

*Exodus 23:27-33; Numbers 32:1-27; Joshua 2:1-24; 13:1,13; 15:63*

The principles that were to govern Israel's conduct in their conquest of Canaan are no less applicable to the Christian life. What can be learned from this epic campaign that will aid us in our spiritual warfare?

*The principle of reconnaissance* (Joshua 2:1-24). Joshua was a prudent military leader. As Jericho, guarding as it did the passes into the interior, was the key point in his strategy, he sent two spies to reconnoiter and bring back a report. "Go, look over the land," he said, 'especially Jericho.'" His purpose in sending them was not to determine *whether* to attack but how and when.

But why resort to military strategy at all? The answer is that the reaction of faith is not carelessness. Possession of a divine promise does not mean a relaxation of vigilance. True faith does not despise the employment of appropriate means. To make a promise of God a reason for neglecting prudent precautions is not faith but presumption.

The two spies crossed the Jordan and slipped into Jericho, but that fortress had its own security system, and their surreptitious entry was soon discovered. That in the providence of God they chose Rahab's house proved fortuitous both for her and for them.

Rahab, the central figure in the drama, played a significant part in the campaign. She was both a prostitute and an accomplished liar, but in this unpromising life God discerned true faith, the one quality without which it is impossible to please Him.

The question naturally arises, Was Rahab's lying justifiable under the circumstances? Can lying ever be justified? Does the end justify the means? Situational ethics would maintain that a lie might be justified in certain situations—a position that would leave us with no absolute standard of truth. Who is to be the judge?

In this connection it should be remembered that Rahab had been reared among a degenerate people to whom lying and immorality were routine. She saw lying as a choice between two evils. Oriental ethics viewed guarding the life of one's guest as an act of hospitality and one of the highest virtues. But God did not need her lies. He could have preserved the spies in a dozen other ways.

The testimony of Scripture is consistent—all lies are sinful, and sin is never sanctioned by God, who exhorts us to "put off falsehood and speak truthfully" (Ephesians 4:25).

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### Principles of Possession

In John's gospel, "believe" occurs about fifty times. In every case "receive" can be substituted with equally good sense. To appropriate is to receive, to take to oneself as one's own.

The centermost verse of the Bible is reputed to be Psalm 81:10: "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." It pictures a nest of little birds with mouths stretched open beyond belief. Their attitude is the expectation and appropriation of faith. Nor does the mother bird disappoint them.

The wonderful father in Luke 15 divided his property between his two sons (v. 12). Despite his glaring faults, the prodigal at least did his father the honor of believing his word and appropriating his share. Not so the elder brother. He even accused his father of not giving him a kid. The deeply hurt father responded: "Son, all that I have is yours!" Yet he had not appropriated even one kid. The difference was not in bestowal, but in appropriation.

(J. Oswald Sanders)

James mentions Rahab favorably: "In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?" (James 2:25) But what was it for which she was commended?

In acting as she did, Rahab was taking her life in her hands. She had to choose between loyalty to her nation and loyalty to her newly-discovered God. Had her deception been discovered, her life would not have been worth a moment's purchase. It was her bravery and unselfish action that James commends, not her lies and deception.

The information that Rahab gave the spies concerning the morale of the Canaanites greatly encouraged Joshua. "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you" (Joshua 2:9). She confessed her confidence in the God of Israel: "The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Joshua 2:11).

All the other inhabitants of Canaan possessed the same knowledge of God's dealings with Israel as Rahab and had the same opportunity for repentance, but that did not lead them to faith. Rahab alone believed, asked for mercy, and received it. Though surrounded by a hostile environment, she exercised faith in a God who was the antithesis of the gods she had worshipped.

What a commentary on the mercy and grace of God that Rahab became a member of the true Israel, married a prince of Judah, became a progenitor of the Messiah, and found her place among the heroes of faith in God's roll of honor in Hebrews 11!

The believer too, is enjoined to engage in reconnaissance, to be alert to the strategy of the adversary. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

*The principle of dispossession.* Coexistence with the nations of Canaan was expressly forbidden. But before Israel could possess the land with its cities and houses, they must dispossess the present inhabitants, and that meant stern conflict. "I will hand over to you the people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you" (Exodus 23:31), was the divine promise. But failure to dispossess them would involve Israel in endless trouble, as they proved to their cost, "If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the

land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live" (Numbers 33:55). No quarter was to be given.

We each have in embryo in our hearts the equivalent of the seven nations of Canaan. Jesus gave an unflattering diagnosis: "From within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:21-23). If we give quarter and house-room to these sins and do not avail ourselves of the mighty victory gained for us by our Lord on Calvary, our experience will be like that of the unbelieving Israelites. "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires" (Ephesians 4:22).

But is not this something beyond our powers? Have many of us not tried and failed a hundred times? Perhaps these sins seem more firmly entrenched than ever. The good news is that we are not left to do this alone and unaided. Here is His promise to Israel and to us: "My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land . . . and I will wipe them out" (Exodus 23:23). Israel was His instrument, but God supplied the dynamic for the achievement of His purposes. In the event, Israel possessed only as much of the land as they dispossessed.

*The principle of appropriation* (Joshua 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3). This principle has been mentioned earlier, but it is fitting to consider it further in this context, for it is one of the vital secrets of the Christian life. Thousands who lived drab, defeated lives have experienced a radical transformation through mastering the art of appropriation, of turning promises into facts, of making their own in experience what God has given them.

The land had been given, but every square foot had to be personally possessed. The cities were already there, but they must be occupied. The houses were built, but they must be lived in. So is it with the broad land of God's promises.

On some farms there is a cattle trough designed to supply fresh water to the cattle as they require it and at the same time to obviate waste in time of drought.

The trough is built in the center of a platform under which is a strong steel spring. When the animal treads on the platform, the spring is compressed, and this opens a valve that allows the water to flow freely into the trough. So, as long as the animal remains on the

platform, the water will flow. When it moves away, the valve closes and the flow of water ceases. The supply of water is always there, but it is apparent only when appropriated.

God has made available to us the unsearchable riches of Christ, a limitless supply always available, but only that on which we place our feet becomes ours in actuality.

Peter makes a tremendous assertion in 2 Peter 1:3. "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." Taken at its face value, this means that there is nothing we will ever need to enable us to live a holy and victorious life that has not become ours by virtue of our union with Christ. But unless we plant the foot of faith on those blessings, we are none the better for their bestowal.

William Penn, from whom the state of Pennsylvania takes its name, so befriended and ingratiated himself with the Indians of that state that they made a gift to him of all the land he could walk around in a day. Taking them at their word, Penn rose early the next morning and walked briskly all day until dusk. When he returned to the camp at twilight, one of the Indian chiefs quizzically said, "The paleface has had a very long walk today!" But they were not displeased. He had honored their word, and they honored his trust. The land he encircled that day is now the city of Philadelphia.

Surely we should not have less trust in our faithful God. When we claim the blessings He assures us He has bestowed, He will be as good as our faith. No amount of power or willingness on the part of God can make up for lack of trust on ours.

*The principle of progression* (Exodus 23:29-30; Deuteronomy 7:22). The Israelites were not required to possess the whole land at once. "The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you *little by little*. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you" (Deuteronomy 7:22; italics added).

At first it would have seemed better if the nations were expelled or exterminated all at once, or at least quickly. But God knew the people of Israel were too few to effectively control the wild beasts, so He said, "I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land will become desolate. . . . Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of

the land" (Exodus 23:29-30). God is realistic in His expectations.

The work of sanctification in the life of the believer is also progressive. There are stages of spiritual growth. We are not expected to attain the degree of holiness reached by a John Wesley or a Murray McChesney overnight, but we are expected to continue progressing toward maturity (Hebrews 6:1). The promise of possession of the land was for one step at a time.

To the very end there will remain unexplored territory in our lives to be subdued and brought under the sway of our Master. The crisis of sanctification leads to a never-ending process that will be consummated only when we see Him and are like Him (1 John 3:2). Growth in grace is not instantaneous like regeneration, and this should keep us in a state of constant dependence on the Lord, who will increase the area of our victory as we are ready to experience it.

Let no one think that sudden in a minute

All is accomplished, and the work is done.

Though in thy earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it,  
Scarce were it ended in thy setting sun.

(F. W. H. Myers)

*The principle of renunciation* (Deuteronomy 7:2). The Hebrews were leaving behind forever the bondage of Egypt and entering a new land that demanded a new life. Twelve stones taken from the bed of the Jordan (Joshua 4:8) symbolized that the old Israel was dead; the new cairn erected on the Canaan side of Jordan proclaimed that they were a renewed people. As Paul put it, they had come through death to newness of life. The old life of Egypt with its bondage and corrupting influences was behind them forever. The returning waters of the Jordan separated them from the old life. What point would there be in destroying the evils of Canaan if the evils of Egypt had been allowed to penetrate?

The renunciation of Egypt was to be complete and final, and no new treaties were to be made with the people of Canaan. "When . . . you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them" (Deuteronomy 7:2).

The Christian is enjoined to reckon himself "dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). Allowing elements of the old life to remain will only retard spiritual progress. A worldly Christian whose standards have been lowered to meet the compromising conditions of his environment can never exercise the

qualities of salt and light in this corrupt world. In order to make a spiritual impact on our generation, we must be set free from the adverse influences of both Egypt and Canaan by an act of irrevocable renunciation.

As He had promised, God led His people to victory in many battles until the power of the nations of Canaan was effectively, though not completely, broken. But the record of those remarkable conquests was marred by a melancholy refrain:

But the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah, so they continue to live among the Israelites to this day. (Joshua 13:13)

Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah. (Joshua 15:63)

The Manassites were not able to occupy these towns, for the Canaanites were determined to live in that region. (Joshua 17:12)

When Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the Lord said to him, "You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over." (Joshua 13:1)

It proved a disastrous mistake to have allowed the nations to remain in their midst through a failure of faith and endeavor. We make a similar mistake and experience similar problems when we fail to assert our share in the victory of Calvary over the sins and failures in our lives. Behind the assurance "Sin shall not be your master" (Romans 6:14) lies all the power of the risen Christ.

In the light of the magnitude of God's gift to Israel and the resources He placed at their disposal, it is pathetic that they never enjoyed their full inheritance.

Our spiritual charter, too, is much wider than our actual wealth. We receive pardon and forgiveness and too often are content with that, instead of pressing on to enjoy all the privileges of joint-heirship with Christ. While reveling in the assurance of their justification, too many Christians fail to press on to an experience of practical and progressive sanctification.

Let us cultivate a holy discontent and not be satisfied with partial possession of our spiritual inheritance.

Israel's partial possession of their inheritance was bad enough, but the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh succumbed to an even worse peril and came yet further short of the divine ideal.

Even after the signal victories they had seen, these tribes rested content just short of the Promised Land—near, but not in it. They had pressed Moses to grant them the delectable pastoral land they had selected on the desert side of Jordan (Joshua 1:12-15). Moses acceded to their request, but only after they had consented to fight alongside the other tribes until Canaan was subdued (Numbers 32:5-7, 16-37).

At first sight that seemed quite a satisfactory course. They risked their lives with their brethren. But that did not alter the fact that they had chosen the land that bordered on Egypt, not Canaan. They find their counterpart today in those who believe there is a life of blessing and fulfillment but choose to live nearer the world, with which they have more affinity.

Many Christians travel a long way toward Canaan, come to the very boundary, but the demands of full surrender and obedience are too stringent. Life in the Christian's Promised Land would involve too much renunciation and self-denial. Sheltered by the blood of Christ, they have crossed the Red Sea and traversed the desert. They have even sampled the fruit of the land, but they are not prepared for the step of faith that will bring them safely across Jordan and into permanent residence in Canaan. The temptation to settle just short of Canaan proves too strong.

The history of these border-dwellers affords a serious warning to those facing the same temptation. They were the first to fall before the invading Assyrians and were swept into a captivity from which they never returned. Ever after, they were a source of trouble and embarrassment to the Israelites. Those in the land and out became like two separate nations, having different dialects and frequent disagreements. A border-dweller can always be detected by his dialect! He does not speak the pure language of Canaan.

The contemporary lesson is that we choose the level on which we live our Christian lives. God did not compel the two and a half tribes to cross the Jordan. They made their choice, and He ratified it. Nor does He force his blessings on us. If we prefer not to take the decisive step, we are left with the consequences. It is recorded of Israel that "He gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them" (Psalm 106:15).