

CONDITIONED FOR CONQUEST

JOSHUA-THE ADVENTURE AND VICTORY OF FAITH

by Doug Goins

On the thirteenth of this month, Scott Grant, Ron Ritchie, Ed Woodhall, Steve Zeisler, and I set out on a long-awaited journey to Pakistan. We had spent almost a year trying to get into that country, in response to an invitation to teach at a pastors' conference there, which we were convinced was from the Lord. We had a day of travel on each end of our journey, three days in Bangkok, Thailand, and then five days in the country of Pakistan. We had a tremendous time traveling together, representing this body and the Lord Jesus. And it was a great trip, far beyond anything we could have imagined, prayed for, or hoped for. God was abundantly good to us in so many ways-physically, relationally, and in our ministry.

But the trip brought up one issue for me that I have struggled with my entire life. It reminded me once again of what an impatient person I am in the flesh, apart from Jesus. Waiting for things does not come easily to me. After all the delays and roadblocks, when all the travel arrangements were finally in place, we were very anxious to get to LaHore, Pakistan to begin the conference. Then at the very last minute, we found out that we were going to have a three-day delay in Bangkok, Thailand. God was good, and we had great relationships and great ministry opportunities there. But I confess, I was frustrated, because it seemed to me that the real strategic calling was Pakistan. So I struggled with the Lord in my impatience while we waited in Bangkok for the "real" ministry to start.

That struggle for me was similar to the strategic moment that the nation of Israel faced in Joshua 5 as they waited to begin the conquest of the land. The people had crossed over the Jordan River as the Lord miraculously held back the flood waters. They placed the memorial stones of the death and burial of their old wilderness life in the riverbed. Then they placed memorial stones of resurrection, of new life in the land of promise, on the riverbank at Gilgal, a reminder of God's saving power and his grace at work in their lives.

Now Israel is ready to begin the conquest of the land and the attack on Jericho. It certainly seems like the right moment strategically to launch an all-out offensive. All the people are united under Joshua's leadership and are following the Lord. We're going to see in the text that the people of the land are paralyzed with fear. From a human point of view, it's the perfect time for Joshua to act.

Ironically, however, God has something else in mind. God is never in a hurry. The events described in chapter 5 take at least ten days. And then the people are going to march around the city of Jericho for six more days. God has the people wait more than two weeks after crossing the Jordan before giving them their first taste of victory in the land.

I struggle to accept the fact that God's delays are always much more valuable than my haste. We're always anxious to *do* something for God, and we forget that the first thing he wants is for us to *be* something for him. God's people have to be prepared before we can be trusted with victory. The triumphant conquest of the land is to be the victory of God, not the victory of Israel or the victory of Joshua. It will be, the power of God that gives Israel the victory. This delay in chapter 5 is going to be a time of spiritual conditioning.

There are four spiritual principles we're going to pull out of this chapter. The first is that when God expresses himself in and through his people, the world takes notice. Second, the spiritual preparation of God's people must precede any activity. Third, God's people must be alert to change, because God won't always do things the same way. And fourth, God's people deserve and need leaders who are themselves being led by God, who are not self-directed.

Verse 1 brings us to a decisive moment, not just for Israel but for the Canaanite residents of the land that Israel has just entered:

When all the kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites that were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their heart melted, and there was no longer any spirit [courage] in them, because of the people of Israel.

God expressed himself through his people, and the world took notice. We saw in chapter two how demoralized the Canaanites were with the rumors of what God had done through Israel.

This God of Israel had opened the Red Sea for an entire nation to escape the land of Egypt. The God of Israel had preserved them through forty years in the wilderness. The God of Israel had worked through his people to defeat two kings in Ammon and Moab, east of Jordan. Now this nation was camped at the doorstep of Jericho-and the people were terrified.

We don't need to be afraid of the non-believing world around us, because the Lord of the universe is with us. But, too often we live in fear. That was true of many of the Christians we talked with in Pakistan. The opposition of Islam is so obvious, so overwhelming, so oppressive. The things they have to be fearful of are very easy to see. But even in this country, I talk with believers who seem to have a Christian inferiority complex, believing that they have given up a lot of follow Christ, that somehow non believers live with greater advantage. The non-Christians look stronger, more confident, more self-assured.

But it isn't really true! Non-Christians live with everything to fear. Their gods fail them constantly, and then they watch us who know the Lord Jesus to see if we are in touch with ultimate reality. We should never be afraid of who we are. The world is dying to see people who are different, who have an alternative.

The apostle Paul described this dynamic in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. He said that we are a fragrance from Christ if he is expressing himself through us. To those who are being saved we're a fragrance of life to life. To those who are perishing, we're a fragrance of death to death. There will be a reaction.

We had a number of conversations with courageous Pakistani Christians who are having Muslim friends approach them, wanting to know more about their prophet Jesus Christ. This is happening in a country where converting from Islam to Christianity, proselytizing, and talking against the prophet Mohammed are illegal. Yet when people see spiritual reality, they're drawn to it.

The logic of the narrative in verse one would seem to lead to an immediate attack on Jericho after the crossing of the Jordan River. The spies had told Joshua when they came back from reconnaissance that the people were demoralized. Joshua had extensive military experience, and his army was united behind him. But instead of allowing the people to attack, God asks them to stop for a period of spiritual preparation before the battle. They must focus on two important acknowledgments of their covenant relationship with Him: the covenant sign of circumcision and the covenant meal of Passover. So in verses 2-10 both of those things are reinstated in the life of the people. This is a section that focuses on the necessity of spiritual preparation or conditioning before we're ready to serve the Lord. Look at verses 2-3:

At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the people of Israel again the second time." So Joshua made flint knives, and circumcised the people of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth [Hill of the Foreskins].

The nation had to wait at Gilgal while the men submitted to this painful surgery. Circumcision was the initiatory rite into the covenant privilege of God's family that had marked the Jewish nation. God gave a covenant relationship to Abraham back in Genesis 12 when he called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. In Genesis 15 God sealed the covenant with a sacrifice. Then in Genesis 17 God gave circumcision as the sign of the covenant to Abraham, and said that all of his descendants were to bear that mark of covenant relationship. Through this ritual the Jews became a marked people, because they belonged to the true and living God. The

sign meant that they were under loving obligation to obey him. This mark on the bodies of the men of the covenant reminded them that their bodies belonged to the Lord, and they were not to be used for sinful purposes. Remember that Israel was surrounded by nations that served idols and worshipped those idols in sexually degrading ways. This physical mark reminded the Jews that they were a special, separated people, a holy nation, and that they were to maintain purity in all of their relationships-in their marriages, in their society, and in their worship.

Verses 4-7 explain the historical necessity for Joshua's circumcising the people of Israel:

And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people that were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the nation, the men of war that came forth out of Egypt, perished, because they did not hearken to the voice of the LORD; to them the LORD swore that he would not let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. So it was their children, whom he raised up in their stead, that Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

The Jews hadn't practiced circumcision during their years of wandering in the wilderness. Thirty-eight years earlier they had refused to believe God and enter into the land. So God disciplined the people by keeping them in the wilderness until the entire older generation died off except for Joshua and Caleb. Now the new generation was in its inheritance, and it was important that the people renew their covenant relationship with God. Their parents had sinned in the wilderness-how much more would this new generation be tempted now that they were in the land and faced with paganism and immoral religious practices! They would be tempted over and over again to compromise with their enemies. So the covenant needed to be re-established and redefined for the people through circumcision. Look at verse 8. There is a kind of a quiet humor in this understatement:

When the circumcising of all the nation was done, they remained in their places in the camp till they were healed.

Imagine yourself as an Israeli soldier who has just been circumcised, waiting to get better, looking at this city in front of you, and thinking, "Why couldn't we have done this on the other side of the river? We can't move for a few days, and if they come after us, we're sitting ducks." It was a tremendous act of faith to remain in their places, waiting to heal. Joshua had to exercise faith in performing this amazing act on all these men. The people had to wait, obey the Lord, and trust him even though they were weak, in pain, and vulnerable to attack at this time. But the spiritual reality is that in that weakness they were made strong. Hebrews 6:12 describes the attitude of these people as it challenges us to be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Tremendous patience was required in waiting for this time of healing to be accomplished.

In verse 9 God himself explains a wonderful aspect of this important sign of the covenant:

And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal [Rolled Away] to this day.

As the foreskin of each male sex organ was cut away, God says that symbolically and spiritually all the reproach, failure, shame, guilt, and humiliation they had carried with them through all the years since the exodus from Egypt-all that had been rolled away. They were given again the sign of their right relationship with God.

Twice on the plains of Moab before Moses died, he had told the people of Israel that the physical act of circumcision pointed to a spiritual reality: The people must circumcise their hearts. Colossians 2:11-14 makes clear that circumcision signifies the putting off of the flesh, the cutting off of the old life with its power of condemnation over us. Let's put ourselves right in the middle of this passage: "...and in Him you were also

circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." The guilt, shame, and disgrace of our sinful past is gone! It has been cut off, and it can no longer affect us. Its power has been broken.

In our study of chapter 4, we saw that the nation Israel's passage through the Jordan symbolized our identification with Christ, our being placed into his death and burial. Their coming out on the other side symbolized our being raised with him in his resurrection, being given newness of life. Circumcision symbolizes the effects of that identification, the cutting off of that old life and the ability to live a new life. Israel could look back at what happened at Gilgal, the Hill of the Foreskins, and remember what God did. And whenever a Jewish male viewed his sex organ he was reminded that every day he could cut off the flesh. He could consider himself to be dead to the old sinful patterns of living and thinking and behaving.

The apostle Paul calls us to practice this same kind of reckoning in Romans 6:11-13: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness."

I talked about my impatience as I waited for the Lord to allow us into Pakistan. But about two or three weeks before we were supposed to leave on the trip, a different kind of trauma had set in-I got really fearful about physical safety on the trip. I had heard enough stories about martyrdom in Pakistan. I didn't especially want to leave Candy a widow and my kids fatherless. So I asked people to pray for me, that God would deal with that anxiety, and many folks did. I got a wonderful e-mail message from Lambert Dolphin, and I read it a few days before I left. It was very encouraging. He said "Yes, I'll pray for you." But he also confronted me with the reminder that I get scared before every major trip like this. He said, "Doug, you don't have to live that way. That's not who you are in Christ." Sitting there in front of my computer screen, I was having my own Gilgal experience. I could go on living as though I were a fearful person, anxious about international travel, or I could choose to claim the reality that God is not a God of fear, and he did not create me to be a fearful, anxious person. Although painful, it was a great time of claiming the certainty that I was not a victim of fear, affirming that God is adequate to protect me and defend me, and that I am in his sovereign, providential care. It was a great time of cutting away the flesh of old patterns of believing and thinking.

The second part of the spiritual preparation process for conquest had to do with the Passover. Look at verse 10:

While the people of Israel were encamped in Gilgal they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jericho.

The Passover hadn't been celebrated since the giving of the law at Sinai, partly because the law required that men be circumcised to partake of Passover, and this new generation wasn't circumcised. But this was an observance that Israel needed to re-institute in preparation for their conquest of the promised land. It reinforced their identity as God's chosen people, as the ones he had saved out of death and bondage, and brought to life.

Now in verses 11-12 something very dramatic happens as soon as Israel celebrates the Passover:

And on the morrow after the passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased on the morrow, when they ate of the produce of the land; and the people of Israel had manna no more, but ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

The third principle is that God's people must be alert to change, because God won't always do things the same

way. In the wilderness the people has learned to trust God for the provision of manna. Now they would be called to trust Him as they grew their own crops. Learning to live that way would have been difficult. Change is always tough.

If you've been to the Sinai, you know that there's not much food or water there, so the provision of manna became normative for the people. Now remember when you were a baby Christian, just learning to walk by faith, how there seemed to be miracles everywhere. God took care of you in spite of yourself, meeting needs that you didn't even understand. But it didn't stay that way as you learned to walk, to feed yourself, to grow in learning how to relate to the Lord on your own. The reality is that God is Lord of both the supernatural and the natural. It doesn't really matter which way his goodness is communicated to us. The results are the same in that he expresses his character and provides for us. Our needs change as we start to grow and learn and understand, to walk more and more by faith and less and less by sight.

We should think about our church in this regard. We shouldn't expect PBC to be the same forever. We ought to expect God to break through in fresh, new, creative ways of doing ministry, relating to one another, and relating to our community-new ways that would require us to live closer to him, in greater dependence on him, and in less dependence on the pattern that we've gotten used to.

Verses 11 and 12 suggest that change is just a fact of life. There is a time for it. God's resources are sufficient to help us live creatively with any change that he brings our way. We can't live in the past, trying to keep things the way they've always been.

We met a wonderful group of Christians coming home from the Orient on our return flight from Taipei to San Francisco. It was a group of about thirty YWAM people, who had spent two months in the Philippines doing discipleship training and evangelism. We talked to a great couple who had been part of a ministry outreach on the north coast of California. They said that this little group of Christians had gotten saved in the Jesus movement and had hung on to the cultural trappings of the late sixties and early seventies-tie-dye and hippie stuff-for twenty-five years. They wouldn't change. And their ministry, which had once been very vital, faded out because they tried to live in the past. They required God to keep doing things the same way he had done them before. It was very sad to this couple that what could have been a vital ministry of evangelism basically didn't exist anymore. God's people must be alert to change. God won't always do things in the same way.

The closing section of this chapter brings us to Joshua's encounter with the commander of the Lord's army. This is one of several pre-incarnation appearances of Jesus in the Old Testament. Look at verses 13-15:

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man stood before him with his drawn sword in his hand; and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and worshiped, and said to him, "What does my lord bid his servant?" And the commander of the LORD'S army said to Joshua, "Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.

The fourth principle is that God's people deserve and need leaders who are not self-directed, but led by God. Joshua was walking alone outside the camp, looking up at the city walls of Jericho. He was thinking about the best way to take the city. Suddenly he was confronted by an armed warrior with a drawn sword. Being a warrior himself, Joshua took the offensive and challenged the man, asking him to identify himself: "Are you friend or foe?"

The answer recorded in the text puts everything in proper perspective. God is sovereign, and it's never a question of whether God is on our side, but whether we are on God's side. Joshua responded wordlessly. He fell on his face in worship and submission before the authority of the Lord. Joshua called himself a servant and asked for his battle orders. The Lord Jesus asked Joshua to remove his sandals, because he was on holy ground. This was the same thing that happened to Moses before the presence of the living God in the burning bush in the wilderness. The holiness and greatness of God overwhelmed both Moses and Joshua.

The promises that God had made to Joshua in chapter 1 were now beginning to come true. God was making Joshua a leader that the people would trust and be willing to follow.

What Joshua experienced alone on the plain of Jericho can be true for us as well. No matter what we're facing, no matter how complicated or difficult the problem in our life is, it just provides more opportunity for God to demonstrate his power. He is King Jesus, the Captain, the Commander-in-Chief. He is the one who gives us orders, asks us to listen and take him seriously, and then he gives us his strength to live one day at a time.

Before I left for Pakistan, I was talking to my dad on the telephone, telling him about this passage--about Joshua's willingness to listen. My dad reminded me of the great passage in 1 Samuel 3 where the prophet Samuel says to God, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh." My dad's observation was that most of us say, "Listen, Lord, for Thy servant speaketh!"

The Chinese Bible teacher Watchman Nee said, "Not until we take the place of a servant can He take His place as Lord of our lives." Joshua understood his need for the Lord's direction in his life. He knew that he was second in command. Joshua had tremendous capability, but he knew his limitations. It is crucial that we be led by God, whatever the leadership tasks to which we're committed. Some of the greatest military leaders in history became pathetic failures because of unchecked pride. They became their own leaders, not humbling themselves, not falling on their faces before the living God, claiming his strength and listening to him. It's just as true for us in Christian leadership. Pride can quickly and easily drive us. But when God is at work in us, people will know the difference. Whatever the spiritual leadership we're called to exercise--at home, in the church, or in the community--we need to have a clear sense of being led ourselves. The ultimate leader is the commander of the army of the Lord, before whom we are privileged to daily fall on our faces, acknowledging his holiness, his supreme leadership, and his promise to provide the energy and the resources we need for the tasks that are ours.

God gave me a chance in Bangkok, Thailand to be quiet and alone, to listen to him. He gave me a chance to deal with fear, impatience, and frustration. I had been committed to teaching out of the book of Jeremiah at this pastors' conference in Pakistan. I was going to teach about Jeremiah's suffering for righteousness' sake, the rejection of his message, and the persecution he experienced in Judah. I had felt that this was what the Lord wanted me to do, to identify with the pastors of the suffering church in Pakistan. But in Bangkok I ended up in a hotel room by myself for two and a half days. That gave the Lord a chance to get through to me; it forced me to listen to him. I had this growing sense that I shouldn't teach the chapters out of Jeremiah. I didn't know why, but I began to feel that I should teach Mark 10 for these pastors. Mark 10 focuses on servant leadership and on competition. James and John come to Jesus and say they want to be number 1 and number 2 when he comes into the kingdom. So Jesus has to deal with these two men who are driven by ambition and competition, to talk about where true leadership is based and how God raises leaders up. But I didn't know why I should teach that, and I felt awkward--who was I to talk to these pastors, who had suffered so much, about issues of pride and competition?

The morning I was supposed to speak, at our first breakfast of the conference, we were sitting with Pakistani pastors. Some of them spontaneously began to tell us about struggles in the church of Pakistan with competition among pastors: Young pastors were not trusting older pastors, and older pastors were fearful that they wouldn't be cared for in their retirement, and so were unwilling to move out of their parsonages. It was really affecting the life of the church. I got goose bumps! I was thinking, "Okay, Lord, that's the point. That's why you got me alone and redirected my thinking." That morning I taught from Mark 10, and the Lord used it in people's hearts. It was an amazing example of God's revealing himself and saying to me, "Are you willing to follow and do what I want you to do, even though you don't understand it completely?"

The main lesson of Joshua 5 is that we must be spiritually prepared people if we're going to do the Lord's work successfully and glorify his name. Instead of rushing into the battle, in the words of the old gospel song, we have to "take time to be holy."

Let me review the four spiritual principles and ask you to wrestle with them a bit before the Lord: (1) When God expresses himself in and through his people, the world takes notice. Are you fearful of the non believing world around you? Or do your friends and family see a Christ-confidence in you that is powerfully attractive?

(2) The spiritual preparation of God's people must precede their activity. Maybe you need to reread Colossians 2:11-14, to believe that your past no longer controls you, that the condemnation of your old life has no more power over you. Its guilt and shame and embarrassment are gone. The power of the past really is broken in your life. (3) God's people must be alert to change. God won't always do things the same way. Perhaps you're struggling with changing circumstances, learning to depend on God in new ways. Have you given God permission to do new things in your life? Or are you struggling, resisting areas of change? (4) God's people need and deserve leaders who are being led by God, who are not self-directed. Maybe what you need to wrestle with is the issue of servanthood. Are you led by the Lord? Are you listening to the Lord more, or speaking at him most of the time? Are you learning spiritual leadership, or are you driven by pride?

Listen to what Paul says about Christ as our Passover and how Christ deals with sin in our lives: "Cleanse out the old leaven [the leaven of sin] that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal [passover] lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Corinthians 5:7-8.) I encourage you to deal with any of these issues that God has put before you through the Spirit to cleanse you; to experience his forgiveness; to set things right with your Lord, the commander of the Lord's army, who calls us to fall down before him.

Catalog No. 4461
Joshua 5:1-15
Eighth Message
Doug Goins
February 25, 1996

Copyright (C) 1995 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.