

# MARK JENKINS MINISTRIES

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P.O. BOX 701138 • TULSA, OK 74170

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Pricks And Thorns

Dear Friend,

Over the past few months of lessons, we have observed how God utilized Israel's march across the wilderness and subsequent entry into the Promised Land to teach us about taking possession of our Promised Land. God used these real life events to illustrate spiritual truths which we must take heed to in order to possess what belongs to us. It's our inheritance, but we must follow God's directions if we are ever going to take possession and enjoy its benefits. Our Promised Land isn't waiting for us in heaven, it is available right now for us to enjoy as sons of God.

We need to learn from Israel's experiences after entering their Promised Land so that we don't duplicate their mistakes. In other words, what happened to them in the natural are our spiritual examples. For instance, we learned last month that God didn't want Israel holding onto the plunder of Jericho and how this pointed to us allowing weaknesses to remain buried in our flesh. As long as we continue to ignore, or even protect, what is lurking in our unmortified flesh, we give our enemy a perfect target at which to aim.

What else did God **not** want Israel to do? God did not want Israel to make alliances with the inhabitants of the land. His instructions for them were to totally destroy the inhabitants of the land. What spiritual significance might this have for us? In this lesson, we are going to answer this question with the hope that in doing so we will learn more about what is necessary for taking possession of our Promised Land.

Notice how God's attention wasn't so much focused on Israel's enemies as it was focused on Israel's obedience. In other words, one army was no different to God than the next. None of them had any chance so long as God was backing Israel. Wouldn't it make sense that if our focus of attention was to be on our enemy that the same would have been true for Israel? Instead, the focus of attention was more on Israel's obedience, or lack thereof, and the blessing or consequences they experienced as a result.

Our enemy, the devil, is already defeated. The havoc he causes in believer's lives isn't because the enemy is so great. It's because like Israel, we have in some way made ourselves vulnerable to his attack. Either by outright disobedience to God or by allowing our own weaknesses to remain unchallenged in our lives, we make ourselves susceptible to the enemy's attacks. These become open doors used by the enemy to torment us.

Following the events surrounding Achan's disobedience, a group of people approached Israel that were the epitome of craftiness. They were referred to as the inhabitants of Gibeon. Their actions towards Israel were deceitful, devious, and underhanded. You might be thinking, "Oh they must represent the devil". The truth of the matter is, the inhabitants of Gibeon actually represent our own flesh.

"How can that be?" Very easy; who is it that is always telling you that you are too busy to pray? Your flesh! Who is the one that tries to convince you that you are okay just the way you are? Your flesh! Who doesn't want to lose its position of influence over you? Your flesh! Your flesh is the cunning, crafty, deceiving foe that is being exemplified by the inhabitants of Gibeon. Let's see how they approached Israel and tricked Israel into doing the very thing that God had warned them not to do.

After Israel's victory over Ai, the inhabitants of Gibeon devised a plan to trick Israel into "making a league", or an alliance, with them. (Joshua 9:3-6)

***"And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, (4) They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up; (5) And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. (6) And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, 'We be come from a far country: now therefore make you a league with us.' "***

God had already warned Israel through the mouth of Moses what the consequences would be if they did not drive out all the inhabitants from the land of promise, let alone make an alliance with them. (Numbers 33:55-56)

***"But if you will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which you let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land***

***wherein you dwell. (56) Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.”***

The inhabitants of Gibeon were essentially playing a trick on Israel by wearing worn out clothes and carrying moldy bread and old wine. They were attempting to convince Israel that they were from a far off land when in fact they were Israel's neighbors. (Joshua 9:9)

***“And they said unto him, ‘From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the Lord thy God...’ ”***

(Joshua 9:12-13)

***“This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is moldy: (13) And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.”***

It wasn't until after Joshua had made an alliance with them, (Joshua 9:15), that Israel realized the inhabitants of Gibeon were in fact their neighbors. Israel was fooled into believing their lies, resulting in their disobedience to God's command. This is exactly how our unmortified flesh treats our reborn human spirit. The flesh wants the spirit man to make peace with it. Don't challenge it by doing anything spiritual, which will cause permanent change to take place. Just be a nice little Christian and everything will be fine.

The word “wily” used in verse 4 to describe the deceptive behavior of the inhabitants of Gibeon is an excellent one-word description for our flesh. Just as Achan and his hidden treasure was a type and shadow of anything we allow to remain buried in our flesh, the inhabitants of Gibeon are a type and shadow of the craftiness of our flesh and how it will do anything to remain in charge. Our flesh will lie to us and tell us we are too busy to pray or read the Bible and by all means we can't fast. Anything that will minister to our spirit man and challenge our flesh will always be met by opposition.

God's instruction through Moses to Israel to drive all the inhabitants out of the land is the same as God saying to us today that we must drive the weaknesses out of our flesh. Any weaknesses we allow to remain will be “**pricks** in our eyes and **thorns** in our sides”. They will be the very things that the enemy will target for our destruction. Like Israel, it is not by our own strength that our weaknesses

are being driven out. It is by our actions that enable the Holy Ghost to root them out, just as it was God's strength backing Israel that defeated their foes.

The flesh that we are incased in is our own worst enemy. The flesh influences how much we pray, fast, or spend time with God. Whatever portion of our mind has yet to be renewed with the truth of God's Word is still programmed to think like the world. Consequently, it stands in direct opposition to the things of God. It will fight relentlessly against the spirit man to maintain its position of dominance, protecting all those hidden weaknesses that we are convinced won't ever change.

Reading God's Word, confessing His Word, meditating on His Word, praying in tongues and worship all work together empowering the Holy Ghost to dethrone the flesh and root out those weaknesses. Fasting can also play an important role in ridding your flesh of these weaknesses. Refuse to accept the lie that you are okay just the way you are and don't need to change. That's like Israel listening to the inhabitants of Gibeon telling them they are from a far off country.

What's at stake is experiencing the fullness of your Promised Land while here on earth. Your flesh would be content to live a nice little life here, don't make any waves, don't attract any attention by the enemy and by all means make sure the flesh is content. Yet, what a shame it would be to be slave to your flesh here and then go to heaven and discover you only possessed a miniscule fraction of your Promised Land because **your flesh beat you out of the rest. It tricked you into making a league with it, which cost you all the joy of taking possession of more of your Promised Land while here on earth.**

It is too late, once we are standing in front of Jesus, to realize all that God had for us if we had only been willing to take possession of our Promised Land. Don't wait until then to discover all that God has for you here and now. Don't take your "wily" flesh for granted. It's the one telling you that you have plenty of time in the future to answer your call. It says: "Don't get in a hurry. You have other things to think about right now. You have bills to pay, children to raise, careers to be worked." It won't ever jump at the thought of spending time in God's Word nor will it ever consider fasting as a good idea.

Developing our spirit man doesn't seem to be nearly as important now as it will be when we stand in front of Jesus and giving account for our lives. God knew the challenge we would face developing our spirit and having to contend with our lying flesh and gave us this type and shadow warning us of just how crafty our flesh could be. Let's take this illustration to heart and let's refuse to allow our lying flesh to seduce us into living a lackluster life by making alliances with it instead of putting it to death.

Remember, we have the victory and the enemy is defeated. What a shame it would be to allow a defeated foe to keep us from experiencing all of our Promised Land by giving him entrance into our lives through our own weaknesses. All we have to do is give the Holy Ghost what He needs to attack those weaknesses and we close the door to pricks and thorns in our life.

In next month's lesson we will look at more of Israel's experiences taking possession of their Promised Land and see how they relate to us today. You won't want to miss it.

~ Grace be with you

*Mark Jenkins*