

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 13 July 2003

No. T0274

Speaker: Mr. David Pulman

The Hand of the Lord: The Hand with a Sword - Joshua 5:13-15

New beginnings happen to us all. During my life time I can pick out a few which come readily to mind. When I started school at the age of five, my first employment and when I retired. But the most important beginning must be the day when I accepted Jesus as my Saviour and Lord.

Joshua and the nation of Israel were facing a new beginning. Moses, the servant of the LORD, was dead. Moses had been the leader of the nation of Israel from Egypt, through the wilderness to the border of the "promised land". A new leader had been appointed, "Joshua the son of Nun ... a man in whom is the Spirit", Numbers 27:18. Joshua was a man approved by God to take the nation forward into the land of Canaan, to conquer and settle into the inheritance that God had first promised to Abraham many hundreds of years ago.

This was a new beginning for the nation with all the potential for either greatness and glory or for dismal failure. The early chapters of the book of Joshua provide the detail of the changes that accompanied this new beginning. As already stated, the nation had a new leader in Joshua. There was the challenge of crossing the river Jordan in full flood. Spies would be needed to view the land and ascertain the condition of the people. Would they fail and be like the ten spies forty years earlier or would they bring back a good report?

As with the Red Sea forty years previous, the river Jordan moves back to allow the people to pass over on dry ground. God once again worked mightily for His people. Let me read from Joshua 4:23 and 24: "The LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed over, that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

When the Jordan was crossed the people needed to be circumcised. Circumcision was the physical sign connected with the covenant promise from God. God had promised the land of Canaan to Israel for an everlasting possession, see Genesis 17:7-10. As a circumcised people they had separated themselves to God and broken forever their links with Egypt. Once the nation had taken this step of faith, then the Passover could be celebrated. This was a reminder of God's deliverance and His promise of a new land. In verse 11 we find the people eating of the produce of the land and the miraculous feeding by God stopped. No more manna, a symbol of their wilderness wanderings.

Now Joshua goes to view Jericho. Joshua already knows that God has given the city into his hand. Joshua has the testimony of Rahab, an inhabitant of Jericho. Let me read from 2:9-11, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." This was a remarkable testimony from Rahab, an inhabitant of Jericho. Jericho was to be the first conquest.

Was Joshua wondering how God would achieve this victory? Was Joshua apprehensive about the task ahead? I am sure as he viewed Jericho that his thoughts also encompassed the totality of the work ahead, a vast land with many foes. It seems as if Joshua was looking down at the city because he suddenly lifts his eyes and sees a man with a sword. Joshua immediately challenges the warrior.

Let me read verse 13, "It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, 'Are You for us or for our adversaries?'" Such clearness of thought is a challenge to us. If I look around at family and friends, what would their answer be if I raised the same kind of challenge to them? When the census form came round one of the questions asked had to do with nationality, "How do you describe yourself?" In God's terms there are only two categories, those who have Jesus as their Saviour and those who do not. Through the gospel message, Christians seek to win people for Jesus.

From the challenge that Joshua gives it is obvious that he is committed to the task ahead. As far as Joshua is concerned, there is no middle ground of compromise or neutrality. A person is either with God and His people or they are an enemy. The reply from the warrior is more than Joshua expected. Verse 14 states, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." Many Bible students consider this person to be the Lord himself, a theophany, a supernatural manifestation in human form. With this thought in mind we can readily see that His claimed title of "Commander of the army of the LORD" is most appropriate. Whatever concerns Joshua may have had, here was his God ready to lead, guide and ensure victory in the first challenge that Joshua faces. We have a Captain to whom we look. Let us read Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." The word "author" is the same in the original Greek for captain or leader as per Strong's concordance. Our challenges are of a spiritual nature, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:12. Also we have a Captain who has already gained the victory. It is the Christian's place to hold that ground of victory.

Let us read in 1 Corinthians 15:57, "Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In Ephesians 6:11, "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Also in Ephesians 6:13, "Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Joshua had a very real and tangible land in which the warfare was to be conducted. He could see the enemy clearly. For the Christian it is a little different. We have already read Ephesians 6:12, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

The enemy of mankind, the devil, has blinded people's eyes so that they do not see the danger they are in and the free salvation that God has freely for them. Let us read 2 Corinthians 4:4, "Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." For those who know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Satan desires nothing better than to make us ineffective for God. Satan will use many things in his opposition to cause believers to stumble and fail. In Joshua 7 we find Achan had coveted and stolen treasure from Jericho instead of following God's command. This brought disaster in the next campaign and progress could not be made until Achan was discovered and dealt with for his disobedience.

The revelation that the man who faced Joshua was the Commander of the army of the Lord produced a worthy response from Joshua, verse 14, "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped." This must always be the response from our hearts to every fresh appreciation of our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. We find this so often in the epistles, a burst of praise seems to come spontaneously from the writer. Peter does this in 1 Peter 1:3-5: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." When we read such words, it causes worship and thanks from our hearts. Jesus said to the woman at the well of Sychar, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24.

Worship then leads to a fresh impetus on Joshua's part and he seeks advice and guidance for the way ahead. "What does my Lord say to His servant?" If Joshua was expecting to be given a battle plan immediately then he was disappointed. The Lord's first communication is to instruct him as to the nature of the whole situation. This was the commencement of a conflict which was to be marked by God's standards and not the standards of this world. Verse 15, "Then the Commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so."

This was to be a holy war. God was to use the nation in judgement upon the inhabitants of the land. God had said to Abraham that his descendants would go into Egypt until the right moment came for their blessing, but that they would act in judgement upon an evil people. Genesis 15:16, "In the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." Was God being unkind, unmerciful, uncaring for the people of Canaan? Absolutely not! God gave them hundreds of years to change, to repent and to seek forgiveness. Rahab is a wonderful example of God bringing blessing. Rahab heard how God had worked for Israel. Rahab knew that judgement was coming on the whole land of Canaan. Rahab did works of faith when she sheltered the two spies and asked for salvation. Does God say no? Where there is repentance, God lovingly showers down a blessing beyond what we could ever imagine.

In Joshua 6:23 we find Rahab, her father and mother, and all her family are brought out of Jericho and given a place of safety outside the camp of the nation of Israel. But God's blessing for Rahab was not some lone place just within the door. We understand from Matthew 1:5 that Rahab marries a prince from the tribe of Judah and so the one time

harlot becomes a princess and becomes part of that royal line from which Jesus was eventually born. For us who have been saved by God's grace, a onetime sinner becomes a "child of God". Such blessing is almost beyond telling!

However, judgement comes to the unrepentant. God demands holiness from His people, in how we live, in what we say and in the things we do. In Psalm 93:5 we have this statement, "Your testimonies are very sure; Holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever." Also in Hebrews 3:6, "Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are." Blessing brings with it responsibility.

Joshua comes to understand that this land was to be a holy land, see Zechariah 2:12, the land where God was to place His name. God expected His people to act in holiness for God is very jealous concerning His own name and nature. He is just so with Christians today as the above scriptures bring to our attention.

Before closing we need to consider the fact that this warrior commander had His sword in His hand. The commander was ready for the battle. His power was going to be demonstrated in a remarkable way at Jericho. The offensive was to be like no other. There had to be obedience on the part of Joshua and the army. The marching round the city and the eventual blowing of trumpets on the seventh day was followed by the collapse of the city walls. At this point the city was defeated. They trusted in their fortification but God destroyed it completely.

This is a wonderful picture of salvation. Satan's power was death but death has been defeated by a risen and glorified Christ who is now at God's right hand. God through Christ did the work and gained the victory. Believers enjoy the fruit of that victory. Joshua and the army went into the city over the broken wall and brought judgement on the inhabitants but the treasure - silver, gold, bronze and iron - belonged to God. The features of salvation are God's, the redemption, righteousness, judgement and justice. Believers come into the advantage of what God has accomplished; it is not our work.

Following Jericho there was the small city of Ai. Achan caused the inhabitants of Ai to be victorious. How? Achan stole from God. Achan coveted the goods of Jericho. Achan's sin made the whole army ineffective. These become challenging considerations for Christians today. The sin of one believer can and does reduce the effectiveness of the whole company of believers. Someone might well say, "It is only a small matter." "Who cares or notices?" God cares and notices! The sin had to be found out, exposed, confessed and dealt with. Not until then would Joshua and the army be able to go on to further victories. Notice there is no repetition of the kind of victory seen at Jericho. Jesus only needed to endure the cross and death once. From now on we work out our salvation, Philippians 2:12. We take the whole armour of God and stand, Ephesians 6:13.

There is a sword for the Christian, Ephesians 6:17: "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." However the word of God is very powerful. In Hebrews 4:12 we are told that "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Part of the armour that the Christian has is the sword of the Spirit. Used in warfare it is to defeat the attacks of Satan. Remember how the Lord when tempted in the wilderness used only Scripture to defeat Satan! This is the only sure and effective means of countering any attack. In contrast we have Eve in the Garden of Eden who mixed up what God had said with her own thoughts - defeat was inevitable! Let us always and solely rely on Scripture.

However the sword has other work to do. The word of God opens up the heart and conscience of those who do not believe and lets in the light of the truth. The presentation of the message of salvation is the only way that someone who is lost and in the darkness of sin might be brought into the light and liberty of sins forgiven. This message of salvation is wonderfully stated in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Finally, the sword of the Spirit has a further work. This is what Achan ignored. As I read and use Scripture, its power applies to me. What I preach and teach to others must first be applied to myself. If I fail to apply what I read to my life in a practical way, then I will become ineffective.

The man with a sword in His hand was not only relevant for Joshua and the conquest of the land of Canaan, but He is in every way of great relevance to Christians today. We too need to be like Joshua, to worship our Saviour and Lord, to seek His guidance and to obey.

There is a hymn by JH Sammis which comes to mind.

*When we walk with the Lord,
In the light of His word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.*

*Trust and obey;
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*

Let us pray.

Lord, we give thanks for the victory of Your salvation. We are thankful too that You are a Saviour who is willing to guide Your people day by day. Help me to be like Joshua, not afraid to ask for guidance, ready to listen to the answer and willing to carry out Your will. Bless and strengthen every believer so that we may take up the whole armour of God and stand for the truth without compromise. Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.