

A hand holding a sword against a blue sky with clouds. The hand is wearing a metal wrist guard and a ring. The sword is held diagonally across the frame.

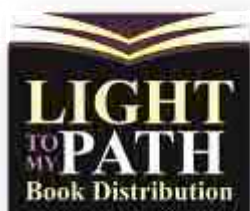
JOSHUA, JUDGES *and* RUTH

A Devotional Look
at Israel's Conquest of
Canaan and
Leadership
Under her
Judges

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Joshua, Judges and Ruth

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and Israel's Leadership under her Judges



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Joshua, Judges and Ruth

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Diane Mac Leod, Lee Tuson

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PREFACE TO JOSHUA

The book of Joshua records the conquest of the Promised Land under the capable leadership of Joshua, the successor of Moses. Unlike Moses, Joshua was a military leader. He was God's man for the time. Through him, all the land west of the Jordan River would be brought under Israel's control.

It is interesting to note that, while Joshua was a military commander, his strength and success were in his obedience to the Lord God. This becomes powerfully evident on several occasions. We see what happens when Achan disobeys the Lord and risks the lives of many men in Joshua's army in the city of Ai. Jericho's walls fell, not by military might but by a simple act of obedience to God.

Joshua is an inspiring story of what is possible when we put God first and walk in His ways. Joshua saw God do the impossible as he stepped out in faithful obedience to His commands. God is looking for people like Joshua in our day, people who understand that victory is not in human strength and wisdom but in simple obedience.

As you read this book be inspired by the power of God that moves in and through Joshua. Be encouraged in the fact that God keeps His promises. Watch what happens when Israel fails to obey God. The book of Joshua is a reminder

to us of what the Lord God wants to do today. He is building His kingdom, pulling down the strongholds of the enemy through simple people like you and me who chose to follow Him and walk in obedience to His call and leading.

May the Lord be pleased to use this commentary to inspire the reader to step out more boldly in faithful obedience to the Lord God and His call.

F. Wayne MacLeod

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA

Author:

There is no indication in the book of Joshua as to its author. We do have a brief record in Joshua 24:25 about him drawing up a covenant at Shechem and recording this in the Book of the Law of God:

(25) On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. (26) And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

This passage, however, seems to refer to a particular covenant that Joshua wrote and not necessarily to the entire book. Traditionally, Joshua is given credit for its authorship. For the most part, however, the book seems to be written about Joshua and does not read as if Joshua were writing the events about himself.

Background:

Joshua was the son of Nun from the tribe of Ephraim. He was likely born in Egypt during the time of captivity. In Numbers 13:16 we read that his name was Hoshea but

Moses changed it to Joshua, meaning, “Jehovah is help” or “Jehovah is Saviour”. Joshua served with Moses as a military commander (see Exodus 17:8-16). He went part way up Mount Sinai when Moses brought down the tablets containing the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32:17). He was one of the twelve spies Moses sent into the land of Canaan in Numbers 13:16-17. He, along with Caleb, believed the Lord would give them victory over the stronger Canaanites. For their faith, they were permitted to enter the Promised Land when all the other Israelites their age perished in the wilderness for unbelief. At the time of his death, Moses commissioned Joshua to lead Israel into the land of Canaan. Joshua is distinguished primarily as the military commander who helped Israel conquer the land of Canaan. He was also an able administrator who saw that each tribe was given its plot of land. Joshua’s spiritual leadership is also evident in the closing chapters of the book as he challenges his people to walk faithfully with the Lord their God in the land He was giving them.

Importance of the Books for Today:

The book of Joshua is important historically because of what it teaches us about how God gave the land of Canaan to Israel. It records the details of the conquest of the land under the leadership of Joshua.

Beyond the historical value of the book we see its tremendous spiritual significance. The book has a number of lessons to teach us as believers today. The name “Joshua” is the Hebrew form of “Jesus” in Greek. He bears the same name as the Lord Jesus and is seen in many ways as a prophetic picture of Christ. His name means “Jehovah our Saviour.” He led his people victoriously into the Promised Land. This is what the Lord Jesus came to do. Joshua’s

life and ministry looks forward to an even greater deliverance and inheritance that would come through the Lord Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews wrote about this in Hebrews 4:8-10 when he said:

- (8) For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day.
(9) There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; (10) for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

There are many practical encouragements in the book of Joshua for us today. We see how God was so willing to give His people victory over their enemies. We see how He led His people into those victories. We also see what happens when God's people did not consult Him. Despite their failures, God still accomplished His purpose. We find strength and comfort in the examples in this book.

Joshua reminds us that victory comes through obedience to the Lord God and His Word. In his final challenge to Israel, Joshua called for them to make a decision. They were either to serve the Lord and walk in His ways or turn from Him and follow the gods of the nations around them. He warns them, however, that their future as a nation depended in the decision they made. If they sought God and His ways, they would prosper in the land He had promised them. If they turned from him they would lose everything.

The book teaches us some important lessons about working together as believers. God's people were deceived by their neighbours into making a treaty of peace. They jumped to conclusions and almost engaged in civil war with their brothers. What is exciting about this book is how Joshua and his leaders worked out these issues. No battle

will come without its conflicts. Joshua, however, gives us insight into how to deal with those conflicts when they arise.

1

JOSHUA'S CALL

Read Joshua 1:1-18

Under Moses' capable leadership, the people of Israel were established as a nation under God. He delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, instructed them in God's laws and led them through the wilderness to the door of the Promised Land. Before he died, Moses commissioned a man by the name of Joshua to take his place as the next leader of Israel (Deuteronomy 3:28).

Joshua's role as leader of God's people would be very different from the leadership of Moses. Moses was a priest and prophet. Joshua would be a military commander. Different times demanded different leadership.

There would be an adjustment for God's people as they learned to deal with a new leadership style and vision. Joshua would not have taken his calling lightly. I am sure he felt somewhat unworthy of following in the footsteps of such a powerful leader. God's purpose for his life was very evident, however, and Joshua willingly accepted God's will.

As we begin, in verse 2, God shared with Joshua His heart for Israel. God told Joshua that he wanted him to prepare to cross the Jordan River and enter the land He wanted to give His people (verse 2). God promised that He would give them this entire land (verse 3). Their territory would extend from the desert of Lebanon and the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. We need to understand that God had a purpose for His people. In these verses He shared with Joshua His vision for the nation. He did this for a very important reason.

If Joshua was going to lead God's people, he needed to do so in accordance with the purpose and plan of God. All too often we forget that we are God's servants called to do God's will. This should go without saying, but the reality of the matter is that many of God's servants do not share His heart or vision. All too many have never truly sought God's will for their ministry. They have their own ideas of what they want to accomplish. If we want to serve God, we need to have a clear sense of His direction and purpose. In this passage we see how God shared His purpose with Joshua. He showed him how much land he wanted to give His people. He showed him the boundaries of that land. In sharing this, God gives Joshua direction and boundaries for his leadership.

Notice that there were boundaries to the territory that God wanted to give His people. As a good leader Joshua needed to know how far God wanted to take His people. Sometimes our vision goes beyond what God wants to give us. Sometimes our vision is much less than God's.

With the success of his campaigns, there may have been the temptation for Joshua to go further than God wanted him to go. At other times we are not ready to go far enough in our conquest of the land God had given us. A good

leader will seek the Lord's direction. He will not go beyond what God had given, but he will do everything in his power to complete all that God has given him to do. In these verses God gives Joshua a clear sense of what He was expecting from him.

Notice also in verse 5 that not only did God show Joshua His purpose, but He also promised to equip him to accomplish that purposes. God told Joshua that no one would be able to stand against him all the days of his life. God would protect him from his enemies. His presence would go with him wherever he went (verse 5). God would never forsake him. Joshua knew that as he stepped out in obedience to the will and purpose of God, he could do so knowing that God would always be with him. When he had to make an important decision, God would be guiding him. When he had to face a powerful enemy, God would fight with him. God stands with those He calls.

God told Joshua that he was to be strong and courageous because victory was assured (verse 6). Notice that God also told Joshua that He would lead His people to possess the land He had promised them. With God at his side victory was assured. How could he fail if Almighty God was with him? What enemy could overpower him if God stood with him? What a privilege it is to have the Lord God stand with us as we step out in His will to accomplish His purpose. Victory is ours not because we are strong, but because the Lord our God stands with us.

With God at his side, Joshua was to be strong and courageous. It is one thing to know that God is with us and another to act as if God is with us. Joshua was to let his knowledge of God's presence give him strength to step out boldly. He was not to shrink back from the enemy. He was

to find courage to face the dangers and obstacles the enemy would throw in his path. Does the knowledge of God's presence change how you do ministry? The knowledge that God is with us is not just a comforting thought, it also carries with it an obligation. Those who know that God is with them will stand more boldly to face the enemy. They will take greater risks because they know that nothing is impossible for God.

Verse 7 is a very important verse in the life and ministry of Joshua. If Joshua was going to be successful in his ministry, he would have to learn to walk in obedience to the Lord God and His law. In verse 7 God warned Joshua:

Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

When God says, "Be careful," He is warning Joshua of a serious danger. If there was one thing that would destroy him and his ministry it would be disobedience to the Lord God and His law.

With this in mind, God told Joshua that he was not to let the Book of the Law depart from his mouth (verse 8). In other words, Joshua was to speak of the Word often. He was to share it with others and have it regularly read. Joshua was also to meditate on the Word of God day and night. He was to think and reflect on that Word each day. His thoughts and attitudes were to be governed by the Word of God. By keeping God's law fresh in his mind, it would influence every decision he made. God's Word was to guide his thinking, his actions and his decisions as a leader of God's people.

God promised that if Joshua obeyed and did things in accordance with the law of God, then he would be successful. We can be assured that Joshua would be challenged by Satan on this point. Throughout the history of the world, Satan has often challenged God's people in the area of obedience to God's Word. The temptation to compromise would be very real for Joshua, but God was calling him to be faithful to every word. There would be powerful enemies sent against Joshua. Those enemies would be terrifying. In those times, compromise would be a temptation. There would be times when things would not go as Joshua expected. In those times of discouragement he might be tempted to turn slightly from the clear commands of the Law. God warns him, however, not to be terrified or discouraged. He was to persevere in obedience to God and His law. In obedience alone God promised success.

Joshua heard the call of God and His warning. In verses 10-11 he accepted God's call on his life, and assembling his officers to his side, challenged them to prepare the people to cross the Jordan to take possession of the land. Joshua accepted this position knowing that there would be many challenges, enemies, and battles. Joshua would have to go to the Lord for guidance, strength and wisdom. Being called to do something and having God at your side does not mean that you will never have to struggle.

In verses 12-15 Joshua spoke particularly to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. We read in Numbers 32:1-27 how these tribes had asked Moses for permission to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan. It was agreed that these tribes settle in this region on the condition that they help their brothers fight the enemy and settle in the land God had promised them in Canaan.

In verses 12-15 Joshua reminded these tribes of this obligation. The women and children of these tribes would not be forced to travel with them as they fought off the inhabitants of the land. Only when the Lord gave rest to their brothers and sisters, were the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh free to return to their own land (verse 15). The concern of their brothers and sisters was to be their concern as well. Imagine what it would be like if God's people could give themselves no rest until their brothers and sisters had conquered all that God had given them to conquer. God was calling the nation to be concerned one for another. They were to see the needs of their brothers and sisters to be as important as their own.

God gave Joshua favour with the people. In verses 16-17 they said, "Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you." The people even made a commitment that whoever disobeyed Joshua's commands was to be put to death (verse 18). They surrendered whole-heartedly to Joshua and his leadership.

God called Joshua to lead His people as they possessed the land of Canaan. When He called him, He also showed him His purpose. He promised to stand with him in all his endeavours as long as he walked in obedience to His Word. Joshua was to be careful not to wander in any way from that law. His success hinged on obedience to God. God gave Joshua favour with the people and they stood firmly behind him.

For Consideration:

- What has God called you to do for Him? Have you been faithful to this call?
- What is God's heart for your ministry? Is it possible for us to serve our own purpose in ministry and not the Lord's?
- What comfort and encouragement do you find in knowing that God stands with us in ministry? How does the knowledge of God's presence change how we do things?
- What is the importance of God's Word in our ministry? Can any ministry succeed if we are not living in obedience to God's Word?
- What do we learn about the importance of considering the needs of others as being as important as our own?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you His purpose for your ministry? Ask Him to keep you focused on His will and not your own.
- Thank the Lord that He promises to be with you. Ask Him to help you to find confidence and strength in the knowledge of His presence.
- Ask God to give you a heart for your brother and sister in need.

- Thank God that He has given us His Word as a guide and comfort. Ask Him to give you a deeper desire for His Word. Ask Him to help you to live in obedience to the Scriptures.

2

RAHAB AND THE SPIES

Read Joshua 2:1-24

Joshua did not waste any time pursuing the purpose of the Lord for his life. God had made it clear to him that he was to defeat his enemies and settle his people in their land. In obedience to the Lord, Joshua prepared his men for battle.

In chapter 2 Joshua secretly sent men to spy out the city of Jericho (verse 1). The spies went out in obedience to Joshua's order. When they arrived in Jericho, they found a place to stay with a woman by the name of Rahab. We are told that Rahab was a prostitute. A footnote in the NIV translation says that Rahab could also have been an inn-keeper. This shows us that the spies did not go to her because she was a prostitute, but because she had a place to stay.

We are not told what the spies did during their stay in Jericho. However, word of their presence did get out and the king of Jericho was informed (verse 2). The king immediately sent a message to Rahab commanding her to bring to him the men who had come to her house that night. He informed her that they had come to spy out the land (verse 3).

God softened Rahab's heart toward the spies, and she determined that she would not release them to the king, but do everything in her power to protect them. She told the king that the two men had come to her but she did not know where they had come from (verse 4). In saying this Rahab was protecting herself. She did not want the king to see her as a protector of foreign spies.

Rahab also told the king that the men left her house at dusk just when the gates of the city were being closed and she did not know where they went. She advised him that if he sent men after them quickly he might be able to catch up with them (verse 5). In saying these things Rahab was deceiving her king and buying time for the spies.

Verse 6 tells us that Rahab took the spies and hid them on her roof under stalks of flax she had laid out there. The king's men, following the advice of Rahab, went out in pursuit of the spies. As soon as the king's men left, the gates of the city were closed. This would keep the spies from either entering or leaving the city (verse 7).

Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up to the roof to speak with them. What she told them that day was significant. She told them that she knew the Lord had given them the land. She also told them that a great fear had come over all the people who lived in her country because of the Israelites (verse 9). Her nation had heard how the Lord had gone before them and dried up the waters of the Red Sea for them when they came up out of Egypt. They had also heard how God had given them victory over King Og and two kings of the Amorites (verse 10). The story of what God was doing in His people preceded them. The heart of the entire nation was melting in fear of God and His people (verse 11).

God was doing a powerful work in the lives of His people. Unbelievers stood in awe of what God was doing. They saw the power and majesty of God displayed in the lives of His people. They knew that God was with His people and this caused them to fear and tremble. What does the unbeliever see in the lives of God's people today?

The words of Rahab were prophetic in nature. While she did not live a life that pleased the Lord God of Israel, nor did she belong to His people, she was still used of God to help the entire nation of Israel. These spies had come to spy out the city of Jericho. What Rahab told the spies that day confirmed to them that God was with them. They would go back to Joshua and tell him what Rahab had said. Through this prostitute, God was telling the great military commander Joshua that He would give Him the city of Jericho and the surrounding territory. God often speaks in strange ways and through strange people.

That night Rahab had a very particular request. She asked the spies to swear to her that they would show kindness to her and her family when they attacked the city of Jericho. It was not likely that the spies told her that they were going to do this. As spies this was a secret they would have kept to themselves. Rahab knew, however, that these men would not only return but that they would also conquer the city and take over her country. Rahab simply asked that when they did return, they would remember her kindness to them by sparing her life and the lives of her parents, brothers, sisters and all who belonged to her family (verses 12-13). She asked them to give her a sign to confirm this promise (verse 12).

The spies listened to Rahab and promised on their own lives, that they would do as she asked. In other words, if her family perished as a result of the battle, they would

give their own lives to her in compensation. The only condition was that she not speak a word to anyone about them and their reason for being in the city. If she kept their secret, they would treat her kindly and be faithful to their promise to protect her and her family (verse 14).

Once the agreement was made, Rahab let the spies down the city wall by a rope through her window. Her house formed part of the city wall (verse 15). As they left, Rahab told the spies that they were to go to the hills and hide there for three days before returning to their land. This way, their pursuers would not find them (verse 16).

Before parting company with Rahab, the spies requested that she make an oath with them (verse 17). They told her that she was to tie a scarlet cord in the window through which she had let them down. They also made her promise that she would gather her family into her house when they attacked the city (verse 18). They also told her that if she told anyone what they were doing in the city they would also be released from their promise to her (verse 20). Rahab agreed to all these conditions and tied a scarlet cord in her window (verse 21). The spies climbed down the wall and fled for the safety of the hills.

Let me speak briefly on the subject of the cord that Rahab would use to indicate where she and her family were. Notice that the colour of the cord was scarlet. This is the colour of blood, which is often used as a symbol for Christ and his work. These men also had heard the story of how blood was painted over the doorposts of the houses of their fathers and mothers in Egypt. When the angel of death passed over the land and saw the blood on the doorpost that family was spared from death. This seems to be the symbol here. The scarlet cord marked Rahab's house as being the home of a protected people. Only under the

covering of that scarlet cord, would there be any safety for Rahab and her relatives.

This is a powerful picture of what the Lord Jesus has done for us. He protects and keeps all who will accept His death on their behalf. His blood was shed for sin and all who will take cover under the shelter of His blood can be saved from the judgment of God.

The king's men pursued the spies. They searched all along the road but could not find them. They returned to Jericho empty-handed. After three day of hiding in the hills, the spies returned to Joshua. When they arrived home, they told him all that had happened (verse 23). They were convinced that the Lord had given the land into their hands (verse 24). A big part of that conviction came through the words of Rahab the prostitute.

For Consideration:

- Who was Rahab? How does God use her in the lives of the two spies?
- What evidence do we have of the faith of Rahab in the God of Israel?
- How did the inhabitants of Jericho see the people of God? What evidence was there of His presence and power in their lives? To what extent does the unbelieving world see the presence and power of Christ in us?

- How is the scarlet cord tied in the window of Rahab's house a picture of the Passover and ultimately a picture of the Lord Jesus?
- What does this passage tell us about the victory God wants to give His people?
- What do we learn in this chapter about the type of person God can use?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to reveal Himself and His power even more in your life.
- Thank the Lord that under His blood we are safe and secure from our enemies.
- Thank the Lord for the victory He wants to give us as believers. Thank Him that even Satan trembles at the thought of God's power in us.

3

CROSSING THE JORDAN

Read Joshua 3:1-17

The two spies who had gone into Canaan had given their report to Joshua. Joshua understood from this report that the Lord wanted them to cross the Jordan River and conquer the city of Jericho. With this encouragement, Joshua prepared his men for battle. Verse 1 tells us that it was early in the morning that Joshua and his men set out for Shittim and camped by the Jordan. They would camp there for three days.

After three days, officers went through the camp giving orders to the people (verses 2-3). They were commanded to follow the ark and the Levites who were carrying it (verse 3). Notice, however, that the officers made it clear that they were to keep a distance of one thousand yards (900 meters) between them and the ark of God. They were to follow it at a distance. There are several things we need to say about this.

First the ark was the place where God chose to reveal His presence to His people. By following the ark, the people of God were following the Lord who was going ahead of them not only to lead them but also to protect them. The

ark of God was a visible symbol to the people that God was with them as they went to conquer the land.

Notice also that while the ark of God went ahead of the people, they were not to approach it or go near it. There was a distance between God and His people. God would lead them and go before them, but He was also to be respected and honoured. To approach the ark in an unworthy or unauthorized way was to perish. God's people were sinners. He was a holy and just God. As they followed His leading, God's people were never to forget that He was a holy God who demanded obedience and respect.

For this reason, the officers challenged the people to consecrate themselves before God because He was going to manifest His presence in their midst (verse 5). When the officers told the people to consecrate themselves, they were telling them to deal with anything that would offend a holy and just God. This meant getting rid of anything that would grieve Him. It meant confessing their sins and making things right with Him. The holy and just God was going to make His presence known to them the next day. They needed to be ready.

In verse 6 Joshua told the priests to take the ark and pass ahead of the people. God's people were to follow them. As Christian leaders we are to set an example for those God has put under our charge. It is our responsibility to go before them and show them the way.

God told Joshua in verse 7 that He would exalt him in the eyes of Israel so that they would know that God was with him just as He was with Moses. God wanted His people to respect and honour Joshua as His chosen servant. In order that people would follow and listen to him, God chose

to give Joshua favour in their eyes. Victory would be difficult if the people of God did not listen to or respect the leader God had set above them. God makes sure that Joshua has the respect of the people so that this will not be a hindrance to His people conquering the land He had promised them.

In verse 8 God told Joshua to command the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant to the edge of the Jordan River and to stand there in the water. There at the water's edge, God would reveal His power and presence.

To prepare the people for what God was going to do, Joshua summoned them and told them the words God had given him. He told them that God was going to give them victory by driving out the various nations before them (verse 10). He told them that the Ark of the Covenant of God would go into the Jordan before them and show them how to cross into victory (verse 11).

When Joshua had spoken to the people, he chose one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (verse 12). In Joshua 4:2-3 we see that these men would each carry a stone from the river and set it up as a memorial to the work of God that day. For the moment these twelve men would stand and watch what God would do.

As soon as the feet of the priests who carried the ark, touched the waters of the Jordan, the flow of the water was cut off so they stood on dry land (verse 13). This parallels what took place when the waters of the Red Sea piled up so that the people could cross on dry land when they were escaping the Egyptians under the leadership of Moses. The similarity of these two incidents is not without reason. God wanted the people to know that He was with Joshua

as He had been with Moses. He wanted the people to follow Joshua as they had followed Moses. With this miraculous sign, He would confirm Joshua as their leader. He would also confirm His purpose for them to conquer the land of Canaan. This would give the people great courage as they began a long battle to possess the land of Canaan.

As the Ark of the Covenant went before the people, the obstacle standing between them and Canaan was removed. The waters of the Jordan stopped so that God's people could cross over into the land He had promised. When the people saw that the Jordan River had stopped flowing and the waters piled up like a heap, they broke camp and crossed to the other side with the priests carrying the ark before them (verse 14).

In verses 15-17 the author takes time to explain more fully what actually took place that day. We are told that the Jordan was at flood stage at that time (verse 15). This would have made it certainly very difficult, if not impossible, for the people to cross to the other side. We are told, however, that as soon as the feet of the priests who carried the ark touched those flood waters the waters upstream stopped flowing. The waters piled up in a heap a great distance away at a town called Adam. The water in the Jordan from Adam down to the Salt Sea was completely cut off (verse 16). This allowed the people of God the opportunity to cross over to the other side. As the people crossed the Jordan on dry ground, the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant stood in the middle of the river until all the nation had crossed. Their work was not finished until the very last person crossed over safely. What a beautiful picture of what it means to be a leader today. These priests stood firm in the middle of the Jordan River. The nearest person to them was required to be at least one thousand yards or almost a kilometre away. Their role was a lonely

one. They could see people crossing at a distance, but they were too far from them to speak. They held up the ark for many long hours as the people crossed to safety. Sometimes the role of leader is a thankless and lonely job, but it is important that we be faithful. The lives of countless people depend on our faithfulness.

What took place that day was nothing short of a miracle. This miracle served several purposes. First it stirred up the confidence of the people in Joshua as their leader by showing them that God was with him as He had been with Moses. Second, it showed the people that God had a particular purpose in mind for them. He wanted to give them victory and He would go before them as they sought to conquer the land He had promised them. Finally, the miracle had a very practical purpose and was intended to physically enable God's people to cross over to the other side of the Jordan River. God removed the barrier between His people and the land He had promised.

This passage also has something to tell us about leadership. We see how God gave Joshua favour in the eyes of the people. We see how Joshua took His directions from the Lord. We see how God called the priests to go before the people to show them the way. We discover how God worked through these ordinary priests to perform a wonderful miracle. We see the faithful perseverance of the priests who stood firmly in the middle of the Jordan until all had passed safely to the other side. God is looking for leaders like this in our day as well.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn from this passage about the importance of following God? Is there any area of your life where you have been running ahead of God?
- What does it mean to consecrate ourselves before God? Is there anything in your life that hinders the work of God?
- What do we learn in this passage about the tension between God as a God of mercy and love who guides and protects and God as a God of holiness and justice who judges sin and demands respect? How do we maintain these attributes in balance?
- What does this passage teach us about leadership and its obligations?
- What did this miracle accomplish in the lives of God's people?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you anything in your life that hinders His work in you and your community?
- Ask God to forgive you for times when you have exalted yourself. Thank Him for the favour He has given you in the eyes of other people so that you can have an impact on their lives for His sake.
- Take a moment to consider what you have learned about leadership from this passage. Ask God to make you more like the leaders in this chapter.

- Thank God that He is a God who still does miracles. Thank Him that He is able to give you the victory you need in your situation.

4

MEMORIALS

Read Joshua 4:1-24

One of our weaknesses as human beings has to do with an inability to remember the goodness and faithfulness of God. He gives us victory in one situation but we still worry about the next. We forget all too quickly the victories God gives us, and fail to learn the lessons from them. Throughout the Bible we see how God encourages His people to set up memorials to remember His goodness. Many of the feasts and festivals of the Old Testament were designed to remind God's people of His wonderful works on their behalf. In the New Testament we celebrate the Lord's Table that reminds us of His death and resurrection. Here in this chapter of Joshua, God challenged His people to set up monuments to remember His faithfulness and power.

In chapter 3 we saw how God stopped the flow of the Jordan River so His people could cross to the other side. When the whole nation had crossed the Jordan the Lord spoke to Joshua and told him to choose twelve men, one from every tribe. These men were to take twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan where the priests had stood. They were to carry the stones from the Jordan River to the place where they would stay that night. There the stones were to be set up as a memorial (verses 2-3).

Joshua called together the twelve men and told them to go to the place the priests had stood in the middle of the Jordan. Each man was to take up a stone and carry it on his shoulders to the place where they would camp that night (verse 5).

From verse 6 it is quite clear that these stones were to serve as a memorial for the generations to come. Future generations passing by would see these peculiar stones and ask what they meant (verse 6). This would give God's people the opportunity to tell the story of how God stopped the flow of the Jordan so His people could cross to the other side (verse 7).

Let me take a moment to consider these stones. They served three purposes for the people of God. First, they helped God's people to remember the story of His victory that day. They reminded them of how God enabled them to cross the Jordan River.

Second, they also served as physical proof of the miracle that had taken place that day. These stones were likely large and smooth river stones. They stood out in the landscape as being out of place. Anyone who looked at them could see that they were river stones. They served as physical proof that someone had gone into the river and pulled these stones out. This was very convincing evidence that the crossing of the Jordan was real and not a made up story.

Finally, these stones provided God's people with a wonderful witnessing tool. When people asked about the stones, they would have the opportunity to share how God had stopped the flow of the Jordan for them. This would certainly have given those who heard story and saw the stones cause to reflect on the power and glory of God in a

wonderful way. The twelve stones were gathered from the river as Joshua had commanded and carried with them to Gilgal where they were set up as a memorial to the great work of the Lord (verse 19).

In verse 10 we return to the priests who stood in middle of the Jordan River with the ark of God. This verse tells us that these men stood in the middle of the Jordan River until everything the Lord had commanded had been completed. Only when all the people had crossed and the stones had been gathered from the river bed did the priests cross over to the other side (verse 11).

Special reference is made here to the men of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh who crossed over (verse 12). These tribes had chosen to settle on the other side of the Jordan. They had, however, agreed to send their men to fight alongside their brothers until all the land had been conquered and settled. Notice that forty thousand men armed for battle crossed the Jordan River to the plains of Jordan ready to fight (verse 13).

These priests were God's representatives holding back the power of the river until all His people were safe. This is the call of God on the lives of His servants today as well. He calls us as His servants to stand firm pushing back the forces of darkness and evil until all His people are safely on the other shore. This is not an easy task but it is a very important one requiring great perseverance and patience. What a privilege and honour it is to be priests who serve in this capacity for men and women in need.

According to verse 14, the Lord used this incident to exalt Joshua in the sight of Israel. This incident proved to God's people that He was with Joshua. They saw him more clearly as God's representative and one in whom they

could put their confidence. As a result, they revered him just as they revered Moses before him. How easy it would have been for the people to compare Joshua to Moses who had been used so powerfully to deliver them from the bondage of Egypt. I can imagine that Joshua felt somewhat awkward following in the footsteps of such a mighty man of God. The reality of the matter, however, is that Moses was a simple instrument in the hands of a powerful God. Joshua was no different. God could use Joshua just as He had used Moses. There is wonderful encouragement in this for us all. The same God who worked in Joshua and Moses is willing to work in us as well. The power to serve is not in us but in God who works through us.

When everything God intended that day was complete, God told Joshua to command the priests to come up out of the Jordan River with the ark (verses 15-17). Verse 18 tells us that as soon as the priests came up out of the water with the ark, the river returned to its flood stage. There could be no doubt that God had done a wonderful thing that day.

It was on the tenth day of the first month that the people crossed the Jordan and travelled to Gilgal where they camped. Gilgal was on the eastern border of Jericho (verse 19). There in Gilgal, the twelve stones that had been taken from the Jordan River were set up as a memorial (verse 20). Joshua told the people that when their descendants asked them the meaning of these stones, they were to tell them of how Israel crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, just as they had crossed the Red Sea in the days of Moses (verses 21-23). Joshua told the people that the Lord did this for two reasons.

First so that all the people of the earth would know that His hand was powerful. It is the intention of the Lord God to reveal Himself to the whole world as a powerful and holy God to whom nothing was impossible. God has always had a missionary heart.

Second, God performed this miracle so that His people would always fear and reverence Him as their God. They had seen His awesome power on their behalf. They had seen how He was able to act on their behalf. His love for them was real. He pushed back the waters of the Jordan for them. As they began their conquest of the land of Canaan, God's people were fully aware that nothing was impossible for their God. If the mighty Jordan in flood stage was no match for Him, certainly He could give them the land He had promised. No enemy was big enough to overcome them. They could face the battles before them with confidence in the powerful and loving God who acted on their behalf

For Consideration:

- Have you ever seen God do a wonderful work only to forget what you had seen the next time you had to face a trial or struggle? Explain.
- Do you have "memorials" or ways to remind yourself of the goodness and power of your God? What can you do to help yourself remember God's goodness in your life?
- How did the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant give us an example of true leadership?

- The God who worked in Moses also worked in the life of Joshua. He is the same God who still works in His people. What encouragement do you receive from this?
- How has God demonstrated His power and glory to you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for a time that He clearly revealed His power and glory to you. Ask Him to help you remember this when you face the trials that will come your way.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use you to accomplish His purpose. Ask Him to demonstrate His power and glory more fully in your life.
- Thank the Lord for working in your life. Thank Him that He is willing to push back the obstacles that stand between you and His purposes, just as He did for the people in Joshua's day.

5

PREPARATIONS

Read Joshua 5:1-15

With most things in life, if we want to do a good job, we need to prepare well. An athlete knows that he or she must train seriously for a competition. Without adequate preparation in the form of study, a student may fail his exam. Preparation is necessary in the work of the Lord as well. In this chapter we see how God prepared His people for the conquest of the land of Canaan.

Notice in verse 1 how the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and the Canaanite kings along the coast lost courage when they saw how the Lord had dried up the Jordan River before Israel. We have already seen how God used this in the lives of His people to assure them of His presence. By drying up the Jordan, God inspired His people and showed them that He was with them. This united and encouraged Israel in the battle before them. Beyond this, however, the crossing of the Jordan River on dry ground caused the Canaanites and the Amorites to fear God and His people. Who could stand up to a God who could stop the Jordan River?

We see from this how the Lord God went before His people to prepare the land for their conquest. As He went before

them, God shattered the confidence of the enemy. The miracle of the crossing of the Jordan was clear proof to the people of Canaan that there was a power at work that was stronger than any power they had ever seen. They knew that they were no match for the God of Israel.

Notice in verses 2-7 that there was also preparation required for God's people before they could be released into battle. God spoke to Joshua and told him to make flint knives in order to circumcise the Israelite men (verse 2). The place where this circumcision took place would be known as Gibeath Haaroloth with means literally "Hill of Foreskins" (verse 3).

Verses 4-7 explain to us the reason Joshua had to circumcise these men. Circumcision was a requirement for every male Israelite. It was a sign that they belonged to the Lord God. This command was given by God through Abraham in Genesis 17:11-14. According to Genesis 17:11-14, Israelite males who were not circumcised were to be cut off from the people of God.

Prior to leaving Egypt, the Israelite men had been circumcised. However, during the forty years the Israelites had travelled through the desert, circumcision had not been practiced. The Israelites who wandered through the desert grumbled and complained and often refused to follow God's requirements. Those who were now in Joshua's army had not been circumcised.

If these men were to be successful in their battle, they would have to get right with God. To this point God had been faithful to them despite the fact that they were not circumcised. God is a merciful God. There comes a time, however, when in order to progress further in our relationship with God and our ministry, we will have to deal with

the obstacles to His blessing. If Joshua's army was going to experience further blessing from God, they would have to be circumcised as God required.

In obedience to God, Joshua ordered that all males be circumcised. We are not told how long this took or how many men there were in the nation at that time, but one thing is sure. They were in a very vulnerable position. Being circumcised would have put them at risk. Had the enemy become aware that all the men were recovering from their circumcision, this would have created for them an ideal opportunity to attack. Not only did this circumcision enable God's people to put things right with God but it also gave them yet another opportunity to learn to trust Him in their weakness.

Verse 8 tells us that the whole nation remained camped in the area of Gibeath Haaroloth until they had healed from their circumcision. At that time, the enemy did not approach. God protected and kept them as they obeyed Him and His law. The Lord was pleased with their obedience and in verse 9 he told Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." What was the reproach of Egypt? The people of God were in bondage as slaves in Egypt. They were mistreated and abused by their cruel masters. They were beaten and forced to work for a cause that was not their own. Now, however, things were going to change. God was going to give them their own land. He was going to allow them to plant their own gardens and build their own homes. They would live in this own land and be blessed abundantly by God. They would no longer live as slaves.

The circumcision of the male Israelites seems to be a turning point for Israel. By consenting to circumcision, these males released an even greater blessing of God on their

nation. They removed the obstacle that hindered the fuller blessing of God.

Notice also in verse 10 that on the fourteenth day of the month the Israelites celebrated the Passover in Gilgal. The Passover was a celebration to remember how God had set His people free from the bondage of Egypt. Before moving forward, God's people needed to look back. They needed to be reminded of the great victory of God and His mercy in delivering them from the bondage of Egypt. By looking back at God's wonderful deliverance, God's people were given courage to face their future. They were reminded by this Passover of how God had set their ancestors free. They were reassured that He could deliver them as well.

The Passover was a time not only for remembering their history; it was also a time of thanksgiving and praise. During this celebration, God's people honoured Him as their Deliverer. They worshiped Him for His goodness and mercy and committed themselves to trust Him in the future. All this was an important part of preparing God's people for what He had in store in the coming months.

Notice something else that happened the day after the Passover celebration. For the very first time in forty years, God's people ate the produce of the land. During their wilderness wandering they had eaten manna. In verse 11, they enjoyed unleavened bread and roasted grain. The day after the Passover, God stopped providing manna. Now they would enjoy the fruit of the land God was giving them. God's blessing was released on them in a new way. The daily diet of manna would give way to a bountiful variety of fruits, grains and meats. They would experience the provision of God in a new and delightful way. Heaven was releasing its blessings on an obedient people.

Notice finally that God meets particularly with Joshua. Joshua was near the city of Jericho when he saw a man in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand (verse 13). Joshua did not know what to think of this man. He did not know if he was an enemy or a friend so he asked him, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

The response of the man is interesting, "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (verse 14). Obviously, this person was an angel of the Lord. He had come as a messenger to Joshua. When Joshua heard the reply he fell face down and asked him what message he had for him. The angel told Joshua to take off his sandals because the place he was standing was holy (verse 15).

There are a couple of details we need to examine in this context. Notice first, that when Joshua asked the angel if he was for him or for his enemies the angel replied that he was for neither. We should not assume from this that God was neutral. God had already proven, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that He was with His people and wanted to give them victory over the inhabitants of the land. When the angel told Joshua that He was neither for him or his enemies he was telling him that he had not come to fight with him or for him. The angel had come for another purpose. That purpose can be seen in verse 15 when he commanded Joshua to take off his sandals because he was on holy ground. This takes us back to the days of Moses in Exodus 3 when the Lord called him to return to his people and lead them out of Egypt. The Lord God used the same words with Moses that day in Exodus 3:5:

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

When Moses removed his sandals God spoke to him and commissioned him to lead His people out of Egypt. We do not have the words of the angel to Joshua in this chapter, but we are safe to assume that on that occasion the Lord God commissioned Joshua just as he had commissioned Moses to lead His people into victory over their enemies.

As God prepared His people for the conquest of the land of Canaan, He also prepared Joshua and gifted him in a very special way. He gave Joshua His authority and anointed him to lead the people. Joshua would move out with a deeper empowering of the Spirit of God on his life to do all that God required of him. As leaders we, too, need this special empowering for the task to which God has called us.

God prepared His people for the conquest of Canaan. He went before them to break the proud spirit of their enemies, causing them to tremble before His people. His people were circumcised so that there would be no obstacle standing between them and His greater blessing. Through the celebration of the Passover they had time to reflect on God's past victory and trust Him for future victories. Joshua was commissioned and empowered by the angel of the Lord. All these preparations were essential if God's people were to be victorious.

For Consideration:

- How important is it for us to be prepared for the ministry God has given us? What difference does preparation make? What do we need to do to be prepared today?
- Notice how God broke the proud spirit of the enemies. Does God need to do this in our day? Describe the mind-set of the unbeliever today?
- Circumcision was an obstacle for God's people to move on in their walk with Him. What obstacle stands in the way of your experience of God's deeper blessing on your life and ministry?
- Joshua was commissioned for the task of leading God's people into victory. Can we do the ministry God has called us to do without His anointing and empowering?
- How has God shown you His grace in the past? What stories of God's faithfulness have impacted your life? How does looking back give us courage to face the future?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have grumbled and complained as He has prepared you for ministry.
- Ask the Lord to show you any obstacle that stands in the way of His deeper blessing in your life and ministry.

- Take a moment to look back at the faithfulness of God in your life. Thank Him that He is a faithful God. Thank Him that He is able to deal with any obstacle that you will face in the future.
- Ask God to empower and anoint you for the task to which He has called you. Ask Him to forgive you for believing that you could do this without His empowering and wisdom.

6

JERICO

Read Joshua 6:1-27

In chapter 5 we saw how God prepared His people for the conquest of the land of Canaan. Chapter 6 records the first great victory over the inhabitants of the land. Before we move into the details of the conquest of Jericho, we need to understand something of what is happening in this book of Joshua.

It might be possible for some to say that God was being unfair to the nations who were being driven out of their land. These people had lived on this land for many years. The Israelites were now taking over their land. The reality of the matter, however, was much deeper than this. According to Leviticus 18:24-25 God was judging these nations because of evil:

"Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants."

Imagine that you owned a home and rented that home to tenants. It is your understanding and agreement that they will care for the home as long as they are in it. Imagine that the tenants in your home were destroying it. What would you do? Would you not have the right to remove them from the home and give it to someone else? This is what God is doing here in the book of Joshua.

This earth and all that is in it belongs to God. He has given us the privilege of living here but He has the right to take it away. We understand from Leviticus 18:23-25 that God was telling His people that if they repeated the sins of the nations He drove out before them, they, too, would lose the land He was giving them. This, in fact, did happen when God sent the nations of Assyria and Babylon to invade Israel in later years. As a result of their sins, Israel was also driven from her land and sent into exile.

The conquest of Canaan was about God punishing sin and restoring obedience and worship of the true Creator. These nations served other gods, but they were still accountable to the one true God of Israel. He holds all people accountable for sin.

As we begin chapter 6 Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelite presence. In other words, the gates were closed and locked in anticipation of an attack. Notice that no one went in or out of the city (verse 1). This is an indication of the terror the Israelites inspired in the hearts of the nations. They were so afraid of Israel that they hid behind their walls and locked gates. They would not even risk sending their soldiers into the open to fight them.

God told Joshua that He was going to deliver Jericho into his hands (verse 2). Notice also that God told him what he was to do in order to have that victory.

In verses 3-5 God gives Joshua the details of the plan to conquer Jericho. He told him that he was to march around the city with all his armed men for six days. Seven priests were to carry ram's horn trumpets in front of the ark of God as they marched around the city. On the seventh day they were to march around the city seven times blowing the trumpets. At a given moment the priests were to sound a long blast of the trumpets. When the people heard that long blast they were to shout with a loud voice (verse 5). At that sound of this loud cry from the lips of God's people, the walls of Jericho would fall.

The plan did not make any sense from a military point of view. The walls of Jericho were made to withstand the attacks of great armies, how could the shouting of soldiers bring them down? Beyond this, however, we can only imagine what it would be like for an army to expose themselves to the enemies on top of the wall by marching around the city in this way. They would have been easy targets for the archers on the wall.

Joshua was not governed by his own way of thinking. He was willing to listen to the Lord and do what He said. He had already seen the waters of the Jordan stop to let the people cross. Surely God was able to bring down the walls of Jericho as well. In obedience to the Lord God, Joshua called the priests and told them to take up the ark and have seven priests march before it with a trumpet. They were to march around the city with an armed guard (verse 7).

The priest obeyed Joshua and took up the ark. With an armed guard and seven priests before them blowing the trumpets, they marched around the city once and returned to their camp (verses 8-11). Joshua commanded them not to speak a word at that time (verse 10). Humanly speaking there would likely have been some fear in the hearts of the

people who marched around the city. Despite the fear, they did as God required.

Early the next day, the priests took up the ark of the Lord again. With the seven priests carrying ram's horn trumpets and the armed guard, they marched a second time around the city sounding the trumpets (verses 12-13). They repeated this procedure for six days (verse 14).

On the seventh day they got up at daybreak and marched around the city as before, except they circled the city seven times instead of the usual one time (verse 15). When the priests sounded the trumpet blast at that seventh time around the city, Joshua commanded the people to shout. He told them that God had given them the city (verse 16). The faith of Joshua in the word of the Lord is clearly seen here. The people obeyed Joshua even though they did not understand how things were going to turn out. Joshua, however, had a strong faith in God and His word. He knew that the walls would fall down at the sound of Israel's shouting.

Notice also that Joshua gave some final commands to his soldiers as they prepare to go into the city of Jericho. In verse 17 he told them that the entire city was devoted to the Lord. That is to say, they were to take nothing from the city for themselves. They were to slaughter everything and everyone in the city. Only Rahab the prostitute and all those who were with her in her house, were to be saved because she has hid the spies who had come into the city.

Joshua warned the soldiers that if they took anything from the city, they would bring about their own destruction and risk the safety of the entire nation by taking what belonged to God (verse 18). All silver, gold, bronze and iron articles were to go to the treasury of the Lord (verse 19).

When the trumpets sounded and the people shouted, the walls collapsed just as God had said. The Israelite army charged and took the city (verse 20). As Joshua commanded, they destroyed every living thing in the city both, humans and animals (verse 21).

In verse 22, Joshua commanded the two men who had spied out the land to go to Rahab's house and bring her out with all who belonged to her (verse 22). The spies did as Joshua commanded and escorted Rahab, her father, mother, brothers and other relatives to a place outside Israel's camp (verse 23). Rahab and her family would live with the Israelites from that time forward (verse 25).

The city of Jericho was burned with everything in it (verse 24). As Joshua commanded, the gold, silver, bronze and iron articles were brought to the treasury of the Lord. Joshua pronounced this curse on the city in verse 26:

"Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: "At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates."

This curse would fall, many years later, on a man by the name of Hiel of Bethel who attempted to rebuild the city of Jericho. 1 Kings 16:34 describes for us what happened when he laid Jericho's foundations:

"In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun."

Verse 27 concludes with the clear statement that God was with Joshua and his fame spread throughout the region. There can be no doubt that the battle for Jericho was the Lord's victory. Joshua was an instrument but it was clearly God who gave the victory. The way that victory was obtained could leave no doubt about this.

For Consideration:

- Was God unjust or unfair in removing the people of Canaan from their land and giving it to His people? Explain.
- Does anything we have really belong to us? How does our understanding that everything belonging to God change how we view our possessions?
- What were the risks of marching around the city of Jericho? Does obedience to God bring risk?
- Describe the faith of Joshua and his willingness to listen to God's plan? How did this bring him victory?
- How important is it for us to learn to listen to God? Do you think that Joshua could have come up with this plan to conquer Jericho? How did God receive glory through the way the city was conquered?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to be faithful with the things He has given you.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the things He has put under your charge.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be willing to listen to Him and do things His way.
- Ask God to give you greater faith and more willingness to obey like Joshua.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have taken for yourself the glory He deserves.

7

ACHAN'S SIN

Read Joshua 7:1-26

The Israelites had just experienced a wonderful victory over Jericho. God had powerfully demonstrated His presence that day as the walls of the city fell at the shout of the Israelite soldiers. Joshua had ordered his soldiers not to take anything from the city. Everything was to be destroyed except for the gold, silver, bronze and iron articles which were to go to the treasury of the Lord.

Among the soldiers that day was a man by the name of Achan from the tribe of Judah. Despite Joshua's direct order, he took articles from the city and secretly kept them for himself. Because of this, the anger of the Lord burned again the entire nation.

It is important that we notice what is happening in this chapter. The sin of one man will affect the entire nation. The blessing of God would be hindered because Achan acted in his own interest and not in the interest of the nation as a whole. How easy it is for us to become self-centred. Satan would have us think only of ourselves. This verse shows us that what we do in secret does have an impact on others. Achan's secret sin would have devastating consequences on the nation as a whole.

Achan's sin was unknown to Joshua when he sent spies to the town of Ai. These spies went into Ai and brought back their report (verse 2). Inspired by the victory they had won over Jericho, they encouraged Joshua to attack the town, telling him that it was no match for the army of Israel. In fact, the spies did not feel it was necessary to send the entire army against this small town. They believed it would fall very easily into their hands.

Joshua's decision, based on the report of the spies, was to send three thousand soldiers to conquer Ai (verses 3-4). The results were not what Joshua had expected. The inhabitants of Ai killed thirty-six Israelite soldiers and chased them out of their city, sending them into retreat. The defeat was humiliating for Israel, and the hearts of God's people melted with fear (verse 5). The nation was left to wonder what had happened and whether God had abandoned them.

Joshua, in particular, was confused about what had taken place that day. He tore his clothes in a sign of mourning and fell face down to the ground before the Ark of the Covenant and remained there until the evening. The ark was where the presence of the Lord was revealed. By falling down before the ark, Joshua was seeking to hear from God. He needed to know what had happened and what the Lord wanted him to do. Notice from verse 6 that the elders of Israel did the same. As a sign of mourning they also sprinkled dust on their heads.

As Joshua waited before the Lord, he prayed. His prayer is recorded in verses 7-9. In this prayer Joshua asked the Lord why He had brought His people across the Jordan to deliver them into the hands of the Amorites to be destroyed (verse 7). Notice that he told God that he wished he had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan.

There is a real tone of discouragement in Joshua's voice. He had suffered his first defeat. He wasn't sure if he wanted to continue with what God had called him to do. He feared that the news of this defeat would give courage to the Canaanites and they would surround Israel and wipe them out (verse 9). Joshua was brought to the end of his resources. He did not know what to do. He was afraid and wasn't sure where God was.

We cannot underestimate the devastating effect that this defeat had on Joshua and the nation. They feared for their lives. Joshua wished he had never embarked on this conquest. He felt incapable of being the man God had called him to be. Have you ever been discouraged and wanted to quit? There are not many servants of God who do not face such a temptation at least once in their ministry.

God spoke to Joshua in his discouragement. He told him to get off his face and stand up (verse 10). This was not a time for mourning. It was a time to deal with sin in their midst. God revealed to Joshua that Israel had sinned by taking articles that had been devoted to Him. Their defeat at Ai was a result of sin (verse 12). Instead of mourning, they were to deal with the sin in their midst.

Imagine a thief complaining because he had been caught and sent to prison. Would you not tell him to stop complaining because he deserved his punishment? In essence, this is what God is telling Joshua. He is telling him to stop crying over his defeat, get up off his face and deal with the sin in his camp. Until they had dealt with the sin there would be no more victory over their enemies (verse 12).

The consequence of Achan's sin was devastating for the entire nation. God's presence was pushed away by sin. Israel could not expect the blessing of God as long as they

were deliberately sinning against Him. How often we cry out for God's blessing but are unwilling to deal with the sin in our midst. The lesson of this chapter is vital. If we want to see revival in our midst, we must first become serious about the sin in our camp.

In verse 13 God told Joshua to consecrate the people in preparation for the next day when He would expose and judge their sin. This consecration would likely have involved ceremonial purification and sacrifices. God made it clear to Joshua that they would not be able to stand against their enemies until they had removed the sin from their camp. Israel's victory depended on her obedience to God and her willingness to walk in His purposes for their lives.

God told Joshua that the next morning the people were to present themselves before Him tribe by tribe. He would reveal the tribe that was guilty. Each clan of that tribe was to present itself before God until He revealed the clan that was guilty. Each family of that clan was then to present itself before God until the family was chosen. Finally, each man in that family was to stand before God until the individual guilty for the sin was exposed (verse 14). When that individual was revealed, he and his whole family were to be burned to death because they had violated the direct command of the Lord God through Joshua (verse 15). The punishment was severe, but the future of the entire nation depended on this sin being removed.

The next morning Joshua had all the tribes come forward. The tribe of Judah was chosen (verse 16). It is unclear what the procedure was for choosing the tribe but God gave them some clear indication. When the clans of Judah came forward the clan of the Zerahites was selected (verse 17). From the clan of the Zerahites the family of

Zimri was singled out. When each man in the family of Zimri came forward, God revealed Achan son of Carmi to be the one guilty of taking devoted things from the city of Jericho.

Joshua demanded that Achan give glory to God and confess his sin. Nothing was going to change Achan's punishment. He and his family were going to die. There was no question in the minds of the people that he was guilty. Joshua still asked Achan to confess his sin to the nation. He told Achan that in doing so he would bring glory and praise to God. This is worth considering in further detail.

This passage is telling us that confession of sin brings glory and praise to God. By confessing his sin, Achan recognized before the whole nation that he was wrong and that he had offended a holy God. He accepted that he deserved the punishment God was going to give him. He recognized that the Lord God was a holy and just God and that he was a sinner deserving His judgment.

In verse 20, Achan confessed that he had sinned and humbled himself before the Lord God. "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done," he told Joshua and the entire nation. We often see Achan in a negative light. This passage, however, shows us something different. Achan openly confessed his sin and submitted to the Lord's punishment. There are many people who could learn from his example. There are people who refuse to deal with their sin and rebellion against God. They choose to die in their sin rather than humble themselves, glorify God and submit to their punishment. Achan leaves us an example to follow in his confession and submission to the discipline and punishment of God.

Achan told Joshua and the people how he had seen a beautiful Babylonian robe, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels. He confessed to the nation that he had coveted them and had taken them for himself. Achan even told Joshua where he could find these articles. He told him that he had hidden them under the floor of his tent (verse 21).

When Joshua heard the confession of Achan, he sent his men to Achan's tent to gather the stolen articles. Notice in verse 22 that Joshua's men ran to Achan's tent. There was urgency in this matter. God was angry with the nation and there was no time to lose. When the men brought back the stolen articles they spread them before the Lord (verse 23). The sin was exposed to the entire nation. Now that everything was exposed, it could be dealt with. Are their sins in your life that need to be exposed like those of Achan? Hidden sin will only hinder us and keep us from the blessing of God. Achan has the courage to confess and expose his sin. In doing so, he opened the door for the entire nation to be blessed again. His exposure of sin and submission to God's punishment would release the nation from the curse he had brought on it.

Notice that while Achan did confess his sin, he still had to suffer the consequences of his actions. Achan and his entire family were taken into the Valley of Achor along with the articles he had stolen (verse 24). There in that valley, Israel stoned Achan and his family and burned their bodies (verse 25). Then they heaped up a large pile of rocks over their remains. That pile of rocks was a powerful reminder of the danger of sin and its consequences on the nation as a whole.

Confession of sin does not mean that we will not have to suffer the consequences of our actions. It is possible to

confess and be forgiven and still have to face the consequences. Sometimes our lives will be changed forever by the foolish and sinful decisions we make in life. God will not always spare us from results of sin. We see in this chapter an example of a man who openly and humbly confessed his sin. He gave glory to God in his death but he and his family were cut off from Israel.

Achan's sins affected the entire nation. This is a very powerful reminder to us. Consider the fact that your sin could be holding back your family or your Christian fellowship group from the blessings of God. Only by confession and repentance can that blessing be fully restored. Verse 26 tells us that after these events the anger of the Lord was turned away from His people. By his confession and death, Achan restored the blessing of God to the entire nation.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn from this passage about how sin affects people around us? How have your sins affected others?
- Can we hide anything from God? Are there any sins that you are trying to hide from people today?
- What do we learn in this chapter about the importance of dealing with sin in our lives?
- Have you ever been discouraged like Joshua? What were the circumstances of that discouragement?

- How did Achan glorify God in his confession and death? Would you be willing to expose your sin so that blessing could be restored?
- Does confession mean that we will not have to face the consequences of our sin? Would you be willing to face the consequences of your sin in order to be right with God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to reveal any sin in you that holds you or others back in their walk with God.
- Thank God that He is willing to meet us in our discouragements. Thank Him for how He exposed the sin of Achan and restored hope to Joshua and the nation of Israel.
- Ask God to give you the courage of Achan to confess your sin so that God is glorified in you.
- Thank the Lord God that because of the work of His son Jesus, we can be forgiven of our sins. Thank Him that though He was sinless He died in our place.

8

THE DEFEAT OF AI

Read Joshua 8:1-35

Israel's experience at Ai had taught them a powerful lesson. Achan's sin was the cause of their humiliating defeat at this little town. While they were defeated, it was not God's intention that they remain in that defeat. Having dealt with the obstacle that stood in their way, God now calls Joshua to return to Ai to conquer it. He told him not be afraid or discouraged. He was to go up against the city with his whole army and this time he would have victory (verse 1).

There is a very important challenge for us in this verse. God does not want us to remain in our defeat. There are places of defeat in our lives that we have to revisit. Sometimes those places have crippled us emotionally and spiritually for years. I can imagine that Joshua would have gone to do battle with Ai with great caution. He was not confident in his own strength. He knew that he had already failed at Ai. With faith in God, however, Joshua returned to Ai to defeat it. Maybe we need to do the same thing in those places where we have been defeated in the past.

God told Joshua that he was to do to Ai as he had done to Jericho (verse 2). That is to say, he was to completely kill

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all the inhabitants. This time, however, there would be one exception. God permitted them to carry off plunder and livestock for themselves. Again there is an important lesson for us to see in this. We need to listen to God and follow His leading in each new situation. In Jericho they were to take nothing. In Ai they could take plunder. Notice also in verse 2 that God told Joshua that he was to set an ambush for Ai behind the city.

Joshua chose his best fighting men and sent them out at night to set an ambush behind the city. They were to wait in readiness for his signal (verse 4). He would take another group with him and attack the city from the front as he they done the first time (verse 5). The group that attacked from the front of the city would allow themselves to be pushed back by the soldiers of Ai. The hope was that Ai would pursue them, leaving the city defenceless. When they had lured Ai's soldiers from the city, those waiting in ambush were to attack, take the city and set it on fire (verses 6-8). Those who were going to ambush the city, set out during the night to find a place to hide and wait to attack the city. They found a place between Bethel and Ai and waited there.

Early the next morning Joshua gathered his men and marched against Ai. They approached the city from the front. Unknown to the people of Ai, about five thousand Israelite soldiers were waiting to attack from behind (verse 12).

When the king of Ai saw Joshua approaching from the front, he gathered his soldiers and set out to meet Israel in battle (verse 14). He had no idea that Israel had set up an ambush behind the city. As planned, Joshua and his army let themselves be driven back. Ai, thinking that they were

winning the battle pursued the Israelites toward the desert, leaving the city defenceless (verse 15-16). Verse 17 tells us that not a single man was left in the city. All of them went in pursuit of Israel.

When all the men had left the city, God told Joshua to hold out his javelin (verse 18). As soon as he held out his javelin, the men waiting in ambush left their positions and attacked the city. They captured it and set it on fire.

The soldiers of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of their city rising up. The Israelites, who had been fleeing, turned around to attack Ai's soldiers (verse 20). Ai had nowhere to go. The army they were pursuing turned around and attacked them from the front and the men who had taken the city came at them from behind (verses 21-22). Ai was caught in the middle.

Israel defeated the people of Ai and killed all the men. Verse 23 tells us that they took the king alive and brought him to Joshua. Joshua hung the king and threw his body at the entrance of the city where it was eventually buried in a large pile of rocks (verse 29).

Israel returned to Ai and put to death all the inhabitants of the city (verse 24). Twelve thousand men and women were killed that day. This was the entire population of Ai (verse 25). Joshua did not stop until he had destroyed every living person in Ai (verse 26). Israel carried off livestock and plundered the city as God had commanded Joshua (verse 27). The defeat that day was total. The entire population of the city was wiped out. Everything of value was stripped from it and the city left as an empty pile of ruins.

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Whether we like it or not God has absolute right over all things. As Job discovered, God gives and He also takes away (Job 1:21). The city of Ai disappeared from the earth. God judged them for their wickedness. The day is coming when this entire earth will be burned up with fire (Revelation 21:1). Only those who know Christ will be safe on that day. The defeat of Ai as tragic and horrible as it was, is a picture of what will happen one day to this entire earth when God comes to judge and remove sin.

When the battle was over, Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal (verse 30). This altar was built according to the specifications that Moses had commanded in the law. It was made with uncut stones without the use of an iron tool (verse 31). On that altar Joshua burnt offerings to the Lord. Verse 32 tells us that, in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua copied the Law of Moses on stone. He also had half the people stand in front of Mount Gerazim and the other half in front of Mount Ebal to listen to the reading of the Law of Moses.

Moses encouraged the people to perform such a ceremony in Deuteronomy 27:2-5; 11-14:

When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster. Build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones.

Do not use any iron tool upon them... "On the same day Moses commanded the people: When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali. The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice."

In obedience to the command of Moses, Joshua divided the people into two groups. The Levites read aloud the words of the law. Those people who stood before Mount Gerizim pronounced blessing on all who would follow the commands of the Lord. Those who stood before Mount Ebal pronounced curses on those who refused to obey His commands. God's people had a choice to make. They could follow the way of blessing or they could choose the way of cursing.

These events happened directly after Achan's sin and the defeat of the nation at Ai. God's people had before them a powerful example of what would happen if they turned from the Law of God.

As the Law of Moses was read that day, God's people were faced with an important decision. Would they obey and be blessed or would they walk away and be cursed like Achan and his family. The two stones before them reminded them that their victory could only be obtained by living in obedience to God and His Word. As they stood on the threshold of Canaan with the remainder of the land before them, it was of utmost importance that they understand that their victory did not lie in the strength of their army but in the obedience of their hearts.

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For Consideration:

- Are there areas of your life where you have been living in defeat? What are they? Do you believe that God wants you to continue living in this defeat? What does this passage teach us?
- How important is it for us to seek the leading of the Lord in each situation of our lives. What difference was there between the command of God for Jericho and for Ai?
- What does the defeat of Ai teach us about the judgment of God to come?
- How important is obedience to the Lord and His Word? Can we have true victory in the Christian life if we are not walking in obedience?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you victory in those areas of defeat in your life. Ask Him to give you grace to face these areas again.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to give you complete victory.
- Ask God to help you to be more attentive to His leading. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you did things in your own way without consulting Him.
- Ask God to give you a greater appreciation for His Word and a greater desire live in absolute obedience to it.

9

THE GIBEONITES

Read Joshua 9:1-27

Joshua's victory at Ai was noticed by the kings in Canaan. When they heard of his victory, the kings of the hill country in the western foothills and along the coast decided to join forces to fight against Israel (verse 1). They formed an alliance of nations comprised of Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. All these nations united with one purpose in mind, to make war against Joshua and Israel (verse 2). We will return to this alliance of nations at a later point.

Of immediate concern for us is a group of people from Gibeon. They did not join this coalition force against Israel. They had another plan. Verse 4 tells us that they resorted to deceit. They decided to trick Israel into protecting them.

In order to deceive Israel, the Gibeonites sent a delegation to Joshua. This delegation brought with them donkeys loaded with worn-out sacks and old wineskins that were cracked and mended (verse 4). The men wore patched sandals on their feet and old clothes. Their bread and food was dry and mouldy (verse 5). When they arrived at the camp of Israel, they said that they had come from a distant land in order to make a treaty with Israel (verse 6).

The Gibeonites knew that the Israelites would not make a treaty with any nation in the region where they wanted to settle. Having heard of the power of God at work through the people of Israel, the Gibeonites did not believe they had any chance of overpowering them with their army. Their only chance of survival was to deceive Israel into thinking that they had come from a distant land that Israel had no interest in conquering. If they could deceive Israel into a treaty of peace, they might be spared.

Israel was suspicious of this request for a peace treaty. "But perhaps you live near us. How then can we make a treaty with you?" they told them in verse 7. Joshua asked them where they came from in verse 8. They told him that they came from a very distant country. They had heard of the wonderful works of their God in their distant land. They mentioned particularly what God had done in delivering Israel from Egypt and the kings east of the Jordan (verse 10). The Gibeonites told Joshua that their elders suggested that they take provisions with them and go to see Israel to make a peace treaty with them (verse 11). They reassured Joshua that they were from a distant land and that they also wanted to maintain friendly relations with them.

To prove that they were from a distant land, they showed Joshua their provisions. They told him that when they left home their bread was warm but now it was hard and mouldy (verse 12). They also showed him their cracked wineskins, worn-out clothes and sandals and told him that these things had worn out on their journey (verse 13). All this was designed to deceive the people of God.

Verse 14 tells us that the men of Israel sampled Gibeon's provisions, but did not inquire of the Lord. This is the most important verse of chapter 9. Joshua made his decision

based on externals. He saw the bread, wineskins, clothes and sandals of the Gibeonites and believed them. The decision he would make was based on what he saw with his own eyes. He did not speak to the Lord about this situation and so he was deceived.

The fact of the matter is that things are not always as they appear. Something can make perfect sense from a human perspective but lead us into great error and sin. We cannot always trust human logic or what our eyes see. This is why we need to seek the Lord and His direction in our lives and ministries. Satan is a master of deception and deceit. He can make things look very good but in the end we will fall into his trap.

God's purpose for Jericho was that everything in the city be destroyed. When it came time to conquer Ai, God permitted His people to loot the city and take the livestock. In both cases God's purposes were different. Joshua needed to listen to the leading of the Lord for each situation. He did not do this in the case of the Gibeonites.

In the last chapter, Joshua wrote the Law of God on two tablets of stone. The people stood before Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and pronounced blessing on those who would obey the Law of God and curses on those who disobeyed. It was clear that if God's people were going to be blessed they would have to live in obedience to the written Word of God. What we see here, however, takes us one step further. Not only did God's people need to be obedient to His written Word but they also needed to be sensitive to His particular leading in each situation they encountered.

Because Joshua did not seek the specific will of God here in this situation, he was deceived by the Gibeonites and made a treaty with them (verse 15). About three days later

the Israelites discovered that they had been deceived. The Gibeonites lived very near them (verse 16).

When Israel discovered this they set out for the cities of Gibeon Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. They faced these cities, but they did not attack them because their leaders had made a treaty with them before the Lord (verse 18). While the assembly grumbled because of the deceit, the leaders were bound to their treaty and could not harm the Gibeonites (verse 19).

In a day when promises are easily broken, we need to take a lesson from these Israelite leaders. It is true that they had been deceived. Their treaty was based on false information, but they had committed themselves to live a peace with the Gibeonites. The Lord heard their promise and would hold them to their commitment.

There are times in our lives when we make foolish promises. It is all too easy for us to try to get out of those promises when we realize what we have done. The reality, however, is that God expects us to be true to our word. He expected Israel to be true to their promise to Gibeon. He expects the husband to be true to his wife even though things did not turn out as he had hoped. He expects businesses to be true to their commitment even though they discover that they may lose money in the process. Israel is true to her word even though it was not to her advantage. I believe God expects the same from us today.

Israel's leaders realized that they had made a commitment to Gibeon and could not back out of it (verse 20). The only alternative for them now was to let them live but to make them their servants. From that point on, the Gibeonites would be woodcutters and water carriers for Israel (verse 21).

In verse 22, Joshua called Gibeon to give an account of their actions. He told them that they would be under a curse for their deception and they would have to live from that point on as Israel's servants (verse 23). The Gibeonites told Joshua that they were afraid of the God of Israel because they knew how He had promised the entire land to His people (verse 24). They willingly submitted to be servants of Israel (verse 25). While their lives were spared, the Gibeonites suffered the consequences of their actions.

This chapter reminds us of the importance of seeking the Lord's direction in all we do. It is a reminder that our human logic can sometimes lead us astray. It is also a powerful reminder to us of the importance of keeping our promises even when that does not work out to our advantage.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about how Satan seeks to deceive God's people? How has Satan been deceiving people today?
- Can we always trust human logic and wisdom? Explain.
- Why is it important for us to learn how to discern the leading of the Lord in each situation of life?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of keeping our promises even when it is not to our advantage?
- What were the consequences of Gibeon's deception?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you greater discernment to see the deception of the enemy.
- Ask God to help you to trust less in your own wisdom and logic and more in His leading.
- Have you ever broken your promise to someone because it was no longer convenient for you? Ask the Lord to forgive you and give you grace to be true to your word even when it hurts.

10

GIBEON'S REQUEST

Read Joshua 10:1-43

The Gibeonites had deceived Israel into a treaty of peace. Israel's leaders understood that though they had been deceived, they were still accountable before God to be faithful to their agreement. They made the Gibeonites their servants to chop wood and carry water but spared their lives.

In this chapter their commitment to the peace treaty with Gibeon would be put to the test. Adoni-Zedek was the king of Jerusalem. It should be remembered that the city of Jerusalem did not belong to Israel at this time. King Adoni-Zedek heard how the Gibeonites had made a treaty with Israel. He also heard how Israel had defeated Jericho and Ai. He was greatly disturbed by these events (verse 1). Verse 2 tells us that Gibeon was an important city. All its men were good fighters. Adoni-Zedek may have felt angry because Gibeon had joined forces with his enemy.

Adoni-Zedek felt he needed to do something about this new threat. He spoke with the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon and asked them to join forces with him to attack Gibeon because it had made a treaty with Israel

their enemy (verses 3-4). The kings agreed to attack Gibeon.

The Gibeonites sent word to Joshua at Gilgal asking him to come to their aid (verse 6). It should be noted here that Joshua could have interpreted these events as God's way of releasing him from the treaty with Gibeon and punishing them for their deception. How careful we need to be about drawing these kinds of conclusions. Satan also seeks to deceive God's people by putting circumstances in their path that can justify their actions and draw them away from God's purpose.

How easy it is to justify sin by the circumstances that come our way. The young man justifies marrying an unbeliever by saying, "surely the fact that we love each other is God's way of telling us that it is okay to be 'unequally yoked.'" It is like the business man justifying his dishonesty by saying, "Surely if what I am doing was so wrong God would not allow me to be so successful." From the very beginning of time the enemy has been promoting this sort of logic. He will give us a measure of success and tell us that success, not the Word of God is the measure of whether we are on the right path.

Joshua did not fall for this trap of the enemy. He had made a promise to the Gibeonites and he was going to be faithful to that promise. Joshua gathered his army together and marched from Gilgal (verse 7). As he went to defend the Gibeonites, the Lord spoke to him and told him not to be afraid because this coalition of five nations would not be able to resist him (verse 8). The attack of Gibeon was not a way out of a treaty made by deception but God's means of giving Israel a great victory over their enemies.

Verse 9 tells us that Joshua marched all night from Gilgal and took the enemy by surprise. The enemy was thrown into confusion before Israel. Israel pursued them and defeated them (verse 10). Notice from verse 11 that God demonstrated His presence that day by causing large hailstones to fall from the sky. More enemies died from the hailstones than from the Israelite sword. How could the enemy fight against this kind of power?

In verse 12 Joshua made a very strange request of God. He prayed that the sun would remain still in the sky over Gibeon so that he could completely defeat his enemies. God answered his request and the sun stood still allowing Israel the light necessary to completely wipe out the alliance formed against Gibeon (verse 13). Israel was empowered with the supernatural power of God. Verse 14 makes it quite clear when it says, "Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel."

The five kings had fled and hid in a cave at Makkedah. Joshua was informed of this and sent his men to roll large rocks up against the mouth of the cave so they could not escape (verses 17-18).

With the enemy kings sealed in the cave, Joshua then commanded his men to pursue the enemy. They were not to let them reach their cities (verse 19). The Israelites completely destroyed the enemy. Only a very few fleeing soldiers actually reached their fortified cities (verse 20). The Israelite army returned safely to the camp Joshua had set up at Makkedah where the five kings were sealed in the cave (verse 21).

When the enemy was completely destroyed, Joshua called for his men to open the mouth of the cave where they kings had been held captive (verse 22). His men

obeyed and brought the five kings before Joshua (verse 23). Joshua commanded his army commanders to put their feet on the necks of these kings so he could kill them. Joshua told his men that this is what the Lord would do to all who resisted them (verse 25). He hung the bodies of the kings in five trees until evening (verse 26). At sunset he commanded that the bodies be taken down and thrown into the cave where they had been held captive (verse 27). They piled rocks over the mouth of the cave to seal.

Having defeated the alliance of five kings, Joshua then turned his attention to the surrounding nations. In verses 28 he took the city of Makkedah and totally destroyed everyone in it. From Makkedah Joshua moved to Libnah (verse 29). God also gave them that city as well. As he did with Makkedah, Joshua put everyone to death, leaving no survivor (verse 30).

The next town on this military campaign was the town of Lachish (verse 31). Joshua attacked Lachish. Horam, king of Gezer came to the aid of Lachish but on the second day the city fell and all its inhabitants were put to death (verse 32). Joshua also defeated Gezer who had come to aid Lachish (verse 33).

From Lachish Joshua marched to Eglon (verse 34). They took up positions and attacked the city. Eglon fell in a single day and was totally destroyed (verse 35). After Eglon, Joshua attacked Hebron leaving no survivors (verse 37). Finally Israel turned its attention to Debir (verse 38). They took this city as well killing all its inhabitants (verse 39).

On this great military campaign Israel conquered many cities. They killed all the inhabitants of as the LORD had commanded them. Israel now controlled the region from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and from Goshen to Gibeon

(verse 41). All this land was conquered in one campaign because the LORD fought for Israel (verse 42). No nation could stand against Israel. After this campaign, Joshua and his army returned to Gilgal (verse 43).

Let's remember the context of this great campaign. Joshua had answered Gibeon's call for help. Though Gibeon had deceived Israel into a peace treaty, Israel's faithfulness to this treaty brought great blessing from God. Surely this is a powerful challenge to us today. God expects us to be faithful to our vows and promises. His blessing and enabling power will be ours if we are faithful to Him.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about being led by God's and not deceived by circumstances?
- How can Satan use circumstances to distract us and send us down a wrong path?
- How did God bless Joshua's faithfulness to his treaty of peace with the Gibeonites?
- God was willing to stop the sun from setting to give Joshua complete victory. What does this tell us about God's desire for our victory and the power at our disposal?
- Israel's conquest of Canaan almost seems effortless in this passage. Are all victories in the Christian life like this? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you not to be deceived by circumstances but clearly led by His Word and His Spirit.
- Ask God to help you to be faithful to the promises you have made even when it is difficult and they do not work to your advantage.
- Thank the Lord for power that is at your disposal for victory over the issues you wrestle with today.
- Ask God for grace to persevere when the battle does not seem as effortless as it does in this chapter. Thank Him that victory is yours in Him.

11

CANAAN IS CONQUERED

Read Joshua 11:1-23

God gave Joshua and the people of Israel great victory over an alliance of five nations that had attacked the Gibeonites. From that initial battle, Joshua continued his conquest of Canaan, conquering a series of nations and taking over their land. These victories did not go unnoticed. King Jabin of Hazor heard what had happened and sent word to a number of kings, calling them to join forces to deal with the Israelite threat. Included in this alliance of nations were King Jobab of Madon, the kings of Shimron and Acshaph, the northern kings of the mountains, the Canaanites in the east and west, the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites and the Hivites (verses 2-3). Verse 4 describes the army as being as numerous as the sand on the seashore. This army also had a large number of horses and chariots. This great alliance of nations gathered together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel (verse 5).

Obviously this army outnumbered Israel and posed a serious threat to them. Humanly speaking, Israel was no match for this army. In verse 6, however, the Lord spoke to Joshua and told him not to be afraid of them. He told Joshua that by that time the next day he would hand the entire enemy army over to him. Joshua was to hamstring

their horses and burn their chariots (verse 6). The hamstring is a tendon at the back of the knee. By cutting this tendon they horse would become lame and useless for battle.

With the strength of those words from the Lord, Joshua and his army attacked their enemy at the Waters of Merom (verse 7). As He promised, the Lord gave Joshua great victory. Israel defeated this much larger army and pursued them until there were no survivors (verse 8). Joshua hamstringed the enemy horses and burned their chariots. It should be noted that by hamstringing these horses and burning their chariots God was keeping Israel from taking these things for themselves. Imagine, for a moment, that God had allowed Israel to take the enemy horses and chariots. What would likely be the result? Would Israel not have been tempted to trust in the chariots and horses and not in the Lord? How often has this been the case for believers? How often have we begun to trust in the gifts God has given rather than in God Himself? How many servants of God have fallen because their trust slowly turns to their experience and education rather than in the Spirit of God? God did not want His people to be tempted in this way. By asking Joshua to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots of the enemy, He was protecting His people from trusting in anything other than Himself. It would do us well to examine our lives and ministry to see if there is any way we are trusting in anything other than God.

Verse 10 tells us that after this victory, Joshua captured Hazor and killed its king. According to verse 1 it was Jabin, King of Hazor who had headed up this revolt against Israel. Joshua captured his city and put everyone in it to death, burning the city to the ground (verse 11).

In those days, God gave Joshua great success. He took all the royal cities of the land and put their kings to death (verse 12). His practice was to completely destroy all the inhabitants of the cities he conquered. He did this as the Lord had commanded him through Moses.

However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 20:16-18)

Notice in these words of Moses the reason for slaughtering the nations. Moses told his people that they were to slaughter all the people of these nations because, if they didn't, they would be a temptation to the people of God. By killing off all the inhabitants of each city they conquered, Joshua was protecting his people from their evil ways. Sometimes we need to be very serious with sin. If we allow it to remain we will soon find ourselves falling into its trap.

While the inhabitants of the land were to be slaughtered Israel only burnt certain cities (verse 13). God also allowed the Israelites to carry off large quantities of livestock from the cities they conquered (verse 14).

One of the reasons for the success of Joshua in these battles was that he did everything God commanded him to do (verse 15). Joshua realized that his victory did not depend on military strength but on obedience to God. God is not looking for people who are strong in themselves. He is

looking for men and women who are obedient to Him and do things in His way.

Because he was obedient, God gave Joshua tremendous victory. He conquered the entire land (verse 16-17). He captured their kings and put them to death as God commanded. There was no force that could stand against Joshua because God was with him. Verse 18 reminds us, however, that the conquest of Canaan did not take place over night. Joshua battled these various kings for a long time. Perseverance and obedience were the two essential ingredients in Joshua's battle against Canaan. God rewarded him for this and gave him the land.

Except for the Gibeonites, Joshua did not make a peace treaty with any nation living in Canaan (verse 19). His confidence was in the Lord God and establishing a nation that walked in obedience to His Word. Notice how God went before Joshua to harden the hearts of the nations against His people so that they would wage war with them and not offer peace to them. God did this so that the nations would be judged for their sin and so that Israel would not be tempted to form alliances with them. Everywhere Israel turned, she had enemies. This was not a curse but a blessing. It was by this means that God would establish His people in the land as His own people. They could serve Him with no compromise. By hardening the hearts of the nations, God was removing all obstacles to a deeper and more intimate relationship with Him.

In verses 21-22 we read that Joshua also destroyed the Anakites from the hill country. So complete was the destruction of these people that there were no Anakites left in the territory of Israel (verse 22). Their influence was removed so that when God's people settled in the land there was no temptation.

All the land that Joshua conquered would be handed over to the various tribes of Israel as Moses directed. Joshua accomplished everything the Lord had called him to do and he did so in faithful obedience to His Word. As we look at our lives and ministries, can we say that we have followed Joshua's example? Have we been obedient and done things God's way? Have we trusted from start to finish in God and His leading? May God give us more men and women like Joshua in our day.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever come up against an enemy that was bigger than you? Does the size of a problem mean anything to God?
- Why did God ask Joshua to hamstring the horses, burn the enemy chariots and destroy the enemy cities they conquered?
- Are there things in your life that keep you from fellowship with God? What are they? What do you need to do about it today?
- What role did obedience and perseverance play in the life of Joshua?
- Is it possible for us to depend on our education, experience or gifts rather than in the wisdom and strength God provides? What will be the result?
- Have you ever been tempted to form alliances with unbelievers? Why do you suppose God wanted Israel to completely destroy all the inhabitants of the

land? What would have been the temptation for Israel living beside unbelieving nations? What is the temptation for us living and working with unbelievers?

For Prayer:

- Thank God that He is bigger than any particular problem you are facing today.
- Ask God to show you one thing that stands between Him and greater fellowship. Ask Him to help you to remove that obstacle.
- Ask God to help you to persevere and be obedient as He requires.
- Ask God to help you to surround yourself with men and women who will help and encourage you in your spiritual walk. Are there any people in your life that hinder your walk with God? Ask God to help you to know what to do with these relationships.

12

CONQUERED AND DIVIDED

Read Joshua 12:1-13:33

Chapters 12 and 13 of the book of Joshua give us a list of the kings that Moses and Joshua defeated. They also begin to explain how the Israelites settled in the various regions of the land God had given them.

In Joshua 12:1-6 we have a list of the kings who were defeated east of the Jordan River under the leadership of Moses. This list includes the names of Sihon king of the Amorites (verses 2-3) and Og king of Bashan (verses 4-5). We also have in these verses a description of their land which Israel conquered. The land east of the Jordan was given by Moses to the Reubenites, Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The men of these tribes were required, however, to fight with their brothers to conquer the land west of the Jordan before returning to their allotment (see Joshua 1:12-15).

Joshua 12:7-24 gives us a list of the kings that were conquered under the leadership of Joshua to the west of the Jordan River. Joshua conquered the lands of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites and allotted this land to the various tribes of Israel (verses

7-8). Verses 9-24 list the thirty-one kings Joshua conquered in the land west of the Jordan. This list is a powerful testimony to the power of God who was working through Joshua and Israel in those days. Not a single king in the territory west of the Jordan could stand up against the nation of Israel and their God who stood with them.

By the time all these nations were conquered Joshua was an old man. We are not told how long it took Joshua to conquer the land. In Joshua 13:1 the Lord spoke to Joshua and reminded him of his age. "You are very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over," God told him. Despite his age, God still had a work for him to do. We will discover that Joshua's focus would now be to divide the land and settle his people in their territories.

In verses 2-5 God spoke to Joshua about the land Israel still had to conquer. The land of the Philistines and Geshurites remained unconquered. In particular, there were five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron that needed to be overthrown (verse 3). Included in this list also were the regions of the Sidonians, the Geshalites and Lebanon.

From Joshua 13:6 God reassured Joshua that He would drive out the Sidonians of the mountainous regions of Lebanon. God wanted Joshua, however, to allocate the land he had conquered to Israel and divide it among the various tribes (verse 7). This word from God was a turning point in Joshua's ministry. Up to this point, Joshua had been a military commander. Now in his old age, God was giving him another task.

Sometimes it is difficult for us when God moves us from one ministry to another. In his final years, God had another role for Joshua to play. It is important for us to know God's

leading even in our older years. Joshua had completed the task God had given him to do in his younger years when he had his full strength. Now that he was older God had another work for him. Joshua willingly accepted this change and gave himself wholeheartedly to this new task.

The remainder of chapter 13 describes for us the allotment of territory to the tribes of Manasseh, Reuben and Gad, who settled on the east of the Jordan River. This land had been assigned to these three tribes by Moses before the people crossed the Jordan. Verses 9-12 describe the territory and its boundaries reminding us that this had formerly been the territory of Sihon king of the Amorites (verse 10) and Og king of Bashan. Moses defeated these two kings and allotted their land to the tribes of Manasseh, Reuben and Gad. Verse 13 tells us that the Israelites did not drive out the people of Geshur and Maacah from this territory. These people would continue to live among the Israelites. This was in direct violation of the will of God who did not want these nations to be a stumbling block for His people.

Verse 14 reminds us that the tribe of Levi did not receive an inheritance of land. Their inheritance was to be God's servants among the various tribes of Israel.

From verses 15-23 we have a more detailed description of the territory allotted by Moses to the tribe of Reuben on the east side of the Jordan. Included in this is a list of towns and regions that were given to the tribe of Reuben by Moses.

The allotment of the tribe of Gad on the east side of the Jordan is described in verse 24-28. This description gives the names of the towns and regions that were given to Gad as their inheritance.

The chapter concludes with a description of the towns and regions allocated to the tribe of Manasseh east of the Jordan (verses 29-31). Their territory formerly belonged to Og king of Bashan.

In this portion of Scripture we see how the promise of God for His people was being accomplished. It was the will of God to settle His people in the land He had promised their ancestors. As the territory is allotted to each tribe, God is fulfilling His promise. It would be up to Israel now to live in the land their Lord had given them and possess it for His glory.

For Consideration:

- What does the long list of conquered kings in this section teach us about the power of God to work in His people? Take a moment to consider the victories God has given you.
- What was God's purpose for Joshua in his old age? Have you seen your ministry change over the years? What does this teach us about being sensitive to the Lord's leading?
- What does this allotment of land to the different tribes teach us about the faithfulness of God to His promises? How has God been faithful to His promises in your life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the fact that He is a powerful God who stands with us. Take a moment to thank Him for some particular victories He has given you in life.
- Thank the Lord that He does not forget us in our old age. Thank Him that while our ministry may change, He can still use us.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for how He has been faithful to His promises in your life. Be specific.

13

CALEB'S REQUEST

Read Joshua 14:1-15

God had given Joshua the task of allotting the conquered land to the people of Israel. In the last chapter we were given a description of the land allotted by Moses to the tribes of Manasseh, Reuben and Gad on the west side of the Jordan River. This next section of the book describes the land given as an inheritance to Israel on the western side of the Jordan River in the land of Canaan. These inheritances were assigned to the nine and a half tribes living in Canaan by casting lots.

The descendants of Jacob's twelve sons formed twelve separate tribes named after their fathers. Joseph, however, did not have a tribe directly named after him. Genesis 48:5 tells us, however, that Jacob adopted Manasseh and Ephraim (Joseph's sons) as his own children. While there would be no tribe named after Joseph his inheritance was divided between his two sons. Manasseh and Ephraim would be considered half-tribes because they divided Joseph's inheritance. Moses allotted territory to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan. Nine and a half tribes were still to receive their inheritance west of the Jordan.

Verse 3 reminds us that the tribe of Levi, though considered a tribe of Israel, was not to receive an inheritance of land. They were to live among the various tribes and serve as priests of God on their behalf. Certain towns would be allocated to the Levites among the tribes of Israel so they would have a place to graze their flocks and herds (verse 3-4).

Of greatest concern in this chapter is the request of a man by the name of Caleb. We read about him in Numbers 13. Moses sent spies into Canaan to examine the land and bring back a report. The spies returned and told Moses that the people were too numerous and strong for them to conquer. Caleb disagreed with his brothers telling Moses that God was able to deliver the inhabitants into their hands (see Numbers 13:30). The other spies, however, discouraged the people so that they refused to enter the land. God told Moses that, apart from Caleb and Joshua, none of those who refused to enter Canaan at that time would enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:34-36). God promised Caleb, however, a portion of the land for his inheritance because of his trust and confidence in Him.

In verse 6 Caleb approached Joshua about the promise Moses had made to him. He reminded Joshua of how, in Kadesh Barnea he had been sent into Canaan to explore the land and bring back a report (verse 7). He told Joshua how the brothers who went with him gave a report that caused the people's hearts to melt with fear. Only he had the faith to believe that God could give them the land (verse 8). That day, Moses told Caleb that the land on which his feet had walked would be an inheritance for him and his children (verse 9).

For over forty years Caleb wandered through the wilderness with his fellow Israelites not seeing the fulfilment of

the promise of God. He watched as every one of his fellow spies died in the wilderness. Now only he remained of all those who had gone into the land from Kadesh Barnea. The time was now right for him to inherit the land he had been promised.

A strong and vigorous eighty-five year old Caleb now stood before Joshua asking him to grant the fulfilment of the promise made to him through Moses (verses 10-11). That day Caleb asked Joshua for the hill country he had walked on over forty years ago (verse 12). Notice from verse 11 that Caleb did not expect that this country would be given to him without battle. He reminded Joshua, however, that he was still strong and able to go to battle for this land.

The country that Caleb asked for was a territory inhabited by a people known as the Anakites. Verse 12 tells us that their cities were large and fortified. They would not be easy to conquer. Caleb was not deterred by this however. He still believed that the Lord his God was able to give him victory. With God's help he would drive them out.

Caleb did not pretend that he had strength in himself. He was not depending on his own resources. His confidence was in the Lord God and His promises. With God helping him, he would drive out the Anakites and take their land.

Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron as his inheritance (verse 13). While we do not have the details of how it all happened, Caleb and his men did conquer that land and passed it down to their children. The name of the town that Caleb conquered used to be Kiriath Arba. It had been named after Arba the greatest man among the Anakites.

The story of Caleb is a challenge to us all. Let me say a few things about Caleb here in closing.

First, Caleb was a man of tremendous faith who was not afraid to be different from the crowd. When all his companions believed that they could not defeat the Canaanites, Caleb stood firm in his commitment to God and His ability to give victory. He was not afraid to be different from the crowd. He was a man of faith and sometimes that meant that he had to tread a lonely path.

Second, Caleb was a man of tremendous perseverance. Notice that he waited for forty-five years for the promise of God to be accomplished in his life. He wandered through the wilderness and watched his companions die. Throughout that time he trusted in the promise God had given him. He believed he would see the Promised Land. How easy it would have been for him to lose hope as the months passed into years and the years into decades. He is an example of perseverance and trust in God's promise.

Third, Caleb was a man whose confidence was in God not in his own strength and wisdom. Caleb believed from the very beginning that it did not matter how strong the enemy was—God was stronger. As an eighty-five year old man he stood before Joshua to ask for the hill country he had walked on when he was a man in his forties. He knew that the Anakites were powerful and lived in fortified cities but he was not looking to his own strength. He knew that God was greater than anything the Anakites could throw at him. He stood boldly before Joshua that day looking to God for the victory.

Fourth, Caleb was a man who was willing to fight. He knew that his victory was in the Lord but he was ready to use all his resources to see that the promise of God was accomplished in his life. God had promised him this land and he was ready to trust him for it but he also prepared himself to do battle. He offered himself and all he had to the Lord

for the accomplishment of that promise. Not all of God's promises are handed to us without effort. In fact, often we will have to work hard and do battle before we can see the fulfilment of His promises in our life. Some people give up because the effort is too much. Caleb was ready to fight to the very end. He was not going to give up until God's promise was completely fulfilled in his life.

Caleb's request, "give me this hill country," is a powerful challenge to us today. He knew that God had a purpose for him and his life and committed himself fully to realizing that purpose in its entirety. What is the purpose of God for your life? What is your "hill country?" Are you ready to persevere for years and even decades as you wait for that promise to be fulfilled in you? Are you ready to do battle against the Anakites that stand between you and the fulfilment of that promise? May God raise up more men and women like Caleb in our day.

For Consideration:

- How does Caleb prove to be a man of faith in this passage?
- Would you be willing to stand against all your companions for the truth? How easy is it to "go with the flow?"
- Are there any promises of God you have yet to see fulfilled in your life? What are they? What do you learn from Caleb in this passage?
- In whom does Caleb put his confidence? Where is your confidence?

- Are God's promises always fulfilled without effort on our part? Explain.
- What is your personal "hill country" God wants you to conquer?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you courage to be willing to stand firm in faith even when others are wandering away.
- Thank the Lord that we can have great confidence in Him and his promises. Thank Him that there is no obstacle that He cannot overcome.
- Ask God to show you His purpose for your life and ministry. Ask Him to give you grace to conquer the territory He has for you to conquer.

14

THE ALLOTMENT OF LAND TO JUDAH, MANASSEH AND EPHRAIM

Read Joshua 15:1-17:18

We have already seen that the task God gave to Joshua toward the end of his life was to allot the territory he had captured to the various tribes of Israel. In this meditation we will examine the allotment of territory to the tribes of Judah, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Judah's Allotment

Chapter 15 focuses on the allotment of territory to Judah. Generally the territory of Judah extended to the territory of Edom and the Desert of Zin in the south (verse 1). Verses 2-4 explain in more detail the southernmost boundary of the Judah's territory. The eastern boundary extended to the Salt Sea and the mouth of the Jordan River (verse 5). Details of the northern boundary of Judah are found in verses 5-11. Finally, verse 12 gives us the extent of the western boundary of the territory of Judah.



Verses 13-20 give us that account of Caleb and his territory. Caleb was from the tribe of Judah but he particularly distinguished himself from all other members of his tribe because of his faith in God.

Joshua gave to Caleb a portion of land in Judah. Caleb was to take the region of Kiriath Arba. Kiriath Arba would be renamed Hebron (verse 13). In order to occupy this land, Caleb had to drive out the Anakites (verse 14). He

also fought the people living in the town of Debir which was formerly called Kiriath Sepher (verse 15).

Caleb told his men that he would give his daughter Acsah in marriage to any man who would attack and capture the city of Kiriath Sepher (Debir). Othniel, the son of Caleb's brother Kenaz took the city, so Caleb gave him his daughter in marriage (verse 17). In verse 18 Caleb's daughter Acsah asked her father for a spring in the Negev. Caleb granted her request and gave her the upper and lower springs (verse 19).

Verses 21-62 list for us the various towns captured or allotted to Judah. Verses 21-32 list the towns in the south of Judah's territory. Twenty-nine towns are listed in these verses. Verses 33-47 list a series of villages allotted to Judah in the western foothills. Verses 48-60 contain a list of villages in the hill country of Judah. Finally verses 61-62 name six towns and villages in the desert that were given to Judah. From verse 63 we see that Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem. The city was well defended and Judah could not overpower them.

The Allotment of Manasseh and Ephraim

The sons of Joseph were Manasseh and Ephraim. Some of the tribe of Manasseh had been given territory on the east side of the Jordan by Moses. The tribe of Manasseh, however, was a large tribe and needed more territory than what was given to their brothers east of Jordan. The territory allotted to Joseph's sons began at the Jordan and crossed through the region of Bethel and Beth Horon to the Sea (16:1-3). This is a very general description of the land allotted to Joseph's sons.

Joshua 16:5-9 describe in more detail the territory allotted to Ephraim. Notice in verse 10 that the tribe of Ephraim was not able to dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer. These Canaanites lived among the Ephraimites. They were not forced to be servants of Ephraim but were a free people living among them.

Joshua 17 is a description of the territory allotted to Manasseh. Manasseh's firstborn was Makir. Makir became the ancestor of the Makirites who were known as great soldiers (verse 1). They were given the regions of Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan. The rest of Manasseh sons were the heads of various clans. Six clans of Manasseh are listed in verse 2 (Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hepher and Shemida). The family of Zelophehad in the clan of Hepher did not have any sons. He only had daughters (verse 3). These daughters went to Eleazar the priest and Joshua and told them how Moses had promised them land even though they had no male descendants (see Numbers 27:1-7). Joshua listened to their request and gave them an inheritance along with the males of the clan (verse 4). The inheritance of these clans of Manasseh was west of the Jordan beside Gilead and Bashan (verse 5).

The boundary description for the tribe of Manasseh west of the Jordan River is found in verses 7-10. They bordered the territory allotted to Ephraim in the south. In the north, Manasseh's territory extended to the allotment given to Issachar and Asher (verses 11).

Notice again in verses 11-12 that the Manassites were not able to occupy certain towns of the Canaanites who were determined not to give up their land to Manasseh. As the Israelites grew stronger, however, they subjected the Canaanites in these towns to forced labour but they did not drive them out completely (verse 13).

God's blessing was obvious on Joseph's sons. In verse 14, the people of Ephraim and Manasseh approached Joshua for more land because they were too numerous for the inheritance they had received (verse 14). Joshua told them to clear land for themselves in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaites (verse 15). Joseph's descendants told Joshua, however, that this was not enough for them. Notice that they also told him that the Canaanites who lived in the surrounding country had iron chariots (verse 16). They were afraid of these Canaanites. Joshua refused to give them any more inheritance (verse 17). He told them that they were to clear the land they had and that God would give them victory over the Canaanites if they were willing to face them (verse 18). They would have to fight to obtain more territory. This was not something they were really keen on doing. Joshua's challenge to the descendants of Joseph is a challenge to us as well. Sometimes victory only comes through hard work and perseverance.

For Consideration:

- In chapter 16 we see how Caleb had to fight for his territory even though it was promised to him by God. Are there things in your life that God is calling you to work hard to obtain?
- Caleb's daughter only had to ask her father and he gave the springs of water she asked for. Do we always have to fight to obtain the promises of God? Are there things you have not obtained from God simply because you have not asked Him?
- Notice the number of Canaanites who were not dislodged from the territory allotted to Israel. They did

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not have victory all at once. In some cases they did not seem to have victory over these enemies at all. Are there issues in your life that you need more strength to overcome?

- Joseph's descendants were afraid of the Canaanites and hesitated to make the effort to clear the land to make more room for their people. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were not sure you wanted to put forth the effort to gain the territory God had for you?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is able to strengthen you to overcome the obstacles that stand between Him and His purposes for your life.
- Ask God to give you discipline and perseverance to fight the battles He has called you to fight.
- Ask God to reveal to you any obstacles in your life that need to be overcome. Ask Him for strength to overcome those obstacles.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for victories He has given to you in your spiritual life.

15

THE ALLOTMENT OF THE LAST SEVEN TRIBES

Read Joshua 18:1-19:51

As we begin chapter 18 we see that the people of God set up the Tabernacle in the town of Shiloh (verse 1). Verse 1 makes it quite clear that the whole region of Canaan was now under Israel's control. It is interesting to note in verse 2 that Joshua challenged his people to take possession of the land the Lord had given them. There seems to be a distinction between bringing the nation under their control and possessing the land. This is an important distinction we need to note.

When the Lord Jesus died on the cross He conquered the power of sin and brought to His people victory over its legal hold on their lives. He also paved the way for all believers to live in the victory He had obtained for them on the cross. Like Joshua, Jesus conquered the territory held by the enemy and set us free from his power and control. This does not mean, however, that sin will never again be a temptation. The victory is there for us but we still have to trust God and wrestle against sin and its temptations. This is what

was happening with the people of God. They had conquered the enemy but they still had to take possession of the land, settled in it and bring it under submission to the purpose of God.

There was still a large amount of land that had not been possessed by God's people. Joshua proposed that they select three men from each of the seven remaining tribes and send them throughout the land to survey it (verse 4). This team of surveyors was to divide the remaining land into seven parts and bring back the description of each lot to Joshua. Joshua told the people that Judah was to remain in the southern region while the rest of the tribes would live in the north (verse 5). When the land was divided into seven lots, Joshua and the priests would cast lots to see which land God would give to each of the seven remaining tribes (verse 6).

The men went out to survey and divide up the land God had given them. Joshua instructed them to return to him at Shiloh when they had completed their survey (verse 8). The men did exactly as Joshua commanded and returned to Shiloh (verse 9). As Joshua promised, he cast lots for the land that had been divided by the surveyors (verse 10). He did this in the presence of the Lord. By casting lots, Joshua was removing any possibility of discussion on this matter. The Lord would determine where each tribe would live. The remainder of chapters 18 and 19 describe the allotment given to each tribe by the casting of lots.

The first lot was for the tribe of Benjamin. Their lot was between Judah to the south and Manasseh and Ephraim to the north (verse 11). A detailed description of their boundaries can be found in verse 12-20. In verses 21-28 we have a list of twenty-six important cities and town that formed part of Benjamin's inheritance.

In Joshua 19:1 we read that the second lot fell to the tribe of Simeon. What is interesting about the inheritance of Simeon was that it fell within the territory of Judah. Joshua 19:9 tells us that Judah's territory was too big for them so Simeon was given part of their land. Verses 2-8 is a list of important towns and cities allotted to the tribe of Simeon.

The third lot fell to the tribe of Zebulun. The allotment that fell to Zebulun is described for us in verses 10-15. Their territory was north of that allocated to Manasseh. Verse 15 gives us a list of some of the important towns and villages located in Zebulun's territory.

The fourth lot fell to the tribe of Issachar. The boundaries of Issachar's territory are described in verses 18-23. Included in this description is a list of sixteen important towns and villages.

Asher's lot fell next. Verses 24-31 describe the land allotted to them. Their lot was on the sea in the northern region of the land God had given to his people. It included twenty-two important towns and villages.

Naphtali's lot was sixth. Their boundaries are described in verses 33-34. Verses 35-39 list nineteen fortified cities that fell to Naphtali as part of their inheritance.

The seventh and final lot fell to the tribe of Dan. The boundaries of their inheritance are detailed in verses 41-46 and included a list of important cities and towns. The territory described for us in these verses was located just north of the territory allotted to Judah in the south along the sea coast. The tribe of Dan however had difficulty taking possession of their territory. This may have been because of the people who were in the land when they went to possess it. For this reason they went north to the region of

Leshem and took the city and occupied it as well (verse 47).

When Joshua had finished dividing up the land and allotting it to the various tribes, the Israelites gave him his inheritance (verse 49). He was given the town of Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim. He would build up the town and settle there with his family (verse 50).

All these territories were assigned to the seven remaining tribes of Israel at Shiloh by the casting of lots in the presence of the Lord (verse 51).

These two chapters, while filled with land descriptions and lists of towns, are important for several reasons. First, it shows us that God is faithful to His promises. He gave to each of the tribes an allotment for their families as He had promised.

Second, these chapters teach us that it is God's purpose that we possess and occupy the territory He has given us. God had conquered the territory through Joshua but He expected his people to settle in and defend the land. Through Jesus Christ we too have been given victory but God now calls us to live in that victory.

Finally, these chapters show us that God has an assignment for each of us. The allotment given to each tribe was different but God had a place for each one. In a similar way God has a purpose for each of us. He expects us to step out and live in that purpose. He expected each tribe to occupy the plot of land He had given them but He also expected that they develop that land for His glory. Whatever gifts God has given you are to be used for His glory and purpose. Whatever territory God has given you to possess, He expects that you will do your utmost to possess and

defend. He has a very specific place, purpose and ministry for each of us. May we find that purpose and place and occupy it until He returns.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between conquering and possessing? How has Christ conquered Satan? What do we need to do to possess what Christ has conquered from Satan?
- Is it possible for believers to live in defeat even though God has given them victory? Explain. What victories do you need in your life?
- What does the casting of lots indicate to us about how Israel felt about God purpose for each tribe? Does God have a particular purpose for your life? What is it?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord Jesus that He has conquered Satan and sin.
- Ask God to help you to possess what He has conquered for you from Satan.
- Are there areas of defeat in your life? What are they? Ask the Lord to help you to take these areas back from Satan.

- Thank the Lord that He has a very specific purpose and plan for your life. Ask Him to help you to see His purpose for you and walk in it.

16

SPECIAL CITIES

Read Joshua 20:1-21:45

In the last few chapters we have seen how Joshua allotted territory to the various tribes of Israel. Each tribe was given a special parcel of land by God to possess. We learn from chapters 20 and 21 that Joshua also set aside cities for the Levites. Included in these were a number of cities where those who had unintentionally killed another person could flee. God had instructed Moses to set aside these cities of refuge in Numbers 35:6-34. There are several things we need to understand about these special cities.

Notice first in verse 3 that they were intended for the person who had accidentally or unintentionally killed another person. There was no such protection for those who murdered a brother or sister intentionally. This person was stoned to death. The people sheltered in the cities of refuge were people who did not have evil intent. The death they caused was by accident or some carelessness on their part. Here in the city of refuge they would be protected from anyone who wanted to avenge the killing.

Verse 4 tells us that when an Israelite was guilty of killing another person unintentionally he or she was to flee to one of these cities of refuge. Before gaining entrance to the

city, however, they needed to present their case to the elders of the city. These elders would examine each case and when it was clear that the crime was unintentional, they would allow the person into the city and protect them from anyone seeking revenge. According to verse 5, if an avenger of blood pursued these individual to the city, the elders were not to surrender them over. They would be protected by the city against harm.

Notice also that the person who fled to the city of refuge was to remain in the city until he or she has stood trial and until the high priest had died (verse 6). They were not to return to their town where the incident occurred. It should be noted that the person who had accidentally killed another human being still had to pay for his or her crime. These individuals were not put to death but they were tried and imprisoned in the city of refuge. It is important to note what Numbers 35:26-28 tells us about this:

"But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder. The accused must stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; only after the death of the high priest may he return to his own property."

Those guilty of unintentionally killing another human being were still held accountable for their actions. They were not permitted to leave the cities of refuge on pain of death. Only when the high priest died, could they return to their families. Even unintentional sin was to be punished.

Verses 7-8 give us a list of towns and cities set aside as cities of refuge for the Israelites. These cities were scattered throughout the various tribes of Israel so that the person who unintentionally killed another person could flee to them for protection from an avenger of blood (verse 9).

There were also other cities set aside in Israel for the Levites. It should be remembered that the Levites who were the priests and servants of God in Israel were not given a particular territory. They were scattered throughout all the tribes of Israel so they could serve as God's representatives among them. In Joshua 21 the Levites approached Joshua, Eleazar the priest and the tribal heads to remind him of God's command through Moses that they received an allotment of towns throughout Israel as their inheritance (verse 2). What follows is a description of the various towns and cities given over to the Levites from each of the tribes of Israel.

It should be remembered that Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath and Merari. The descendants of each of these three sons were given special responsibilities before the Lord (see Numbers 3:21-37). Cities were given to each of these sons of Levi.

The descendants of Kohath were known as the Kohathites. They were allotted thirteen towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin (verse 4) and another ten towns from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan and Manasseh (verse 5).

Gershon's descendants or the Gershonites were given thirteen towns from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh to the east of the Jordan (verse 6).

Merari's descendants, the Merarites received twelve cities from the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Zebulun (verse 7). The towns allotted to the Levites included pastureland for their flocks (verse 8).

Verses 4-8 give us a general idea of where how each tribe gave cities and towns to the Levites. What follows in the remainder of the chapter is a more detailed account of the cities given to each Levitical family by tribe. The following chart illustrates Joshua 21:9-39 showing what towns each tribe gave to the individual clans of Levi as their possession.

Verses	Given to	From	Cities Given
21:9-16	Aaron (Priests)	Judah Simeon	Hebron Libnah Jattir Eshtemoa Holon Debir Ain Juttah Beth Shemesh
21:17-19		Benjamin	Gibeon Geba Anbathoth Almon
21:20-22	Kohathite	Ephraim	Shechem Gezer Kibzaim Beth Horon
21:23-24		Dan	Eltekeh Gibbethon Aijalon Gath Rimmon

21:25-26		Manasseh	Taanach Gath Rimmon
21:27	Gershonite	Manasseh	Golan Be Eshtarah
21:28-29		Issachar	Kishion Daberath Jarmuth En Gannim
21:30-31		Asher	Mishal Abdon Helkath Rehob
21:32		Naphtali	Kedesh Hammoth Dor Kartan
21:34-35	Merarite	Zebulun	Jokneam Kartah Dimnah Nahalal
21:36-37		Reuben	Bezer Jahaz Kedemoth Mephaath
21:38-39		Gad	Ramoth Mahanaïm Heshbon Jazer

Altogether there were forty-eight towns given over to the Levites throughout Israel. Each of these towns included pastureland for their flocks (verses 41-42).

With the allotment of cities of refuge and the cities for the Levites, everyone in Israel was given a claim in the land. Israel separated and settled each tribe in their land. Verse

44 tells us that God gave them rest on every side. Not one of their enemies could stand against them. All their enemies were subject to them (verse 44). All of God's promises to the people of Israel came true. They had overcome tremendous obstacles, but through them all, God had been faithful and now His people were settled in their land.

What is significant in this section is that each tribe had a contribution to make. The Levites were God's representatives and God expected that each tribe do their part to welcome them into their land. By surrendering territory to the Levites, God's people were opening their hearts to His servants. They were to make room in their land for God and His servants the Levites. God expects nothing less today. Do you have room in your business for God? Do you have room in your personal life for God?

For Consideration:

- What do we see in this passage about the compassion of God for those who fall unintentionally into sin?
- What is the difference between unintentional sin and intentional sin? Are we guilty if we sin unintentionally?
- How are the cities of refuge a picture of the Lord Jesus? Is there hope outside of the Lord Jesus?
- What do we learn about the obligation of each tribe in Israel to return to the Lord a portion of what He had already given them? Does God have part of

your business or work? Does God have part of your finances and your time?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is gracious to us when we fall into sin.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to be part of our lives and activities.
- Ask the Lord to show you how you can devote a portion of your work, your time, or your finances to Him.

17

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Read Joshua 22:1-34

As human beings, because we do not always see the whole picture, we can jump to the wrong conclusion. Sometimes those false conclusions can lead to serious consequences. Joshua 22 is the story about a misunderstanding between the tribes of Israel.

As we begin, Joshua summoned the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Remember that these three tribes had an inheritance on the east side of the Jordan. While they would not be living on the west side of the Jordan with the rest of their brothers and sisters, they had fought with them for their territory. They stood faithfully by their brothers through their battles until all of the land had been conquered. Now it was time for them to return to their families who had stayed on the other side of the river.

Joshua commended the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh for their faithfulness to their brothers and sisters (verse 3). Notice that Joshua told them that they had been faithful to the mission the Lord had given them. It was God's purpose that they help their brothers conquer the land of Canaan. Even though they would not inherit any

part of that land, God still wanted them to stand with the other tribes in its conquest.

The faithfulness of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh in standing with their brothers is significant for a couple of reasons. First, they were given, by this means, a deeper understanding of God's character. As the people of Israel swept through the land of Canaan and took it over, they saw clear evidence that God was with them and going before them. As they experienced the failure at Ai when they were defeated because of Achan's sin, they gained a new appreciation of God's holiness. When the sun stood still, they understood how much God was willing to stand for them. Imagine that the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had missed these experiences. Their understanding of God was strengthened by their experience with the other tribes. They would return to their territory renewed in their relationship with God. I'm sure they would have many wonderful stories to tell their wives and children east of the Jordan River.

Second, these three tribes were geographically separated from the other tribes of Israel. Had they remained on the east side of the Jordan and not fought with the other tribes it would have been easy for them to feel like they had no part with them. By crossing the Jordan and fighting with their brothers for the land of Canaan they were establishing a strong bond with them. They had fought and conquered the land together.

In verse 4 Joshua told the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh that they were free now to return to their own land. Before they left for the other side of the Jordan, however, Joshua challenged Reuben, Gad and Manasseh to be faithful to the law that Moses had given them (verse 5). He

reminded them that they were called to love the Lord and walk in His ways with all their heart and soul.

Having commended them for their faithfulness and challenged them to love and obedience, Joshua blessed the three tribes and sent them back to their homes (verse 6). Part of the blessing these tribes received from Joshua was in the form of large herds of livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron and clothing. This was the plunder they had taken from their enemies (verse 8).

With this blessing, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh left their brothers and began their journey home across the Jordan (verse 9). Before returning home, however, they decided to build a large altar (verse 10). When the other tribes of Israel heard that they had built this large altar by the Jordan, they were very upset (verse 11). They were so upset that they decided to declare war on them (verse 12). Obviously, they saw this large altar as a pagan altar. It was obviously not constructed according to the specifications of the Lord for an altar.

In verse 13 the Israelites sent Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest to Gilead where Reuben, Gad and Manasseh had erected this altar. Along with Phinehas were ten of the chief men of from each of the tribes of Israel (verse 14).

When this delegation arrived at Gilead, they told the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh what the others tribes thought of their altar. They saw the altar as a way of breaking faith with the God of Israel. They saw this as an act of rebellion against the Lord God (verse 16). They went as far as to remind them of the sin of Peor. We read about this in Numbers 25:1-5. At that time, the Israelites turned their back on the Lord God and began to engage in sexual immorality with Moabite women. They also sacrificed to

the Baal of Peor. In doing this, they brought the wrath of God on themselves. The delegation reminded the other three tribes that to that day they had not completely cleansed themselves of the sins that took place that day. There may still have been people who were tempted to follow the ways of the gods of Moab.

Phinehas and the leaders of Israel reminded the three tribes that by turning away from God they would bring His wrath on the whole nation (verse 18). They pleaded with them not to rebel against the Lord God by building a pagan altar. They even invited Reuben, Gad and Manasseh to live with them if the land they were going to possess was defiled and was not experiencing God's blessing (verse 19). They also reminded Reuben, Gad and Manasseh of Achan who took the things that were devoted to God. When Achan took these articles from the city of Jericho and hid them under his tent, the curse of the Lord fell on the entire nation (verse 20). By acting unfaithfully to the Lord, the health of the entire nation was at risk.

On the one hand, we have to admire the dedication of the people of God. We see here an indication of their commitment and where they were spiritually at that time in their lives. They did not want anything to stand in the way of the blessing of God and were willing to deal with anything that would separate them from that blessing. We could certainly use more people like this in our day.

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh heard what the other tribes said. In response they told them that the Lord God, "the Mighty One" knew their intentions. In calling God the Mighty One, they are reaffirming that He was their God and that they had no intention of turning from Him.

Notice also in verse 22 that they said: "If this has been in rebellion or disobedience to the LORD, do not spare us this day." In other words, if we have done wrong we are willing to be judged. They essentially gave their brothers permission to kill them if they found them guilty of rebelling against the Mighty God of Israel. "If we have built our own altar to turn away from the LORD and to offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, or to sacrifice fellowship offerings on it, may the LORD himself call us to account," they said in verse 23.

This response is important. Reuben, Gad and Manasseh could have responded very differently. They could have been insulted and became angry with the other tribes of Israel. They could have reminded them of how they stood faithfully with them in battle against their enemies. Who among us has not done this when accused falsely?

The response of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh is a humble response. They begin by telling their brothers that they were quite willing to submit to the severest of judgment if they had done wrong. They had no intention of hindering the blessing of God for their brothers and sisters. In fact they would willingly lay down their lives rather than take their blessing from them.

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh went on to explain their actions. They explained that the altar they built was never intended for worship. Instead, it was to be a reminder of their oneness with the rest of Israel. According to verse 24, they feared that because they were geographically separated by the Jordan River from the rest of their brothers their future generations would say:

"What do you have to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? The LORD has made the Jordan a

boundary between us and you—you Reubenites and Gadites! You have no share in the LORD."

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh did not want future generations to push them aside. Though geographically divided from the rest of the nation, they wanted them to know that they were all of the same blood and family. They shared the same heritage and history. They feared that if the rest of Israel pushed them aside and failed to recognize their children as part of the same nation, this would be cause their future generations to turn to other gods (verse 25).

It was because of this that the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh decided to build an altar. The altar was not for offerings or sacrifices but as a memorial (verse 26). It was to serve as a witness between them for generations to follow that they were one nation under God (verse 27). They built a memorial in the form of an altar because the altar represented the worship of the God of Israel. By building this replica as a memorial, not for sacrifice, they were saying that they would serve and worship the God of Israel and honour Him alone (verse 28). Reuben, Gad and Manasseh reassured their brothers that they had no intention of rebelling against the Lord God by building an altar for worship (verse 29).

When Phinehas the priest and the other community leaders heard the response of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh they were very pleased (verse 30). They were reassured that the Lord God had not abandoned them nor was His curse on them (verse 31). I am sure also that they felt reassured in their bond with Reuben, Gad and Manasseh.

Phinehas and the leaders returned home and reported their findings to the Israelites (verse 32). The whole nation was glad to hear the report and praised God. All talk of

going to war with Reuben, Gad and Manasseh ended and obviously the relationship between them was strengthened (verse 33). Reuben and Gad named the altar "A Witness Between Us that the LORD is God."

This story is a warning to us about jumping to conclusions. None of us really understand the motives and intentions of our brother or sister. It is all too easy to draw false conclusions based on what we see. Notice in this passage that before sending their army, Israel sent Phinehas and the community leaders to talk with Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Those talks brought clarity and resolved the problem. Reuben, Gad and Manasseh also are to be credited with humbly listening to the concerns of their brothers and being patient with them in their misunderstanding. Many problems can be avoided among believers today if we would only follow this example.

For Consideration:

- Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were faithful in standing with their brother and sisters in battle. How faithful are you to stand with your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- For Reuben, Gad and Manasseh the Jordan River was a potential threat to unity with their brothers and sisters. What issues have the potential for dividing believers today?
- Have you ever been guilty of jumping to the wrong conclusion? How does Israel deal with the misunderstanding so as to avoid a war? What lesson do you take from this?

- How do Reuben, Gad and Manasseh respond to the misunderstandings of their brothers? How important is our response to misunderstandings?
- We see the commitment of Israel to the purity of their land and the glory of God. What issues dishonour the Lord in your land today? What do you feel needs to be done about this?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to stand with your brothers and sisters in their time of need.
- Ask God to show you the issues that cause division among believers today. Ask him to help you to overcome those barriers.
- Ask God to help you to respond in a way that would glorify His name when you are misunderstood.
- Ask God to give you grace to listen to the opinions and viewpoints of others before making a judgment about them.
- Ask God to give you a deeper commitment to seeing His name honoured in your land.

18

JOSHUA'S WORDS

TO THE NATION

Read Joshua 23:1-16

Years had passed since the people of Israel had crossed the Jordan River and conquered the land God had promised them. By this time Joshua was an old man. He had lived a life faithful to God. He had worked with Moses and been trained by him. When Moses died, God called Joshua to lead His people in the conquest of the land of Canaan. When the land was conquered, God asked him to be an administrator and divide up the land among the people. Joshua was faithful in that responsibility as well. God's purpose for Joshua was now coming to an end. The day was approaching when the Lord would take him to be with Himself. In this final period of his life, Joshua was used by God to challenge his people to walk in faithfulness and obedience.

In this chapter Joshua called all of Israel to himself. The elders, leaders, judges and officials stood before him and Joshua spoke to them (verse 2).

In verse 3 Joshua reminded his people of what the Lord had done for them. He reminded them of how they had come into the land and conquered mighty nations. They had not obtained this land because they were strong. The Lord God of Israel had fought for them and given them the land they now possessed.

Joshua challenged his people to remember what God had done. It is all too easy for us to forget what the Lord God has done in our lives. How quickly we forget the victories He has given. How easy it is to overlook the blessings. We become discouraged and downcast when we see the difficulties ahead. We wonder how we will ever be able to overcome. Joshua calls us to take our eyes off the future long enough to look to the past. As we look back, we see the hand of a faithful God who never once abandoned us. We see His deliverance and victory. Our eyes move from our circumstances to the God of our circumstances. Joshua challenged his people to remember what God had done for them. In remembering what God has done in the past we find courage to face the future.

Still on this theme of remembrance, Joshua told his people to remember how he had allotted the land God had given them (verse 4). This land was their land now. The enemy would try to claim it back from them but they were to remember that this was the inheritance God had given them. The God who gave them this land would enable them to possess it. He would give them strength to keep that land and push back their enemies (verse 5).

I can imagine that Satan would have put some doubts in the minds of God's people as they sought to possess their land. "Do you really think you are strong enough to drive these enemies out," he would ask. "Do you really have a right to take this land," he would question. Satan will often

try to cause us to doubt our ability to walk in the victory God wants us to have. You can almost hear him say, "You're going to fall; it's just a matter of time. You don't have the strength to persevere." Have you ever felt those doubts? Joshua knew that as the people of God possessed their land there would be challenges. For this reason, he called them to remember that it was God's will that they occupy this land. The God who gave them the land was also able to keep them in it and drive back all who opposed them. The God who calls us will give us all we need to be faithful to that call.

In verse 6 Joshua challenged the Israelites to be very strong. Joshua knew that his people would require much strength if they were going to be victorious over their enemies. Joshua tells his people in verse 6 how they could be strong. They would be strong by being careful to obey all that was written in the Book of the Law of Moses. They were not to turn aside from the law but obey it with all their heart. The strength of God's people was found in obedience.

Disobedience grieved the heart of God and drove His presence from them. Obedience, on the other hand, brought blessing. If God's people wanted to be strong, they needed to be obedient. An obedient and faithful people are a strong people.

There would be many challenges to this obedience. Pagan nations surrounded them with their evil ways. Joshua told his people that they were not to associate with these nations. They were not to call on their gods or swear oaths in the names of their gods (verse 7). Instead, they were to hold fast to the Lord their god and remain true to Him. Any compromise with the nations and their gods would weaken

them as a nation. The secret to their strength was to walk in obedience and faithfulness to the one true God of Israel.

In verses 9-10 Joshua speaks of the strength that was at work in Israel through their obedience. They had driven out great and powerful nations. Not one of those nations was able to withstand them. Just one Israelite could rout a thousand because God was fighting for him. How foolish it would be to walk away from this great God who was the source of their strength. How foolish it would be to turn their back on Him by choosing instead to follow the path of lesser gods.

While obedience is vital if we are to experience the victory of the Lord, Joshua told the people in verse 11 that they were also to be careful to love the Lord their God. He was their strength. All their blessings flowed from Him. He was the source of their life. They were to honour and walk with Him in love. There is an external obedience that does not honour God. The Pharisees of the New Testament obeyed the Law of Moses but they did not love the Lord wholeheartedly. God expects obedience from a heart of love. This is the kind of obedience that comes from the heart and delights in God and His ways.

Joshua warned Israel that if they turned from God, allied with pagan nations and adopted their ways they would suffer terrible consequences in their nation. He makes these consequences very clear in verses 13-16. If they allied themselves with the pagan nations around them, God would no longer keep these nations out. Israel would find she was incapable of dealing with the nations. God was more than willing to give His people victory. All he required from them was obedience from a loving heart. Disobedience to God would strip them of their power and authority and leave them helpless before their enemies. The nations

around them would become a snare to them. They would be overcome by their enemy. The enemy's whip would sting their backs as they forced them into subjection. Ultimately, they would perish and the land the Lord had given them would be stripped from them. They could lose everything through disobedience.

In verses 14-15 Joshua told the people clearly that just as God had been faithful in all of His promises for their good, He would also bring the evil He threatened on them if they turned their backs on Him. God would not hesitate to take away everything He had given them if they turned from Him. His burning anger would flame up against them if they violated his covenant by serving other gods. They would quickly perish in the land.

Sadly, God's people did not heed the warnings of Joshua. Because of their disobedience to the Lord God, the descendants of the people who settled in the land would be defeated by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. They would be taken from the land the Lord had given them and sent into captivity in Babylon. What keeps God from stripping His blessings from our land today?

This chapter is a powerful reminder of the importance of wholehearted obedience to God and His purposes. Obedience and faithfulness to the Lord God are the secret of our strength. You can have all the spiritual gifts you want but if you are not walking in obedience, God's blessing is stripped from those gifts. May God show us the importance of walking in obedience.

For Consideration:

- Consider for a moment the various ministries God gave Joshua. What ministries has God given you? What is His present call on your life?
- How important is it for us to remember what God has done? How does looking back give us strength to face the future?
- Has the enemy ever caused you to doubt that you can continue to walk in victory? What encouragement does this chapter bring you?
- What, according to Joshua, is the secret of strength?
- How does disobedience strip us of strength?
- What keeps God from stripping away the blessing He has given us today?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to walk in His specific purpose for your life and ministry today.
- Take a moment to look back in time to remember the good things God has done for you. Thank Him for these blessings in your life.
- Thank the Lord that He enables us to continue to walk in victory. Thank Him for some specific victories. Ask Him to give you grace to continue to walk in them.

- Ask the Lord to help you to confess and deal with any specific disobedience in your life.
- Thank the Lord for His grace that continues to bless us even when we do not deserve it. Ask Him to help you to not take this grace for granted.

19

THE COVENANT AT SHECHEM

Read Joshua 24:1-33

We examined Joshua's challenge to Israel's leaders in chapter 23. The time of Joshua's death was fast approaching. Before he died, however, he called for an assembly of the tribes of Israel. When they had gathered before him at Shechem, Joshua spoke to them (verse 2). These were possibly the last words Joshua spoke to the nation as a whole.

Joshua began in verse 3 with a reminder to his people of their history as a nation. Notice in verse 3 that the words Joshua spoke were from the Lord. Joshua spoke as a prophet. This would be his final role as a servant of God before he died.

Joshua reminded his people of their humble beginnings as a nation. Their story began with Abraham who lived beyond the Euphrates River. Abraham and his fathers did not know God. They worshiped other gods (verse 2).

One day God spoke to Abraham and led him out of his land to the land of Canaan. He blessed him and promised

him many descendants (verse 3). Abraham had a son by the name of Isaac.

Isaac had two sons (Jacob and Esau). God gave Esau the hill country of Seir but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt (verse 4). They became slaves in Egypt. This was not because God did not care them. He had an even greater purpose for them than he had for Esau and his descendants.

In time God rose up a servant by the name of Moses. Through Moses and his brother Aaron, God punished the Egyptians and brought Jacob's descendants out of Egypt (verse 5). The Egyptians pursued the escaping Israelites as far as the Red Sea (verse 6). When Israel cried out for help, the Lord put darkness between them and the Egyptians. Pharaoh's army could not approach Israel. God separated the sea so that His people could cross on dry land. When the Egyptians followed them into the sea the Lord caused it to fall down on them so that they drowned (verse 7). They were all witnesses to the great power and protection of the Lord their God in those days.

From the Red Sea the people of Israel went into the desert. For forty years the Lord protected, fed and kept them. He brought them through that desert to the land of the Amorites east of the Jordan River (verse 8).

The Amorites fought against God's people but God gave them into their hands. The Israelites defeated the Amorites and took possession of their land (verse 8).

Amon was not the only nation east of the Jordan to oppose Israel. Balak king of Moab lived in that region as well. He sent for Balaam the prophet to put a curse on the Israelites (verse 9). Again, however God protected His people. God

blessed Israel again and again (verse 10). He delivered them from the attack of Balak.

Joshua went on to remind Israel of how they crossed the Jordan and came to the city of Jericho (verse 11). The citizens of Jericho fought against them as did the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites. God gave Israel victory over every one of these nations. In verse 12 Joshua told his people that the victory over those nations was not the result of their own bow and sword. The Lord sent a hornet ahead of them. It is somewhat unclear what Joshua meant by this statement but we can generally understand it to refer to the fear and turmoil that God put in the hearts of the nations that Israel was to conquer. Imagine for a moment that you stirred up a hornet's nest. As those stinging hornets come after you, what is your response? You run as fast as you can, swinging your arms to get rid of as many of these stinging insects as possible. This is what it was like for the enemies of God's people. They ran, fearing for their lives and the power of God that was with His people who pursued them.

God gave His people a cultivated land which they had not farmed. He gave them cities they had not built. They ate from vineyards and olive groves they did not plant. All this was a gift from God to His people (verse 13).

Having reminded his people of the grace of God in providing, caring, protecting and blessing them, Joshua then challenged them to live as His people. In verse 14, he told them to fear the Lord and serve Him with faithfulness. The God who had made them into a powerful nation was worthy of their service and worship. There was no god like the God of Israel. Joshua commanded his people in verse 14 to throw away all other gods. No other god was worthy of their worship.

Joshua called his people to make a choice that day (verse 15). He told them that if serving the Lord God was undesirable to them then they were to choose the god they would serve. He told them that he and his family had made up their minds. They were going to serve the God who had brought them out of Egypt. They were committing themselves to Him alone.

Joshua's call to his people was a call to commitment. He wanted them to make their intentions clear. All too often we sit at the cross roads. We could go either way. God is calling us to make our decision. In Revelation 3:16 Jesus rebuked the church of Laodicea because it was lukewarm. He told the church that He wished that they were either cold or hot but because they were lukewarm He would spit them out of His mouth. Joshua, speaking as a prophet of God, told the people of his day that they were either for God or against Him. They were either to serve Him with all their heart or not at all. That day Joshua was calling for a decision. Were the people of Israel going to follow God wholeheartedly or not? God wants to know the same thing from us today.

In verse 16 the people made their decision. "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!" they said. They recognized the goodness of God. They recognized that He had brought them out of Egypt and performed many great signs before their eyes (verse 17). It was this God who had protected them against their enemies, giving them the land they possessed (verses 17-18). They committed themselves that day to serving the Lord God of Israel.

Joshua heard their response but reminded them that they were not able to serve the Lord as they said they would. It

could be that Joshua saw prophetically that Israel's commitment that day would not be kept. Later generations would turn their backs on the Lord God. Ultimately, the land God gave to His people would be stripped from them because of their disobedience.

Notice in verse 19 that Joshua reminded his people that the God they were committing themselves to was a holy and jealous God. If they turned from God to serving other gods, God would turn His back on them. He would bring disaster on them and destroy them (verses 19-20).

The choice the people had to make was between life and death. If they chose God they would live and know His blessings. If they turned their back on God they would perish without hope.

In verse 21 the people again make a firm commitment before Joshua that they would serve the Lord their God. Joshua told them that they were witnessed against themselves in the vow they had made (verse 22).

Making this promise to follow the Lord with their mouths was one thing. Putting it in practice was another. In verse 23, Joshua told Israel that if they were serious about their vow they were going to have to throw away the foreign gods among them and yield their hearts to God alone. Was it possible that even as they spoke, there were individuals with foreign gods in their possession? Joshua is calling the people to move beyond words to action. Words come quite easy. Joshua challenged his people to backup their words by action. In verse 24 the people agreed to do as Joshua said.

To seal their engagement, the people made a covenant before God. Joshua drew up the terms of this covenant

(verse 25). The covenant was recorded in the Book of the Law. Joshua then took a large stone and set it up under an oak tree near the place where the tabernacle was set (verse 26). He told the people that the stone was a witness against them and their promise to God that day. The people agreed (verse 27). After sealing their commitment to God, the people returned to their homes (verse 28).

Joshua died after these events. He was one hundred and ten years old when he died (verse 29). He was buried in Timnath Serah in Ephraim, the land that had been given to him as an inheritance (verse 30). Israel served the Lord under his capable leadership and even during the lives of the elders who served with Joshua (verse 31).

Verse 32 records the fulfilment of a promise Joseph called his sons to make. While he was in Egypt, Joseph made his sons promise that they would take his bones from Egypt and bury them in the land God promised (see Genesis 50:25). According to verse 32 Joseph's bones were buried in Shechem in a plot of land Jacob had bought many years before (see Genesis 33:19). That land was given as an inheritance to Joseph's descendants.

Also at this time Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest died. He had faithfully served with Joshua. He was buried at Gibeah on a piece of land that had been allotted to his son Phinehas (verse 33).

This period of Israel's history was a glorious one. God used Joshua as a military leader, administrator and prophet. Under his capable leadership, the land of Canaan was given over to the people of God. God accomplished His wonderful purposes by giving Israel a land of their own. Now that Joshua had died, the task of administering and governing the land would fall into the hands of a series of judges. The

covenant commitment Israel made at Shechem that day would be seriously put to the test in the years to come.

For Consideration:

- How does Israel's history prove the blessings and faithfulness of God in their lives? How has God's blessing and faithfulness been proven in your life?
- Esau's descendants were given the region of Seir but Jacob's descendants, whom God wanted to bless, were held as slaves in Egypt. What does this teach us about trials in life?
- Joshua made it clear that Israel's victory was not because of their great leadership or because of their military strength. Israel was victorious only because God was with them. Is it possible to trust in other things for victory today? Explain.
- What do we learn in this passage about God's desire for us to commit ourselves totally to Him? Have you made that commitment? Have you been faithful to God?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the many ways He has blessed you in this life.
- Thank the Lord that He can use trials to accomplish His purpose. Thank Him that in those trials we can see God in a new way.
- Ask God to show you if you have been trusting in anything other than Him for victory.
- Ask God to show you if there is anything in your life that defiles your commitment to Him.

Preface to Judges

Through the capable leadership of Joshua, Israel was now settled in Canaan. After his death, the nation was lead by a series of judges. These judges were often military leaders who brought the judgment of God on enemy nations and insured the security of His people. God was still Israel's King.

In this book we see the struggle of God's people with the temptations around them. They are a people prone to wander from Him and His purposes. It is important to note the connection between Israel's faithfulness to God and His blessing on them as a nation. As they wander from God, His people separate themselves from His blessing. Often this led to serious consequences. We read of God's people, oppressed by the enemy, living in caves and hiding in mountains for fear of what their enemies might do.

In these times of despair, when Israel cried out to God, He would send a deliverer to judge their oppressors and set them free. God's blessing would be restored when His people returned to Him. In their blessing, however, they were quick to forget Him and the cycle was repeated. The reader cannot help but be struck by Israel's tendency to wander and God's incredible patience with her as a nation.

As you study the book of Judges, take note of how often God's people fall into sin. Notice also the wonderful patience of God with them and be encouraged in your own

spiritual walk. Consider the devastating effects of sin, however, on the lives of God's people. See how their sin and rebellion only brought helplessness and despair. Victory, for God's people, was not in their military strength or careful administration but in obedience to the Lord God their one true King.

My prayer for you as you begin this study is that the Lord God would give you a deeper appreciation of His wonderful patience with us as a people who are so easily distracted from His purpose. My prayer would also be that the Lord reinforces the importance of obedience in the Christian life. May this book inspire you to seek grace to walk more faithfully with Him.

F. Wayne MacLeod

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

Author:

Traditionally, many Bible scholars believe that the book of Judges was written by the prophet Samuel. There is no conclusive evidence of this in the book, however.

Background:

The name of the book comes from the leaders who ruled in Israel in those days. After Joshua, a series of leaders, known as judges, ruled in Israel. There is some question as to why these rulers were called judges. Generally we think of judges as those who make rulings in a court. This is not necessarily the case with the judges of this period. These individuals were used of God to bring His judgment on Israel and the nations who opposed Israel. Many of these judges were military leaders who delivered Israel from the oppression of foreign nations.

We have the record of thirteen judges in this book. The following chart lists the names of the judges of this period.

Judge	Passage
Othniel	Judges 3:7-11
Ehud	Judges 3:12-30
Shamgar	Judges 3:31
Deborah (and Barak)	Judges 4:1-5:31
Gideon	Judges 6:1-8:32
Abimelech	Judges 8:33-9:57
Tola	Judges 10:1-2
Jair	Judges 10:3-5
Jephthah	Judges 10:6-12:7
Ibzan	Judges 12:8-10
Elon	Judges 12:11-12
Abdon	Judges 12:13-15
Samson	Judges 13:1-16:31

One of the key themes of the book of Judges is the cycle of disobedience and deliverance. God's people were quick to wander from Him. Whenever they did, their enemies would oppress them. In their distress they would call out to the Lord and He would send a judge to deliver them. When they were comfortable, the people of God would once again wander and the enemy would return. This cycle of disobedience and deliverance is repeated many times in the book of Judges and shows something about the natural inclination of the heart of God's people to wander.

Importance of the book for Today:

The book of Judges has much to teach us about human nature. In this book we see how the people of God were so prone to wander from God and His purposes. We can see ourselves in these people.

We also see the devastating consequences of wandering from God. Every time the people of God turned from Him

and His purposes, the enemy was given a foothold in their lives. There was a serious price to pay for wandering. Sometimes their rebellion stripped God's people of everything they had and they were forced to hide in caves, fearful of their enemies. While obedience to God leads to blessing, disobedience can only bring devastation and pain.

One cannot read the book of Judges without seeing the patience and grace of God toward a rebellious people. Over and over again the Lord forgives and restores His repentant people. While there were certainly great consequences to pay for rebellion and wandering from the truth, God's heart was always open to receiving all who would turn from their sin and seek Him with all their heart.

At times in the book, we are left to wonder about the kind of people God chose to use to deliver His people. We meet cowardly Barak, who refused to take up arms unless Deborah went with him. Gideon doubts the will of the Lord in calling him and demands a sign. Samson, breaks his vow as a Nazirite, lives a life of questionable morals with unforgiving anger in his heart all his life. Despite the sins of His servants, God used them to accomplish His purposes. How much more can He do with those who seek Him with all their heart?

The reader of the book of Judges cannot help but wonder why the Lord God would continue to be patient with a rebellious people who continually provoke Him. The book is a reminder of our own weaknesses. We see ourselves in the nation of Israel and are encouraged to know that God is willing to forgive us as well. Judges challenges us in our relationships with brothers and sister in the faith. Seeing

the patience of God toward His people obligates us to forgive and demonstrate patience and loving kindness toward each other in our differences.

ENEMIES IN THE LAND

Read Judges 1:1-36

To understand the book of Judges it is important that we know something about the book of Joshua. Joshua led his people into the Promised Land. Under his leadership, the people of God overcame their enemies and settled in the land of Canaan. Toward the later part of Joshua's ministry, the territory was allotted to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. While Joshua had conquered the land, there were still pockets of resistance. As each tribe moved to its allotted territory, they had to deal with people who did not want to leave.

There is another important detail we need to understand. God commanded Israel to destroy all the Canaanites living in the land (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). They were not to intermarry with them. There was to be complete separation between the people of the land and the people of God. This was because the Lord knew that these nations would tempt His people to follow their evil ways.

As we begin the book of Judges, Joshua has died. There was no national leader chosen to replace him. Each tribe cared for its own affairs and the nation, as a whole, was governed by the principles of God's law. Notice in verse 1

that they consulted the Lord God when they needed to know His particular will in a given situation. This was done through the prophets and priests who were God's representatives and spokesmen for the nation. God was their King, and the prophets and priests were His representatives.

While the land of Canaan now belonged to Israel, there were Canaanites living there who refused to surrender to Israel's domination. They needed to be subdued.

As we reflect on this passage we see a picture of what the Lord Jesus has done for us. Like Joshua, the Lord Jesus has broken the back of the enemy. By His death on the cross He has provided the solution for our sins. Satan has been defeated. This does not mean, however, that Satan has accepted defeat. He and his demons still linger in the land, refusing to give up and causing problems, tempting and seeking to hinder the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

What is true of Satan is also true of our own sinful flesh. God gives all who come to Him a new life. That does not mean that we will never struggle with the old nature. That old nature does not want to admit defeat. We still feel its pull and fall prey to its temptations. We still need to die to the pull of our old nature on a daily basis.

While the land had been conquered, Israel still had to do battle with enemies who did not want to leave. It was God's will that all these pockets of resistance be defeated and rooted out. God wanted His people to live in complete victory over their enemies. He did not want these nations to tempt His people with their evil ways.

Israel realized that they needed to do something about the Canaanites living in the land. While the people of God knew that they were to drive out the Canaanites, they were still careful not to trust their own human wisdom in this matter. They sought the Lord about how they were to conquer the Canaanites.

It is quite possible for us to seek to advance the kingdom of God through human wisdom. How easy it is to trust in our education and experience. God expects us, however, to seek Him and His direction in all we do. This is what Israel is doing in verse 1. They knew that that Lord wanted them to drive out the inhabitants of the land. Now they sought His will regarding how that was to be done. The written Word of God and the Spirit of God walk hand in hand. God leads us through the clear principles of His written word, but He also shows us through His Spirit how any given situation.

In verse 2 the Lord told Israel that Judah was to lead an attack against the Canaanites who still lived in the land. He promised to give the land into their hands.

With this clear word from the Lord, the tribe of Judah and their brothers, the Simeonites, who were given an allotment in Judah's territory, set out to fight the Canaanite resistance (verse 3). Judah was successful in defeating the Perizzites. Verse 4 tells us that they struck down ten thousand men in the region of Bezek.

While in the region of Bezek, Judah fought against a man by the name of Adoni-Bezek. His name literally means "lord of Bezek." He was obviously a very important and powerful individual in that region. Adoni-Bezek fled from Judah's army. Judah pursued and captured him. When he was captured, they cut off his thumbs and big toes (verse

6). While this seems to be a strange thing for them to do, the context shows us why they did it. According to verse 7, Adoni-Bezek had cut off the thumbs and big toes of seventy kings. He knew now that the God of Israel was judging him for his cruelty. Adoni-Bezek was taken captive and died in the city of Jerusalem.

The city of Jerusalem was also attacked and taken by Judah at that time. They burnt the city and killed its inhabitants. It should be remembered that Jerusalem was not yet the city it would become under David. It was merely one of many cities that Judah needed to conquer. It would become in time, however, the principle city of Judah.

After conquering Adoni-Bezek and the city of Jerusalem, Judah focused its attention to the southern region of the Negev. Here they fought the Canaanites living in the hill country. They advanced against the people of Hebron and defeated the cities of Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi (verse 10).

From these victories, Judah advanced against the region of Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). As they advanced, Caleb put forth a challenge to his men. He told them that he would give his daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who captured Kiriath Sepher (verse 12). Caleb's younger brother Othniel took up the challenge and defeated the city. Caleb gave Acsah to him in marriage (verse 13). Othniel would become one of Israel's first judges (see Judges 3:7-11).

Acsah, the new wife of Othniel urged him to ask her father Caleb for a field. With his permission she went to see her father Caleb and asked for a field with a spring of water. Caleb granted her requested (verses 14-15).

In verse 16 we read about a group known as the Kenites. They were the descendants of Moses' father-in-law. It should be remembered that Moses' father-in-law was not an Israelite. He admired the Israelites, but he was not one of them. This created certain confusion in Judah. Israel lived with these foreigners and had a healthy relationship and respect for them, but they were not God's people. We read that the Kenites would separate from the people of God and move to the Desert of Judah where they would settle. This would place a distance between Israel and the Kenites.

The tribes of Simeon and Judah also attacked the Canaanites living in the city of Zephath. They destroyed this city completely (verse 17). They also took the regions of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron (verse 18).

Judah took possession of the hill country, but they were unable to drive out the inhabitants of the plain because they had iron chariots (verse 19). We should not see from this that God was unable to give His people victory. What we do need to understand, however, is that some enemies are harder to remove than others. Sometimes God allows certain enemies to linger to keep us humble and reliant on Him.

The apostle Paul prayed that God would remove an enemy from his life. Listen to his testimony in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

God chose not to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh so he would not become proud.

The city of Hebron was given to Caleb (verse 20). He drove out three of the sons of Anak from that region.

In the first 20 verses we have seen Judah's efforts to drive out the inhabitants of the land. The remaining verses of this chapter tell us something about the other nations of Israel.

Verse 21 tells us that the tribe of Benjamin failed to dislodge the Jebusites who lived in their region. These people lived among the Benjamites for many years.

Ephraim and Manasseh attacked the city of Bethel and the Lord was with them (verse 22). They sent spies into Bethel to discover how to attack. The spies saw a man coming out Bethel and demanded that he show them how to get into the city. They promised to treat him well if he told them what they needed to know (verses 23-24). The man showed them how to get into the city and Ephraim and Manasseh entered, taking possession of it. As agreed, they spared the man and his family (verse 25). That man went to the land of the Hittites and built a city which he called Luz which was the former name for Bethel (verse 26).

The tribe of Manasseh did not drive out the people of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam or Megiddo. The inhabitants of these regions were determined to live in these regions (verse 27). Israel would eventually press these people into

forced labour but they never drove them out completely (verse 28). Let me say a word here about this.

It is possible for us to bring our attitudes or sins into submission. Even the unbeliever can change his or her sinful attitude or stop a harmful habit. We can suppress these sins and not let them control us for a time but they are still in our lives tempting us. Submitting the enemies to forced labour was like this. God's people were in control but the enemy still lived in the land. God is willing not only to help us control our sin but also to give us complete victory over it. You might be able to live in victory over lust but you know that it is constantly tempting you. God is willing to remove that temptation completely. All too often we settle for something less than what God desires. Like Israel, we are content to subject our enemies to forced labour when God wants us to remove them completely.

Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer. These people lived among the Ephraimites (verse 29).

Zebulun did not drive out the Canaanites in Kitron and Naholol. While they did subject them to forced labour they let them remain in the land (verse 30).

Asher did not drive out the people living in Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Aczib, Helbah, Aphek or Rehob. All these people lived in the region of Asher (verses 31-32).

Naphtali did not drive out the people living in Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath. They were subjected to forced labour but remained in the territory of Naphtali (verse 33).

Verse 34 tells us that the Amorites confined Dan to the hill country not allowing them to come down to the plains. We

are left with the impression that the tribe of Dan was being held hostage to the Amorites. Dan seemed to be powerless against their enemy and was not able to advance.

The Amorites put up a strong resistance to Israel. They were determined to hold on to several regions (verse 35). As the tribes of Joseph became stronger, however, they forced the Amorites into forced labour.

As we examine this chapter there are several important spiritual lessons for us. We see here that God wanted His people to live in victory over their enemies. He wanted them to conquer the land and the inhabitants that would only lead them away from the truth of His law. Each tribe had its challenges. Some of these tribes were more victorious than others. Judah had great victories. Dan seemed to be overcome by the enemy. Judah did not seem to be able to overcome the people of the plain. Other tribes simply did not seem to make the effort to get rid of the people in their territory. Notice that not one of the tribes was completely successful in getting rid of every foreign influence in their territory.

This is a picture of the church today. All of us are at various stages in our relationship with God. All of us have areas in our lives that need to be surrendered more fully to the Lord. There are habits, attitudes or issues in our lives that need to be conquered in Jesus' name so His work is unhindered in our lives. What is important for us is to realize that while Christ has already conquered the enemy on the cross, it now remains for us to drive them out and occupy their territory. Are you willing to do this? Are you willing to allow the Spirit of God to identify those areas of your life that need to be surrendered to Him? Will you make it your priority to trust God for victory in those areas of your life?

For Consideration:

- If Jesus has conquered sin and the devil, why do we still wrestle with it in our lives today?
- What areas of your life need to be more fully surrendered to the Lord God?
- It is possible for us to do the work of the kingdom in human strength and wisdom? Why do we need to seek the direction and leading of the Lord in the work of His kingdom?
- Does God allow us to wrestle with some of our enemies for life? Do you have some enemies in your life that you have not been able to conquer? How can God use those enemies for His glory in your life? Consider the example of Paul mentioned in this chapter
- What is the difference between being in control of our sin and having complete victory over our sin? Are there some areas of your life where God wants to give you a more complete victory?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has already conquered sin and the devil. Thank Him that they have no ultimate power to keep us from God today.
- Ask the Lord to show you an area of your life where He wants you to have a more complete victory. Ask Him to lead you into that victory.

- Ask God to give you grace to walk in victory over the enemies He has chosen to remain in your life for your good.

21

ISRAEL IS TESTED

Read Judges 2:1-23

As we begin chapter 2, an angel of the Lord has come to God's people with an important message from God. The angel reminded the people how God had led them out of Egypt and into the land He had promised their fathers (verse 1). In bringing this to their minds, the angel was reminding Israel of the faithfulness and grace of God toward them as a nation. They had not deserved such favour, but God blessed them anyway. All the way through the wilderness the children of Israel grumbled and complained about God's leading. God judged their fathers and mothers, allowing them all to die in the wilderness because of their sin, but He renewed His grace and favour to their children.

Notice in verse 1 that the angel also reminded the Israelites that God had made a covenant with His people. He told them that He would never break that covenant with them. Their relationship with Him was sure and guaranteed in this covenant. All God asked in return was faithfulness and devotion. He asked that they devote their hearts to Him, turning from all other gods to serve and love Him alone. They were not to make a covenant with the people of the land He was giving them to possess. They were to

break down their altars and worship God alone in the land He had given them.

As the angel of the Lord stood before the people of Israel that day, he accused them of breaking their covenant vows to the Lord. He reminded the people that they had not been faithful to God, their husband. They had turned a lustful eye to the gods of other nations. They had allowed these gods and the practices of these nations to distract them and cause them to be unfaithful in their covenant with their own God.

The angel told the people that God would not drive out these nations (verse 3). Under Joshua God's people experienced great victories. There was no nation or people who could stand against Israel, but now things would change. These nations would be a thorn in their side. They would irritate them and be a curse and snare to them. This brings up several questions.

Had God given up on His people? By no means. God's love and devotion to His people was as strong as it had always been. The problem was the attitude of God's people. Have you ever tried to get someone to love you when they were not ready to do so? You can't force people to love. Forced love is not really love at all. There are times when all we can do is to back off and let time and circumstances heal a broken relationship. God's heart was broken because of His people's wandering hearts. In this verse, he backs off because His people are not ready to receive Him. He does not give up on them. Instead He waits patiently for them to return.

Did God's plan change for His people? Again the answer is, "no." God still wanted His people to remove all the foreign gods in the land. He still wanted them to drive out all

the pagan influence. He was willing to help them do this if they were willing to receive His aid. The problem, however, was that the people of God were captivated by the evil of the land. They did not want God's help in driving out these people. Their hearts were not devoted to Him alone. They lusted in their hearts after the evil of the land. God saw their hearts. He decided that he would give them up to their evil ways.

God did not give them up because He no longer loved them. He gave them up because it was the only way they would truly appreciate His love. He gave them up so they would see that these gods had nothing to offer them. He gave them up so that they would see how empty the world and its attractions were and come back to Him with a whole heart.

Why did God not give Israel victory? The answer is quite simple. God's people did not want that victory. They were quite content to have these nations living with them. They were attracted to their gods and their sinful ways. Could it be that the reason we don't have victory in our lives is because we do not want that victory. We know that God wants us to have victory but we don't want what God wants. We are too attracted to the enemy and his evil ways.

Notice particularly in verse 3 that these nations would be a thorn in the side of Israel. They would be a snare to them. In other words, Israel would soon find out that the gods and the evil ways she was attracted to would prove to be empty. What she lusted after would become a burden to her. Her love for these foreign gods and sinful ways would turn to frustration. There would be no satisfaction in the end.

Notice the response of the people to the message of the angel in verse 4. They wept aloud. Verse 5 tells us that they called the place Bokim meaning "weepers." There at Bokim they offered sacrifices to the Lord God. While all this seems to be quite sincere, the remainder of the chapter tells us that it wasn't. God's people were certainly grieved to hear the news that they were going to be disciplined by God. They were saddened to hear that God would remove His blessing from them. The question we need to ask ourselves, however, is whether this did anything to break their attraction to the gods of the nations around them. Obviously, from the remainder of this chapter, we see that the people's love for other gods was not diminished by the words of the angel of the Lord. They grieved not because they had hurt God but because He was withdrawing His blessing.

Verses 6-9 give us the background to this period of time in Israel. When Joshua was alive, he sent each of the tribes to take possession of the land he had given them. As long as Joshua and the elders who served Joshua lived, the people served the Lord (verse 7). When Joshua died, however, things were very different. A whole generation grew up not knowing the Lord God of Israel (verse 10). They were not taught the ways of the Lord and His deeds of favour toward Israel. This resulted in the nation turning its back on God. Instead of worshiping the Lord God of Israel, they turned to the gods of the Canaanite people (verse 11). They forsook the Lord God to worship the gods of the nations around them (verse 12). This provoked the Lord to anger.

God handed His people over to raiders who plundered them (verse 14). They had been a powerful nation under Joshua. That great nation was no more. The enemies they

once conquered now plundered and captured them. Notice that at this time in Israel's history they were being sold to enemies as slaves (verse 14). They could not resist their enemies. Verse 15 tells us that wherever Israel went, the hand of the Lord was against them so they were defeated. The nation was in great distress. The Lord was showing His people what it was like to live without His protection and favour, because they had turned their backs on the only true God.

In their distress, the people of God would cry out to Him. In response God raised up a series of judges. He empowered these judges to help His people and deliver them from the hand of their enemy (verse 16), but God's people rejected these judges. They wanted out of their distress, but they were not willing to commit themselves to the Lord God. The people would not listen to the judges God sent, but chose to prostitute themselves with other gods (verse 17). As soon as the judge would die, the people would return to their evil ways and become even more corrupt than before (verse 19). God's people were interested in God's blessings but they were not interested in God Himself.

All this made God very angry with Israel. They rejected His love. They refused to acknowledge their obligation to Him and the covenant they had made with Him (verse 20). Because of this, God gave them over to the nations around them. Israel became powerless against these nations. God allowed His people to pursue their evil ways and chase after other gods. He did not stop them. God did not give up on them. As we will see in this book, He would consistently send judges to them in their time of need. His ear still listened to their cries for help. They were never completely destroyed, but they grieved and groaned under the heavy and oppressive hand of the foreign nations around them.

Notice from verse 22 that God chose to use the nations to test His people. God did not abandon His people to the nations. These nations, however, were God's means of disciplining Israel so that they would return to Him and see the evil of their ways.

Consider for a moment that you were in Israel at this time. All you can see is that the nations are oppressing you. They have raided and looted your land. They have taken some of your people with them as captives and sold them as slaves. You do not see the hand of God in this. All you can see is that God's blessing is no longer on you as a nation. From God's perspective, however, things were very different. God gave the nations permission to oppress His people but He did not remove His hand from them. They were under His watchful eye. These nations could only do what God allowed them to do. God was using everything these nations were doing to refine and test His people. He was disciplining them because He loved them and wanted them to return to Him. He was teaching them lessons through these days of trial. Verse 23 is quite clear about this when it says that "the Lord had allowed those nations to remain." All this had a purpose. God was still in control. His purpose was to break the stubborn resistance of His people and restore them to Himself.

Have you been feeling the hand of God's discipline? Has He been trying to refine you? Will you let Him accomplish His work and draw you to Himself?

For Consideration:

- How has God been faithful to you? Give some examples of this faithfulness in your life.
- Have you been faithful to God? What things keep you from God? What distracts you from God and His purpose for your life?
- Are there sins you still long for in your life? Do you still find yourself attracted to those sins? Can you expect real victory in this area of your life if you really don't want it deep down in your heart?
- What is the difference between grieving because you lose God's blessing and grieving because your sin has offended a holy God you love?
- What has God been using in your life to test and refine you?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His faithfulness. Be specific in your thanksgiving.
- Ask the Lord to remove all distractions in your life that keep you from being all He wants you to be.
- Ask God to remove your love for a particular sin and give you victory over it.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater love for Him. Ask Him to forgive you for thinking more of His blessings than of Him.

- Thank the Lord for the trials He has allowed in your life to refine you and draw you closer to Himself.

22

OTHNIEL, EHUD AND SHAMGAR

Read Judges 3:1-31

During this period in Israel's history, God raised up a series of judges to lead His people. These judges acted often as military commanders to give God's people victory over their enemies.

God's people need to know how to do battle with the enemy. While today the battle is more spiritual in nature, we still need to know how to fight the enemy. Satan will not let up in the battle for the souls of men and women. He is constantly seeking to destroy the work of the church. As believers, it is important that we understand that we are in the midst of a battle. A believer who does not know how to fight the temptations and arrows of Satan is at a serious disadvantage. While it is not the place here to speak about how to do this battle, let me simply remind the reader that the apostle Paul often challenged believers to fight the good fight of faith (see 1 Corinthians 9:26; 1 Timothy 1:8; 6:12). Ephesians 6:11-18 is a detailed description of how believers are to put on the armour of God in order to fight off the attacks of the enemy.

As we seek to advance the kingdom of God, we can be sure that we will be opposed. Every believer needs to know how to stand against the enemy. In verses 1-2 God wanted to teach the Israelites how to have victory over their enemy.

God left the enemy in the land in order to teach His people how to do battle. Verses 3-4 tell us, however, that there was a second reason for leaving the enemy in the land. These nations were left also to see whether God's people would obey His commands (verse 4). It is important that we understand what is happening here.

It is the desire of the Lord God that we obey Him wholeheartedly. Sometimes He will test that obedience. While God already knows what the outcome will be, these tests are often very helpful for us. They show us the condition of our hearts. When God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son on the altar, it showed Abraham and all those around him the condition of his heart. He proved that he was ready to surrender even his only son to the Lord. There have been times in my life when I have compromised in my obedience to the Lord when confronted with a test. These times have shown me the condition of my heart and challenged me to do something about it. While God will never tempt us to do evil, He does want us to recognize the condition of our heart. There are times when He will allow temptations to come our way to show us where we stand with Him and how easily we could fall.

From verses 5-6 we see that Israel failed the test. They lived among the various nations and took the women of these heathen nations as their wives. They allowed their children to intermarry with those who worshiped foreign gods. This was in direct violation of the command of God forbidding intermarriage with these nations.

Notice that not only did the Israelites marry these foreign wives, but they also turned from the Lord God to serve the gods of these nations. This clearly revealed the condition of their hearts. They were not wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord their God. They lustfully looked after other gods.

God was angry with His people. He punished them by delivering them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim the king of Aram (verse 8). For eight years, Israel was subject to him and his rule. The oppression under the reign of Cushan-Rishathaim was so great that Israel cried out to the Lord God. This is exactly what the Lord wanted. He wanted His people to see their need of Him and return to Him as their God and King.

God's ear was open to the cry of His people. He had not abandoned them in their sin and rebellion. When they cried out to Him God answered their cry. He raised up a deliverer for them by the name of Othniel (verse 9). Othniel had already distinguished himself as a leader by attacking and conquering the city of Debir (see Judges 1:11-13).

God was with Othniel and empowered him. Othniel went to war with Aram and God gave him victory (verse 10). As a result of this battle, Israel was freed from the oppression of Cushan-Rishathaim. For forty years Israel would enjoy peace and security.

After the death of Othniel, however, Israel turned away from God (verse 12). Their commitment to Him did not last. Again they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Because they turned their back on Him, God gave them over to Eglon, king of Moab (verse 12). Eglon joined forces with the Ammonites and the Amalekites and attacked Israel, taking them captive (verse 13). This time Israel was subject to

Moab and his rule for a period of eighteen years (verse 14).

In their despair Israel cried out to the Lord God for help. Once again the Lord raised up another judge by the name of Ehud to be their deliverer (verse 15). Ehud went to Eglon, king of Moab to present him with a gift from Israel. Unknown to the king of Moab, Ehud had strapped a sword about a foot and a half long to his right thigh under his clothing (verse 16). Ehud presented his gift to Eglon (verse 18). Ehud told the king that he had a secret message for him. King Eglon sent his men away so that he was alone with Ehud (verse 19). The king rose from his seat and approached Ehud. As he approached, Ehud reached out with his left hand, drew his sword and plunged it into the King's belly (verse 21). King Eglon was so fat that the handle of the sword was covered over (verse 22). Ehud slipped out of the room through the porch and locked the door behind him, leaving the king to die by himself (verse 23).

King Eglon's servants found the door locked. They initially did not think too much of the matter believing that the king was possibly relieving himself (verse 24). The servants waited for some time and began to realize that something was wrong when the king did not come out. Taking the key they opened the door and found the king dead on the floor (verse 25).

As the servants were waiting at the door, Ehud escaped to Seirah. When he arrived there he blew a trumpet calling his army to prepare for battle (verse 27). Leading his army, they took possession of the fords of Jordan allowing no one to cross (verse 28). During the course of that battle, Israel struck down ten thousand vigorous and strong Moabites (verse 29). After these events, Israel experienced peace for eighty years (verse 30).

When Ehud died, God gave Israel another judge by the name of Shamgar. He struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox goad, saving Israel (verse 31). The ox goad was a pointed stick made of hard wood. It could measure sometimes up to ten feet in length. The end of the stick was sharpened to a point and was used to poke an ox to get him to go in a certain direction. The other end of the goad had a blunt metal piece that was used to scrape off the blades of the plough the ox was pulling.

Despite Israel's rebellion, God had not rejected her. When she cried out to Him for help, He heard her cry and raised up a judge to deliver her from her oppression. This passage shows us clearly that God is very patient with His people. He is faithful even when we are faithless.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about the need of every believer to know how to do battle with the enemy? What weapons do we use as believer against the enemy?
- What enemies or temptations do you face in your Christian life?
- Have you ever been tested by God through trials? What did this test teach you about yourself?
- What do we learn here in this chapter about the patience of God with us and our failures?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to teach you to be a valiant warrior for Him.
- Ask the Lord to show you how to overcome the particular temptations you struggle with personally.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with you in times of failure.
- Ask God to help you to learn the lessons He wants you to learn through suffering and struggle.

23

DEBORAH

Read Judges 4:1-5:31

After the death of Ehud, the Israelites fell into evil and turned their backs on the Lord God. As a result, that Lord allowed Jabin, king of Canaan and his military commander to conquer them (verse 2). Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots and cruelly oppressed the nation of Israel for a period of twenty years. In their despair, Israel cried out to the Lord for help (verse 3).

Verse 4 tells us that a prophetess by the name of Deborah served in Israel at that time (verse 4). Notice from verse 5 that she would hold court at a specific location between Ramah and Bethel in the territory of Ephraim. When there was a matter of dispute between them, the Israelites would come to Deborah at this location to have their disputes settled. Obviously, Deborah would consult the Lord and bring back His decision for the people (verse 5). While there were individuals in the nation who were seeking God and His purpose, the vast majority of the nation had turned their back on God.

On this particular occasion, Deborah sent for a man by the name of Barak, the son of Abinoam of the tribe of Naphtali. God had heard the cries of His people for deliverance from

Jabin and was going to answer those cries. The answer would come in the person of Barak.

Deborah told Barak that the Lord God of Israel had commanded him to take ten thousand men and lead them to Mount Tabor. God would lure Sisera, the commander of King Jabin's army to the Kishon River. (verses 6-7). Here, God would to give His people victory over their enemies through Barak.

When Barak heard the command of the Lord through Deborah, he told her that he would only fight Sisera and Jabin if she went with him. His faith was not in God but in Deborah. Deborah told him that she would go with him but because of his lack of faith in God, the honour for the victory would go to a woman (verse 9). The impact of this statement can be lost in some cultures. Women in those days were not trained as soldiers. In many cases, they were not even educated. For Barak to lose the honour to a woman was a shame he would have to bear for the rest of his life. With Deborah's commitment to be at his side, however, Barak summoned ten thousand men to follow them into battle.

While there is no shame in working with others for the expansion of the kingdom of God, we are left to wonder here if there are things God has called us to do but we lack faith to obey. There are times when God will call us out from the crowd to stand alone. Sometimes our dependence on other people is a hindrance. Here in this passage God was asking Barak to stand alone with Him and watch what He would do. Barak could not do this, so that honour would go to another. More than this, however, Barak would lose an opportunity to know the power of God in his life personally. How often do we find our strength in other people and not in God? Are we willing to stand alone in the strength God

provides even when we are separated from the support of friends and loved ones?

Verse 11 is important to the story but seems somewhat out of context. It speaks of a man by the name of Heber who was a Kenite. The Kenites were the descendants of the wife of Moses who lived in the land with Israel (see Judges 1:16). Heber had left the other Kenites and pitched his tent near the region of Kedesh. Unknown to him at that time, this was part of the plan of God for the deliverance of Israel from Sisera and Jabin.

We return to the story of Barak in verse 12. When Sisera heard that Barak had gone to Mount Tabor, he gathered his nine hundred chariots and his men and went to the Kishon River as God had told Deborah. This would have been a confirmation to Barak that the word of God through Deborah was true.

When everything was in place, Deborah commanded Barak to attack Sisera, telling him that God had given the commander into his hands (verse 14). In obedience to the Lord, Barak and his men came down from Mount Tabor and attacked Sisera. God was faithful to His word and Barak routed Sisera and his chariots. Fearing for his life, Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot (verse 15). Barak continued the fight and pursued the Canaanites and their chariots to Harosheth Haggoyim. All of Sisera's troops fell. Verse 16 tells us that not a man was left. God give great victory that day.

Sisera fled on foot to the home of Heber that Kenite. At that time, there were friendly relations between King Jabin and the Kenites (verse 17). Sisera sought refuge in Heber's tent.

Jael, the wife of Heber invited Sisera into their tent. She provided for his comfort and hid him under a covering (verse 18-19).

Fearful of being discovered, Sisera asked Jael to stand at the doorway of the tent and say, "no" to anyone who asked her if anyone was there (verse 20). Jael's allegiance, however, was not to Sisera. As he slept under the covering in her tent, Jael picked up a tent peg and hammer and drove it through his head and into the ground, killing him (verse 21). The great enemy of God's people died at the hands of a Gentile woman.

When Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael told him to come into her tent and she would show him the man he was looking for (verse 22). Barak found his enemy with a tent peg through his skull. The word of the Lord through Deborah came true. The defeat of Sisera would not go to Barak but to a woman.

That day, the Canaanite oppression stopped. Israel defeated Jabin's army and Jael gave them victory over Sisera the military commander. King Jabin and his forces were defeated (verse 24).

Great praise went to the God of Israel that day. Deborah and Barak sang a song of deliverance and victory. That song is recorded for us in chapter 5. The song is a statement of what happened when Israel's leaders took their responsibility seriously and the people offered themselves willingly to obey.

Notice that Deborah and Barak sang this song to the Lord in the presence of the nations. They realized that the victory they had received was not their own but the result of the Lord's working in their midst. The song pictures the

Lord going out from Seir (verse 4). As He marches the earth shakes before Him, the heavens pour down water, the mountains quake in His presence (verse 5). Who can stand against such a God? Barak and Deborah do not take the credit for this great victory. They understood that the victory was the Lord's.

Verse 6 shows us what life was like in Israel at that time. In the days of Shamgar, the last judge before Deborah, the roads were abandoned as travellers took to winding paths. In other words, the not roads in Israel were safe to walk on. Travellers had to find secret ways to travel from one place to another. Verse 7 tells us that village life in Israel had ceased. There was no community life. They could not go out to work and talk with friends and neighbours. They feared for their lives and closed themselves up in their homes.

In the midst of all this terror, God raised up a woman by the name of Deborah. She became a mother to the nation.

In Deborah's day, Israel was following the gods of the nations around them (verse 8). They had abandoned the one true God. In punishment, God brought war to their gates. Israel was defenceless against their enemy. Israel's streets were unsafe. People were afraid to leave their homes. They were defenceless against the enemy attack. They had abandoned the Lord God their only source of strength.

In verse 9 Deborah and Barak sing their praises to the leaders of Israel and the willing volunteers among the people who were willing to do something about Israel's situation. The situation looked helpless, but among the people of Israel, there were men and women who were willing to trust in their Lord and make a difference. These men and

women are powerful examples to us in our day. The situation may look very hopeless, but those who trust in God can make a difference.

Notice in verse 10 the warning to those who were riding their white donkeys and sitting on saddle blankets. The white donkey was ridden by those who had conquered. At this time in Israel's history, their enemies were riding those white donkeys. The song calls these enemies to consider the voice of the singers at the watering places in the land. These singers sang of the righteous acts of the Lord and the great deeds He did through the warriors of Israel (verse 11). God would give Israel victory over their enemies. Israel would recount the wonderful deeds of the Lord in the presence of their enemies.

The call goes out in verse 12 for Deborah and Barak to wake up and break out in song. Barak was to arise and take his enemy captive. The men of Israel, who had survived the terror of Jabin and Sisera, were summoned to come to Deborah and Barak (verse 13). Not everyone responded to that call to battle. Some came from the tribe of Ephraim. The tribe of Benjamin joined forces against the enemy as did the people of Zebulun (verse 14). The tribe of Issachar joined Deborah and Barak and attacked Sisera in the valley as they ran down the slopes of Mount Tabor (verse 15).

In the tribe of Reuben there was much searching of heart. They did not have the faith of the other tribes. Many of them refused to take a stand against Sisera and Jabin, choosing to stay by the safety of their campfires (verse 16). Gilead also chose to remain in the safety of the region beyond the Jordan. Dan did not join with the forces of Deborah and Barak, nor did Asher. Zebulun, however, was

willing to risk their lives and so was the tribe of Naphtali (verse 18).

Those who were willing fought the kings of Canaan. God was with them. Verse 20 tells us that the stars of heaven fought against Sisera. This is simply to say that God moved His hand in favour of His people. Those who were willing to take the risk experienced the presence of God and overcame. There at the Kishon River God strengthened His willing people so that the enemy was defeated (verse 21).

The sound of horse hoofs could be heard galloping away. This may be the sound of the enemy escaping in fear of their lives (verse 22). As the enemies fled for their lives, the voice of the angel of the Lord is heard, "Curse Meroz, Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the Lord against the mighty." Meroz was an Israelite town in the tribe of Naphtali. The angel of the Lord is not cursing the enemy here but rather the people of God who refused to believe in God and trust His Word. These people, along with the others who refused to stand up for righteousness and defend the land God had given to them were all cursed by the Lord.

By not fighting the enemy these tribes of Israel were part of the problem. They were lazy and unwilling to risk their lives for the cause of righteousness. Instead of standing up for the truth, they chose to remain in the warmth of their campfires and the safety of their coves. God was angry with them for this. God is looking for people who are willing to risk everything for Him. When we chose the comforts of our home and the security of what we know over His leading, we sin and fall under His curse.

Jael, who killed Sisera is blessed (verse 24). Sisera asked for water and she gave him milk. Notice the poetry of verse 25. Jael brought Sisera curdled milk in a bowl fit for nobles. The bowl and the curdled milk are symbols of what happened to Sisera. The milk was presented to him in a bowl fit for nobles. Jael welcomed him into her tent as a great man, receiving him with respect and reverence. The milk she served him, however, was curdled and sour. When Sisera came into her tent she drove a tent peg through his head (see verse 26-27).

The song goes on in verse 28 to describe what might have happened at Sisera's home town. Sisera's mother, unaware of his death, waits for his return. She looks out the window behind the luxury of the lattice work of her home, wondering why her son is taking so long to return. A wise woman comforts her saying that her son was likely delayed because they were dividing the spoils of war after their victory (verse 30). This comfort's Sisera's mother for a time, though the comfort is false.

The song ends with a curse on the enemies of God and a blessing on those who will love Him and follow His ways.

"So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength" (verse 31).

After the defeat of Sisera, Israel enjoyed peace for forty years. This was twice as long as they had been oppressed. God's grace is abundant.

These two chapters tell us a lot about the condition of the land of Israel at that time of Barak and Deborah. There was a general lack of faith in God's ability to deliver His people. When the call went forth for men to fight Sisera, not every

man responded. Whole tribes refused to take up the challenge. Even Barak lacked faith and demanded that Deborah go with him. The nation was weak spiritually. God was able to use those who took up the challenge to stand up against the enemy, however. Their faith may not have been big, but it was enough. God gave victory through those who took a stand and the nation was blessed with forty years of peace.

For Consideration:

- What do chapters 4 and 5 teach us about the state of faith in the nation of Israel at the time of Barak and Deborah? What is the state of faith in your town or village today?
- What do we learn in this passage about Barak's faith? What comfort do you find here to see that God can even use people with weak faith if they are willing to obey?
- While Barak's lack of faith does not hinder God's overall plan for Israel's victory, it does mean great shame for him personally. How does our lack of faith bring shame on us?
- By giving victory over Sisera through a woman who had never been trained in military tactics, what does God say to the nation about the kind of person He can use to bring victory for His people? Notice here that Jael, who killed Commander Sisera was not even an Israelite.

- God cursed those who refused to take a stand with His people against the enemy. Have you taken a stand? What role has God given you to play? Are you taking that role seriously?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His great patience with us even when we have failed Him so often.
- Thank the Lord that He is still able to use us even when our faith is very small.
- Ask the Lord to remove the shame your lack of faith has brought to yourself and the church.
- Ask the Lord to give you a greater boldness to stand up for the truth and to walk in His ways.

24

GIDEON'S CALL TO MINISTRY

Read Judges 6:1-40

After the defeat of Sisera and Jabin of Canaan, the people of God lived in peace for forty years. During that time of peace, however, they began to sink back into their sinful ways. Israel's victory over sin never seemed to last, but God's patience with them as a nation never seemed to end. Though they were severely punished for their wandering hearts, they were not rejected by their heavenly Father.

Because they turned their backs on God, He gave them over to the Midianites for a period of seven years (verse 1). It is important that we understand the conditions of the land during those seven years of oppression under the Midianites.

Verse 2 tells us that the Midianites were so oppressive that the Israelites "prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds." The Israelites were not safe in their homes. They had to leave their homes and

find hiding places in the mountains and caves to protect themselves from the oppressive Midianites soldiers.

Notice from verses 3-4 what the Midianites were doing. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites and the Amalekites would invade their land. They would ruin their crops leaving them nothing to eat. Notice also that they ravaged the land, killing Israelite sheep, cattle and donkeys. These Midianites and Amalekites came in great numbers, helping themselves to all the produce of the Israelite countryside (verse 5). Israel was left hungry and destitute. The Midianites so impoverished the people of Israel that they had nowhere else to turn but to God. They cried out to Him and he send a prophet to speak to them (verse 7).

The prophet reminded the people of the compassion of God He told them of how the God of their ancestors had delivered them from the oppressive hand of Egypt, the most powerful nation on the earth at that time. There in Egypt, their fathers and mothers were also oppressed and beaten, but God set them free and gave them their own land (verse 9). All God expected in return was that His people serve and worship Him alone. They did not do this, however, and so they found themselves in the situation they were in that day (verse 10).

This prophet had a very important role to play. He reminded the Israelites of the reason for the condition of their land. They were oppressed because they had turned their backs on the Lord God. As long as they continued to walk away from God, they would always have problems. The prophet called the people to repent of their sins and return to God.

It was vital that the people of Israel understand that it was sin that stripped them of their blessings. How often have we wanted blessing while holding on to our sins. God was showing His people that they could not have both. Their sins would remove their blessing. They could never have ultimate victory over their enemies if they did not recognize and deal with their sin.

Having reminded the people of the reason for the oppression in their land, God then send His angel to minister to them (verse 11). It is interesting to note that we have no record of the people repenting of their sin. In the period of the judges we see a people who continually fell into sin. In His mercy, God would give them a period of rest from their oppression but Israel's attraction to sin would ultimately bring defeat again. The fact that God sent His angel to this rebellious people is an act of tremendous grace on His part.

The angel of the Lord sat down under an oak tree in the region of Ophrah. This piece of land belonged to a man by the name of Joash the Abiezrite (verse 11). The Abiezrites were a clan in the tribe of Manasseh (see Joshua 17:2).

When the angel appeared, Joash's son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress. We immediately ask the question, why was Gideon threshing wheat in a winepress? Verse 11 tells us that they were threshing the wheat secretly in this winepress so that the Midianites did not see them. This again shows us the conditions of the land in those days.

The angel of the Lord had a word for Gideon. In verse 12 the angel called Gideon a mighty warrior and told him that the Lord God was with him. All this was news to Gideon. He did not likely see himself as a mighty warrior.

Gideon did not understand what the angel was saying. "If the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?" he asked the angel. Obviously this was something Gideon had been struggling with for some time. He did not see evidence of God's presence with His people.

Notice also in verse 12 that Gideon asked the angel about the wonders of God in the past. "Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?'" It would seem to me that Gideon has been thinking long and hard about these things. Could it be that he had been praying to God and seeking God about these things? He had heard about the great things God had done in the lives of his ancestors and wondered why those great signs and wonders were not being repeated in his day. Obviously, he longed to see the Lord God move in power over His enemies as He had done in the past. Could it be that God chose Gideon because he longed to see these things again?

While Gideon longed to see the power of God revealed again in his day, his faith that this would happen was quite small. He believed God had abandoned His people.

That day the Lord spoke to Gideon and challenged him to go in the strength he had to save his people (verse 14). This verse is significant. It shows us that there was something in Gideon that God wanted to use. There was strength in him that could save the nation. What was that strength? It is obvious that the strength spoken of here was not a human strength, for this Gideon did not have. Notice two things about Gideon here.

First, Gideon's heart was crying out for God to do something. He looked to the past, saw the great things God had done and wondered why God was not doing them in his

day. "Where are the wonders our fathers told us about?" he asked in verse 13.

The second thing we discover about Gideon in this chapter is that his heart was broken because God had abandoned the nation. There are many people that don't even notice that God is no longer in their midst. Gideon longed to see God return and bless His people again.

These qualities in Gideon could have been the strength God was referring to in verse 14. Gideon's strength was not human and physical. Could it be that his strength was in his desire to see God work again and his grief over the absence of God's presence in the land? Here was a man that God could use. With even this much of Gideon's heart in tune with Him, God could save the nation.

Gideon knew his personal weakness. "How can I save Israel?" he asked in verse 15. Gideon reminded the Lord that his clan was the weakest clan in the tribe of Manasseh. He also reminded God that he was the least in his whole family. Gideon did not understand that the source of his strength was not his physical or mental abilities but his heart for God. God told him that day that He would be with him and in His strength he would strike down the Midianites (verse 16). We can only imagine what Gideon was thinking that day. The oppression of the Midianites was so great that Israel was hiding away in the mountains and caves. They were threshing their grain in the winepresses in order to hide it from their enemies. The thought of being the one God would use to give victory to His people would have been overwhelming for Gideon.

Gideon heard the words of the Lord, but wanted to be sure that he had heard right. He asked the angel to give him a

sign. What the Lord was asking of him was significant. Gideon needed to be sure that what he was hearing was truly from God. We should not necessarily see this asking for a sign as a weakness on Gideon's part. God often gave signs in the Scripture to confirm or seal what He was saying to His people.

It is also worth noting that while Gideon asked for a sign, he also went to get an offering for the angel of the Lord. The word used for "offering" in the Hebrew can refer to a donation, a tribute or a sacrificial offering. It would seem best to see what Gideon was doing here as an act of hospitality. He was offering the angel of the Lord something to eat. It may have been his intention to speak more about this matter to the angel. While some people believe Gideon was bringing a sacrifice to the Lord here, verse 19 seems to indicate that the meat was intended to be eaten. We get this impression from the fact that Gideon put the meat in a basket and took along some broth in a separate pot. The broth would not have been required if what he was offering the angel was intended as a worship sacrifice.

When Gideon returned with the food, the angel of the Lord told him to put the meat and the unleavened bread on a rock (verse 20). He was also to pour out the broth. While not clearly stated here, it is likely that the broth was poured over the meat and unleavened bread on the rock. When Gideon obeyed, the angel of the Lord took the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock and consumed the meat and the bread. When that happened, the angel of the Lord disappeared (verse 21).

Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord who had appeared to him that day (verses 21-22). This realization

brought fear to his heart. He feared that he would die because he had seen the angel of the Lord. God told him not to be afraid and replaced his fear with peace (verse 23). In response to what had happened that day, Gideon built an altar to the Lord and called it "the Lord is Peace" (verse 24).

This encounter with the angel of the Lord would have been life-transforming for Gideon. He knew now that God has not abandoned His people. He had seen a great sign confirming that he had been called to be God's instrument in delivering Israel from the oppression of the Midianites.

God did not ask Gideon to go to battle right away. He did give him an assignment, however, that was very close to home. That night God spoke to Gideon and asked him to take a bull from his father's herd. The bull was to be seven years old, or fully mature. He was then to tear down his father's altar to Baal and cut down the pagan Asherah pole that was beside it (verse 25). In its place, Gideon was to build an altar to the Lord God. Using the wood of the Asherah pole he was to build a fire on the altar and sacrifice the bull he had taken from his father's herd (verse 26). By doing this, Gideon was taking a stand. He needed to be willing to clean out his own house before he could be used of God to deal with the sins of the nation. This act also would have settled in his mind and in the minds of the people of Israel that Gideon stood against Baal and the gods of the Canaanites. Gideon was, by this act, taking a public stand for the God of Israel.

Gideon obeyed the Lord. He took ten of his servants and, because he was afraid of his family and the men of his town, he did the deed at night when no one could see him. Gideon was timid and fearful, but God was willing to use

him. It should be noted that by this act, God was dealing with Gideon's fears.

In the morning when the deed was discovered, the people investigated the matter and found that Gideon was responsible (verse 29). The men of the town demanded his father bring out his son so that they could kill him for such blasphemy (verse 30).

Joash responded by asking the crowd why they were trying to deal with this problem themselves. He told them to let Baal deal with the matter since it was his altar that had been torn down. "If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar," he told the angry crowd. Leaving the matter in the hands of their god Baal, the people left. From that day on they called Gideon "Jerub-Baal" meaning "let Baal contend" (verse 32). Through this incident, God was showing Gideon that he was fully able to protect and keep him if he would walk in obedience to His will.

These verses show us something more of the spiritual condition of the land at the time. The men of the town where Gideon lived were angry because an altar of God had been built on top of the ruined altar of Baal. There can be no doubt about their allegiance. They did not want the God of Israel. They wanted Baal. This was the people that Gideon was going to deliver from the hands of the enemies. They were not ready to repent of their sin. They were not willing to commit themselves to the Lord God. They still wanted Baal and their pagan gods. Despite their unworthiness, God still reached out to them through His servant Gideon.

The time for war came soon enough. The Midianites and the Amalekites, along with some other peoples from the east joined forces, crossed the Jordan and camped at the

Valley of Jezreel (verse 33). The Spirit of the Lord filled Gideon. In response, he blew a trumpet summoning the Abiezrites from his own clan to follow him (verse 34). He also sent messengers throughout the tribe of Manasseh, calling them to arms. The call to battle went to the tribes of Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. All these tribes were asked to stand with Gideon against the enemy.

As Gideon prepared for battle, he went to the Lord God to ask Him if He would give him victory over his enemies. While it is true that Gideon does seem to struggle with faith, it should be understood that it was the custom of the kings of Israel to seek the will and blessing of God before going into any battle. This is what Gideon is doing here. Gideon asked God to show him a sign assuring them of victory over the Midianites and the Amalekites (verse 36).

Gideon asked for a very particular sign from God that day. He set out a wool fleece on the ground and told God that if the morning dew was on the fleece and not on the ground he would know that God would save Israel and give them victory. When Gideon rose in the morning he squeezed a bowlful of water out of the fleece, while the ground was dry (verse 38).

Again that day, Gideon asked for one more confirmation. He asked God to make the fleece dry the next morning when the ground was covered with dew (verse 39). When he awoke the next morning, it was exactly as he had asked (verse 40). By this Gideon knew that God would certainly give him victory.

The nation of Israel had turned from God. In the midst of this land, however, there was a man who grieved over the fact that God's presence was no longer evident in their midst. This man longed to see the wonders he heard about

in the history of the nation. He was not a strong individual. He struggled with fear and timidity, but he was willing to obey. This is all God needed. He would take this man and use him to bring deliverance for His people.

For Consideration:

- Describe the state of the nation of Israel in the days of Gideon.
- What strength did Gideon demonstrate?
- What were Gideon's weaknesses? What kind of person can God use?
- Is it wrong to ask God for a confirmation of what you believe He has been saying to you?
- Gideon was called to take a stand and clean out his own house first. What stands in the way of you being used of God? Have you taken a clear stand for the Lord in your community?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to reveal any sin that keeps you from experiencing His victory.
- Thank the Lord that even though we are unworthy of His grace He still showers it on us.
- Thank the Lord that despite our weaknesses and shortcomings, He is able to use us for the expansion of His kingdom.

- Ask the Lord to give you a burden, like Gideon, to see Him work again in our day.

25

GIDEON DEFEATS

THE MIDIANITES

Read Judges 7:1-25

We saw in the last meditation that Gideon was a simple man who came from a small family in the tribe of Manasseh. He did have a seed of faith in his heart that God was quite willing to use for His glory. We will see in this chapter that God wanted His people to know that *He* would give them victory over the Midianite. God planned the events of this chapter so that there could be no doubt as to who was giving them the victory.

From chapter 6 we learn that Gideon had gathered a large army to fight the Midianites. Gideon and his army were camped at the spring of Harod. The Midianite army was north of them near the hill of Moreh (verse 1). Everything was set up for the battle.

From a human point of view, the bigger Gideon's army, the better the chance of defeating the Midianites. God's victory, however, does not depend on numbers. As they were camped by the spring, God spoke to Gideon and told him that his army was too big. Notice in verse 2 the reason God

wanted to reduce the size of Gideon's army. God did not want the people of Israel to think that it was their own strength that delivered them from Midian. God wanted to weaken His people so that they would know that the victory came from Him.

Does it surprise you that God sometimes delights in weakening us? Listen to what the apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 about the "thorn" in his flesh.

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul understood what Gideon had to learn in this battle. God sometimes allows weaknesses to remain in our lives so that we will realize that the victories we obtain are from Him and not due to our own abilities. God wanted to reduce the size of Gideon's army so that they would know that the victory he gave them was from Him. To reduce the size of Gideon's army, God told him to allow anyone who was afraid to go home (verse 3). That day twenty-two thousand men left Gideon's army, leaving him with only ten thousand to fight the cruel Midianites.

As Gideon watched twenty-two thousand men leave, God spoke to him a second time. In verse 4 He again told him

that there were still too many men in his army. He told Gideon that He would sift through the remaining ten thousand soldiers. Gideon was to let go all that God told him to let go.

It is important to see that Gideon's faith is being tested here. Gideon is often portrayed as a man who did not have much faith. What we need to see, however, is that Gideon continued to obey the Lord. Even when his army was being thinned out, he continued to trust the Lord. The secret to his strength seems to be his willingness to trust and obey the Lord.

God asked Gideon to take his men down to the water. He told Gideon then to watch the men as they drank water from the spring. He was to separate those who lapped the water with their tongues from those who kneeled down to drink (verse 5). We should not try to interpret this verse to say more than it is saying. There was nothing special about how one group drank the water over the other. God's purpose here was to reduce the size of Gideon's army so that such a small group remained that there would be no question that He alone had given them victory.

Out of the ten thousand men that went down to the spring to drink water, only three hundred lapped the water with their hands to their mouths. All the others got down on their knees to drink (verse 6). God told Gideon that He would save the nation with these three hundred men. Gideon was to send the other soldiers home (verse 7). Gideon did exactly as the Lord commanded. Nine thousand seven hundred more soldiers were sent home that day.

Notice in verse 9 that God appeared to Gideon the night after he had sent the men home. God told Gideon that He was to go down against the Midianite camp. God promised

to give Gideon and his small army victory over their enemy. Notice also, however, in verse 10 that God told Gideon that if he was afraid to attack, he was to take his servant Purah with him to the Midianite camp and listen to what they were saying. God knew Gideon's fear and wanted to give him a sign that would encourage him in his obedience.

Revealing his fear, Gideon took his servant down to the enemy camp (verse 11). There they discovered that the Midianites, Amalekites and some other eastern people had settled in the valley. They were so numerous that verse 12 describes them as being as "thick as locusts" and their "camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore." Seeing this would have been enough to discourage Gideon but God had specifically told Gideon that his encouragement would come from what he heard not from what he saw.

As Gideon was arriving at the camp he heard a man telling his friend about a dream he had. He told his friend that in his dream he saw a round loaf of barley bread tumbling into the Midianite camp. The loaf struck with such force that it overturned a tent so that it collapsed (verse 13).

As Gideon listened, the friend interpreted the dream. "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands" (verse 14).

When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he worshiped God (verse 15). He knew that God was going to give him victory over the Midianites. When he returned to his own camp, he called out to his men: "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands" (verse 15).

I find it interesting that the Lord would use the dream of the enemy to bring an encouragement to Gideon. God is not limited to speaking to us through those who love Him and are specifically gifted by Him. God can use even the enemy to speak to our hearts and encourage us.

That night Gideon divided his three hundred men into three companies. Each group was given trumpets and empty jars with torches inside them (verse 16). The jars would likely have been made of clay and when the torches were put inside them they would have concealed the light of the torches. We should remember that it was night time and an army of three hundred men each carrying a torch would have awakened the enemy and prepared them for battle. Concealing the lighted torches under the clay jar would have kept their presence a secret.

Gideon told his men to watch him and do exactly as he did (verse 17). When he and those who were with him blew their trumpets, all the others were to do the same. As they blew their trumpets they were also to shout, "For the Lord and for Gideon" (verse 18).

The Jews had three watches in the night. The first watch was from sunset to 10 p.m. The second watch was from 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. The final watch was from 12 a.m. to sunrise. Gideon arrived at that middle watch just as the guards had changed (verse 19). This would have placed the time just after midnight. When they arrived at the enemy camp Gideon blew his trumpet and broke the jar that was in his hands. All the others followed his lead. We can only imagine the response of the enemy. All of a sudden they heard the blast of up to three hundred trumpets sounding in the night. After that loud blast, there was a crashing sound as at least three hundred jars were smashed. With the smashing of the three hundred jars, the

light of over three hundred torches was seen shining around them. Then there came the shout of three hundred soldiers crying out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" (verse 20).

The noise so startled the enemy that they began to run from their tents in fear, screaming as they fled. They turned on each other with their swords in the dark (verse 22). The Midianite army fled from the valley.

Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and Manasseh were called to pursue the escaping and fearful army of Midian (verse 23). Gideon sent messengers to Ephraim asking them to come down against the Midianites (verse 24). The Ephraimites responded to the call and took possession of the waters of the Jordan as far as the region of Beth Barah (verse 24). They also captured two Midianite leaders by the names of Oreb and Zeeb. Both leaders were killed and their heads brought to Gideon (verse 25).

While Gideon experienced fear and sometimes questioned what God was doing, he still chose to obey. God blessed his obedience and brought great victories through him. There will be times when we too are afraid and uncertain of what is ahead. This passage challenges us to obey nonetheless. God will honour those who obey and walk in His commands.

For Consideration:

- What are your personal weaknesses?
- In what things, apart from God, are you tempted to put your confidence?

- How was God glorified in the weakness of the apostle Paul? How was God glorified in the weakness of Gideon and his army? How is God glorified in your weakness?
- How does God minister to Gideon's fear? What encouragement do you find in the fact that God does not condemn Gideon for his fear as long as he was willing to face it in faith?
- Does fear always have to keep us from obedience? What does Gideon teach us about this? What are your personal fears?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is able to use you with all your weaknesses for His glory?
- Ask the Lord for forgive you for the times you have placed your confidence in other things.
- Ask the Lord to give you victory over your personal fears.
- Thank the Lord for Gideon's example of obedience despite his fears and insecurities. Ask the Lord to make you more like Gideon.

26

GIDEON DIES

Read Judges 8:1-35

Through the efforts of Gideon and his three hundred men, God routed the massive Midianite and Amalekite army. Gideon called on his fellow Israelites to join him in defeating them completely. Israel's army pursued the enemy, killing many.

As we begin chapter 8, Gideon is faced with a problem. In verse 1 the Ephraimites criticized him for not asking them to go into battle when he went to fight the Midianites. It is clear from Judges 7:24 that Gideon sent his messengers to Ephraim inviting them to join him in battle. The Ephraimites responded to that call and took control of the waters of Jordan in an attempt to block the escaping enemies crossing the Jordan River. They also killed two key Midianite leaders (see Judges 7:24-25). The problem the Ephraimites had with Gideon was that he had not invited them on this final assault with his three hundred men.

Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh who was the son of Joseph. Ephraim was also a son of Joseph. Both tribes were descendants of Joseph. It may have been that the Ephraimites felt that they should have had special atten-

tion from Gideon in this battle. This would have been especially true now that Gideon had successfully routed the Midianites. Ephraim wanted to share in the glory. As things turned out the glory did not go to them. This is exactly why God had led Gideon to reduce the size of his army to three hundred. He knew that if there was any way the people of Israel could take the glory for this victory they would do so.

Notice Gideon's response to the Ephraimites in verse 2. He reminded them of how great a tribe they were compared to his small clan. "Aren't the gleanings of Ephraim's grapes better than the full grape harvest of Abiezer?" he asked them. In other words, what is my little tribe compared to the great tribe of Ephraim. He told them that what was left over after the vines were harvested in Ephraim was greater than the full harvest of his little tribe of Manasseh.

Gideon also reminded Ephraim that they had captured and killed two very important Midianite leaders. "What was I able to do compared to you?" he asked them in verse 3. In saying this Gideon recognized their valuable contribution in the effort to defeat the Midianites. When Ephraim heard his response, their resentment subsided and they calmed down.

While it is somewhat difficult to understand what is behind this reaction of Ephraim, we may assume that they were jealous and wanted some of the glory for themselves. When Gideon reminded them that their names would go down in history for the defeat of these two important Midianite leaders, their lust for glory was satisfied. How easy it is for us to be jealous of the victories of others. Ephraim appears to have a problem we all have to deal with in ministry, the lust for glory.

Gideon's problems did not end with Ephraim. He and his three hundred men were exhausted as they continued their pursuit of the enemy. In their pursuit of the enemy, they crossed the Jordan River and came to the town of Succoth in the region of land allotted to the tribe of Gad.

When Gideon arrived in Succoth he asked the inhabitants to give him and his troops some bread because they were weary from pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian (verse 5). The officials of Succoth, however, refused to give them provisions, saying:

"Do you already have the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna in your possession? Why should we give bread to your troops?" (verse 6).

This response from Succoth made Gideon angry. He told them that when he had captured the kings of Midian, he would return and tear their flesh with desert thorns and briars (verse 7).

Gideon left the region of Succoth and travelled with his army to Peniel. He asked them for provisions for his men but they also refused to help (verse 8). There was a tower in Peniel. Gideon told the inhabitants of this town that when he returned in triumph over the Midianite kings, he would tear down their tower (verse 9).

The Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna, were hiding in Karkor with a force of about fifteen thousand men. This was all that was left of an army of one hundred and twenty thousand (verse 10). We see the tremendous victory God was giving His people. When Gideon discovered their location, he followed a back road to the city and took the enemy by surprise (verse 11). Zebah and Zalmunna fled, but Gideon captured them (verse 12).

As he returned from his victory, Gideon captured a young man from the city of Succoth and questioned him. Through this young man Gideon obtained a list of the names of seventy-seven officials in the city of Succoth (verse 14). Gideon and his men then went to the city of Succoth and showed them the kings of Midian. After reminding them of how they had refused to offer hospitality to him and his men, he took the elders of the city and punished them by tearing their flesh with desert thorns and briars (verse 16). From Succoth, Gideon and his men returned to Peniel where he pulled down their tower to punish them also for their lack of hospitality and compassion for his men.

Gideon then turned his attention to the Midianite kings, Zebah and Zalmunna. In verse 18 he asked them about the people they had killed in the region of Tabor. We do not have a record of this event in the Bible. It seems that these kings, however, had been responsible for the massacre of Gideon's brothers (see verse 19). The kings of Midian do not deny that they had killed these individuals (verse 18).

Gideon asked his oldest son Jether to kill the two Midianite kings because of what they had done. Jether, however, was still a boy and afraid to draw his sword to kill the Midianite kings (verse 20). Zebah and Zalmunna told Gideon to kill them himself. Notice in verse 21 what they told Gideon, "As is the man, so is his strength." These words could have been taken as an insult to Gideon's son. In reality, they were saying that his son was not man enough to take up a sword to kill them so Gideon was going to have to do it himself. Gideon stepped forward and killed them (verse 21).

With the death of the Midianite kings and the defeat of their army, Israel was freed from an oppression that had lasted

for seven years (Judges 6:1). They had seen the capable leadership of Gideon during the battle against the Midianites and asked him and his sons to be their leader (verse 22). Gideon was not interested in being their leader. He felt he had done what God had called him to do. Besides this, he knew that it was not his place to rule over Israel. Israel already had a leader. The Lord God was their leader (verse 23).

Gideon would not go beyond what God had called him to do. There is an important lesson for us in this. Earlier in this chapter we saw how the Ephraimites were looking for glory for themselves. Gideon could have basked in the glory of the victory. He could have become king and had the admiration of the people of Israel, but that is not what God had called him to do. The rest of his life would be, for the most part, out of public view. He would return home and be an ordinary person from that moment on. He seemed quite content to do this. There are times when we go beyond what God has called us to do. Sometimes we are so intent on getting glory for ourselves that we will push our way to the top to get it. Gideon chose to walk away from the position offered him because it was not God's purpose for him, nor did he want to take the glory that was due to the Lord.

Gideon did, however, have one request. In verse 24 he asked the people to give him an earring from their share of the plunder. The Israelites were only too happy to give him such a token of their appreciation. A garment was spread out on the ground and each man threw a ring from his plunder in a pile on the garment. The weight of the gold rings that were put on that pile was seventeen hundred shekels (43 pounds or 19.5 kilograms). Gideon also had the ornaments, pendants and purple garments that had been worn

by the kings of Midian as well as the chains that were on the necks of their camels (verse 26).

From that gold Gideon made an ephod which he placed in his hometown of Ophrah (verse 27). The ephod was part of the garment the priest would wear (Leviticus 8:7). We are not sure why Gideon made this ephod. It obviously had some spiritual significance to him. It might have been as a remembrance of the way the Lord had given him victory over the Midianites. Gideon's intentions are unclear.

What is quite clear in verse 27, however, is that this ephod would become a snare for Israel as well as for Gideon and his family. Israel began to worship Gideon's ephod.

Israel enjoyed peace for forty years. Midian was completely subdued and did not threaten Israel again (verse 28). Gideon had seventy sons and many wives (verse 30). One of Gideon's sons was named Abimelech. His mother was one of Gideon's concubines (verse 31). Gideon died at an old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash in Ophrah (verse 32).

After the death of Gideon, the Israelites again turned from the Lord and worshipped other gods. They set up Baal-Berith as their god (verse 33). Israel did not remember the Lord who had rescued them from the hands of the Midianites (verse 34). Not only did Israel forget the Lord God and His victory but they also failed to respect and show kindness to Gideon's family for their part in bringing them victory (verse 35). God's blessings were quickly forgotten.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about Ephraim's desire for glory? How tempting is it for us to want to receive glory? Who alone is worthy of glory?
- The inhabitants of Succoth and Peniel refused to stand behind Gideon in his effort to defeat the enemy. They were punished for this. How important is it that we stand behind the servants God has called into ministry? How have you been using your resources to encourage those God has called into ministry?
- Gideon refused to become leader of Israel because God was their leader. He knew that this was not the will of God for his life. How content are you with God's purpose? Have you ever found yourself wanting more than God's purpose for your life?
- Gideon's ephod became an object of worship. What kind of things can take the place of God in the church of our day?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to forgive you for the times when you wanted people to see you more than Him.
- Ask God to help you to desire His glory more than anything else.
- Ask the Lord to show you how He would have you to stand behind His servants in ministry. Ask Him to open your eyes to the needs among Christian workers around you today.

- Ask God to help you to be content with His will for your life. Ask forgiveness for the times when you failed to submit to His purpose.
- Ask God to show you anything in your church or personal life that takes glory away from Him.

ABIMELECH

Read Judges 9:1-57

Prior to Gideon's death, the people of Israel offered to make him and his sons leaders. Gideon refused this on the basis that God alone was their leader. One of Gideon's sons was a man by the name of Abimelech. He was the son to one of Gideon's concubines. Abimelech decided to profit from his father's service to the country. He wanted to be leader in Israel. In order to become leader of the nation, however, there were two obstacles to overcome. First, Abimelech needed to gain the general support of the people. Second, he needed to do something about his brothers.

In verse 1, Abimelech went to his mother's brothers in Shechem. Remember, his mother was one of Gideon's concubines. Obviously she was from the region of Shechem and her brothers (Abimelech's uncles) lived in that region. He knew that if there was any place he could get support it would be in Shechem among his mother's family.

When he arrived in Shechem, Abimelech asked them a question:

"Which is better for you: to have all seventy of Jerub-Baal's sons rule over you, or just one man? Remember, I am your flesh and blood" (verse 2).

Remember that the name Jerub-Baal here was another name for Gideon (see Judges 6:32). It is obvious what the intentions of Abimelech are here. He was trying to convince the citizens of Shechem that he would be a better leader for them than his brothers because he was one of them. His efforts paid off and in verse 3 we discover that the inhabitants of Shechem were inclined to follow him.

With the support of the people of Shechem, Abimelech now had to deal with the second obstacle to his leadership—his brothers. From verse 4 we discover that the people of Shechem gave Abimelech seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith. Abimelech used this money to hire some men. With these men he went to his father's hometown of Ophrah, gathered his seventy brothers together and murdered them. Only Jotham, the youngest brother escaped (verse 5). With the other sons of Gideon out of the way, the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered together to crown Abimelech as king (verse 6).

It should be understood here that Abimelech was not chosen by God to be king. This was his idea. He wanted to be leader and would stop at nothing to get his desire. His father recognized God as leader but Abimelech did not. He dared to take the place of God in Israel.

When Gideon's youngest son Jotham heard that Abimelech was crowned king, he felt he needed to say something. He climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim and shouting down to the citizens of Shechem, he told them a parable.

Jotham told the story of some trees that went out to anoint a king. They asked the olive tree to be their king (verse 8). The olive tree refused to be king because it did not want to give up its oil by which both the gods and men were honoured (verse 9).

When the olive tree refused, the trees asked the fig tree to become their king (verse 10). The fig tree also refused saying that it was not willing to give up its fruit to rule over the other trees (verse 11).

The trees then turned to a vine and asked it to become their king (verse 12). The vine refused to give up its wine that cheered both men and the gods to rule over the other trees (verse 13).

The trees finally asked the thorn bush if it would be their king (verse 14). The thorn bush told them that if they really wanted it to be their king they were to take refuge under its shade. If they did not take refuge under its shade, it would send fire on them to consume them. Even the majestic cedars of Lebanon would not be spared from the wrath of the thorn bush (verse 15).

It is important that we note a few facts about this parable before considering further what Jotham was saying. First, notice that the olive tree, the fig tree and the vine were all productive trees. They produced olives, olive oil, figs, grapes and wine. These trees were the first choice because they had something to offer the other trees. Notice, however, that these trees refused to do what was not natural to them. They understood that if they were to lead the other trees they would have to give up what God had designed them to do. The olive tree would have to stop producing its olive oil. The fig tree would have to stop producing figs. The vine would have to stop giving grapes

for wine. God had a purpose for these trees. Like Gideon these trees were not willing to leave that purpose to do something they were not called to do. What has God called you to do? Remain true to that calling. Don't let the enemy distract you.

The second thing we need to see is that the thorn bush was the least of all the trees. It had nothing to offer. It did not produce any useful fruit. The thorn bush was usually pulled out by the roots and burned because not only was it unfruitful but it also hindered the production of good fruit by taking the nutrients from the soil and choking out the good plants.

Notice how the thorn bush demanded that all other trees come under his shade. If they did not come under his shade they would be killed. This is what Abimelech did to his own brothers. Because they stood in his way of success he killed them. If he was willing to do this with his own brothers, what would he do to anyone else who stood in his way? Jotham is comparing Abimelech to a useless thorn bush that demanded submission by force.

Having told the people of Shechem this parable, Jotham wished the inhabitants of Shechem well if they had acted in good faith and treated Gideon's family with the respect it deserved. "May Abimelech be your joy, and may you be his, too!" he told them (verse 19).

Having said this, however, Jotham reminded the followers of Abimilech that his father had risked his life for them (verse 17). He reminded them that they had repaid his father's kindness by murdering his sons. They had made Abimelech king over them only because he was related to them through his mother (verse 18). In verse 20 Jotham

pronounced a curse on all followers of Abimelech if they had done wrong.

Let fire come out from Abimelech and consume you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and let fire come out from you, citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo, and consume Abimelech!

Jotham knew what he believed about the actions of Abimelech and his followers, but he left the matter in the hands of the Lord. He offers both a blessing and a curse. God would apply either one as He saw fit. After speaking his mind, Jotham fled to the city of Beer to escape his brother Abimelech (verse 21). Why were the sons of Gideon killed and cruel Abimelech allowed to live? Why did Jotham have to live in hiding? While we cannot understand the purpose of God, we can be sure of His justice. In the verses the follow, we will see how God works out His purpose in the life of Abimelech.

After Abimelech had governed Israel for three years, God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem (verse 22-23). The good relationship between them did not last. We should not necessarily assume that the "evil spirit" spoken of here was a demon. The word could just as easily refer to an attitude of distrust or anger. What is clear in this passage is the response of the people to Abimelech. They acted treacherously toward him. They no longer wanted him to be their leader. Perhaps they saw him for who he really was. Did God open their eyes to see what he was doing? Verse 24 makes it clear that God allowed this division between Shechem and Abimelech to punish him for the crime of killing Gideon's (Jerub-Baal) sons.

We also need to remember the curse of Jotham in verse 20. There Jotham called for a fire from Abimelech to consume the citizens of Shechem and Beth-Millo and another fire from Shechem and Beth-Millo to consume Abimelech. The curse of Jotham is about to come true. Verse 25 tells us that the citizens of Shechem set men on the hilltops to ambush and rob the people who passed by. In doing this they were thorns in the side of Abimelech.

God also raised up a man by the name of Gaal. Gaal moved to the town of Shechem. He gained the confidence of the inhabitants of the city (verse 26). One day, after the people had gathered grapes and pressed them, they were eating and drinking in the temple. In the course of their conversation that day they cursed Abimelech (verse 27). Gaal heard them cursing Abimelech and asked them why they had to be subject to him (verse 28). He told the people that if he were in command he would get rid of Abimelech. He challenged them to call out their army in revolt against their leader (verse 29).

The governor of the city, Zebul, was faithful to Abimelech. When he heard that Gaal had been stirring up the people against Abimelech, he was angry (verse 30). He secretly sent messengers to Abimelech telling him what Gaal was doing, suggesting that Abimelech and his men advance against Shechem (verses 31-33).

Abimelech listened to the counsel of Zebul and sent his troops out at night. They took up concealed positions in a field in four companies (verse 34). When Abimelech's troops came out of hiding, Gaal was standing at the city gate (verse 35). When he saw them coming, he announced their presence to Zebul. Pretending not to know anything about the attack, Zebul told Gaal that what he saw was only the shadows of the mountains.

Gaal continued to watch in the distance and again went to Zebul telling him that he was sure that an army was approaching (verse 37). This time Zebul admitted that he knew about the army. "Where is your big talk now?" he said to him, reminding him of his talk about defeating Abimelech. He challenged him to gather his people and fight.

Gaal called the citizens of Shechem to stand against the approaching army. They were no match for Abimelech, however, and many were wounded in the battle that followed (verses 39-40). Abimelech was successful in driving Gaal and his brothers out of the city of Shechem (verse 41).

When the gates of the city were opened in the morning, the people of Shechem went out to the fields to work. Abimelech divided his army into three companies (verse 43). Abimelech took one company and rushed forward to the gates of the city and attacked. The other two companies attacked those who had gone out to the fields, killing them (verse 44). All day long, Abimelech attacked the city of Shechem. When he finally captured it, he scattered salt all over it so it would never produce crops again (verse 45).

Some of the people fled to the stronghold of the temple of El-Berith (verse 46). Abimelech followed them to the temple. He took an axe, cut branches and carried them on his shoulders to the stronghold. He told his soldiers to do the same (verse 48). Piling the branches against the stronghold, they set it on fire. One thousand men and women died in the fire (verse 49). The first part of Jotham's curse had come true. A fire had come from Abimelech and consumed the cities of Shechem and Beth-Millo. The second part of the curse was about to be fulfilled.

Abimelech went to the region of Thebez and captured it (verse 50). Inside the city of Thebez was a strong tower. The inhabitants of the city locked themselves inside this tower for safety.

Abimelech and his army stormed the tower in an attempt to capture it and set it on fire (verse 52). As Abimelech approached the tower, however, a woman dropped a millstone on his head and cracked his skull (verse 53). Abimelech quickly called his armour-bearer to draw his sword and kill him so it could not be said that he died at the hands of a woman (verse 54). His armour-bearer obeyed and killed him with his sword. When the army saw that Abimelech was dead, they returned home (verse 55). The second part of Jotham's curse had come to pass. A fire had gone out from Shechem and Beth-Millo and consumed Abimelech.

Verse 56 makes it quite clear that these things happened as a judgment of God to punish Abimelech and the people of Shechem for their wickedness. Jotham's curse had come true. God had judged Abimelech. It is true that evil-doers can prosper for a time. They may become wealthy and powerful, but there is a judgment coming. We will all account for our deeds.

For Consideration:

- Abimelech sought a position that was not his to have. God had not chosen him to be king but he wanted the position anyway. Have you ever sought a position or ministry that God has not called you to? What is God's calling on your life?
- Abimelech sought to manipulate the people of Shechem into accepting him as their leader. How did this work out for him in the end? Why is it important for us to let God move people? What difference does it make when God moves people?
- Jotham, although angry with Abimelech, left the matter in the hands of the Lord. Abimelech actively pursued his interests and goals. Who won in the end? What does this teach us about trusting the Lord?
- What does this chapter teach us about the justice of God?
- We meet a man by the name of Gaal in this chapter who seemed to be raised up by God for a single purpose, to stir up both Shechem and Abimelech. Though Gaal was sent away, he was a vital part of the chain of events that led to Abimelech and Shechem being brought to justice. How important was Gaal's role in this story? What does this teach us about the importance of every person in the work of God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to be content with the role He has given you. Commit yourself to be the best you can be in that role.
- Ask God to help you to trust Him like Jotham. Thank Him that He will work out all the details for our good and His glory.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of justice. Thank Him that justice and righteousness will triumph in the end.
- Take a moment to consider the many people around you with seemingly unimportant roles play. Thank the Lord for how each of them is a link in the chain of God's purpose. Thank Him that each person's role is important.

28

TOLA, JAIR AND JEPHTHAH

Read Judges 10:1-11:40

After the death of Abimelech a man from the tribe of Issachar by the name of Tola rose up as a leader in Israel. He lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim and led Israel for twenty-three years (verses 1-2). Nothing of any significance is recorded during his leadership.

When Tola died the leadership was handed over to Jair of Gilead who led Israel for twenty-two years (verse 3). Jair had thirty sons who all rode donkeys. Each of his sons ruled over a town (verse 4).

Spiritually, the nation of Israel continued to wander from the Lord God. Verse 6 tells us that they served Baal, the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. Clearly Israel's heart was given to the gods of the foreign nations. Israel's heart was not faithful to the God of Israel. Verse 6 is quite clear that Israel had forsaken the Lord God and no longer served Him.

The spiritual condition of the people angered the Lord God. He punished them by giving them over to their enemies,

the Philistines and the Ammonites (verse 7). For eighteen years, these two enemies "shattered and crushed" Israel (verse 8).

In verse 9 we read how the Ammonites, who lived to the east of the Jordan River, crossed over to fight against Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim. Israel was in such a weakened condition that verse 9 tells us that they were in great distress. In other words, they had been brought to the end of their physical resources. They were absolutely helpless against the Ammonites who were invading their territory. They had nowhere to go but to the Lord God of Israel.

In their distress the Israelites cried out to God. "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals," they cried (verse 10).

God reminded His people of His faithfulness in times past. He brought to their attention how He had delivered them from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites (verses 11-12). Despite this, however, His people had still forsaken Him to serve the gods of these nations.

Notice in verse 13 that God refused to come to the aid of His people:

I will no longer save you. Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!

Let's take a moment to consider what God is doing here.

Israel had recognized that she had sinned against God. They came to the Lord God asking Him to help them in

their time of need. God listened to their prayer but, for the moment, refused to give them what they requested.

Israel had one of two options here. First, they could say, "God does not want to help us so we will have to go to our foreign gods." In fact, this is what they had been doing all along. Israel did not choose this option. Instead, in verse 15 Israel returned to the Lord God again, recognizing their sin and casting themselves on Him. "We have sinned, Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now," they prayed. Notice also in verse 16 that they got rid of their foreign gods and served the Lord.

Israel had told God that they had sinned but what good was that when their homes were filled with foreign gods. What would you think of an unfaithful husband who said he was sorry for being unfaithful to his wife but refused to stop seeing his mistress? The true test of whether we are sorry for our sin is not in what we say but in what we do with the sin we say we are sorry about. If an unfaithful husband is truly sorry for being unfaithful to his wife, than he will no longer see his mistress. If Israel was sorry for being unfaithful to God, she would get rid of her false gods.

God heard Israel's words but He also saw her land. The words said one thing but what He saw in the land said another. The words said, "We're sorry" but the idols and gods that filled their land said "not really." Israel could not expect God to answer their prayer if they were not willing to do something about their sins.

Notice in verse 16 that when Israel got rid of their foreign gods, the Lord could not bear their misery any longer. When the obstacles to His blessing were removed, God's heart was moved in compassion. Are you sorry for your sin? Then you will do something about it. Are you asking

God to draw you closer? Then you will do all you can to remove every obstacle that keeps you from Him. Prayer and action must walk hand in hand.

There is a second thing we need to notice in the prayer of God's people. They refused to give up seeking God's help. Notice that they told God that He could do whatever He wanted with them. In saying this, they were accepting full responsibility for their sin. They were telling God that they would accept punishment for their sin.

Israel cast themselves on God for His mercy and gathered their army to face the much superior Ammonite army (verse 17). Their lives were in the Lord's hands. They knew that if He chose to turn from them they would perish for their sin. If He reached out to them they would know victory. They committed themselves to God and waited for His response.

Notice in verse 18 that they found themselves with an army ready to fight, but no one to lead them against their enemy. In Judges 11:1 we meet a man by the name of Jephthah. He was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead and his mother was a prostitute (11:1). Gilead also had other sons through his wife. When these sons were grown up they drove Jephthah away. They told him that he was not going to have an inheritance with their family because he was the son of a prostitute (verse 2). They rejected him as a brother.

Jephthah was forced to leave his family. He settled in the land of Tob where he gathered a group of fighting men around him (verse 3). He and his men gained quite a reputation as warriors.

When the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight Israel, the elders of Israel found themselves in a real problem. They did not have anyone to lead them into battle. It was at that point that they thought of Jephthah. The elders of the land went to find Jephthah in Tob and asked him if he would lead them against the Ammonites (verses 5-6).

Jephthah reminded his brothers how they had driven him away from their family. "Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?" he asked (verse 7).

The elders of Gilead recognized that they had rejected him but they were now turning to him for help. They offered to make him leader if he would come to their aid and help them face their enemy (verse 8). While Jephthah was suspicious of their offer, when the elders promised before God that they would respect him and honour him as their leader, he accepted the challenge (verses 9-11). Jephthah returned to Gilead with the leaders and they made him their commander.

It may be significant that God had His people deal with this matter of Jephthah before sending them into battle. Not only did Israel have to deal with their foreign gods, but they were required to also deal with a broken relationship with a brother. This broken relationship needed to be mended before Israel could experience the blessing of God in the battle before them. Scripture is quite clear that broken relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ can hinder us. God is preparing Israel for battle by removing the obstacles that stand in the way of His blessing. The destruction of foreign gods and the mending of broken relationship were essential elements in the victory that God would give His people.

As leader and commander of the army of Israel, Jephthah sent a message to the king of Ammon. He asked him what he had against Israel that he would invade their land (verse 12).

The king of Ammon answered Jephthah by telling him that when Israel came out of Egypt they took his land from him. He demanded that Israel give this land back to him peacefully (verse 13).

Jephthah again sent his messenger to the Ammonite king with a reply. He told him that Israel did not take the land of Moab or Ammon. In fact, they had asked permission to travel peacefully through their land but that permission was denied (verses 16-19). King Sihon, king of the region at that time, gathered his army and attacked Israel when they asked permission to go through his land (verse 20). The result of that battle was that Sihon was defeated and the whole territory came under Israelite control (verses 21-22).

Jephthah went on to remind the King of Ammon that Israel did not take this territory, it was given to them by the Lord God of Israel. Israel was the rightful owner of the land. Jephthah asked the king of Ammon in return what right he had to take it from Israel seeing that God had given it to them (verse 23). He reminded him that even the Ammonites would possess any land their god Chemosh gave them (verse 25).

Jephthah told the king of Ammon that Israel had occupied that land to the east of the Jordan for three hundred years (verse 26). This shows us how much time had passed from the time of Moses to Jephthah. During those three hundred years, the Ammonites did not retake the land (verse 26). Jephthah made it quite clear to the king of Ammon that if anyone was in the wrong it was him. He wanted to take a

land that was not his to take. Jephthah committed the matter into the hands of the Lord God of Israel to judge (verse 27). Verse 28 tells us that the king of Ammon did not pay any attention to the legal claim of Israel over the land east of the Jordan.

After these events, verse 29 tells us that the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. We are not told how this came about, but we do see the result of this outpouring of the Spirit. Jephthah was given courage to lead his army against the Ammonites (verse 29).

Before going out against the Ammonites, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord. He promised that if the Lord gave him victory he would give whatever came out of the door of his house to meet him when he returned as a burnt offering to the Lord (verse 31).

This vow was intended to gain the favour of the Lord God in the battle. Remember that for many years the people of God had been worshiping false gods. It is not likely that the Law of God was being faithfully taught in the land. Jephthah's vow is not the vow a faithful believer in the God of Israel would make. There were strict rules about the kind of sacrifices that were to be made in Israel. No true Israelite wishing to honour God would make such a vow. Jephthah had no way of knowing what might come to meet him when he returned home.

It is true that the Spirit of God had come on Jephthah and was empowering him to do battle against Ammon. Jephthah, however, was not well instructed in the Word of God and fell into serious error here for which he would ultimately pay a great price.

What is important for us to understand in this context is the connection between the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Jephthah is an example of a man, who is led by the Spirit, but who does not know the Word of God. The Spirit of God obviously did not lead Jephthah to make this vow. He made it on his own. He did so, however, without a complete understanding of the requirements of God in His Law. A better understanding of the Law of Moses would have protected him from making such a vow.

Jephthah's problem exists in our day as well. God leads us both by His Spirit and His Word. There are many who are being led by the Spirit who do not have a good grasp of the Word of God. There are those who say that because we have the Spirit of God we no longer need to be students of the Word. This could not be further from the truth. God has given us both the Spirit and the Word to be our guide. We must learn to walk in the power of God's Spirit but we must also learn to walk in the truth of His Word. Ignore either one and you will find yourself in serious error. Jephthah was being empowered by the Spirit but did not have enough maturity in the Word to keep from falling into error.

After making his vow to the Lord, Jephthah took his stand against the Ammonites. The Lord gave him victory (verse 32). Twenty towns in Ammon were devastated (verse 33).

When Jephthah returned home his only child, a daughter, came running out of his home to meet him dancing to the sound of the tambourine (verse 34). Very conscious of his vow, Jephthah's heart was broken. He tore his clothes and cried:

"Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break" (verse 35).

Jephthah's daughter asked him to give her two months to roam in the hills and weep with her friends because she would never marry (verse 37). Jephthah granted her permission (verse 38). After the two months were over Jephthah's daughter returned to her father and he sacrificed her on an altar (verse 39).

We need to understand that this vow was not from the Lord. God did not accept human sacrifice. Jephthah acted out of his own cultural upbringing. He lived in a culture where human sacrifice was practiced. The pagan religion of the day had influenced his thinking. If anything, this story shows us that God is able to use all kinds of people to accomplish His purposes. The son of a prostitute, heavily influenced by pagan religion becomes an instrument in the hands of God to free Israel from the oppression of the enemy.

Notice in verse 39-40 that from that day there was an Israelite custom in the land. Each year the young women of Israel would go out for four days to commemorate what had happened to the daughter of Jephthah.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel in the days of Jephthah? How did this affect their way of thinking? To what extent has our mentality been affected by the culture in which we live?
- When Israel was weak it turned to God. How does the Lord use our weakness to draw us to Himself?

What has God used in your life to draw you to Himself?

- What is the difference between saying you are sorry and demonstrating this by your actions? Are you truly sorry for your sin? How is this evident in your actions?
- How important was it for Israel to deal with their sin before facing the enemy?
- What is the connection between being led and empowered by the Spirit of God and being led by the truth of God's Word? What does this passage teach us about the importance of both?
- What kind of man was Jephthah? What does this tell us about the kind of person God can use?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to separate the evil influences of your culture from your faith in God.
- Thank the Lord that He does not give up on us even when we wander from Him.
- Ask God to search your heart to see if your repentance and desire for Him goes deeper than just words. Ask Him to help you to demonstrate your love for Him by your actions.
- Ask God to help you to be a person who is not only led and empowered by His Spirit but one who is also guided daily by the truth of His Word.

29

IBZAN, ELON, ABDON AND SAMSON

Read Judges 12:1-13:25

In the last chapter we saw that the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to attack Ephraim and Benjamin (Judges 10:9). The inhabitants of Gilead asked Jephthah to be their leader. God gave him victory over the Ammonites and Israel was set free from their oppression.

One would have thought that the nation would have been overjoyed and grateful to Jephthah for his efforts. This was not the case. In response to this great victory, the men of Ephraim gathered their forces to meet Jephthah asking why he had gone to battle without them. They even threatened to burn his house down with him in it (verse 1).

We need to understand that this was not the first time Ephraim had threatened one of their leaders in this way. In Judges 8:1 after Gideon had routed the Midianites the Ephraimites threaten him in a similar way.

"Now the Ephraimites asked Gideon, "Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us

when you went to fight Midian?" And they criticized him sharply."

Ephraim seemed to be insulted very easily. She seemed to want the glory and was upset when she was not invited to participate in great battles.

Jephthah told the Ephraimites that he *had* called them but they did not come to his aid (verse 2). He told them that when he saw they were not going to help him, he risked his life and that of his men to fight the Ammonites on their behalf. Jephthah was quite puzzled to see the Ephraimites looking for a fight. Verse 4 tells us that the men of Ephraim insulted Jephthah's men calling them renegades (verse 4).

Jephthah decided to give Ephraim the fight they were looking for. In verse 4 he called the men of Gilead together and fought Ephraim. Jephthah and his men captured the fords of Jordan leading to Ephraim. Whenever a survivor from Ephraim tried to return home on the other side of the ford, Jephthah's men would ask them if they were Ephraimites. If they denied being an Ephraimite they would make them say the word "Shibboleth." Because the people of Ephraim had a problem pronouncing the word. Instead of saying "Shibboleth" they would say "Sibboleth." If the individual could not pronounce the word correctly Jephthah's men would seize and kill him.

During the battle between Jephthah and the Ephraimites, forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed. This would have been devastating to Ephraim. Ephraim's jealousy and desire for glory and Jephthah's unwillingness to forgive them for their lack of gratitude resulted in the death of over forty-two thousand men. This shows us the devastation that jealousy and an unwillingness to forgive can create.

Jephthah led Israel for six years. When he died, he was buried in Gilead, the town he was cast out of many years before because he was the son of a prostitute.

After the death of Jephthah there was a series of judges in Israel. Their names are mentioned here in chapter 12 but nothing a great significance took place during their leadership.

Ibzan became leader in Israel after the death of Jephthah. He was from Bethlehem. God blessed him with thirty sons and thirty daughters (verse 8). All his sons and daughters married Israelites outside their clan (verse 9). Ibzan led Israel for seven years. When he died, he was buried in Bethlehem.

After Ibzan's death, Elon became leader in his place. He led Israel for ten years and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun (verse 11).

Abdon was the next leader. He came from the region of Pirathon (verse 13). He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who each rode on donkeys. This would indicate that there was a certain measure of prosperity in the land at that time. He led the nation for eight years (verse 14). When he died, he was buried in his hometown of Pirathon in Ephraim.

During the years of Jephthah, God's people cried out to God for deliverance from their enemies. In Jephthah's day the people of God confessed their sin and destroyed their pagan idols (see Judges 10:15-16). In the years that followed Jephthah, however, the people quickly forgot their commitment to the Lord. By the time Abdon had died, about twenty five years after Jephthah, the Israelites were again doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. Because of this,

God delivered them into the hands of the Philistines. For forty years, the Israelites were oppressed by the Philistines (13:1).

While we have no record in Judges 13 that God's people actually cried out to Him in their distress, He was still watching over them. While punishing His people for their disobedience, God was also preparing a deliverance for them. That deliverance would come from an unlikely source.

In Judges 13:2 we meet Manoah from the tribe of Dan. He had a wife who could not have children. One day the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife and told her that she would give birth to a son (verse 3). This son would not be an ordinary child. He would have a special role to play in the nation. For that reason, the angel told Manoah's wife that she was not to drink wine or any fermented drink or eat anything unclean (verse 4). This was to protect the son she would bear from any defilement. The angel went on to tell Manoah's wife that she was not to cut her boy's hair. He was to be a Nazirite, set apart for God from birth. This child would be used of God to deliver his people from the oppression of the Philistines (verse 5). We can only imagine the joy Manoah's wife would have experienced in hearing this news.

When she heard the words of the angel, Manoah's wife told her husband what had happened (verse 6). This angel of God told her that she would conceive and give birth to a son. She told Manoah how the angel told her not to drink wine or fermented drink because the boy would be a Nazirite from his birth (verse 7).

We read about the requirements for anyone taking a Nazirite vow in Numbers 6:2-21. These vows were taken for

various reasons. During the time of their vow, the individual was required to observe three particular practices. First, they were not to drink wine or other fermented drink. Second, they were to cut their hair. Finally, they were to refrain from touching any dead body. The child born to Manoah and his wife was to observe these restrictions all his life (verse 7).

When Manoah heard what his wife had told him, he pleaded with the Lord to bring the man of God back so he could teach them how to raise the boy (verse 8). Manoah does not question what his wife told him. His concern is to raise this boy as God required. He knew that while this boy would one day deliver Israel from the Philistines, he was going to be responsible to bring him up and train him in the way he was to go. For this he needed God's wisdom and guidance. We have to admire Manoah and his desire to raise his son for the Lord. We can be sure that if our children belong to the Lord God they have a particular calling in life. Like Manoah we need to take this matter seriously. What an awesome responsibility is ours to raise up men and women of God who will minister to the next generation. Like Manoah, we need great wisdom in raising our children to be leaders of the next generation.

God heard the prayer of Manoah and saw his heart to do what was right. The angel of the Lord returned to Manoah's wife. At the time, Manoah was working in the field (verse 9). When the angel appeared, Manoah's wife hurried out to tell her husband that he had come to see them (verse 10). Manoah left his work and ran to meet the angel (verse 11).

When Manoah saw the angel he asked him when the prophetic word about their son would come to pass. He also asked the angel what was to be "the rule for the boy's life

and work" (verse 12). Manoah seems to be genuinely concerned about doing what is right.

The angel of the Lord told Manoah that his wife was to do exactly what he had told her. She was not to eat anything that came from the grapevine, drink any wine or fermented drink or eat anything unclean (verse 14).

Not realizing that the man of God was an angel, Manoah offered to prepare a young goat for him to eat (verse 15). The angel agreed to stay with him but told them that he would not eat any of his food. Instead, he asked Manoah to prepare a burnt offering for the Lord (verse 16).

As Manoah left to prepare the offering, he asked the angel what his name was so that he could honour him when the word he prophesied came true (verse 17). He wanted to have further contact with this man. By asking for his name, he was trying to identify him and find out how he could get in touch with him when the child was born. The angel told Manoah that his name was beyond understanding (verse 18). The word translated "beyond understanding" in the NIV Bible is an interesting one. It can refer to something that is wonderful or even hidden and secret. It comes from a word meaning marvellous or distinguished.

It should be remembered that a name represented the character of the person who bore the name. When the angel refused to give Manoah his name he was telling him something about his character. He was telling him that he was wonderful and awesome. He was greater than Manoah and his character could not be grasped.

Manoah did not fully understand what the angel of the Lord was saying. He did not understand him to be an angel. When he returned with his goat and grain offering, he

placed it on a rock as a sacrifice to the Lord (verse 19). In verse 20 we discover that as the flame blazed from the rock altar, the angel of the Lord ascended to heaven in the flame.

When Manoah and his wife saw this they understood that the person who had met with them was no ordinary person. Both of them fell to with their faces to the ground (verse 20). They knew that they had been in the presence of the angel of the Lord (verse 21).

Manoah was afraid. In verse 22 he told his wife, "We are doomed to die! We have seen God!" A similar thing happened when an angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, calling him to deliver his people from the Midianites. He, too, was afraid he was going to die when he understood that it was the angel of the Lord (see Judges 6:22-23).

Notice that Manoah said that he had seen God. Some commentators believe that the angel of the Lord was the Lord Jesus. What is evident is that the presence of God was clearly demonstrated that day to Manoah and his wife. They feared for their lives.

Manoah's wife comforted her husband who seemed to be overwhelmed. She told him that if the Lord had intended on killing them He would not have accepted their offering or told them about the son that would be born to them (verse 23).

As God promised, Manoah's wife gave birth to a boy. They named him Samson. The hand of the Lord was on him from the time of his birth. God's Spirit began to stir within him (verses 24-25). God has a very particular plan for Samson. He would be the deliverer of his people. God had allowed the Philistines to oppress His people because of

their sin, but He was also preparing a way out for them. God had not abandoned His people.

For Consideration:

- Ephraim seems to seek glory. They appeared to be jealous of anyone who was successful in battle. Have you ever been jealous of those who were successful in ministry? What was the result of Ephraim's jealousy?
- What is a Nazirite? For what purpose was young Samson set aside? What purpose or plan does God have for your life?
- How does Manoah show us that he was very concerned about raising his son for God? How important is it that we raise our children for the glory of God? What impact will good parenting have on the next generation?
- Consider the fear of Manoah and his wife when they understood that God had met them. How do we see God in our day? Have we lost something of the sense of the awesome holiness of God?
- What do we learn here about how God is working out His purposes? Samson was being raised up by God to be a deliverer to a people caught in rebellion. How does this encourage you?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you grace to rejoice in the success of others in ministry. Ask Him to help you not to compare yourself to others, but rather be content with His plan for your life.
- Ask God to show you what His purpose is for you.
- If you are a parent or grandparent, ask the Lord to give you grace and wisdom to raise your children well. If not, ask God to help you to be a godly example and encouragement to the next generation.
- Thank the Lord that He has not abandoned you. Thank Him that He is working out His purposes in your life. Thank Him that even before we cry out to Him He already has the answer to our cry.

30

SAMSON'S RIDDLE

Read Judges 14:1-20

Years have passed and Samson is now a young man in search of a bride. At this time Samson went to the region of Timnath and met a young Philistine woman (verse 1). When Samson returned, he spoke to his parents about the young girl, telling them that he wanted her as his wife (verse 2).

There are two important details we need to understand here. First, the Law of God was clear when it came to the marriage of an Israelite with someone from a pagan nation. God did not want these nations causing His people to turn from Him. Second, at this point in history, the Philistines were oppressing the people of God. What Samson was asking was not something his parents could, with a good conscience, give him permission to do.

We learn from Judges 13:8 that Manoah, Samson's father, was very keen on raising Samson for the Lord. His parents knew that God had set their son apart for a special purpose. The angel of the Lord had told them that Samson would one day deliver Israel from the Philistine oppression (Judges 13:2-5). Imagine for a moment that you were Samson's parents. How would you have felt if your son

came home announcing that he wanted to marry a woman from the people you knew God had set him apart to destroy? From their perspective, Samson was making friends with the enemy. He was compromising his call and disobeying the direct command of God not to marry foreign women who did not serve the God of Israel.

Samson's father and mother were not pleased with his request. "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" they asked him. Obviously, they felt an obligation before God to do what was right for their son. They did not want him to stray from God's purpose for his life.

Samson was not persuaded by his parent's arguments. Those of us who have been parents know that there are times when our children simply do not want to listen to our advice. Samson insisted that this woman was the right one for him.

As the head of the family, it was Manoah's responsibility, to take the steps necessary for his son to get a wife. In that culture, it would not have been possible for Samson to proceed with a marriage without his parent's approval.

What Samson's parents did not know was that God was in this matter. He was preparing Samson for the work He had for him. Through this proposed marriage, God would stir up in him a heart for His purpose. We should not take from this that it was the purpose of God that Samson marry an unbelieving wife. As the story unfolds, we will see that God actually kept Samson from doing this. God would use Samson's desire for this woman, however, to prepare him for the work He had for him.

From verse 5 we understand that Samson's parents agreed to go down with him to Timnah. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah a young lion came roaring toward Samson. God's Spirit came on him and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands (verse 6). We understand from verse 6 that his father and mother did not know about this.

There are several things we need to see in verse 6. First, Samson was a Nazirite and was not permitted to eat the fruit of the vine. Second, Samson's parents were not with him at the time. In verse 6 we have a picture of a young man, weary from travel, approaching a forbidden vineyard without any supervision or accountability. He was putting himself in a place where he could be tempted. No one was around to see what he was doing. What would stop him from breaking his vow by taking the delicious and refreshing fruit of the vine? It is interesting that as Samson approached the vineyard, a lion came out and attacked him. Was this God's way of protecting him? One thing is sure, God does watch out for those He calls.

After killing the lion, Samson continued on his way to Timnah with his parents. There they met the woman and spoke to her. It is quite possible that arrangements were being made for a wedding. After speaking to the woman and possibly her parents, Samson and his parents returned home.

Sometime later Samson went back with his parents to marry the Philistine woman (verse 8). As he travelled on the same road he had taken on his previous journey, Samson remembered the lion he had killed. He turned aside to look for the body. Again, it is important that we remember that as a Nazirite, Samson was not to touch a dead body. Had he been wise he would have resisted this temptation

to look for the body of the dead lion, but Samson does not seem to have the spiritual and moral strength necessary to do so. Instead, he finds himself taking a detour to find a dead body that he was forbidden to touch. Have we not all found ourselves tempted just to look at those things we are forbidden to touch?

When Samson found the body of the lion he noticed that bees had made a hive in it. There in the carcass of that dead lion was a hive filled with sweet honey. Satan made what Samson was forbidden to touch almost impossible not to touch. That sweet honey called out to him. He reached out his hand, scooped the honey from the lion's body and continued his journey. In doing so he broke his vow to God.

What a powerful warning this is to us today. Like sweet honey in a dead carcass on a long journey, Satan will tempt us and make forbidden sin look very appealing. We need to be constantly on guard against his temptations.

Notice in verse 9 that Samson did not tell his parents where he found the honey. This shows us that he knew he had broken his vow. Together they travelled the road to Timnah eating the defiled honey.

When they arrived in Timnah, Samson's father went down to see the woman Samson was to marry, likely to make arrangements for the wedding. Verse 11 tells us that Samson was given thirty companions to celebrate with him. In the course of the celebrations, Samson decided to present these companions with a riddle. He told them that he would give a set of linen garments to each of them if they answered his riddle. If they could not answer, however, they were each to give him a set of linen garments (verses 12-13).

Samson's companions agreed and so he told them his riddle: "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet" (verse 14). The riddle referred to his experience of finding honey in the corpse of the lion he had killed.

Samson's companions wrestled with that riddle for three days but could not come up with the answer. On the fourth day, they decided to speak to Samson's wife-to-be. They told her that if she did not get the answer from Samson and give it to them, they would burn her and her family to death (verse 15). This shows us something of the character of Samson's companions. They appealed to her sense of hospitality by saying: "Did you invite us here to rob us?" In other words, they were blaming her and her family for their loss. They would have to buy Samson a set of clothes if they did not answer correctly.

Samson's wife, threatened by his companions, threw herself on him sobbing. She told him that he couldn't love her because he had given her people a riddle they could not answer. She accused him of keeping secrets from her and her family. She told him that if he really loved her he wouldn't be keeping secrets from her (verse 16). Samson told her that he had not even told the answer to this riddle to his own parents. If discovered, the answer to this riddle would expose his sin and reveal his broken vow before God. Samson did not want this to be revealed.

Samson's fiancée continued to question him about the answer to the riddle. She had reason to do this, as her life and the lives of her entire family were at stake. Finally on the seventh day of the feast, Samson told her his secret (verse 17).

On the seventh and final day of the feast Samson's companions returned to him with the answer to his riddle. "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?"

Samson knew that the only way these men could have answered his riddle was by threatening his fiancée. "If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you would not have solved my riddle" he told them. In other words, they had taken what was his and used it for their own purposes. They used his fiancée to get the solution to his riddle.

Samson was very angry about what happened that day. The Spirit of God fell on him in power. He went down to Ashkelon, a principle city of the Philistines and struck down thirty men. He took these men's clothes and brought them back to Timnah and gave them to his companions to pay off his debt (verse 19). Burning with anger over what had happened, Samson left his fiancée and returned home to his father's house. His wife was given in marriage to one of the "friends".

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about the moral and spiritual weakness of Samson?
- How did Samson break two of the conditions of his vow in this chapter?
- How did Satan make sin attractive to Samson? Consider a time when you fell into a particular sin. How did Satan make sin look attractive to you?

- How did God expose Samson's sin of breaking his vow? What warning do you take from this?
- How did God use Samson's failed engagement to prepare him to do battle with the enemy? How has God used your past failures to teach you lessons?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to protect you from the ongoing attacks of the enemy. Are there any areas of your life where Satan tempts you? Ask God to strengthen you in those areas.
- Ask God to help you not to be deceived by the attractiveness of sin.
- Have you experienced failures in your life? Ask God to teach you the lessons He wants you to learn from these failures. Ask Him to help you to use those lessons for His glory in the future.

THREE HUNDRED FOXES AND A DONKEY'S JAW BONE

Read Judges 15:1-20

In chapter 14 we saw the Philistines threatened to kill Samson's fiancée and family if she did not give them the answer to his riddle. Samson was very angry over this incident and left Timnah during the wedding preparations. God would use what happened that day to prepare Samson to be the deliverer of his people. To this point, Samson's contact with the Philistines had been a positive one. He had visited Timnah and fallen in love with a Philistine woman there. He wanted to marry her and this marriage would have made him one of the Philistines. When he went to Timnah for the wedding celebration, he was given thirty Philistine companions to celebrate this joyous event. After his thirty companions deceived him and threatened his fiancée and her family, however, Samson's attitude toward them began to change.

Samson could not deliver God's people from their enemy, the Philistines, until his attitude changed. He had to see them as the enemy in order to fulfil God's plan of deliverance. The same principle is true for us today. Until we see

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the horribleness of sin and rebellion against God, we will not be effective in dealing with it in our lives. As long as we are befriending the world, we will not have victory over it. God needed to open Samson's eyes to the truth about these Philistines. It was only when Samson saw the Philistines as the enemy, that he could be useful in God's hands to deliver His people.

In chapter 15 Samson's anger over the incident in Timnah had subsided. He decided to return to Timnah and make things right with his Philistine family and friends. He took a young goat, likely as a peace offering, and went to visit his fiancée and her family. Obviously, Samson was not yet ready to be the deliverer of his people. He is still not convinced that God's people truly needed to be delivered from these Philistines. He is still courting his Philistine fiancée and seeking to gain the good favour of her family.

When he arrived in Timnah, Samson told his father-in-law that he wanted to see his fiancée, but her father refused to let him in (verse 1). He told Samson that after the events that had taken place at the wedding celebrations, he was sure that Samson hated her so he gave her to one of his companions as a wife. He offered her sister to Samson in her place (verse 2).

When Samson heard what had happened, he was even more angry. "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them" he said in verse 3. Notice that his intention is to get even with the Philistines because of what they had done to him. His thoughts are not for his people and the oppression of his nation by the Philistines. He seems to be only thinking of his own personal problems with them. He also now feels justified in his intentions because of what they had done to him.

To "get even" with the Philistines, Samson caught three hundred foxes. We are not told how long this took him, but we can assume that it took some time. When he had captured these foxes he tied them tail to tail in pairs, fastening a torch to every pair of foxes (verse 4). Samson then lit the torches and set the foxes loose in the standing grain (verse 5). This resulted in significant damage to the grain, vineyards and olive groves, not to mention the foxes.

When the Philistines saw what had happened, they inquired to see who had done this terrible thing. When they discovered the circumstances behind this tragedy, they immediately went to the house of Samson's fiancée and burned her and her father to death (verse 6).

Samson's hatred of the Philistines only grew in intensity because of what they had done to his fiancée and her father. That day, he made a commitment not to stop until he had his revenge on them (verse 7). It is quite clear now that Samson no longer desired to maintain any kind or friendly relationship with the Philistines. He had gone to Timnah to be reconciled but now all hope of reconciliation is gone. The Philistines were no longer his friends, they were his enemies. Samson was so angry with the Philistines now that he attacked and slaughtered many of them. He then found a cave in the rock of Etam and stayed there.

Samson's actions were a declaration of war between him and the Philistine nation. They pursued him. The Philistines camped in Judan and spread out near the region of Lehi (verse 9). When the people of Judah saw this they asked why the Philistines had come to fight them (verse 10). The Philistines told them that they had come to take Samson prisoner.

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When they heard this, three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave where Samson was hiding. When they found Samson, they asked him why he had stirred up the Philistines against them. He told them that it was to get even for the things they had done to him (verse 11).

The men of Judah, realizing that their own lives were at stake, told Samson that they were going to hand him over to the Philistines. Samson made them promise that they would not kill him themselves (verse 12). They agreed to this and told him that they would simply tie him up and hand him over (verse 13).

Not many people want to be handed over to the enemy. One would have thought it better for Samson to be killed quickly by his own people rather than suffer at the hands of the enemy. Samson did not want this. He wanted to be handed over to the enemies. Being handed over to them in this way would give Samson the opportunity to kill as many Philistines as possible.

There is a clear shift in Samson's attitude toward the Philistines. His heart is set now on killing all he could. Knowing that he was going to die in their hands, did not distract him from his intention. He allowed himself to be handed over so that he could do as much damage to them as possible.

When the Philistines saw Samson, they came running out after him. Their hatred of Samson was very intense. The Spirit of the Lord fell on Samson as the Philistines came out after him. He broke the ropes on his arms, found the jawbone of a donkey and, using that as a weapon, defended himself against his enemy. That day Samson struck down one thousand men (verse 15). Samson declared his victory over the Philistines reminding them that with this one jawbone he had made donkeys of them all

(verse 16). The place where Samson killed the Philistines was called Ramath Lehi meaning "jawbone hill."

Samson's victory over the Philistines came at a cost. While God's Spirit had come on him and given him strength to fight, his body and mind were weary when everything was accomplished. In verse 18 he cried out to the Lord, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?"

There are two things that we need to see in verse 18. First, notice the cost of being used by God. While God's Spirit was the power behind the victory Samson had that day, his human body could only handle so much. At the end of the day, Samson was weary and thirsty. His body was exhausted and his mind weary. Notice second, how easy it was for Samson to fall into doubt and question God even when he had seen such a great victory. He wondered now if he would die of thirst. How could someone who had experienced God's power in this way question His ability to give Him something to drink? While it is hard to imagine how this could be, we know it to be true in our own lives. How many times have we seen the provision of God and yet still find doubt in our hearts? How often has God given us victory over the enemy and still we wonder if He will do it again?

At best, we are weak and frail instruments in the hands of an almighty God. Our bodies and minds grow weary. What we learn here is that Samson was not some great super hero. He grew weary and questioned the will and purpose of God. It is a reminder that God can powerfully use us just as we are.

God heard Samson's cry for help and opened up a source of water to him. Right there under his feet was the answer

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to his prayer. When Samson drank from that spring his strength returned and he was revived. The spring from which Samson drank that day was called En Hakkore literally meaning "caller's spring."

There is a similar spring available to all who will call out to God in their need. God is more than willing to minister to us in our weariness if we will call out to Him. Our bodies and minds are weak and frail at best. We often need His refreshing like Samson. Samson was refreshed by the spring of water that God provided. If you are weary you too can call out for the refreshing and God will provide it for you too.

Notice in verse 20 that Samson would lead Israel against the Philistines for a period of twenty years. God gave Samson victory over his enemies that day. Judah handed Samson over to the Philistines but God overruled. This was not the day of Samson's death. For twenty years Samson would be a thorn in the side of the Philistines. God had not finished what He had begun in the life of Samson so no army would be successful. What a wonderful hope this gives us today. God has a purpose for us as well. Maybe you have felt betrayed by your friends like Samson in this chapter. Maybe the enemy has surrounded you. There is no reason for despair. God is able to give you victory.

In the beginning of this chapter Samson's only concern was that he get even because of what the Philistines had done to him personally. God expanded his vision. Now his heart is to set his whole nation free from the oppression of the Philistines. Samson has come a long way in this chapter. The chapter began with him bringing a young goat to be reconciled with his Philistine family. It begins with Samson not understanding that the Philistines were enemies of God's people. As the chapter closes, Samson now has a

vision to defeat the enemies of God. God has opened his eyes and changed his perspective. God takes a man who sought to befriend the enemy and makes him into a mighty warrior to defend his people against them.

I like to imagine Samson's parents in all this. They wrestled with his befriending the enemy but could do nothing about it. Now they see their son as a leader of his people standing firm against their foes and accomplishing the purpose of God for his life. What hope this give us as parents for our own children. What hope this gives us today for those who are wandering from God and befriending the world. God is able to accomplish His purposes and bring them back.

For Consideration:

- What is your attitude toward sin and the world? Have you ever found yourself being attracted to it like Samson?
- Can we really be effective in accomplishing God's purpose for our lives if we don't see the enemy for what it is?
- How did God open Samson's eyes to the need of his people for deliverance from the Philistine oppression?
- How does God move Samson from a personal focus to leading a national movement?

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- What do we learn here about Samson's human nature? What does this show us about the kind of person God uses?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to see the world and sin for what it really is.
- Thank the Lord for the way He has been working in your life to mature you and bring you to the place of more effective ministry.
- Do you have a friend or loved one who, like Samson, is befriending the world? Ask God to minister to them and draw them closer to Himself.
- Thank God that He refreshes us in our weakness and weariness.

SAMSON'S FINAL VICTORY

Read Judges 16:1-31

Samson was far from perfect in his walk with the Lord God. As we begin chapter 16, we see that he went down to Gaza where he met a prostitute. Unable to resist the temptation, Samson spent the night with her (verse 1). It should be noted that Gaza was a Philistine town. It is unclear why Samson was in this enemy town sleeping with a Philistine prostitute.

When the people of Gaza heard that Samson had come to the town and was with the prostitute, they decided to wait for him at the city gate. At night the gates of the city were locked so no one could come in or out of the city. The intention was to wait until the gates were opened at dawn to attack and kill Samson. They knew he could not leave the city until the gates were opened.

Samson got up in the middle of the night and took hold of the doors of the city gate and tore them loose. Carrying them on his shoulders, he brought them to the top of a hill that faced Hebron (verse 3). In this way, he escaped his enemy. We can also imagine that the inhabitants of Gaza would have been humiliated by the removal of their gates by a single man.

Sometime later Samson fell in love with a woman by the name of Delilah. She lived in the Valley of Sorek. When the rulers of the Philistines discovered that Samson was in love with Delilah they asked her to discover the secret of his strength so that they could overpower him. They promised her eleven hundred shekels of silver each if she would cooperate with them in this matter. This amounted to approximately 28 pounds of silver (13 kilograms) from each leader. History tells us that there were five principle Philistine leaders. Delilah would have profited greatly from this offer. In order to do so, however, she would have to betray the one who loved her.

Delilah's love for Samson was obviously not as strong as her love for the silver she would get by betraying him. In verse 6 she set out to discover the secret to his strength. She is very direct with Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued." This question would have caused anyone to become suspicious, but Samson doesn't seem to clue in to what she is doing. Notice that she asked him how he could be tied up and subdued.

In verse 7 Samson told her that if he was bound with seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, he would be as weak as any other man. Delilah reported this to the Philistine rulers and they who brought her seven bowstrings to tie his arms so they could take him captive (verse 8-9). Samson snapped the strings easily, however, and defended himself against the Philistines.

Delilah complained to Samson saying, "You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied" (verse 10). Samson told her this time that if he was tied with new rope that had never been used he would be-

come as weak as any other man (verse 11). It is quite possible that Samson is playing with the Philistines. He knew he could defeat them and that they were no match for him. At the same time, however, his confidence seems to be in his gift and not in the Lord.

Believing what Samson told her, Delilah took new ropes and tied his hands with them. Again the Philistines attacked and she called out for the second time, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" (verse 12). Samson snapped the ropes as if they were threads and no harm came to him.

Delilah did not give up trying. Once again she asked him to tell her the secret of his strength. This time Samson told her that if she were to weave seven braids of his head into a fabric on a loom and tighten it with a pin he would be as weak as any other man. Delilah listened to him again and while he was sleeping he took his long hair, braided it, and wove the seven braids into the fabric on the loom. She tightened the whole thing with a pin.

When she had woven the hair of his head, Delilah cried out again as she had done in times past, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Samson woke from his sleep, pulled out the pin from the loom and defended himself.

What is significant about the third attempt is that Samson mentions his hair to Delilah. His hair was the secret of his strength. Samson is becoming more arrogant and careless with his game.

Delilah again complained to Samson,

"How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength" (verse 15).

Verse 16 tells us that Delilah prodded Samson day after day until he was "tired to death" of her nagging. Finally, Samson told her that no razor had ever been used on his head because he was a Nazirite from birth. He finally admitted, that if she were to shave his head he would be as weak as any other man. This time Delilah knew that she had discovered the secret to his strength. She sent word to the Philistines to come back again.

Delilah put Samson to sleep on her lap. She then called for a man to shave his head as he slept (verse 19). That day Samson's strength left him. Once again, she called out, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" Samson woke up thinking that he would be able to defend himself as he had done the other times. Because his strength had left him, however, he was taken captive.

The Philistines gouged out Samson's eyes and took him to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles they put him in prison where they forced him to grind grain (verse 21). It should be noted that the work of grinding grain was considered to be beneath the dignity of a man. This was usually a task done by woman. In reality the enemy was humiliating Samson. The great Samson who had often humiliated them by his acts of strength was now blinded, weak and grinding grain in a prison. Obviously, this gave the Philistines great delight. What the Philistines did not take into account, however, was the fact that during this time of captivity Samson's hair began to grow back (verse 22). As his hair grew so did his strength.

On one particular occasion, the Philistine leaders were assembled for a great celebration. They came together to offer a sacrifice to their god, Dagon. As they celebrated, they praised Dagon for giving them victory over Samson (verse 23-24).

As the celebration went on, the leaders called for Samson to be brought out to entertain them. As Samson was taken from prison (verse 25), he asked one of the servants who led him out to put him where he could feel the pillars that supported the temple (verse 26). Verse 27 tells us that the temple was crowded with people. The rulers of the Philistines were present, as were about three thousand people on the roof watching Samson perform (verse 27).

As Samson stood between the two supporting pillars of the temple, he prayed to God. He asked that God would strengthen him for one last great feat of strength to get revenge on the Philistines for taking out his eyes (verse 28). Notice that his focus is on what these enemies had done to him. He wants personal revenge. Despite his self-centeredness, God used Samson to judge His enemies and bring justice to the land.

After committing the matter to the Lord, Samson leaned against the pillars of the temple. With one hand on the pillar to his right and the other hand on the pillar to his left, Samson pushed with all his might. God answered Samson's prayer, and the pillars gave way, causing the roof to collapse on top of the people in the temple. Samson died in the disaster, but so did a great number of Philistines. Verse 30 tells us that Samson killed more Philistines in his death than he did while he was living. Samson's family took his body to his homeland and buried him in the tomb of his father (verse 31).

While Samson is known as a man of great physical strength, he was in fact a very weak man in other ways. His weakness for women led him into trouble. His self-confidence also led him to make decisions that would ultimately lead to his defeat. He seemed to put his confidence in his God-given gift of physical strength rather than in God Himself. God would use him, despite his many weaknesses, to give victory to His people.

For Consideration:

- What were Samson's weaknesses? What role did the women of his life play in his downfall?
- How do you suppose things would have worked out had Samson been able to resist temptation? What temptations do you find particularly hard to resist?
- Samson seems to enjoy playing with the enemy. How did this prove to be his downfall?
- Do you think Samson was blinded to what Delilah was doing? Why do you suppose he stayed with Delilah if he knew what she was doing? What keeps us from fleeing temptation?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you your weakness. Ask Him to strengthen you in these weaknesses.
- What temptations are you facing now? Ask God to give you victory over these temptations.

- Ask God to give you strength to flee the temptations of the enemy. Ask Him to help you to keep away from those places or people that can lead you into temptation.
- Thank the Lord that despite your failures, He is still able to use you.

33

DAN AND THE IDOLS OF MICAH

Read Judges 17:1-18:31

Chapters 17 and 18 of Judges give us a picture of the state of Israel's faith. As we begin, we meet a man by the name of Micah, from the territory of Ephraim. Micah had stolen eleven hundred shekels of silver from his mother (about 28 pounds or 13 kilograms). When Micah heard his mother utter a curse on the silver that had been taken, he brought it back to her and confessed his sin (verse 2). There is something we need to understand about Micah. Verse 5 tells us that he had a shrine with an ephod and some idols. The ephod was generally a piece of clothing worn by the priest. The fact that this ephod was in Micah's shrine with other images and idols shows us that this ephod was not used in the true worship of God. Notice from verse 5 that Micah had installed one of his sons as priests in his shrine.

What we discover from these verses is that Micah is a religious man. His faith, however, is not the faith of his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His faith is influenced by the pagan nations around him. Notice that his faith did not stop him from taking 1100 shekels from his own

mother. Micah, as a religious man, was quite concerned about the curse his mother put on the money he had stolen. He understood and believed in curses and was doing all he could to get out from under the curse on the money he had taken.

We learn about Micah's mother in verse 2. We do not know her name, but she too was a religious person. When she saw that Micah had confessed to taking away that money, she said, "The LORD bless you, my son!" She speaks here very likely of the God of Israel, and blessed her son in His name. Notice from verse 3 that Micah's mother "solemnly consecrated" this silver to the Lord. This too shows us that Micah's mother was a religious lady. She blessed her son in the name of the Lord and consecrated her silver to Him.

What is important for us to realize here, however, is that Micah's mother's faith had also been seriously compromised. Notice in verse 3 that she consecrated the silver her son returned to her to the Lord for her son to make a carved image and a cast idol. No Israelite knowledgeable in the law of God would have ever consecrated silver to the Lord God to make an image and an idol. Again this shows us the religious condition of Israel at this time. People were mixing the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with that of the nations around them.

Micah's mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith to make an image and an idol. These articles were put in Micah's house (verse 4).

"In those days Israel had no king and everyone did as they saw fit" (verse 6). This is an important verse, again telling us something of the condition of Israel at this time. The nation was not unified either under a king or under the law of God. People did whatever they saw fit to do. This led to

all kinds of ungodly practices. We have an example of this in the case of Micah and his mother, who spoke about the Lord God but also worshiped the images and idols of the nations around them.

In verse 7 we meet a young man from the priestly tribe of Levi. He had been living in Bethlehem in Judah. This young priest, however, decided to leave Bethlehem to find another place to live and serve the Lord. In his travels, he arrived at the home of Micah in Ephraim (verse 8).

When Micah met him, he asked him where he was from and where he was going. The young man explained that he was a Levite from Bethlehem and was searching for a place to live (verse 9). Micah offered the young priest a position in his home. He told him he would provide him with clothing and food as well as ten shekels of silver a year for his services as a priest (verse 10). This offer pleased the young Levite who agreed to the conditions and stayed with Micah. Micah treated him like one of his sons and installed him as priest over his home (verse 12). Micah was very pleased to have the young Levite, and felt that the Lord would be good to him now that he had a true priest over his house (verse 13). Micah's concern here is not for God but for his own blessing and security.

Before moving on in this story it is important that we understand something about this young Levite. Remember that Micah had a shrine with idols and images. Micah's faith was not in line with the law of God. This does not seem to bother the young Levite, who was simply happy to have a job. He would become priest over a shrine of idols and images. He was from a priestly tribe in Israel, but he did not have a true commitment to God's laws and purposes. Again this is an indication of the state of the nation's spiritual leaders.

As the story continues in chapter 18, it moves from Micah to the tribe of Dan. At this time, the tribe of Dan was looking for a place of their own. Judges 18:1 tells us that they had not yet come into their inheritance. This is very likely because they had not been able to deal with the people who had lived in the land allotted to them (see Judges 1:34).

Because they were not able to deal with the people in their tribal allotment, Dan decided to look for another piece of land where they could settle. To do this they sent five warriors from Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out the land and bring a report to them (verse 2).

These five Danite warriors travelled northward and arrived in the territory of Ephraim at the home of Micah, where they were offered hospitality and stayed the night (verse 2). While there, they noticed the young Levite who served a priest in Micah's home. They asked him where he was from and what had brought him to the home of Micah (verse 3). The young Levite explained to them how he had come to live and serve as priest in the home of Micah.

Realizing that he was a priest, the Danite warriors asked the young Levite to inquire of God for them. They wanted to know if their journey would be successful (verse 5). The Levite told them that they could continue their journey in peace because they had the Lord's approval (verse 6).

Encouraged by those words, the Danite warriors travelled to the region of Laish. There they discovered that the people in this remote area lived at peace in a land that seemed to be quite prosperous. They were unsuspecting and secure (verse 7). The warrior spies returned to Zorah and Eshtaol to bring their report (verse 8). They recommended to their brothers that they attack these unsuspecting people and take their land (verses 9-10). Six hundred fighting

men from Dan immediately prepared for battle and set out for the town of Laish (verse 11).

The Danite army set up camp near Kiriath Jearim in Judah (verse 12). From there they travelled to the hill country of Ephraim where Micah lived (verse 13). As they approached the home of Micah, the five spies told their brothers about Micah and his idols (verse 14). The soldiers decided to steal Micah's idols and keep them for themselves.

Turning aside to go to Micah's house, they met the young Levite (verse 15). After greeting him, the five Danite spies went inside the house took the carved image, the ephod and other household gods from Micah (verse 17). The young Levite questioned them about this (verse 18).

The Danites told the Levite to be quiet. He was not to say a word about this to his master. They also invited him to come with them and be their priest. They reminded him that it would be better for him to be a priest for a whole tribe than for just one man (verse 19).

Micah had treated this young Levite as a son. This, however, was the chance of a lifetime for the young Levite. He saw here an opportunity to advance his personal position and was quite willing to leave. We also read in verse 20 that "he took the ephod, the other household gods and the carved image and went along with the people.

When the Danites had gone some distance, Micah called the men who were living by him to chase after them, obviously with the intention of getting his idols back (verse 22). They chased after the Danites, shouting as they went. Hearing the commotion behind them, the Danites turned around and asked Micah what he wanted and why he had

come out to fight them (verse 23). Micah explained that they had taken his gods and his priest (verse 24).

The Danites stood their ground and told Micah and his men that if they persisted in this matter they would not hesitate to attack and kill them. They even threatened to kill their families (verse 25). Micah did not want to risk the lives of his men and their families, so he returned home without his gods (verse 26).

Again we see the sad state of the nation at this time. The tribe of Dan stole from their fellow Israelite and threatened to wipe out an entire family if an issue was made of it. It is clear from this that the moral condition of the land was very low.

The Danites continued their journey to Laish. They attacked and burned down the city, killing the inhabitants (verse 27), who were defenceless and had no one to come to their aid (verse 28).

The tribe of Dan rebuilt the city and called it Dan after their forefather (verse 28-29). They then set up the idols of Micah in the city. These idols would be worshiped for as long as the house of God was in Shiloh (verse 31). This meant that they would worship these gods at least until the days of Samuel the prophet.

Verse 30 gives us the identity of the young Levite. From this verse we understand that his name was Jonathan. He was the son of Gershom, the son of Moses. Jonathan and his sons would serve the tribe of Dan until they went into captivity.

It is not hard to see from these two chapters that the faith of God's people has been seriously compromised. While the people living in Israel at this time were religious in nature, they did not follow the Lord God and His ways. The faith of their ancestors was mixed with the pagan religions of the day. Spiritual leaders were no longer leading people into the truth of God's law, but were serving as priest to pagan idols, motivated by profit and selfish intentions rather than a desire for God's glory. Sons stole from their mothers; Brother threatened brother. These were not good days for Israel. They had wandered far from God.

For Consideration:

- What do these two chapters teach us about the spiritual condition of the land of Israel at this time? What evidence is there that the law of God was not being taught in the land? What evidence is there in your land that people need to be taught the Word of God?
- What was the result of not having an authority on which to base their live and decisions in Israel? Why do we need an authority? How is God's Word an authority for life and doctrine?
- Micah's mother offered what she had consecrated to the Lord to make an idol. Is it possible for us to take what belongs to the Lord and offer it to other gods? How have you used what God has given you?
- Consider how the Levite of these chapters compromised his faith in the one true God.

Consider also how he was motivated for his own glory. Have spiritual leaders of our day compromised their faith in any way?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray about the spiritual condition of your land. Ask God to renew His people and bring them back to the teaching of His Word.
- Ask God to help you to be true to Him alone. Recommit your life and all you have to Him. Ask Him to forgive you for times you have failed to use all He has given you for His glory.
- Ask God to give you grace to walk faithfully with Him without compromise. Ask Him to help you to serve Him, not for what you can get, but out of love and devotion to Him.

34

THE HORRIBLENESS OF SIN

Read Judges 19:1-20:48

In the last meditation we saw something of the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. The tribe of Dan had set up idols they had stolen from Micah and bowed down to them. In so doing, they turned their back on the Lord God. Here in chapters 19 and 20 we see the moral and spiritual decline in the tribe of Benjamin. We can only imagine how much the heart of the Lord God was grieved as He looked down on the condition of His people in those days.

Judges 19:1 begins with a statement that Israel had no king. In other words, there was no one to guide and direct the people in the land. They did as they saw fit. There was no authority. No one was leading the people in the ways of the Lord God. While God was literally their king, they had rejected Him and refused His headship.

As our story unfolds, we meet a Levite who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim (verse 1). The Levite took a concubine from the region of Bethlehem in Judah. This concubine was unfaithful to him and went back to her father's house (verse 2).

After four months, the Levite decided to persuade her to return to him (verses 2-3). Taking his servant and two donkeys, he went to see her at her father's house. Her father was happy to see the Levite and welcomed him gladly. Likely, he wanted the relationship between them mended. He pleaded with the Levite to stay with him for three days and treated him with great hospitality during those days (verse 4).

On the fourth day, the Levite decided to return home with his concubine. He rose early in the morning and prepared to leave. The girl's father, however, persuaded him to have something to eat before he left. The Levite agreed and the two sat down to a meal. After the meal, the father-in-law persuaded him to stay another night (verse 6-7).

On the morning of the fifth day the same thing was repeated. The Levite ate with his father-in-law who again tried to persuade him to stay another day. By the time the meal was over, it was late in the day. When his father-in-law again suggested he stay another night, however, the Levite was unwilling to do so. Taking his concubine, he left and travelled toward the city of Jebus (Jerusalem).

Jebus or Jerusalem was a fortified city. At this point it did not belong to Israel. It was getting quite late in the day when the Levite left his father-in-law. As they approached the city of Jebus, the servant suggested they spend the night in the city (verse 11). The Levite, however, did not want to stay in an "alien city." The people of Jebus were not Israelites. He preferred to go on to the city of Gibeah or Ramah where he could at least be among brothers (verses 12-13).

It was getting late when they finally arrived in Gibeah, in the territory of Benjamin. They stopped in the city square.

We need to remember that there was not likely an inn for the Levite to stay. Travellers depended on the hospitality of the people of a region for a place to stay. The city square was a place where the traveller could go to inquire about a place to stay. Verse 15 tells us, however, that no one from the city offered to take them into their home for the night.

An old man from the tribe of Ephraim was living in Gibeah. When he saw the travellers in the city square on his way home from work, he offered them a place to stay (verses 17-19). When the Levite said that he was prepared to stay in the square, the old man insisted that they come to stay with him (verses 19-20). Obviously the man knew it would not be safe for them to stay there all night.

Accepting to his offer, the Levite followed the man to his home. After they had fed their donkeys and washed their feet, the group sat down for a meal with the Ephraimite.

During the course of the meal, some men from the city surrounded the house and began pounding at that door (verse 22). They demanded that the old man bring out his guest so that they could have sex with him. This is an indication of the moral state of the city of Gibeah. The men did not hide their intentions. They were very bold in their sin.

The old man refused to surrender his guest to the men outside. Instead, he offered to give them his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine to do with as they pleased. The men outside the house would not listen so the Levite took his concubine and sent her outside to them and closed the door behind her. Verse 25 tells us that throughout the night the men raped and abused her.

After a good night's rest, the Levite got up in the morning and prepared for his journey. When he opened the door of the house and stepped outside, he discovered his concubine lying on the ground in front of the door. Her hands were on the threshold (verse 27). The Levite looked down at her and told her to get up but there was no response. He picked her up and put her on his donkey and continued his way home.

This incident not only tells us something about the evil that existed in the tribe of Benjamin but also about the Levite. Here was a man of God, willingly to sacrifice his concubine to protect himself. He pushed her out the door for the men of the city to abuse all night long. There is no respect or love for his concubine. There is no record of the Levite getting up at night to see if she was alright. He simply left her out all night long to be abused.

When he returned home, the Levite took a knife and cut his concubine into twelve pieces. He sent these pieces throughout the various regions of Israel (verse 29). He did this to draw attention to what had happened.

When the people of Israel heard what had happened, they were angry and decided to do something about the situation. We see from Judges 20:1 that the whole nation was so stirred up by this incident that they gathered their armies and assembled before the Lord at Mizpah. Four hundred thousand soldiers gathered at Mizpah with sword in hand ready to do battle. They demanded to know how this awful thing had happened (Judges 20:3).

The Levite explained how he and his concubine had come to the city of Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. He told them how the men surrounded the house intent on having sex with him. He went on to explain how they had raped

his concubine so that she died (verses 4-5). He told them that he cut up her body and sent the pieces to the various regions of Israel to show them what a horrible thing had happened in their land (verse 6). The Levite's testimony of what had happened stirred the whole nation. They were angry with the tribe of Benjamin and decided to attack them (verse 8).

The people of Israel were legitimately angry and horrified by what had happened that day. They sincerely believed that something needed to be done to punish such a crime so it would not be repeated in the land.

Have we lost a sense of the horribleness of sin in our land? The response of the nation to the raping of the Levite's concubine may appear to be extreme but the Israelites were legitimately angry and offended by this crime. The guilt had to be removed from the land.

In verse 12 Israel sent men to the tribe of Benjamin, demanding that those who had raped the Levite's concubine be surrendered and put them to death so the land would be cleansed of evil (verses 12-13). Benjamin refused to surrender the men. In fact, various towns of Benjamin came together at Gibeah to stand with them against the threat of their brothers. In so doing they stood behind their actions and defended their sin.

Twenty-six thousand swordsmen and seven hundred chosen men from Gibeah were mobilized by Benjamin to fight their brothers and defend the evil doers. Verse 16 tells us that among the men that Benjamin had gathered that day were seven hundred left-handed men who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss (verse 16).

While Benjamin had fewer than thirty thousand men to defend themselves, the remainder of the tribes of Israel had four hundred thousand men (verse 17). Benjamin was seriously outnumbered.

Before going into battle against Benjamin, Israel went up to Bethel and inquired of the Lord as to who should go into battle first (verse 18). The Lord told them that Judah was to go first. With this instruction from the Lord, the next morning the Israelites went out to fight Benjamin near Gibeah (verse 19). Benjamin cut down twenty-two thousand Israelites that day on the battle field (verse 21). Israel was defeated.

After their humiliating defeat, Israel wept before the Lord until evening. In verse 23 they returned to the Lord and asked Him if they should go up against the Benjamites. The Lord told them to go again.

For the second time Israel faced Benjamin in battle. During that second battle Benjamin again inflicted heavy losses on Israel. Another eighteen thousand men were cut down (verse 25).

After this second loss, the army of Israel returned to Bethel where they sat weeping and fasting before the Lord. In the evening they offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord (verse 26). Again, they inquired of the Lord before the Ark of the Covenant, "Shall we go up again to battle with Benjamin our brother, or not?" (verse 28). The Lord told them that they were to attack Benjamin and that he would give them victory.

This time Israel set an ambush around Gibeah (verse 29). They took up positions against Benjamin as they had done previously (verse 30). Benjamin came out for the third time

to meet them in battle, leaving the city open. As they had done previously, Benjamin began to inflict heavy casualties on Israel (verse 31). God, however, turned the battle and that day, 25,100 Benjamite soldiers were struck down (verse 35). Benjamin's total army was less than thirty thousand so the losses were very serious for Benjamin.

Verse 36 tells us that Israel gave way to Benjamin to draw them from the city so that they could ambush them. At the right time, soldiers hiding around the city made a sudden dash and took the city. Then the Israelites stopped their retreat and attacked Benjamin (verse 41).

Benjamin fled before Israel into the desert. The men of the various towns of Israel cut them off as they fled (verse 42). Eighteen thousand Benjamites fell in battle (verse 43-44). Another five thousand fell along the road toward to the desert. Israel kept pressing them and another two thousand were struck down as far away as Gidom (verse 45). Altogether twenty-five thousand Benjamite soldiers fell (verses 35, 46). Six hundred men were left. They fled to the desert and remained there for a period of four months (verse 47). After this defeat, Israel returned to the towns of Benjamin burning them and putting to death both people and animals (verse 48).

There are several things we need to see in this story. Notice first that victory did not come easy for Israel. They were defeated twice and suffered heavy casualties. We are left wondering why God told Israel to go into battle against their brothers and allowed them to suffer the loss of many lives. How easy it would have been for Israel to believe that their victory came as a result of their superior numbers. By allowing Benjamin to kill large numbers of Israelites, God was humbling them. Israel pleaded with God

for victory through prayer and fasting. Israel knew that ultimately the victory was from God and not a result of their superior numbers. They too needed to be humbled as they dealt with Benjamin's sin.

How easy it is for us to puff ourselves up and look down on a brother or sister who has sinned. Sometimes the Lord has to humble us before He can use us to deal with the sin we see in someone else.

Note also that there are some victories in life that come at great cost. All too often we give up when we encounter problems in life and ministry. Israel did not give up. She persevered until the sin was removed. There is a lesson in this for us as well. We should not be discouraged and give up. God is calling us to face the enemy but sometimes there will be casualties and struggles along the way. Not all victories come without struggle.

Finally, we should recognize that sin is a horrible thing in the eyes of God. It is too easy to lose the sense of how terrible it really is. Israel was horrified at the low moral and spiritual standard in the tribe of Benjamin. They could not sit by and do nothing about this. They took a firm stand and did all they could to remove sin from their land. We would do well to seriously consider what we need to do with the sin in our own lives and land.

For Consideration:

- As we begin this chapter we understand that the nation of Israel has been worshiping idols and the law of God is not being carefully taught or observed. Despite this fact, Israel is horrified at the sin of Benjamin. Are there certain sins that offend us more than others?
- Consider for a moment the Levite in this story. How would you describe him as a spiritual leader in Israel?
- How does this Levite use his concubine to protect himself? How does this attitude compare with the attitude of Christ as a leader?
- How does God humble Israel as He uses them to judge Benjamin for their sin? Why is it important that we be humble as we deal with the sins of others?
- Do you believe that we see sin as God sees it today? Have we become so accustomed to sin today that we no longer see it for what it really is?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to open your eyes to see sin as He sees it.
- Ask God to give you greater humility as you deal with others who have fallen into sin.
- Take a moment to pray for the spiritual leaders of your church and country. Ask God to give them a

conviction of sin and a willingness to follow Him completely without compromise.

35

RECONCILIATION WITH BENJAMIN

Read Judges 21:1-25

In the last meditation we saw how the tribe of Benjamin was nearly wiped out because of the sin of the men who raped the Levite's concubine. Instead of handing these evil men over to the rest of Israel to be punished for their crime, Benjamin defended them. This led to a battle that saw the death of over twenty-five thousand soldiers. We also learn from verse 1 that the men of the other tribes of Israel took an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to a Benjamite. This vow would prove to be very heavy burden on the tribe of Benjamin.

When the battle with Benjamin was over, the tribes of Israel returned to Bethel where they had time to reflect on what had happened. Verse 2 tells us that they were grieved to see such devastation in a tribe of Israel. They wept bitterly, crying out to God (verse 3):

"Why has this happened to Israel? Why should one tribe be missing from Israel today?"

The next day they built an altar and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. They had been guilty of nearly wiping out the tribe of Benjamin and so they came to God in repentance. We need to admire the attitude of Israel here. They had been used of God to deal with the sin of Benjamin, but they took no delight in the pain they had inflicted on their brothers and sisters. Their hearts ached for them.

It is not our purpose here to discuss whether Israel was right or wrong in what they did to Benjamin. The fact is that it happened and now nothing could change it. Israel responded to the harm caused to Benjamin by doing two things. First, the people came to God and repented by offering a sacrifice to God. Second, they did everything they could to be reconciled with their brothers and sisters. Let's consider the process of reconciliation with Benjamin.

In verse 5 we discover that the tribes of Israel had made an oath to the Lord that if anyone refused to assemble to fight Benjamin they would be put to death. This shows us how seriously Israel took the sin of Benjamin. If any Israelite did not do everything in his power to rid the nation of this sin, he was to be put to death. When we sit back and do nothing about sin and evil, when we have the power to do so, we become guilty before God. God is calling us to be a people of action. To refuse to do something when it is in our power to do so is sin. In this particular case, it was a sin worthy of death.

As the Israelites grieved over Benjamin's situation now, however, they asked the question:

"How can we provide wives for those who are left, since we have taken an oath by the LORD not to

give them any of our daughters in marriage?" (verse 7).

Israel's concern is that the tribe of Benjamin be restored and prosper. Right now the problem was that no Israelite could give his daughter in marriage to a man of the tribe of Benjamin because of the vow they had made before the Lord. Unless they could find women for this tribe, they could not grow in number and be restored to their former glory.

As Israel reflected on this, they discovered that the people of Jabesh Gilead had not assembled at Mizpah to fight the Benjamites (verse 8). Because they had not assembled they had not taken the oath to refuse their daughters in marriage to Benjamin. The problem, however, was that Israel had also made an oath before God that if anyone did not come to Mizpah to fight Benjamin they would be put to death.

To fulfil their commitment, Israel sent twelve thousand fighting men to Jabesh Gilead to put them to death (verse 10). They gave the soldiers instructions to kill every man, child and woman who was not a virgin. The soldiers found four hundred young virgin women living in Jabesh Gilead. They captured these women and brought them back to a camp in Shiloh (verse 12).

In verse 13 Israel sent an offer of peace to Benjamin. Part of this offer was the gift of these four hundred virgin women. While this was a noble gesture, there were not enough virgins for the men of Benjamin (verse 14).

The elders of Israel gathered together again to discuss what to do about the shortage of women in Benjamin. They realized that it was because they had killed the women in

their battle with Benjamin that this tribe was in such a difficult position now. How could they find more women for Benjamin so the tribe would be not put under undue hardship (verse 16). They did not want to see the tribe wiped out (verse 17). The men of Israel knew they could not break this vow without being cursed (verse 18). This meant that they had to find another solution.

The solution to the problem came in verse 19. The elders reminded Benjamin of the annual festival of the Lord that took place in Shiloah. We are not told which festival this was but it was a yearly tradition for Israel. The elders instructed the men of Benjamin to hide in the vineyards in the region of Shiloah and when the girls of Shiloah came out to join in the dancing they were to rush from the vineyards and seize them, taking them home as their wives (verse 21). The elders promised that when their brothers complained about this to them they would act in Benjamin's favour by telling them to be compassionate to their brothers because of their need (verse 22).

The reasoning behind this was quite simple. While they could not give their daughters in marriage to Benjamin, the girls could be taken by force. If Benjamin took their daughters by force then no one could say that Israel gave them in marriage to the tribe of Benjamin. This way Israel would be free from any curse related to the breaking of their vow and Benjamin could have enough wives to continue their family line. Israel decided simply to close their eyes and forgive anything that Benjamin might do in this regard.

Benjamin was pleased with the counsel of the elders and did exactly what they recommended. They captured a number of young women and brought them back to Benjamin as their wives. Verse 23 tells us that they rebuilt the towns of Benjamin that Israel had destroyed.

The story of this final chapter in Judges is one of reconciliation. Israel was an instrument in God's hands to judge the sin of Benjamin, but there was also reconciliation and blessing. Are there people in your life that you have offended? Are their people in your fellowship who have been disciplined? May God give us the grace to do our part to see that each one is restored.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in this passage that Israel grieved over what had to be done to Benjamin? What does this teach us about what our attitude should be in regards to church discipline today?
- Have you ever been guilty of hurting a brother or sister in Christ? What can you do to help them be restored to blessing and victory?
- What are some of the sins around you today? What do you think God would have you to do about this?
- What do we learn about keeping the promises we make? Have you made promises? Have you been keeping those promises?
- The challenge for Israel in this chapter was to balance keeping their oaths with showing compassion. Are there ever times when we should break our promises because by keeping them they create undo hardship and difficulty for others?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to grieve with those who struggle in the body of Christ.
- Ask God to show you how you can help those who are in need today. Ask him to show you particular needs you can help with today.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have not taken your promises seriously.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of compassion. Ask Him to give you a greater heart of compassion for those around you.

PREFACE TO RUTH

The book of Ruth tells the tragic story of a family, affected by a famine in Israel, who moved to the land of Moab in the hope of finding a better life. There in Moab, however, the men in the family die leaving behind three widows with no children and no way of providing for themselves. Returning to Israel, two of these widows cast themselves on God for their basic needs.

Ruth is the story of God's provision for these women. As you read, take note of how God works in their lives, carefully timing events and leading them into the fullness of His provision. Notice how God uses them to be a link in a chain that will ultimately bring salvation to the world.

The book reminds us that God is in control of the events of our lives. He can use what appears to be a tragic circumstance to accomplish His greater glory and our good. It reminds us that God reaches out in compassion and cares for us in our need.

My prayer for the reader is that this short story of Ruth and Naomi will encourage you in the struggles you face. I trust that the book will point you to a sovereign and compassionate God who reaches out to us in our time of need.

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

Authorship

There is no indication in the book of Ruth as to its authorship. There is, however, some indication as to when the book could have been written. In Ruth 4:17 we have the record of the birth of a child to Ruth and Boaz by the name was Obed. Ruth 4:18-22 then traces the line of Obed down to David. This indicates that the book would have been written several generations after Ruth, likely in the time of David.

Background

Ruth was the wife of Mahon, the son of Elimelech and Naomi. Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem likely because of a famine at that time (Ruth 1:1). They settled in the land of Moab. While in Moab, Mahon married Ruth, a Moabitess. Eventually, both Elimelech and Mahon died in Moab leaving Naomi and Ruth widows. The book of Ruth tells the story of how these two widows returned to Bethlehem and how God provided for them and used them in a mighty way.

The book was originally part of the book of Judges but later separated to form its own book. The story takes place during the period of Israel's history when judges ruled the land (see Ruth 1:1).

It is interesting to note that David had a good relationship with the king of Moab. 1 Samuel 22:3-5 tells us that when David was running from Saul, he asked the king of Moab to take care of his family until he could understand the purpose of God. As David and his soldiers ran from Saul, his family was protected in the land of Moab by their king. Some Bible scholars believe that the book of Ruth was written in celebration of this relationship between David and the king of Moab.

Importance of the Book for Today

Ruth is an important book for a number of reasons. First it shows the concern of God for two widows in need. It brings comfort to those who struggle in life and reminds us that God cares for us in our time of need.

Ruth also has some important things to say about the concern of God for the nations. In this book we find God reaching out to a widow from Moab. She was not born in the Jewish nation but was used by God to accomplish His purpose for His people. Ruth would become the ancestor of one of Israel's greatest kings. More importantly, however, she would become an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Matthew 1:5). It is quite amazing that the Lord would use a foreigner to the nation of Israel to accomplish His great purposes in bringing the Saviour to the world. God has always had a heart for the nations. The book gives us a picture of that heart.

God answers the needs of Ruth and Naomi through a man by the name of Boaz. He is moved by God to be generous and compassionate to them in their time of need. Again this shows us the compassion of God for widows and those in physical need. Boaz is an example of God's love

in action. He reaches out to Ruth and Naomi in their need and sets an example for us in our day.

In the book of Ruth, we have the story of two destitute widows who were alone in life. Their husbands had died and the family line was going to die with them. God raised up a redeemer who would restore their honour and inheritance in the nation. In a very real way, this is what the Lord Jesus came to do for us. Sin has stripped us of our honour and inheritance. We were left destitute with no hope. The Lord Jesus came as our Redeemer to restore our position and inheritance. Through his work on our behalf, we are now given a place of honour before the Father in heaven. Through Jesus' death, we have become sons and daughters of God and inheritors of his kingdom and all His blessings. Ruth reminds us of the work that Christ did on our behalf.

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NAOMI'S GRIEF

Read Ruth 1:1-22

The events of the book of Ruth took place during the time of the judges (verse 1). We are not told what judge was ruling at that time. We do know, however, that there was a famine in the land.

Verse 1 tells us that a man from Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah took his wife and two sons and moved from Israel to the country of Moab. The move from Israel to Moab was not meant to be permanent. Verse 1 tells us that it was "for a while," likely until the famine in Israel had passed. We learn from verse 2 that the name of the man was Elimelech and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.

While the family was living in Moab, Elimelech died and Naomi had to raise her two sons by herself (verse 3). Eventually, these two sons married Moabite women. Under normal circumstances it was forbidden for an Israelite to marry a foreign wife. Had the family not moved to Moab, this may not have been a temptation for these young men. This shows us that there are times when we can place ourselves and our families in situations that encourage them to wander from the path of God.

The Moabite women that Naomi's sons married were Orpah and Ruth (verse 4). After the family had lived in Moab for a period of ten years, both of Naomi's sons also died. It is interesting to see that the intention of Elimelech was to stay temporarily in Moab because of the famine in Israel. This temporary move ended up being ten years. In that period of time, Naomi lost her husband. Her sons married foreign wives and settled down with them. Their roots were sinking deeper into Moabite ways. We need to understand from this that we can very quickly become comfortable in circumstances that God does not desire for us to remain in. The longer we put off doing what God tells us to do, the more difficult it will become to be obedient.

It was the purpose of God that Naomi return to Israel. The death of her husband and two sons reminded her that Moab was not her home. When she heard that God had come to the aid of his people in Israel, Naomi decided that it was time for her to return (verse 6). Taking her two daughters-in-law, she set out for Israel (verse 7).

As she began her journey, Naomi turned to her daughters-in-law and said, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home" (verse 8). She blessed them and prayed that they would find new husbands (verses 8-9). Kissing them, she said good-bye and told them to return to their own people (verse 10).

Obviously, Naomi's daughters-in-law hesitated to return so she reminded them that there was no future for them with her. She was a widow and could not have any more children to give them as husbands (verses 11-12). Naomi also told her daughters-in-law that the hand of the Lord had turned against her (verse 13). She believed her situation proved that God's favour was no longer on her. In reality, the favour of the Lord was very much on Naomi. She was

not yet able to see how that was possible, but God was even now working out His purpose for her and future generations.

Orpah wept when she heard what Naomi said. This was not an easy parting for Orpah. Kissing her mother-in-law, however, she returned home to her people (verse 14).

Ruth did not want to return to her people. She clung to Naomi (verse 14). Naomi told her that Orpah had returned to her people and encouraged her to do the same (verse 15).

Ruth refused to return to her people. She set her mind to go with Naomi. Not only did she chose to go with Naomi, but also committed herself to worship and follow Naomi's God. "Your people will be my people and your God will be my God," she told her mother-in-law. In saying this, Ruth renounced her Moabite roots. From now on she would be a follower of the God of Israel. Turning her back on her own people and former gods, Ruth committed herself to stand with Naomi in her trial. She would let nothing but death separate them (verse 17).

That day, on the road to Israel, Ruth and Orpah had a decision to make. Orpah chose to return to her roots. Ruth turned her back on Moab to follow the one true God of Israel. We read nothing more about Orpah. Ruth, however, would go on to produce the line from which King David would be born. From that same line would come the Lord Jesus Himself. The decision made that day on the road to Israel, was one of the most important decisions Ruth ever made.

There are many people like Ruth and Orpah on the road of life today. Each of them has an important decision to make. Will they turn back to what they know, or will they

make a commitment to the God of Israel and serve Him. Ruth's decision would have a lasting impact on the whole world.

Seeing that Ruth was absolutely committed to following her and her God, Naomi allowed her to come along to Israel (verse 18). Together, the two women travelled to Bethlehem in Judah, arriving just as the barley harvest was about to begin (verse 22). When they arrived, the whole town was stirred. They remembered Naomi and said, "Can this be Naomi?"

Naomi told her friends in Bethlehem not to call her Naomi anymore. Instead, they were to call her Mara. Naomi means "pleasant." Mara, on the other hand means "bitter." This reveals something of Naomi's attitude at this point in life. She struggled deeply with her lot in life. Even with Ruth beside her, she was still not able to see the blessing of God. She told her friends how she had gone down from Israel full but came back empty-handed. God had afflicted her. She was a childless widow. From her perspective things could not have been any worse.

The reality of the matter was that God was about to do something wonderful in Naomi's life. At this point in time, however, Naomi could not see this. She was depressed and overwhelmed by the pain she had experienced over the last ten years in Moab. Her future was uncertain in her eyes. She didn't know what kind of future she could provide for Ruth. Naomi's eyes were focused on her problems.

What kind of witness do you suppose Naomi was for Ruth, who had just committed herself to follow Naomi's God? Naomi's witness was not a very strong one. She spoke of a God who had abandoned her and left her as a widow,

taking away her children and leaving her without hope. Somehow in the midst of all this, Ruth was still attracted to Naomi's God. How often have we failed as parents with our children, as workers in our work place or as witnesses to our neighbours? God is able, however, to work through us to accomplish His purposes. Naomi was not in a good place spiritually, but God still chose to accomplish His purposes through her. Praise God, He uses us even in our times of weakness.

For Consideration:

- Elimelech and his family moved for "a while" to Moab. The family stayed for a period of ten years. Their two sons were married during this ten year period. How easy is it for us to become comfortable in our situations? Why is this not always a good thing?
- By moving to Moab, Elimelech put his sons in a situation where they would choose to marry Moabite women (which was against the Law of Moses). How important is it that we carefully consider the situations we place our families into? How does our environment influence us and our walk with God?
- What decision did Ruth make on the road to Israel? How would that decision change the rest of her life? Have you made a similar decision?
- Consider Naomi's attitude toward her situation in life. Have you ever had a similar attitude? Explain.

- Can God still accomplish His purposes even if we are not where we should be spiritually?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to open your eyes to any place in your life where you have become too comfortable. Ask Him to give your grace to do something about it.
- Take a moment to recommit yourself to God and His purposes like Ruth did here in this chapter.
- Take a moment to examine your attitude toward your situation in life. Ask God to give you a positive and expectant hope in Him and His purposes.
- Thank the Lord that while you have not always been what you need to be, He has still been able to use you for His glory.

37

BOAZ

Read Ruth 2:1-23

While Naomi's husband and sons had died, she did have a relative on her husband's side in the region of Bethlehem. His name was Boaz. He was a man of good standing in the community and would prove to be an important figure in the story of Naomi and Ruth.

One day, Ruth spoke to her mother-in-law and asked for permission to go into the fields to pick leftover grain. Moses had commanded the Israelites that when they were harvesting their land, they were to leave grain for the poor and the foreigner. In Leviticus 23:22 we read:

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

Ruth knew about this custom in Israel and suggested to Naomi that she allow her to find a field so she could gather grain for them to eat. Naomi gave her permission.

The hand of the Lord God was on Ruth and Naomi at this time. From Ruth 1:22 we understand that they had arrived in Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was beginning. God's timing was perfect. God was caring for them.

Ruth chose a field and began to gather what was left behind the harvesters. What she did not know at the time was that she was gleaning barley in the field of Boaz, Naomi's relative (verse 3). Again we see clear evidence of the hand of God leading Ruth to the right field.

There is another evidence of God's working in Ruth's life in verse 4. As Ruth was gathering barley, Boaz arrived from town. We don't know why Boaz decided to visit the men in his field that particular day. What we do know is that Boaz noticed Ruth in the field and asked his foreman about her (verse 5). The foreman explained that she was from Moab and had come back with Naomi (verse 6). She had asked permission to glean behind the harvesters. The foreman told Boaz that she had been working steadily since the morning. She had only taken a short rest in the shelter (verse 7). Obviously Ruth was very hard worker.

Hearing this, Boaz went to speak personally to Ruth. He told her to stay in his fields to harvest her grain. She was to follow his servant girls wherever they went. He also told her that he had instructed his men not to touch or hinder her in any way. If she was thirsty, she was to drink from the water jars the men had filled (verses 8-9).

Ruth was overwhelmed by the generosity of Boaz. In verse 10 she bowed down with her face to the ground and asked:

"Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?"

Boaz told Ruth that he had heard all about what she had done for her mother-in-law, Naomi, since the death of her husband. He knew how she had left her own country to live with Naomi in Israel. There is no indication of him telling her that he was related to Naomi. Ruth thanked Boaz and blessed him for his generosity (verse 13). In this encounter Ruth is getting a better picture of the Lord God of Israel. While Naomi seemed to be telling her that the Lord God had abandoned them, Ruth was beginning to see a God who was providing in miraculous ways for their every need.

At mealtime, Boaz invited Ruth to join him. He offered her bread and told her to dip it in the wine vinegar that had been prepared (verse 14). When she agreed and sat down with the harvesters to eat, she ate all she wanted and had some left over (verse 14). She kept what was left over for her mother-in-law (see verse 18). This shows us that Ruth was a very thoughtful person who was concerned about her Naomi's well-being.

After the meal, Ruth returned to gathering barley. Boaz gave instructions to his men not to embarrass her or stop her even if she gathered among the sheaves where they had not harvested (verse 15). He told them to pull out some of the stalks and leave them behind for her to pick up (verse 16). They were to do all they could to help Ruth.

Ruth gathered barley until the evening. Before returning home she took what she had gathered and threshed it to separate the straw from the grain. When she finished threshing she had about three fifth of a bushel or 22 litres of grain. She carried this back to her mother-in-law.

When Naomi saw the quantity of barley Ruth had brought home that day she asked her where she had gleaned and blessed the man that had taken notice of her (verse 19).

Ruth told Naomi about the man who had treated her so kindly. When Naomi found out that his name was Boaz, she was very happy. She told Ruth that not only was he a close relative, but he was also one of their kinsman redeemers (verse 20).

A kinsman redeemer was responsible to take care of the extended family when they were in need. This involved providing an heir for a widow who had no children (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), buying back a family member sold into slavery (Leviticus 25:25-28) or avenging the killing of a family member (Numbers 35:19-21). In this case, Naomi was a widow without children. Her husband's family line would end with her. This was a very serious matter. It would fall on the kinsman redeemer to see that her husband's line did not end. Naomi knew that Boaz would do everything in his power to protect Ruth (verse 22). This was a safe place for her to glean. She encouraged her to return.

In chapter 1 we saw how discouraged Naomi was. Now she sees the hand of God in what had happened to Ruth that day. Verse 23 tells us that Ruth stayed close to the servant girls and gathered barley in the field of Boaz until the harvest was over.

God wonderfully cares for His children. His timing is perfect. He led Ruth to the right field at the right time. He led Boaz to visit the field at the right time. He led both women back from Moab at the right time. He led Boaz to hear what Ruth had done for her mother-in-law. All these circumstances show us the hand of God working in favour of these two widows. We ought to take great comfort in how God is able to lead and direct His people. We ought to be encouraged at how He so tenderly cares for those He loves.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about the character of Ruth?
- What does this chapter teach us about the Lord's care?
- How does this chapter teach us about God's timing and how He perfectly plans the events of our lives? Was Ruth aware that she was being led of God in the events of this chapter?
- What do we learn about our responsibilities to care for the members of our extended family?
- Have you ever felt discouraged like Naomi in chapter 1? What encouragement do you take now from chapter 2? Do you see how God has been providing and caring for you today?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of compassion and mercy who cares deeply for you in your time of need.
- Thank the Lord for the way He so wonderfully leads. Thank Him that His timing is perfect.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to any needs in your extended family. Ask Him to help you to know what He would have you to do about those needs.

Thank Him for the example of Ruth in caring for her mother-in-law.

38

NAOMI'S PLAN

Read Ruth 3:1-18

In the last chapter we saw how God gave Ruth favour with Boaz. Naomi was encouraged to see that Boaz, one of her kinsmen redeemers, appeared willing to provide for them in their time of need. Naomi also realized, however, that she was getting older and needed to provide for Ruth's future.

One day Naomi spoke to Ruth and told her that she wanted to provide a home for her where she would be well provided for (verse 1). She reminded Ruth that Boaz was a relative and that she had hopes that he could provide Ruth with the home she needed. For that to take place, however, Ruth needed to take the initiative.

Naomi told Ruth that Boaz would be at the threshing floor that night with his men, working and celebrating the harvest. Naomi told Ruth to wash and perfume herself, putting on her best clothes. She was then to go to the threshing floor, but she was to remain in hiding until everyone was finished eating and drinking (verse 3).

Naomi told Ruth to take note of where Boaz was sleeping. She was then to go over to him, uncover his feet, and lie down (verse 4). Ruth did exactly what Naomi told her to do (verses 5-6). It is unclear why Naomi took this particular approach. Her intention was to have Boaz act on his role as kinsmen redeemer. She wanted him to provide a home for Ruth by marrying her and carrying on the family line.

We will learn from chapter 4 that Boaz was not the only kinsmen redeemer. There was another man who was even closer to whom the responsibility of helping the family would fall. Naomi, likely knew this, but saw Boaz as a better provider for Ruth. She respected him and knew him to be an honourable man. It may be that she wanted this matter dealt with in secret because she really wanted Boaz to marry Ruth and not the other man to whom the right first fell.

The uncovering and laying at Boaz's feet seems to serve several purposes. First, it would wake him up as his feet would get cold. Second, it was a symbol of Ruth's submission to him. Third by uncovering his feet as he slept, Ruth was making a quiet gesture toward Boaz asking him to take her as his wife.

When Boaz was sleeping that night, Ruth went secretly over to him, uncovered his feet, and laid down (verse 7). Something startled Boaz in the middle of the night. He woke up and found a woman lying at his feet (verse 8).

"Who are you?" Boaz asked (verse 9). Ruth answered, telling him who she was. She then told him to spread the corner of his garment over her because he was a kinsman-redeemer.

Boaz knew exactly what Ruth was asking him. She was asking him to marry her. To spread the corner of one's garment over another was to take them under your wing, protect and provide for them. This is what Ruth was asking Boaz to do. This appears to be quite aggressive for Ruth in this particular culture.

Naomi and Ruth are taking action to provide for their future. To this point, God had always provided for them. Here, however, they are more aggressive in their approach. They literally ask Boaz to take on his responsibility and provide for their needs.

We know that God is able to provide for our needs without us having to ask other people. There are times, however, when God's people do need to be challenged to act. Because Ruth asked, Boaz was stirred to do something.

Notice the response of Boaz in verse 10. He was overwhelmed by the request. "You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor," he responded. He saw himself as an old man. He knew that Ruth could have married a much younger man, but she had set her heart on him. This appears to please Boaz. Maybe he hesitated to ask Ruth to marry him for fear of her response.

That night Boaz told Ruth that he would do all he could to provide for her (verse 11). He assured her that everyone knew that she was a very respectable person of noble character. He also told her that there was a relative nearer to them that had the first right to act as kinsman-redeemer. He had to consult this man first before he could marry her (verse 12). He promised, however, that he would do all he could to provide for them as she had requested (verse 13).

Early the next morning, while it was still dark and no one could be recognized, Ruth woke up and left. Before leaving, Boaz told her not to let anyone know that she had been there (verse 14). This would not have been good for their reputation and would have only stirred up false notions of what had happened. Boaz also told Ruth to bring her shawl. As she held out her shawl he poured six measures of barley into it sent her on her way. He went into town, obviously to deal with the matter that Ruth had brought up that night (verse 15).

Ruth returned to Naomi to report on what had happened (verse 16). Ruth also told her that he had given them six measures of barley. The barley was a symbol of Boaz's commitment to do all he could to provide for them. When she heard what had happened, Naomi told Ruth to wait quietly to see what would happen. She knew that Boaz would not give himself any rest until the matter was settled with the other kinsman-redeemer (verse 18).

While Boaz did provide, to some extent, for the women, it took the direct action of Ruth and Naomi to stir him to make the final plans for their future security. God can move people Himself, but there are also times when He asks us to be the instrument through which He stirs His people to action. This simple gesture of Ruth stirred Boaz to action. Sometimes people need to be challenged and encouraged to do what is right.

For Consideration:

- What was Naomi's concern for Ruth?
- Why do you suppose Naomi used this particular method to communicate to Boaz?
- Note the response of Boaz to Ruth's request and the passion he had in answering her request. Why do you suppose he hesitated to do this before she asked him?
- What keeps you from doing what God has given you the responsibility to do?
- Are there people around you that need to be stirred up like Boaz? What can you do to be an encouragement to them?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be a good provider for your family.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for not taking a more active role in doing what He has put on your heart to do.
- Ask God to remove any obstacles that hinder you from doing what He wants you to do today.
- Ask God to help you to be an encouragement, like Ruth and Naomi, to the people around you so that they are stirred up in their commitment to do God's will.

39

NAOMI'S SHAME IS REMOVED

Read Ruth 4:1-22

We saw in the last meditation how Ruth had gone to see Boaz to ask him to take her as his wife and provide for her and Naomi. Boaz was stirred by this request and went to town the next morning to work out the details. While Boaz was a near relative, he was not the closest. There was another man who had first responsibility toward Naomi. If Boaz was going to take on this responsibility, he first needed the approval of this other kinsman-redeemer.

When Boaz arrived in town, he sat at the gate and waited for the other kinsman-redeemer to arrive (verse 1). This was the normal location for business dealings to take place.

When the kinsman-redeemer arrived, Boaz called him over. Boaz then called for ten elders of the town to come and listen to the transaction that was about to take place (verse 2). These elders would judge between the two parties and seal any business transaction that might take place between them.

When everyone had arrived, Boaz bought the matter before the kinsman-redeemer and the town elders. Speaking to the kinsman-redeemer, Boaz told him that Naomi had returned from Moab and was selling the piece of land that belonged to her husband Elimelech (verse 3). Boaz told the kinsman-redeemer that because he was first of the relatives, he had first chance to purchase the land so that it remained in the family's possession. Boaz made it clear that if the kinsman-redeemer did not purchase the land then he would purchase it himself (verse 4). When the kinsman-redeemer heard that the property was for sale, he showed interest and said, "I will redeem it" (verse 4).

Boaz then told him that when he purchased the land he would also acquire Elimelech's wife Naomi in order to maintain Elimelech's name with his property. The Law of Moses stated that when a man died without a son, his brother was to marry the widow and provide her with a son. The first son born of their union was to carry the name of the wife's first husband and inherit his possessions. In this way the name of the dead husband would be carried on in Israel (see Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

In Ruth 1:12 Naomi told her daughters-in-law that she was too old to have a husband and have children. It was likely understood here that because Naomi was too old to have children then the kinsman-redeemer was to marry Ruth and provide her with a son. That son would then belong to Naomi to carry on the name of her husband Elimelech. We will speak more on this later.

When the first kinsman-redeemer heard that he would also have to take on the responsibility of these two widows, he changed his mind. He feared endangering his own estate by purchasing a land that would ultimately not be part of his inheritance to his own children. The problem for this

kinsman-redeemer was not in purchasing the land but in acquiring Naomi and Ruth. If a son was born to him through Ruth and Naomi, the land would automatically be given to that son and considered part of Elimelech's (Naomi's husband) property. In the event that all of this kinsmen-redeemer's own sons died without an heir, the potential was that the son of Naomi and Ruth would inherit all his land. This kinsman-redeemer was unwilling to take that risk and gave Boaz the right to redeem the property himself (verse 6).

It was the custom in those days in Israel that in order for the transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was how the transaction was legalized (verse 7). The kinsman-redeemer removed his sandal and gave it to Boaz in order to seal the deal (verse 8). Boaz then called the ten elders present that day to be witnesses to the transaction. He reminded them that he had just acquired the property of Elimelech and his sons Kilion and Mahlon (verse 9). He also reminded them that he had also acquired Ruth, the widow of Mahlon as his wife in order to maintain the name of their former husbands with the property so that Elimelech's name would not disappear from the town records (verse 10).

The elders declared that they were witnesses to the whole transaction, and they blessed Boaz. Their blessing of Boaz was a three-fold blessing.

First they said, "May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel" (verse 11). The sons of Jacob through Rachel and Leah were the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. The blessing of the elders is significant in that they were giving Ruth, a foreigner a position with the greatest women in Israel.

The second blessing of the elders in verse 11 is this: "May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem." Again this is a significant blessing. The elders seem to sense here that this union between Ruth and Boaz was significant. They did not know how significant it would be at this point, but they sensed that Boaz and his descendants through Ruth would be famous in Israel.

The final blessing is in verse 12, when the elders say, "May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah." Boaz came from the line of Perez. Obviously, Perez and his family line were well respected in Israel. In reality, the elders were saying, "may your line be like the respectable and honourable line of Perez your ancestor." Again, they sense that this union between Boaz and Ruth was going to be significant and produce a very respectable line in Israel.

When the transactions were completed, Boaz returned and took Ruth as his wife. God gave Ruth a son (verse 13). His name was Obed (verse 17). Notice the response of the women of Bethlehem to the birth of Obed. They praised the Lord that He had not left her without a kinsman-redeemer. Notice how they also blessed this son, saying, "May he be famous throughout Israel (verse 14). There is a general sense that this young child was recognized as one who would be significant in the history of their nation.

The women of Bethlehem also knew that the curse had been lifted from Naomi that day. This child born to Ruth would be the heir of her husband's property and carry on his name. He would also provide for her and care for her in her old age. All this had taken place because of the faithfulness of Ruth, who willingly left her own land to minister to her mother-in-law in her time of need. According to the

women of Israel, Ruth was better to Naomi than seven sons.

Notice also in verse 16 that it was Naomi who cared for the child. While Ruth was the biological mother, Naomi would take Obed and raise him as her own son. She would adopt him and he would inherit all that belonged to her husband Elimelech. He would carry on Elimelech's name. Notice in verse 17 what the women in Bethlehem said: "Naomi has a son." This shows us beyond a doubt that Obed (born to Ruth and Boaz) was considered to be the son of Naomi and she raised him as her own child.

We can only imagine the joy that Naomi felt as she took this young child, given to her by Ruth and Boaz, and raised him to be the inheritor of her husband's land and property. Her shame was removed. God had provided her with an heir.

Obed, the son of Naomi, would grow up and have his own children. One of those children was Jesse. Jesse would become the father of David, the greatest king in Israel. David would become the ancestor of an even greater king—the Lord Jesus. In verses 18-22 the line of Perez the ancestor of Boaz is traced to King David.

The story of Ruth is the story of a foreign Moabite woman who committed herself to her mother-in-law and to her God. It is that story of the landowner Boaz who came to their rescue and redeemed both Naomi and Ruth. It is the story of Ruth and Boaz who willingly surrendered their first child to Naomi to raise as her own. It is ultimately the story of how God provided for and cared for two widows in their need.

The story of Ruth is the story of how God saved the line of David through a foreigner. There is Moabite blood in the line of Christ. It shows us that God, from the very beginning, was concerned not only for Israel, but for the whole world. It is the story of how God took two empty-handed widows and did a powerful work through them that would impact the whole world. These two widows were a vital link in the chain of salvation through Jesus Christ. They remind us that God can use every one of us to accomplish His purposes if we will commit ourselves to Him and do not lose hope.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the commitment of Boaz to do things honestly and legally? What does this say about his character?
- How was God's purpose for Boaz worked out in the business meeting that took place in the town that day?
- What do the blessings of the elders reveal to us about their sense of the importance of the marriage between Boaz and Ruth? How did God fulfil those blessings?
- Consider the situation of Ruth and Naomi when they first came to Bethlehem? How does God take a tragic situation and bring great victory through it for these widows. Can God do the same in your situation?

- Consider the sacrifices in this book. How did God use the willing sacrifices of His people to accomplish His purposes? What sacrifices are you willing to make today?
- What significance is there in the fact that there is Moabite blood in the line of Christ?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to walk with Him in honesty and faithfulness like Boaz and Ruth.
- Thank the Lord that He works out His purposes even in the most tragic of circumstances. Commit your circumstances to Him today.
- Ask God to enable you to make the sacrifices required for the expansion of His kingdom.

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