': the author rejects such a man-centred theology. It was the LORD whose victory was witnessed by a people of faith. And such a God was to be feared among all those who came in contact with him or his servants (27).

Finally, since this was the LORD's battle, the spoils were his (18,19): the people must wait for their turn. Meanwhile, the site was symbolically cursed (see Deut. 13:16): a permanent reminder (another one of Joshua's 'pilgrim' sites) of the fate of all those who depart from a covenant relationship with God.

## **7:1-26 Down with a Bump**

After the heady experiences at Jericho, Israel is immediately plunged into the depths of disillusionment, despair, confusion and defeat!

In order to help us understand the point of this chapter, the author has provided us with three 'keys' to unlock its meaning. First of all, he lets us into a secret of which the actors in the story were, at first, unaware: 'But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things' (1). We are even told the culprit's name, 'Achan', and the LORD's

response ( his 'anger burned against Israel' ).

Secondly, he carefully crafts his story around another chi-asmus. Davis illustrates it is this way:

- Yahweh's wrath (burning), 1
- Disaster for Israel – defeat, 2-5
- Leaders before Yahweh – perplexity, 6-9
- Divine revelation of problem, 10-12a
- Mid-point, 12b
- Divine instruction for resolution, 13-15
- Israel before Yahweh – clarity/exposure, 16-23
- Disaster for Achan – execution, 24-26a
- Yahweh's wrath (turned away), 26b<sup>8</sup>

This structure will assist the interpretation of the chapter.

Thirdly, just as verse 1 lets us 'into a secret', the final verse indicates all this is an 'object lesson'.

With this in mind, we can explore the chapter.

If the Canaanite prostitute acted faithfully, here someone who should have known better, an Israelite, 'took some [of] . . . the devoted things' (1). But Joshua is completely unaware of this . . .

Thus, he goes about his routine business as military commander. As before (chapter 2), spies are sent ahead (2) and their report emphasizes the insignificant nature of the task immediately ahead ('not all the people will have to go up', 3). Joshua respects their knowledge and advice and only 'three thousand men went up' (4). Some query Joshua's strategy here: they suggest that Joshua acted without any command from God, with self-confidence and prayerlessness. But we should be careful not to read into the story something that is not there. We actually have no reason to suppose that Joshua hadn't done these things (others would do all these things later and still suffer defeat: see Judges 20). Nevertheless, the troops were 'routed' (4), casualties occurred with 'thirty six . . . killed' (5) and the people were demoralised ('the hearts of the people melted', 5).

Small wonder, Joshua 'tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground' and all credit to him (and 'the elders') that he took his bewilderment to 'the ark of the LORD' (6). In the despair of uncomprehending faith (7)<sup>9</sup> he accuses the LORD of letting his people (7), Joshua (8) and the LORD's own honour down (9).<sup>10</sup>

The LORD's response must have initially given Joshua a shock: it certainly lacked the 'pastoral touch'. Thus, he says, 'Stand up. What are you doing down on your face?' (10). Joshua had to learn that there 'is a time to be on bended knees before God but this was not it'.<sup>11</sup> However, grace and mercy quickly follow as the LORD reveals that 'Israel has sinned' (11); this is the reason for their defeat (12a) and, the crunch, 'I will not be with you any more unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction' (12b). The LORD does not leave Joshua in the dark . . . but he does emphasize action is required to deal with a serious issue! This, as Davis' analysis above indicates, is the critical point of this chapter.

Familiar as many of us are with this story, we ought to pause at this point. Joshua is told that the people have sinned, whereas we know that Achan is the culprit! The point that is being made, however, is that the contamination of a part effects the contamination of the whole. Further, Israel had to learn that to retain the LORD's presence required

that they took absolute fidelity to all that he required with the utmost seriousness. The LORD is not a talisman!

So action is demanded (13-15) which stresses the 'complete purity among God's people as a prerequisite for covenant fellowship between the people and their God'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Hebrew word translated 'disgraceful thing' (15) is usually used in the context of sexual sin. Thus, Israel's action is seen as spiritual adultery that breaks the 'marriage' covenant between the LORD and his people.

Again, to Joshua and the people's credit, they do not 'beat about the bush'. They act immediately, follow the LORD's instructions to the letter and Achan is forced out into the open and exposed as the culprit (16-18).<sup>13</sup>

Joshua's response is remarkable. Whatever his personal hurts, the pain of bereavement of the unnecessary loss, or his sense of outrage for others, his words are tender: 'my son' (19) and they do not dwell upon his feelings but the LORD's honour.

This evokes Achan's confession, in which the psychological process of sin is 'set forth masterfully':<sup>14</sup> 'I saw . . . I coveted . . . I took' (20, 21). The items that attracted Achan were a substantial horde of 'silver', a large ingot of 'gold'<sup>15</sup> and a sumptuously woven, princely-style, 'robe' such as were known among the chic and wealthy in the ancient world (20,21). Wealth and honour had snared him. However, pathetically, Achan indicated he could not really enjoy them: 'they are hidden in the ground inside my tent' (21). Thus Edersheim says, 'How miserable the whole thing must have sounded in his own ears, when he had put the facts of his sin into naked words; how paltry the price at which he had sold himself, when it was brought into broad sunlight.'<sup>16</sup>

Prompt and fully obedient, but highly painful action is taken: such is the cost of faithfulness to the LORD (22-26). Sin required radical surgery not a plaster! Both Achan and those implicated in his sin (he could not have hidden the items without their knowledge) were 'stoned' by the whole community ('all Israel') since they all needed to unite in rejecting sin. The heaping up of 'a large pile of rocks' was a common way of dealing with criminals (rather like a gibbet in later times) and was a way of exposing infamy and offering a warning to others. Burning was an act of purification: a symbolic destruction of the contagion cause by sin. The name given to the place, 'the Valley of Achor', was a permanent reminder of the disaster that had befallen Israel there. Only then, 'the Lord turned from his fierce anger' (26).

So even the 'new' generation of the people were as susceptible to temptation as that which fell in the wilderness. Any sense of superiority that might have existed up to this point is exposed for the folly it is! Israel had been warned . . . how would they respond?

## 8:1-29 The Grace of the LORD's Forgetfulness

We have now become familiar with the thoughtful and skilled manner in which the author of Joshua tells his story. Faced, then, with the rather peculiar structure of this chapter, we are bound to look for the rationale behind the way the tale is told and, in that way, discover the point it is making.

Sometimes a 'zoom lens' technique is helpful in studying a passage. That is true here. At the beginning of chapter 5 we

noted that 5-8 are 'marked off' as a section by the similar introductory formulae in 5:1 and 9:1. The present passage, therefore, brings this section to an end. This seems to thrust 8:30-35 into the limelight as a mini-conclusion. The fact that the content of these verses is unexpected (we expect more 'ripping yarns' of victory) seems to further highlight these verses. In addition to this, there is something of a pattern discernible in chapters 5-9. The stories begin and end with Israel at worship (5:2-12; 8:30-36). Within this envelope there are two accounts of Israelite victories (5:13-6:27; 8:1-29) with the centre-piece being the defeat at Ai (7:1-26). This establishes two parallels in this chapter: 8:1-29 with 5:14-6:27 and 8:30-35 with 5:2-12. Thus 8:1-29 parallels the victory over Jericho.

But this is not all. 8:1-29 also contains a 'panel' structure in which two parts of the chapter correspond to one another. Davis, again, helpfully identifies it in the following way:

- Reassurance from Yahweh, 1-2
- Instructions to the ambush, 3-9
- Joshua and all Israel go up, 10-13
- "Victory" over Ai, 14-17
- Direction from Yahweh, 18
- Action of the ambush, 19-20
- Joshua and all Israel turn back, 21-23
- Defeat of Ai, 24-27
- (Summary, 28, 29)<sup>17</sup>

Since this is so, 1,2 and 18 are thrust into prominence and provide the key to the understanding of the rest of the material.

The moment we start reading this chapter we sense we are hearing echoes. Thus the first verse, with its reassurance, 'Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged', brings 1:9 back to mind and, 'I have delivered into your hands', reminds us of 6:2. It is possible that, 'Take the whole army with you', is a veiled criticism of Joshua's conduct in 7:3,4. Perhaps, more likely, it is a way of stopping Israel glorying in their own achievements. Certainly, the repetition of earlier promises without any mention or concession to recent events is a message of grace since the words indicate God is ready once again to fight for his people (not against them). And the victory is secure: once again the past tense is used!

Verse 2 strikes, however, a different note. In contrast to 6:18,19, the spoils of Ai may be appropriated: 'except that you may carry off the plunder and livestock for yourselves'. Achan's covetousness was unnecessary: the LORD is no one's debtor . . . but he does expect the firstfruits.

The story then begins to take a different turn from the 'battle of Jericho'. Here the people have a more active role: 'Set an ambush behind the city' (2). Thus, the following verses (3-8) describe careful planning and a thoroughly thought-out strategy by Israel's commander: within the parameters of what the LORD had commanded, of course!

Israel was having to learn that God does not always work in the same way. God was also 'letting the people in lightly'. Thus, at Jericho they did nothing, here they have to learn to flex their muscles . . . what will come next?

The details of the combat described here are confusing (but then warfare often is) and has taxed scholars down the centuries. But this confusion should not become a distract-

tion. Slowly, but surely, with the steady but emphatic plod of a village policeman, the inevitable is described. Thus, and artistically, the glory of the LORD is praised.

And the story is told twice: or at least (as noted above) there are two parallel sections. Thus, in verse 18, which commences the second part, the LORD's command and Joshua's immediate response are recorded. Again, the LORD's specific guidance is 'filled out' by Joshua's initiative and the people's sterling efforts and success achieved 'as the LORD had instructed Joshua' (27).

So Ai is defeated, another community overthrown. It becomes another barren site with no inhabitants but the birds of prey and the memorial to another cursed man, whose earthly remains lie under a monument to the folly of failure to follow the LORD.<sup>18</sup> Ai is forsaken, under the curse of the LORD: but not to be forgotten: the stones a perpetual reminder of the call to obedience and the folly of unbelief.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, this is highlighted throughout these verses. Without the LORD on their side, the inhabitants of Ai demonstrate their ignorance (14), stupidity (16-17) and naivety (20-28).

### 8:30-35 Back to Basics

And so the present section that commenced at 5:1 comes to a close and a fitting climax. Shechem, not named here,<sup>20</sup> was in the locality of 'Mount Ebal' and 'Mount Gerizim' (33) and was about 20 miles from Ai, a couple of days walk. While some speculate that this was undertaken as a sort of tactical retreat for military reasons, it seems preferable to see the choice as dictated by religious factors. In fact, it was near this city that Abraham had first received the promise of the land (Gn. 12: 6-7), that Jacob had been restored from a period of backsliding and buried the family gods (Gn. 33-34). What better choice for the people who have lived to see the promises fulfilled and, themselves, need to recognize their recent failures and the call to abandon all for the LORD! Above all, however, the LORD had commanded it (Dt. 27): and Israel is anxious to be faithful.

Knowing our author by now, we are not surprised that his language is saturated with Scripture. Thus the 'altar' (after the model given in Ex. 20:24) is set up and, the sacrifices that accompanied the covenant ceremony on Sinai are offered. Indeed, the whole account is something of a repetition of Sinai. Such an altar was designed to celebrate the fact that 'grace reigns through righteousness'.<sup>21</sup>

This is emphasized by the different offerings (31). The 'burnt offerings' were a substitutionary offering to God on behalf of sinners. The 'fellowship offerings' celebrated friendship with the LORD. Here then, at the LORD's 'dining table' the family are reconciled and able to 'break bread' together.

But those, thus reconciled, must listen to Father-God. Thus, the law was copied on what were probably plastered pillars (32); 'all the words of the law', including 'the blessings and the curses' (34), were read to the entire community: 'including women, children, and the aliens' (35).

Thus, after the initial skirmishes in the land and the positive and negative lessons that the people have learned, this is re-enforced by the covenant renewal ceremony. Israel is reminded that there is no God like theirs: one who is full of grace, faithful to his promises and embraces his people as

his family. At the same time, they are reminded that one of the privileges of family life is discipline: and their Father-God is holy and seeks holiness in his people: a holiness demonstrated in their wholehearted obedience to his word; all of them . . . and to every word!

### 9:1-27: A Blessed Mess!

We noted above that 5:1-8:35 were united together as a section by the structure of the narrative and the way in which the 'introductory formula' about the 'kings' of the Canaanites having 'heard' of Joshua's exploits occurs in 5:1,2 and 9:1,2. In the same way, the following two chapters are both divided from the immediately surrounding chapters and united in the larger section running from 5:1-12 to 12:24 (the description of the conquest) by the same formulae. Indeed, 9:1,2 anticipates 10:1-43 but, in a manner typical of the author of Joshua, tension and expectation are heightened by including a very different type of story: the submission of the Gibeonites.

But why? This is where some detective work is again necessary and where we need to be careful that we do not become preoccupied with our questions but listen to the text. Several things are, indeed, striking. First of all, the Gibeonites (who, as 10:2 notes, were an efficient fighting unit) are contrasted with the other peoples of the neighbourhood. Thus, 'the kings . . . came together to make war' (1,2) whereas the Gibeonites 'resorted to a ruse' (3) so as to establish a 'treaty' with Israel (6). Secondly, the Gibeonites then make their own confession, one that echoes that of Rahab in chapter 2, and flanks the narrative. Thus, in their initial plea they say, 'We have heard reports of him [the LORD]: all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan' (9,10).<sup>22</sup> Similarly they defend themselves with the words: 'Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land . . .' (24). This would appear to give a positive 'spin'. Finally, the Gibeonites are given responsibility to be 'woodcutters and watercarriers' (21) but, in the aftermath of their second confession, this is further specified as 'for the community and the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose' (27). There, in a highly dignified role, they remained 'to this day' (27): never, apparently, a snare to Israel. Thus, in three separate ways, the Gibeonites seem to be presented in a positive light in this chapter.

In contrast, the confederation listed in 1,2 apparently constituted the political power-block of southern Canaan, probably supported by the Egyptians.<sup>23</sup> They were first mentioned in 5:1,2 paralysed with fear. Here they rouse themselves to do something but action fails to materialise and the coalition splits with the defection of the Gibeonites. Only the latter spurs them to eventual action and, probably, enables them to overcome their mutual hostilities. All in all, a pathetic picture of sin and its effects.

The rest of the story is fairly self explanatory: at least at a surface level. Meanwhile, however, we are left with all our questions. For example, were the Gibeonites right to do what they did? Certainly, the Israelites disapproved. Thus Joshua says, 'Why did you deceive us . . .?' (22). But having been

'conned' he was bound to say this! What, then, did the author think? Here verse 4 is interesting when it says the Gibeonites 'resorted to a ruse'. The Hebrew word used here has a range of meanings. It is used of the serpent in Gen. 3:1 where it is translated 'crafty' in the NIV. However, it frequently occurs in the book of Proverbs in a positive sense of wise decision-making. Could the author intend to be ambiguous? Might he be pointing out that life is often messy: reminding us that sometimes we need to be 'wise as serpents'?

And what about Joshua and the Israelites? Is it significant that they did 'not inquire of the LORD' (14)?<sup>24</sup> Might this indicate a failure on Joshua's part, especially in the light of Num. 27:21? Yet, Israel had asked the right questions and applied the obvious tests (8,9, 14,15). Indeed, the Gibeonites had offered tangible evidence, a realistic report and a spiritual testimony: all of which must have struck a chord.<sup>25</sup> Should the Israelites have not used their minds and only sought the LORD?

Answers to these questions seem as many as the commentators who have written about them! Certainly, the context hints that a mistake took place; but what was it? The passage is, variously, seen as evidence that no course of conduct can be so clear as to excuse seeking direction from the LORD, that we need to avoid a cocksure attitude that means we fail to detect our subtle enemies, that victory can be turned into defeat through complacency, that when committed we are most vulnerable to deception, that we need both common sense and the Spirit of God and that neglect of prayer weakens discernment . . . Perhaps the author leaves his story deliberately vague to invite such reflection!

What is, apparently, commended is the leaders' refusal to take the easy way out when their error is exposed (16-21): 'we have given them our oath before the LORD' (19) was determinative of their conduct. Yet should even this always be so?

All of which brings us full circle. The chapter is full of questions, tells a story that leaves lots of messy loose ends and describes a very human tale: full of the frailties associated with sinful humanity. At the same time it commends the Gibeonites! In fact, the overwhelming message of this chapter is that the LORD is a 'missionary' God. It is not on the basis of race but of commitment to the LORD that his people are to be defined. Thus Achan and his family are 'out' while Rahab, her family and the Gibeonites are 'in'. However they got there, the Gibeonites are clearly regarded as rightfully there before the altar of the LORD.

Consequently, there is grace here! Mistakes were made but, amid all the confusion, the Gibeonites did find themselves a privileged place within the community of Israel and in the service of the LORD who does not wish any who seek him to perish.

### Notes

- 1 Schaeffer, 83.
- 2 Keil and Delitzsch's commentary is rarely a scintillating read! However, occasionally they strike gold. So here, where, 57, they say, 'the Lord did not enjoin the renewal of the covenant sign before Israel had been conducted into the promised land, because he saw fit first of all to incline the hearts of the people to carry out His commandment through the magnificent

- proof of His grace. It is the rule of divine grace first to give and then to ask.'
- 3 Davis, 49.
  - 4 It would be better to translate this as worship: something that is only ever offered to a god in the Bible.
  - 5 Price, 69.
  - 6 Keil and Delitzsch, 63f., suggest the Hebrew brings this out more strongly than any English version.
  - 7 They are now incorporated into the life of Israel (25).
  - 8 Davis, 58.
  - 9 So Keil and Delitzsch, 77.
  - 10 Davis, 61, notes that 'There are times when the people of God today stand in solidarity with Joshua's Israel; that is, there are periods in which confusion strikes and we haven't any idea what God is about. We have no recourse but Joshua's – anguished prayer to a mystifying God, pleading both our danger and his honor.'
  - 11 Price, 82.
  - 12 Woudstra, 126.
  - 13 Could the severity of the following punishment be a response to the fact that Achan had had opportunity to confess, but had to be forced to acknowledge his guilt?
  - 14 Woudstra, 129.
  - 15 In the ancient world such were approx. 25x2x1cm in size: a substantial bounty!
  - 16 Edersheim, 68.
  - 17 Davis, 66.
  - 18 The apparent barbarity of this story needs to be set against the far greater horrors of war that have plagued, especially, the last century. Moreover, this passage needs to be read against the background of Lev. 18:24-25, Dt. 9:4-5. Finally, Davis, 69, notes that 'perhaps the living God must stoop to such spectacles; else we might never fear sin.'
  - 19 Compare Dt. 21:22-23.
  - 20 Compare 24:1.
  - 21 Pink, 228.
  - 22 Interestingly, while they are galvanised to action by 'what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai' (3), they fail to mention this in their statement; such would have exposed the fact that they had not come from a distance as the news was too recent!
  - 23 See, further, chapter 10 below.
  - 24 This clause is emphasized in the Hebrew text.
  - 25 Davis, 76-78.