Few can have forgotten their encounters with the book of Joshua. Perhaps years ago, the derring-do of Joshua, the great military leader, will have entranced the young Sunday School pupil as the account of the utter ruin of the walls of Jericho was recounted and choruses sung and enacted, celebrating the victory. At other times the comfort of the words, ‘Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged’ will have become a very personal message in the midst of trouble and difficulty. Then there may well have been an occasion when ‘as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord’ has been a real challenge. And time would fail to tell of encounters with the stories about Rahab and the spies, the examples of Caleb and Joshua (and even the daughters of Zelophehad), of Ai and Achan, of the sun standing still, of giants . . . . Here is the stuff of great sermons and exciting Bible studies!

However, there are dark corners in this book too and lists of unpronounceable names and localities, detailed instructions to ancient people that seem to have little relevance today. Nevertheless, even this is part of the inspired Scripture of which Paul could say ‘it is profitable’. Thus the following studies are designed to follow familiar paths as well as explore ‘spiritually’ dust-filled and cobweb strewn cupboards. And it is hoped that, as a result, the old will become fresh and shimmer once again with excitement and that the new and neglected will reveal unexpected and priceless treasures.

1:1–9 Stepping out of the Shadow

Poor Joshua! The contented ‘No. 2’, he suddenly finds himself thrust into the limelight. Moreover, this was at an age when most have retired and are looking for a quiet life. Further, it was at a crisis point in the life of the people he was called to lead. Finally, it was to follow in the footsteps of one of the greatest men who ever lived!

Something of the anxiety and dark foreboding he must have felt (and with which we can probably identify) echoes throughout these early verses. He is referred to as ‘Moses’ assistant’ (1), Moses being mentioned six times in nine verses! Then, the latter is given one of the greatest accolades in the Bible: ‘the servant of the Lord’ (1); similar phrases occurring later (2,7). How aware Joshua must have been of stepping into shoes that seemed all too great for him!

Further, there is the task with which he is confronted. To ‘cross the Jordan’ (2) might seem a big enough challenge! But he is then to conquer a vast territory ‘from the desert and from Lebanon to the great river, the Euphrates – all the Hittite country – and to the Great Sea on the west’ (4). Joshua would have known, what the story subsequently reveals, that this included the homes of giants and one of the largest cities in the ancient world. He would have been fully aware of the crack troops and sophisticated weapons that his enemies would possess. He must have known the technical mastery that the Canaanites had developed to defend their cities . . . . He knew he was fighting with an ill-equipped, inexperienced ‘rabble’ who had been wandering as nomads in a desert for forty years: not the best training for the task . . . . At his age, we can understand him stretching out for his pension book! But though the task seemed impossible and his own resources inadequate to the task the word of command comes, ‘Now then, get ready . . . . cross’ (2).

Most of us already know the sequel. As the book closes we are told, ‘Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance’ (24:28). But this is some forty years away!

However, it is at this point that we are introduced to Joshua’s God and the following story is really about him. He is the one who is ‘about to give’ the territory to the Israelites (2) and who will be with Joshua ‘wherever you go’ (9). And he already has a track record: ‘As I was with Moses’ (5)! Tumbling through Joshua’s mind must have been a kaleidoscope of images. He would recall the oppression of his youth and the heavy tasks he had been called upon to undertake. But he would also have remembered with awe the plagues that God wrought through Moses and that brought the superpower of Egypt to its knees. For an old man the dividing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh’s home guard would have been as vivid as if it had happened yesterday! Then there was the LORD’s miraculous provision for his vast people in a barren environment for forty years! At the same time there was some unfinished business between the LORD and Moses. Dead the latter might be, but God had made some promises to him: the possession of ‘every place where you set your foot’ (3). All this must have been reassuring.

Nevertheless, Joshua was clearly a timid man. Past history and solemn promises were all right but he still shook in his sandals in the face of the present challenge! There was the understandable danger that he would ‘freeze’ with fright or plunge the depths of depression faced with a challenge simply too big to contemplate. Thus, the LORD comes to him with words of challenge (‘be strong and very courageous’ 6.7), encouragement (‘do not be terrified, do not be discouraged’ 9), and reassurance (‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’, 5. ‘the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go’, 9). Thus, to the guarantee of God’s promises is
added the certainty of his presence.

There is, however, a condition. Fundamental to the fulfilment of God’s promises is a life-long commitment to ‘be careful to obey all the law’ (7). This is to be accomplished by a whole-hearted, moment-by-moment saturation in its teachings and willing obedience to its demands: ‘Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate upon it day and night . . . be careful to do everything written in it’ (8).

The following chapters ‘check this out’. Will Joshua find that in what Eugene Peterson calls his ‘long obedience in the same direction’ God will honour his promises? Above all, will God prove to be the sort of God we, too, can love, trust and obey? In the face of our frailty and the giants, citadels and other enemies that surround us, can we hope to experience his faithfulness to all that he promises us and know the blessing of his presence? Read on!

1:10-18 Whose Agenda?

At first sight this little section appears to offer little but a rather uninteresting filling to the sandwich that contains Joshua’s call and the dramatic account of the spies visit to Jericho. But fillings can be deceptive: a bland appearance betraying a mouth watering taste. So it also is with the Bible . . . not least the book of Joshua . . . and here!

Thus Joshua rises well to the first challenge. The Jordan, we will soon discover, was in flood; a muddy, tree-strewn, torrent of substantial width faced by a people without swimming skills or means to cross!

Nevertheless, Joshua knew his God . . . and his Bible: a fact demonstrated by the manner in which this section is saturated with the book of Deuteronomy.1 Thus, Joshua did not call a council of war but ‘ordered’ the civil and military leaders of the people to prepare for action (10). He did this, not on the basis of any personal claim to authority, but the authority of God’s promise: ‘the LORD your God is giving you [the land] for your own’ (11). Indeed, while the people needed to act (as Joshua had done so promptly) the emphasis is placed upon the one who would accomplish his purposes through them. In this way, ‘The people will take possession. Yes, but only of what the Lord their God gives them.’2 Thus, Joshua ‘is the military commander par excellence in Israel by the very fact that he carries out the command of the heavenly general’.3

At this point we are introduced to a group of people who keep ‘popping up’ through the book of Joshua: ‘the Reubenites, Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh’ (12). These were people who, on the authority of no less that Moses, had been allocated territory east of the Jordan river. Their territory had already been won and sufficiently secured for ‘your wives, your children and your livestock [to . . . stay in the land’ (14). Thus, these two and a half tribes had every human reason to ‘down tools’ and head off home.

But human reason must bow before the LORD’s command! Thus Joshua required them to join the other tribes in the conquest of the west bank (15). Pink puts it this way, Joshua ‘did not beg for compliance as a favour to himself – I hope you will be willing to serve under me. Nor did he appeal on behalf of his brethren – the other tribes will be encouraged if you are willing to help them. Nor did he bid them remem-

ber their promise to Moses. No, he pressed upon them the Word of God.’4

And the two and a half tribes ‘came up trumps’: they pledge absolute fidelity to Joshua (16).5 However, this is not blind obedience, Joshua is obeyed, as Moses before him, precisely because he is walking in the pathway of the LORD’s commands (17,18). Their final words are touching: ‘Only be strong and courageous’ (18). Perhaps they recognized what the LORD did: Joshua’s own sense of unworthiness. They certainly offered pastoral concern to ‘fire his enthusiasm’.

Thus they are presented to us as models. They set aside personal agendas: the fact that their own goals had been met and the natural desire to avoid the dangers ahead and stay at home with their families. They were committed to follow the word of God and faithful God-obeying leadership. They were ready to recognize and support their leader in his vulnerability. They become the first to follow Joshua’s own example.

2:1-24 A Preaching Prostitute

For all the familiarity of this story, there is much that is rather peculiar about it. Why, for example, include a story about a prostitute in the middle of a narrative in which 1:18 seems to naturally lead to 3:1? And what is the story intended to teach?

This is where Old Testament narrative requires something of the skills of a detective. Such stories are often allusive and we need to hunt out the clues to unlock the meaning. Several seem to exist here. First of all, the story suddenly become ponderously slow. When this occurs in Hebrew stories it appears to have been a way of expressing emphasis. The author, therefore, clearly regarded the story as important to what he was trying to share. Secondly, the chapter shows all the marks of very carefully planning. Davis highlights this in the following chart:6

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<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
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<tr>
<td>1a</td>
<td>Joshua’s Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-7</td>
<td>Arrival/Concern: Protection of the Spies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-14</td>
<td>Confession of Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>15-21</td>
<td>Escape/Concern: Protection of Rahab and Co</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>Return to Joshua</td>
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This sort of structure is known ‘in the trade’ as a chiasmus and it tends to throw the emphasis upon the central section. Indeed, Davis also notes that suspense is created at the end of verse 7 and this is unrelieved until verse 15. He says it is as if the reader is being told, ‘Don’t bother your head about how those two fellows will escape; there is something far more important I want to tell you.’

Thirdly, as with many stories, the climax of a Hebrew tale often comes right at the end. That appears to be the case here as the spies report, ‘The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands’ (24).

Finally, Old Testament stories are full of humour. This is not normally the belly-splitting stuff but gentle, dry irony. Could that be true here? Joshua has been called to live by faith in the land. Here ‘sinful’ and ‘pagan’ Rahab shows what is required before ever Joshua is seriously put to the test! Thus she becomes a model and challenge to him!

With all this in mind, we can read the story more intelligently. We might gag at ‘good Christian boys’ visiting a brothel.8 But ethical niceties sometimes need to be set aside
in the context of war and the author shows little interest in the sort of questions that may preoccupy us and lead us to miss the point of his story. Indeed, the choice of a sleazy 'down-town joint' where the proprietor was often ready to offer additional favours was wise. Men, not least strangers missing 'home comforts', would have often trodden a path to her door without comment. Further such, made Rahab's 'yes the men came . . . but they left' (4) plausible. A brothel is characterized by its quick turn-over!

Yet, although they would probably have spoken a dialect familiar to cosmopolitan Jericho, the city was (as will become still more apparent) on high alert. The spy network quickly picked up their presence and reported it to the king who took immediate action. (2.3). Here we might expect the chapter to end, but . . .

We are surprised by Rahab's response. She had 'taken the two men and hidden them' (4, see also the repeated emphasis in verse 6) and then sent the king's men off on a wild goose chase . . . . Or should we be surprised? It is often said there is honour among thieves and perhaps Rahab could further her reputation as a safe haven for other visitors. Was she angling for future business? 21

The sequel shows that the answer is yes and no! Now, in the central section of the chapter (8-15) the reason for Rahab's rather peculiar behaviour is revealed. At nightfall, the two astonished spies are doubtless thunderstruck as Rahab shares not her body but her faith with them. It is possible that her affirmation, 'the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below' (11) still betrays a failure to have reached a full monotheistic faith. In the circumstances her inability to dot her i's and cross her t's is understandable. The spies, however, were less interested to check whether her theology matched precisely with theirs! More staggering was her, 'I know that the LORD has given this land to you' (9). Rahab uses the past tense: as far as she is concerned the occupation has already taken place. And she knows it 'deep down in her gut'. The verb used here implies a deep and strong conviction.

What follows demonstrates the humour of the writer. For forty years the Israelites have been wandering around the wilderness in a faithless state. In the meanwhile the significance of events forty years earlier ('we have heard how the LORD dried up the Red Sea . . . .', 10) and more recent news ('what you did to Sihon and Og') has not been lost on the Canaanites. In fact while Israel had been frightened of the Canaanites, the latter's 'hearts sank and everyone's courage failed' (11). Jericho, at the height of its powers, was demoralized and ripe for taking. Thus a pagan prostitute proved the mouthpiece of God and reassured the spies that 'their God was big enough for the job'.

We should not fail to admire Rahab. Schaeffer says, she was surrounded by a 'hostile and awesome environment . . . she was still surrounded by a monolithic mentality, and entire world-view. She was pressured by a powerful city and an ancient culture . . . . At the moment she could see nothing with her eyes which indicated it would fall . . . [Nevertheless] Rahab knew! And what she knew was totally against her culture. She believed in a new God, a God totally and diametrically opposed to the gods of Jericho . . . . she stood for the unseen against the seen, standing in acute danger until Jericho fell. 22

All this, naturally, led her to seek the mercy of the LORD (12,13). Here is faith in action: she doesn't sign the spies' decision cards but casts herself upon the mercy of their God. 23 Small wonder she is commended in the list of heroes and heroines of faith in Hebrews 11:31!

The spies' flight is described in a very matter-of-fact way: it is presented as scarcely more than necessary background information (15,16,22). What is far more important is that while apparently hanging on the rope! the spies affirm that should Rahab meet the conditions her family will be embraced within the 'family' of Israel and treated just as they would be (17-21). Hence we are given a gentle reminder that Old Testament religion was not so much racial as religious. As with Ruth, Rahab had 'come to take refuge' (Ruth 2:12) under the LORD's wings and was reckoned as a true Israelite. 24

And then the climax of the chapter (24)! The spies return and report Rahab's words in the form usually adopted for a prophetic oracle! Thus encouraged, Joshua is surely ready for action. 25

3:1-17 Life on the Threshold

What a story! Hundreds of years, generations of longing, many years in slavery and living as nomads in the desert: but now . . . Israel is on the threshold of the land of promise. Having moved from Shittim (eight miles from the Jordan), and following an early start, the people are camped on its banks. The promised land is merely a mile away, its mountains and oases in full view (1,2). God is faithful.

But 'three days' wait (2) must have seemed a long time: enough to impress on the people the hopelessness of their situation! 26 During the 'harvest' (15) the Jordan changes character. At other times of the year it is a narrow, easily fordable channel, only a 100 metres wide. However, in the autumn the wider channel, clogged with bushes, can be filled up to 15 metres in depth. Moreover, the steep descent from Galilee to the Dead Sea makes it a raging torrent, impassible to the most intrepid.

At which point we are introduced to the 'ark of the covenant' (3). Up till now the ark has taken something of a back seat. Israel has been led by the cloud and fire. But just as the manna seems to have ceased, so the cloud now appears to have withdrawn. From now on, and for centuries, the ark will be the symbol of God's presence in the midst of his people, kept by its custodians, 'the priests, who are Levites'.

In the meanwhile, it appears that the LORD had already revealed his plans to Joshua (3,4) and the people are stationed 'about a thousand yards' away (4); apparently to get a grandstand view of what is about to happen.

One final act of preparation is required: 'consecrate yourselves' (5). The precise reason for this is unclear. Some suggest that it emphasizes that co-operation and obedience to God's will are necessary to enjoy God's victory. This is, of course, true (as chapter 7 will shortly demonstrate). However, perhaps the focus is rather different here. Thus, Davis comments that 'it is crucial that Israel recognise that what happens is indeed Yahweh's work; and unless they have the
proper insight, expectancy and preparation, they could see Yahweh’s work and yet not understand the true value and significance ... God’s people must be rightly prepared for God’s “show” if they are going to appreciate it, if they are going to be fortified in faith.\textsuperscript{18}

I love the way the author of Joshua tells his story! Just when we are on tip-toe waiting to witness the ‘amazing things’ (5) of which Joshua has spoken, we are tantalised by having to plough through nine verses of final instructions! However, this both heightens our sense of expectancy and throws the contents of these verses into focus. Indeed, as the story unfolds, we are further tantalised by the command to take the ark and ‘go and stand in the river’ (8). Why? We must wait to find out. Meanwhile we might be frustrated by this, but the author has something important to share. What, then might this be?

First of all, the ark and the importance of the faithful service of those with responsibility for it is emphasized (6,8, see also 15). What will take place is the LORD’s work. Secondly, what follows would offer the people the credentials to follow Joshua confidently in the future (7). Effective work demands confidence in the leadership. Thirdly, the people are assured that the promises that the LORD has made in the past are about to become reality: they are on the extreme edge of history in God’s making (9-11). Fourthly, Joshua’s ‘certainly’ (10) and the mute obedience of the priests demonstrate confidence in God’s word and that the lessons of the past have been learned. Here they appear as exemplary leaders for the people following them.

And then, a further stalling tactic! Twelve men are set apart for an unspecified task before ... an incredible miracle is predicted, to the second, in advance: ‘as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD – the LORD of all the earth – set foot in the Jordan, the water flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap’ (14).

The miracle is, however, described in a very matter-of-fact way. There is something rather anti-climactic in the simple chronicle that follows (14-17). But then what did we expect of the ‘Lord of all the earth’? Surely nothing less than absolute fidelity to his word!

Of course, the previous generation had been consecrated, miraculously brought through the waters of the Red Sea. But, faithless, they had died in the wilderness. How will the next generation fare? Read on!

\textbf{4:1-24 Oh No! Two Church Meetings!}

I abominate meetings! I like to get on with the action. So what, on earth, is Joshua doing calling two ‘church meetings’ (1-18, 19-24)?\textsuperscript{21} Yet we need to pause, as Israel did. We are beginning to learn that the author of this book tells us to listen; something critical is being communicated. Time and again, these verses emphasize obedience: ‘so the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them’ (8), the priests and people did ‘everything the LORD had commanded Joshua’ (10, see also the example in 15-18). Above all, ‘The LORD said to Joshua’ and so ‘Joshua commanded the priests’ (15,16). Here then is community where from the senior leader, through the other leaders and to the people, fidelity to God’s words is the ‘core value’.

But not all is repetition. We are given (again in a matter-of-fact way) further details of the crossing. All the emphasis here lies upon the fundamental inactivity of the people. The ark was centre stage (it is mentioned five times in eleven verses). It was the LORD who was at work. All the people did was that they ‘hurried over’ (10). You bet they did! What an exciting day: rushing through the river-bed to place their feet upon the promised land. Another day there will be work to do. Here the LORD, and he alone, is at work!

In the midst of all this God’s promise to Joshua was fulfilled (14) and he was ‘exalted ... in the sight of all Israel’ (compare 3:7). Interestingly, in the latter passage, Joshua was promised exaltation like that of Moses. However, Moses’ leadership had been accompanied by a lot of ‘aggro’ down the years. Joshua seems to have largely escaped this, but then it is the LORD’s way to exceed his promises!

‘Church’ Meeting No. 2 (and be warned! several more are coming up in chapter 5) is found in verses 19-24. Yet neither this meeting nor those that preceded or follow is what you would normally expect of a military commander before engaging in war!

The early verses are a bit of a puzzle. Which stones are these? Were there two memorials or one?\textsuperscript{22} In a study such as this one can leave the details to the scholars. Two points are, however, of interest. As 5:11-12 will emphasize, this was the season of the Passover. This meeting appears, therefore, to be preparatory to the events of chapter 5. The Passover had symbolized how an unholy people, covered by the blood of the lamb, might know God’s friendship and see his mighty power. Forty years later a new generation, who had now experienced a repeat of the Red Sea and the fulfillment of the Exodus, needed to be reminded of some very
basic truths (20-23)! The stones were a start (and their import­ance repeatedly stressed), but there were other important lessons to learn before the people, within sight of the city of ‘Jericho’ and on its ‘eastern border’ (19) could deal with problem no. 1.

Secondly, God ‘performs his acts before the forum of the peoples’.22 But he does this not merely to flabbergast his ene­mies but ‘so that you might always fear the LORD your God’ (24). Thus, remembering his works is a powerful incentive to faithfulness.

To Be Continued

Notes
1 Thus, for example, verse 11 echoes Dt. 3:18; 4:5, 14, verses 12,13 reflect Dt. 3:20 (as well as Num. 32) and verse 18 reflects Dt. 1:26, 43: 9:23.
3 Butler, 18.
4 See Numbers 32.
5 A. W. Pink, Gleanings in Joshua (Chicago: Moody, 1964), 21f.
6 Some note that in 4:13 40,000 fighting men are recorded as coming from these tribes. On the other hand Num. 26:7,18,34 mentions 110,000. Is this indicative of partial obedience in response to Joshua’s ‘all’ (14)? In view of the fact that the two and a half tribes seem to consistently feature in a positive way throughout the book of Joshua, it seems preferable to conclude that Joshua called for the crack troops to follow him while leaving ‘Dad’s army’ at home to secure the land.
8 D. R. Davis, Joshua: No Falling Words (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), 25.
9 Davis, 25.
10 Various attempts by squeamish commentators to ‘re-invent’ Rahab as an inn-keeper show a great deal more as to the imagination of the writer than their fidelity to the text!
11 We may be surprised that Rahab’s property was not ‘turned over’ by the secret police. However, in the ancient world the privacy of a woman was usually respected. I recall the not dissimilar story told by a friend from the old Eastern Europe. He said that, when he was a baby, his parents used to smuggle Bibles in his carrycot since to disturb a baby was disapproved in his culture!
13 In doing so, she thinks like a typical inhabitant of the ancient world and seeks mercy for her family and clan. See, M. H. Woudstra, The Book of Joshua (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 74.
14 Elsewhere this is emphasized in other ways. She is named in both David’s and Jesus’ genealogies and in 6:25 her marriage to Nashon (a prince in Israel, see Num. 7:12) is recorded.
15 Davis, 28, helpfully notes that God’s ‘word should be suffi­cient to bolster us. But because of the weakness of our faith, he graciously stoops down and by a plethora of signs, evid­ences, and providences makes us feel assured of his already sure word.’
16 So J. Garstang, The Foundations of Biblical History. Joshua and Judges (London: Constable, 1931), 135. He adds that eight miles was probably a typical march for a company like Israel; hence the early start.
17 Was this the divine purpose behind the delay?
18 Davis, 34. Yahweh is the Hebrew name for God, usually trans­lated in our Bibles as LORD.
19 Surely the worst of all meetings!
20 Davis, 39.
21 By its translation the NIV assumes two but the Hebrew text is less clear.
22 Woudstra, 96.
The Book of Joshua

Stephen Dray

The Second in a Series of Studies by the Editor

5:1-12 Yet More Meetings!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Completely ‘out of the blue’ Joshua is found alone ‘near Jericho’ (13). In fact, the Hebrew text uses a word that usually means in or on. Perhaps this is intended to conjure up a picture of Joshua right underneath the walls as they tower in all their impressive might above him! If so, his reconnaissance
must have brought home to him the intractable nature of the problem (see 6:1). And, as he ‘looked up’ (at the walls?) he spotted a fellow soldier, armed for battle: ‘a man . . . with a drawn sword’.

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

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

At the same time there was plenty to encourage Joshua. The anxious general was met by a fellow-soldier and one who was ‘commander of the army of the LORD’ (14). He had the hosts of heaven at his disposal. Perhaps, this was a reminder that he has ‘not come to take sides but take over’.7

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

6:1-27 The LORD ‘fight the Battle of Jericho’!

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

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt of the challenge Israel faced (1)! Jericho was a frontier town, a key Canaanite city and a powerful fortress. It was probably regarded as impregnable: especially now it was bolted and barred.8 But such was to leave the LORD out of account: always a hazardous business! Despite its ‘king and mighty men’ (2) the LORD’s work was as good as ‘done and dusted’: note the ‘I have delivered’ which stresses it is his work and, from his perspective, can be spoken of in the past tense!

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

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

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

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

And surely this is the point that is re-emphasized in the final verses (22-27): the interweaving of the sacking and defeat of Jericho with the deliverance of Rahab and her family.9 For this story is a triumph not simply of Joshua or the people’s faith but of hers too. But it was not Joshua who ‘fit the battle of Jericho’: the author rejects such a man-centred theology. It was the LORD whose victory was witnessed by a people of faith. And such a God was to be feared among all those who came in contact with him or his servants (27).

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

7:1-26 Down with a Bump

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

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

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

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

This structure will assist the interpretation of the chapter. Thirdly, just as verse 1 lets us ‘into a secret’, the final verse indicates all this is an ‘object lesson’.

With this in mind, we can explore the chapter.

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

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

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

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

Familiar as many of us are with this story, we ought to pause at this point. Joshua is told that the people have sinned, whereas we know that Achan is the culprit! The point that is being made, however, is that the contamination of a part effects the contamination of the whole. Further, Israel had to learn that to retain the LORD’s presence required that they took absolute fidelity to all that he required with the utmost seriousness. The LORD is not a talisman!

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

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

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

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

Prompt and fully obedient, but highly painful action is taken: such is the cost of faithfulness to the LORD (22-26).

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

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

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

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

Sometimes a ‘zoom lens’ technique is helpful in studying a passage. That is true here. At the beginning of chapter 5 we
noted that 5-8 are 'marked off' as a section by the similar introductory formulae in 5:1 and 9:1. The present passage, therefore, brings this section to an end. This seems to thrust 8:30-35 into the limelight as a mini-conclusion. The fact that the content of these verses is unexpected (we expect more 'ripping yarns' of victory) seems to further highlight these verses. In addition to this, there is something of a pattern discernible in chapters 5-9. The stories begin and end with Israel at worship (5:2-12; 8:30-36). Within this envelope there are two accounts of Israelite victories (5:13-6:27; 8:1-29) with the centre-piece being the defeat at Ai (7:1-20). This establishes two parallel sections in this chapter: 8:1-29 with 5:14-6:27 and 8:30-35 with 5:2-12. Thus 8:1-29 parallels the victory over Jericho.

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

Reassurance from Yahweh, 1-2
Instructions to the ambush, 3-9
Joshua and all Israel go up, 10-13
“Victory” over Ai, 14-17
Direction from Yahweh, 18
Action of the ambush, 19-20
Joshua and all Israel turn back, 21-23
Defeat of Ai, 24-27
(Summary, 28, 29):7

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

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

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

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

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

The details of the combat described here are confusing (but then warfare often is) and has taxed scholars down the centuries. But this confusion should not become a distraction. Slowly, but surely, with the steady but emphatic plod of a village policeman, the inevitable is described. Thus, and artistically, the glory of the LORD is praised.

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

So Ai is defeated, another community overthrown. It becomes another barren site with no inhabitants but the birds of prey and the memorial to another cursed man, whose earthly remains lie under a monument to the folly of failure to follow the LORD.8 Ai is forsaken, under the curse of the LORD: but not to be forgotten: the stones a perpetual reminder of the call to obedience and the folly of unbelief.9 Indeed, this is highlighted throughout these verses. Without the LORD on their side, the inhabitants of Ai demonstrate their ignorance (14), stupidity (16-17) and naivety (20-28).

8:30-35 Back to Basics

And so the present section that commenced at 5:1 comes to a close and a fitting climax. Shechem, not named here,10 was in the locality of 'Mount Ebal' and 'Mount Gerizim' (33) and was about 20 miles from Ai, a couple of days walk. While some speculate that this was undertaken as a sort of tactical retreat for military reasons, it seems preferable to see the choice as dictated by religious factors. In fact, it was near this city that Abraham had first received the promise of the land (Gn. 12: 6-7), that Jacob had been restored from a period of backsliding and buried the family gods (Gn. 33-34). What better choice for the people who have lived to see the promises fulfilled and, themselves, need to recognize their recent failures and the call to abandon all for the LORD! Above all, however, the LORD had commanded it (Dt. 27): and Israel is anxious to be faithful.

Knowing our author by now, we are not surprised that his language is saturated with Scripture. Thus the 'altar' (after the model given in Ex. 20:24) is set up and, the sacrifices that accompanied the covenant ceremony on Sinai are offered. Indeed, the whole account is something of a repetition of Sinai. Such an altar was designed to celebrate the fact that 'grace reigns through righteousness'.11

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

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

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

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

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

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

The rest of the story is fairly self explanatory: at least at a surface level. Meanwhile, however, we are left with all our questions. For example, were the Gibeonites right to do what they did? Certainly, the Israelites disapproved. Thus Joshua says, 'Why did you deceive us ...?' (22). But having been 'conned' he was bound to say this! What, then, did the author think? Here verse 4 is interesting when it says the Gibeonites 'resorted to a ruse'. The Hebrew word used here has a range of meanings. It is used of the serpent in Gen. 3:1 where it is translated 'crafty' in the NIV. However, it frequently occurs in the book of Proverbs in a positive sense of wise decision-making. Could the author intend to be ambiguous? Might he be pointing out that life is often messy: reminding us that sometimes we need to be 'wise as serpents'?

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Davis, 49.

4 It would be better to translate this as worship: something that is only ever offered to a god in the Bible.

5 Price, 69.

6 Keil and Delitzsch, 63f., suggest the Hebrew brings this out more strongly than any English version.

7 They are now incorporated into the life of Israel (25).

8 Davis, 58.

9 So Keil and Delitzsch, 77.

10 Davis, 61, notes that ‘There are times when the people of God today stand in solidarity with Joshua’s Israel; that is, there are periods in which confusion strikes and we haven’t any idea what God is about. We have no recourse but Joshua’s – anguished prayer to a mystifying God, pleading both our danger and his honor.’

11 Price, 82.

12 Woudstra, 126.

13 Could the severity of the following punishment be a response to the fact that Achan had had opportunity to confess, but had to be forced to acknowledge his guilt?

14 Woudstra, 129.

15 In the ancient world such were approx. 25x2x1cm in size: a substantial bounty!

16 Edersheim, 68.

17 Davis, 66.

18 The apparent barbarity of this story needs to be set against the far greater horrors of war that have plagued, especially, the last century. Moreover, this passage needs to be read against the background of Lev. 18:24-25, Dt. 9:4-5. Finally, Davis, 69, notes that ‘perhaps the living God must stoop to such spectacles; else we might never fear sin.’

19 Compare Dt. 21:22-23.

20 Compare 24:1.

21 Pink, 228.

22 Interestingly, while they are galvanised to action by ‘what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai’ (3), they fail to mention this in their statement; such would have exposed the fact that they had not come from a distance as the news was too recent!

23 See, further, chapter 10 below.

24 This clause is emphasized in the Hebrew text.

25 Davis, 76-78.
10:1-43 Credit where Credit is Due

This chapter finds itself structurally defined by the two introductory formulae of 10:1 and 11:1. But what a peculiar chapter it is! It begins with one of the most remarkable stories in the whole of the Bible (1-29); only to end with the first instalment of one of the many 'boring' lists in Joshua (30-43). To the first reader, however, the latter would have been far from boring and, overall, the message of the chapter would have accelerated the heart beat . . . for here something of vital and exciting significance to their past was being retold.

Up till now the Israelites have had it easy: Jericho fell down, Ai was an insignificant provincial town and the Gibeonites had given up without a fight! However, this has secured a wedge of territory in the middle of Canaan and the southern cities are in danger of being isolated. Thus, the situation changes . . . big time. Enraged, and, understandably, 'very much alarmed' at the capitulation of the Gibeonites (who, hitherto, had been part of the coalition's crack troops: 'all its men were good fighters' 2), the confederation of Egyptian-backed cities based around Jerusalem are aroused to action. The size of the threat is probably emphasized in two ways: first, by repetition (3-5). The Israelites are no longer playing war games: this is serious, the 'big boys' are threatened. Secondly, however, we are struck that Gibeon, with its strong standing army, sends word saying 'quickly . . . save us! Help us' (6). Indeed the reference to 'the Amorite kings from the hill country' may be a veiled reference to 'crack' troops.

So Joshua prayed . . . well no he didn't! Sometimes action not prayer is the answer when the way ahead is clear. Joshua had an obligation to the Gibeonites and so he 'marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men' (7). Granted, the LORD encourages him: but the words are old and familiar ones: 'Do not be afraid . . . I have given them into your hand' (8). This is little more than an invitation to trust an old promise, but in a new and far more threatening situation. Gradually, the LORD is discipling his people for ever greater challenges.

The following story is well known and scarcely needs retelling. However, as with many familiar stories, familiarity can breed contempt or, at least, cause us to miss the point. Several things stand out in the verses 8-21. First of all, the LORD expected Joshua to think for himself and take action. Thus, we are told that 'After an all-night march . . . Joshua took them by surprise' (9). Nevertheless, and secondly, 'The LORD threw them into confusion . . . The LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel . . . Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!' (10, 12, 14). For all Joshua's efforts (and they are not minimised) they would have been in vain if the LORD was not fighting with Israel: Ai had proved that. Thirdly, while Joshua's prayer is remarkable ('sun, stand still', 12), emphasis still lies on the LORD who is the subject of all the verbs in verses 10-12. Joshua is not the hero of the story: the LORD is! Finally, the victory was overwhelmingly complete (16-21). The insurmountable enemy and its cities is routed: 'Joshua destroyed them completely' (20, see also 27).

Meanwhile the kings of the five confederated cities had been discovered and captured (16-18) pending the end of the battle. Afterwards (and how the author relishes repeating 'the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon . . . these kings', 23,24), they are slain 'and left hanging on the trees until evening' (26). Such would have emphasized that they were cursed: and their final resting place would have been a warning to others not to rebel against the LORD (27). Before this, however, the leaders of Israel were called upon to 'put your feet on the necks of these kings' (24) as a sort of promise that 'This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight' (25).

Hence the final verses! The victory just described was but the first of a long campaign: but one in which, as predicted, victory was succeeded by victory until 'Joshua subdued the whole region' (40). Thus, not only was the centre of the land secured but, now, all the territory to the south was too, and all that was needed was for the tribes to undertake the 'wiping up' operations. No wonder every next battle is loving and awesomely recorded by the author as an act of worship!

Indeed, credit is given where credit is due: 'Joshua conquered . . . because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel' (42). Thus Pink says, 'There is no magnifying the human instrument, no paying homage to the national hero, but, instead, a placing of the glory where it rightfully belongs.'

11:1-23 The Big One

This chapter continues the description of Joshua's victories. It does so is such a 'laid back' manner, omitting all the details that might have made it interesting, so that it is possible we miss the fact that some very important truths are being communicated.

The final verse of the chapter is the provisional conclusion of the first half of the book of Joshua (the full conclusion is reached in the following chapter). Simply, and in a very matter-of-fact manner, we are told, 'the land had rest from war', because 'Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD
had directed (23)

The steady progress of the previous verses has, inexorably, led up to this. In words that are carefully crafted to reflect God’s promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21) and Moses (Ex. 3:8, 17), the LORD fulfills his promises to the letter. The very understated way the story is told is surely intended to communicate the thought, ‘well he would, wouldn’t he!’

In the meanwhile, however, the chapter also stresses that to do this, the LORD accomplishes the humanly impossible. In chapter 10, we noted that Israel was faced with a ‘real’ enemy for the first time. In this chapter, they face a superpower! There they subdued the substantial powers in the south of the land, here they are faced with the northern coalition.

Archaeological studies have confirmed the picture hinted at in the early verses. ‘Hazor’ (1) was one of the megalopolis of the ancient world. The size of the ruins suggests it could have contained a population of 40,000 people: larger than the population of London until the last few centuries. But that is not all. It was the centre of a massive federation of city states (10) that were capable of raising a vast army: ‘as numerous as the sand on the seashore’ (4). Such were equipped with the most sophisticated military hardware of the ancient world, ‘a large number of horses and chariots’ (4), and had placed themselves, strategically, in the best defensive position ‘at the waters of Merom’ (5). In the face of this Israel was an ant engaged in battle with an elephant! The situation was hopeless.5

In the previous chapter (10:8) the LORD merely repeated his earlier promises and encouraged Joshua to use his particular abilities as a military strategist. Here the story is different and Joshua is given specific instructions: ‘You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots’ (6). Throughout this book we have discovered that the LORD does not use an inflexible method: but whichever way he adopts, he leads his faithful people to victory!

And so it proved (6-15). Hazor and all the surrounding cities are razed to the ground (10,11), ‘totally destroyed’ and plundered (12-15). Just as God had said to Moses (note this point is repeated 12,15,20, 23) so he delivered. Thus ‘although the narrative almost has the form of a chronicle, it does not fail to note that the credit for the victories belonged to the LORD’.5

The one great victory is followed by a brief description of what was a ‘long’ campaign (18): perhaps as much as seven years.7 Victory was won over the long-haul: doubtless amid privation, danger, fear, uncertainty and disappointment. The LORD was rewarding faithfulness, endurance and stickability ... even in an octogenarian!

In all this, the LORD demonstrated that the worst fears of the Israelites were unnecessary. Joshua, we are told, ‘went and destroyed the Anakites’ so that ‘no Anakites were left in Israelite territory’ (21,22). Forty-five years earlier these ‘incredible hulks’ had been seen as too great a challenge; even to the LORD who had divided the Red Sea (see Num. 13). Now they are given the briefest of mentions: ‘game, set, and straight sets win’ to the LORD. Thus God exposes the groundlessness of the fear and unbelief of the previous generation.8

But why such carnage? Interestingly 19, 20 seem to echo the start of this story, back in Egypt. Sustained and repeated acts of unbelief had first hardened Pharaoh’s heart, a condition that the LORD then ‘confirmed’ by hardening it! Thus, it was the ‘LORD himself who hardened their hearts’ (20) because they had been persistent rebels against his grace: they had had more warnings than the Gibeonites! What a solemn warning against persistent unbelief.9 What a fantastic chapter!

12:1-24 Name them One by One

Most of us don’t like reading lists ... so this chapter is a bit of a ‘turn off’ (but just wait for the following chapters)! However, like it or not, this is the climax to the first half of the book. Lovingly, dwelling on each little detail, it provides a ‘song of praise to the Lord’s honor’ for all the mercies of the conquest.10

First, then, the victories won by ‘Moses ... and the Israelites’ in Transjordan are recounted (1-6); with the inevitable reminder that Moses was ‘the servant of the LORD’ (6). The victories over ‘Sihon’ (2-3) and ‘Og’ (4-5) are often celebrated in the Old Testament. They were the two victories under Moses that promised so much for the future under Joshua.

And what Moses started ‘Joshua and the Israelites’ (7) completed. It was one work; albeit performed through two very different people. Again we hear an echo from Gen. 15:18-21: everything God had promised Abraham so many centuries earlier was fulfilled as ‘Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites’ were conquered (8).

What victories they were! One by one the kings who were overthrown are listed from great ‘Jericho’ (9) to little ‘Tirzah, thirty one kings in all’ (24). The writer wants to dwell on every single success ... every little (or big) token of the LORD’s faithful mercies to his faithful children. Hallelujah!

Of course this is not simply a history lesson; any more than any part of Joshua is simply that. It is a challenge to all its subsequent readers. These verses are to encourage others to take up the mantle of obedience, to galvanise for the long-haul and ‘steel and strengthen’ for our own grand ‘finale’.12

13:1-33 The Mortgage Discharged!

Title deeds are not exciting ... not at least, unless they have been received because the mortgage has been paid off. Then, perhaps, every line confirming possession may be thrilling indeed! So chapters 13-19 of Joshua, which describe the allocation of the land to each of the tribes may not be of great interest to us ... but to those who were receiving the inheritance promised for hundreds of years, it was a very different story.

These verses set the scene. Joshua is now ‘old and well advanced in years’ and he is reminded that, for all his achievements, the mapping up operations still require that ‘there are still very large areas of land to be taken over’ (1). This is specified (2-6). The implication clearly is that others must complete the task he has begun. There is, however, a reminder and encouragement, of what Joshua himself had experienced: ‘I myself will drive them out before the Israelites’ (6).
Interestingly, in order to achieve this the land must be allocated to the tribes. The implication here is to be noted. From now on, it is not going to be one campaign under one leader. There is no suggestion that Joshua is to have a successor in the same way that he had followed Moses. No! Now the responsibility is to be shared: others who have lived in the shadow of Joshua’s example, have to take responsibility for themselves. Meanwhile, as ever, Joshua is to act ‘as I have instructed you’ (6).

And so the title deed begins (8:33)! Yet the list here is different from the one that follows. Here we are given an account of the allocation of ‘the other half tribe of Manasseh, the Reubenites and the Gadites’. The significant difference is that these already ‘had received the inheritance that Moses had given them’ (8). This is repeatedly emphasized. Thus, ‘Moses had defeated them and taken over their land’ (12). See also, verses 13, 24, 29, 32. They had to be allocated to each family ‘clan by clan’ (23,28,31).

At the same time the importance of dealing with every threat to community life is stressed. Thus, the ‘Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practised divination’ (22). Sadly, the writer adds, with great honesty, ‘But the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day’ (13). Some were simply not up to the challenge to be faithful to God in all things and in the ‘long haul’.

Finally, there is the brief reference to the Levites.. so brief that it might be missed (33). After all, they will get a chapter to themselves later! However, the author wants here to ram home one point about them: ‘the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance’. Put another way, they were to constantly remind Israel, by their own lifestyles, that what was true for them in a very visible way was, in fact, the calling of all.

In all this, therefore, the transjordanian tribes were to be both an encouragement, challenge and warning to all the other tribes whose allocation will now be recorded.

14:1-15 Faith Rewarded . . . Eventually!

The next six chapters describe the allocation of the land to the remaining ‘nine and a half tribes’. Emphasis falls upon the fact that this ‘inheritance’ is ‘in the land of Canaan’: the territory that was specifically promised by the LORD to his people (1). Wisely, the various areas were ‘assigned by lot’ in order to ensure that allegations of bias were avoided (2) and were supervised by the ecclesiastical, military and political leaders: ‘Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun and the heads of the tribal clans’ (1). Here was no free-for-all. Overarching all this is that it was undertaken ‘as the LORD had commanded through Moses’ (2, 5).

By now we are familiar with the way the author keeps us waiting. Once again, just as we expect to be told the details of the allocation, we are re-introduced to Caleb (6-15).

What is particularly interesting is the way this story fits in the larger context. Caleb was one of the two spies who had demonstrated faith in the LORD’s ability to give the Israelites the land: now he receives his own inheritance. Then, at the end of chapter 19 we are told how Joshua, the other faithful spy, received his territory. Thus the two accounts of the LORD’s faithfulness to these two old men begin and close this section of the book. At the same time, there is also a break between chapters 17 and 18 that is signalled by the ‘new start’ in 18:1 (‘The whole assembly of the Israelites gathered’). In the light of this we notice that chapter 17 ends with the complaints of the Ephraimites whom Joshua encourages to take the hill country. This suggests Caleb and the Ephraimites are being offered as counter-examples. However, Joshua, an Ephraimite, takes the hill country for himself at the end of chapter 19! Thus his story is a counter-point to the failure of his own tribe. All in all, then, this is a very clever piece of writing that helps us to acknowledge the author’s focus.

The vividness of the story, suggests that it may well have been recounted by an eye-witness. It introduces us to an old man of eighty-five (compare 7 and 10) who recalls that forty five years previously he had ‘followed the LORD wholeheartedly’ when others had ‘made the hearts of the people melt with fear’ (8) by emphasizing the difficulties rather than looking to the LORD. On that occasion he had been promised ‘the land on which your feet have walked’ (9). To many this would have been something of a two-edged promise; he had actually visited the territory of the Anakites (12) before whom the other spies had trembled. However, just as the LORD had kept him alive (10), so that he was ‘just as vigorous to go out to battle as I was then’ (11), so his faith had burned bright throughout the years. Thus, he asks, ‘(G)ive me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day’ and ‘I will drive them out’ (12).

Under the blessing of Joshua, on account of his whole-hearted obedience, Caleb entered his inheritance. We shall discover how this was achieved later. Here it is described as though it was ‘simplicity itself’: despite the fact that ‘Arba, who was the greatest of man among the Anakites’ lived there (14). Thus, after years of ‘weary wandering, of incessant toil and ceaseless conflict, of unfulfilled hopes’ (15), Caleb’s faith had burned bright and had reaped its reward. Thus he experienced ‘peace’ (15): the full experience of all those blessings that accompany the end of hostility and the enjoyment of the promises of God.

15:1-63 The LORD gets his Hands Dirty

The initial verse of this chapter introduces a formula, ‘the allotment of the tribe of’, that repeats itself (in at least a similar pattern) throughout chapters 15-17 and, thus, binds them together into a unity. Here the allocations of the ‘senior’ tribes of Judah, Ephraim and Manasseh are recounted. Judah comes first: probably as the tribe to whom the messianic promises had been given (Gen. 49:6-12).

A closer look at the three chapters reveals diversity amid the sameness. For example, in the present chapter, 2-12 describe in detail the boundaries of the allocated territory and 20-62 list the detailed allocation clan by clan, city by city, village by village. Each of these two sections is footed by a story: one of success (13-19) and the other of failure (63).

But to what purpose? Several points are apparently stressed here. The first is that God’s promises have their fulfillment in the ‘concrete . . . his gifts are tangible and visible’. Secondly, many, though often small, are very spe-
specific. How must the inhabitants of a tiny village near 'Beth Dagon' (41) have rejoiced in the LORD’s provision of their little plot of land... and those in the next... and the next... and the next! Thirdly, such provisions were those of a God who was interested in ‘small’ people, clan by clan. Fourthly, these very specifics confirm the LORD’s faithfulness to his promises to their ancestors to the minutest detail. Fifthly, as Butler notes, such detail may emphasize that the world of society and politics is not independent of the authority of God.

Meanwhile, and in the midst of all this, we have a fuller account of Caleb’s securing Hebron (13-19). It is evidence of a vigorous faith put into action in a rather canny way! It contrasts with the indolence of others who were younger and should have known better (63). The latter marks a jarring, warning note that is amply justified in the light of the book of Judges.

Caleb’s offer has something of ancient Palestinian culture about it (as does Acsah’s rather delightful twisting of the old man round her little finger, 18,19)! But it was also an incentive to bravery since ‘only a man of faith and courage would attack such a place’.21 Possibly it anticipates the answer to the question, who will be the leader to follow Joshua? Othniel, of course, re-emerges as the first judge after the death of Joshua (Judg. 3:7-11).

Thus a long and apparently tedious chapter comes to life as the word of God: an ongoing encouragement and challenge to all those who are children of God. And such ‘life from the dead’ offers us some encouragement, too, as we dive into the next two chapters.

16:1-17:18 Faith and Faithlessness

One of the interesting things about apparently boring bits of the Bible like this is to notice the clever ‘tricks’ the authors play with their information. We have already noticed this in the previous chapters of Joshua. It is evident again here. In chapter 15 we were provided with an enormous amount of detail as to the allocation of land to Judah: it included, for example, a description of the boundaries as well as the specific allocation of towns and villages. In these two chapters, however, the former are described more sketchily and the latter not mentioned at all. Instead, the account seems, first of all, to focus upon the final verses of each chapter (16:10; 17:18): verses that appear to be designed to echo 15:63. Secondly, the beginning and end of the passage include two cameos stories (17:3-6; 17:14-18) that contrast with one another. Thirdly, the latter story seems to pointedly contrast with 15:13-19 and 19:49-50: passages that form part of the introduction and conclusion of this major section of Joshua. Here then is the work of an artist with words; and art with a purpose, since such patterns throw light upon the reason the story is told.

The prominence afforded to Judah in chapter 15 is to be understood in the light of the messianic promise of Gn 49:9ff. Verses 1-4 also gain focus in the light of the death-bed scenes of Jacob. In Gn. 48 the birth order of Manasseh and Ephraim was set aside by a divine oracle. The divine order is followed here. It prompts Davis to comment that while the author ‘does not ring any bells about it; it’s just a reminder, another hint of Yahweh’s strange ways. How often the divine way reverses the conventions of men, overthrows the human canons of what ought to be. That’s why the God of the Bible is so stimulating and refreshing. He is never a prisoner of what fallen man regards as normal. Again and again he turns human standards on their heads, causing us to wonder and cheer... And that is reason to adore him.”22

So, first of all, Ephraim’s allotment is briefly recorded (5-10). However, we begin to recognize something of an emerging chorus line in verse 10: ‘They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer’. This compares with 15:63 but here there is the added detail that they ‘live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labour’. There is just a hint here, therefore, that the decision was a commercial one: this way the Ephraimites could improve their standard of living. Such would, however, have dire consequences (see Dt. 7:1-5) and Gezer would never be fully subjugated for centuries (1 Kings 9:16). Here then were a people who failed to ‘seize the moment’, found a better route to satisfy themselves than obeying the LORD’s commands and used God’s blessing as an opportunity to march to their own tune. Rather than rejoice in God’s grace and renew their faithful commitment to him, they were seduced into believing that the LORD’s blessing justified their unsanctified strategies.

17:1-13 is almost an exact parallel to 16:5-10. Here the allotment of the half-tribe of Manasseh is concluded with a similar, but more serious, failure (12,13). They too subjected the ‘Canaanites to forced labour’. However, the problem was that they ‘were determined to live in that region’ and the faith and resolve of the Manassehites was generally unable to match it. Thus, even the subjugation of the Canaanites was a partial and temporary thing. The result was inevitable syncretism: faith in the LORD rendered weak, the hold on true religion frail and the development of a powerless religion the inevitable result.23

Perhaps we detect here a further problem that has been noted elsewhere. The people may have been effective in the sprint but poor at the marathon. The latter can be boring, unsatisfying and the crowds may have gone home by the time the race is completed! But faith is demonstrated far more in the ‘long haul’ than in the adrenalin-driven crisis or project. Here the Manassehites signally failed....

But not all of them. Embedded in this narrative of partial success amid faithlessness is the story of the daughters of Zelophehad (3-6)... and what a glowing example it provides among the encircling gloom. The background of the story is found in Num. 27:1-11. Here, we are introduced, however, not to a great leader of the land like Caleb but a specific family (names and all!) of disadvantaged, marginalised and otherwise vulnerable women, who plead the promise of God through Moses. Yet, like Caleb before them, (who also ‘went’ to Joshua, 4, compare 14:6) they demonstrate their faith and a ‘forthrightness to plead Yahweh’s past word’.24 When the LORD speaks, he addresses all sorts and conditions of people. And when he speaks, he expects faith to be exercised from the greatest to the most insignificant.

The final little story (17:14-18) is told with the skill of a consummate story-teller. There are, perhaps, echoes to be heard of 14:6-15. And it all sounds so plausible... even spiritual: ‘We are a numerous people and the LORD has blessed...
us abundantly’ (14). In fact, a comparison with Num. 26, suggests that this was an overstatement. The tribe and a half amounted to no more than 60,000 whereas Judah (76,000) and even Dan (64,300) and Issachar (64,300) were bigger. Moreover, their allocation included some of the most fertile territory in Palestine.14 The vale of Sharon was the breadbasket of Palestine and had sufficient resources to feed all the tribes.20 The problem was that to possess this land required hard graft and danger. Such was also true of the upland regions. Thus, it is probably best to translate ‘The hill country is not enough for us’ (16) as ‘we cannot acquire the forests’.21 In other words it requires too much effort.

One other little subtlety seems present here. Joshua is asked, ‘Why have you given us only one allotment?’ (14). Joshua, himself, was an Ephraimite (indeed he will take up his residence in the hill country, 19:49,50). It appears, then, that the people may be suggesting that Joseph should, therefore, receive preferential treatment from a fellow-Josephite: whatever the LORD might apportion! Perhaps better, however, the words may imply that since the LORD had singled out Joseph in the past, they should be given preferential treatment as God’s ‘favourite’. God’s grace is, therefore, seen as a ground for preferment and status rather than an encouragement to greater fidelity.

Not surprisingly, Joshua cuts through the cant! If God has blessed them and they are ‘so numerous’ then ‘go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves’ (15). He acknowledges that this may not be easy. Forest-clearance is arduous and, after all, this is the territory of the ‘Perizzites and Rephantes’ who have ‘iron chariots’ and ‘are strong’ (18). Nevertheless, in the face of their continuing wingeing, he argues that since they are ‘very powerful’ they surely have the ability to ‘have not only one allotment, but the forested hill country as well’ (17,18). Thus he exposes their fear to venture on God that they were clothing in pious clichés.

Consequently, the Josephites were challenged to recognize that ‘God is not a prisoner of human odds, that his promises are not a ground for inactivity but were to provide the framework for their onward pilgrimage amid the disappointed side of God’s gifts’:28 the hard slog of discipleship. Meanwhile, they were missing the moment . . . Thus, faithful old Joshua arouses them to action! The land has been ‘given’, so how long are they going to hang around before getting off their backsides to do something (3)?

What follows is a masterly example of leadership (4-10)! Joshua helps establish the vision, delegates responsibility and encourages the responsible and united leadership of others. His strategy also encourages unity; the division of the land by a committee representing all parties before the use of the lot ‘at Shiloh in the presence of the LORD’ (10) is a masterstroke! In this way none are elite but only God’s elect: and all are his people!

Some of the allotments that follow (18:11-19:48) were rather double-edged. ‘Issachar’ (19:17-23) inherited the plain of Esdraelon: the most fertile area but also the one most easily subject to enemy attack (as any atlas of the Bible will demonstrate). Throughout the list, however, the details emphasize the sheer graciousness and greatness of the gift and the working of the lot stresses divine ordering. Thus, while some (like ‘Dan’, 19:40-48) were unsatisfied and unwilling to face the challenge of faithful obedience, the others were encouraged to recognize and rejoice in the fact that their ‘lot’ was what the LORD, in his grace, had appointed for them. And in all this the LORD proved that he was no-one’s debtor.

Indeed, if this was true for tribes and clans it was no less true for individuals (19:49-51). Thus, little ‘Timnath-Serah, in the hill country of Ephraim’ at which the tribes of Joseph had ‘turned up their noses’ became, for Joshua, the place where, last of all (49), he entered his promised inheritance, ‘built up the town and settled there’ (50).

Davis notes this is a fitting conclusion not only to this section but to the events described in Numbers 13,14. He says, ‘It is a standing witness to the fact that the majority may be neither faithful nor right . . . that Yahweh keeps his
promises (Num. 14:24,30), even if he must preserve his two faithful men from Anakim, chariots, and high water to do so . . . There is more in Hebron and Timnath-Serah than one usually hears."

As for Joshua’s leadership it is nearly done. Moving into semi-retirement the baton is passed on (not jealously treasured): it is the LORD’s work (51). ‘Eleazar’ and the ‘heads of the tribal clans’ are now responsible for seeing the LORD’s work to completion.

Notes

1. This interpretation follows T. C Butler, Joshua (Waco: Word, 1983), 114 and J. Garstang, Joshua/Judges (London: Constable, 1931), 170, 175, 177.
3. This reads like an old hymn! Was it often sung in the days that followed in the worship of Israel’s God?
7. Compare 14:10. The sending out of the spies appears to have been two years after the exodus; see Num. 13.
9. The ‘hardening’ phrases in Exodus repay examining so as to trace out the above pattern.
10. Davis, 104.
12. Davis, 105.
13. See chapter 21.
15. So Woudstra, 228.
18. Scholarly commentaries are full of discussions as to precise locations etc. Such are generally sleep-inducing and unnecessary to the purpose of the present volume.
22. Davis, 130, 131.
23. Compare Ex. 23:23-33; 34:11-16; Dt. 7:1-6.
24. Davis, 132.
27. So Davis.
29. Perhaps the reference to the ‘God of your fathers’ (3) is a subtle hint that unfaithfulness in the path caused the fathers to miss the blessing.
30. Davis, 147.
The Book of Joshua
The Final of a Series of Four by the Editor
Stephen Dray

KEYWORDS: life in the land, faithfulness, unity, will of the Lord, sacredness of life, image of God, Levites, material needs, God's promises, obedience, love, discipleship, worship, failure, grace, commitment, holiness, covenant

20:1-9 Taking Life Seriously
This little chapter appears, at first sight, to be one of the dreariest in a boring section of an otherwise exciting book! However, we have every right to assume that the original author did not consider it tedious. So how are we to unlock its secrets?

Here are some of the clues. The previous discussion has demonstrated that chapters 14-19 are designed as a clear and separate section of the book. In this context, the present chapter seems to commence a new section. In fact 14-19 deal with the allocation of the land, whereas 20-24 seem to relate specifically to 'how to live in the land as the people of God'. Indeed there is a discernible structure to the final five chapters in which the central section (22, the return of the trans-Jordanian tribes, their job done) is flanked on each side by two sections. In the earlier section (20, 21), the faithfulness of Israel to establish, in practice, God's demands for life in the land is stressed by two examples. In the latter (23, 24) two addresses of Joshua (to leaders and people) establish the need for ongoing faithfulness and unity. Finally, the Hebrew word dibber ('said') is used in verse one, instead of the more usual amar and appears to stress the unique significance of what is being said here (and possibly, in the following chapters). All this goes to show, once again, the skill of the author . . . and emphasizes that each of these chapters is vital to his message: not least the present one! It even suggests, as Davis notes, that to consider these details mundane and dreary indicates that we have not heard their witness.

The book of Joshua resonates throughout with 'the LORD said to Joshua' (1) and, 'as I instructed you through Moses' (2). Though Joshua is shortly to take a back seat and, eventually, be removed in death, the 'Israelites', changed circumstances notwithstanding (a point emphasized, perhaps, by the 'Then' in verse 1), are still to be guided by the will of the LORD, the word of God. Nothing was to be done except as explicitly demanded by the LORD or as an application of those things he had revealed about himself and his ways.

An example, but a vital one, follows: the need to 'designate the cities of refuge' (2).

What is described in this chapter is what one commentator described as the 'most sophisticated clemency system in the ancient world'. Elsewhere in the ancient world evidence abounds that life (especially that of the under classes) was cheap. The poor and vulnerable were reckoned as merely other chattles and regarded as a capital asset to be used and expended as desired. This passage, however, makes it clear that to be a child of God demanded a different world-view and one that demanded that all human life was treated with honour and in the light of God's revelation.

In particular, this chapter stresses that life is sacred. Thus even accidental homicide is 'punished' and the culprit has to suffer curtailed freedom: even if, as seems possible, such assisted the Levites in sacred functions (6). However, protection is offered, even, especially, to the 'alien': the person without the social and economic ties that might otherwise offer protection and offer status (9). Moreover, the number and location of the cities indicates that protection was to be freely and easily available.

This radical departure from the secular world was grounded on the biblical principle that all human life is sacred because it is created in the image of God. The consequence was that dignity was to be afforded to all and the image of God cherished in each one. Such was to be a vital principle that was expected to govern all that Israel did in God's land: No wonder the author thought it necessary to emphasize it.

21:1-45 Taking Witness Seriously
Contained within the section bounded by chapters 20-24, the present chapter may be expected to offer a further example or principle by which the people are to live in the land the LORD had given them. What, then, is it?

To partly answer this question we are to note the way the story commences (1-3). We have already noticed that the author of this book uses 'echoes' to make his point. He does so here. Thus, the gathering of 'the family heads' who approached 'Joshua' (1) resonates with 14:6. Usage in both places perhaps hints that what is taking place here meets with the author's approval. This impression is strengthened by their appearing at Shiloh and their appeal to the fact that 'The LORD commanded through Moses' what they now request (2). That what subsequently took place was the LORD's will is re-emphasized by 'as the LORD had commanded the Israelites gave' (3). Thus, in all this we are introduced to people acting in full conformity with and by faith in the word of God.

The background to the request of the Levites lies in Num. 35:1-8. Unlike the other tribes, they were no have no territory except 'towns . . . with pasturelands for our livestock' (2) allocated to them 'out of . . . [the] inheritance' of the other tribes (3). Thus, they were to have no inheritance of their own, be distinct from the other tribes and diffused among them. The reasons for this are given elsewhere. The LORD
was their inheritance and they were to live off the proceeds of their ministry as priests (Josh. 13:14, 33; 14:3; Dt. 18:1-2): a ministry that included the administration and performance of the sacrificial system, the role of judges and teachers of the law. In this way they were to be a spiritual influence and catalyst to faithfulness to the LORD wherever they were.

Nevertheless they were unable to live on air, however spiritual their tasks. Thus, they were given the promised provision (4-8) and their respective cities allocated to them (9-42). This provided a gentle reminder that the LORD was concerned for the practical and material needs of those set aside for ministry ... and expected all his people to take a part in this provision!

All of this leads up to one of the great passages in the book (43-45)! Davis describes this passage as ‘the theological heart of the book of Joshua’, and notes that its method for communicating its message is by means of ‘sledgehammer theology’.

Once the Levites had their ‘allocation’ resolved the business of settlement was completed. This provided one of those occasions to look back and reflect: rather as an anniversary, birthday or new year can do. When this was done the lesson was simple: God always does what he promises! Thus ‘all the land that he had sworn’ he gave; ‘they took possession and settled there’. In this they were granted ‘rest on every side’ and ‘not one of their enemies withstood them’ Indeed, ‘Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled.’ It was a big ask. The people had needed to be got out from under subjection to the most powerful man and country in the ancient world, they had to be fed through forty years in the desert, they had twice needed to overcome insurmountable obstacles provided by sea and river, they needed to negotiate giants and face some of the most sophisticated military hardware available in their day: and in awesome numbers. But the LORD did it! His promises stood head and shoulders above the difficulties (and what difficulties!) along the way.

22:1-34 Taking Faithfulness and Unity Seriously

As the last five chapters of Joshua have begun to unfold we have noted that they were designed to ask the question, how then should the Israelites live in the land that the LORD had won (chapters 1-12) and apportioned out to them (chapters 13-19)? We suggested above that chapters 20 and 21 provide two examples that highlight two principles by which the people are to conduct themselves: respecting the sanctity of life and living in such a way as to mediate the presence of God. The two chapters that follow the present one describe two ‘assemblies’ in which Joshua addresses first the leaders (chapter 23) and then the people (chapter 24) in order to instill the ongoing need for godly living among the people.

The present chapter, therefore, finds itself in the middle of this larger section and describes both an example and several assemblies of the people! This suggests that it was designed to occupy a central role and to declare some vitally important truths to its readers.

In particular, verse 1-9 may be divided in the following way:

a 1-4 The two and a half tribes commended by Joshua for their fidelity to the LORD
b 5 The principles of fidelity to the LORD re-affirmed
c 6-8 The tribes blessed by Joshua if they maintain this fidelity to the LORD
c 9 Conclusion.

This structure highlights the central place verse 5 occupies and introduces the theme of the chapter. Verse 5, itself, has an interesting shape.

a ‘Be very careful to keep the commandment . . .’
b ‘love the LORD your God’
c ‘walk in all his ways . . .’
a ‘hold fast to him’
b ‘serve him with all your heart and all your soul’

In this way sections a) and b) complement one another and demonstrate the fact that genuine obedience is seen in the wholehearted response of love. Thus, the central principle, ‘walk in all his ways’, is highlighted and amplified. At the same time we note that most of the verbs emphasize continuous action ('keep', 'love' 'walk', 'serve'); especially, 'hold fast'.

In this highly effective way the author is, of course, seeking to emphasize two vital truths. The first is that a truly religious life is seen in obedience to all that God has commanded: but not by means of the scrupulous legalism of the (later) Pharisees. Rather genuine obedience is freely and willingly offered from a loving heart. Here, then, is, perhaps, the most fundamental principle of the religious life. Only love enables us to fulfill the LORD's commands.

The other vital truth is that the past, present and future hold hands in faithful discipleship. What the LORD has said determines our world-view and actions and, in so far as this is sustained over the long haul, we demonstrate the authenticity of our walk with God.

The central place that such perspectives should occupy is emphasized in two ways. First of all, these words are Joshua’s final charge before the two and a half tribes return home: and final words are normally important. Secondly, as noted above, the tribes are both commended for past success (1-4) and are given a blessing (6-8) should such continue to characterise their faith and conduct.

The remainder of the chapter (10-34) shows how all the tribes took such teaching very seriously: especially when it came to the matter of their ‘engaging with God’ in worship. The story of the transjordanian tribes building a memorial altar needs little amplification. However, we note that the present section emphasizes the two speeches of the Canaanite tribes (15-20) and the response of the transjordanian tribes (22-29), together with the resolution (31).

For the tribes living in Canaan, the ‘building an altar for yourselves, other than the altar of the LORD our God’ (19) appeared a serious matter. Thus the rich vocabulary of sin in the Old Testament is appealed to in order to describe such actions as to ‘break faith with the LORD’, to ‘turn away’ from him in an act of ‘rebellion’ (16). Thus they recognized that it was not up to the people of God to determine the fashions for worship: only the LORD could do that.

And failure was a very serious matter. Such was idolatries (like 'the sin of Peor', 17) and brought the community
under God's curse. Thus Achan's sin brought wrath 'upon the whole community of Israel' (20). For the nine and a half tribes, therefore, unity and blessing could not exist in the face of apostacy, even if the latter was clothed in religious dress.

The transjordanians' response was calm and yet the 'disconnected statements and outcries' may reflect both an eyewitness and the evidence of deep distress at the misunderstanding. The repetition of God's names, 'The Mighty One, God, the LORD' (22) is no mere rhetorical flourish. It was, in fact, their desire to honour him that prompted their action. They, too, believed that self-willed worship was wrong (23). Rather, their concern was that they recognized fidelity cannot exist without unity.

Thus, through dialogue, the serious threat was overcome. Leaders (31) and the whole assembly (32-33) acknowledged that no breach in fellowship with the LORD and one another had occurred. Indeed the altar's name, 'A Witness Between Us That the LORD Is God' (34), confirmed the people's mutual recognition of their unity and fidelity to the true God.

23:1-16 Taking the Long Haul Seriously

Following three examples of how to 'live right' before the LORD, the book of Joshua ends with two of Joshua's last sermons: messages designed to drive home the lessons of the previous three chapters: and, indeed, the message of the book. The previous chapter has emphasized that the people of Israel started well. It is, however, another thing to 'maintain the vigour and vision over the long haul'!

Joshua was clearly aware of this! The people had for some time experienced the 'rest' of the LORD's faithfulness and their obedience. However, the years had passed and natural decay highlighted the fact that death was not far away since Joshua was 'old and well advanced in years' (1). Consequently, and apparently with the solemnity that should mark such an occasion, he 'summoned' (2) the leaders of the people to a final 'briefing session'. His concern, understandably, was to drive home the necessity of ongoing loving faithfulness.

It is very easy to forget the blessings we have received at the LORD's hands. Thus Joshua reminded the leaders that 'you yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake' (3). Wisely he invites them to 'remember' this (4) and reminds them of some specific examples. Rooting his faith in the changelessness of the LORD he draws the only possible conclusion in the face of the new battles that lie ahead: 'The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way' (5). The LORD is no 'airy-fairy' deity. His acts are demonstrated in the 'nitty-gritty' of the personal experiences of life. Such alone can (and should) reassure us in the face of impending difficulties. Thus in these verses past (3), present (9-11) and future (5) are all embraced on one canvas. He is, indeed, 'the LORD your God'.

Old men and women often remember the past as though it were yesterday. Do we perceive something of that here as Joshua's mind goes back forty years to the LORD's words in 1:6-9? Certainly his words are almost entirely drawn from those far-off ones the LORD addressed to him. In the meanwhile, they had become embedded in his mind, heart and will. They had determined his own life style; now he encouraged the leaders who followed him to follow his example.

Yet we begin to recognize that there was something troubling the old man! The 'nations' keep reappearing (4,7,9,12,13). Faithfulness for Israel needed to be worked out in the context of a surrounding culture that rejected the God of Israel. Such would always present the insidious pressure to move down the path that led them first to 'invoke', then 'swear by', 'bow down' to and, finally, 'serve' the gods of that culture (7). In the face of such a threat they must needs be separated unto the LORD: and perseverance was required lest they be caught off guard (8).

Old people often ramble and repeat themselves. Arguably Joshua does that here (9-13). Again, he reminds them of victories against 'great and powerful nations' (9) that were entirely against the odds: 'one of you routs a thousand' (10). Again, he warns the people not to 'turn away' by associating and intermingling with the 'survivors of these nations' (12). Once again he calls them to 'love the LORD' (11) for this is the power that alone can secure willing and devoted obedience.

But if devotion is not enough to secure faithfulness the consequences of failure should strengthen the weak. The warnings here are stronger than the words of Moses (Num. 33:55); they are designed to stay in the memory! They will be skewered by 'snares and traps'. Word pictures pile up images of pain, misery and destruction: 'whips .. thorns .. perish from the good land' (13). Disobedience carries a wretched entail.

With the final verses (14-16) it is almost as if the old man, 'about to go the way of all the earth' (14), summons up what remains of his rapidly diminishing strength to ram home his message. Once again he reminds them of the LORD's faithfulness: 'every good promise of the LORD your God has come true' (15). However, the God who is faithful in blessing is faithful to curse and, says Joshua, will 'bring on you all the evil he has threatened' (15). Again disaster awaits those who forsake 'the covenant of the LORD your God' (16) and adopt the practices and mentality of the surrounding culture. The LORD is jealous for his good name!

Thus Redpath notes that failure brings defeat, discomfort and disgrace while the safeguards to faithfulness lie in obedience, separation and love. The choice is, thus, starkly presented.

This is a remarkable chapter that is comprehensive in its scope. It embraces Israel's distant past, its present experience and offers an interpretation of the future that will stand up to the exile and beyond. It, thus, provides 'the theological explanation of the history of Israel'. It justifies the fact that the Book of Joshua stands at the head of the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. And its message has an abiding relevance in a different era!

24:1-13 Taking the LORD's Grace Seriously

So we come to the end of the story and Joshua's last and greatest sermon! The sonorous tones of verse 1 immediately alert us to the fact that something very significant is about to
occur. Thus, ponderously, we are told that ‘Joshua assembled . . . summoned . . . the elders, leaders, judges and officials . . . all the tribes of Israel’. To this is added that ‘they presented themselves before the LORD’. And all this took place at ‘Shechem’.

But why Shechem? This city has not so far appeared in the story of Joshua. However, it had long held ‘hailed associations for Israel.’ This was the place where Abraham, the founding father of the nation, had first received the promise of Canaan for his descendants and where he set up an altar to the LORD (Gen. 12:6-7). It was the place where Jacob nearly ‘blew it’ and where only sheer grace prevented the utter destruction of the people of God (Gen. 34, 35). It was the place where Jacob had re-dedicated himself and abandoned his former gods once and for all (Gen. 35:3,4). It was the sort of place that made the historically and religiously conscious come out in goose bumps!

So Joshua commences his sermon. He begins with a history lesson (2-13): yet it is no mere description of the past. Thus, in verse 7 he speaks of the LORD putting ‘darkness between you and the Egyptians . . . You saw with your own eyes . . . Then you lived in the desert a long time.’ But, except for the last statement, few of the people in front of him had been actual witnesses to these events! Is this the natural mistake of an old man? Or could there be another explanation? In fact, it seems most likely that Joshua was emphasizing that this was, indeed, their history. This was a story in which each individual Israelite was involved.

What then is the story? It is a tale of grace upon grace. So Joshua begins, ‘Long ago your forefathers . . . worshipped other gods’ (2). It is interesting to note how expositors of this verse seek to evade its ‘in your face’ meaning. ‘Ah, yes,’ they say, ‘but Nahor and Abraham were different in some way, morally more upright, seeking the promise of an altar to the LORD, deserving of grace’. But there is no suggestion of this here! Indeed, as the story unfolds, it is all about the ‘LORD’ (who is mentioned 17 times in this section!). Thus, Abraham’s preference rested not in anything he might have done, was or might one day become. Rather it rested in divine action: ‘But I took your father Abraham’ (3). Thus Davis comments, ‘That there is a people of God at all rests on the single thread of the mere good pleasure of God. who, for no apparent reason, took hold of our father, Abraham, a sinner.’

Yet the promises made at Shechem took a long time to mature: ‘Isaac . . . Jacob’ were to come and go and even ‘Esaú’ was ‘assigned the hill country’ while ‘Jacob and his sons went down into Egypt’ (4). Thus grace unfolds slowly amid the mysteries of a providence that bring blessing to the erring and suffering to the faithful.

Eventually, of course, that grace was manifested through signs and wonders. The LORD ‘afflicted the Egyptians’, super-power of their day, and, at the Red Sea the people ‘saw . . . what I did to the Egyptians’ (5,7). Yet the power of God was still more remarkably seen in the day-by-day provision when ‘you lived in the desert for a long time’ (7). Grace was as powerfully at work in meeting daily needs as in the spectacular!

Indeed, as the story unfolds, the LORD demonstrates his complete mastery over all those forces that might seek to harm Israel. The lands to the east of Jordan may have required little of the divine exertion that freed the people from Egypt. But Joshua highlights the malevolent, unseen powers of darkness in the attempt to make ‘Baalam, son of Beor . . . put a curse on you’ (9). However, this agent of darkness was seen to be utterly subject to the LORD: ‘I would not listen, so he blessed you again and again’ (10). Thus human might and supernatural powers were swept aside by the grace of God.

And so ‘you crossed the Jordan’ (11) and amid threat and danger all the promises of the LORD to his people were fulfilled. Thus, in words that echo Dt. 6:10-11, the magnificent gift of a homeland which required neither construction work nor agricultural activity to enjoy was graciously given. Indeed, ‘Israel’ could not boast of her prowess, she could not correctly speak of her conquest of the land, but she could glory in her God who gave her richly all these things to enjoy: a beautiful country, established cities, and fruit bearing vines and olive trees which they had never cultivated.

Joshua will spell out the implications of his telling of the Bible story. Yet the applications lie on the surface. The LORD whose grace had been indispensable in the past was alone the one to whose love and mercy the people ought to look to in the future. Perhaps, too, we can learn from Joshua’s understanding of human psychology. Thus Gaukroger comments: ‘Most of us when we are facing the future exaggerate the problems, and when we are facing the past we exaggerate the blessings. We speak of the good old days. So Joshua was keen to remind the people about all that God had done in order to affect the way they thought about the future.’

The call to ‘throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt’ (14) also sounds strange. Surely they could not still be implicated in the sins of Abraham: even if the residual impact of life in Egypt might have still clung to them! However, the ancient word was dominated by two super-powers and the cultural and religious imperialism that came with it. Israel was also subject to the local sub-culture, the ‘gods of the Amorites’ (15). Joshua’s words, therefore, may best be seen as a call to ensure that the people are alert to the dangers and seek to free themselves from all earth-bound world-views that constitute idolatry.

This, he indicates, has been his own habitual practice since ‘we will serve the LORD’ (15) is, perhaps, best translated ‘we will continue to serve the LORD’.

The people’s response (16-18) bears all the apparent marks of what Joshua was seeking. With some indignation (‘Far be it from us’, 16), the Israelite assembly responds. They echo Joshua’s earlier words and affirm that the LORD’s might acts in the past on their behalf were such that ‘We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God’ (18).
In the light of this Joshua’s response (19-20) seems surprising. Yet there is a profound realism here. Hitherto the people had acted like a ‘weathervane’ (21). Thus, their words were cheap. They demonstrated a failure to grasp spiritual realities. Professions of service of the LORD cannot be made without due recognition of divine holiness, his claim to exclusive lordship and his hatred of all conduct that fails to account for such realities. The LORD is ‘a holy God: he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion ... sins’ (19). He is not merely there to be a pocket miracle-worker. Rather faithful listening in a life-changing encounter is ‘right hand man’. As such, he also enjoyed the faithfulness of the LORD to his promise and ‘died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phineas’. Thus the remains of these three faithful men were each ‘laid to rest in the land that God had promised to their fathers.’ The LORD is always faithful to his promises!

Thus Joshua’s response to the people is a call that they recognize their own frailty, face ‘fairly and squarely’ the nature of God and their need for both a deeper motivation for service and their utter dependence on the grace of God. Notwithstanding Joshua’s ongoing warnings the people profess, ‘We will serve the LORD our God and obey him’ (24). Such may, perhaps, suggest progress since in the earlier verse they had merely said ‘We will serve the LORD’ (21). Possibly there is evidence here that the Israelites were coming to recognize that it was not confessions of faith or regular ‘correct’ worship that constituted them the people of God. Rather faithful listening in a life-changing encounter were essential: ‘This, and only this, is true service of Yahweh.’ All else is a counter-witness.

Thus Joshua, present at the previous ratifications of the covenant, renews it again (25-28) and, once more, provides a visible reminder in the landscape to the promise-making and promise-keeping God and to the responsibility this places upon those who follow him. Joshua could do no more to secure the faithfulness of those who followed him. Indeed, ‘He was a soldier, and his career had been essentially military; but he speaks to them not of conquest - the sound of the trumpet and the gleam of the sword cannot be recognised in his address - but the holiness and obedience which become the chosen of God.’

24: 29-33 What a Faithful God!

The early words of the book contained the refrain that referred to Moses as ‘the servant of the LORD’. This, the greatest of all biblical accolades is now given, in death, to Joshua (29). He had not served himself but faithfully, all his life, he had put the LORD first. And to faithful Joshua the LORD had proved faithful: ‘they buried him in the land of his inheritance at Timnath Serah’ (30).

Moreover, if Israel was to subsequently fail, it was due to the next generation failing to be the example that he himself had been: ‘Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel’ (31).

At which point we might expect the book to close . . . but no! we are re-introduced to Joseph or rather ‘Joseph’s bones’ (32). With this reference we are taken back to Gen. 50:24-26. There Joseph had expressed his confidence in the promises of the LORD by expressing the desire to, eventually, be buried in Canaan. Thus the LORD had been faithful, even in death, to Joseph’s humble trust.

‘Eliezer’ too (34), as Joshua’s ‘Aaron’ had proved an able ‘right hand man’. As such, he also enjoyed the faithfulness of the LORD to his promise and ‘died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phineas’. Thus the remains of these three faithful men were each ‘laid to rest in the land that God had promised to their fathers.’ The LORD is always faithful to his promises!

Notes
1 D. R. Davis, Joshua, Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000, 149.
3 I remember starting world history at senior school with the law Code of Hammurabi. He was presented as the first great legislator. Great he may have been and the law code, in many respects, fair . . . but only for the upper classes (as the various translations of his work demonstrate!)
4 The reference to the ‘death of the high priest’ (6) is tantamounting. Does it imply that with the death of the priest an appropriate expiation has been made?
5 Judg. 17: 18 shows what could happen if this went wrong.
6 Davis, 157, 158.
8 Davis, 177.
9 F. Delitzsch, ‘Joshua’, in Keil & Delitzsch, Old Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1973), 224; note that these four words constitute ‘the four outward forms of divine worship’.
10 Gaukroger, 152.
13 Where the order of the books depart from that of the Greek-inspired English Bible and view Jos 2: Kings (minus Ruth) as the Former Prophets.
14 But see comments above on 8:30 35.
16 Davis, 189.
18 Gaukroger, 157.
20 His call is echoed by Paul in Rom. 12:1, 2.
22 The last two words emphasize both willfulness and failure.
23 Butler, 276.
25 Woudstra, 186.