

# Great Expectations— Joshua



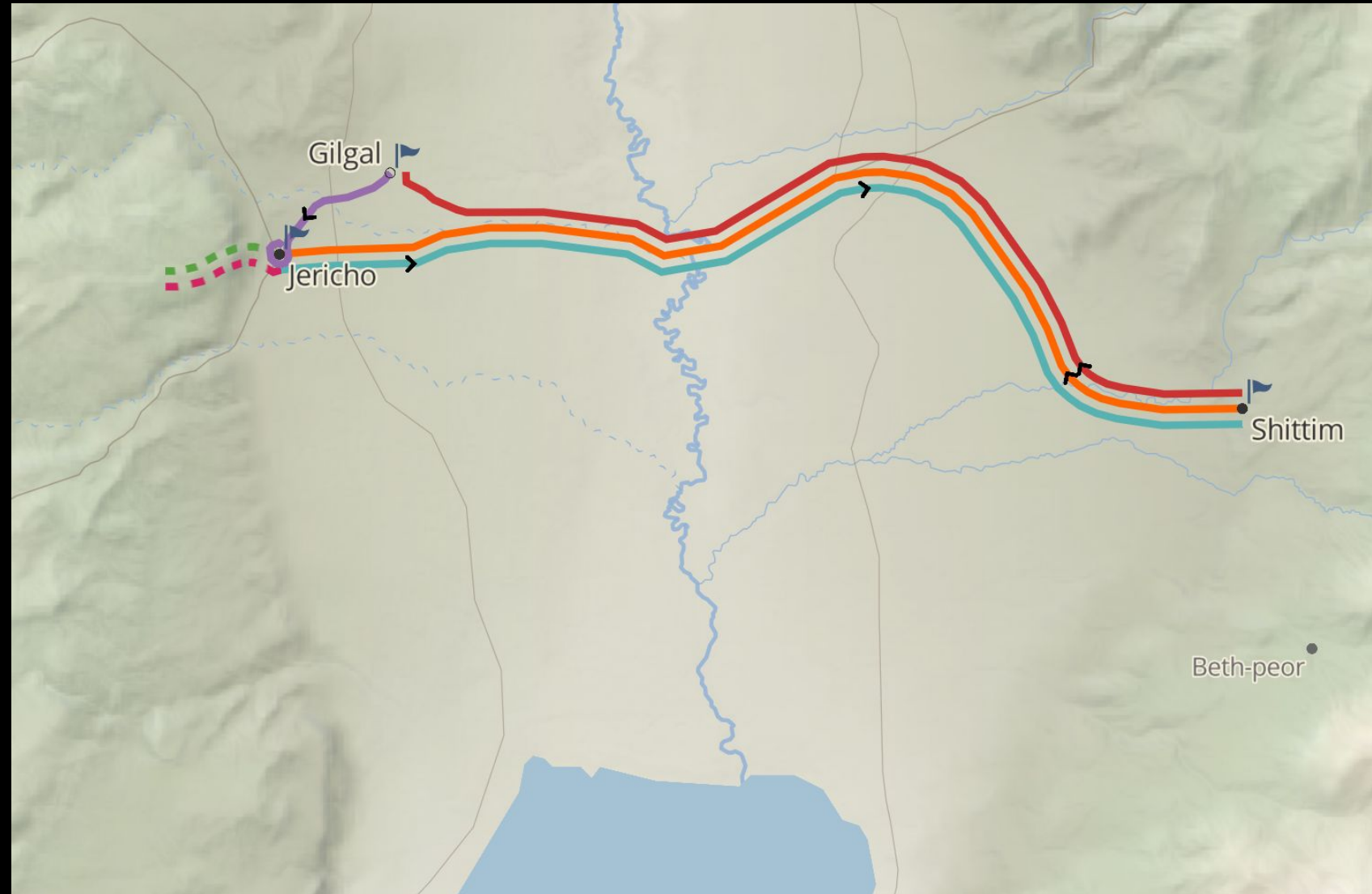
## Joshua 3:1-5, 4:19-24

<sup>1</sup> Then Joshua rose early in the morning and they set out from Shittim. And they came to the Jordan, he and all the people of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. <sup>2</sup> At the end of three days the officers went through the camp <sup>3</sup> and commanded the people, "As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. <sup>4</sup> Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." <sup>5</sup> Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you" . . . .

<sup>19</sup> The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. <sup>20</sup> And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. <sup>21</sup> And he said to the people of Israel, "When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' <sup>22</sup> then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' <sup>23</sup> For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, <sup>24</sup> so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever."

God's great work of redemption in the OT took place in two parts.

Under the leadership of **Moses**, the Lord saved his people out of bondage in Egypt, and then, under the leadership of **Joshua**, he brought them into the Promised Land.





I once stood on the ruins of the ancient city of Jericho, looked East across the Jordan Valley, and saw the place where this miracle took place.

3,400 years later, the Jordan River is still the eastern border of the Land of Israel.

Today the ***Allenby Bridge***, which is one of the border crossings between Israel and Jordan, spans the River not too far from where the Israelites crossed into Canaan. Only they didn't have a bridge.



God miraculously parted the waters of the Jordan River so that the Israelites could cross over into the Promised Land.

And he **commanded Joshua to set up 12 stones** on the West Bank of the Jordan to commemorate the miracle.

This story demonstrates how remembering the **great things God has done in the past** gives us reason to trust him in the future.

The key idea is found in verse 5:

<sup>5</sup> Then Joshua said to the people,  
**"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."**



*God does amazing things for those who trust him.*



# 1. God can show you the way to go when you don't know the way.

Joshua 3:3-4

"As soon as you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests, then you shall set out from your place and follow it. <sup>4</sup> Yet there shall be a distance between you and it, about 2,000 cubits in length. Do not come near it, in order that you may know the way you shall go, **for you have not passed this way before.**"





This generation of Israelites *had never seen* the Promised Land before.

These are the *children and grandchildren* of the Israelites who came out of Egypt.

The conquest of Canaan would be a *new experience* for all of them.



Since the Ark of the Covenant manifested God's presence, it was *God himself* who led Israel through the Jordan River.

Joshua 3:10-11

<sup>10</sup> And Joshua said, "Here is how you shall know that the living God is among you . . . . <sup>11</sup> Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is passing over before you into the Jordan."





God's guidance is  
still available to us  
through **the Bible**  
and through **prayer**.

Psalm 119:105

<sup>105</sup> Your word is a  
lamp to my feet and a  
light to my path.



On my way to church one morning the local police and a couple of representatives from the railroad were stopping cars at a railroad crossing and giving the drivers a pamphlet called "***Safety at the Crossing.***"

In the wake of several highly publicized collisions between trains and cars at crossings, the railroad was trying to ***educate drivers*** on the subject of crossing safety.

The pamphlet said that ***the most dangerous place on any street or highway*** is a railroad crossing. Nationwide, the chance for ***death*** or ***serious injury*** in a train/motor vehicle collision is ***40 times greater*** than for any other type of highway accident.

That makes a great deal of sense.

Yet each year ***230-260 people die*** and thousands more people suffer ***disabling injuries*** in accidents at railroad crossings.





Now, here's the really amazing thing: *more than half* of these accidents occur at *crossings with flashing lights and gates*. They happen because *drivers ignore the warning* lights and drive around the gates.

I find that incredible. How big an idiot do you have to be to do something like that?



But here's  
something even *more*  
*amazing*.

For **everything** you  
could ever think to do  
to mess up your life  
there is some sort of  
**warning** in the *Bible*.

Yet people choose to  
*ignore* or *remain*  
*ignorant* of those  
warnings.





It struck me as I studied this passage this week that at *every stage of life*, all of us stand in the place of the Israelites at the Jordan River: we're going someplace we've never been before.



Forty-five years ago  
when Pat and I marched  
down the aisle and out  
the door of the church  
after our wedding, I had  
*never been a husband*  
before and she had *never*  
*been a wife.*





Five years later at 3:00 am on a snowy night in Pittsburgh when our first son showed up four weeks early on the very night we finished out last Lamaze class, we were beside ourselves with fear as well as excitement.

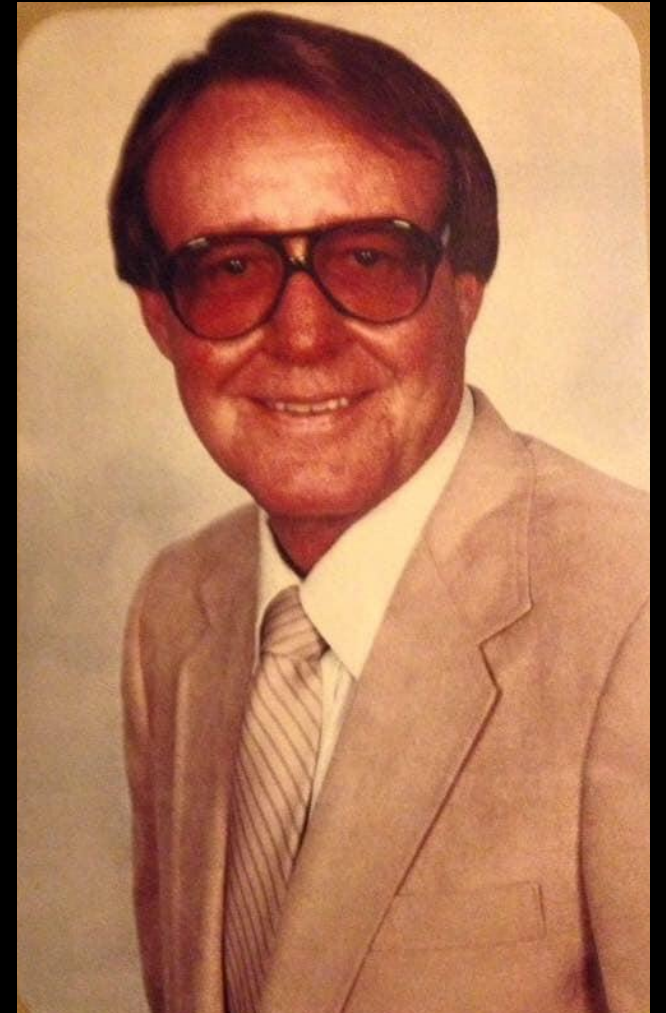
Neither of us had been *a parent* before.





When at the age of 28 I said  
goodbye to my dad in a hospital  
room in Atlanta, I'd never **lost a  
parent** before.

And three years later when Pat  
and I stood beside the grave of a  
little baby boy in Elizabeth City,  
NC, we had never **lost a child  
before**.



All through life ***we keep going places we've never been before.***

So those instructions from Joshua 3:3-4 are important to me:

Follow the Lord, then you will know the way to go, for "***you have not passed this way before.***"





## 2. God can remove impossible barriers from your path.

Invading Canaan via the Jordan River was *physically impossible*.

In *March* the Jordan is at *flood stage*, swollen with the melted *winter snows* from *Mount Hermon*.

There was *no* way to *ford* the River across to *Gilgal*. Actually, you couldn't cross it today if the Allenby Bridge weren't there.

But God told Joshua to give the order to *advance* and that he would miraculously part the waters.





Joshua **obeyed** God and the moment the *priests* carrying the Ark of the Covenant stepped into the muddy, swirling waters, *God stopped the river* from flowing, dried up the river bed, and the people crossed over into Canaan on *firm, dry ground*.



God has a history of leading his people *over, around, or through impossible barriers*.



During one of Israel's wars with the Philistines, King Saul's son, **Jonathan**, and his armor bearer were spotted by a Philistine raiding party. **1 Samuel 14** records an incredible victory over the Philistines against impossible odds that began with these words:

**1 Samuel 14:6**

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, **for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.**"



Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed 20 enemy soldiers in a small field. That heroic encounter shocked the Philistines in the outpost and set off a panic that spread to the rest of their army. When King Saul and the rest of the army of Israel saw the enemy begin to take flight, they joined in the battle and that day won a great victory of their enemies.

*But this battle was started by just two men!*





When the prophet Jeremiah could not fully grasp how God could raise up empires to carry out his plans, God said:  
*"Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?"*  
(Jeremiah 32:27).





When Mary asked the angel Gabriel how she could give birth to God's own son when she was a virgin, Gabriel replied, "*For nothing will be impossible with God*" (Luke 1:37).



When the disciples wondered how God could save sinful men, Jesus answered, "*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26).



Do you face insurmountable  
obstacles in your life?

Are you in over your head?

Has your daily grind become  
unbearably oppressive and you  
just can't see any way out?

Then listen across the ages to  
the echo of Jonathan's words  
***"Nothing can hinder the LORD  
from saving, whether by many  
or by few."***





Is there some powerful addiction that has brought your life to ruin?

Does it seem that you will never be able to break the grip of some fatal attraction that holds you in its sway?

Then you need to hear again the voice of the angel Gabriel "***Nothing is impossible with God.***"



Have you been beaten up  
by life?

Do you feel powerless?

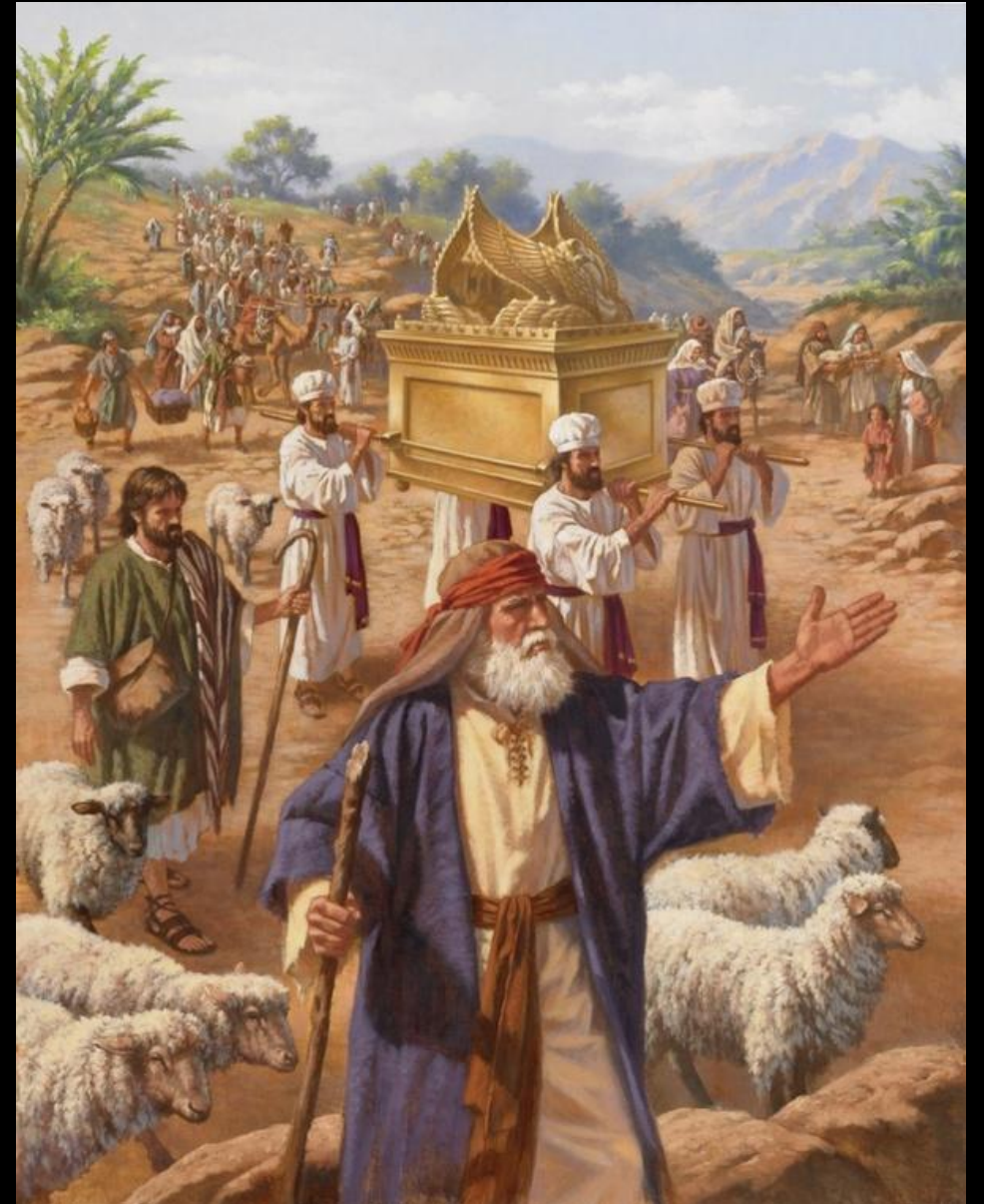
Does a life of spiritual  
victory, peace, and health  
seem beyond your grasp?

Then hear the voice of  
the Lord God himself as  
he asks from heaven ***"Is  
anything too hard for  
me?"***





Remember that Joshua moved the nation up to the river three days *before* he knew *how* God intended to get them across.





### 3. God can defeat and drive out your enemies

Joshua said that the miracle of crossing the Jordan would be a *sign* to Israel of the power of their God over their enemies.

Joshua 3:10

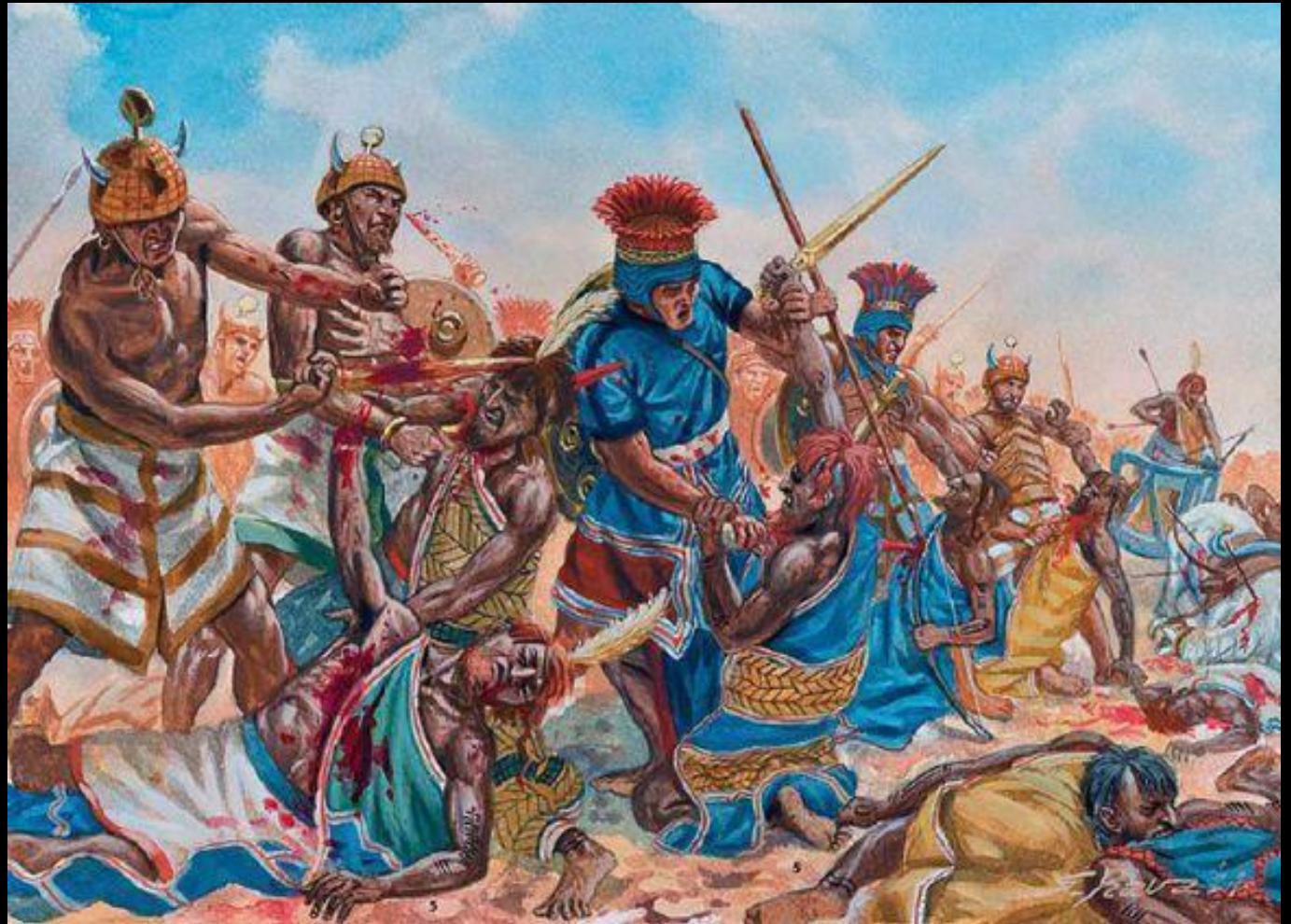
<sup>10</sup> And Joshua said, “Here is how *you shall know that the living God is among you* and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, and the Jebusites.

Let's not minimize the fact that the Israelites faced some ***formidable enemies*** in the conquest of the Promised Land.

Most of the Canaanites lived in large ***fortified cities*** with ***high walls***, some 50 feet high. It would be several centuries before the ***Assyrians invented siege warfare*** and the use of massive machinery and engineering corps to subdue walled cities. Even then a siege would often last for several years before a city fell.



The cities were guarded by *battled-hardened troops*. The Canaanites *loved war*. They had been bred for it for generations.





Among the Canaanites was a race of abnormally large people, called the **Anakim**. They were an ancient race of giants who lived in the hill country of Canaan, particularly around Hebron, and by the sea.

At least three Philistine cities—**Gaza**, **Gath**, and **Ashdod**—had these giant warriors in their armies.

In Numbers 13:33, the terrified spies said that they felt like **grasshoppers** beside them. And they had gained a terrifying reputation. A common saying in those days was, "**Who can stand up against the Anakites?**"



The enemy had *superior strength, fortifications, experience, and numbers.*

Although the Canaanites had all these advantages in their favor, they were *doomed* before the battle began.

God had prepared a *destiny* for his people.

He had already *decided the outcome* of the contest.

The *only question* for the Israelites was their *decision to act on God's promises* and to seize the opportunities he laid before them.

Just as in the desert the LORD went before the Israelites in a pillar of cloud and fire so now He would go before the Israelite army as a devouring fire to destroy the enemy.





Israel's miraculous crossing of the Jordan ***struck fear in the hearts of their enemies.***

Joshua 5:1

<sup>1</sup> As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.



Do you have *powerful enemies* who are seeking to bring you down?

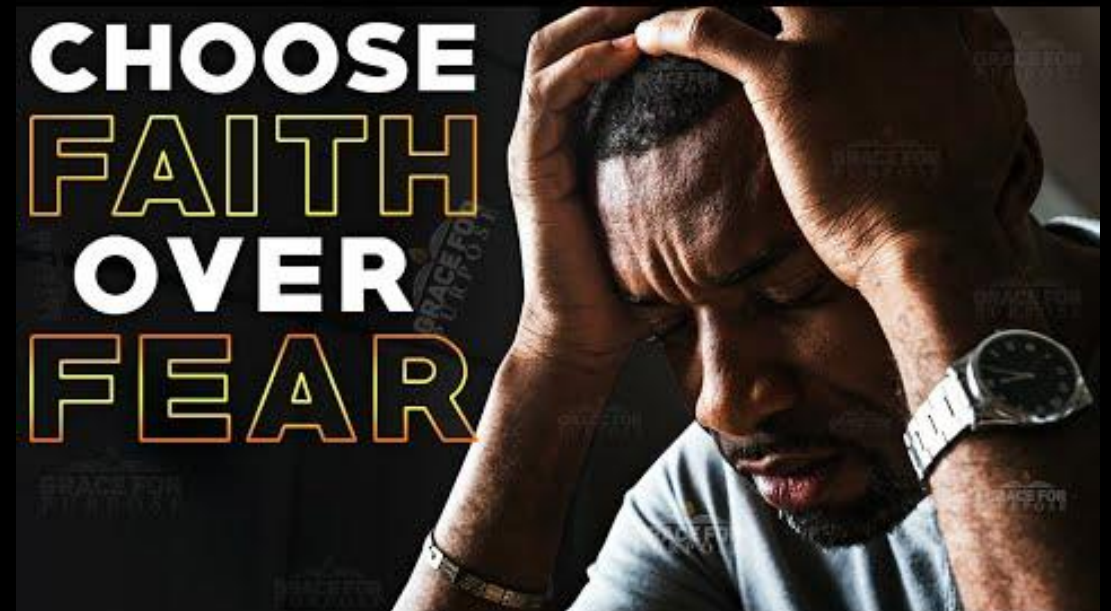
When you go to work tomorrow is there someone there who would love to have *your head on a stick*?

Perhaps your enemies live instead *inside your own heart*.

Does the *fear* of something terrible happening to you or someone you love threaten you?

Are you held hostage by your own *guilt* and *failures*?

God can drive out those enemies.

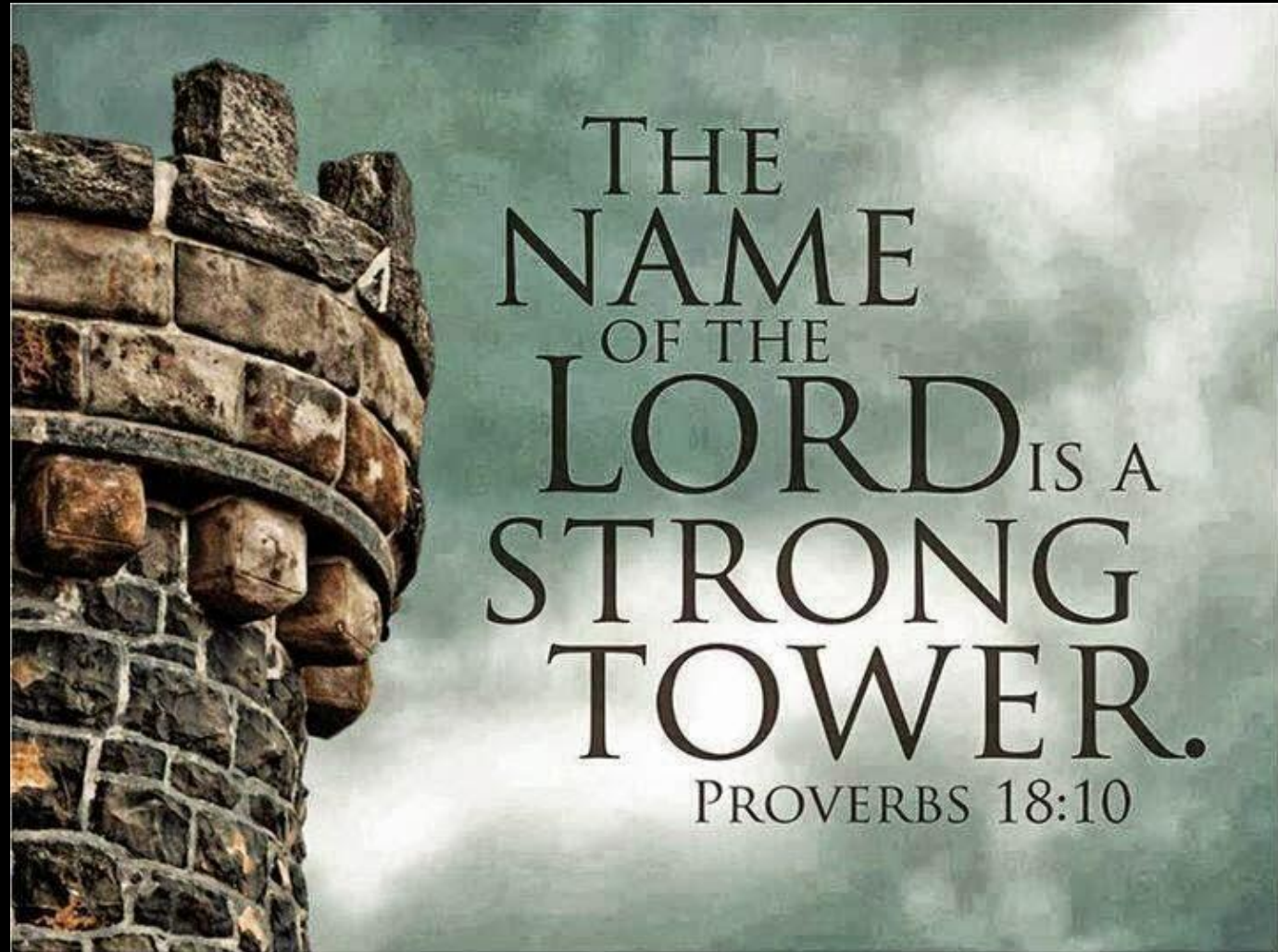




*The Lord still  
protects his people.*

Proverbs 18:10

<sup>10</sup> The name of the  
LORD is a strong tower;  
the righteous man runs  
into it and is safe.





## Psalm 35:1–3

<sup>1</sup> Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me! <sup>2</sup> Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help! <sup>3</sup> Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers! Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"



## 4. God can provide for all of your needs.

Joshua 5:10-12

<sup>10</sup> While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. <sup>11</sup> And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. <sup>12</sup> And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.



For 40 years God had fed the Israelites with *manna* that fell from heaven.

The manna continued until the day they ate their first food from the land of Canaan.

God made good on his promise to bring them into “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8).



**AND GOD IS  
ABLE TO MAKE  
ALL GRACE  
ABOUND TO  
YOU**

SO THAT HAVING  
ALL SUFFICIENCY IN  
ALL THINGS AT ALL  
TIMES, YOU MAY  
ABOUND IN EVERY  
GOOD WORK.

*2 Corinthians 9:8*





## Conclusion

The 12 stones commemorating the miraculous crossing of the Jordan were there to remind future generations of Israelites "*that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever*" (Joshua 4:24).

