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“What is happening in Ulster?”

“Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff,” Joshua 7:11, KJV. (Bible reading Joshua 6:27 through Joshua 8:2)

This a transcript of a sermon preached by Rev Ivan Foster in Ahoghill Orange Hall on Wednesday 25th May 2011. There has been minor editing to improve the syntax.

I would like to turn your attention please to a portion of God’s Word found in the book of Joshua. I am sure many of you will find it familiar. Joshua chapter 7 will be our main study this evening and I would like you to turn to that, although we will just read from the last verse of chapter six to begin with.

Perhaps I could just say a little word or two before we go any further. I would like to thank Roy (Councillor Gillespie) and indeed all those associated with Roy who invited me along here to bring a word from the Scriptures and seek to apply it to the circumstances in which we all find ourselves in Ulster. I’m not going to be making a political commentary tonight. What I have to say will strictly be from the Word of God. That’s not to say that it will not have an impact upon the political affairs in our country because God’s Word should always have an impact, an influence upon the affairs of the country. But I am not coming to preach to you any political dogma. Far be it from me to take that on myself. If I’ve learned anything in the last forty years it is that men very often get the wrong end of the stick altogether when it comes to politics.

But we can look to God’s Word for guidance in a day such as this and I hope that what we have to say will be owned of God. I don’t come here believing in myself to be any authority on these matters but I do desire simply to be a mouthpiece through which God will speak to all of our hearts.

I do think God has something to say to us here in Ulster at this time. I believe we need to hear what God has to say in Ulster at this time.

Perhaps what He has to say might not be to all our pleasing, but we need to listen nevertheless. I like what you read in the Acts of the Apostles when that man whose name is familiar (he is Cornelius) was directed by the Lord to send to Joppa for Peter to come and when Peter came, Cornelius, who was an Italian - he did not know the Lord, he wasn’t a Christian at that time, he was a soldier seeking truth and when Peter came he said: “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God,” Acts 10:33, KJV. I have thought throughout my life of those words and I have often thought, “Well that’s the perfect congregation; that’s the perfect attitude to have when you come to God’s house. We’re here to hear whatever you say whatever has been commanded thee of God.” I trust tonight that what I say is commanded of God and if it is commanded of God and anything that I do say has God’s authority, I hope you will hear it and



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submit to it.

Could we read then from the last verse of the chapter 6 of the book of Joshua? This is just after the great victory of Jericho and I am sure that you are familiar with the story of the victory of God's people at Jericho. When we come to verse one of chapter seven, the very first word of this chapter introduces a little shadow. "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel."

The accursed thing, by the way, was that which was dedicated to God. The use of the word "accursed" in our terminology conveys something quite different from what it meant in Biblical times. It was that which was consecrated to God. It belonged to Him and of course there was a judgment attached to it in that anybody who took it came under God's judgment. So let me just say that by way of explanation.

So having taken that which was dedicated to God, that which was accursed, they have brought upon their heads the judgment of God and God was saying, "Until this matter is dealt with I will never be with you again. I'll not go forth with you again."

There was a system under the law of God by which the people might know the judgment of God, the mind of God. The high priest had a pouch in his garments, inside of which were two stones distinguished one from the other and we presume that one stone signified a "Yes" and one stone signified a "No" and whatever stone he pulled out from this pouch indicated the mind of God. So the tribes of Israel were paraded and one after another they passed and the stone was pulled out, "No", "No", "No" and they came to the tribe of Judah and it was a "Yes".

I am suggesting to you that this was the method by which this judgment was carried out. We are told that they were brought by their tribes and the tribe of Judah was taken so there was an indication given that the man that was guilty was of the tribe of Judah.

So then the tribe of Judah was assembled and it says Joshua brought the family of Judah and he took the family of the Zarhites man by man and Zabdi was taken. So there was this process of elimination. And Joshua brought Zabdi's household man by man and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah of the tribe of Judah was taken. This is the man that God in His providence has indicated is the guilty one.

Achan, when challenged, confesses.

"And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they *are* hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, *it was* hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the



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midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD," Joshua 7:20-23, KJV.

After his confession, judgment takes place. "And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones," Joshua 7:25, KJV. As a result of the sin in the camp being put away, God's blessing is restored and, under His direction, the city of Ai is conquered.

(Prayer is offered before the preaching.)

Were I to give what it is I wish to say to you tonight a title, I think I would simply entitle it, "What is happening in Ulster?"

I am sure that question has been asked by most of us here and asked on many, many an occasion. "What do you think is happening?" And we have asked one another and perhaps after we have discussed it together we have gone away as puzzled as ever. There is only one source of information where we can hope to get a satisfactory answer to a question like "What is happening in Ulster?" and that is the Word of God. God is on the throne you know. No matter what changes we may have seen in our land over the last five years, and no matter how, as we would see it, earth-shattering those changes appear to have been, God is still upon the throne. He hasn't lost control of things. And we can seek of Him an answer to our needs.

We are going to concentrate tonight upon one verse and I want to leave that one verse with you. I hope that you will go home and think about it and ponder over it. It's the verse 11.

"Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put *it* even among their own stuff."

These are the words of the Lord and He is answering a very puzzled and a very alarmed, a very distressed leader - Joshua. When you read what Joshua has to say from verse 6 through to verse 9, if you ponder what is said there, you will discover that Joshua is very distressed indeed and he has said these words after lying on his face in the dirt all day.

In other words he has been so stunned that he couldn't say a word, he was in a state of shock and it's only in the evening time, verse six tells us, only in the evening time that he finally can open his mouth to God. Now these tiny bits of information set down in God's Word are for you to look at and think about and place into the picture.

So here is a man distraught and I would say more distraught than any of you have ever been over the last five years. I know that there has been much distress of heart and mind, but I haven't yet heard of people lying on their face outside in the dirt all day, so distressed were they by events. Now here is a man who has been distressed to that degree.



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And God is answering him and in verse 11 you have God's answer. "Here is what's wrong, Joshua. Here is what lies behind this catastrophe that has reduced you to this state of desperation and until this matter is dealt with, Joshua, nothing is going to improve."

I want to speak on this text tonight.

Now I am retired. I have free board and lodging at Roy Gillespie's so I can be here for a long time. But we do hope to have you home by breakfast. But I do pray God will help us tonight humbly and faithfully and earnestly to look at what His Word has to say to us. I hope that you are here tonight with a desire in your heart to hear what God the Lord has to say and I hope that you are praying even now for me that I might be enabled to bring to you a word from the Lord.

Perhaps before I commence saying anything about what is happening in Ulster in the present time, maybe I should say something about what has happened in Ulster in the past. And then when we have considered the past we can come back again to the present and have a look at the future.

You know I was thinking tonight that this is my first time in Ahoghill Orange Hall or preaching anywhere near Ahoghill. But one of the very earliest times I preached as a young student was in the old tabernacle in Ballymena. Pastor Paisley was then really in retirement and visiting preachers were coming and I was one. Poor people that they should have been afflicted with the likes of me because after forty years I still can't preach very much so you can guess what it was like forty years ago. But it's a strange thing that I should find myself back after all these years. It would have been back in 1965 that I was preaching there. That's a while ago!

But back at that time in our province, Ulster was entering upon the enjoyment of a wonderful time of blessing which I believe lasted about a quarter of a century. It's difficult to be precise about the matter of time but many of God's people who passed through that period, now looking back, will discern, I think, a decline in the spirituality within the land which became noticeable about the beginning of the 1990s. It was not an immediate shutting off of heaven's blessing any more than a sunset brings immediate pitch blackness. It doesn't. As the sun sets the light dims gradually.

What may be known is that during that period of time from the mid-60s up until about 1990 there was a time of wonderful fruitfulness. But the fruitfulness of the 1960s and the 1970s was noticeably absent as the 1990s began to dawn. The period of blessing of which we are speaking was marked by a spirit of earnest, zealous witnessing for Christ and a bold contending for His name against His enemies. It was a time of conversion amongst sinners. It was a time of church-planting. It was a time of triumph for the gospel and a notable retreating of the enemy.

I suppose I could take time tonight as a Free Presbyterian minister and list the congregations that date their commencement back to that period but I'll not do that. But I do know that there were many, many congregations formed back then.



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When I entered the Free Presbyterian Church in 1964 you hardly needed more than one hand to count the number of congregations. But within the next twenty years there was a great enlarging of that number, a great adding to the congregations and the congregations that commenced at that period were strong, vigorous congregations and that probably still marks the most of them.

It was also a period when not just the Free Presbyterian Church but others, like the Independent Methodist Church, began their work of witness, and I am sure that there are many independent assemblies and fellowships in Ulster that had their beginning in that period of time.

It was then a time of blessing, men and women, a time of God's mercy upon us.

Ecumenism, which had been increasingly rampant in the 50s and 60s, received a very strong check at that time. I suppose an example of the set-back for ecumenism and its programme of reunion with Rome, an example of the set-back that ecumenism suffered, may be seen in the fact that in 1980 the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which had been a founding member of the World Council of Churches, the body through which ecumenism carried out its policies, the Presbyterian Church here in Ireland, by a vote of its members, withdrew from the World Council of Churches and that withdrawal came about as a result of a stirring there was in the country that was amongst the ordinary members of that denomination. And I just set that as an example of how the tide was running in the country, and how even those who were not that particularly sympathetic to the zeal, the evangelistic zeal that was evident, had to take note of it and pull in their horns and take a step backward, such was the evidence of God's stirring and blessing amongst the people. However, that day of blessing has been drawing to a close. I believe that it is evident to many people that we are well into the gloom of the approaching night.

Now there are Christians who don't want to accept that, who don't want to acknowledge that, and the reason they don't want to acknowledge that is that if, for a moment, they were to say, "Yes, things are not what they were. We have not the blessing, we have not the power of God amongst us as once we did," if they do admit that then they've got to say, "I wonder why then that is?" and that would entail an examination that some evangelicals don't want to get into.

But, men and women, I hope we are honest enough tonight to acknowledge that things are not what they once were and I hope that we are earnest enough as Christians to say, "I am not prepared to just accept that. I want to find out what is wrong.

"Why is it so then that today we have not the spirit of blessing, of power amongst us that once we knew? Oh there is pressing forward in my mind what I want to say but I am not going to say it. I could take you on a tour of Ulster tonight and we could stop outside various ecclesiastical premises and we could peep in through the door and we could see empty seats where once there were crowds thronging. Once there were crowds thronging and surely we have to say why is this so?



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Well you know there is only one thing that can end revival blessing. Only one thing. It's not God's will that He stop revival. That is not God's will. It is not God's will that you and I be backslidden. God's will is that you and I be filled with the Holy Ghost. That's the commandment given of Paul to the church at Ephesus and, of course, to us all: "Be filled with the Holy Ghost". That is God's will. That's the position we should be in day after day after day. Peter said: "Grow in grace." It's not God's will we suddenly stop growing, and worse than that begin to wither and shrink. That's not God's will. So, not for a moment do we believe that we, tonight, are experiencing the mighty blessing of God that was amongst us in a time past, not really that long ago, especially when you are my age as it only seemed to be yesterday. No it's not God's will that this be so. It's not that God is weary of blessing His people. There is only one reason why we don't have the same blessedness amongst us today.

SIN. Sin - that's the problem.

God has been offended by sin and in consequence He has withdrawn His favour, His mercy and His blessing. He has ceased to pour out His blessing upon us and that's why we don't have today what we did have as a people in the 60s and 70s.

The passage we have just read illustrates the truth that sin is the cause. I deliberately read the last verse of chapter 6 and right into the first verses of chapter 8, and in the last verse of chapter 6 the people are rejoicing in the midst of God's blessing and victory. It says that the fame of Joshua spread across the whole country because God was with him. But we know that God said to the man, "I am not with you any more and I'll not be with you again until you deal with the sin that has come amongst you." The change happened very quickly. I mean, you know, that between verse 27 of chapter 6 and the opening of chapter 7 there are not years, it is only days. Oh! things can change very quickly among God's people, men and women, and the changes that we now have been forced by circumstances to face up to are the consequences of sin.

Now we can turn to look at this portion of God's word which dates from thousands of years ago and yet is still relevant today here in Ahoghill in the 21st century as it was back then in Israel. Just as relevant, applicable. What we have here has been recorded by God through his servants and preserved from innumerable satanic attempts to destroy this word we have here tonight, because what is here God wants us to learn from.

Paul wrote to the Romans, and I find myself referring to these verses almost every time I am on my feet which is not very often now that I am retired, but almost every time I am on my feet I refer to these words in Romans 15:4. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." God has written these things for our learning and what happened in the camp of Israel is for our learning and I hope we are going to learn from it.

The first thing I want to say tonight by way of a point is this:

I. This sin which brought defeat to Israel followed a wonderful victory in Jericho.



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That's what I want you to know. The sin that brought defeat took place in the day of great blessing. You remember the victory at Jericho and the story of it? The story of Jericho was typical of every time God's people have experienced blessing and revival. That's why God has recorded these times, that we might look at them and understand what happens when He works, how He works in revival blessing when He gives victory to His people.

Remember what happened at Jericho? It was a rather unusual scene. Remember how the people were told to march around the city. There was the carrying of the ark and there were the priests with the trumpets which they blew on the first six days once a day and then continually on the last day that they were required to march around the city. And they went out for those six days and they marched around the city and then went back to wait. It's a wonderful picture even of what was happening in Ulster in the 60s and 70.

1. What was happening in the 60s and 70s in the most remarkable way was God put on display the means of salvation. That is what happened. You see, they carried the ark, that precious piece of furniture that God had ordained would feature in His plan of salvation because on the day of atonement the high priest came within the veil in the tabernacle and the blood was sprinkled on the ark. It's a wonderful picture of Calvary. That's what it is, a picture, a type of Calvary and our Saviour dying as the Lamb of God and His blood shed for our redemption.

And as Israel marched around Jericho they were holding up the means of redemption and that's what happened in Ulster in the 60s and 70s in a marvellous way. Suddenly it was easy to preach the gospel! Suddenly it seems as if a people who were not that gifted or scholarly were enabled by God to lift up Calvary and hundreds came to look!

That's what happened in the 60s and 70s. I know, men and women. I was there. There was a stirring and people came, Sabbath after Sabbath, to gaze upon the cross, to hear about Jesus the mighty to save and preachers found it easy to hold up the Saviour.

2. There is a picture of that as the people carried the ark of the covenant around the city and the priests blew the trumpets. It was a funny noise! I don't really think that the noise of the trumpets would be attractive, because they were rams' horns if I am not mistaken and I'll tell you this, you'll not play the "The Sash" (traditional Ulster loyalist song) on a ram's horn or anything like a melodious tune! It was just a blare that the world would find no attraction in. Isn't that what the gospel is like to the world? And it's only when God touches your ear that you are able to hear sweet music from the gospel trumpet. Oh how I mocked the gospel until there was a day God touched me and my heart melted as I listened to what before I had considered to just be a blaring, unattractive, anything but melodious noise. That's what was happening in the 60s. God gave an ear for the gospel.

I want you to think for a moment; we don't have any direct reference to this here in this passage. I suggest to you that as the hosts of Israel marched around the city and were carrying the ark in silence and the only noise was the blare of the ram's horn, the people on Jericho's walls would have been watching this and saying, "What is this that's taking



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place?" And on the first day they would have been intrigued and somewhat startled but less so the second. And I think by the third day they would have been laughing and jeering at these Jews and this strange ritual. Do you remember the laughing and the mocking and the sneering in the 60s? Do you remember when the people, who wanted the blessing of God and were enjoying His power, were nevertheless counted by the world as the off-scourings of all things. Sneered at, mocked at. I can well remember that. We are a whole lot more acceptable today. Newspapers are not writing things about us today that they were writing back then. Why we are respectable people today, well some of us are anyway! (Laughter)

But back then, my friend, there wasn't an edition of the newspapers in Ulster that went out that didn't carry a blast against the people of God. Oh there is a parallel here in this passage I tell you.

3. The shout of victory. Then on the final day after the sounding of the trumpet we read in chapter 6 and the verses 4 and 5: "And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets. And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long *blast* with the ram's horn, *and* when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him."

That's the first time that any human voice was heard from the camp of Israel and it was a shout of victory. It was a shout of faith. It was a shout by which they claimed that city and God says that when the shout will be heard that the wall of the city will fall down flat and the people shall ascend every man straight before him. And at a shout Jericho fell.

I'll just say this, It didn't fall in a heap of ruins. I believe that what happened then was that the walls sank down into the ground. And the reason that I believe that is because every man went up straight in front of him. If the walls had fallen down then because they were mighty walls there would have been a mountain of rubble that would have been anything but easy for the person attacking the city to get over. It would have been very difficult indeed.

Another reason why I believe that is that Rahab's house was on the wall. She survived. I don't know how she would have survived if her house on the wall had fallen in a heap of rubble. But instead if, as I am suggesting to you, the walls sank down into the ground suddenly, as if you found yourself in a lift, Rahab found herself on the ground floor and opened the door and stepped out. Oh! this was a mighty victory from God and the city was given to the people who shouted. And Ulster, in the 60s and 70s and into the 80s, was claimed by the people of God. Prime Ministers fell, governments fell, parties fell, not before a well-oiled political machine but before a praying, preaching people.

Oh! I think there is a picture here of a wonderful day of blessing and yet, my friend, in that day of blessing there were sown the seeds of ruin. For it was when Achan went up into the city that he committed the sin. In the very day of blessing, the very victory of the taking of



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Jericho, that's when the sin was committed. You know we are never in greater danger than when we are in the day of blessing, the day of success. That's when we are in the greatest of dangers. That's when we are tempted to think of ourselves far above what we ought to think. When they are standing on the wall and shouting at you and mocking you and calling you for everything you really feel nothing, but in the day of triumph you can start getting too big for your boots and there was an element of that you know in Achan's sin.

God had given them the city. What a victory and as the men rushed forward everybody was fleeing from them and there was consternation, there was fear. There wasn't a well organised resistance. Nobody was resisting. The city was theirs and in the midst of this victory, in the midst of this triumph, in the midst of this dominance, he was tempted to take what he shouldn't.

It was back in those days in Ulster, men and women, that there began what resulted, in recent times, in a reversal that would shock the most of us here, if not everyone that is here.

Not merely shocked us but thrown us into confusion that we can hardly cope with what we have witnessed and what we have seen. But I am telling you that what we have witnessed and seen had its beginnings in those days of triumph and that to me makes the matter all the more sad.

II. The first signs of the sin which brought defeat is what I want to draw your attention to now.

Before the Lord disclosed to Joshua that there was sin in the camp that sin was making itself known. Before God said to Joshua "There is sin in the camp", the sin was manifesting itself. It was there for Joshua to have seen if he had eyes to see it. The green shoots of error are to be seen in this passage as we study it closely.

Achan's sin could not have been in secret. I want you to notice the words of God here in the verse 1 of chapter 7. "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel."

Stop right there! "The children of Israel." But I thought it was only Achan who took the forbidden thing. Yes, that's true, but here God is holding the whole nation responsible and God is a just God and He does not hold me responsible for that which you have committed and about which I know nothing. God does not work that way. So when we find God holding Israel accountable for the sin that Achan committed, we come to one conclusion. Somehow or another the nation was implicated in the sin.

I think that, without a shadow of a doubt, when Achan took that which was forbidden, took of the spoil: the gold, the silver, the goodly Babylonish garment, others would have seen him take it.



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In an army attacking a city, soldiers don't go off on their own. That would be bad military tactics. You are liable to be killed if you did that. Soldiers, for their own security, would operate in units. So there was a unit of men who saw Achan do what he did and did nothing, and that unit of men would have come back and, instead of reporting to their senior officer what Achan had done, they said nothing and so the guilt spread by silence, by acquiescence, by being party to the wrongdoing and thus God was offended and began to withdraw from Israel, the whole of Israel.

You know I only need to get a jab in my hand with a thorn that has dirt on it and if I don't attend to it bacteria are there, infection begins and if I don't attend to it, it begins to spread and if I don't attend to it, it will kill me in the end. Just a simple thing like that and it's just the same, men and women, when great sin breaks out amongst God's people and it's not dealt with and one after another people turn their back on what's been done and pretend it hasn't been done and minimise it and make light of it and pass over it. It soon affects the whole body and you can see evidence of the infection spreading in Israel, the infection of sin spreading in Israel, the loss of God's blessing spreading in Israel as a result of Achan's sin.

1. It's seen, for instance, in the report of the spies. Joshua was planning, "Right, we have now conquered Jericho, what's the next city?" "Ai, right, I'm sending some of you men out to have a look at it, tell us what circumstances are like and come and report back." And it was through the report of the spies that you can see the evidence of sin working.

I can't go into all the details perhaps that are merited but let me just point out to you that it's evident in the report of the spies that self-confidence was growing. Listen to what they say; you'll see that. I don't even have to belabour that point. It says there in verse 3, "And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; *and* make not all the people to labour thither; for they *are but few*." "It's not a big place. It will only take a handful of men", they said. Over-confidence, not a reliance on the Lord. "I mean, we've just smitten Jericho. We've just destroyed Jericho." So they reasoned, forgetting the fact that it was the miraculous intervention of God that made Jericho a victory.

They would still be walking around Jericho if God had not knocked the walls down! Sin is at work and they are beginning to have inflated ideas about themselves and they are forgetting God's part.

2. They underestimated the enemy. It says in verse 3 "there are only a few of them". Why here is the very spirit we find later in Samson. Remember when Samson was lying there and Delilah was working her wiles and she said finally, "Samson, the Philistines be upon thee", he said, "I will go out and shake myself as in other times." "I'll make mince meat of them!" But he had lost out with God. It says "he wist not that the LORD was departed from him", Judges 16:20 KJV. And these men, with their inflated notions of themselves: "We don't need the whole army, a handful of us can do it", showed an underestimating of the enemy. "There are only a few of them and we can handle them."



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You'll notice too that these things have to be studied carefully. Look at what they are saying in verse 3. ". . . *and* make not all the people to labour thither; for they *are but* few." That's a very important phrase.

3. Serving God had become "wearisome". That is what the word "labour" means. You know when you begin to get notions of yourself above your station and you forget God's part in the whole working of His providence and His grace and deliverance for His people, then His work and doing it His way become a wearisome thing for the flesh. When men get fleshly, going God's way becomes a burden. Oh! I can remember men and women back in the 60s and the 70s. What a delight God's people had in every meeting that was convened and they put themselves out in order to get there. It's not so now, it's a wearisome thing. We have so many other things to do and really it is too much trouble. That's the spirit that is now beginning to arise.

4. But not only the report of the spies but the response of Joshua shows that God's grace is withdrawn. Listen to me, listen to me, Christian. If God were to withdraw His hand off you tonight you would probably end up in the pub before you went home. We're kept by God's grace. We are enabled to go on as Christians by God's grace. It's not the power of your personality, it's not because of your resolve or your determination or what you know. If it were not for the Lord we would all fall.

And this sin that has broken out has offended the Lord. He has withdrawn His grace and the withdrawal of His grace is seen even in Joshua. He accepted the spies' counsel. He didn't say, "Wait a minute, up to now it's been God's will that the whole of His people go forth in these campaigns, all of the men are involved in these campaigns." All of Israel marched around Jericho. No, he didn't say, "Wait a minute. What's God's will on this?" He immediately was attracted by the suggestion and he abandoned the strategy that had been successful. I read to you the opening verses of the chapter 8 because I want you to notice what God says in verse 1.

"And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land". When they successfully attacked Ai Joshua was back to doing what God wanted him to do and that meant employing all the people of war but when he was in this frame of mind, affected by the sin that had broken out in the camp, he was adopting a different strategy. He was employing a different method.

You know, men and women, and here I come to the heart of what it is that I want to say tonight. I believe there began in that time of blessing in the 60s, 70s and the 80s the adopting of a new strategy. I believe that we, I am not pointing the finger and saying he or they, I am saying we collectively as the people of God, we forsook the Biblical format for advancing God's cause in this land for one that was designed by men, just as Joshua set aside God's plan for attacking the Canaanite cities and nations and adopted the one suggested by the spies. Political action took over from spiritual action.

This world's politics have generally operated outside the morality of God's precious Word. Politics have very little regard for God's Word and you are not in politics very long until you



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will find that you have a choice, doing what God says or doing what I think will get me votes.

In the 1960s, we saw a political movement begin which was motivated by and promised submission to God's law. Our disappointment tonight in how things have turned out in recent years stems, I believe, from the utter abandonment of that principle. God and His law took second place to popular opinion. The abandonment began, I believe, in the middle 80s and it increased until the position was reached where we now have murderers in government and we have state funding of sodomites and we have convicted terrorists sitting on the board that governs the affairs of the police. And that didn't start today or yesterday. I believe we were all there when that began, we were all there when that began.

Such an abominable state of affairs as I have just described is still justified by some who profess allegiance and submission to the law of God, but oh how wrong they are! I have no doubt that such a course of action, involving Christians as it does, has cost us God's blessing and I think we must all concede that we have been tainted by some degree at least by this departure.

And I acknowledge before you all that I, with enthusiasm, supported that political movement in the 60s and 70s, though with increasing concerns and discontentment in the middle 80s. I withdrew from politics at the end of the 80s due to a dawning realisation that first principles had been abandoned.

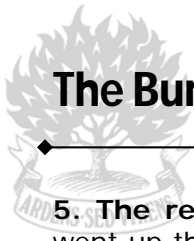
That doesn't make me better than anybody else for not for one moment back then, did I realise that that which I suspected was happening would develop to the degree that it has.

But I own that I was enthusiastically involved in the 60s and 70s and therefore I must share some part of the responsibility, as must all who were there and were part of that gradual drift away from what God's Word says should be done by Christians and what was done.

I did not see then at the end of the 80s a situation coming about where the words of the prophet Isaiah in the chapter 5 verses 20 to 23 would apply to professing Christians in Ulster today. Isaiah said: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto *them that are* wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto *them that are* mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

"That's the situation that we are in tonight. And, men and women, we have to lament, if we are honest, that we had part, at least at the beginning of this departure, we helped its growth and we must own that before God.

Poor old Joshua! You see, the spies came and then he embraced their plan and he made it his and he became guilty with them.



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5. The result was the retreat of the army. Look at what it says in verse 4. "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai." You know the spies had said, "Look we can easily handle these. Two or three thousand can go up and we'll take the city." You know you don't even read of them fighting here. Look at it, look precisely at what God's Word says. Remember every word is inspired of God. It says that they went up "and they fled".

It wasn't much of a fight! Fight? Listen to me. You can't fight when the Lord is not there. You may think that you are going to toss the place and turn everybody upside down and thrash everybody all around you, but if you are there without the Lord you'll not do it. You'll just be like Samson. He said, "I'll go out now. I'll fix them as I've always done", but the Lord was not with him and he was taken and he was bound and they burned out his eyes. You know, I listened to an interview just yesterday. I have never been able to listen to it before. Oh! it was there. I found it on the internet and I looked at it many a time but I could never bring myself to listen to it. It was so vexing and grievous and I'll say no more than that, other than to say that it was acknowledged in that interview that the whole arrangement (the power-sharing government between the DUP and Sinn Fein) that we have now operating in this country was entered into because of fear. There was a fear of what London would do. There was a fear of what Dublin would do. And therefore there was a capitulation and an acceptance of murderers in government.

I can remember days, men and women, when a little handful of people went out in this country and faced the government and faced the police force and faced the whole establishment and defied them and said, "No, we will not have ecumenism in its political form or in its ecclesiastical form and you can jail us and you can do what you like with us but we'll not have it!" But now there's an embracing of murderers in government because they could not find it in their heart to say, "No! we're not having it".

Why? Look at the Bible. There was a departure from the Lord and the Lord departed from them. The Lord departed from them.

6. You know it's interesting Joshua is taken up with a concern that is the result of this defeat of the soldiers at Ai. It results in the enemy being strengthened. Look at verse 9. "For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear *of it*, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?"

This is what is going to be the outcome. This is what Joshua is sensing and feeling and thinking. "This defeat at Ai is going to encourage the Canaanite and they will attack us and we will be destroyed".

The enemy is always strengthened by the defeat of God's people. It always encourages the enemy and although there are still many unionist cheers echoing around this county at the recent election results there is only one winner. I haven't counted up all the votes and I hardly think the exercise is worthwhile, but if I did I am inclined to think that I would discover there were less unionists voting this time than before but there are more Sinn Fein-



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Oh! the enemy is strengthened. There is not the awareness of it that there ought to be.

I will hasten to a conclusion.

III. The aftermath of this defeat is seen here in the camp.

And there are some sad things to notice here.

1. First of all in his prayer, Joshua blames God. Verse 7. "And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!"

It's all God's fault! Many a man I have talked to, many a woman too, since 2006 and it is God Who is getting the blame. "How can I believe the Bible any more? How can I believe God any more now that murderers have been accepted into government?"

It's a bit like those people in America who sold their property and spent their savings expecting the Lord to come back on Saturday past. And now they are standing like goons and saying, "I did everything the Bible told me to do."

The Bible never told any one of them to do anything that they did do. It was a poor demented old man that they foolishly followed. God's not to blame, men and women. Ulster's problems and Ulster's troubles are not to be laid at God's feet but at our feet.

2. You know Joshua spoke to God using the language of those whom in the past he had utterly repudiated and rebuked. Look at what he says. We'll not take much time at this. He says halfway through verse 7: "Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!"

Now where did you hear that sort of words before? Those are the words the people said to Moses when the spies came back with their report about the land and they rounded on Moses and they said, "We had been better staying in Egypt. Why did God bring us here to be destroyed?" And there were only two spies that stood up for right, Caleb and Joshua. But here is Joshua now and he's talking the language of the traitors that he repudiated some forty years earlier.

That's what sin does to us, men and women. That's the change that sin will bring in us. Remember Peter when the Lord said, "I'll go up to Jerusalem and there I will be arrested and crucified." And Peter said, "Far be it from thee" and he rebuked the Lord. And the Lord Jesus said, "Get thee behind me Satan." Peter was talking like the devil. Peter was opening his mouth and out came the words of the devil. That's what sin can do.

And poor old Joshua here is talking just like the rebels of some forty years before. Who would have believed that Joshua could speak like that. Oh! men and women, that's what



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3. Joshua says in verse 7 that God had made a mistake. “And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!” “God made a mistake in bringing us here. Let’s go back and cross over the Jordan and what land we had captured there from the Moabites we’ll settle on.” That is what he is saying. He wants to abandon God’s strategy and God’s plan. Oh! I hope you see the parallel today.

IV. I’ll close in a matter of minutes by pointing out to you how the situation was redeemed.

Praise God, it was turned round. You know, men and women, even from such a state of defeat and confusion and unbelief as that which was to be found in the camp of Israel in chapter 7, there is deliverance. And I am saying tonight that we are not without hope here in Ulster.

We’ve suffered disappointment and set-backs in the political realm. But the political realm is not the realm in which God’s victory is necessarily shown. Don’t you think that. Victory returned to the camp of Israel and when victory returned to the camp of Israel then they went forward conquering.

What needs to happen in Ulster is that the camp of God’s people is put right and from that there will flow advancement in whatever form God wants to advance His cause in this land and I don’t know what form that might be.

You know, men and women it’s probably not the best place in the world to say this but I’ll say it anyway. I’m not so in love with the ‘Union Jack’ that I care whether or not it’s flying, because it ties me to a country that is fast turning to Islam, sodomy and every other form of corruption and wickedness. I don’t see the scenes that my forefathers saw when they carried banners depicting Ruth pleading with her mother-in-law to let her go with her to Israel and thus saying to our brethren in the rest of the United Kingdom, “Don’t cast us off. We want to remain British.”

The United Kingdom is a country that has forsaken God and there’s every sign that God has forsaken it. I don’t know what future is held for us here in Northern Ireland but I am confident that whatever that future is, if God is leading His people it will be well with us.

The first thing to attend to is to get the camp of Israel straightened out.

1. The straightening out of the camp began in the place of prayer. It was while Joshua was praying that God spoke to him and said: “Get thee up Joshua.”

Now Joshua began his prayer in a very bad spirit but the longer he stayed in prayer the more he came to seeing things in the right light. He starts with blaming God in verse 7 and



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he ends up concerned about God's great name. That's what praying does, you know. You might come to the prayer meeting full of unbelief and all sorts of stupid notions, but by God's grace as you get before God, God will straighten you out.

And God straightened out Joshua and he came to the conclusion that the real thing he should be concerned about was the honour of God's name. Now God says, as it were, "You've come to the truth, Joshua. Now you've really come to the heart of the matter. Right, let's get to the work of dealing with the issue. Get on your feet! There is work to be done. There is sin in the camp and you've got to deal with it."

2. Facing up to their guilt, that is what Joshua had to do. "There is sin in the camp, Joshua, and you've got to face up to it. And every man in Israel has to face up to it." And there has to be a searching and an examining of every man before God before the matter is resolved.

Oh! how we need in Ulster again a spirit of humility. A spirit of humbling ourselves before God and waiting on Him.

3. It was in obeying God that victory was restored. For God said to Joshua in chapter 8 in the opening verses, as we've already read: "And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land: And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it." Joshua 8:1, 2, KJV.

Joshua did what God commanded and Ai fell. Victory, triumph can be restored to the cause of God in this province if there is a submitting to His Word and a yielding to His Word. And each one of us gathered here tonight it will begin with us. Let us humble ourselves before God. Take God's word, recognise I've played a part in this folly. I was there when it all began. That's not the case with all of you here. Some of you are by no means old enough. But I am sure you have all played your part in that folly that I have been describing when God's strategy was set aside and man's strategy took its place.

I'll close with one incident that I remember. It was 1985 and I was in a delegates' meeting and the manifesto for the local government election that was coming up was being discussed. It was proposed by the party leadership that we no longer stand for the Sabbath but replace it with a policy of local option. Whoever wants to have the pubs open well let them have them open. It was argued in that meeting that you can't give people an option on the commandments of God. You either stand for God's commandments or you don't.

That meeting took a decision and it rejected that notion that was being proposed by the leadership. And men from Ballymena council were behind the thinking as well as men from Castlereagh. That so angered the leadership that, in a manner quite contrary to the rules, but then who cares about those, another count was demanded. This time if you were for the proposal you got up out of your seat and you walked over and stood against one wall



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and if you were against the proposal you got up out of your seat and you stood against the opposite wall. That would show who's who. But the vote was still lost and I went home from the meeting and I said, "Lord there is something wrong, there is something wrong."

And I lived with that truth until I could live with it no longer and I said I'm getting out because I could see what was happening. You couldn't win with God's policy therefore we'll change the policy.

And that thinking, men and women, has taken us to murderers in government and funding sodomites. And whatever part we have played in the development over the years we have got to repent of before God and pray that repentance will be given to all. The victory is a spiritual one, men and women. It will not be won in the polls. Maybe the Lord has told us that in recent days.

It will be won on our knees before God. I have spoken too long tonight but may the Lord be pleased to bless His Word to our hearts.