

James Philip Bible Readings

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THE BOOK of JOSHUA

In the Hebrew Bible the book of Joshua begins the second division of books, designated The Prophets (the first division being the Law, Genesis to Deuteronomy and the third designated the Writings). The second division of books is itself sub-divided into the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets). The former Prophets are, of course, history books, but history is prophetic in that it has a teaching value, and it is this prophetic teaching value, that is important for us in our study of Joshua. Belonging, then, to the second division of the Hebrew Scriptures, Joshua stands distinct from the first division, the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy), yet it continues the theme of the earlier books without intermission. The Pentateuch gives us the story of the people of God up to the time of their arrival at the borders of the Promised Land, with the last chapter of Deuteronomy recording the death of Moses. Joshua then takes over the leadership of the people; it becomes his task to lead them into the Promised Land.

1) 1:19

It will be useful and indeed it is necessary to spend some considerable time dealing with introductory considerations, so as to set the book of Joshua in its proper context, and to determine principles and methods of exposition and interpretation. Genesis is the book of beginnings, and for our purposes in this study we may say that it records the beginnings of the chosen people, in Abraham their progenitor, and the story of his family and how it came to be in Egypt in the first place. Exodus tells us the story of the growth of that family into a nation, and of Pharaoh's maltreating of the people of Israel (this is the earliest recorded instance of anti-Semitism and Jewbaiting), of their marvellous deliverance from the house of bondage, and the beginning of their journey to the Promised Land, the giving of the Law, and the building of the Tabernacle. Leviticus marks time historically, as it were, covering a period of less than two months; it records the regulations laid down for fellowship and worship for God's people, and the whole elaborate format of the sacrificial cultus. Numbers records the story of the journey and wanderings of Israel in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land, a journey which could have been completed in a matter of weeks, but in fact because of sin took nearly forty years. Deuteronomy, containing Moses final words to the people, underlines the spiritual principles of the Law of Sinai and its fulfilment, with an exposition of the ecclesiastical, judicial, political and civil organisation, which was intended for a permanent foundation for the life and well-being of the people, in the land of Canaan. Joshua gives the next instalment of the historical record. The children of Israel are on the borders of Canaan once again: forty precious years have been wasted but now they are ready to enter into their inheritance. What we read in the following chapters, records a series of campaigns by which Israel went in and possessed the land and divided it among the various tribes.

2) 1:1-9

Now a word or two about the interpretation of the book. We could almost speak of a twotiered interpretation. In the first place we recognise that it is a historical record, and for those whose interests lie in history, there are a number of fascinating archaeological books about the period that make thrilling reading, and are readily available in public libraries. It is, however, history with a purpose and there are lessons for us to learn from it about God's dealings with His people and His moral government of them. But we must remember, when we say it is history, that it is revelation also. It is revelation history, and therefore it bears messages from God. This is the significance of all biblical history as such. It is history with a purpose, not the mere enunciation of a sequence of events (for very often the biblical writers are selective), and it is what we learn about the principle of divine action in history that is so important, because God is the Lord of history. What we have to understand is that the principles of divine operation and divine government in the book of Joshua are the principles by which God works in the present day. There is but one God, and according to the Bible He changes not.

3) 1:19

We can also, however, interpret Joshua as also other books of the Old Testament by saying that the Old Testament is God's picturebook for His people, and that in it we are given in pictorial, historical form many telling illustrations of spiritual truth. We have the best kind of warrant for saying this: the New Testament itself. Two passages in particular should be considered; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 and Hebrews 4:11. In the first of these, Paul 'spiritualises' the historical incidents of the crossing of the Red Sea and the provision of water in the wilderness, and makes them yield spiritual messages and spiritual admonition. Indeed, it is more than a mere spiritualising of an historical occasion: it is the assertion and recognition that in the literal, historical experience something else was also taking place, namely a spiritual experience of God. This is of enormous importance for a true understanding of the Old Testament. In the second passage, the apostle spiritualises the Canaan rest, maintaining that it is a picture of the rest of faith into which God's people are invited to enter. We must be careful, however, lest we make overprecise and indeed overconfident application of this 'typical' interpretation, for there are dangers lurking here, and the temptation to push interpretation inexorably to all sorts of improbable conclusions is not always resisted. We must be content with the apostolic limitations in such interpretation and not be over concerned or over precise to force the Old Testament stories into a preconceived pattern. Far better and safer to follow the apostolic example.

4) 1:19

The first verse of the book tells us how God spoke to Joshua after the death of Moses. Throughout the chapter it is clear that God is authorising, commissioning and commanding this man to take up His work where Moses had laid it down. The question we must now ask is why Joshua? And what are the circumstances associated with God's taking up of this particular man? To answer these questions we need to go back to the first references to Joshua in the Old Testament, from Exodus 17:9 onwards. It does not take very much thought, in working back, to realise that Joshua must have been born in Egypt during the captivity, as Moses was. He was junior by many years to Moses, but then the captivity was a long, long time. He could only have been a young man when the host of Israel left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. We see, then, the drama of the situation: the man we meet with here is a man with a history. He is the product of a number of factors, which made him the new leader of God's people, and we need to look at some of these factors now. In the story in Exodus 17:9 ff we see Joshua as a man singled out by Moses as a potential leader. It was a moment of crisis for Israel, and at such a time one does not choose a nondescript to lead an army against the enemy but rather someone on whom you have already had your eye and in whom you have learned to have confidence. Thus early, then, to have already attracted the notice of Moses surely argues that here was a man emerging as a potential leader and a warrior of God. One commentator suggests that 'the initial occurrence of anything in Scripture ('the law of first mention') invariably supplies the key to the later ones, forecasting by means of a broad outline its subsequent usage'. Is it not significant that the very first time Joshua is brought to our notice it is as a successful warrior, fighting the enemies of the Lord?

5) 1:19

What was said in the previous note about the reference in Exodus 17:9 ff about Joshua could be said with equal force about later references to him cf Exodus 24:12, 13, 32; 33:10, 11; Numbers 11:2430; 13:116; 14:9; 27:1523. Together these references point a message of the first importance. Joshua, born in slavery, was a very young man when the stirring events of the exodus took place; he was therefore God's gift to Israel, even when they were in captivity, and from his mother's womb he was a chosen vessel unto God. When one thinks of the influence that great and mighty acts of God in any day and generation can have on young lives, it should make us realise the immense importance of exposing our young folk to gracious and telling influences. One thinks, for example, of the indelible impression that must have been made upon the children who gathered with their parents at the meeting Paul had with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20), as they were exposed to the apostle's mighty utterance and testimony. This is how it was with Joshua. He was brought up in the atmosphere of the great works of God. When God is moving in mercy and power in gathering people to Himself, it is surely a great time to be alive. It is true that we are living in dark and fearsome days. But although we might fear for our families in the future, there is another sense in which we should rejoice that they have been brought to the birth in days when the right hand of the Most High is manifestly at work in sovereign blessing. A great time to be alive, indeed!

6) 1:19

There is another lesson to be learned from Joshua's experience. It is that what we are, and what we allow ourselves to become and to be made in youth, may well be definitive for all our future. It was because Joshua was caught up in the ongoing work of God, because his heart responded to what God was doing among His people, because he dedicated himself as a young man, and surely this is implicit in these verses, to the things of God and his heart became fired with them, that he became a leader of men. If we do not make much of Christian life *now*, if we are feckless and problem ridden *now* what are our lives going to be like *later*? Is it likely that God will suddenly find us usable instruments for His purpose? Hardly! Instruments are forged over a period of time, and God trains His men over the years and prepares them, often by His natural providences, for His future work. This is why it is so imperative to take Him seriously when we are young. Not that we can ever afford to take Him less seriously when we are older, but unless young people do take Him seriously when they are young, their future life is likely to be blighted. They will be no use to God; they will be so much spiritual flotsam and jetsam on the tides of time, nothing more. This is how young people need to interpret the sometimes mysterious workings of divine providence in their lives. Is God roughing you? Well, recognise that something like this might be going on, and it is how you react and respond to it that will dictate and determine what you will be capable of being ten, twenty years from now. After the death of Moses, disaster and collapse of the work? Oh no! God buries His workmen, but carries on His work. He has somebody all lined up to take Moses' place. He had been preparing his successor for more than forty years, and then when Moses was gathered home to glory, He said, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! Now let me continue where you left off. I have the very man, and he is ready. Joshua, come here. I want you.' That is the background of this book

7) 1:19

It does not require much imagination to realise what a tremendous thing Moses' passing must have been to Israel. They could so easily have become demoralised with the sense that nothing could ever be the same for them again but God was not prepared to allow them this luxury. It is not that He was insensitive to their sorrow and their sense of loss, but that there were bigger things than this that must be given priority. This is the force of the 'therefore' in 2: the next stage of the divine programme was about to be initiated and carried through. Indeed, there is a sense in which even Moses' tremendous and magnificent work as leader and deliverer was only preparatory to what was now to take place, for this is the point at which the promise given to Abraham was about to be fulfilled, after so long a time. There is a sense in which all the mighty acts of God in Exodus, the manifesting of His power against Pharaoh, His protection of His people through all the wilderness journeyings and wanderings, had been accomplished with this in view, and for this purpose, that one day He could say this: 'Joshua, arise, go over this Jordan'. Equally impressive and significant is the fact that the commission given to Joshua is so similar to that given to Moses. He gave both the same promises, the same kind of injunctions and commands and the same kind of assurances. Joshua, to be sure, was not the man that Moses was; Moses was a giant on any estimate, but Joshua was not of that stature. He was a fiery, energetic soldier, a good general, a very shrewd tactician, one might even say a master strategist; but he was not the giant that Moses was, yet God gave him the same assurances and the same promises as He had given to Moses. There is a great lesson here: God does not keep His special promises for big men, but gives them to all His children. And because this is so, we are able to claim and inherit the promises that God spoke to Moses and Joshua.

8) 1:19

The promise, then, the provision, and the pattern were the same in each case. Moses crossed the Red Sea, Joshua is to cross Jordan, and the same miracle is going to take place. The sea and the river are equally difficult when it comes to crossing them with an army dryshod, and the same God performs the same miracle on both occasions. Also, Moses sent spies in to view the land, and Joshua will also send spies, as we shall read in the next chapter. The parallels are very evident, and the spiritual lessons we can gather are very important. For example, the promise in 3 repeats to all intents and purposes the earlier promise given to Moses in Deuteronomy 11:24 with only the tense of the verb being different. Moses received the promise from a standpoint of distance from the land, both in time and in geography; but now, when they are about to cross over, the wording changes to '*that have I given you*'. Canaan was theirs in the gift of God, before they ever entered into it, and there was a givenness about the inheritance. In the spiritual parallel, this is fundamental to a true understanding of the gospel. The old theologians used to speak of Christ's 'finished work', and one of the things they meant was that the work of redemption was completed two thousand years ago, and it is given to men before ever they enter into its grace and provision. All Christ's bountiful provision in His death and resurrection is already ours in the gift of grace: it remains therefore to make it our own, and to 'possess our possessions' by faith.

9) 1:19

'Possessing their possessions' however, meant for Israel a wholehearted and sustained effort, and only as much as was taken by conquest would be theirs in fact and experience. And Israel did not ever possess in fact all that was theirs in title. At the end of Joshua's life God could say, 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed' (13:1). Some of the tribes were sluggish in subduing the part of Canaan that was given to them in the apportionment of the inheritance. They allowed some of the Hittites and Canaanites to continue in their midst without subduing them, and this led to a great deal of trouble for them later on. It is so like this in the spiritual life also: the inheritance is ours in the gift of God, but we have to possess it and make it our own. There are two different kinds of possession: it is possible to possess something without it really ever becoming our own. It is possible, for example, to buy a beautiful piano and treat it merely as a piece of furniture. But one does not really *possess* a piano until one masters the instrument, and that takes a great deal of very hard work. The analogy can be pursued a little further: such 'possession' is a gradual and progressive one. One does not attain musical competence overnight, but only little by little. This principle holds good, whether in the conquest of the Promised Land or in spiritual life (cf Deuteronomy 7:22). And the emphasis on unremitting hard work is a healthy and wholesome one, especially for spiritual life. This is something that many will need to learn.

10) 1:19

The promise in 5 is passing wonderful, and rightly understood it presents both a challenge and an encouragement to us. We might well be tempted to say, 'that is all very well for Joshua but can it apply to us also?' Yes, indeed it can, as we see when we look at Hebrews 13:5, 6. The words there 'for He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee' are surely based on this word to Joshua. And what the apostle is doing is taking the promise God gave to Joshua and applying it to New Testament believers, for he goes on, 'so that we may boldly say...'. Not Moses only, not Joshua only, but we *also* may boldly say 'the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me' (Psalm 118:6). Here is an absolutely clearcut indication that we can take this word in 5 and apply it to our own situations. It is a charter for us to put ourselves in Joshua's place. We are not the stature that he was, but pygmized by comparison, yet God says this to us: 'as I was with Joshua, the Joshua who brought the walls of Jericho tumbling down! so will I be with thee'. Well might the exhortation in 7 lay upon us, and suddenly seem a glorious possibility. For with such a promising God, nothing can be impossible for us.

11):19

We should notice the emphasis in 8, 9 on 'this book of the law'. This is the first reference to a man having the book of the law as a guide, and it is very clear Joshua's meditation therein was to promote obedience, and it is worth remembering that the period of Israel's history covered by the book of Joshua, was one in which they were most obedient to the will of God, and in which they most prospered. When one thinks of all the ups and downs, the murmurings, and backslidings of the previous generation these forty years in the wilderness, the contrast presented by this book is impressive indeed. Without question it is the note of obedience that explains the immense and triumphant forward movement of the people of God. Alexander MacLaren makes a notable comment on these verses, 'Not only is there courage needed for the applications of the principles of conduct which God has given us, but you will never have them handy for swift application unless, in many a quiet hour of silent, solitary, patient meditation you have become familiar with them. The recruit that has to learn on the battlefield how to use his rifle has a good chance of being dead before he has mastered the mysteries of firing. And Christian people that have their Christian principles to dig out of the Bible when the necessity comes, will likely find that the necessity has passed before they have completed the excavation. The actual battlefield is no place to learn drill. If a soldier does not know how his sword hangs, and cannot get it in a moment, he will probably draw it too late'.

12) 1:1018

These verses record the response of faith to the divine promise and summons, made by Joshua and the people. It will be noted that Joshua says that 'within three days' (11)) they would cross over the Jordan into the land. This has been interpreted in different ways. On the one hand it may have the force of the phrase we sometimes use about 'striking when the iron is hot', that is to say, as soon as God commanded, Joshua was up and doing. On this interpretation the words represent Joshua's instant obedience. This makes very good sense as an interpretation, because when God says something to us, we do not want to be putting off action for a week, or a fortnight, or a month, or a year. Instant obedience is called for. On the other hand, it may mean a pause of three days in order that both Joshua and the people might see the impossibility, humanly speaking, of the situation at the Jordan. The river, as we see from 3:15, was in full spate, a raging torrent, and it may well be that Joshua was brought to the river bank and made to pause, so as to see the impossibility of this challenge to which he was called and summoned, and learn that he must come to an end of himself and trust wholly in the God of the impossible, who raises men from the dead. God would need to do wonders, would He not, with a river like that!

13) 1:1018

It will be useful to pause in our ongoing exposition to consider further the reaction of faith to difficult and impossible situations. An illustration will help. The biography of the late Lord Reith of the BBC gives a moving account of Reith's early struggles in youth and young manhood. Brought up in a strict Presbyterian, Calvinistic tradition, and having a particular melancholic temperament and spirit which led him to fear that he was foreordained to eternal loss, he was gripped by a gloomy fatalism that pressed in upon his spirit, and the record of his early years was one of a tremendous battle and struggle to get through the dark thing that oppressed him. It is some measure of the stature of the man that he did what he did in life with this kind of melancholic disability hanging so desperately over him. This is a very useful illustration of what is taught in this chapter. We all have our problems: if it is not a melancholic temperament, it is something else, and we would be wise to remember this when we tend to complain about our lot. It is what we do with our problems that is the important thing. Are we going to lie down to them, and mope and moan, or are we going to battle and wrestle and resist unto blood, striving against them? That is the way to enter into divine blessing, and it can hardly be doubted that this is one of the greatest lessons in spiritual life. The fact is, we so often lack *spunk*, and that is why we do not get very far. It is not that we have problems - everybody has - it is our attitude to them that counts. We can lie down to them, we can give in, we can be defeatist; or we can grit our teeth, square our shoulders, and get on with it. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. The kind of person who dreams about being 'carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease' will never get anywhere in spiritual life. This is one of the more important lessons the book of Joshua has to teach us.

14) 1:1018

In 12 a new subject is introduced. It seems that the three-day period was spent, amongst other things, in speaking to the Reubenites, the Gaddites and the half tribe of Manasseh. This requires a little explanation, and it is found in Numbers 32 which gives the background to the situation. Joshua is reminding the 2½ tribes of what they had undertaken to do, as if to jog them into the realisation that they must now redeem their promise, and not fall down on it. They had said to Moses that they would come armed with the rest of the children of Israel and go into the land to help them fight their battles, and then return to the east side of Jordan and settle down. It is clear from the passage in Numbers that Moses had a deep concern lest they might prove unfaithful and repeat the sins of their fathers, hence his sharp reaction. He had bitter memories of KadeshBarnea, and he was intent - as indeed Joshua was - that the 2½ tribes should not fall into the same snare. There are spiritual lessons of some import to learn from this. There are those in spiritual life who are content to remain 'on this side of Jordan' because they like the land and the conditions, as these tribes did. It is very interesting and fatefully significant - that centuries later when the Assyrian empire came rolling like a juggernaut from the east, these were the tribes that first felt the brunt of the enemy's power. The spiritual lesson is clear: beware of sitting on the fringes of God's work. God accepted the limitations that these tribes placed upon their wholehearted consecration to His work and purposes, and blessed them indeed within these limitations. And God also accepts the limitations that Christians place upon themselves when they are content to be fringe members: they can perhaps be relied on for their cooperation in some special effort, but their enthusiasm will soon subside, because their hearts are really elsewhere. But there are some blessings that God cannot give them indeed: His best blessings because they have closed the door to them by being content to stay on the fringes of God's work. Is it surprising that Moses was suspicious of such an attitude, and that Joshua had to harp on at them about it here?

15) 1:10-18

In 16 ff we have the response of the people to Joshua's challenge exhortation (10 ff). It seems better to take these verses this way than to restrict them to the response of the 2½ tribes. Again we see the remarkable continuing parallelism with Exodus 19:7, 8. The response here is exactly the same as that made to Moses on the earlier occasion, but what a different outcome it had. There, the people's protestations were followed in the event by a whole history of murmurings, disobedience, rebellion and resistance of the divine will, until God had to turn them back in judgment into the wilderness; but here, the words 'all that thou commands us we will do...' were fulfilled. Right through the book of Joshua we see the glad evidence of it, in one of the greatest times of obedience in the history of Israel. Doubtless, that earlier generation were sincere in what they said, and really meant it, *at the time*. But it is not the feeling of dedication or the attitude to it, at the moment it is made, that is important, but what follows day by day, year by year. And only time will tell. What we have to learn here is that it is blessedly and gloriously possible to continue to live in obedience to the will of God all the days of our lives. But we need a continuing will to do so.

We should note finally the import of the people's words to Joshua in 18: they take God's words to Joshua in 7 upon their own lips and speak His encouragement themselves to their leader. When a people are really right with God, they can be a source of immense encouragement and heartening to God's servants. They can say with meaning, force and authority, 'be strong and of a good courage'. There is a mutuality of encouragement in the life of consecration: servants and people are alike summoned and challenged. And if God saw how tremblingly Joshua was facing the future, doubtless the people saw it too, and acted accordingly. This is the kind of participation by the laity that really matters.

16)2:114

A careful comparison of chronological details makes it clear that it was in the threeday period mentioned in 1:11 that Joshua sent the spies into the land to reconnoitre Jericho, and that it was at the close of this time, when the spies came back that Joshua moved across Jordan. There are several points to note in this incident. First of all, we have once again an echo of Moses' sending in of his spies, and as such it is a test for the people, and a challenge to them to react differently this time round. When we fail one test, God usually engineers circumstances so that we will sit that test again. This is how it is in the school of God. And as we see later the response was very different. One of the supreme values of this story is the way in which a sensitive and hazardous military operation was used of God in a remarkable and wonderful way to seek out one prepared soul in that doomed city of Jericho and claim her for a destiny of salvation. The spying operation is itself full of drama, and it does not need much imagination to realise that it contains all the elements of a modern thriller with the hazard of mortal danger and peril very much in evidence, and so much in the ongoing military campaign that was to follow, depending upon its success. But even this pales into insignificance in face of the still greater drama and thrill of Rahab's wonderful conversion. There is much to discuss in this, and we shall continue to look at it in the next Note.

17)2:114

Our first reaction on reading this story is to say that the grace of God works in very strange and unexpected places and unexpected people! Humanly speaking, Jericho was the last place on earth that one would have expected to find faith. There were no Bibles in Jericho; there were no prophets in Jericho; there was no covenant in Jericho; it was a city abandoned to evil, as were the other cities that fell to Israel, and it would be true to say that gross darkness covered the people. Yet here was a woman wrought upon by the Spirit of God and made a believer in the God of Israel, one soul quickened and awakened to believe in his Name. Commenting on this wonderful story in the Epistle to the Hebrews (1131), the apostle says 'By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.' But where did that faith come from? One can only say 'faith cometh by hearing', and in 8 ff we see what this meant in her case. 'I know....' she said, and the reason she knew and had come to conviction was that she had heard what great things the Lord God of Israel had done. The news of the mighty exploits of the living God had gone before the children of Israel on their forward march, and had struck terror into the hearts of the people of Jericho. But whereas for the people of Jericho it was a negative, even superstitious terror (although they were gripped by it), for Rahab it was full of grace, because her terror led to penitence and faith: the terror of the Lord wrought mightily in her soul, and brought about the miracle of regeneration. She responded, in typical New Testament fashion, to the news of the mighty acts of God.

18)2:114

It must be clear, then, that Rahab had become a believer in the God of Israel before ever the spies entered Jericho and that it was because she was a believer that she helped them. She recognised that her hour had come, and being drawn out into the open, confession - to put it in Paul's words in Romans 10:10 - was made unto salvation. She is called Rahab the harlot, but she was not a harlot when the spies came to her house, as a careful examination of the text will make clear. One commentator points out that the fact that she had stocks of flax on the rooftop makes it plain that she was already engaged in an honest occupation. One recalls the picture of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31, and what is said to be one of the marks of her virtue: 'she taketh wool and flax and worketh it with her hands'. Here is another virtuous woman, working with flax, who used to be very different, but who had heard of the God of Israel, and the miracle took place in her which explains everything else in this story. Is it not marvellous that in such a situation and at such a time outwith the covenant people and the covenant grace, such a miracle should have taken place, and that God should have magnified His mercy in this broken, soiled piece of humanity, and wrought faith in her heart, not only gathering her into the fold of Israel, but as we shall see more fully in a later Note appointing her a place of significance in His redeeming purposes for the world? What a God is ours!

19)2:114

Something needs to be said at this point about the lie she had told to the king's men when they came searching for the spies (4, 5). There are those who say that it was legitimate to do so: in the circumstances she had no option, for if she had not lied, the spies would have been captured and she would have been put to death. But that is special pleading; a lie is a lie, whoever tells it, and is it ever right to do wrong? And we do not know, do we, that the spies would have been killed but for the lie. God was not dead. One recalls what happened in Sodom, when the depraved men of Sodom attempted to lay hands upon the angels of God. God blinded them so that they went about groping helplessly. Could He not have done the same to those who were searching out the spies? Can we think that it would have stretched Him to have done so? If Rahab had decided instead not to say anything, and to allow the soldiers to search her house, we can hardly doubt that God would have managed to cope with the situation. After all it was He who brought the spies to her house: they were the emissaries of his grace; and when you are in the service of God, you are immortal until your work is done. What can we say about Rahab in this? The lie was wrong, yet God did not allow His blessing to be forfeited; and if we bear in mind that Rahab was a new believer, and that she lived in a situation which had been bereft of even common grace as most people know it, it is at least understandable that she succumbed to the temptation. What is written here is not recorded to justify the telling of lies, but that we might see that a believer is not made perfect in a day, and that her genuine faith is not called in question by the lie that she told.

20)2:1524

Another lesson that the chapter holds for us lies in the interesting interaction of faith and works both in relation to Rahab herself and also in relation to the spies and Joshua. With reference to Rahab, it is significant that two epistles in the New Testament quote the story: Hebrews uses it as an instance of faith, while the epistle of James uses it as an instance of works. Both, of course, are equally true, since faith without works is dead, and Rahab's faith was proved by her works. But we also see the interaction in the chapter as a whole, in the attitude of the spies and of Joshua. In chapter 1, God said to Joshua very plainly that the land was his: 'Every place that the sole of thy foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you' but this did not mean that proper and necessary steps need not be taken. It was going to be possessed through the means of a military campaign and there is therefore nothing incongruous or inconsistent in Joshua sending spies in to spy out the land. To say, as some do, that it was an act of unfaith and unbelief on Joshua's part is really to miss the point: all the proper military expedients were certainly in order including the spies' precautions about hiding themselves and escaping to the hills. This is a very important consideration. One meets people from time to time who seem to conceive of trusting in God in terms of sitting back and doing nothing, in the belief that by making use of legitimate means they are betraying their faith and trust. This is simply confused thinking. The apostle Paul says, 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure'. There we have the interaction of faith and works, expressed succinctly: energetic and wholehearted endeavour is not only compatible with, but an essential accompaniment of, genuine faith.

21)2:1524

One other lesson has to be considered before we leave this chapter. We see here something of the farreaching implications of redemption, for Rahab the harlot was redeemed into the glorious purposes of God. One has only to think of what she was and then think of what she became to appreciate this. Hers had been a wasted life, in which lust and passion had burned up all that was fine and pure in her, and left nothing but ashes; and then by the grace of God she became, not only a believer, but one who was incorporated by the sovereign act of God into His redemptive purposes for the world. In the genealogy in Matthew's gospel, we find the name of Rahab in Jesus ancestry: Boaz, who married Ruth, and was the greatgrandfather of king David, was the son of Rahab. This is the marvel of the whole story: she was caught up by the grace of God into the divine purposes of redemption and by that grace she found a place in the plan of God for the blessing of the world. That is what God did with this woman. Is it not absolutely wonderful? An inhabitant of Jericho, a city doomed to destruction, but in sovereign grace God said 'I will take this life to Myself', and He magnified His mercy in this broken, soiled piece of humanity and wrought faith in her heart and transformed her, appointing her a place in the outworking of a world's redemption. Here, indeed, is the story of the lost coin bearing the image and superscription of the King, minted for a particular purpose, but out of circulation and fulfilling no useful purpose. And grace sought and found her, and brought her into the purpose for which she had been predestined before all worlds. What a message of hope: there is no life so hopeless, so useless, so marred, so lost, but the grace of God can take it up and redeem it into usefulness and meaning and purpose. 'I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten' (Joel 2:25).

22)3:16

We come in this chapter to the record of the crossing of the river Jordan by the children of Israel. It scarcely needs to be underlined that this event must have been one of immense importance and significance for the people of God, for it was the fulfilment of His promise given so long previously to Abraham, and the completion of the event that began at the Exodus. As we are told in another place (Deuteronomy 6:23), God brought them out that He might bring them in; so that we really need this part of the story to complete the picture of the divine operation of the deliverance of His people. First of all, a word about the structure: the actual operation of the crossing of the Jordan occupies chapters 3 and 4. Alexander MacLaren points out that after the description of the preparations (3:16) there are three sections, (i) the actual passage of Jordan (3:7-17); (ii) the lifting of the memorial stones in the river bed (4:1-14); and (iii) the return of the waters and the erection of the memorial stones at Gilgal (4:15-24). He points out that in each of these sections there is a threefold division, as follows, first of all, we have God's command to Joshua; then Joshua's communication of that command to the people; and thirdly the actual fact, fulfilling these. That is to say, we see the history first, in the mirror of the divine word; then in the orders of the commander-in-chief; and then as a thing actually happening. This is how we shall look at the unfolding story.

23)3:16

These verses follow immediately upon what is said in chapter 1 (chapter 2 is in effect a parenthesis, describing the experience of the spies). What we read in 2, 3 takes up the story from 1:611. We have before commented on the similarity between this incident at the Jordan and that on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea. It might be thought that the situation was different here, since on the former occasion the Israelites were in desperation, with the Egyptians at their heels and the Red Sea before them, whereas here there was no pressure on them. But *is* this so? We suggest that there was the moral and spiritual pressure of the meaning of the earlier experience at KadeshBarnea upon them, and the consciousness that if they failed to go forward this time God would turn away from them completely. They had the best kind of moral compunction to go forward. There is a sense in which God hems people in like this; there is a ruthlessness about the divine love - 'stern' and 'relentless' - might be better words to describe it, but whatever word we use it is there. God sees to it that we are brought to a position where there is no alternative except to cast oneself utterly in faith upon Him. They had already said (1:16), 'All that thou commandest us we will do' but it is one thing to say it in theory, and quite another to be prepared to act upon it, when you are standing by the banks of a swollen and raging river, and Jericho is over on the other side, an unknown quantity, and God is saying 'over you go'. This was their position and indeed their predicament and it is one often reflected in spiritual experience, as we see from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:810.

24)3:16

The next lesson in these verses relates to the nature of the command that was given to the people (3). When they saw the Ark they were to follow it. The rest of the instruction (4) was that a space of about 2000 cubits was to be maintained between the Ark and themselves, 'That ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore'. This may be a purely practical consideration: they were a great multitude, and if they had all hustled behind the priests, no one would have seen where he was going. The meaning would then be 'Let the Ark get far enough out in front to enable you to see where you are going'. That is to say, they were breaking new ground and therefore they needed clear guidance and leading. One commentator, however, suggests that the AV rendering in 4 is not very accurate and should read 'Ye have not travelled *in this manner* before', that is, they had not travelled with the Ark in front of them before. Previously, when they had moved, it was the pillar of cloud and fire that had gone before them, with the Ark of the covenant in their midst, a fact symbolising the Lord's presence among them. There is an important symbolism at work here, from which we can learn much. The people were now under a new dispensation, so to speak, and under new conditions. When God had led them out of Egypt through the wilderness they had the supernatural guidance of the pillar of cloud and fire; but now that special, supernatural guidance was being superseded by something much more ordinary. There was a departure from the phenomenal sort of guidance to something less spectacular, the staple guidance that God delights to give His people. What did the Ark symbolise? In the Ark were the tables of stone, the Ten Commandments; the Ark therefore symbolised the Word of God. The pillar was replaced by the Divine Word, and they were now to be a people led and guided by the Word. This is a picture of maturity, a picture of a people come of age; and a people come of age does not need spectacular 'pillar of cloud and fire' guidance, but will be guided by the Word.

25)3:16

The symbolism referred to in the previous Note has a great deal to teach us about the matter of divine guidance. There is a type of mind that hankers after the spectacular and the dramatic in spiritual life, and that practically insists on phenomenal 'pillarofcloudandfire' experiences. This, it needs to be understood, is a carnal sort of indulgence which at best, can stunt spiritual growth, and at worst make shipwreck of faith. We should pay particular attention to what the apostle Peter says in his second epistle (1:16-21), where he contrasts the visionary experience on the Mount of Transfiguration with the 'more sure word of prophecy' that is given to us. We should notice what Peter is emphatically insisting upon in these verses: he is downgrading the spectacular, and upgrading the Word. The important thing for the believer is not special, visionary experiences, but the Holy Scriptures. Would that all God's people had this all important truth lodged deep in their hearts.

Here, then, is the picture of a people loyally following the Word, subject to the Word, captive to the Word, and obedient to all its dictates. This is a tremendous and thrilling reality, and this is what the Church should be. And when this obtains, then impossible barriers can be crossed. Here is the answer to so much of the Church's present ills, and it points a way of remedy that almost alone, of all the sometimes desperate expedients of recent years, has hardly been considered. We sometimes sing 'Like a mighty army moves the Church of God', but it does so only when it is captive to the living Word. In this regard Joshua's exhortation in 5, 'sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you,' seems to have particular significance for the Church today, for it indicates that the wonderworking power of the Lord was linked with the sanctification of the people, and in this particular context, 'sanctification' must surely indicate a commitment in obedience to the Word.

26)3:717

In these verses we see the unfolding pattern of God's command to Joshua, Joshua's repetition of the command to the people, and then the historical enactment. Just as the passage of the Red Sea had authenticated the mission of Moses to the previous generation, who in consequence, we are told, 'believed God and His servant Moses', so now the new generation were to have a parallel authentication (7). But we should notice the difference between 7 and 10. The first reference speaks of an assurance given to Joshua that the people would know the Lord was with *him*, but when Joshua relates it to the people, he says the people would know that God was with *them*. That is, Joshua takes from God's word in 7 an assurance to himself personally and privately, and therefore he does not need to pass that word on to the people. He knows perfectly well that the people are going to realise that God is with him, but the important thing is that they should realise that God was also going to be with *them*. This is a very lovely distinction, and it prompts the comment that if God has said He will be with you, you do not need to waste time trying to convince other people about the fact, for it will be selfevident. It is impressive to see in 8 how many echoes there are from the earlier situation at the Red Sea: they were to stand still and watch God at work. It was, of course, a test of faith, and this is often a necessary test today: if we are sure enough that God has spoken to us, we can afford to stand still at His bidding, and it will not matter what may come crowding around our heads. God has spoken, and we can trust Him. Is this a word for some of us today?

27)3:717

We should notice the significance of what is said in 10, 11 : 'Hereby ye shall know... Behold the Ark of the covenant....passeth over before you....'. The association of ideas is inescapable: the Ark was a promised sign, and as they watched the Ark going into the waters of Jordan, causing the waters to run away, that was to be for them a sign that God would do likewise with their enemies, and that was what was going to happen. It was as if God said to them, 'Watch this', and when the Ark went in to the water and the river was divided by it, He went on to say, 'Do you see that? So it will be with your enemies. The waters are running away, I have dispersed them. I will in like manner disperse your enemies'.

The whole sequence of events unfolded in this chapter is surely a pattern of spiritual work. What is needed in a leader is vision. Given that, and if it is seen that he has it, ought he not to be followed? And when he is followed will not the outcome be miracle? This is why it is so urgently needful to pray that the men whom God has set in the pulpits of the land, should be men open to the heavenly vision. It is not enough to have right doctrine, desperately important though this is, in a day when so much wrong doctrine abounds; right doctrine without vision, does not work. One of the responsibilities God lays upon His people, is that they should pray for His appointed servants, that He would give them vision and that He would send an anointing upon them that would make their ministry a potent and prevailing thing in the land. At the very least, this is something that believers owe to those who are called to preach. It is a debt that none of us can ever fully pay, but we must be up and doing, to make costly intercession for them. This is the way forward today.

28)4:114

We come in these verses to the second of the three sections dealing with the crossing of the Jordan, and once again we see the pattern unfolded of (i) God's command to Joshua, (ii) Joshua's communication of the command to the people and (iii) the enactment of the divine will and purpose. It is surely significant that three times in these two chapters we have this particular pattern, and we should not be slow to learn from it. The key note is **obedience**. It starts with God, when He says something to His people, and His servant obeys, and urges obedience upon the people in turn. It is significant that this is the pattern in a period of Israel's history when everything tended to go right for them. There is something fundamental, elemental, in this: it is a spiritual principle that we must needs learn in our own experience.

The symbolic is clearly quite prominent here. The stones were symbols of the great thing that had happened, and they were to stand as a memorial to remind them of it. The Ark was also symbolic: there it stood motionless in the bed of the river, borne by the priests, amid all the bustle and activity of the crossing. And it stood as the guarantor, the protector, the restrainer, a silent presence to ensure their safety. So long as it was there, the waters could not touch them. As MacLaren puts it, 'Not till the last loiterer has struggled to the further shore does He cease by His presence to keep His people safe on the strange road which by His presence He has opened for them'. And surely it was easier for the people to believe that the torrent would not rush down upon them when they saw the priests with the Ark on their shoulders in the bed of the river as the symbol of the divine presence. And what must have been the test for the priests' faith, as they stood by their appointed post, in complete obedience, with the waters of Jordan towering miraculously, mysteriously on either side of them, held back by the mighty, unseen hand of their God. Can God depend on us like this, to stand where He has placed us and not to move until He tells us?

29)4:114

Throughout this passage it is explicitly underlined that Joshua gave instant obedience to the commands that the Lord gave him (2, 3; 10), and this was matched by the obedience of the people. It is unquestioning obedience to the commands of God that makes spiritual life really work; and there is no question but that herein lies the secret of the great forward movement of Israel into the land. The reference in 12 to the 2½ tribes is significant. These were the tribes who were reminded by Joshua of their earlier promise to come over Jordan to help in the subduing of Canaan. Reference has already been made to Numbers 32, where we see that they had opted to settle on the east side of the Jordan. Moses had been very suspicious of their attitude, and was with difficulty convinced of their good faith. But they promised Moses that when the time came, they would go in with their soldiers to help with the fighting, then return to their inheritance on the east side of Jordan. Here, in 12, is the fulfilment of that promise: they passed over armed, before the children of Israel. Clearly they were the obvious choice to form the vanguard, since they alone of all the tribes did not have their women and children with them. Having no family encumbrances, they were well suited to fulfil this duty. What is said in 14: 'The Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel' is a fulfilment of the promise given to him in 3:7 (which see): in all that was done that day, the Lord set His seal upon the new leader, and established him in the sight of the people.

30)4:1524

It does not need much imagination to see a spiritual application in 1518, for after all, Jordan has been traditionally associated in the minds of believing people with the idea of divine judgment of one sort or another. As long as the Ark of the Lord was in the river bed, the waters that would otherwise have drowned them were held back, but as soon as the Ark was removed, the waters came rushing down and covered all the banks as they did before. This may be a symbolic reminder to us, as one commentator puts it that 'the suspension of the power of death for men, has its limits. When the day of grace is over, the waters will 'return unto their place and flow over all the banks as before'. In the meantime, while the day of grace still continues, it is the presence of the faithful in the world that stays the judgment of God upon men and nations. Jesus once said that His people are 'the salt of the earth', and part of the function of the church's presence in the world is to prevent the unrestrained eruption of evil. When the prophet Isaiah said 'the righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart' (57:1), he meant not merely that God's people are dying and the ungodly could not care less (although that is true), but rather that God's people are dying, and the ungodly are not getting the message, viz. that when God's people are removed from the world, there is no longer any restraint against the eruption of evil. That is why it is so needful to have a strong and vital spiritual Church in the world. When that obtains, far more telling and potent impact is made than by any amount of socio-political engagement and involvement.

31)4:1524

The date mentioned in 19 is surely significant. In Exodus 12:2, 3 we read that it was on the tenth day of the first month that the lamb of the Passover was set apart and sanctified. It can hardly be accidental that forty years to the day, the children of Israel passed over Jordan! The association of ideas is always present. A word needs to be said about the significance of the twelve stones (20). This was the *second* set of stones (the first set being placed in the Jordan, 9), and *these* were erected by Joshua in Gilgal as a memorial, which could be referred to by succeeding generations. What they were meant to represent can hardly be in doubt. This was a point of new departure with the children of Israel: in passing through Jordan and emerging into Canaan they entered into a new experience in God's dealing with them. There was a very real sense in which Jordan represented for them a death and a resurrection. This was the symbolism of the two sets of stones: one in the river bed and covered over, and one in Gilgal as a memorial of what had happened, and both alike bearing witness to a death that had brought life. This surely foreshadows the New Testament doctrine of the believer's union and identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, the spiritual reality of which we see in shadows, types and illustrations throughout the teaching of the Old Testament: Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah; Moses refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; and now Joshua. Nor is it different in the New Testament itself: Jesus said, 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself...', let him come to the river Jordan and go through the waters. And significantly and symbolically, the first company of believers were baptised in Jordan. One of the old Puritan commentators suggests that when John the Baptist was preaching by Jordan (near to Gilgal) and asserted to the Pharisees that 'God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham', he may well have been referring to the stones that had been set there by Joshua for a spiritual memorial. The deathlife pattern is found everywhere in Scripture, by those who have eyes to see.

32)4:1524

We must spend another day on this reading before going on to the next chapter, to consider the implications of what is said in 2124. There are two simple lessons to underline: the first is the propriety and usefulness of, and indeed the need for, Christians to rehearse with their children the mighty acts of God. If these verses say anything to us they surely say 'Do not discourage the children from asking questions, and do not dare say to them 'Children should be seen and not heard'. It is part of their Christian nurture that they should do so, and there is nothing more likely to thrill their souls, than for older folk, who have known the ways of God and experienced His visitations, to tell them how great God is and how mighty the things He has done. This is to render them the best kind of service. It is one of the ways in which young lives can be shaped and fashioned, and inspired to follow Christ. Let us think, for example, what it must have meant to the children who accompanied their parents to Miletus (Acts 20) for the farewell meeting with the apostle Paul. An unforgettable experience indeed, and one they could never have forgotten. The second lesson concerns the duty of parental instruction. The training of children in the ways of God is not something that ought to be left to Sunday School teachers or Scripture Union leaders, for their task ought to be regarded as supplementary to the main burden of parental instruction. The fact that so much in modern days has been left to these dedicated and devoted workers is a measure of parental failure. And when parents have lived to see the wonders of God's grace at work in themselves and in the fellowships to which they belong, have they not much to impart to their children that will thrill and bless their hearts?

33)5:19

This chapter falls naturally into three parts, the first dealing with circumcision (19); the second, with the keeping of the Passover (1012); and the third the mysterious appearance of 'the Captain of the host of the Lord'. Once again, as in the previous chapter, the symbolic and typological significance of the events is highly important. As to the act of circumcision, it is not that those receiving it should be undergoing a second circumcision, but that this new generation that represented Israel should be starting again with God. It seems clear that the rite of circumcision had fallen into disuse, so far as those that had been children or babes in arms when Israel came out of Egypt and those born in the wilderness were concerned. For background to this, Numbers 14 should be consulted, particularly 2034. Circumcision was the mark of Israel's covenant relationship with God, and this was withdrawn from the earlier generation because of their sin. They experienced God's 'breach of promise', Numbers 14:34. Now, the covenant was being restored to the new generation. This does not mean that God forsook His people in the wilderness; indeed, He bore with them patiently for these forty years, ministering to them and supplying manna from heaven day by day, but the covenant sign was withdrawn from them as the mark of the alienation of God from that whole generation. The significance of all this, in the context of this chapter is that the new generation were being taken up by God for His ongoing purposes. They were once again a covenant people, with all the privileges and all the blessings, and indeed all the protections of the covenant as they went forth to battle.

34)5:19

There is another lesson for us to learn from the symbolism of circumcision. There is a very real sense in which this constituted, in symbolic form an experimental application to the lives of the children of Israel of the pattern of death and resurrection, already indicated in the memorial stones mentioned in the previous chapter. It is not difficult for us to see New Testament analogies here. As Israel passed through a death, so to speak, and emerged into a new life and a new relationship with God, so it is with the believer. The apostle Paul's words in Colossians 2:11-13 and 3:15 are surely conclusive in establishing such a spiritual analogy. Christians are set apart unto God in their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and they are to show the signs of their practical consecration to Him by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ and by mortifying their members which are upon the earth. This is what took place in the rite of circumcision: the pruning knife of the Lord was applied and Israel was set apart unto Him. The sign of circumcision was meant to show that this is where they stood. Significantly, in 9, there comes the word 'This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you'. Their circumcision marked the final step in their severance from Egypt's bondage, including all the weary wilderness years. This was the beginning of 'God's new thing' for them, in recognition of which they proceeded to keep the Passover as we shall read in the next Note.

35)5:1015

It is surely not without significance that the rite of circumcision and the ordinance of the Passover should stand in such close association here, when in fact baptism and the Lord's Supper stand also in that same close relation. This was the first celebration of the Passover for nearly forty years. The original enactment was in Egypt, when God made bare His holy arm and delivered His people; then, a year later it was celebrated again at Sinai, after which there comes the gap of 39 years, stretching from Israel's failure at Kadesh Barnea, during which (the rite of circumcision having been withdrawn) the Passover could not be kept. It is interesting to note that there is no record here of the Lord commanding the Passover to be kept; Joshua kept it voluntarily, with a sense of its being the right thing to do. When we bear in mind the Lord's injunction to him in chapter 1 to meditate day and night in the book of the law, it seems clear that he was guided by the Word in what he did here. As such its observance was surely a symbol of commitment, in which Israel was recalled to basics in their relationship with God. The matter of the 'old corn of the land' and the cessation of the manna has also symbolic significance, marking a transition: they were no longer a pilgrim people in the wilderness, needing supernatural provision, and therefore it was no longer given them. The passing from the miraculous to ordinary should not be thought of as a matter of regret but one of coming of age in which a new provision was instituted for a new situation no less Divine, indeed, but just different. You do not need manna from heaven, if there is a baker's shop down the road!

36)5:1015

The final section of the chapter (1315) is deeply mysterious, and this seems intensified by the fact that the verses are apparently isolated from anything before or after them. It will help us to understand them, however, if we recognise that 6:2 ff continues the mysterious interview between Joshua and the Captain of the Lord's host, and unfolds the latter's plan of campaign. 'As Captain of the Lord's host am I come', he says, 'and this is what you are to do'. Such is the sequence. There is a remarkable similarity in this incident to the experience Moses had at the burning bush, and the kind of command issued is the same in both cases (cf Exodus 3:1 ff). Also, it is significant to realise *when* it was that Joshua saw him: after the rite of circumcision had been administered and the Passover had been celebrated, that is to say, after a committed obedience to the mind and will of God. This, in fact is generally when we are likely to meet with the Captain of the Lord's host and be taken up into the divine purposes. Who was he? Was this nothing more than a theophany? Hardly. We hold it to be a preincarnate appearance of Christ, and analogous to many instances in which the angel of the Lord (or the angel of the covenant) appeared at various times to God's people. This is not fanciful exegesis: belief in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity really commits us to the view that Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, operates throughout history, before as well as after His incarnation. We shall continue our consideration of these verses in the next Note.

37)5:1015

Joshua's concern was to know whether this mysterious personage was on his side or against him. The nature of the reply given him seems to indicate, 'It is not so much that I am on your side as that you are on My side'. There is an infinity of difference between the two attitudes. But Joshua is not simply being reminded that He, not Joshua, was the Commander in Chief of the Israelite army, that was true, of course, and He was going to be just that, but the phrase 'the host of the Lord' is far bigger than the army of Israel. The host that He was Captain of, was the heavenly host of principalities and powers (in the good sense), later to be revealed to Elisha's young man at Dothan. This was an assurance to Joshua that in the battles he was about to engage in, these unseen powers were going to be at hand to help, and to enable him to prevail. This is why the Lord's servants are at any time able to say 'they that be with us are more than they that be with them'. And this also is why the somewhat trite saying that 'one with God is a majority' is the simple truth. The hosts of God encamp around His people. It is very wonderful, is it not, that Michael and all the other archangels are arrayed around *us*, under the command of their mighty Captain to do battle on *our* behalf (cf Revelation 19:11 ff). No less than this is the heritage of those committed to the service of God. Small wonder that the apostle Paul cries out in Romans 8:37, 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us'!

38)6:116

We must not forget the underlying spiritual reality throughout the ongoing campaign of conquest that begins with this chapter. The more one reads the Old Testament Scriptures, the more one becomes convinced that it is a very partial understanding of them to think merely in terms of the material blessings enjoyed by the people of God. It is true, of course, that God did prosper His people materially, but to confine our thinking to this is really to miss the deepest point about this revelation history. Paul clearly points out, in passages like 1 Corinthians 10, for example, that there is a spiritual stratum underlying the material. This is borne out in 2: 'I have given into thy hand Jericho'. It was an accomplished fact before ever Jericho fell, and this corresponds to the remarkable statement in 1:3. Right at the outset, there is the 'givenness', and all that follows indicates how that givenness was to be realised and appropriated. What we must grasp is that the issue was never in doubt: the children of Israel moved *from* a position of victory, not *towards* it. This also is the wonderful reality in the Christian's experience: we start from a position of victory; all our enemies are foredoomed in the victory of Christ, and it is all a question of our appropriating the victory that has already been given to us in Him. 'I have given you the victory', says the Lord, 'now take it, and make it your own'. Until we grasp this salient and fundamental point about the Christian life, we will never really make very much of it.

39)6:116

The Lord's instructions to Joshua (through the Captain of His host) were clear and unmistakable, and they were met with instant obedience and instant action. There was no questioning of the mighty Captain's strategy or tactics. This is what makes 6 ff such a thrilling reading. We should bear in mind that the operation took place at a time when faith was waxing strong and mighty in Israel, and this is always when things tend to happen in marvellous ways. But, of course, this was no ordinary campaign, no ordinary warfare, and this was no ordinary people, but the people of the living God, and He was in the midst of them. And where He is, anything can happen. There is a significant phrase in 8: we are told that they 'passed on before the Lord'. This indicates the consciousness the people had that the Lord was in their midst, and that all was being done in His presence. We should point out at this juncture that to have mighty faith does not make us into supermen, and there is nothing here of the magical, superman variety. Many in the Israelite army must surely have been mystified at the command to tramp round the walls of Jericho these seven times. They would not have been human if they had not been mystified, because Joshua had not told them that the walls were going to fall flat. They had simply received the divine directive; it was theirs to obey it. And obey they did, without understanding. We are not to suppose that the mighty Captain was visible to the people, indeed every indication suggests that He was not. The appearance was something vouchsafed to Joshua alone. It was an unseen Presence that was with them, and yet it was a presence of which they were conscious, and which made everything different. And that is something that we *can understand*. We know the difference it makes to a Church service when there is a sense of the Divine Presence in our midst, and it is then that we know that anything could happen.

40)6:1727

These verses complete the account of the fall of Jericho in a victory that was total and complete, with the utter destruction of the city and its inhabitants (of which we shall say something in a later Note, and the preservation of Rahab and her family). There are many spiritual lessons to be learned from this chapter. The principles that underlie the story are really fundamental. This is what the apostle takes up when he says, in Hebrews 11:30, 'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down'. This is the supreme lesson. Here are a people of whom it could be truly said that God was in complete control. The life that is not controlled by God, and the Church that does not submit itself to His Lordship must surely be doomed from the outset to failure and ineffectiveness. His work must be done in His way and in His time, not otherwise, not before, not after. Jesus said, 'Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?'. Peter, in Acts 5:32, says that God gives the Holy Spirit to them that obey Him. The whole essence of the great victory that Joshua wrought at Jericho is that he did to the letter exactly as the Lord had bidden him. There was utter obedience and submission to the word and will of the Lord. It is true that in one sense the victory was a foregone conclusion, since the city was already theirs in title in the word and promise of God. But this does not mean that the whole thing was automatic; very much not. It was the total obedience offered to the word of promise that made the title such a glorious reality. The spiritual parallel is evident: the obedience of faith, by which we learn truly to reckon on the completeness of Christ's victory enables us to go forth conquering and to conquer in our daily lives.

41)6:127

We have referred to the attitude of complete obedience that lies at the heart of this wonderful story. All alike did as they were told: the priests had to do certain things, the Ark of the Covenant had to be in the midst, the people had to be with the priests. One commentator points out that this is a good pattern for Christian work. The people must be with the priests, right with them, and surely this is a valuable and necessary lesson for us to learn. Sometimes people speak in a rather disparaging way in our view inadvisable - of Presbyterian or nonConformist forms of service, maintaining that too much is left to the Minister and that there is not enough participation by the congregation in worship. They want to introduce things like responses or question and answer, or whatever, into the service. This, apparently, would be participation. But a major misunderstanding of the situation lies behind such an attitude. Let us suppose, for example, a considerable number of people listening to God's Word in the service are as yet uncommitted, who may be at various stages of interest and concern, or even 'sitting on the fence'. The preacher, if he is worth his salt, is preaching for a verdict from these people; but every true believer present should be absolutely with the preacher in that concern, and participating in it, urging on the Word by silent prayer, saying, 'Go on, go on', interceding with all his heart in order that the Word might have free course. That, in our view, is true and meaningful participation, and that is what ought to be: no one should be in church as a spectator, simply listening to a performance. God forbid! If we are believers, we are just as much in the front line as the man in the pulpit, and we should recognise ourselves as being just as involved and active in the sending forth of the Word as he is. Together with him we constitute the vehicle by which God may bring salvation to those who are as yet uncommitted. People and priest are together in this. This is what we need to relearn today.

42)6:127

Another important lesson this chapter teaches us, has to do with the weapons of our warfare. One cannot but think that Paul had this story in mind when he wrote, in 2 Corinthians 10:4 ff, the famous words, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds'. At all events, whether this is so or not, the story of the fall of Jericho affords us a perfect illustration of his words. It was, in fact, a most extraordinary thing that God asked Israel to do: 'March round the walls and blow the trumpets'. A city had never before been taken in this way, it was something absolutely unheard of, and humanly speaking, nothing could have looked more foolish. It does not need much imagination to see the incredulity dawning on the faces of the inhabitants of Jericho, as they saw this strange people, about whom such terrifying rumours had reached them, plunging them into fear and dread, tramping round the walls in silence, and in seeming uselessness. But it worked! And what was impossible to normal methods of warfare became possible with God. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. This was the point of the exercise, to show the people of God, and indeed the world at large, that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. The parallel is very clear. What was true here is true for the Christian Church, faced as it is with its great Jericho today, the grim, gaunt, and impregnable fortress of modern society, with all sorts of sociopolitical action employed to breach it, and the foolishness of preaching discounted and dismissed as having no possible relevance. When is the Church going to learn that this is the weapon that is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds?

43)6:127

Even the symbolism of this story proclaims the lesson underlined in the previous Note. We are told that the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant before the hosts of Israel. The significance of this is that in the Ark lay the tablets of stone with the law of God engraved on them. This action was symbolic of their trust in the living Word of God. It was by the Word of the Lord that Jericho was breached. Indeed, this is why the going forth of the Word of the Lord into Canaan showed that the whole land was to be subdued. Perhaps the lack of evidence of any result during the first six days is also meant to convey a message for us. It must certainly have been a test of faith for the Israelites, to go on tramping without anything happening. This has relevance, surely, for us who are involved in the ministry of the Word today: men are preaching, preaching, preaching, and not much is happening, perhaps; but they are being faithful, that is the point. And one day, one great glad day - and many reading these Notes are going to live to see it - the heavens are going to open, and there will be 'days of the Son of man' in Scotland, the like of which we have read about in olden times, and we will marvel and exult and rejoice, as Israel did at the fall of Jericho. And must they not have had some sense of the Divine Presence becoming more and more real to them, as day by day they tramped round the walls, enabling them to continue in their obedience, and must not their confidence have begun to rise? There is such a thing, after all, as the earnest of the Spirit!

44)6:127

Before we leave this chapter we must say something about the completeness of the destruction wrought on Jericho, and the solemn warnings given to the people to have no association with 'the accursed thing' (18). Is this simply an example of blood-thirsty and ruthless slaughter, abhorrent to the spirit of the New Testament? To think thus is to miss the point. The Canaanite nations, as we are explicitly informed in different places in the Old Testament, had reached such depths of depravity and evil that nothing but utter destruction was left for them. Israel was the instrument of divine judgment upon these nations: the fatal infection of evil, which they represented, was to be utterly extirpated, otherwise there would be no possibility of the new nation of Israel being able to live in Canaan at all. The seriousness of disregarding the command for utter destruction is seen only too clearly in the next chapter, when the sin of Achan bid fair to bring destruction upon Israel itself.

Within this grim record we have the beautiful story of the preservation of Rahab and her family, which had been promised in 2:12 ff. God is faithful to His Word! The far-reaching implication of what is said in 25 about Rahab's dwelling in Israel 'even unto this day' is, as we have already seen underlined in the fact that, being incorporated into the divine purposes of God for redemption, she became one of the ancestors of the Lord Jesus, the Saviour of the world (Matthew 1:5).

45)7:115

There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between the experience at Jericho and their experience at Ai, recorded in this chapter. Everything is different. In the one we see an army victorious, triumphant and invincible; in the other we see that same army in disarray, fleeing ignominiously from the field of battle before their rather surprised conquerors, the people of Ai. The circumstances surrounding this remarkable event, and the cause of this disastrous defeat, are unfolded for us in this chapter. It opens with a bald statement about a sin committed by one of the Israelites, Achan by name, and this statement is clearly meant to stand as an explanation of all that follows. It is a sinister prologue to the story of the debacle at Ai, and there is much for us to learn from it. We look first at the account of the defeat itself. Spies are sent by Joshua to view the city of Ai, next in line for destruction by the advancing army of Israel. Their report is that only a small detachment of the army would be necessary to reduce the city, for, as they said, it was small and not very considerable in the opposition it was likely to offer. A company of 3000 therefore went forward against the city. But something clearly happened, and they fled in disorder and confusion. This produced a cataclysmic destruction of morale in the Israelite army, and Joshua prostrated himself before the Lord in prayer, dismayed and perturbed, clearly seeing the implications from the human point of view of this unforeseen defeat. It was in this context that the Lord exposed the sin of Achan and showed how it must be dealt with. Such is the situation from which we are to draw the lessons of the incident.

46)7:115

It is clear that the principle lesson to be drawn has to do with Achan, and it is this that must occupy our main attention; but there are some things we can gather from the outline of events given in yesterday's Note, at least by implication. For there is more than a suggestion that Joshua and his victorious army were guilty of over-confidence after their experience at Jericho, and that they assumed too lightly that Ai would present no difficulty after their earlier triumph. It is not wrong to be elated at victory, but being elated assuredly has dangers: it can lead to a trust in the arm of the flesh as if it had been by their own prowess that they had vanquished Jericho. This is surely hinted at in 3, in the confident pronouncement by the spies. In this connection it is interesting to find one commentator pointing out that of the three recorded occasions on which spies were sent forward to view the situation by Moses at Kadesh Barnea, by Joshua at Jericho, and here in two of the instances the returning spies presumed to advise their leader what to do, and on both occasions, disaster came. While in the one instance in which they prepared to leave things to the Lord at Jericho the battle went their way, and success resulted. Overconfidence, leading to trust in the arm of the flesh, and therefore to spiritual carelessness! And when we are spiritually careless, the enemy of souls gains an advantage over us.

47)7:115

If Joshua had not been so flushed with success, he might not have been betrayed into thinking in purely military terms of Ai; and also he would have been more sensitive to the Spirit's direction and intimation that all was not well in the camp. Surely it could not have been God's will to leave him in ignorance of what Achan had done? Nor could it have been God's original, directive will for His people to go up against Ai and be defeated in this way. That would not make sense. No, God does not let evil go unchecked; but what if Joshua was not hearing very well at that time? It may well be that God had been whispering to him, 'Joshua, pause a moment, there is something wrong, you know'. But in his elation over Jericho, Joshua was careless and was not listening, and the whisper of God's warning voice went unheeded. God may have had no option but to allow the defeat to take place. It could have been avoided, if Joshua had been more alive to the situation and more sensitive to the whisper of the Spirit. Someone said 'Achan, at the beginning of Israel's warfare for Canaan, and Ananias, at the beginning of the Church's conquest of the world (Acts 5), are brothers alike in guilt and in doom.' It is very striking that the two stories are so parallel in their import, the difference between them being that in the New Testament the sin was detected and dealt with before it could compromise the whole people of God, whereas here it was not, until it was too late. There is surely sufficient here for one day's meditation.

48)7:115

We turn now to the central consideration, which is Achan's sin, stated briefly and starkly in 1, and elaborated in his own confession in 20, 21. We must note first of all what is implied in the statement in 1: 'The children of Israel committed a trespass, for Achan took of the accursed thing.' In other words, the sin of Achan incriminated and involved the whole people of God. Two things may be said about this: first of all the reality of what may be called the solidarity of men in their sin. None of us lives unto himself, and none of us sins unto himself; and when Achan sinned, the Divine Presence was withdrawn not merely from him, but from the whole people of God. On the other hand this is the second thing it was the fact of the general spirit of carelessness in the people as a whole, through elation at the victory of Jericho, that allowed the carelessness in one particular individual to take such a sinister turn. This is what that carelessness did to him and this is what disastrous consequences it had. There can therefore be no question of pointing the finger at Achan and blaming him alone. They were all, in this ironic and paradoxical way, involved. If the fellowship of the people of God had been stronger and less disposed to carelessness, Achan might have been stronger too and might have borne up in the moment of temptation. This is truly a devastating lesson, and one that Christian people in the fellowship of the gospel need to learn. Does this not say something to us about our attitudes to those who fall and fail, and should it not deliver us forever from any spirit of censoriousness, and withal, remind us that prevention is better than cure? God deliver us from carelessness and complacency! Jesus did warn against putting stumbling blocks in the way of 'His little ones'.

49)7:1626

We consider next how Achan's sin is described, in its inmost nature. The phrase used in 1 is 'committed a trespass in the accursed thing.' Alexander McLaren says that this phrase has the force of 'a breach of trust', and is an expression frequently used in the Pentateuch to describe Israel's treacherous departure from God. Also, 'the accursed thing' means 'the devoted thing'. The spoil of Jericho was set apart for Jehovah, and therefore to appropriate any part of it was sacrilege. It was the first city of Canaan to fall, and the spoil was the first-fruits of this conflict; and by law the first-fruits belonged to God. He had declared at the end of chapter 6 that everything was to be devoted to destruction, apart from specified items to be taken for the use of the Tabernacle, therefore to touch it was to touch forbidden things. This is the seriousness of the sin: it was robbing God, appropriating what was His. It was a breach of trust, a breach of the covenant. Every sin in the believer has this element of breach of trust in it; it is this that makes it so terrible. God has trusted us to be His, and to act in character with this calling: not to do so is to sin against trust and love. And when sin is put in these personal categories we see what a terrible and terrifying thing it is. Furthermore Achan's sin was a sin against light. There was absolutely no question of its having been done in ignorance, for we see in 6:17,18 that there was an explicit command given to Joshua and the people by God, and the warning was quite plain: 'If you touch anything in that city you will make yourself accursed.' And, secret sin though it was, (20, 21) God exposed it, bringing it out into the open, to Achan's cost. The hidden things of darkness, be they ever so skilfully concealed, can never be hidden from God. 'All things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do' (Hebrews 4:13).

50)7:1626

We consider next Achan's confession in 20, 21, and note the progression in the words 'I saw, I coveted, I took, I hid'. Is not this the history of the course of sin? We could transpose these four verbs into Genesis 3, so exact a description are they of what happened in man's primal sin. When Eve 'saw, that the tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise', she 'took' of the fruit thereof. Then Adam and his wife 'hid' themselves from the presence of the Lord (Genesis 3:6, 8). This is the basic essence of sin, and we find ourselves habitually in this pattern when we commit it. It begins with a look, or a thought, then it becomes a desire and we covet. The reason Eve eventually took the fruit is that she had taken it, tasted it, a hundred times in her imagination first. That is always the story of sin. And having committed it, we have the impulse to cover up and to hide, in shame and fear. And that is how it was with Achan. But we cannot hide from God. Inevitably, He comes and says 'Adam, where art thou?', and out He trails us, and out He trails it, too! We see also something not only of the tragedy and perversity of sin but also its deceitfulness and foolishness. What good did Achan get out of it? He could not even take it out at night in his tent to savour his acquisition of it. It was buried, and all he could do was to stand on it and say to *himself* 'I have silver and gold under my feet, but it has to stay there'. Poor enjoyment, indeed, for all the trouble it brought him. How totally sin betrays us in the satisfaction it offers!

51)7:1626

We must next consider the method by which Achan's sin was exposed publicly. What does it mean that 'the tribe of Judah was taken', then 'the family of the Zarhites', then 'the household of Zabdi', then Achan? We are not told, but we assume from what we read elsewhere in the Old Testament, that it must have been by one of two possible ways, either by the drawing of lots, or through the operation of the Urim and Thummim, the stones that sparkled in the ephod of the High Priest. By whatever means, however, the tribe of Judah was singled out from the others, then within the tribe the family, and within the family the household, until finally Achan was singled out. However it was done, no one disputed the result. And one can very well imagine the growing consternation, conviction, and agony of conscience in Achan, as the divine process inexorably narrowed down to him. He must have been utterly broken down as he made his confession (20, 21). The sentence passed on him was a judicial one: death by stoning. Rough justice, we may feel like saying, but this was the appointed way, the recognised method in a theocratic community, of dispensing justice, and it persisted right into the New Testament era. Stephen the deacon was stoned with stones because they thought him guilty of blasphemy (Acts 7). If we are tempted to say, 'Surely this was a very extreme penalty, could he not have been forgiven?' the answer must be, that forgiveness is not in question here. He confessed his sin, and the question of his forgiveness cannot be in doubt. But a murderer is not released, nor does he escape the due process of the law, even if he finds forgiveness and becomes a believer. The law's demands must still be met. True, Achan was not a murderer, but as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, if what he did had been left unchecked it would have corrupted the people of God and spread like a poison through their whole system. At this early stage in Israel's progress into the land, it was imperative for the body of Israel to be kept pure.

52)7:1626

One final word before we leave this solemn chapter. We are told in 26 that the name of the place was called 'the valley of Achor'. It is impossible not to think of the remarkable words in Hosea 2:14 ff, where God speaks through the prophet, words of promise and comfort to His erring people, and none more wonderful than the words 'the valley of Achor for a door of hope'. What an evocative phrase! The valley of Achor, the place of sin and shame and of abandonment by God 'There', says God, 'I will open a door of hope'. And blessed be His Name, it has been proved true again and again in the experience of communities, churches, fellowships, and individuals, that the place of sorrow and shame, sin and brokenness can in the mercy and grace of God become a door of hope, opening out into the broad table lands of God's love and power. This is the wonder of the gospel: sin does not have the last word in the human situation; God delights in mercy, and though in a little wrath He hides his face from His people for a moment, yet with everlasting kindness will He have mercy upon them (cf Isaiah 54:8-10).

53)8:113

In this chapter, the situation with regard to Ai is completely changed: the city is put to the sword and Israel goes on her conquering way once again. The lesson is clear and plain: when there is sin in the camp, things go wrong and disaster follows: when things are put right, victory comes. How wonderful (1) that God's 'Fear not' can be restored to a people who have failed - such is divine grace! We should not miss the important implication in this: there is a strange perversity in the human spirit which, when a man has sinned badly, makes it uphill work for him to believe in the forgiveness of God. It is a common pastoral experience, to discover that while the forgiveness of God is not in doubt, that believer may find it very hard to forgive himself. This is one of the fruitful causes of disheartening and even spiritual breakdown. There is a test of faith involved here: if God forgives our sin, we have no kind of right to remain preoccupied with it. Rather, it must be resolutely put behind us; the past must be allowed to be the past, and remain there. The command 'Take all the people of war with you' takes us right back to the position at the beginning of chapter 7, when Joshua sent the spies to view Ai. It is as if God had said to Joshua 'Now we will go right back to the beginning and start again'. This also is the wonder of grace. And this time there was to be no mistake. We see particularly what is said in 2 about the spoil: this was different from the Jericho situation. Jericho was the first city of the campaign, and as such the firstfruits belonged as of right to God. This is why they were to keep their hands off, and why Achan's sin was so inexcusable. But Ai was not the firstfruits, and therefore God said, 'Help yourself, the spoil is yours'. In the light of this, one realises just how little need there ever is to take by stealth what does not belong to us, when God is so liberal to His people. It is a device of Satan to insinuate into human hearts that God is being unfair in His dealings with us (cf Genesis 3:1 ff). The Psalmist's word is always true: 'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly' (Psalm 84:11).

54)8:1429

On this occasion, the city of Ai was to be taken by means of an ambushment, not a miraculous intervention as at Jericho. Some think this was God's 'second best', for Israel, and that if they had not sinned in the matter of Achan, Ai would have been miraculously delivered into their hands as Jericho had been. But this is a dubious interpretation; there are no grounds for supposing that the whole campaign to subdue Canaan was to be miraculous in the Jericho sense. Indeed, there is ample evidence to indicate that God's hand was truly on the situation as it was. God is not prodigal of the miraculous, when ordinary means will suffice; indeed He can work miracles through ordinary, as well as extraordinary, means. Perhaps the real evidence of the miraculous is that the 30,000 men who lay in wait near the city should have remained hidden, so near to it and for so long a time, and that the king of Ai did not send scouts or patrols round the walls to see what was happening. The strategy that Joshua applied was to draw out the enemy, to expose them and so trap them. This is a fertile illustration of spiritual realities, because this is also how God deals with evil, as we have seen in our studies in Revelation, where one central message is that the reason God allowed evil to go unchecked for so long, was that He was giving it its head, drawing it out fully so as finally to destroy it. Joshua, as we can see in 6, read the enemy's mind correctly, and this is something that we also must learn to do in spiritual warfare. Paul says of Satan 'We are not ignorant of his devices'. But so often **we are**, and because we do not take the trouble to become acquainted with them, we are out-manoeuvred again and again. Know your enemy is one of the greatest needs in spiritual warfare. What Joshua did here, **we** may by the grace of God do also in spiritual life.

A word must be said once again about the totality of the destruction that took place at Ai. This is one of the problems in the understanding of the Old Testament, and many find it extremely difficult to reconcile this as they call it brutal destruction with any kind of moral principle. But we need to see what we are about here. If this were simply an ordinary campaign of conquest, these strictures would be legitimate and indeed inevitable; but to think of an ordinary campaign of conquest here, is precisely to miss the point. What was taking place was a divine enterprise, in which God was dealing in judgment with the heathen nations of Canaan because the cup of their iniquities was full to the brim. It was an enactment of divine judgment, and Israel was the instrument in the hands of God for the fulfilling of it. In the book of Genesis we are told that God sent the Flood upon the earth to wipe out and to destroy the monstrosity of evil that had proliferated in the antediluvian era. It had become so bad, and evil had become so abandoned, that for the sake of the continued existence of the world that entire generation had to be destroyed. In the same way, the nations of Canaan had sunk so low in iniquity that only one thing was left for God, to wipe them out, men, women, children and animals. It was the only way for the dread infection to be stayed. Ancient history bears out how unspeakably depraved some of these ancient peoples had become; and when nations reach a certain point in their depravity, God strikes, and that is that. This is what was happening here; and Israel was simply the instrument of the divine purpose.

But God was also accomplishing something else: Israel was going to replace this welter of depraved nations and tribes in Canaan. And when Israel herself went the way of the previous Canaanite tribes, God dealt with them also, and uprooted them into captivity in Babylon. It was the same principle at work. This must always be remembered when we study Old Testament campaigns of this nature: when the point of no return is passed, extirpation of abandoned evil is the only possible way to deal with it.

56)8:129

The fate of the king of Ai is recorded in 29. There is a certain significance in this. Why, it may be asked, is this recorded, and why did Joshua not put him to the sword? The reason must surely be that hanging was a *judicial* penalty (in the same way as crucifixion was in Roman times). Joshua was acting in a judicial capacity, and this was a judicial act. The king of Ai was held guilty in the sight of God, and he was judged as such and hanged on a tree until eventide. Joshua's command that his carcass be taken down when the sun went down, was also in accordance with the Levitical law; and if we did not understand that this was in fact a judicial act, we might be pardoned for supposing that there was a certain cynicism in speaking of Joshua observing the letter of the law so meticulously. But, in fact, he was applying the law of God all the way through, thus bearing symbolic witness that this was God's campaign, and God's way of vindicating His justice and righteousness.

57)8:3035

The last verses of the chapter are particularly interesting and significant. What was done here, we are told in 31 was in accordance with the Lord's command to Israel through Moses. It will be useful, indeed necessary, to look in this connection at two passages in Deuteronomy, 11:26-32 and 27:128-68. The first of these passages gives but a brief reference, but the two chapters give a full statement of the ritual of Ebal and Gerizim. The picture is as follows: there is a great valley about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile wide between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (visitors to the area have testified that the acoustics of the place are quite remarkable), formed like a vast amphitheatre, in which voices from one side of the valley are clearly heard on the other side. Six tribes were to be on the one side and six on the other, with the Levites down in the valley. The Levites were to speak to all the men of Israel, crying out with a loud voice the cursings and the blessings of the law of God, which was rehearsed before the people in this way. Deuteronomy 27 contains the cursings and Deuteronomy 28 the blessings. It is to all this that these verses in Joshua 8 refer. It does not need much imagination to see the drama and impressiveness of such a tremendous occasion and it contains many lessons for us. And first of all this: what Joshua and the people were doing was to pay their vows to the Lord according to the Scriptures. Worship, not warfare, was the first priority of their lives. Several commentators make the point that it would have seemed, humanly speaking, that having reduced Ai to such destruction, Israel should have moved right forward up country and made the most of their advance while they could. Instead, however, they turned aside to Shechem, where Ebal and Gerizim were situated, a place hoary with association from the days of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And there they paid their vows to the Lord.

58)8:3035

In the second place, this ritual would have been a graphic reminder to Israel of the possibilities for weal or woe before them, because of the terrible experience they had had at Ai. 'Cursing or blessing', it was as if God were saying, 'The choice is yours. There are two ways to walk, either with Me, in obedience to My word, in which case you will know the blessings that I have promised to My people; or, in disobedience and carnal selfconfidence, in which case you will know the cursings.' They had in fact already experienced both, in chapter 7, cursing, in chapter 8, blessing. And everything was related to the Word of the Lord. He was, in effect, saying, 'Here is chapter and verse for you, which will explain the events of the past days'; and He would point to the passages in Deuteronomy and say, 'This is why you came to grief at Ai, and this is why you found victory the second time'. But there is another significance also in this ritual. What was happening, in effect, was that Joshua was planting the law of God in the land of Canaan. He wrote there upon the plastered stones a copy of the law of Moses, in the presence of the children of Israel (32). This was a highly symbolic act: Here was a country that had passed the point of no return in evil and depravity, and God was about to destroy the inhabitants for their sin; and here was His new people who were to live in accordance with His law. One is reminded of the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in the New World in the 17th century: they planted the Word of the living God in that New World. This was the testimony that Joshua enacted at Shechem.

59)8:3035

Reference back to Exodus 24 shows that this whole scene at Ebal and Gerizim was a repetition of that at Mount Sinai, when God stated the terms of the covenant for His people. He had delivered them with stretchedout hand and mighty arm out of the house of Egypt and the land of bondage, and brought them to Sinai, saying, 'I am the Lord thy God that brought thee out...thou shalt have no other gods before Me'. And when He unfolded to them the terms of the covenant, the people listened and responded, 'All that the Lord hath said unto us, we will do'. We know how tragically they failed in that undertaking, and they were turned back at Kadesh Barnea to perish in the wilderness. But now a new generation has been taken up by the Lord, and He is renewing, reratifying the covenant with them. And they were taking possession of Canaan not only on the grounds of a promise given to Abraham, (they were in Abraham's country at that point, for Shechem was a place with sacred and hallowed associations for the Patriarch) but also according to the terms of the law of God. They were embracing God's law as the rule of their life, and as the condition of their prosperity. Such is the significance and the impressive symbolism of this enactment here.

60)9:1,2

The point of the reference in the first two verses of this chapter is that what happened was a reaction on the part of these heathen kings to what Israel had done. The planting of the law of the Lord in Canaan led to the mobilisation of the enemy! Surely this is an eloquent reminder to us of man's natural hostility against God. The outcome of this hostility is not unfolded until the next chapter, which relates the campaign of the heathen kings against Israel and Joshua's signal victory over them. This is prefaced, however, by an interlude about the inhabitants of Gibeon. Before we turn to this interlude, it may be remarked that the victory Joshua won over these heathen kings was a monument to the faithfulness of God toward those who were prepared to be faithful to His word. This is not reading into the text what is not there, for as we have already seen the basic lesson of the book of Joshua is not so much that it is the account of a campaign of warfare and the subjection of Israel by an invading army so much as a 'holy war' in which Israel was the instrument in God's hand for the fulfilling of His purposes. And Israel remained great and victorious so long, and only just so long, as she based her life upon the law of God. Also, bearing in mind the spiritual implications of this warfare, we may say that the reaction of the kings was devil inspired; and as such it provides a graphic illustration of spiritual warfare. Wherever and whenever a consecration is made by the people of God, Satan counterattacks, sometimes like this, with all the fury of a roaring lion, as the ongoing campaign shows; but sometimes he comes much more deviously and with craft and subtlety, as the rest of this chapter represents, in the story of the Gibeonites, to which we turn in the next Note.

61)9:327

The story of the Gibeonites is an interesting and graphic one. Fearful of the power of Israel, they resort to guile and deceive Joshua and his army into entering a covenant and league with them. This represents the wily subtlety of the evil one who stands behind all material warfare. In spiritual terms, we have a useful parallel to this in the early chapters of Acts. When the Church of God was on the march, Satan reacted and stirred up opposition and persecution against the apostles. This was the direct frontal attack, Satan as a roaring lion. But when the persecution did not suffice to stay the Church's advance, Satan worked more subtly, as we see in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. And what he was unable to accomplish by direct frontal attack, he nearly did by the devious method of introducing corruption into the Church through two of its members. This is the kind of pattern we see in this story: the Gibeonites became Satan's tool in this very wily and crafty ploy, which proved successful. The story, simple in itself, raises a number of major issues. It will be noted that in 7 the men of Gibeon are called the Hivites. The significance of the introduction of this name must surely be to underline to us who they really were. It is as if the sacred writer is saying, 'These men were among the inhabitants of Canaan, and as such doomed to destruction by the command of God, and His people were expressly forbidden to make a covenant with them'. The divine command relating to this was quite unequivocal, as we see in Deuteronomy 7:1, 2 (which echoes Exodus 34:12). Joshua and his men were taken in completely by their guile and betrayed into breaking the express command of God, through ignorance of their origin. It seems clear from 7 and 8 that they were suspicious and uneasy; but they allowed their suspicions to be lulled. Alas, this proved to be a costly and fateful error, as the sequel shows.

62)9:327

The marginal reading in 14 seems to suggest that they received the men because of their provisions. This may not, however, mean anything more than that they accepted them on the strength of examining the provisions and finding them old and wasted, i.e. as evidence that they had been on the way for a long time. This, it seems clear, was the deception that was practised upon them by the Gibeonites, and it was on this ground that Joshua 'made a league with them'. He did this, however, significantly as 14b points out, without asking counsel of the Lord. Obviously, he and his men sensed something odd, and the gentle intimation of the Spirit made them cautious; but they brushed this aside, and chose to believe their eyes and their senses, rather than the check on their spirits. There is an important lesson for us here. It is obvious that the whole matter was negotiated hastily and without sufficient care. If only they had suspended judgment, and given the matter more thought, giving due weight to the uneasiness of which they were conscious! How important it is to respect the check on our spirits that comes from God, and how needful to establish a relationship with Him in which we recognise how He speaks to us. Jesus said, 'My sheep know My voice'. Do we? How much better it would have been for Joshua to have waited to verify the position and clarify it. We are not told how counsel was to have been sought from the Lord, but it was surely a clear case for consulting the Urim and Thummim, or the high priest's ephod, so as to discern the Lord's mind. If they had taken the trouble to do this, the whole deception would have been exposed as, of course, it was only three days later when it was too late, and they found themselves committed by oath to this people, in direct contradiction to the will of God. How very solemn!

63)9:327

We shall see in the next chapter how Israel became presently involved with the surrounding heathen kings because of the Gibeonites, for when the kings heard that Gibeon had entered into league with Israel, they amassed their forces against them; and Gibeon, facing certain annihilation, immediately appealed to Israel for help, on the ground of their newly covenanted obligation. Wrong decisions always involve fateful implications. It seems clear that here was another failure for Joshua similar to that at Ai, because of carelessness. The fact that God overruled their folly and made capital out of it for the furtherance of His purposes does not absolve Joshua from the responsibility of having done wrong. The question that must exercise our minds is that about the covenant that was made. It is clear that Joshua, even when the whole matter was exposed and the craftiness of the Gibeonites laid bare, regarded the covenant as sacrosanct. He had given his word in the name of the God of Israel, and it could not be broken. And the question that arises is, was it right to honour a vow that was made through craft and trickery? Joshua and the princes thought it must be kept, while the congregation of Israel murmured against their decision, and were all for executing vengeance upon the Gibeonites. Who was right? This is an important question with far-reaching implications, and it is not an easy one to answer. We shall proceed to consider it in the next Note.

64)9:327

Two questions arise in this matter: firstly the general one: Is it right to break an oath, a vow? And secondly, in this particular incidence, would it have been right for Israel to have done so? Looking at these questions will serve to clarify our minds. So far as one can see, on the basis of the Word of God, it cannot be right to make an oath, if that oath relates to something that is prohibited by God in His Word, and therefore against His known will. The oath that Paul's enemies made to kill him, and Herod's oath to Salome are cases in point. Could it ever be right to honour such vows? Also, Jephthah's vow in Judges 11, related to something that was prohibited in the law of God; and these instances surely make it clear that it cannot be right to keep an oath if keeping it violates the known will of God. Does this then, mean that Joshua was wrong to have honoured this oath? It might be thought, from what has been said, that he was. But what then, are we to say about the reference in 2 Samuel 21:1, 2 where we are told that a famine had come upon the nation of Israel as a punishment for what King Saul had done in slaying the Gibeonites, in defiance of the oath that had been made by Joshua, so long before? This is an impressive and disturbing piece of evidence, which might make us hesitate to say that Joshua was wrong in honouring the vow. It may be that the only thing we can say is that Joshua did it in all good faith, believing the Gibeonites to be strangers from afar rather than 'local' Canaanites, and that in these circumstances it was right and proper and honourable for him to honour the covenant, having once made it.

65)9:327

Over against what was said in the previous Note, we have, however, to look at other scriptural teaching. Psalm 15:4 speaks in commendation of the man who swears to his own hurt and changes not, thus extolling a man who honours his vows. But there is a basic difference between disowning a covenant because it was wrong, and disowning a covenant because it happens to prove inconvenient; and the reference in the Psalm is surely to the latter. To break a vow because it is going to be inconvenient to keep it, is dishonouring and dishonourable, but it is quite another matter to break a vow because it is wrong in the sight of God. Perhaps what we need to say with regard to Joshua is that the lesson here is about the honour of the man, whether or not it was right for him to keep the covenant, and that it was this that persisted right down to Saul's time. In Numbers 30 we find some very definite legislation about oaths and vows and the annulling of them in particular circumstances. The point being made there is that it is recognised that a young person may in the flush of enthusiasm make a vow that is unwise and injudicious, and therefore it is legitimate for a father to contradict and counteract it - at the time; in which case the young person is regarded as not bound by it. John Calvin has some fine things to say on this whole subject, and it will be useful to look at his words which we give in the next Note.

66)9:327

Here are the great Reformer's words, referred to at the end of the previous Note: 'As timid and inexperienced consciences, even after they are dissatisfied with a vow, and convinced of its impropriety, nevertheless feel doubts respecting the obligation, and are grievously distressed, on the one hand, from a dread of violating their promise to God, and on the other, from a fear of incurring greater guilt by observing it, it is necessary here to offer them some assistance to enable them to extricate themselves from this difficulty. Now, to remove every scruple at once, I remark, that all vows, not legitimate or rightly made, as they are of no value with God, so they ought to have no force with us. For if in human contracts no promises are obligatory upon us, but those to which the party with whom we contract wishes to bind us; it is absurd to consider ourselves constrained to the performance of those things which God never requires of us: especially as our works cannot be good unless they please God, and are accompanied with the testimony of our conscience that He accepts them. Therefore, if it be not lawful for a Christian man to attempt anything without this assurance, and if any one through ignorance has made a rash vow, and afterwards discovered his error, why should he not desist from the performance of it? Since vows inconsiderately made, are not only not binding, but ought of necessity to be cancelled. Hence we may conclude, that vows which have originated in error and superstition, are of no value with God, and ought to be relinquished by us.'

67)10:111

Whether or not it was right for Joshua to have honoured the vow and covenant with Gibeon, it remains true that he was saddled with this embarrassing people, and also more importantly that God overruled their presence in the midst of the congregation in a wonderful way. In these verses we see God coming to Joshua afresh and saying, in relation to the heathen kings (3), 'Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thy hand.' Joshua, then, was taken up again by God: the man's heart was right with Him, and the main direction of his life was Godward. This does not minimise or nullify the fact that he erred in making the covenant, through insensitiveness to the Spirit's intimation. Nevertheless, the main direction of his life was right. This is the encouraging thing: in many things we all offend, but God can take up our mistakes and faults, and overrule them and make capital out of them for His glory. In this battle, which was brought about directly by the covenants that had been entered into with the Gibeonites, God stepped in and said 'Put it in My hands, Joshua'. How very heartening and encouraging all this is! It is something, when engaged in the Lord's work, to have this kind of assurance, that making mistakes as undoubtedly we do and have done, God can graciously overrule them and give His work a new thrust. Not that this is ever an excuse for complacency or carelessness or for believing that mistakes do not matter very much; but oh, the knowledge and the assurance that God can overrule in spite of everything, this is the wonder and glory of being in His service.

68) 10:111

As to the account of the battle at Bethhoron, it will be seen at once that this is a different kind of battle from those previously fought. Hitherto, Joshua has tackled one thing at a time, but here is a confederacy of kings. The complications of the episode with the Gibeonites were, it seems, directly responsible for this. The attack was made upon Gibeon because of their going over to the Israelites. And Israel, having treaty obligations, went to their succour. This was the circumstance out of which Joshua and Israel won a remarkable and devastating victory. It is useful to consult a map to see the geography of the situation. Gilgal, about 10 miles to the north of the Dead Sea, in the valley of the Jordan, was where Joshua and the Israelites were encamped. Gibeon is perhaps 20.5 miles due west of Gilgal, and all the cities mentioned in this chapter are clustered there within a radius of 15 miles of Gibeon. Thus Joshua had to travel some 25 miles westwards to engage in battle. This he did, deciding upon a night march to come suddenly upon the kings and take them by surprise; and humanly speaking this is how they were defeated (9). One is reminded of another, much more recent, historical instance very similar to this. During the 1745 rebellion in Scotland, the forces of the Young Pretender, when they were stationed in Holyrood Palace, decided precisely to do this in attacking the Hanoverian army at Prestonpans. It was a distance comparable to that mentioned here. They made a night march, attacking before dawn, discomfiting the enemy and routing them. The map of the district here reveals the extent of the rout: Bethhoron is 7 miles northwest of Gibeon, Azekah and Makedah 15 miles southwest. It was a rout indeed!

69) 10:115

In the midst of the rout, God intervened, and a sudden eastern storm of hail assailed the fleeing armies (11) and devastated them. F.B. Meyer comments: 'The storm that broke in that late afternoon over the rugged descent to Bethhoron was no common one. Oriental hailstones are of great size: it is said that sometimes lumps of ice, of a pound or more in weight, will fall; and these would naturally kill any on whom they fell. But the remarkable thing in this case was that the storm broke in a moment when its fury could be spent on the Amorites without inflicting injury upon Israel. 'It came to pass as they fled from before Israel, while they were in the going down of Bethhoron, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died; they were more that died with the hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword'.'

There was a still more remarkable divine intervention, however, as we see in 12:14, 'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.' How are we to interpret this, and what are we to say about it? A great deal has been said, and we simply rehearse a number of the interpretations that have been given. There are those who maintain that what is recorded here is simply an instance of poetic licence, giving a metaphorical account of the fighting, as if to say that in one day Israel did the work of two days. This is a point of view of course, but it seems to smack of the same philosophy that suggests that the feeding of the 5000 in the New Testament was simply a matter of Jesus teaching in such a way that the crowd forgot their hunger. Behind all such interpretations there lies a basic unwillingness to accept the reality of the miraculous and a limiting of the power of the living God. We must surely look beyond this to other ways of understanding such a happening.

70) 10:1215

F.B. Meyer's comment is worthy of our attention: 'We place no limit to the divine power. He who made all things is the Monarch of all. It is indeed easy for Him to impose his will on nature, man, or human will. The miracle of the Resurrection is so stupendous in the raising of our human nature, incorporate with the Divine, to take its place in the heart of the forces of the spiritworld, that we need not hesitate to accept any wellaccredited marvel. Nor should we scruple to believe that God could make the clock of the universe stop, if it were necessary that it should do so.

'But it is not necessary to believe that He did this. No doubt here, as elsewhere, Scripture uses the language of ordinary human life. By some process the laws of which are at present unknown to us, but of which we get glimpses, in refraction, in the afterglow of sunset, in the fantastic appearances familiar to travellers in high latitudes and amongst the loftiest mountains, God was able to prolong the daylight until Israel had made an end of slaying their foes, with a very great slaughter, so that only a decimated remnant entered into the fenced cities. The how is not material to our present purpose. It is enough to express our belief in the fact itself. Somehow, the duration of that day's light was lengthened out until the people had avenged themselves of their enemies; 'and there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel'.'

71) 10:12-15

Another interpretation, given in the IVF Bible Commentary suggests that the meaning of Joshua's word here was a command to the sun to stop rising, not to stop setting. This is very intriguing. It is pointed out that the phrase 'the sun stood still and hastened not to go down' could very legitimately and accurately be rendered 'the sun hastened not to come out for about a whole day'. In other words, the situation was not so much that the slaughter went on for most of the day and that Joshua asked God to stay the sun from setting until the slaughter was finished, but rather that he prayed to God that the sun would not rise. The more one thinks of this, the more intriguing and plausible it becomes. We remember after all, that Joshua came upon the enemy by night (9). According to this view, what happened was that Joshua surprised the enemy while still asleep in their camp, and so utterly demoralised and routed them, that they fled in the semidarkness as dawn was about to break, and that Joshua prayed to God to continue that halflight so that the enemy would be unable to see who was attacking them or what was going on, and that God answered this prayer by sending the supernatural storm of hail which brought and maintained a darkness in which the sun appeared not to have risen at all, and a gloom and dusk which continued for the rest of that day. This, of course, does nothing to minimise or 'explain away' the miracle, for it is just as much a miracle to stop the sun from rising as to stop it from setting. And indeed the message is surely plain: when we are intent utterly upon God's will, we can always look for surprising things to happen in the fulfilment of it. There is nothing too hard for the Lord, He will move heaven and earth to come to our help (cf Psalm 18).

72) 10:1643

The imprisonment of the five kings in the cave at Makkedah took place obviously in the period when 'the sun stood still', and they were left there to be dealt with later on. Joshua would allow nothing to divert him from the central task of obliterating and destroying the enemies of Israel. One might feel that there is a great measure of ruthlessness in all this, and this is true, but we must always bear in mind that Joshua and Israel were the Lord's executioners, the appointed instruments of the divine judgment upon these abandoned nations: this is why they were to be destroyed utterly and without mercy. (This was the significance of their being hanged (26, 27) rather than put to the sword). It was a judicial sentence placed upon them, and Joshua was bearing witness to the fact that a judicial execution was taking place. There is another point of symbolical importance in 21:24. What is recorded in these verses does not describe the normal run of behaviour in the warfare of these days. Joshua is symbolically intimating to the captains of Israel that this is what God had given them, and that they would put their feet upon the necks of all their enemies in turn. God had given them the whole land, and this, in symbol, was an indication of what God was going to do for them (cf 1:3). We are entitled, on the authority of the New Testament, to spiritualise these stories, and apply them to spiritual warfare. One thinks of the enemy within us, the power of indwelling sin that besets the believer (Paul speaks in Romans about sin reigning as king in our hearts), and this is what God says in the grace of the gospel: 'Put your feet upon the necks of these kings'. This is the promise we are to lay hold upon. Did Paul, we wonder, have this incident in mind when he wrote that glorious word in Romans 16:20, 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly'?

73) 11:15

This chapter and the next deal with Joshua and Israel's campaign against the northern part of Canaan and the remainder of the conquest of the land. They also bring us to the end of the first section of the book, with ch. 13 ff giving the account of the partitioning of the land. We are told in the opening verses of this passage that when news of the victory Israel had won in the south over Adonizedec and his confederates reached the ears of the northern kings, an immediate reaction took place. There was an instant coalition, and the amassing of forces to fight against Israel (it is an interesting and profitable exercise to look up the place names given in 15 on the map. When we do, we see that Merom (5) is on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee and that its waters run almost exactly from the northwest into the sea). We note immediately in 1 something that we have seen on several occasions already in this book: it was when the king of Hazor 'heard those things', i.e. the news of Israel and her exploits, that the opposition was kindled. It is ever so: in Jericho they heard of the exploits of the God of Israel and Jericho was paralysed while Rahab was wrought upon by the Spirit of God and believed; the Gibeonites heard, and felt they must come to terms with the Israelites and their God; and now here, not surrender, but bitter opposition was the result of their hearing. We need to see, however, that this was not simply a repetition of the southern confederacy, but something much bigger, and more considerable, a very major confrontation. Jabin, king of Hazor, was the leader who raised the north for battle, and he rallied a very impressive army indeed (4). They were ready for battle too (5), and pitched camp at Merom, awaiting developments. The reference in 4 to the horses and chariots serves to heighten the drama of the situation for, of course, Israel's army were all footmen. It does not need much imagination to realise the quality of the opposition that Israel had to face.

74) 11:6-14

One wonders whether Israel trembled at the thought of such a confrontation. Perhaps this is what lies behind the assurance given in 6; it was an exhortation to them, however, to remember the promises of God (cf 1:5; Deuteronomy 20:1 ff). The terms of the assurance given in 6 were that on the morrow God would deliver the enemy into their hands. We need, however, to fill in some local details. The distance from Gilgal to Merom is about 100 miles; Joshua must therefore have taken four or five days to march northwards with his army, and doubtless during the march intelligence reports would be coming in about the vastness and ferocity of the formidable taskforce that was about to engage them. The assurance given in 6 would probably therefore have been given in the evening of the fourth day, by which time the reports about the horses and chariots might well have served to bring some trepidation to the hearts of the Israelites. It is in this kind of context that we need to understand the account before us.

It is not difficult to relate all this to spiritual categories, in relation to the spiritual battles of the kingdom of God. For behind this one, and this is the deepest understanding of the situation, there was the spiritual battle and challenge, for this is not merely the story of a people engaged in a military campaign. It was that, but it was also more, for God's purposes were being fulfilled, and we must always recognise that His archenemy, Satan himself is in the background, opposing these purposes, with a view to frustrating their fruition, which was in the long term the coming forth of the Redeemer Who was to destroy him.

75) 11:6-14

Once again, as so often in these studies, we see spiritual lessons underlined in the manner in which the battle was to be won. God was to deliver up the enemy into their hands (6), but He was going to do it through their fighting with the enemy: 'thou shalt hough their horses and burn their chariots with fire'. This is a clear illustration of the real nature of the Christian fight of faith: it is God Who does it all, but this never means that we are passive, or that we sit back 'leaving it all to Him'. Paul sets out the true paradox perfectly in the well known words of Philippians 2:12,13 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure'. This does not mean that God does His part and we do ours: God does it all for us, but He does it through our instrumentality. That is the point. And repeatedly we have seen in the book of Joshua how this typical illustration is given us for our learning. Never at any time did Joshua stand idly by, rather, he went in to battle and fought, and God fought marvellously and wonderfully in and through him. In the Christian life, our position is that 'we have been crucified with Christ'. This is something that God has wrought, but it is we who have to mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit, and that engages our earnest, strenuous and wholehearted activity. We have to fight like anything to make our position in Christ a reality in our experience.

76) 11:6-14

On the strength of the divine promises, Joshua went on the offensive (79). There is something very significant and important here. So often in our thinking about spiritual warfare we adopt defensive positions, guarding against Satan. This is necessary and proper, for he is a wily and unremitting foe; but if we are really sure of God and of His promises, we can afford to go on the offensive against him, as for example in prayer, bringing divine power to bear on human situations, taking the initiative in it, rather than in terms of 'Lord, defend us'. One thinks of the mighty prayer meeting in Acts 4:24 ff: there was nothing defensive about the apostles on that occasion, they were not cringing, nor did they have the sense of being hopelessly up against it. They recognised that they were on the victory side. So it was with Joshua here, he could afford to take the initiative, on the strength of the promises. This is surely a pointer to strategic advance in the work of God, and there is certainly a place for this in the Christian life. One thing seems certain: the confederate army was so confident of its strength that they could not have dreamed that Joshua would have the temerity to attack them, feeling that the initiative was surely with them. And Joshua's sudden attack unnerved them. Sometimes a little well-timed initiative on the part of God's people can do a world of good in the extension of the frontiers of His kingdom. Should we not try it sometime, standing on the promises of God?

77) 11:6-14

It says a great deal for the discipline of the Israelite army that with the enemy in a complete rout, Joshua should have kept to the divine instructions in dealing with them (9). At times of great exhilaration it is so easy to throw discretion and caution to the winds and exceed our remit, and do things that are unwise and even foolhardy in an excess of zeal. But the overmastering pattern in Joshua's whole leadership was obedience to the express will and command of God. It is his obedience that explains everything about the success of this campaign (the word 'so', repeated in 15 and 16 is eloquent in this respect). This is the great lesson the chapter holds for us in relation to spiritual life. If you want to prosper, you must learn to obey, even to the details of the divine commands; there is no substitute for this, least of all in days when preoccupation with exalted spiritual experience seems to lead many astray. Common, mundane obedience to the word and will of God, given people prepared for this, we have a sure prescription for spiritual advancement and prospering. How needful a lesson this is, especially although by no means exclusively to young Christians: the real test of the worth of one's Christianity is not in a continuing series of thrills and excitements but in the downtoearth ordinary obedience we offer to the word and will of God in our daily walk.

78) 11:1523

It is said in 18 that 'Joshua made war a long time with all those kings'. To see just how long, may be deduced from a glance at 14:7,10, where Caleb speaks of his experience in Israel. He was 40 when he went from Kadeshbarnea to spy out the land, which means that he would be 78 at the end of the wildernesswandering period which lasted 38 years, and Israel began to move into the promised land; and if he was now 85 (14:10), then the campaigns described in these chapters of Joshua must have covered a period of seven years. In 19, 20, we see an impressive example of the interaction between the divine sovereignty and the wickedness of men. The hardening of the hearts of the heathen by the Lord was with a view to their being destroyed, but it was also because the cup of their iniquities was filled and running over. Alongside this verse we therefore need to place Paul's statement in Romans 1:28, 'Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind'. In 21, 22 the point of the particular reference to the Anakims, the race of giants, is that when the twelve spies returned to Moses with their adverse report (Numbers 13/14), part of their complaint was that the Anakims were there, and that they were as grasshoppers in their sight. But here, as the climax of the campaign, God demonstrates to a people who once were fainthearted that not even giants can stand in the way of those who are in the will of God. There is nothing impossible when God is in control, and even the opposition thought to be invincible is overcome. What a mighty word is this: the Anakims destroyed by the grasshoppers! We are told in 22 that the only giants who were left were the Gaza, Gath and Ashdod; and, many generations later one of them, Goliath by name, came and terrorised the army of Israel. Then David, who doubtless knew these verses, went in the name of the Lord, and once again the grasshopper slew the Anakim. This is written for our encouragement: no giant can stand in face of those who are in the control of the living God.

79) 12:124

This chapter forms a postscript to the account of the Israelite campaigns in Canaan, giving a list of all the conquered kings, 31 in all, with 16 enumerating those from the eastern side of Jordan, and in 7 ff those on the west side. It is an impressive record, the more so when we compare it with the opening chapter of the book, and a monument to the faithfulness of God and His promises. The lesson it proclaims is simple: when God promises to give His people the land, they may presume to the full on that promise, however weak they may be, numerically or otherwise, however much they may feel themselves but grasshoppers. He is faithful that promised, and He will do all that He has said He will do. This is a word of wide spiritual application. Some of us believe that God has given us Scotland for Christ. We are a small band as yet, though not nearly so small as we were 25 years ago. We are, in the main, lightly esteemed, sometimes barely tolerated, held sometimes in amused contempt by the ecclesiastical establishment. But it is the grasshoppers that win the day, and if God has promised, we may presume to the full on His promise. Evangelicals were weak in the early years of the 19th century, yet God gave them so much of Scotland in the great revival movements from 1859 onwards. And we likewise, before the end of the 20th, may hope to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. The day will yet come when we shall see a very different situation in our dear land. There is nothing too hard for the living God, and no might arrayed against His holy gospel, however entrenched in any hierarchy it may be, can resist His invincible power. And that God is our God for ever and ever. But let us not be complacent. Let us be like Joshua, obedient to the word and will of God, and leaving nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses. That is our task, that is what we have to do. God grant that we may be a willing and obedient people in the day of His power!

80) 13:17

We come with this chapter to the second division of the book of Joshua, which deals with the partitioning of the land. There is a sense in which there is not a great deal of scope for commentary or interpretation, because the chapter consists largely of geographical detail. Someone has called it 'The geographical manual of the Holy Land, the Doomsday Book of the conquest of Palestine'. The first seven verses contain the command to divide the land among the remaining 9½ tribes (the other 2½ Gad, Rueben and Manasseh having already been given the territory on the east side of Jordan); the remainder of the chapter describing that territory on the east side of Jordan; while in chapter 14 onward we have a description of the settlement of the 9½ tribes on the west side. Geographical and factual though it be, however, there are a number of valuable lessons, both in relation to the spiritual aspects of what Joshua was commanded to do, and also in spiritualising the situation to make it apply to Christian life which we are entitled, and encouraged by Paul's example in 1 Corinthians 10, to do. The first lesson relates to Joshua's old age (1): the statement that very much land still remained to be possessed teaches us that even a lifetime of service for God is not enough to do all that needs to be done. This should surely stand as an incentive to those who are younger, either on the threshold of fruitful service or in their prime to be up and doing and to work with all their might for the kingdom of God while it is yet day. As Jesus said, 'The night cometh when no man can work'. There is never plenty time for all that needs to be done.

81) 13:17

It will be noticed that it was the Lord who told Joshua that he was old and stricken in years. This prompts a number of reflections, as for example, the question whether we do not sometimes need to be told that we are 'past it'. Joshua had been a very fiery and energetic warrior, probably 90 years old by this time, and it may be he was pressing himself beyond his strength, and needed this word from the Lord, as if to say: 'The job is not done yet, Joshua, so let us do something to ease and help the situation.' And so Joshua is given another task, and another responsibility, to divide the land for an inheritance. This is very comforting. Old age does not disqualify us from service, it is simply that the service may change to something else. From leading, Joshua was now to delegate, and to apportion the land; new tasks were given him within the general, overall purposes of God. No longer able to fight, perhaps, he could still exercise a ministry of encouragement, and exhort the people to go in and possess their possessions. Thus, right to the end he was in active service. There is a wonderful phrase in Psalm 92:14, 'they shall still bring forth fruit in old age'. This is surely something that one should expect. If a man has served God faithfully and honourably over the years, He does not just throw him over when he grows old, but rather promotes him to other kinds of work. And indeed, in the economy of God, there are some whose most fruitful time in the whole of life comes in their last years, when they are well beyond pension and retirement age. It is quality, not quantity, that counts, in any case.

82) 13:833

The dividing of the land among the tribes of Israel, with each given its particular part of Canaan, was not merely their reward for victory, although it was that, but also their responsibility from God, because each tribe had a part to play in the ongoing possession of the land. This is an important consideration, not least for the illustration that it gives of spiritual things. The land had been conquered in principle, as we have seen in previous chapters, both the south and the north were subdued in Joshua's campaigns yet so much had yet to be done. The various tribes had to 'make their own' the 'conquest in principle', that Joshua had accomplished. One commentator remarks 'That allotment must have strengthened faith in their ultimate possession, and encouraged effort to make the ideal reality, and to appropriate as their own in fact what was already theirs in God's purpose'. Also, each tribe was to do its particular job. This is something basic to the Christian doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ. We are members in particular of that body, each with his own task to perform. The New Testament has a great deal to teach us on this theme, and it will be useful for us to spend a little time considering what the apostle Paul says on the subject. For example, in Ephesians 1:11, he speaks of the inheritance that is ours in Christ. This word in the Greek, means 'an allotted portion', and it could just be that Paul's thinking here is conditioned by the Old Testament symbolism of dividing the land. What he refers to in Ephesians 1 is the share given us in the stewardship of the fullness of the times which is committed to Christ: a glorious, mysterious and thrilling concept in relation to the life to come. To read this into the spiritualising of this passage in Joshua opens up a wonderfully rich spiritual insight. More on this theme in the next Note.

83) 13:833

Further in relation to the idea of being members in particular of the body of Christ; we should consider Paul's emphasis in Romans 12:4, 5. Here is a comment from our Bible Notes on that passage: 'The whole point, says Paul, is that we are all different from one another, and meant to be so, in function and service. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority. We have all different duties and we must be intent on doing to the best of our ability what God has given us to do. The gifts that men have are gifts, and not to be taken pride in, or used for personal advancement, but for the good of the Body, the Church. Since this is so, it is both useless and dangerous for one member to covet another's place or gift, for in so doing he is both trespassing beyond bounds and at the same time neglecting his own. To see things in this light, is the way to come to a true assessment of one's importance; we all have a part to play, and only a part, and if God has appointed us not only a small but also an unobtrusive, part, then we must content ourselves with it, and realise that only in glad acceptance of it, will true happiness and peace and wholeness ever be found.' This is why it is so very important that we should know what God's will is for our lives and be content with it, and be doing it with all our might. Many Christians spend the greater part of their lives fruitlessly and vainly coveting positions that were never meant for them; looking over their shoulder and being wistfully envious of others who seem to have so much more interesting a task in the kingdom of God than they have, forgetting that although the grass always seems greener on the other side of the fence, it is just as hard to cut! If these verses before us have anything to say to us today, they tell us to be up and doing, to fulfil our allotted task, without shedding regretful tears because our lot is not different from what it is.

84) 13:833

We should also notice here the difference and disparity between the extent of the 'givenness' of the inheritance and Israel's possession of it afterwards. What was given them in title by God is expressed in 1:4 and all this could have been theirs, and should have been, but all along there remained much land to be possessed, as we see from Judges 1:19-2:5. We see from these solemn references that disobedience was involved: they could not drive them out because they would not, and because they would not, they finally could not. This vicious circle is true in spiritual life also. Indeed, this whole pattern affords a very fruitful illustration in Christian things. The Christian is given his inheritance in Christ, and he too has a promised land. The promises of God are yea and amen for him in Christ. But it is always true that 'there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed'. There is not completeness of experience in this life for the Christian, and there is never a time when he is not obliged to say, with Paul, in Philippians 3:12 ff 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ...but...I press toward the mark'. In this connection, there are two different kinds of error that have to be guarded against. The first is to assume that since there can be no perfection in this life, we should be content with what we are and where we are, and no longer strive against sin. The other is to assume that the Christian can enter into the experience of Christian victory and regard himself as 'having arrived', and needing nothing more. Paul's words in Philippians are a sufficient answer to both errors. It is a question of unremitting endeavour day by day until our life's end to enter in more and more to all God has for us. In this warfare there can be no exservicemen!

One obvious application of this possessing the land in spiritual things relates to the knowledge of the Scriptures and of the things of God through that knowledge. One recalls our Lord's words to His disciples 'Launch out into the deep!' It is very possible for Christians to live in the shallows in this respect instead of probing deeply into the riches of the Divine Word. We remember the dismay and disquiet we experienced when a young student confessed quite frankly that he often 'switched off' early in the sermon when the subject matter was something he was not very interested in. This raises some very basic questions. If it were simply a question of listening to a performance, this would not matter, but if it is the living Word of God that is being expounded! This is how arrested development comes about in spiritual life, and spiritual handicap that can lead to permanent disability. It is all a question of whether we are going to tell God what He should be giving us in His Word, or whether we are prepared to take what He has to give us, things to divert or amuse, to titillate our jaded palates, the 'chocolate biscuits and meringues' of the party time, or the strong, nourishing and wholesome fare that builds healthy, strong and stable lives. It is we ourselves who determine our standard of living in the spiritual life, not God. Malnutrition for the Christian is a wholly avoidable condition! Christians certainly need not become spiritual flotsam and jetsam upon the waters of life, but it is predictable that some will if they prefer a starvation diet instead of the true bread of life.

86) 13:833

Before we leave this chapter it may be helpful to consider the following comment from F.B. Meyer's book 'Joshua and the Land of Promise', 'In us, as in Canaan of old, there are the seven nations of sin. Hereditary tendencies to evil; unholy habits that have entrenched and fortified themselves; worldly compliances which have become part of our existence. When first we became Christians, we made a determined onslaught on these things, and met with much success; but we have become weary of incessant watchfulness and conflict. We have no taste for the girt loin and the erect, alert soldierattitude. Our heart is only touched here and there by Christ; and our peace is incessantly broken by the raids of those unextirpated evils, which swoop down from time to time, carrying everything before them. There is much land still to be possessed.

'Would it not be well to enumerate the points in which we are deficient not in a spirit of morbid self-scrutiny, but of honest selfanalysis? Is not the first step towards an amended life a clear appreciation of what needs amending? We may well turn from our own efforts at selfknowledge, and bare our hearts to the inspection of the Spirit of God, asking Him to search us and show what wicked way there is in us, ere He leads us in the way everlasting.'

87) 14:115

This chapter deals with the portion of the inheritance given to one man, Caleb, the colleague of Joshua in early days when the spies were sent into Canaan by Moses. There is a sense in which the lessons here are parallel to those which we drew in connection with the earlier life of Joshua, particularly in the early dedication of God's will and service that marked and decisively influenced all his later life. It will be instructive to look at the earlier evidences of Caleb's experience, so as to give as full a picture as possible cf Numbers 13:6, 30; 14:6, 24, 30, 38; 26:65; 32:12; 34:19; Deuteronomy 1:36; also Joshua 14:6; 15:13, 14, 16, 18; 21:12; Judges 1:12, 15, 20; 3:9 (see 1 Chronicles 4:15); 1 Chronicles 2:46, 48, 49; 6:56. With the help of these background verses we are able the more fully to understand Caleb's words here in 6 ff. Here is a man of God, reminding God of what He once said, and of what He had once promised. Indeed, what God had said became the basis of Caleb's own words. In 8 he was not making any selfrighteous boast in claiming that he had 'wholly followed the Lord', for this is what we read of him in Numbers 14:24 (cf also Deuteronomy 1:36). We may recall what was said about Joshua in an earlier Note, and see how true it was also of Caleb. How a man shapes in his early years as a follower of God, and the way he responds in the first flush of his dedication to Him, can fashion and qualify all the rest of his life. This, then, is how important the early years of our spiritual life can be. What a lesson this is for all young people reading this Note! It says to them: 'You are making your future now, for weal or woe; carelessness now may mark you for life, and dedication now could mean a lifetime of fruitful service'.

88) 14:115

Here, then, is Caleb taking a stand, and continuing as he began, on the promises of God. A twofold promise was given him: first of all, in these immensely critical days he was going to remain alive, and God would preserve him in the midst of the wholesale judgement all around him, and bring him into the land. When one thinks of the long and tortuous history of the children of Israel in the wilderness, their rebelliousness, querulousness and lowspiritedness, this was not a little thing. What an encouragement it must have been to him! When God says to a man that He will keep him alive, that man is immortal until his work is done. It must necessarily have done something to Caleb to know that, however long it might take God to bring His people into the land, he was going to be among them. Secondly, he was promised the inheritance of the place where his feet had trod, particularly Hebron. The impressive and tremendous picture that we have here is of a life lived for fortyfive years on the promise of God. What a way to live! This, it is implied in 11, is how to retain and maintain a strength and vigour. Does not this add a new dimension to the apostle Peter's words in 1 Peter 1:5, 'Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation'.

89) 14:115

Here is a comment from Alexander Maclaren about Caleb: 'All these 45 years Caleb had 'hid the word in his heart' had lived upon it and thought about and believed it, and recognised the partial fulfilment of it, and cherished the secret fire unknown to any besides. And now at last, after so long an interval, he comes forward and stretches out a hand, unweakened by the long delay, to claim the perfect fulfilment at the end of his days. So 'The vision may tarry', but a life based upon God's promise has another estimate of swiftness and slowness than is current amongst men who have only the years of earthly life to reckon by; and that which, to sense, seems a long, weary delay, to faith seems as but 'a watch in the night'. The world, which only measures time by its own revolutions, has to lament over what seem to the sufferer, long years of pain and tears, but in the calendar of faith 'weeping endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning'. The weary days dwindle into a point when they are looked at with an eye that has been accustomed to gaze on the solemn eternities of a promising and faithful God. To it, as Him, 'a thousand years are as one day' and 'one day' in the possibilities of divine favour and spiritual growth which it may enfold, 'as a thousand years'. To the men who measure time as God measures it, His help, however long it may tarry, ever comes 'right early'.'

90) 14:115

Caleb's request in 12, 'now, therefore give me this mountain' represents his claiming of the promise given him so long before, as it was also the embracing of a continuing task, namely the subduing of the Anakims. This is a word that lends itself to spiritualising. We can think of a mountain as being an obstacle of difficulty. In a literal sense this was a challenge and a hazard so far as Caleb was concerned, because there were giants there; but the point to be made is that great difficulties can be tackled and overcome if God has promised and we wholly follow Him. What is the mountain of difficulty that we face at the moment? And what is our attitude to it? We may be looking for ways round it, but just do not know what to do, and feeling like beating an ignominious retreat. But Caleb said, 'Give me this mountain', and it is open to us also to say the same. If we dare to do so, and are prepared to walk wholly with the Lord, then He will give us the mountain, and the giants there too, and we will conquer them. This is a practical point, whatever the problem, whatever the hazard, whatever the hindrance if only we wholly follow the Lord. Nor is it presumption so to think, for it is a prayer based on the promise of God. We should recall how Jacob prayed at Peniel (Genesis 32): he kept on saying, 'Lord, You said'. He reminded God of His promise, and God could not but answer him. God had put in his hand an instrument by which he could overpower Him: 'As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed'. This is what Caleb did: he was in the true line of succession; and so may we do, and be!

91) 15:120

Chapter 15 is largely concerned with the partitioning of the land, and particularly the lot of the tribe of Judah. We have already pointed out, in relation to all the wealth of geographical detail given here and in earlier chapters, that the significance of it is that the children of Israel were allotted a particular part of God's further purposes in the land. We have related this to the biblical doctrine of membership in the body of Christ, with each one being 'members in particular', with a particular job to do. In the life of God's people, the Church, our responsibility is for our own task, not for anyone else's, and the wellbeing of the Church's corporate life depends upon each member discovering his own gifts and exercising them, without any vain hankering after the tasks and responsibilities of others, whether from motives of envy, ambition or simple discontentment with his lot. In 13,14 we see Caleb fulfilling his task, and it is interesting to compare his words in 14:12 with what is said here. God gave Caleb his mountain, and he expressed his thanks in the best kind of way: he drew his sword, charged at the giant, and slew him. And Hebron, which means a place of communion, became his, and it was the fulfilment and fruition of a lifetime of trusting in the promises of God.

92) 15:120

We look now particularly at 16-19, a remarkable personal incident relating to Caleb and his family. Having subdued Hebron, Caleb next turned to Debir (also called Kirjathhepher). And he made the remarkable pronouncement recorded in 16, promising his daughter Achsah to the warrior who captured the city. It is not that Caleb had spent his strength by this time, that he delegated the campaign to someone else. He had another idea in mind. He had a daughter, and being the kind of man he was, a man of great character and integrity, would not have wanted to see his daughter marry unworthily. We suspect that he already knew that Othniel (who, in fact, was his nephew) was already in love with her, and wanted to put him to the test, as if to say 'How will you react to this challenge, Othniel?' If then, as has been suggested, Caleb was concerned to see of what stuff his future son-in-law was made, he must have been highly satisfied with the result. This young man is the Othniel we come across in Judges 3, as the first of the judges of Israel, i.e. the first national leader after the death of Joshua, and we see how God's providences are at work in the preparation of a man. We saw in the case of Joshua that how he reacted to the challenge of God in his earliest days proved critical for all his future. We have seen also how Caleb in his early years proved faithful and that this qualified all his future service for God. And now, in this domestic idyll of love and romance, in the choice of a husband for Achsah the same is happening once again: Othniel proves himself worthy in battle, and at a later stage this proving, stood him in good stead, when God's Spirit came upon him and chose him to be one of the judges of His people.

93) 15:120

What follows in 18,19 teaches another eloquent lesson. Clearly Achsah's dowry had included a parcel of land in the south. That whole area was in the patrimony of Caleb, given him by God, and a careful study of the map will show that Hebron (called Kirjatharba) was in the hill country, that central, hilly portion of Palestine about 20 miles south west of Jerusalem, but that Debir was much more on the lowlands. This was where Achsah had been given the parcel of land, and it was apparently fairly parched and not well served with water. Hence her request in 19. The significant thing here is that she is following in her father's footsteps: Caleb had asked 'Give me this mountain', and it had been given him. And Achsah did likewise, following the inspiration of her father's faith. There is something very lovely and wonderful about this. What a great thing it is when the daughter of a man proves to be of the same spiritual calibre of her father: 'give me also springs of water', and Caleb gave her more than she asked, the upper springs and the nether springs. This is often how God deals with His children: when they ask, He gives them far, far more than they could bear to hope. He gives with such abundance, for He is indeed a bountiful God. The spiritual lessons here are very beautiful and very telling.

94) 15:2163

In these verses there follows a list of the towns given to the tribe of Judah, arranged in the four districts into which the land was divided, according to the nature of the soil: the south land (2132); the low land, or Shephelah (3347); the mountains (4860), and finally, the towns in the wilderness of Judah (61, 62). No particular incidents are recorded in these verses, though we doubt not but that if there were others who asked for springs of water or any other blessing, the same bountiful God would as bounteously answer. Perhaps we could think back once again to Achsah's request in 19, in relation to the need to live by the promises of God. One of the most precious and wonderful experiences of Christian life is to receive what we know in our deepest hearts are personal promises from our Father in heaven as we read the Scriptures. The encouragement that we must surely receive from this chapter is the assurance that as we live by the promises, God will bless us, and heaven and earth will pass away before He shall fail of fulfilling them. What would this word in 19 mean, in spiritual terms, for example, to a man called to go and minister in the Border country of Scotland or in Galloway. What must it have meant to an Aberdonian sent by God to Edinburgh to minister, as he prayed 'O God, thou hast given me a south land, give me also springs of water'. God is faithful and the springs of water have run over the years. Perhaps our task today is to pray this promise into reality in the Borders and in Galloway, for the men whom God has called to serve Him in these parts.

95) 16:110

Once again in this chapter, as in the previous one, there is little in the geographical details requiring comment or exposition. We may look, however, at what is said about several of the tribes in this section of the book. In 15:63 we are told that 'the children of Judah could not drive them (the Jebusites) out...'. Then, in 16:10, concerning the Ephraimites, they drove not out the Canaanites...'. Then, in 17:12, 'the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of the cities ...'. This is a recurrent note in these chapters, and there is a very real significance in it. We should note the differences in the actual phrases: the difference between 16:10 and the other two is that the latter two at least made the attempt to drive the enemy out, whereas the Ephraimites apparently did not even try to do so. It was the express command of God that the Canaanites be driven out and destroyed, and Judah and Manasseh had tried to fulfil the divine command but could not. Theirs was a failure of endeavour, but Ephraim's was a failure in obedience. It is interesting, however, that the Ephraimites were apparently strong enough to subdue the Canaanites so as to bring them under tribute (10, cf also 17:13). Financial gain, then, was more important to them than obedience to the known will of God. This almost casual reference can assume a very real significance in the study of the word of God. When all is said and done it is not much different from the sin of Achan who coveted and took the accursed thing, although God had commanded it to be destroyed. It is interesting also to follow through the experience of those tribes that disobeyed God. One readily recalls Psalm 78:9,10, 'The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle...', 11; and Hosea 4:17, 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone' (cf also Judges 17). The lesson is plain when we leave undealt with, things about which the Lord has expressed His mind and will, these things usually spell big trouble in subsequent days. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap' (Galatians 6:7).

96) 16:110

Here is a comment by F.B. Meyer on the statement about the Canaanites in 17:12 'But the Canaanites would dwell in that land'; this, though it anticipates tomorrow's reading, has a practical relation to what was said in the previous Note: 'Mark the strength of that word would. It was no expression for those Canaanites to use. They were a dispossessed race. They had neither part nor lot in Canaan; and Israel made a profound mistake in allowing them to remain in the face of God's great word, 'I will drive them out from before the children of Israel' yet let us not condemn them, lest we condemn ourselves. There is not the least reason why besetting sin or fleshly lusts should hold their own, or find any foothold in the region of the saved nature. Never allow them to say they must or they will. Granted that they would be able to keep us at bay, they have no weight in the presence of that Omnipotence which vanquished them on the cross, and is pledged to destroy them utterly. For all the territory which we should win for God we have sufficient power, if we would but use it; there is no work so hard, no temptation so mighty, no post so difficult, but there is also sufficient grace contained within the one great gift of the Holy Spirit to meet our every requirement. Perhaps the best path to the speedy acquisition of spiritual power for the majority of those who shall read these lines would be to claim and use the abundance of grace which is within their reach awaiting them in the living Saviour.'

97)17:113

In the ongoing description of the apportionment of the land among the tribes of Israel, we come to the brief reference to the daughters of Zelophehad in 3, 4. The reference is brief, but we may turn back to Numbers 27 to get the full story, and see what in fact is being said here. Here is a situation in which an unprotected, defenceless family of daughters, who seem to have no provision made for them within the known and declared legislation concerning inheritance in the Promised Land, appeal to the justice and faithfulness of God for recognition and redress, and their appeal is upheld and honoured by the patriarch, Moses. It is very remarkable to find this piece of humanitarian legislation at such an early date, when the rights of minorities, let alone minorities of women, were so little recognised or noticed, and it emphasises once again how 'advanced' the Mosaic code really was. But it does something far more also: it underlines the reality of the Fatherly care of God for those who have been hardly used by life, those whom misfortune has buffeted, those who are 'the poor of the land', those who tend to be forgotten in the mad whirl of life, those who have few to care for them, fewer still to plead their cause. Here, then, is a word of encouragement for all who have ever found themselves in this position of helplessness, in need, lonely, unprotected, unprovided for, underprivileged, deprived of the protection and sustaining forces men-folk can give; and it is this: there is a God in heaven Who cares, Who sees, and understands, and will move in answer to our cries, and will provide for our needs.

98) 17:113

There is another important lesson to learn from the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. We should bear in mind that Israel was very much still in the wilderness, when their original approach to Moses was made; the Promised Land was as yet a dream for them; it was not theirs at that point to apportion to the tribes. Yet, here is a group of people laying claim to an allotted part of it, as if it had all been conquered and made over to the chosen people. Here is faith indeed, faith in the word of promise! They did not doubt that what God had promised He would surely perform; they were determined to be in on it. It is very wonderful to think that in the midst of so much faithlessness and backsliding and worldliness in Israel at that time there should be this kind of unquestioning faith in the promises of God. It is surely an example of the idea of the faithful remnant, and reminds us that even in the darkest moments God has His seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to Baal. There is something else also, it is not difficult to see a spiritual parallel here. The Promised Land in the Old Testament is a type and illustration of salvation and eternal life, and if this is so, then the five daughters of Zelophehad were staking their claim to eternal life, and laying hold upon it. This is a very graphic and telling illustration of how to enter the kingdom of God. They considered the promises of God; and they interpreted them in relation to their own case, and applied them personally to their own needs and desires. Matthew Henry, the Puritan commentator, in his own penetrating way, suggests that in this respect these five daughters of Zelophehad were indeed the five wise virgins, and one wonders whether in fact our Lord may conceivably have had them in mind when He told the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25.

99) 17:14/18

These verses relate to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, and speak of their reaction to the portion of land allotted to them. A quick look at the map will show just how substantial an apportionment of land had been given them; yet their complaint was that they had not been given enough: they had been given 'but one lot' even though, as they claimed, they were 'a great people' whom the Lord had blessed hitherto. Not merely their numerical strength (they were two tribes), but their honourable descent from the man who after all had been overlord of Egypt, seems to have made them think that they were above the ordinary run of people. This is a very interesting and instructive episode. They were clearly living on the strength of past tradition, and had developed a querulous sense of not being given enough prominence in view of their sterling (!) qualities. When it is put like this, we can immediately recognise a very common complaint. We are always liable to meet some believers who feel that their worth is not recognised sufficiently. Discontentment with their lot breathes right through these verses, and they were obviously looking over their shoulder at other seemingly more privileged tribes. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence (although it is just as hard to cut!), and when envious eyes are cast on others whose lives and tasks seem so much better and so much more attractive and satisfying than their own, nothing is surer than that a 'chip on the shoulder' will develop, with a secret grudge against God, as we covet something bigger and better. But God does not give us something bigger and better until we have proved ourselves in the smaller tasks, and He warns us against being dreamers in this regard.

100)17:1418

Joshua is very wise in his dealings with Joseph. In effect, he said 'If you are a great people, then get stuck into the job God has given you, and let us see how you shape doing it before you cast envious and discontented eyes on others'. One thinks of the parable of the talents here, and of the importance of being faithful in a few things if we are going to qualify as rulers over many things. This is God's principle: why should we ask Him for wider spheres of usefulness, when we fail to utilise those that are within our reach? Why should we dream of great things for ourselves, if we have not yet possessed the inheritance that God has allotted us? 'Cut down wood', said Joshua. How riled they must have been to hear these words, for they were a great people, and great people of that sort scorn to do menial tasks like cutting down wood. But Joshua had the measure of them, and his insistence on the mundane, hardgraft work, devoid of glamour, but full of usefulness was the very thing that these unrealistically self-conscious and self-important people needed. It was a call to responsible stewardship of what had been given them in their true lot - enough, in all conscience, for them to be up and at it and doing worthily. But their eyes were off their responsibilities, and they were thinking of other things. They were indolent, and lacking in courage and resourcefulness to tackle a difficult and forbidding task. As Christians, we also must beware of opting out of our God-given responsibilities and of avoiding difficult and to us uncongenial disciplines, these are the very things that God has ordained shall be for the shaping of our lives and characters. More of this in the next Note.

101) 17:14/18

The message of these verses for Christians is very clear: we must learn to be reconciled to our lot. It is surprising the number of believers for whom this has been the biggest battle they have ever had to fight, a refusal or unwillingness to accept the lot that God has appointed for them, because their eyes are on something else, something different something which many can see is unsuitable for them, and even an impossibility. But they have had dreams about it, and therefore what God has given them in His providence and grace proves unattractive and left undone. What we must learn from this is that a victory can be gained if we have a right attitude to what God has given us, and that we can glorify His Name by winning through in a difficult and challenging and uncongenial situation. This is one of the lessons Paul also teaches in Romans 12:4 ff. Here is a quotation from our Notes on that passage: 'We have all different duties and we must be intent on doing to the best of our ability what God has given us to do. The gifts that men have are gifts, and not to be taken pride in, or used for personal advancement, but for the good of the body, the Church. And since this is so, it is both useless and dangerous for one member to covet another's beyond bounds and at the same time neglecting his own. To see things in this light is to come to a true assessment of one's importance; we all have a part to play, and only a part, and if God has appointed us not only a small, but also an unobtrusive, part, then we must content ourselves with it, and realise that only in glad acceptance of it will true happiness and peace and wholeness ever be found. After all, we cannot be more useful to God than He chooses to make us.'

102)18:110

This chapter and the next continue with further geographical content, as they describe the 'lots' given to the remaining seven tribes of Israel, Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and Dan. Yet they can be made to yield a number of interesting and important lessons. We look first of all at the reference in 1, 2, to Shiloh, and the setting up of the Tabernacle there. Up to this point in the campaign and conquest, Israel's headquarters had been at Gilgal, considerably further south. Now the move takes place to a more central point, from which further allotment of the tribes took place. There are two very different interpretations of this move. Most commentators assume that Joshua and Israel must have received the guidance of God to move the Tabernacle from Gilgal to Shiloh. Some, however, maintain that there is not the slightest hint in Scripture that God had given any such order, and that the absence of any such hint suggests it was purely practical and prudential considerations, and particularly their own convenience, that made them move to the more central place, in other words, a move made in the energy of the flesh, which was to prove to have fateful consequences in the future (cf the tragedy of Shiloh, as a place of apostasy, in Samuel's time). This interpretation would make sense if it could be substantiated; but it is only conjecture, and in fact there are one or two references in later parts of the Old Testament which might seem to query it, as for example, Jeremiah 7:12; Psalm 78:60. The point, however, is well made that in the matter of changing location, we do stand in need of divine leading and direction, and that moves made without that sanction can be fraught with hazard and even tragedy.

103)18:110

A second lesson of these verses lies in the challenge Joshua issued to the seven tribes (3). Obviously it was a challenge to their indolence. The point being made is not so much that they could have possessed their inheritance before the allotment had been made, as that, having seen allotments made to the two and a half tribes Judah, 15:1ff, Joseph 16:1ff, the half tribe of Manasseh 17:1ff), they were to blame for not applying to, as it were, the high court of Israel for their own lot. They had been neglectful of pressing in, they had been hanging back, unconcerned about their entitlement. They were at ease, in a state of un-possession, and Joshua took them to task for it. They had battled in the warfare wholeheartedly, but now they had settled back on their ease, and showed little concern to take up their land. Joshua had his own way of dealing with this problem: three advanceparty members of each tribe were to take a good look at the inheritance (4), then report on their findings to Joshua and, through him, to the tribes. This was meant to encourage them and be an inspiration to them to go in. The spiritual analogy is not hard to seek. To view the greatness of our inheritance in Christ even to be told about it is what spurs the spirit to activity. It is the kind of sentiment expressed in the words of the hymn,

'Think what Spirit dwells within thee,
What a Father's smile is thine:
What thy Saviour died to win thee:
Child of heaven, shouldst thou repine?'

The point is, the fact of our inheritance, when known, exercises a power and virtue upon our hearts, to draw us on to the possession of them. And do not let us minimise the importance of 9, and the words 'in a book'. What could emphasis more clearly the value of the printed word in the spiritual life!

104) 18:1128

In these verses the lot of the tribe of Benjamin comes up according to their families, and a description of the boundary is given, with all their towns, cities and villages, including Jerusalem. One might again wonder what could be got out of these geographical lists, but we should realise by now that there is always significance in them; and if we recall two other earlier passages in the Old Testament, and compare them with this, it may give some new and fresh insights. The passages are Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, the former giving the blessing of Jacob to the twelve patriarchs, the latter the blessing of Moses. These are remarkable prophetic utterances which, being recorded in this way in Holy Writ, have a great significance for all the future of the sons of Jacob. At first glance, what is said of Benjamin in Genesis 49:27 by Jacob is very different from what is said in Deuteronomy 33:12 by Moses, but the contradiction is only seeming. For both are true, since both were fulfilled. One commentator indeed points out that it is very remarkable that Moses speaks such a tender word about Benjamin, while Jacob, who doted on the young man, speaks a very harsh word indeed. But something still more to the point can be said: it is a matter of history, on the one hand that the tribe of Benjamin was one of the fiercest and most warlike of all the tribes (cf Judges 19:1430; 20:1214); yet on the other hand, from a geographical point of view Moses' word was also very true, since Benjamin was wedged in between Judah in the south and Ephraim in the North, and no enemy could come near them without coming through either the one territory or the other. Both insights are therefore true, from their own point of view, and complementary, rather than contradictory. And it is perfectly possible, depending on which aspect of Benjamin's experience is in view, to see the force of either of these utterances.

105)19:19

Simeon is the next tribe mentioned. The reference is in Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:57, but it is interesting that there is no corresponding reference in the Deuteronomy passage, although in the Greek version of the Old Testament (LXX) the word 'Simeon' does occur in the second part of 33:6 (scholars, however, think there is no justification for this translation). The fact that Simeon is not mentioned may be because his inheritance was within the inheritance of Jacob. The reference in Genesis. 49 is to the earlier terrible story in Genesis 34, when Jacob's daughter Dinah, was cruelly violated, and Simeon and Levi her brothers wreaked a terrible and violent vengeance on the guilty ones, incurring the distress and anger of their father, Jacob, and indeed the anger of God. They were scattered in Israel. It is a fact that almost no reference to the tribe of Simeon is made throughout all the Old Testament history. The Levites who were reinstated, and received an honoured place in the purposes of God, serving in the Temple, had no inheritance either, God was their inheritance. They were given cities but the 48 cities they were given were not all in one place, but scattered throughout the land. Once again we find the ancient prophecy from the lips of Jacob being remarkably fulfilled: 'I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel'.

106)19.1016

The next tribe to be mentioned is Zebulon. In Genesis 49:13 we read that 'Zebulon shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his borders shall be unto Zidon', and in Deuteronomy 33:18, 'And of Zebulon he said, Rejoice, Zebulon, in thy going out'. We are told, then, that Zebulon's border was toward the sea. A glance at the map will show that this is the area in which Mount Carmel is situated, and the seaport there at the present day is Haifa. One commentator points out that Haifa is the only natural harbour in Israel, and that the word 'haven' used in Genesis 49 is in the Hebrew a word from which 'Haifa' is derived. If this be the case, then the mention of Zebulon being near the sea seems to suggest that opportunity was given to this particular tribe, if it was so inclined, to be a maritime people. We know that the Jews were never very enthusiastic about maritime exploits, they were a land people, but God apparently opened a door of opportunity to them, which was not taken. Zebulon is mentioned in the New Testament (Matthew 4:15,16) as being 'Galilee of the Gentiles' and it is of Zebulon that the prophet says, 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.' All the disciples of Jesus, apart from Judas Iscariot, were Galileans, and lived within the geographical area of Zebulon. This will surely open up our thoughts very imaginatively with regard to the word in Deuteronomy 33, 'And of Zebulon he said, Rejoice, Zebulon, in thy going out'. The apostles went out from Galilee, and the gospel went out from Galilee, and they possessed the west and the south, and very much more! It is not really fanciful to relate these ancient prophecies in this way to the New Testament. We need to recognise that they were spoken on the impress of the Spirit of God: they were deeply mysterious, but in very marvellous ways the words of Jacob were fulfilled in the posterity that flowed from his sons.

107) 19:17-31

Of Issachar (1723) little is to be said. The reference in Genesis 49:14,15 says that 'He saw that rest was good, and the land it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute', while in Deuteronomy 33:18 there is a reference to 'Issachar in thy tents'. They were content to remain where they were, occupied with pastoral pursuits and having no higher aspirations to venture forth. Issachar is one of the tribes that one hears nothing more about throughout the whole of Old Testament history. The next tribe, Asher (2431) is more interesting. In Genesis 49:20 we read 'Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties', while in Deuteronomy 33:24 we read 'Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoe shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be'. The reference to dipping his foot in oil is probably a reference to the fertility of this particular part of the inheritance. Little as there is recorded in Old Testament history of Asher, it is nevertheless to this tribe the wonderful promise is given, 'thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be'. The scholars tell us that 'shoes' are better translated 'bars'. The reference is to God's protection of them in the northern-most tip of the country, and the promise here given is that the frontiers of Israel shall be safe. Two alternative translations of the next phrase, 'as thy days, so shall thy strength be' are given by a Jewish interpreter. One is 'thy strength in old age shall be as the strength of thy youth'. This was fulfilled in Caleb's case, was it not, because when he was 85 he was as fresh and nimble as he had been in his 40s. Another translation is 'As thou spendest thy days in doing the will of God, or not doing the will of God, so shall thy strength be'. That is a very remarkable rendering. Your strength will be just in proportion to whether or not you do the will of God! If a man is working for the Lord, he is immortal until his work is done; but if a man is not doing the will of God he will say 'Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?' A solemn thought indeed!

108) 19:3248

The next tribe to receive its inheritance is Naphtali, situated just south of the tribe of Asher, and adjoining Zebulun. Naphtali, as we are told in Genesis 49:21, 'is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words' and, in Deuteronomy 33:23, 'O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, all full with the blessing of the Lord'. The suggestion in these references is of activity, vigour and movement. There is an interesting reference in Judges 4 in this connection. Barak the judge was raised up by God, and Deborah challenged him to rise to the occasion against the enemies of the Lord, and he won a remarkable victory. Barak was of the tribe of Naphtali. If, as some commentators do, we refer the phrase in Deuteronomy 33:23 to an ultimate fulfilment in the time of Christ, we must recognise that Naphtali was the area where the Lord Jesus lived as a boy, in Nazareth. In the phrase 'possess thou the west and the south' the word 'west' is translated elsewhere as 'the sea'. The only sea in that vicinity is the sea of Galilee; and this in fact is how the gospel spread, through the preaching of Christ and his apostles.

Dan is the last of the seven tribes mentioned here. In Genesis 49:16,17 Dan is spoken of as a serpent, and in Deuteronomy 33:22 as a lion's whelp. One commentator points out concerning Dan's calling that he was given the name of Dan by his mother (cf Genesis 30) because he was to judge, the idea being that he was to vindicate the disconsolate, just as God had vindicated Rachel in the distress of her childlessness. But instead, he chose, a life of violence. He was 'an adder in the path, that biteth the horses' heels, so that his rider shall fall backward'. In the book of Judges we read some very scarifying stories about this tribe away up in the far north, where they eventually settled, and the vile, cruel and wicked deeds they committed, of which the book of Judges is so very full.

We have taken time to look at all these statements, not because they are particularly referred to in the book of Joshua, but to fill in background. This is one of the ways in which we can find immense enrichment in Bible study as we see, amongst other things, the record of some of the great men of Scripture who were thrown up by some of the tribes rather than others - Saul, David, Jonathan, et al.

109) 19:49-51

The tribes were all set, then, in their various places in the land, and they possessed the inheritance that God had given them. This is the seedbed out of which the meaningful history of Israel in the land began to develop. We must never forget the point of all this: we simply need to ask the question, 'What was the purpose of God in giving them this land?' Here is the answer: God gave them this land in order that in the fullness of the time His glorious purposes of redemption might be worked out in a geographical context, in order that in the fullness of the time there would come forth from one of these tribes, Judah, one who would be the Saviour of the world. And all the history of the kings, and all the history of David, right through 1 and 2 Samuel, has reference and significance in relation to the contributions that history made to the ongoing purposes of God. This is how we must understand the Old Testament and this is why it was so important to get all these tribes set in their proper places. Only when the scene was set, could God's next move begin.

Finally, we see in the closing verses of the chapter that when all the tribes had been settled, and their inheritance established, Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua, the son of Nun, their leader, allocating to him the city which he requested, TimnathSarah in Mount Ephraim. And so the story comes round full circle. Caleb, his companion and fellowspy at KadeshBarnea, was given his inheritance at the beginning of the allocations, and now Joshua, taking the lowly and last humble place, received his when all the others had been given theirs and we doubt not, given as a reward for his faithfulness. It would be good to read the first chapter of the book once again in this light and see how substantially he had lived in obedience to the Word of the Lord, mistakes notwithstanding, and now, 'according to the word of the Lord' (50) his inheritance was secured. God is faithful!

110)20:19

We come, in this chapter and the next, to the institution of the cities of refuge. This is an important and significant institution, and some time must be spent looking at it. First of all, we need to see the 'history' of these cities of refuge. The first reference to them is in Exodus 21:12¹⁴ a bare reference to the provision to be made, following immediately upon the giving of the Ten Commandments, and found among the general enactments given according to Moses. In these verses, a distinction is made between murder and manslaughter. Inadvertent or unwitting killing (13) over against premeditated murder (14). It was in the case of those involved in the first of these that a place of refuge was to be appointed. The next reference is found in Numbers 35:6, 14,15, where the number of cities is specified as six, three on this side Jordan (i.e. the east side, since at this point Israel had not yet crossed into the land) and three on the other side. Then, in Deuteronomy 4:41⁴³ the three on the east side of Jordan are specified, Bezer, Ramoth and Golan. Next, in Deuteronomy 19:1¹³ further instructions were given: the land was to be divided into three parts, so that one city of refuge would be accessible for anybody in a particular position; and a way was to be prepared to it (3), to guide the fugitive to safety. Finally, here in Joshua 20, the full and complete picture is given. In Numbers 35:6 it is said that the cities of refuge were provided among the cities given by inheritance to the Levites. This is the link with Joshua 21. The Levites were to be given 48 cities (cf 21:47) and of these 48, six were to be cities of refuge. This is underlined in 21:13, 21, 27, 32, 36, 38.

III) 21:142

We read through these verses for our continuing consideration of the cities of refuge, always remembering that chs 20 and 21 belong together in subjectmatter and cannot well be separated. It will be useful also to look back to Numbers 35, to consider the place the Levites and their cities had in this important institution. They were, as we have already indicated, to have no inheritance in the land: the Lord was to be their inheritance, and they were called to be separate, and to be different from the other tribes. The fact that they were to be dispersed throughout the land in the 48 cities set apart for them by the twelve tribes means that they were to have no corporate existence as a tribe; rather, they were fragmented in this way, in a Godappointed isolation. Furthermore, this dispersion was with a view to the instruction of the people of God in the law of the Lord (see Deuteronomy 33:10). There is a twofold lesson in this for us. On the one hand, it underlines the fact that 'the separated life', so far as those called to the ministry of the Word is concerned, is likely to be a life of loneliness and isolation, and it is in the context of such a loneliness that the Lord's work is to be done. On the other hand, this is a lesson for all who are, as Christian witnesses, called to be separated unto God. We may well be placed in lonely places, as to family, neighbourhood, or work, and it is no warrant to leave our place just because there is no congenial Christian fellowship there, but rather the opposite. Let everyone abide in the calling (place) wherein he is called, for this is God's purpose and strategy, to spread the witness as widely and comprehensively as possible. How else is the law of the Lord to be made known?

112)20:1-21:42

Next, a word about the significance of the cities of refuge. The appointment of these cities is part of the general judicial system evolved among the Old Testament people of God. The provision that they offered was, as we have indicated, for the manslayer, who killed inadvertently or accidentally, not for the murderer who deliberately took life. In ancient times, not only in Israel but elsewhere, the duty of avenging a killing lay upon the nearest kinsman, and obviously, situations would arise in which vengeance might well be wreaked on those who had not killed deliberately, and it would seem that this merciful legislation was instituted to prevent excesses that might develop into blood feuds. Thus, a man could flee to any of these cities for sanctuary, pending an enquiry into the matter by the congregation of God's people, who would judge whether it was a deliberate murder or an inadvertent killing. If they were satisfied that it was the latter, the killer could find refuge and sanctuary in the city, and be free from the fear of retribution so long as he remained within its walls. If he ventured outside, he did so at his peril for he could be slain with impunity. When one thinks that this is something that took place centuries before Christ, one is amazed at its humanitarianism. This is one of the many places where the lie is given to the suggestion that the Old Testament God was a harsh and bloodthirsty deity and that Old Testament religion was hard and unyielding. For those with eyes to see, compassion and mercy are writ large upon the pages of the ancient Scriptures.

113)20:1-21:42

It is significant to see, however, that although the unwitting killer had his life spared, his freedom was certainly curtailed, perhaps for years until the reigning high priest of the day died. This bears witness to the fact that there may well have been culpable carelessness involved in the killing, if not intentional malice. Many of the fatal accidents on our roads today are committed by men who never meant to kill, but perhaps they had one or two drinks too many and this is what caused the accident. They are culpable, but they are not murderers, in the intentional, premeditated sense of the term.

But there is another consideration, of a different sort. The Levites, as we have said, were set apart to be ministers and teachers of God's Word, and some of their cities were to be cities of refuge. There is surely an association of ideas here: the function of the cities matched the function of the Levites. Here were men separated unto God for the ministry of His Word, and these cities were recognised as places to which the burdened and heavy laden could turn in times of need, and find refuge and rest. There is surely a lesson for us here. Happy the man, separated unto the gospel of God, who himself is recognised as a place to which the burdened and the needy can come and find refuge. When a man walks with God, he will become known as one to whom men may come for counsel, help and comfort. We wonder whether, when Jesus said, 'Ye are the light of the world, a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid' (Matthew 5:14) He may have been thinking of the cities of refuge in old time. This is something to make us think, is it not?

114)20:1-21:42

Let us now look at some spiritual analogies in relation to this ancient constitution, for the association of ideas is rich and fruitful. When Paul speaks in Philippians 3:4 ff about counting all things loss 'that I may win Christ and be found in Him', surely this is suggestive of the city of refuge scene. He has fled to Christ for refuge, and being found in Him, he is safe. We have the same kind of emphasis in Hebrews 6:1720. It would surely be impossible for any New Testament writer to use the idea of 'fleeing for refuge' without having in the back of his mind the Old Testament concept. It is this that enables us legitimately to apply the idea as a type of Christ and His gospel, and how marvellously apt the illustration proves to be. For one thing the cities were appointed by God Himself, as expressions of His mercy and compassion; and so it is with the gospel. For another thing, they were provided as a shelter from the avenger, and it is certainly not by accident that some of our greatest evangelical hymns, such as Toplady's 'A debtor to mercy alone' echo this thought so eloquently. The avenger of blood is powerless to come near us when we are sheltered by the atoning blood of Christ. Furthermore, these cities of refuge were all set in prominent places, to be seen by all: no one in a position of need would be too far away from one of them. What is more the road to the cities was plainly marked out, which made them easy of access. And this is how it is with the gospel. The idea that God plays hard to find is not one that is ever countenanced in Scripture. The gospel is not inaccessible, or difficult to grasp or understand. 'The word is nigh thee', says Paul in Romans 10, 'even in thy mouth and in thy heart'. This is what is borne witness to by the cities of refuge.

115)20:1-21:42

One commentator has pointed out that the very names of the cities of refuge are evocative: Kadesh signifies 'holy', Shechem signifies 'shoulder', a place of strength and safety; Hebron signifies 'fellowship'; Bezer signifies 'a fortified place'; Ramoth signifies 'height' or 'exaltation'; Golan speaks of 'exaltation and joy'. I do not know that we should read too much into these names, for it would be easy to run riot with all sorts of spiritualising, and we should perhaps be content with the general outline; but these are sufficient to show what a wonderful provision God made for his people, and that this was written into the judicial system that was established among them, as a merciful and compassionate provision to save men from the rigours of heartless, brutal and cruel jungle law. And just as God made merciful and compassionate provision then, so in Christ He makes merciful and compassionate provision for all who call upon His Name. What is perhaps the most practical and challenging thought that comes out of all this is the association of ideas between the Levites' cities of refuge and their calling to be ministers of God. The great question is: does it get around to people in need that they will find their burdens lifted in our place, among our people? Are we this kind of people? This is the challenge.

116)21:4345

These verses form a kind of epilogue to the two chapters that we have been dealing with in the past few days' Notes. Three times in these verses the emphasis is upon the fulfilment of the faithful Word of God: in 43 it is the land which the Lord swore to give that was given them; in 44 it is the same; in 45 all came to pass 'which the Lord had spoken'. What a wonderful epilogue this is, magnifying as it does the faithfulness of our faithful God! 'Hath He said, and will He not do it?' Heaven and earth will pass away before God fails of His faithful word to His people. All that He hath sworn to their fathers came to pass. It was a matter of His honour, and there is nothing that binds the mighty God so utterly and completely as the promises He gives to His children. God is not free, in this sense: He is not free to break His word, and He willingly binds Himself to the promises He makes. This is why the great saints in Scripture were able again and again to go to God and say, 'O God, Thou saidst...' if even an opportunist like Jacob could pray at Peniel 'Lord, I am not worthy of the least of Thy mercies, but Thou didst say Thou wouldst do this ...', and God put Himself in Jacob's power in that way, and Jacob wrested from the hand of God the fulfilment of that Word. God delights to be trusted like this: He is glad when we go to Him in this way. Indeed, He invites us (Isaiah 43:26, 'Put Me in remembrance' - inviting us to remind Him of what He has said. And if God said it, He will do it. This is the glorious and comforting and reassuring word that the end of this chapter proclaims to us.

117)21:4345

The following is F.B. Meyer's comment on these verses: 'So the work was finished.' 'There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass'! And this is true still. Our Father has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. He has withheld no good thing. In Jesus all fullness dwells; all that is needed for life and Godliness. We are complete in Him. If there is failure, it is ours, not His. If the book of Joshua is followed by that of Judges, it is because God's heirs yield to unbelief and sin. In the eternity, which is at hand, as we stand together and review our life course with its battles and marches and experience, its losses and gains, its heights of privilege and depths of failure we shall without doubt take up and repeat the glad confession of these noble words, and confess that no good thing failed us of aught that the Lord had spoken, but that all came to pass.'

118)22:19

We come in this chapter to a matter of spiritual discipline within the body of God's people, Israel. It is an account full of interest and valuable instruction in a number of directions, as we shall see when we proceed. In these verses we read of the two and a half tribes of Israel who settled on the eastern side of Jordan. We have already had occasion to note the circumstances of their settlement there, in 1:1215 (and, in an earlier reference, Numbers 32:127). When we studied this, the question that arose was whether the two and a half tribes were wrong in choosing this part of the Promised Land. Moses clearly had reservations about it; he could see looming up before him another situation like that at Kadeshbarnea, when the tragedy took place by which they were turned back into the wilderness. There is a real question mark here. Some scholars point out that the tribes were quite entitled to settle there, that in fact the border of the Promised Land in God's plan was not the river Jordan, but the hills of Gilead in the east, in what is known as Transjordan today. Others, however, feel that in settling where they did they were not too concerned to press into the western part of the land. The question of interpretation is an open one. But whether it was wrong or not for them to do this, something else was wrong, as we shall see later in the story. In the meantime, however, Joshua, agreeing that they had kept to their undertaking, and had fulfilled all that they had promised to Moses and to himself, consented to their 'demobilisation' and parted from them with his blessing with the marvellous fivefold exhortation in 5. We shall look at this, along with other observations of the situation, in the next Note.

119)22:19

In the previous Note we said that Joshua, agreeing that the 2½ tribes had kept to their undertaking, and had fulfilled what they had promised to Moses and himself, consented to their 'demobilisation' and parted from them with his blessing. We look now at that blessing, in 5. It is a very moving, and indeed beautiful utterance, with a fivefold exhortation, to love the Lord, to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all their heart. It would be difficult to find a more comprehensive statement anywhere in Scripture. One is reminded and indeed the commentators point this out of the similarity of the thought with Paul's famous words in 1 Corinthians 6:19, 'Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's'. This in effect is what Joshua enjoined upon these tribes as they went their way. One also thinks of Barnabas' exhortation to the Christians at Antioch in Acts 11:23, as he 'exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord', and one wonders whether this word of Joshua's may have been in his mind when he gave such an exhortation and, of course, our Lord's own words in the great commandment: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength' (Mark 12:30) make it clear that Joshua was animated by the Spirit of Christ in what he said. What better word could we take to ourselves than this as we seek to walk with Him?

120)22:1020

In the Note of two days ago we pointed out that although the question of interpretation of the 2½ tribes' action in settling on the East side of Jordan is an open one, and that whether or not it was wrong for them to do so, something else was wrong, and we see very clearly that this was so in the verses now before us, for a crisis was almost immediately precipitated in Israel. The building of another altar on the far side of Jordan very nearly brought about war between the 2½ tribes and the rest of Israel. We may ask what led to this, and what lay behind it. F.B. Meyer's comment here is helpful: 'When they reached the fords of Jordan and reflected that the stream would presently divide them from the rest of the people, a sudden fear seems to have taken them lest, in coming days, the seven and a half tribes might say to their children, 'What have ye to do with Jehovah, God of Israel, for the Lord hath placed Jordan a border between us and you. Ye have no portion with us'. To obviate this, and to make it clear for all coming time their identity with the rest of the people, they built an altar on the western bank of Jordan. It was a great altar to see, not intended for burnt offering or meal offering, or for religious rites, but as a perpetual witness that its builders were lealhearted Israelites. But it was a great mistake.' We must bear in mind the actual situation. They had been at war for seven years, and now they were being demobilised and sent back to normal life. It must have been a time of great emotional and psychological unsettlement and upheaval one has only to recall the immediate post war years in our time to realise the immense amount of disorientation that thousands of soldiers returning to civilian life certainly experienced and this is often a danger point from the spiritual point of view, because this is when we tend to do wrong things, say wrong things, and make wrong decisions and take wrong turnings. It is easier, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 6 to stand firm during the battle than to remain standing after the battle is over. This is the kind of situation we have in these verses.

121)22:1020

The building of the altar was a source of immediate alarm to Israel. To appreciate the significance of this we need to realise that Israel's concern was entirely based upon the known will of God. They knew what God had said about altars, and that building another was forbidden. The scriptural position is quite clear, as Deuteronomy 12:114; 13:1228 make clear (cf also Exodus 23:1217). At this time Shiloh was the place of the Lord's appointment, and the altar of the Lord was there. Israel therefore must have realised immediately that the action of the 2½ tribes was an express violation of the command of God. Naturally, they thought the worst, how could they have done otherwise? It was inevitable that they should think they had rebelled against the Lord. It says a great deal for Israel, while they gathered themselves together at Shiloh to go to war against the, as they thought, defaulting tribes, that they should first of all have had a counsel of war, and decided to send Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten princes, to look into the situation. This also was in accordance with the declared will of God (Deuteronomy 13:1218). We should note particularly what is said in 8; it is clear that Phinehas realised that such a serious action would have inevitable repercussions. It was as if he had said, 'Today you are doing this thing, but it is tomorrow that I am concerned about'. No man liveth unto himself. There is always an 'afterwards'. Clearly, it was the fateful implications of what they had done that so alarmed Israel, and past precedents, as we see from 17, were very much in their minds. We shall consider those in the next Note.

122)22:1020

Why was Phinehas chosen for this investigation? The answer to this question is found in the reference to Peor in 17. The allusion is to the story of Balaam and what followed it in Numbers 22:5, and particularly 25: 3-13. It was because he was a man zealous for the honour of God and had been given God's covenant of peace that he was the obvious choice to lead the commission of enquiry. And, in fact, we see in what follows how marvellously peace and reconciliation were effected. It is certainly worth noticing, the beautiful touch in 19, with the offer of some of their own land to the defaulting tribes on the other side of Jordan. Given the sense of outrage that the Israelites felt at their offending brethren, it says a great deal for the conciliatory spirit with which they remonstrated with them. The earnest, even loving, note in the words 'rebel not against the Lord' is very impressive, and sets Phinehas' work in a remarkable light. Clearly, the memory of what had happened at Peor, and later at the valley of Achor (20), weighed heavily with Phinehas and his companions. As we shall see in tomorrow's Reading the tribes protested their innocence of any evil intent, and the whole vexed question was settled amicably, without recourse to warfare. Conciliation prevailed and peace was restored. But that, alas, was not all that there was to it. Innocent intentions can often lead to corrupt practices, and we will need to follow through this thought in the Readings that follow.

123)22:2/34

'Innocent intentions can often lead to corrupt practices' we said in the previous Note. We have only to turn to the next book of our Bibles, to Judges 8:24 ff (the aftermath of Gideon's famous victory over the Midianites) to see the force of this, and to realise the importance and significance of Paul's words in Ephesians 6, 'and having done all, to stand'. Gideon waxed mighty against the Midianites, standing firm like a rock as God's man, but when the battle was over and the crisis had subsided, he did something with the most innocent of intentions, setting up a golden ephod in Ophrah, and it became an object of worship that was a snare to him and to the people of Israel. He meant it merely as a memorial, but it became something very different. The 2½ tribes also meant their altar to be a memorial, a visible reminder to the other tribes that they also belonged to God. But they already had God's Word that they were part of His people, and His enactment had ordained that they should be so. That should have been sufficient for them, but no they wanted a visible token. And just as Gideon's ephod became a snare, although never intended by him to become one, a snare to the people that led them into idolatry, so it was with these tribes, as we see when we look further on in Old Testament history, to 1 Chronicles 5:23-26. Also, eleven years before the main captivity of the northern kingdom took place, these 2½ tribes were the vanguard of the captivity, and there is at least strong presumptuous evidence that their hankering after the gods of the land had its origin in the altar that they erected at this time. No, good intentions are not enough, however innocent they seem: the things we do need to be consonant with the revealed will of God, and what they did that day was not consonant with that revealed will.

124)22:2/34

All this bears solemn lessons for us in spiritual life. It is incumbent upon us as believers to regulate our lives so that they are consonant in their main direction with the revealed will of God. This may be illustrated in a number of ways. For example, our forefathers had strong ideas about the purity and plainness and simplicity of worship, and in pursuit of this ideal, which they based upon the revealed word of God, the buildings in which they gathered for worship were plain and unadorned. But we have witnessed the emergence of an 'aids to worship' pattern which has shown remarkable progress over the years away from that plainness and simplicity. What, for example, does the following statement say to us on this matter, in the light of what we have been discussing in the last Note or two, in a report sent down by the Assembly some years ago which spoke of our inherited conception of the communication of the Word of God which, it was said, has been unduly narrowed and calls for enlargement. It goes on: 'For example, we can see a need to uphold (against the Calvinist Reformers' understandable overreaction) the validity and the value, as communicating the Word of God, of various nonverbal forms: such use of symbols and rituals, of representational art and music, as Lutheranism has retained and as has proved inestimably valuable for personal and corporate devotion to countless people. Through our Puritanised Calvinist heritage we have been deprived of these and spiritually impoverished by their lack. Admittedly, in recent years we in the Church of Scotland have begun to make good the lack with stained glass windows, murals, symbolic furnishings, and use of colour, rituals at special seasons (e.g. Christmas, Holy Week, Easter). It is now possible to celebrate the Lord's Supper without a sermon. Even yet, however, we have far to go, and have many novel, as well as old, nonverbal vehicles to consider as possibly legitimate and fitting modes of communicating the word of God'. Food for thought?

125)22:2/34

Murals, stained glass, symbolic furnishings, and what have you. Who can doubt that some of these things can assume a place in the minds of congregations and individuals that is likely to usurp the place of God, and that they have become, for all practical purposes, idolatrous. We mention this simply to point out that innocent intentions can lead to corrupt practices. The Roman blasphemy of the Mass started with an innocent intention, and from a wellintentioned altar, it has become a place of a blasphemous sacrifice, which is the antithesis of the Christian gospel. Now, it is true that Phinehas and the princes recognised the innocency of the tribes' intentions, and we may surely applaud the reconciliation that took place, for it avoided bloodshed a striking witness once more to the remarkable compassion and forbearance so often evidenced in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and as such, an example to be followed. But the fact remains that the New Testament reminds us that we must abstain from all appearance of evil; and if Gideon's experience is any criterion we can see the tragedy that can take place from an innocent act committed in the aftermath of battle when the victory had been won. Having done all, they did not stand, but fell. These things are written for our learning and admonition, and we should pray that God Himself will make us fully aware of the need for our lives to be lived in consonance with the principals of the divine revelation.

126)23:110

The two final chapters of the book record Joshua's parting counsels to the people of God, with chapter 23 giving his exhortation to the rulers, and chapter 24 his exhortation to the people themselves. These verses begin with the statement that Joshua 'waxed old and was stricken in age' (1). This, it will be remembered, was said also in 13:1, but ten chapters have passed before Joshua takes upon his lips the words spoken on that occasion by the Lord. It is not certain whether there is any significance in this, or whether this chapter is meant to read chronologically immediately after ch 13; but here is Joshua confessing his age before the elders of Israel. In an earlier chapter, we read about Caleb, the other old man in this scene (it is sometimes forgotten that in all the company of Israel at this time, there were only two old men; all the others of that generation had died off in the wilderness before Israel were allowed into the land, therefore Joshua and Caleb were of a different generation to the others). Here Joshua is old and stricken in years, but we recall how Caleb very confidently gave testimony that although he was 85 years old he was as hale and hearty as he had been when he was forty. This naturally prompts the question why this difference between the two men, since there could not possibly have been more than a few years difference in their ages? One possible explanation is that Joshua was the leader of God's people who bore the burden and responsibility for them, and that this was what aged the man. One recalls how the apostle Paul spoke of himself as Paul the aged (Philemon 9), when he could have been little more than 60 years old at the time. Doubtless it was what he called 'the care of all the churches' that wore him out. It was interesting that we should see Joshua expressing the same sentiments in a similar situation.

127)23:110

Joshua, then addresses himself to the leaders of the people. The commentators are not slow to point out that there are parallels to this in the New Testament. In 2 Peter 1 we have the appeal and exhortation of another old man nearing the end of the road to the church he is about to leave (2 Peter 1:13 ff). Similarly, we may recall how Paul, on that famous occasion on his way back to Jerusalem from his missionary journeys, called for the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, and exhorted them in the marvellous words of Acts 20:17 ff, urging them to stand firm and to stand fast, in very much the same terms as Joshua does here. One is conscious of the sense of history, even of destiny that is involved in such passages. In his exhortation, Joshua first of all (35) enunciates the facts of God's mighty power toward His people, in all that he had done, and in all that He yet would do. Once again it is a reminder to the people of the greatness of their God. This, in true New Testament fashion, is always the basis of biblical exhortation: the summons to courage and to faithfulness rests on the foundations of what God has done for us. It is this that gives the exhortation meaning, and therefore that leaves us without excuse when we fail to respond and rise to them. 'Ye have seen all that the Lord your God has done.' Is not this the best kind of basis for an inspirational exhortation? We have only to look back on our own lives over the years, to see all that God has wrought for us, and in us, and among us as His people, to have hearts filled with gladness and joy and gratitude. Well, let us look back today, and as we see His hand upon us over the years, let us thank Him, and take courage.

128)23:110

A threefold exhortation is given, the first part of which is recorded in 6. 'Be ye therefore very courageous...'. These are familiar words echoing the exhortation given to Joshua himself at the outset of his leadership of the people (1:6, 7). Indeed, they are almost exactly the words that God spoke to him then, and now he passes them on to the people as he is about to leave them. Joshua was therefore speaking from experience, as one who had himself proved God. He did not say 'I used to think and believe this, but now I am a sadder and wiser man', rather, he had proved God over the years and therefore could commend Him unreservedly as One who was utterly trustworthy. This must have meant a great deal to the elders of Israel, because they knew what God had said to Joshua all these years ago, and now in the light of experience it was as if he were saying to them, 'This is no theoretical matter: I am not saying this because it is my job to do so, but because over the years I have proved God to be trustworthy, and proved His words to be a source of power and strength, and it is yours to prove it also'.

Secondly, he exhorts them to cleave unto the Lord (8). The message in 710 is very clear: the word to which we go in an attitude of desire to obey it, is the word which contains the promises of God, and those who so come to the Word are immediately confronted with these promises in all their richness. God is no man's debtor. The alternatives and the dangers are also made very clear. It was certain that if they became identified with the heathen by marriage or by religion they would find trouble (cf 13), and things would go wrong for them. Their only safe attitude was to cleave to the Lord.

129)23:110

The association of ideas in 8, 9 is significant. Previous cleaving on their part had led to the Lord's power being made manifest. This is always how it is. If you want to taste the power of God, we have to do the cleaving. One recalls the great apostolic prayer meeting in Acts 4:24 ff, which gives a notable example of cleaving to the Lord. The disciples' part was to be bold, courageous and obedient, doing their duty of preaching the Word, while it was God's part to stretch out His hand to heal and to do signs and wonders. 'And when they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled together.' When we cleave to the Lord, He is allowed freedom of manoeuvre and action in His people and for His people. 'The Lord hath driven out from before you great nations and strong' (9). It is as if Joshua were saying 'The reason why we had such success is not because we are a great army, but because we have been obedient to God, His has been the power'. One has only to cite the disastrous episode at the city of Ai, when they did not cleave to the Lord but became careless and their army was ingloriously defeated, to see the truth of this. This is a lesson that God's people need to learn. Alas we are often so very slow to learn it, and sometimes we have to learn the hard way.

130)23:1116

The third part of Joshua's exhortation is summed up in the words in 11, 'Take good heed therefore....'. This echoes other passages in the Old Testament, as for example Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. Here is a fine comment by F.B. Meyer, 'The whole law of God, and of human life, is fulfilled in that one word, 'Thou shalt love'. Take good heed to love God, and all other injunctions are comparatively needless. Love God, and you will be content with nothing less than to inherit all the land, even to that great sea of his love upon which the sun never goes down. Love God, and courage must possess you; as the timid bird will assail the dreaded depredator of her nest, her maternal love making her oblivious to all considerations of her own safety. Love God, and you will love His Book, nor wish to swerve from it. Love God, and you will not seek a love which is inconsistent with your supreme affection. Love God, and you will possess God, and be possessed by God; and things which otherwise had been snares, and traps, and scourges, will become steppingstones to a fuller, richer life. Love God, and you will become one with all holy things in heaven and upon earth, and throughout the universe, to whom He is the supreme Love'. These are words that take us to the heart of everything. Jesus once said, of Mary, 'One thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her'. The most practical thing of all in Christian life is love to Jesus. There are those who imagine that this is sentimental mysticism or pietism, but the fact remains that those who have done most in the world for Christ, and for God, and for the gospel, and for the kingdom. have been those who have loved Him utterly. This is why Joshua says, 'Take good heed therefore unto yourselves that ye love the Lord your God'. This puts in proper perspective the whole campaign of conquest. As has already been pointed out we are not to interpret or understand this campaign merely as one of conquest this would be to miss the point. Here is a people in God's hands fulfilling His purposes; and it is a people and their ongoing experiences with their God that is the important thing. Joshua is, as it were, reminding them of how things stood between their God and themselves.

131)23:1116

There are several reasons why Joshua made this particular appeal. The first being seen in 6, 7, in the fact that there was an enemy, and that that enemy could be a very real snare to them. The temptation to idolatry is always present for the people of Israel in one form or another. Indeed, it is present long before they become a nation (we are told in 24:1, 2 that their ancestors served other gods, and later in the same chapter we find Joshua challenging the people to turn from their idols). This was therefore not a theoretical warning, but something Joshua saw as a live option; and victory here would be only at the price of constant and continuing vigilance. From the later history of Israel we know sadly enough that this was something that came at them again and again. The only effectual answer lay in observation of the law of Moses. The association of ideas in 6, 7 is clear: it is only a life strengthened and renewed day by day by the word of God that can be kept from idols. One is sometimes amazed at the problems that Christian people make for themselves, and at the sometimes incredible difficulties they get into. The answer is simple: they have neglected this basic piece of challenge and instruction, they have fallen down upon the business of feeding upon the Word of God. A great many of the problems in Christian life are eminently solvable, and would be solved, if Christians simply got down to a serious study of the Word, and to feed upon the truth of God. But it is sometimes the most difficult thing in the world to convince them that this is the answer to their problems. They will do anything rather than simply address themselves to this discipline. And they wonder why they have problems!

132)23:1116

Another reason for Joshua's exhortation is seen in 1113, in the weakness, and the evil propensities, of human nature. Joshua was very discerning: he knew the power within their hearts that could lead them astray. Yet, over against that undoubted weakness, he places the power of God's Word to restrain and to redeem. This is everywhere evident in the Scriptures. 'Thy word have I hid in my heart', says the Psalmist, 'that I might not sin against Thee' (Psalm 119:11). 'All Scripture', says Paul, 'is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The answer is in our hands, he says. Over against the propensities of our natures and this is something very real to us all over against the weaknesses within us, over against the known and admitted frailties of our being, he sets the energising power of the Word of God. The third reason Joshua gives for his exhortation is the faithfulness of God (14): 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you' (cf 24:213, where this is elaborated in some detail). This was something ascertainable. Joshua was, in effect, saying 'Listen, you men of Israel: at the beginning, God said such and such: he said He would do this, and this, and this. And now look how it is with us today: God has done this, and this, and this. Everything He promised He has done'. Joshua thus holds out this great testimony to the faithfulness of God and gives it as a reason why they should be strong and courageous.

133)23:1116

The fourth and final reason for Joshua's exhortation is seen in 15,16, in the reality of divine discipline. The solemn warning in these verses is analogous to the warnings given in connection with Ebal and Gerizim (8:3035; Deuteronomy 11:2632, Deuteronomy 27/28). This is one of the integral realities of God's dealings with His people. God expects His grace to be taken seriously, on pain of punishment. We cannot and we may not trifle with the grace of God, and it is not ours to reject, if we so wish, with impunity. He intends that His grace should be received. This is the point that is being made here. Just as, when they had walked with Him, God fulfilled all His promises to them, so if, at any future time, they swerved from the path of obedience, all this would come upon them. Sadly enough, we read in the very next book of the Old Testament - Judges - that when Joshua died the people swerved away from God and worshipped idols; and this was the beginning of the great decline which brought Israel down to such a pitch of barrenness and desolation and forsakenness in the time of Eli, when Samuel was raised up by God for His people's deliverance. Such, then, is Joshua's commission to the elders of Israel, 'How solemn and moving his words, and how gratifying to know that these elders who outlived him responded to the warnings (24:31), He charged the elders over the people: he encouraged them, counselled them and admonished them, in order that not only they themselves might be preserved, but that through them the entire nation might be guarded from sin' (Pink).

134)24:113

We come in this final chapter to Joshua's parting exhortation to Israel, following upon his counsel to the elders in the previous chapter. We should note first of all the significance of his gathering the people to Shechem. (1) There seems to have been a very real, and indeed, decisive symbolism in this, because Shechem was a place of solemn association to the people of God. We have already seen in earlier chapters (8:30-35; Deuteronomy 11:26-32, 27/28), the scene: Ebal and Gerizim, where the blessings and cursings were pronounced in the presence of all the people, contingent upon their obedience or disobedience; Joshua seems deliberately to have brought the people back to Gerizim as if to underline his final words to the people, reminding them of what God had vowed upon them, and impressing upon them in his dying counsel the importance of standing firm in the Lord. There is also a further significance and association with Genesis 35:24, in Jacob's call to his family to reconsecrate themselves to God. It is clear that the incident involving Jacob was very much in Joshua's mind at this point, as we may see from the language he uses in 14:23, 25, 26, picking up Jacob's very words to his family. Further, there is the symbolic association of the oak at Shechem, under which Jacob buried these strange gods. There is another, even earlier, reference to Shechem in Genesis 12:47 (Sichem and Shechem are the same place). Joshua is bringing this to their remembrance also, as if to say, 'This is the very place where Abraham built the first altar to the Lord, when He promised the land to him'. It must surely have been a tremendously dramatic situation, and a place of solemn association for the people. Such is the background of the exhortation which follows.

135)24:113

First of all, Joshua gives a rehearsal of all Israel's previous history under the grace of God. He is surely speaking in a prophetic vein, with the impress of the Spirit of God upon him, so that it is God Himself who is speaking to them in this review of all His gracious dealings with them, in order to appeal to their hearts for an attitude of holiness, fear and love toward Him. The review is comprehensive, from their call in Abraham (3), their redemption through the Red Sea (57), their preservation through the wilderness (810), to their inheritance of the land (1113). What is it meant to say to us? Just this. 'Not one thing hath failed of all the good things that the Lord your God spoke concerning you, all are come to pass concerning you, and not one thing hath failed thereof'. This is the Lord's testimony to Himself, a testimony to His faithfulness; and this is the point of the exercise, to remind them and us of His faithfulness to His promise. We should notice the constant emphasis, 'I took, I gave, I sent, I did, I brought, I gave, I destroyed, I delivered, I sent, I have given'. Throughout, the emphasis is upon what God has done. There is no mention of the battles, no mention of the heroes of the faith, although they are all there, but always the emphasis upon the sovereign grace and sufficiency of God. This was all of God, and it was all of grace. It is salutary and encouraging for us to remember this, and to be assured that when God begins something He will make an end of it. As Paul puts it in Philippians 1:6, 'He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ' (cf Genesis 28:15 for a similar assurance given to Jacob). This is one of the most tremendous things in all spiritual experience. When a man can be sure of that, there is nothing that can stand in his way, and he has confidence and peace all along the line. Heaven and earth will pass away before God fails to bring to completion what he has begun.

136)24:142:15

Following the review of God's faithfulness in 113 we now have Joshua's appeal to the people. In this pattern we have a perfect parallel to what we see in the New Testament, where in the Pauline epistles the invariable rule is - first of all the great indicatives of the faith, what God has done in Jesus Christ, and then the great exhortation and imperative to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called. Joshua similarly based his appeal on the grounds of what the Lord had done, and he thereby intimated that God had put an immeasurable responsibility upon them to fulfil all faithfulness in their dealings with Him, because He had been so utterly faithful to them. The appeal is in similar terms to that given to the leaders of the people in chapter 23, but with a very specific warning about idols. 'Fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the river and in Egypt' (14). We have already referred this back to Genesis 35:24; obviously the reference must be to some kind of household gods, such as, for example, Rachel stole from Laban's household (Genesis 31:17-19, 30-32). This reference indicates that there was such a thing as idolatry in the family of Israel before they ever became a nation. It is certainly true that idolatry must have been always present very near to the surface of their mind, since Israel were hardly out of Egypt when they were making a golden calf to worship. It seems, alas, to have been a more or less constant factor in the experience of the people. What we can learn from this is that things carried over from the old life always prove deadly and fatal in the long run to the new. It is a lesson that we are very slow to learn. We are prepared to give them house room without worshipping them, shrinking from the radical course of casting them out, but soon or late, they overpower us and do us harm. Do not let us forget the Corinthian church, and the things they brought with them from the old life into the new, and the immense harm they did to that fellowship. Do not let us forget, either, that the apostle John concludes his first epistle with the words, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols'.

137)24:14-25

It is in this context of the danger of idolatry that Joshua makes the appeal in 14,15. We should note particularly the positive aspect of the challenge in 15 over against the negative 'put away' in 14: 'Choose you this day whom ye will serve.' This choice and decision is called for, against the background of the faithfulness of God as rehearsed in 113. Here is 'the expulsive power of a new affection', as Thomas Chalmers used to put it.

Here is the way to put away strange gods, and here is the significance of the rehearsing of God's mighty acts. It is when our hearts are gripped and inspired by what He has done that we find the motivating power to make a right choice. We do not make the choice 'in vacuo', and it is not a bare imperative that is given but one set over against the riches of God's grace. We should also notice the words at the end of 15 'As for me and my house...'. Joshua was a man who was head of his own house in very truth, and he carried the others with him. One commentator points out that there is, in fact, no mention of Joshua's house anywhere else in the Old Testament, or of any of his descendants. The suggestion has been made that the house of Joshua embraces all the faithful servants of the Lord. 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end' (Hebrews 3:6). Is not this a thought worth pondering?

138)24:14-25

What should particularly interest us, however, is the response made by the people (2618). They said all the right things, and were theologically and doctrinally sound, echoing the thought of 1113, which Joshua had spent so much time labouring before them. But in 19-24 his reply to them is very significant. Did he detect traces of insincerity in their statement, or even levity, in a lightly made vow? Perhaps, as one commentator suggests, he felt the unreality of their profession, because they gave no sign of abandoning their strange gods. It is very interesting and significant that at no point did they say that they would, even if Joshua kept on repeating it. There were affirmations, but no action, affirmations but no fruits of repentance. One commentator observes, 'Had he hoped for a repetition of the scene that had taken place on that very spot so many years ago when, at the challenge of Jacob, his household gave him all the strange gods which were in their hands, and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them beneath the oak which was by Shechem' (Genesis 35:4). Be this as it may, it does not seem feasible for Joshua to have kept on urging them to put away the strange gods unless in fact they were known to have been dabbling in idolatrous practices. There would have been no point in Joshua saying this in a merely theoretical way. Clearly there must have been something in the people needing such a challenge. And Joshua, though he kept on emphasising the need for action, got nothing but renewed protestations.

139)24:14-25

Alexander Maclaren makes an interesting comment here: 'Joshua's ear must have caught some tones of levity, if not insincerity, in the vow that they made. So he meets it with a douche of cold water in 19, 20, because he wishes to condense vaporous resolutions into something tangible and permanent. Cold, judiciously applied, solidifies; discouragements, rightly put, encourage. The best way to deepen and confirm good resolutions, which have been too swiftly and inconsiderately formed, is to state very plainly all the difficulties of keeping them. The hand that seems to repel, often most powerfully attracts. There is no better way of turning a somewhat careless, 'we will' into a persistent, 'Nay, but we *will*' than to interpose a 'ye cannot'. Many a boy has been made a sailor by the stories of hardship which his parents have meant as dissuasive. Joshua here is doing exactly what Jesus Christ often did. He refused glib vows because He desired whole hearts. His very longing that men should follow Him made Him send them back to bethink themselves when they promised to do it. 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever thou goest!' was answered by no recognition of the speaker's enthusiasm, and by no word of pleasure or invitation, but by the apparently cold repulse: 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air roosting places; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head'. That is what you are offering to share. Do you stand by your words? So, when once 'great multitudes' came to Him, he turned to them, with no invitation in His words, and told them the hard conditions of discipleship as being entire selfrenunciation. He will have no soldier enlisted under false pretences. They shall know the full difficulties and trials which they must meet; and if, knowing these, they are still willing to take His yoke upon them, they will know how exuberant and warm the welcome which He gives!'

140)24:14-25

What Maclaren says in the quote in the previous Note makes very good sense. It may be that this is what Joshua was recognising; but even if that is true, as we are sure it is, we must not miss the repeated insistence by Joshua on action, in 14, 20, 23. And three times the people did not answer that challenge. It was rather like the challenge that Jesus gave to Simon Peter on the shores of Galilee after the Resurrection: 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me...?' (John 21:15 ff). Peter never rose to the word that Jesus used in that passage for love *agape* any more than Israel rose to Joshua's challenge, but used a lesser word. Joshua wanted action, and when we recall that he was using the very words that the patriarch Jacob had used in Genesis 35:2 ff, it is fair comment to say that he wanted Israel to act in this way according to his challenge. They protested their determination to serve the Lord, but did they really give up their idols? This serves to underline one reason why the apostle Paul uses the particular words he does in his great appeal in Romans 12:1, 2 '...present your bodies a living sacrifice'. He certainly means that we should present our whole selves, all that there is of us to God, yet he used the word 'bodies', and for this reason, he wants our consecration to be a concrete, visible one. God is not interested in a disembodied consecration; our response must be not in theory or in principle only, but in a body, that is, expressed in action. That is what Joshua wanted here: he wanted an actual severance from the idols. We need not doubt that the people were absolutely sincere in what they said, but the fact is, to say, 'The Lord our God will be served, and His voice will be obeyed' is not the same as saying, 'We now put away our idols, our strange gods, in this visible act of severance'. Is this reading more than is warranted into these verses, or is there a real point at issue here?

141)24:26-28

If what we have suggested in the previous Note is valid, we must assume that there must have been a sense of regret, if not failure, in the heart of Joshua as he wrote the words in the book of the Law of God and set up the stone of remembrance under the oak (26) as a witness to the people's avowals. After all, the stone was but a symbol, bearing witness to what the people had said, rather than an evidence of something they had done. Jacob had actually buried his family's strange gods under the oak at Shechem, and we are sure that Joshua would have by far preferred to have such a concrete evidence of his people's consecration rather than merely a symbol. It may well be that this is the point at which the later declension of Israel, recorded in the book of Judges was made inevitable. When one thinks of all the idolatry that darkened the life of Israel in succeeding generations, one can understand all the more clearly Joshua's urgent insistence in this passage on a real response, and his disappointment at not seeing it.

142)24:29-33

We turn finally to the last verses of the book, reading them in conjunction with Judges 2:6-12, which repeat them in substance. There is something important for us to note here. It would seem, and it did seem, that the consecration that Israel made was true and real enough, and that it continued during the lifetime of the elders who out-lived Joshua a matter of years, it may be. And it might be said, 'They did well, after all, then'. But it was not so very long afterwards that they began to decline, as Judges 2:11ff makes plain. This is surely a confirmation that they did not rise radically enough to Joshua's challenge. By and by, the evil thing that they had allowed unchecked, took over in their lives and drew them away from the Lord. It is a very frightening thought, is it not?

The last two verses are full of significance (32, 33), relating to the burial of the bones of the patriarch Joseph in Shechem. In Hebrews 11:22 we read, 'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones'. It is a remarkable thing that of all the wonderful story of Joseph in the book of Genesis, covering many chapters, the inspired Chronicler in Hebrews has nothing to say, but chooses as the significant part of the patriarch's experience his dying mention of the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt, and the commandment concerning his bones. Why should this be? It is the recognition, and this was something clearly recognised by Joshua also, that it is the ongoing purposes of God that are the important and significant issue in all this story: not the campaign of conquest, but the preparation of the people over the ages for the divine plan of redemption. We shall say more of this in the next Note.

143)24:29-33

Continuing the thought at the end of the previous Note, what we need to realise is that Joseph recognised that he was part of the divine plan of the ages, and to him, that was more important than the feeding of the starving millions in Egypt during the years of famine. He was conscious of being part of something infinitely greater. And Joshua and the children of Israel recognised that the important thing was not their inheritance of the various parts of the Promised Land, but their fitting into the ongoing purposes of divine redemption. There is a great lesson for us in this: the most important thing for any of us is to be able to discover what part we have to play in the strategic purposes of God in our day and generation, and for the future. That is the only thing that matters, for that is what we are here for; and happy is the man who has the basic, downtoearth consciousness that he is in the place of God's plan and purpose for his life, for it means that life has meaning and significance, and that it will accomplish something. Without this, and apart from this, we do not live, we simply exist.

144)24:29-33

Once again, then, at the end of the book, in a startling and graphic way, the thought is underlined and underscored for us that the important thing in the Old Testament is not so much the history of a people, but their separation unto God, to bring forth in the fullness of the time One Who was to be the Saviour of the world. One can hardly doubt that this is how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament scriptures. 'Search the Scriptures', says Jesus, 'for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me'. This does not mean looking for abstruse or improbable texts and making them types of Christ but rather that in the whole revelation, from beginning to end, testimony was being borne to Him. The great significance of Israel being in this land of Canaan was that one day, in the fullness of the time, there would come from their descendants the precious Seed of God, Who was to bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15), and bring us everlasting redemption.