

Ian Leitch is a Scottish evangelist. His travels sometimes take him here to America. Ian's unique personality and pulpit style appeal to people of all ages. It has been written that his enthusiasm for the gospel and godliness are contagious. I enjoyed reading an article in which Ian spoke of being invited by a businessman to come and speak to his employees... over in Scotland... something he readily accepted. ... After he spoke to them... he was approached by female staff member who asked if they could speak privately. ... She said, *'Ian, when I was 22, I was in a serious car accident, and my boyfriend was killed. I have gone through a lot of surgery and am now doing well. When that happened, I lost my faith.'*

What do you say to someone like that? Well, I prayed and I said, as kindly as I could, *'You know, when they built the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, and the QE2, they did not test them in dry dock. They didn't leave them in dry dock and get big hoses on them to see if they would leak. They got those ships out into the open ocean to put them through sea trials. These trials were not intended to sink the ship. These trials were to prove that the ship was seaworthy. The only way you can know whether your faith is real or not is when the pressures of life come, when you go through trials. Then you know if you are seaworthy or not. Can I ask you honestly, did you lose your faith or did you find you had none?'*

She said, *'Ian, I guess you are right, I had none.'*

Would you agree with Ian... here... that God sometimes tests you and I as believers...? ... O.K. ... So now let me ask you this. ... Why? ... If God is all-knowing... what is He trying to learn... or discover... that He doesn't

already know...? Why test...? ... Does the fact that God sometimes tests us... show that God is **not** omniscient...? (...He isn't all-knowing...?)

(YOU SEE...) What I like about Ian's answer... is that his example shows... what I think God is doing when He tests us. ... I believe that he **does** test us... AND that He is nevertheless all-knowing. ... **He** already knows what the test result will be. ... But **we** don't. ... The testing that God does in your life and in my life... is for **us** to discover. It is for **us** to learn. **We** need to become aware of the condition of our faith.

When I test my students at the college... it isn't so much because I'm curious about how much they know... ... It is because I want them to see whether or not they have mastered the material I've been presenting... If they have... I want them to be encouraged and motivated to learn more... If they don't pass the test... I want them to be motivated to prepare better for the next one.

But please be certain that God **does** test us! ... Furthermore... we should be aware that it often comes... right after we have experienced a victory in our life... like the Israelites who just experienced one... in crossing the Jordan. ... 400 years before them... Abraham arrived in the land of promise and was confronted with a famine (Gen. 12). Elijah triumphed over Baal and was threatened with death by evil Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18-19). After His baptism in the Jordan, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan (Matt. 3:13-4:11).

Since great victories can lead to great pride... God allows us to be tested in order to remind us to depend on Him. ...The Scottish preacher Andrew Bonar (back in the 1800's) used to say, "*Let us be as watchful after the*

victory as before the battle." Our faith grows through testing... and so does our dependence on God.

This morning in our passage from Joshua... we find God testing the Israelites. He conditions them. He is building their faith... causing them to depend on Him... because they have some incredible battles that lay ahead of them... in driving out the inhabitants of Canaan.

Now last week... we read that under Joshua's leadership... and by miraculous intervention... some 2 million soldiers and civilians crossed the Jordan River... on firm/dry ground... during the time when the Jordan was at it's flood stage. ... A beachhead was quickly established at Gilga... and from every human point of view... it was time to strike **immediately** at the strongholds of Canaan.

Joshua 5:1

The morale of the people of Canaan had utterly collapsed in the face of one old... and two recent... news items... that had spread through the land: (a) that the God of Israel had dried up the Red Sea... (b) that the Israelites had defeated the powerful kings of the Amorites in Transjordan... (c) that Yahweh had just now dried up the waters of the Jordan River so that the Israelites could cross over into Canaan.

As this news spread... so did fear. What better time to strike a paralyzing blow? ... Certainly ANY military leader of Israel... who was worth his weight in salt... would have favored an **immediate** all-out offensive. There is NO time to waste!

But this was not God's plan. ... He is never in a hurry though His children often are. ... This is how God often tests me. "*God let me see this happen right now! ... **Now**... Lord... would be a good time for me to see Your Mighty hand of provision...*" ... But... God is on a different wave length.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV)

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

From God's point of view Israel was not yet ready to fight on Canaan's soil. Pushing the Canaanites out of the land was going to require some pretty hard testing. ... Before God would lead Israel to conquer the land... He would further need to prepare them... for the greater tests... which lay ahead. (Step by step... God is making their faith stronger for their next challenge.)

We find several tests in today's passage that are designed for getting the Israelites ready for the greater tests of fighting the Canaanites. With each of the tests... God had specific outcomes... some specific lessons to be learned. ... And these same lessons are what you and I need to learn... in order for God to use us... in a significant way... in our future.

If I assume that you were like me when I was in school... you had always hoped your teacher would tell you the answers just BEFORE you took a test. This morning I am going to be like the teacher I always wished that I had. I am going to be like those questionable teachers... today... who teach the tests to their students.

Here are your answers. Are you ready...? The answer to test question #1 is... (Now... listen up... and you may want to write this down... because you **will** be tested...) ... Answer 1... is... “Whenever God expresses Himself in and through His people... the world takes notice. ... Count on that! ... We have already seen the question to our answer here. ... We saw it a few minutes ago... when we read Joshua 5:1.

This one is perhaps the easiest of our test questions. ... (The best teachers I’ve ever had... started easy... and got increasingly more challenging with their test questions.)

God wanted the Israelites to learn that when He acts on behalf of His people... the world takes notice of it. God is out ahead of them. ... He was already at work... before the battle began. ... And do you know what...? God is out ahead of you... with the challenge that you are now facing.

Have you learned this...? Are you applying faith to this...? God is running ahead of you. He is already at work. ... He wants you to join Him in what He is doing.

Joshua 5:1

We will come back to test question #1 in a moment. Right now... I want to teach a few more answers to this test...

OK... now here is the answer to test question number 2... ... The spiritual preparation of God's people must precede any activity. (Did you get it? Remember it **will** be on your test...) ... Sometimes we wonder why God isn't fighting a particular battle for us... We want Him to give us an

immediate result... But... all the while... He is actually more interested in what...? ... In **developing** us. ... So answer number two is... “the spiritual preparation of God's people must precede any activity.

Third... the answer is... “God's people must be alert to change... because God won't always do things the same way...” Ooooh... This one is a hard one. A lot of Christians don't **like** this answer. But it is the **correct** answer. God's people must be alert to change, because God won't always do things the same way.

And fourth... This one... too... is often hard to learn... but here is the answer... “God's people deserve and need leaders who are themselves being led by God, who are not self-directed.”

So... now that you have the answers... it's time for us to take a peek at the test... and to do a little more exploring of test question number one. ... Oh! One more thing... When you take this test... the questions may be phrased a little differently... As a matter of fact... God probably **will** phrase the situation different for you... But as long as you remember the answers... you should do fine. ... Just **apply** the correct answers.

Joshua 5:2-15

As I've already noted... even before Israel did anything to take the land... the Lord went before and demoralized the enemy. God had knocked the wind right out of them. ... There was no longer any spirit in them. ...Verse 1 is transitional. It takes us from Israel's crossing the Jordan in chapters 3 and 4... to the testing events that we read about in chapter five. ... Because of Joshua 5:1... we know how it is possible for Israel to exist

unopposed... in enemy territory... long enough to stop and take these tests... which would have required no less than 10 days. The Canaanites were paralyzed with fear for at least 10 days.

Whatever your test question may look like right now... if God is testing you... be sure to apply this answer... Don't underestimate God. If we are faithful to God, He will cause great opposition to disappear. God can change the attitudes of those who oppose Him... even today!

We don't need to be afraid of the non-believing world around us, because the Lord of the universe is with us. But, too often we live in fear. This is true when you watch or listen to the news and see what is happening in our Nation's capital... or in the mid-East right now. The opposition of Islam is so obvious, so overwhelming, so oppressive. But over there... or in Washington DC... we don't have to think non-Christians look stronger, more confident, more self-assured.

Non-Christians live with everything to fear. Their gods fail them constantly, and then they watch us who know the Lord Jesus to see if we are in touch with ultimate reality. We should never be afraid of who we are. The world is dying to see people who are different, who have an alternative.

The apostle Paul described this dynamic in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. He said that we are a fragrance from Christ if he is expressing himself through us. To those who are being saved we're a fragrance of life to life. To those who are perishing, we're a fragrance of death to death. There will be a reaction.

The next part of Israel's test... is seen in verses 2-10...

Before crossing the Jordan River... the spies had told Joshua when they came back from reconnaissance... that the people were demoralized. ... Joshua had extensive military experience... and his army was united behind him. ... But instead of allowing the people to attack... God asks them to stop for a period of spiritual preparation before the battle. ... They must focus on two important acknowledgments of their covenant relationship with Him: 1) the covenant sign of circumcision... and 2) the covenant meal of Passover. ... So in verses 2-10 both of those things are reinstated in the life of the people. ... This is a section that focuses on the necessity of spiritual preparation or conditioning before we're ready to serve the Lord.

The nation had to wait at Gilgal while the men submitted to painful TEST - circumcision surgery. ... But why was circumcision so important...? Circumcision was the initiatory rite into the covenant privilege of God's family that had marked the Jewish nation. ... God gave a covenant relationship to Abraham back in Genesis 12... when he called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. ... In Genesis 15 God sealed the covenant with a sacrifice. ... Then in Genesis 17 God gave circumcision as the sign of the covenant to Abraham... and God said that all of Abraham's descendants were to bear that mark of covenant relationship.

Through this ritual the Jews became a marked people... because they belonged to the true and living God. ... This mark on the bodies of the men of the covenant... reminded them that their bodies belonged to the Lord... and they were not to be used for sinful purposes. ... Remember that Israel was surrounded by nations that served idols and worshipped those idols in sexually degrading ways. ... This physical mark reminded the Jews that

they were a special... separated people... a holy nation... and that they were to maintain purity in all of their relationships-in their marriages... in their society... and in their worship.

But over the years... the Jews came to trust in the external *mark* of the covenant and not in the *God* of the covenant who wanted to make them a holy people. ...They thought that as long as they were God's covenant people... they could live just as they pleased! ... Moses warned them about this sin (in Deut. 30:6)... and so did the prophets (Jer. 4:4 is just one of many examples.) ... When John the Baptist called the Jewish leaders of his day to repent... the Nation's spiritual leaders said... "*We have Abraham as our father*" (Matt. 3:9.) In other words... "*Behavior doesn't matter – ethnicity does!*" "*We were BORN in good standing before God!*"

They were not unlike some people today... who feel **certain** they're saved... and are going to heaven... because they're baptized... have joined the right church... and/or participate regularly in Communion. ... As good as these religious activities can be... they must never become substitutes for a **personal** faith in Jesus Christ... that follows Him.

Even though... from a human point of view... since the Canaanites were struck with such fear... and such seemed like the perfect time to strike into battle with the occupants of the land... God had something else in mind... It was this painful surgery... which also required a few days of recovery.

God is never in a hurry. The events described in chapter 5 take at least ten days. And then the people are going to march around the city of Jericho for six more days. God has the people wait more than two weeks after crossing the Jordan before giving them their first taste of victory in the land.

I struggle to accept the fact that God's delays are always much more valuable than my haste. ... (LISTEN... Include this in your answer to question #2...) ... We're always anxious to **do** something for God... and we forget that the first thing He wants is for us to **be** something for Him.

... .. **PAUSE**

God's people have to be prepared before we can be trusted with victory. Make sure you embed this in your answer to question number two as well... God's people have to be prepared before we can be trusted with victory.

Joshua 5:8

Imagine yourself as an Israeli soldier who has just been circumcised, waiting to get better, looking at this city in front of you, and thinking, "*Why couldn't we have done this on the other side of the river? We can't move for a few days, and if they come after us, we're sitting ducks.*" It was a tremendous act of faith to remain in their places, waiting to heal. Joshua had to exercise faith in performing this amazing act on all these men. The people had to wait, obey the Lord, and trust him even though they were weak, in pain, and vulnerable to attack at this time. But the spiritual reality is that in that weakness they were made strong. Hebrews 6:12 describes the attitude of these people... as it challenges us to imitate what we have been reading here...

Hebrews 6:12 (ESV)

so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Tremendous patience was required in waiting for this time of healing to be accomplished. ... Circumcision would incapacitate the males for upwards to a week... while healing took place. ... So circumcision would leave the Israelites very vulnerable to attack by the armies of Canaan at that time... for the Israelite soldiers would be in no condition to fight back effectively.

Disabling these men by circumcision in hostile enemy territory... just a few miles from Jericho... was a great test of faith. ... If Jericho's fighting men were watching (and they probably were) ... if they weren't melting in fear... they would have been laughing themselves silly. ... But God's word tells us that... in our *weakness*... we are made *strong*...

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

They were totally at God's mercy and entrusted into His care.

God's Word may seem *illogical and dangerous*... but remember that obedience brings His blessing and protection. ... It may seem illogical to love your enemies... or to tithe when you have so many bills... or honor your parents especially when they may be harsh or wicked... or submit to an unloving husband... or serve a tough employer... but God's way **does** work and brings blessing... and protection. God was teaching His people to wait on Him and prepare themselves before battle.

Now... what do you suppose verse 9 means...? What exactly is “the reproach of Egypt”? ... There is some powerful encouragement for you and I in this concept...

Joshua 5:9

The reproach of Egypt was in the fact that Israel had left Egypt but had not been successful in gaining land of their own. This was the reproach which Moses was concerned about at Sinai... when he begged God not to wipe out Israel and start all over... in response to their making a Golden Calf to worship.

Exodus 32:12 (ESV)

Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.

A similar concern of Moses was expressed in Numbers 14:12-16 at Kadesh-barnea... when the Israelites listened to the 10 spies instead of Joshua and Caleb. ... At that time... it wasn’t the Canaanite’s whose hearts melted in fear. It was God’s people. They wanted no part of God’s plan. They were too fearful.

Numbers 14:11-16 (ESV)

And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.” But Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD,

are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.'

The world is always quick to mock God's people if God's people do not appear to be the gainers by their faith.

I think that "the reproach of Egypt" refers to the ridicule of the enemy when Israel failed to trust God at Sini and later at Kadesh Barnea. Moses didn't want the Egyptians to spread the word that the God of Israel couldn't finish what He had started.

Israel's sin with the Golden Calf... and at Kadesh Barnea was a reproach to them... but now that was all in the past. ... The nation was actually in the Promised Land! ... They allowed the Lord to bring them in and were ready for conquest! ... No matter what the Egyptians and the other nations had said about Israel as they mocked them... that reproach was now completely gone.

Each man bore on his body the mark that reminded him that he was a son of this Covenant-keeping God... and the land was his to conquer and possess.

In the life of the believer... the reproach of the world will be rolled away when Christ returns. ... Our joy and victory in Christ will take the sting out of the scoffing and mockery of a wicked world... which will be watching! ... They will know that the Gospel we had been proclaiming had been true all

along. There will be no more reproach to the Gospel... that seems to exist today.

Joshua 5:10

No male could participate in the annual Feast of the Passover unless he had been circumcised... having the mark of identity as a true son of the covenant. So that had to come first. Now they could obey the covenant and remember Passover.

Apparently the Passover was not observed during the wilderness wanderings, but now at Gilgal in Canaan the feast was again observed. The recent Jordan crossing was so similar to the crossing of the Red Sea that vivid memories were brought back to those who had been in Egypt. (Persons under 20 at the time of the Exodus were not excluded from Canaan). ... No doubt many were between the age of 40-60 and remembered how their father killed a lamb and sprinkled its blood on the doorpost and lintel. Those now in Canaan could still hear the awful death cries of the Egyptians' firstborn. Then there was the excitement of the midnight departure, the terror of the Egyptian pursuit, and the thrill of walking between walls of water to escape Egypt.

Now they were reliving it again. As the lambs were slain they were assured that as the Red Sea crossing was followed by the destruction of the Egyptians, so the crossing of the Jordan would be followed by the defeat of the Canaanites. So remembering the past was an excellent preparation for the tests of the future. God's power would deliver them through all the

conflict that lay ahead. The Passover would stir up their hopes of deliverance and victory in the promised land of God

Joshua 5:11-12

God's people must be alert to change, because God won't always do things the same way. In the wilderness the people has learned to trust God for the provision of manna. Now they would be called to trust Him as they grew their own crops. Learning to live that way would have been difficult. Change is always tough.

If you've been to the Sinai, you know that there's not much food or water there, so the provision of manna became normative for the people. Now remember when you were a baby Christian, just learning to walk by faith, how there seemed to be miracles everywhere. God took care of you in spite of yourself, meeting needs that you didn't even understand. But it didn't stay that way as you learned to walk, to feed yourself, to grow in learning how to relate to the Lord on your own. The reality is that God is Lord of both the supernatural and the natural. It doesn't really matter which way his goodness is communicated to us. The results are the same in that he expresses his character and provides for us. Our needs change as we start to grow and learn and understand, to walk more and more by faith and less and less by sight.

We should think about our church in this regard. We shouldn't expect Living Water to be the same forever. We ought to expect God to break through in fresh, new, creative ways of doing ministry, relating to one another, and relating to our community-new ways that would require us to live closer to

him, in greater dependence on him, and in less dependence on the pattern that we've gotten used to.

Verses 11 and 12 suggest that change is just a fact of life. There is a time for it. God's resources are sufficient to help us live creatively with any change that he brings our way. We can't live in the past, trying to keep things the way they've always been.

Israel has gotten the right answers to three test questions here in Joshua chapter 5. #1. Whenever God expresses Himself in and through His people... the world takes notice. ... #2. The spiritual preparation of God's people must precede any activity. ... #3. God's people must be alert to change, because God won't always do things the same way.

And now we come to this rather strange incident... that has had many scratch their head... and ask... “What in the world is this doing here...?” It seems so out of place...? The whole exchange between Joshua and the soldier seems awkward and out of place to our story. ... But it isn't, really.

God needed to show Joshua that he was to submit to his higher authority.

Despite Joshua's long military experience he had never led an attack on a fortified city that was prepared for a long siege. In fact, of all the walled cities in Palestine, Jericho was probably the most invincible. There was also the question of armaments. Israel's army had no siege engines, no battering rams, no catapults, and no moving towers. Their only weapons were slings, arrows, and spears—which were like straws against the walls of Jericho. Joshua knew the battle of Jericho must be won because, now that they had crossed the Jordan, Israel's troops had no place to which

they could retreat. Further, they could not bypass the city because that would leave their women, children, goods, and cattle at Gilgal exposed to certain destruction.

Joshua was probably pondering such heavy thoughts... when he became startled at something which came across his sphere of vision. **He lifted up** his eyes to see a Soldier brandishing His **sword**. Instinctively he challenged the Stranger, saying in effect, "Who goes there—friend or foe?" ... Now in good ol' American English he said... "What's the big idea? Who gave you an order to draw a sword? I am in command here... and no one is to fight just yet!" Then that One, whom I believe was the pre-incarnate Christ, turned to him, and when He turned, He said, "I don't fight on your side or theirs... but as captain of the host of the Lord..."

Notice the reaction of Joshua. He fell on his face before Him.

You see, Joshua learned at that very instant... that the army's General Head Quarters was NOT his tent. ... It was at the throne of God. ... God was leading them. ... Joshua was NOT captain of the hosts of the Lord. Joshua was under that captain... And he would be taking orders from Him.

Sometimes we need to see that God is not so much taking OUR side... but instead we need to see Him more - as **sovereign**. It is far more important that we recognize God's position... than to know God's plans.

(LISTEN) 'We can easily become more interested in special guidance than in a right relationship with the Guide.'

But... the soldier did offer some guidance to Joshua. He had a drawn sword. A drawn sword always means that the sword-bearer is ready to fight. God was ready to fight on Israel's behalf.

Let me review the four test answers... and ask you to wrestle with them as you look at the questions in your own life: (1) When God expresses himself in and through his people, the world takes notice. Are you fearful of the non-believing world around you? Or do your friends and family see a Christ-confidence in you that is powerfully attractive? ... (2) The spiritual preparation of God's people must precede their activity. Is there some reproach in your life... because of past sin...? Do you sense the world is mocking you because of it. ... Confess your sin... lay it down at the cross... and don't pick it up again. Leave it there. Believe that your past no longer controls you... that the condemnation of your old life has no more power over you. ... Its guilt and shame and embarrassment are gone. ... The power of the past really is broken in your life. ... (3) God's people must be alert to change. God won't always do things the same way. ... Perhaps you're struggling with changing circumstances... learning to depend on God in new ways. ... Have you given God permission to do new things in your life? ... Or are you struggling... resisting areas of change? ... (4) God's people need and deserve leaders who are being led by God... who are not self-directed. ... Maybe what you need to wrestle with is the issue of servanthood. ... Are you led by the Lord? ... Are you listening to the Lord more... or speaking at Him most of the time? ... Are you learning spiritual leadership, or are you driven by pride?