

## The Gradual Conquest

[Ralph Erskine](#)

**“And the Lord thy God will put out these nations before thee, little by little.” Deut. 7:32**

ISRAEL, being typical of the church; and the land of Canaan; typical of heaven; and Israel’s conquest over the nations, their enemies, typical of the spiritual conquest of the Lord’s people over their spiritual enemies; and the manner of dealing with them, for the most part typical of the way of God’s dealing with His people in all ages; therefore I would deliver to you the gospel of this text, and open it in this observation:

THAT as the true Israel of God have nations of enemies in their way to the possession of the heavenly Canaan, so the Lord their God will conquer these nations, by little and little.

TO OPEN and confirm this doctrine, I shall enquire what nations of enemies they have in their way to the heavenly Zion. See how many and mighty nations stood in the way of Israel’s possessing the earthly Canaan, “Seven nations, greater and mightier than they.” Now, in like manner, there are great and mighty nations that oppose the true Israel of God to the heavenly Canaan above, and hinder their peaceable possession of any part of heaven that, through grace, they possess on earth.

IN ALLUSION, therefore, to the seven nations here, that God cast out before Israel of old, I shall show seven of these nations of spiritual enemies and oppositions that are in the way to the heavenly Canaan, and that disturb the Israel of God in any begun possession that they have here through grace.

1. A NATION of vain thoughts. We are by nature vain in our imaginations; and these vain thoughts lodge within the walls of Jerusalem; “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?” Jer. 4:14. Do you not find a nation of this sort swarming about your heart every day, and every hour of the day? Yea, I am mistaken if these Philistines have not been upon you, and if these nations have not been besetting you, and besieging your souls in time of hearing and praying; and I imagine they who are exercised and bound for heaven, will find a need of almighty power, to put out this nation before them, though there were no more.

2. THERE IS a nation of worldly cares which Christ compared to briars and thorns, that choke the seed of the word, This nation goes under the name of Frugality; but if you look narrowly to its armor, you will find the motto thereof to be, “Careful about many things, but neglecting the one thing necessary:” and yet this is such a powerful nation

that many people are subdued by it, so as they can do nothing but mind earthly things, and so lose heaven and come short of salvation.

3. THERE IS a nation of doubts and fear's, and sinful discouragements, and unbelieving, objections. The soul is upset and overwhelmed oft-times with them, Ps. 42:6,7.

4. THERE IS a nation of ungodly men from without, that also vex and oppose the Israel of God in their way to the heavenly Canaan.

5. THERE IS a nation of powerful giants, as the sons of Anak are called. And some of them have mighty giants in their armies, particularly these three, Sin, Satan, and Self; these have powerful armies to fight their hellish battles. And there is also:

6. A NATION of deceitful lusts in the heart. O what swarms of lusts make up this army of hell! If you will travel through the camp of your heart, you will see an armed regiment of gigantic lusts; there you may see grim-faced ignorance, armed with the devil's black livery; there you may see cursed atheism and unbelief, armed with lies and blasphemies, and bitter invectives against heaven; there you will see cruel enmity, armed with a bloody sword of forcible opposition unto God and Christ.

There you also will see subtle hypocrisy, armed with: fraud: and flattery; there you will see brazen-faced hardness of heart, armed with a brow of brass; there you may see doltish, security, armed with a fearless spirit and stupid conscience; towering pride armed with a robe of gaudy attire, and an eye of scorn, contempt, and. disdain; as also self-righteous confidence, armed with gross ignorance, both of the spirituality of the law and mystery of the gospel. There is a powerful nation of heart-plagues and deceitful lusts that reign over the ungodly world, and many times rage in the hearts of believers to the leading of them captive.

7. THERE IS A NATION of actual out-breakings in the life, and sins in the conversation; these are like the common soldiers of the army of hell, making daily excursions into the camp of Israel; yea, every hour of the day they are breaking out on this hand, and on that hand, and round about us on all hands, in innumerable omissions and commissions. The former nation I mentioned was the lusts of the flesh, and this nation was the works of the flesh; the lusts of the flesh are deceitfully hidden within the walls; the works of the flesh are open and manifest, making continual outward excursions. You may have a list of them, Gal. 5:19-21.

NOW, to those seven nations all the world of mankind are, by nature, kept in subjection; and, which is worse, they are willing slaves and captives to them; and even the Israel of God that have left their camp, and fled under the colors and standard of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of salvation, are many times led captive by them; they are still giving battle to Israel. Now, O you that are bound the celestial Canaan, what think you of these nations? Are they not seven nations greater and mightier than you? Surely, if you have found, to your sad experience, the power and policy and the pernicious influence, of

these mighty nations upon you, it will be welcome news to hear that “The lord thy God will put these nations from before thee, by little and little.”

THIS LEADS to the next thing proposed, namely, to speak of the manner of the conquest, “by little and little.” The manner of the conquest here expressed, is gradual. Therefore. I would here show by what several steps, strokes, or degrees He puts out the nations.

I do not limit the Lord to this or that way; He is sovereign, but I speak of the ordinary steps and degrees, by which He brings any poor sinner that was under the power of sin and Satan, mixed with, and under the power of the nations of hell; by which, I say, He brings them to the field of battle. There are *several* fields that the Captain leads them through, before they be on the field of battle, where the nations are put out before them.

1. HE LEADS THEM to the field of consideration, and makes them there bethink themselves what a sad state and condition they are in, while waging war against heaven, under the devil’s banner. What am I doing? and where am I going? and what will be the end of these things, and of living in the service of these nations of lusts? And, oh! where will be my landing place to eternity, if this be my course?

WHEN THE LORD begins a good work on his people, He brings them first to consider their ways; “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet to Thy testimonies,” May be He brings them to it by some rousing providence; whereby He stops their career in wickedness, and hedges up their way with thorns, as He stopped Manasseh, and held him in the thorns of Babylon till he began to consider and know that the Lord was God, and that he was fighting against God.

2. ANOTHER little advance, where by little and little He leads them forth to battle, is His bringing them next to the field of concern: this natively follows upon due consideration. The man is brought to see the hazard and danger he is compassed with, and to be afraid of the issue. The Lord brings them into the field of great concern, where they are filled with a greater concern about salvation than ever they had about any thing in the world, saying with the jailor, “What shall I do to be saved?” Is there any salvation for me, that have been fighting against God all my days?

3. ANOTHER little advance is, His bringing from the field of concern to the field of restlessness, even to a restless endeavor, to come out of Satan’s camp, and out of that sad condition they see themselves in:— for this concern about salvation, and fear of everlasting damnation, makes them to fall about the means of relief; and so they read, and pray, and hear, and meditate, and mourn, and weep, and reform; and you would think they are by this time beginning to fight against the nations of their lusts; but, however these means be good in themselves, and a restlessness in the use of them may be wrought under the awakening influence of the Spirit of God; yet there is some other field the man must be taken through, before he be capable to lift arms against his lusts in an evangelical and acceptable manner; while he is yet in this field, he is ready to be filled with vain imaginations and legal dreams, like the young man in the gospel, that

it is by doing some good thing or other he is to have eternal life. In this case, he may be doing a great deal of duties, and doing what he can with the greatest natural seriousness; and yet to no purpose; because he is doing upon the principle of the old covenant of works.

4. ANOTHER little advance is the Lord's bringing him from that field of restlessness to the field of despair; so as to despair of help in themselves and in their endeavors; to despair of ever getting victory by their legal diligence; to despair of life by the law, and their own obedience thereto. When the soul is upon this field, it meets with the law and sees the extent and spirituality of it, as exacting no less than perfection; internal perfection, in heart and nature; external perfection in lip and life; eternal perfection in point of continuance and duration.

When the lord brings a man to this despair in himself, and to despair of relief from creatures and means, then there begins to be some hope in Israel concerning him. Therefore:

5. ANOTHER LITTLE ADVANCE, while the Lord is bringing the man by little and little to the gospel-camp, is this: He brings him from the field of despair to the field of hope: I mean, to a distant sight of the cape of good hope, in the hearing of the glad news of the gospel, concerning the Captain of salvation, in whom alone poor enslaved sinners may be made more than conquerors over sin, Satan, and the world; over death and hell, and all their spiritual enemies. The soul hears of this mighty Captain, that He is able to save to the uttermost; and so conceives hope that perhaps He will show mercy, and deliver a poor captive. I speak not here of the new and lively hope that is the fruit and effect of faith; for, on this field of hope that I speak of, the man is yet between hope and despair, as it were: this hope cannot be a helmet to him, while he yet lacks the shield of faith; yet it is such a hope, wrought by the objective revelation of the gospel, as keeps him from sinking into utter discouragement; and excites, enables, and encourages him to go forward, because he sees a door of hope open, in the call of the gospel, wherein he hears Christ calling him to come freely, and receive His grace.

When the man is brought to this, he is truly not far from the field of battle; Therefore,

6. ANOTHER LITTLE ADVANCE IS, after the soul is brought over all those fields, by the good hand of God upon him, he is brought to the, field of saving faith, getting such a discovery of Jesus Christ, the Captain of salvation, by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, as powerfully determines him to take on with Him as a volunteer, being made willing in the day of power. Here the man sees Him girding His sword upon His thigh, even His glory and majesty. By this sword of glorious grace, the sinner is made a willing subject to follow the glorious Captain, and employ Him to fight all his battles, and drive out all the nations of his lusts before him. Thus you see how, "by little and little," the Lord brings them forth to the field of battle; and by what various degrees they are brought from slaves of the devil and their lusts, to be soldiers of Christ. And now, as by little and little He brings them to the field of battle against the nations in

a day of power, so by little and little carries on the conquest, till the day of death, when the warfare is accomplished.

**Though human might oppose;  
The Lord my helper, I shall be  
Triumphant o'er foes.  
Though nations compass me about,  
The swarming hosts of sin,  
Yet in the name of God the Lord  
I shall the vict'ry win.  
Psalm 118**

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