

THE SPOILS OF VICTORY

by Doug Goins

During World War II my dad served in the United States Army in the European theater. I was born while he was in the hedge rows of France. He named me after General Douglas MacArthur, the American commander of the Pacific Theater of the war. I've read the life of MacArthur and taken great interest in his exploits.

MacArthur's darkest and probably most desperate day was March 11, 1942. The command center at Corregidor in the Philippines was facing imminent attack by Japanese forces, who had taken the entire Philippine archipelago by then. Surrender was inevitable. General MacArthur had only three words to say to his Philippino, Australian, and American comrades as he stepped onto the escape boat, bound for Australia: "I shall return!" On his arrival nine days later in the port city of Adelaide, Australia, the sixty-two-year-old military commander closed his remarks with this sentence: "I came through and I shall return!"

Two and a half years later, on October 20, 1944, he stood once again on Philippine soil after landing on the island of Leyte. I was privileged to stand on that spot four years ago with Mark Jacobsen, one of our PBC missionaries. My family and I spent a month in the Philippines ministering there. Mark and I drove the length of Samar Island and the length of Leyte Island. The Philippine government has designated that spot a national monument, and there's a large statue of General MacArthur there. At the base are inscribed the first words that he spoke as he waded ashore upon his return to the Philippines: "This is the voice of freedom, General MacArthur speaking: People of the Philippines, I have returned!" MacArthur kept his word. His word was as good as his bond. Regardless of the odds against him, including the intense focus of enemy strategies, he was bound and determined to make his promise good.

Remember, if you have seen the earlier messages in this series in the book of Joshua (Discovery Papers 4454-4467), those same God-developed character qualities were apparent in General Joshua of Israel. We've studied together through the first twelve chapters in the book of Joshua. At this point Joshua has successfully completed two-thirds of his campaign, following his divine commission from the Lord. He has crossed the Jordan to enter the land of Canaan. He has persevered through seven years of tough military battles in conquest of the land. As we concluded chapter 12, he had conquered the enemy, and he was in control of most of the major cities of Canaan.

It strikes me that the kind of leadership we see in Joshua and that we saw in General Douglas MacArthur is almost extinct in our society. Whether it's an executive or an apprentice, a teacher or a student, a blue-collar or a white-collar worker, a presidential candidate or an officer in the home-owners association, a Christian or a pagan, increasingly rare are those people who follow through on their word with consistent integrity. Because of this problem, there is a new term that has been coined, with which we are painfully familiar-credibility gap. To say something is credible is to say it is believable, or trustworthy. To refer to a gap suggests a breach or a reason for doubt.

In the remainder of the book of Joshua, chapters 13-24, the credibility, faithfulness, or trustworthiness of the nation of Israel as God's people, and even of General Joshua himself, is going to be tested. Joshua is now called to fulfill the final part of his commission from the Lord, to divide up the land that God has given them so that each tribe can claim its inheritance and enjoy the gift from God. Chapter 13 introduces four ways that their credibility is going to be tested, and these four tests will unfold in the remainder of the book.

The first test of credibility is the desire of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to stay east of the Jordan, to live with the Amorites, and in Bashan rather than with the rest of the tribes of Israel in God's land. The second test of credibility will be the need to continue fighting as individual tribal groups against little pockets of resistance, small groups of Canaanites who weren't driven out or were in hiding in the mountains. The third test of credibility will be the need for the tribes to learn how to trust the Lord himself to ultimately be

their inheritance. They have to focus on the spiritual resources that God wants to give them, not the physical. And the fourth test of credibility is idolatry or false religion.

As we come to chapter 13 we turn a corner from conquest to settlement. Rather than reading the whole chapter, which is filled with place names and names of kings and rivers and mountain ranges, we'll highlight some important verses out of this chapter. Verse 1 is a description of the situation at hand:

Now Joshua was old and advanced in years; and the Lord said to him, "You are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed...."

The verses that follow summarize the land that needs to be possessed, both west and east of the Jordan. Then, tucked away in the middle of verse 6, there is a powerful promise from God:

"I will myself drive them out from before the people of Israel; only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and half the tribe of Manasseh."

In verse 8 God reminds Joshua of what Moses did before in dividing up the land east of the Jordan among Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh.

We never arrive in this life

One observation that strikes me, as I look at the first verse, and as the chapter unfolds, is that we never completely arrive in this life. Remember, Joshua is an old man, probably close to a hundred years, at the conclusion of the military conquest. When he succeeded his mentor Moses he seemed so vigorous, strong, and focused. Now he is battle-scarred; leadership has taken its toll on him. The phrase "advanced in years" in Hebrew suggests that he has failing capacities; he's starting to lose it physically and mentally. He's not the man he was. But the work isn't completed. He's running out of time and energy, but he still has to divide up the land. (He's not the general leading the united armies of Israel now; each tribe must fight its own battles.) It comes as a startling moment of truth when we realize our own human limitations and discover that we may never accomplish everything that we planned to accomplish in this life. Yet Joshua doesn't get discouraged.

The central areas have been conquered, but there still remain enclaves of Canaanite opposition on the periphery, on the coastal plain along Philistia, up in the north in Tyre and Sidon (which is now Lebanon), and around Mount Hermon and the northern mountain ranges (see the first few paragraphs of chapter 13).

Two things stand out in these opening verses. One is that great promise of God in verse 6, "I will drive them out." The ongoing work of possessing the inheritance is God's responsibility; it rests in his hands. God will carry out the promise. He will give the individual tribes the strength and resources to clear the land and possess their inheritance.

The second thing that stands out is the references to Moses made here. Joshua was trained under Moses' leadership, and he watched Moses divide the land east of the Jordan. But he also watched Moses go up on Mount Nebo, look across into the promised land, and hear God tell him, "You will not enter. You will die with the work undone. You will never experience what you've lived your whole life looking forward to. Others will pick up the responsibility and carry on in your place." Joshua, of course, did that. So he understands that God will raise somebody up to take his place in turn. God is ultimately responsible for leadership.

This principle that we never fully arrive in this life is also found in Christian living. But this reality is foreign to our contemporary mindset. We are goal-oriented, "management- by-objective" people. We want externally quantifiable definitions of what is expected of us. We want to be able to say, "I'm done, and I did it right. I'm now the person I always wanted to be." But even though we don't accomplish everything we might wish, God's work continues on, and he accomplishes his purposes.

The apostle Paul had a clear understanding of this in Philippians 3:1-4:1. This was written at the end of Paul's life when he was in prison. Paul was an incredibly energetic man who was very task-oriented. But it's clear

that he knows he will never accomplish all that he wishes. There is tremendous freedom in coming to the realization and accepting that we will never completely arrive in this life. We never stop growing in the grace of Christ, laying hold of Jesus Christ as our inheritance. That's really the good news.

In Philippians 3:13-14 Paul says, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." What is it that he has not yet taken hold of? What is the prize, the goal that he's aiming for? If you look at the whole paragraph, you see that it's knowing Jesus Christ, gaining intimacy with him, being found secure in him, being conformed to his image. The ultimate goal, in a word, is Christlikeness. The Christian life is not about accomplishment ultimately, it's about relationship.

Joshua 13 focuses on what Moses did in the era before, dividing up the tribal lands for Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. At the end of the chapter, verse 32 makes a summary statement:

These are the inheritances which Moses distributed in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan east of Jericho.

The word inheritance is used more than fifty times in the second half of the book of Joshua. It's a very important word. The Jews inherited their land. They didn't win it as a prize of warfare, or purchase it in a business transaction. The Lord himself was the sole owner of the land, and in a sense he leased it to them. Listen to God's instructions from Leviticus 25:23: "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants." Imagine God being your landlord!

The rent that God required was very simple—he wanted loving, submissive obedience. And as long as the Jewish people honored the Lord with their obedience, he would bless them. He would make the land productive and keep the nation at peace with their neighbors.

At the end of chapter 8, after the battle of Ai, remember how all the tribes gathered in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerazim and agreed again to the Law. They accepted the requirements of covenant relationship. And within that covenant definition was how they were to live in the land, the kind of hearts they were to have, the kind of relationships they were to maintain. By affirming that covenant, they were agreeing that God owned the land, and that their possession and enjoyment of it depended on their submission and obedience to him. It was a gracious gift of love, and if they loved him they would play by his rules as they lived in the land. But there are subtle warnings given in our chapter about the credibility of their love for the Lord.

Borderline believers

We studied what Moses already did historically in dividing up the land east of the Jordan in chapter 1. Let's review it quickly. Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh agreed to help the other tribes conquer the land before they returned to the east side of the Jordan to enjoy their inheritance. Remember, they asked Moses for that land, even though it was outside the boundaries of Canaan. They felt that it was suited for raising cattle, and the fact that they wouldn't be living within God's appointed land didn't seem to bother them. So Moses granted them a concession, and he allowed them to settle across the Jordan. When we study chapter 22 in a few weeks, we're going to learn that while that choice may have been good for their cattle, it was terrible for their children. These tribes became a buffer zone between the Jews in Canaan and the pagan nations like Moab and Ammon. Their location made them extremely vulnerable both to military attack and to ungodly influence in their lives. Both of those liabilities eventually brought their downfall.

The desire of the two and a half tribes to stay east of the Jordan rather than living with the rest of the tribes in God's land is the first threat to Israel's credibility. It's a warning for us as well not to become borderline believers. Perhaps you get close to the inheritance in Jesus Christ, and experience some spiritual victory in your life, but you're still determined to go back to the comfort east of the Jordan in the wilderness, to the indulgence, the enjoyment, the seeming freedom. For you the quality of material life is more important than life eternal. You just want a little bit of God.

Listen to these words expressing the heart of a borderline believer by Wilbur Rees: "I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please, not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy three dollars worth of God, please."

Failing to continue the fight

Verse 13 introduces the second threat to the nation's credibility. It speaks of the two and a half tribes' failure to capture the extreme northern territory of Geshur and Ma'acath. Under Moses' leadership, the nation drove out Og the king of Bashan and Sihon the king of the Amorites. But look at verse 13:

Yet the people of Israel did not drive out the Gesh'urites or the Ma-ac'athites; but Geshur and Ma'acath dwell in the midst of Israel to this day.

The day this book is written, that Canaanite opposition is still there, bedeviling them, tempting them, assaulting them. We're going to hear this litany again and again, in every tribal territory, of the people's failure to possess their possession. Though it lies open before them, they simply don't take hold of that which is theirs. This book does celebrate the great victories, the promises and triumphs that God accomplishes, but it doesn't hide the fact that sometimes the fulfillment of the promises is limited by Israel's failure to obey.

Two reasons emerge as to why Israel won't drive out these little Canaanite pockets of resistance. First, they're tired of fighting, and they just want to give up. They don't want to continue the struggle and exertion of the battle. Second, they make these people pay tribute. They want the financial security that will provide them. God's people don't go on and do what he said because they want ease and peace at any price. They're practical materialists, basically.

Does that sound contemporary? I know both of those temptations tug at my heart. My own credibility as God's man is at risk because I don't like doing battle against the enemy. I'd just as soon duck and cover. I'm not different from anybody else. And I would love to have some sort of guaranteed financial security, just as you would. Both of those things tempt us and threaten our credibility as people of God.

The issue of who owns us

The third test of Israel's credibility is found in verse 14 and echoed in verse 33. The tribe of Levi was given no tribal inheritance in the land:

To the tribe of Levi alone Moses gave no inheritance; the offerings by fire to the Lord God of Israel are their inheritance, as he said to him...But to the tribe of Levi Moses gave no inheritance; the Lord God of Israel is their inheritance, as he said to them.

For the Levites, the Lord himself and the privilege of serving him in priestly worship were inheritance enough. They were given four cities in each tribe, forty-eight in all, in which to live and serve the Lord. They were given certain portions of the meat that was brought for sacrifices. There were tithes and offerings that helped support the priestly work of the Levites.

But there are more important issues involved in scattering this tribe of Levi throughout the nation. For one thing, God didn't want tribal responsibilities to be a distraction from the work that he called them to. He wanted them to devote themselves completely to his service. Also, God wanted them to be salt and light among the tribes. They were the teachers of the Law, the ones who reminded the people what their place was in the land. They were to keep teaching covenant relationship to God and reminding Israel not to get too earth-bound, but to stay focused on the Lord. They were teachers of truth and righteousness.

For us today who claim to follow Jesus Christ as our inheritance, the reality is that we are sons and daughters of Levi. In Peter's words, we are a royal priesthood collectively, and priests individually. We are owned completely by our Lord Jesus Christ. We are bought with the price of his shed blood. Again, hear the

passionate words of Paul in Philippians 3: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." (8-10). That is the significance of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price." And that was a terrible price, the death of Jesus on the cross.

We're called to be salt and light in this world as well, just as the Levites were. We're to speak truth wherever we go, to live out truth before the folks with whom we come in contact. Remember the words of Paul to Timothy as he faced into ministry responsibility. This is a military metaphor appropriate to our study in Joshua. Paul said to Timothy, and to each one of us, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs-he wants to please his commanding officer" (2 Timothy 2:3-4). This is the third threat to credibility: being owned by anything other than God himself, going AWOL, sort of resigning from service to Jesus Christ to serve ourselves.

The seduction of Balaam

The fourth threat to credibility is found in Joshua 13:22. This verse is part of a paragraph that describes Reuben's inheritance in the south. The paragraph is a historical footnote listing all the different kings and those in the opposition whom Moses conquered and the people executed.

"Balaam also, the son of Be'or, the soothsayer, the people of Israel killed with the sword among the rest of their slain."

The story of Balaam is found in Numbers 22-25 before the entrance into the land. Under Moses' leadership the Israelites were traveling northward from the wilderness up into the trans-Jordan. They had to go through the kingdom of Balak in the land of Moab. Balak the king saw this huge force of Israelites, and he hired Balaam, a false prophet, to call down the curses of the gods on Israel. Balaam stood up on a hill overlooking this huge army, but every time he opened his mouth to curse the nation, God put a blessing in his mouth. So he gave up that strategy and instead proposed that Balak throw a big Moabite welcome celebration for this nation. They had food and drink, and it turned into an orgy. The Israelites, through Balaam's influence, were seduced into sexual immorality, and the Jewish men took Moabite women to marry some of them, having children with them. But the worship they engaged in was idolatrous.

The New Testament writers develop this story further. In 2 Peter 2:15, Balaam is described as a prophet for hire. Jude warns about prophets who are more concerned about the profit motive than really representing God truthfully. Again, Paul in his letter to the Philippians refers to the spirit of Balaam that was a threat to them: "For as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things" (3:18-19). In Ron Ritchie's recent series in Revelation, we saw that the letter to the church of Pergamum mentions the sin of Balaam. Jesus, speaking to that church, tells us to guard ourselves against anybody who teaches the false doctrines of Balaam, who puts a stumbling block before God's people, leading them into false worship, idolatry, and even sexual immorality. In terms of a threat to our credibility, this story teaches us to watch out for preachers for hire, religious mercenaries who blend truth and lies, good and evil. Ultimately they will corrupt and destroy us.

Here is a quote from Eugene Peterson expressing a desire to be delivered from the lies of Balaam that we hear from different kinds of authority figures:

Christian consciousness begins in the painful realization that what we had assumed was the truth is in fact a lie...We pray, "Deliver me from the lies of advertisers who claim to know what I need and what I desire. Rescue me from the lies of entertainers who promise cheap thrills instead of joy. Save me from the lies of politicians who pretend to instruct me in power and morality. Deliver me from the lies of psychologists who offer to shape my behavior and my morals so that I will live long, happily and successfully. Rescue me from the lies of religious leaders who, in the words of the Old Testament prophet, 'heal the wounds of this

people lightly.' Save me from the lies of moralists who pretend to promote me to the office of captain of my own fate. Deliver me from the lies of pastors who, in the words of Jesus, 'leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.' Rescue me from the person who tells me of life and omits Christ, who is wise in the ways of the world and ignores the movement of the Holy Spirit."

Three or four years ago I met with a woman who had been in a church singles group in another town. Some of the leadership in that group had advocated loving sexual relationships between thoughtful, mature singles. They called the partners to be accountable before the Lord in this love relationship. They defined that as healthy Christian sexuality without repressive legalistic morality. But that was the sin of Balaam. This dear lady's seduction by that perversion of biblical truth had resulted in shame, overwhelming guilt, and a sense of absolute spiritual defeat. I had the great joy of praying with her, leading her into forgiveness for that sin of naiveté that caused her to be seduced. She was able to make a fresh new start in her life of faith.

We've looked at four threats to credibility. In your life, is there a gap developing in any of these areas, a little crack in your credibility as a follower of Christ? First, is your Christianity borderline? Do you have a foot in the world and a foot in the kingdom of God, trying to play both ends against the middle? Do you want only a little bit of God, enough to make your life better, but not enough that you have to pay any real price? Second, are you tempted to call a truce with the world, the flesh, and the devil? Would you rather have ease and wealth than fight and stand for what is true? Third, are you waffling in this area of being sold out to the Lord? Would you just as soon have your life back and forget all this salt and light business? Fourth, have you begun to be seduced by the lies of Balaam, either telling you that sex is salvation or that you really can worship lots of different gods-the Creator Savior God of the universe and all the other little gods that want your resources and control of your life? Each of these four issues is only a subtle whisper in the life of Israel at this point. But all four of these issues are going to explode into destructive violence later on. Some of it we will see in the book of Joshua, and some will come during the period of the Judges. But the price is going to be horrible.

Finally, do you want to close the gap? Do you want credibility restored to your life of faith? It's not about reformation, turning over new leaves and making lists. It's about pursuing intimacy with Jesus Christ with all your heart. Listen once more to the passion of the apostle Paul: "What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him...I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...." Then Paul speaks of the process in which we are all involved: "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

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