

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 12

Introduction

Are you discovering a deeper relationship with God as a result of your Bible studies? The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us leave behind the more elementary principles of the faith and go on to perfection (Hebrews 6:1-3). He has two reasons for this. He wants us to be mature and strong to withstand deception. He also wants us to be equipped to teach others.

Yeshua said that *every scribe who is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like a man that is a householder, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old*. He was referring to the scribes of His day who kept accurate records of the Scriptures. He was saying that if these scribes had a balanced understanding of the Torah and how it was fulfilled in the Kingdom of Heaven then such a person would have much more to share with others. We must be like that Scribe, able to understand the foundations of our faith from the Tanakh and the fulfillment through the New Covenant in Yeshua's Blood.

The Epistle to the Galatians is both a warning and an encouragement. Having studied the Epistle we are more equipped to put our Bible readings in perspective. Let us now return to Deuteronomy and complete our readings of this last book of Torah. It is a wonderful book, written to the Israelites with a pastoral emphasis. Moses was a pastor (shepherd) to the Children of Israel as well as a Prophet. It is even more wonderful when we perceive that the great Shepherd, Yeshua, is speaking to us through it.

Day 1

Deuteronomy Chapter 24. What is behind all these laws? It is a good exercise to make a list of principles that come to mind as you read them carefully one by one. In your list you will have such items as purity, fairness, honesty, compassion, justice, mercy, care for the stranger, and consideration of others. Starting with this you can compare it with the fruits of the Spirit that we read in Galatians and consider how the principles that Moses taught are meant to be evidence of these deeper spiritual truths. This was as true for the Children of Israel as it is for us. Remember that what the Bible teaches us comes directly from the heart of God. Our studies tell us what God is like. He teaches us so that we will learn to be like Him.

The Laws of God make allowance for the realities of life in a fallen world. Marriage is mentioned in this chapter. It is not God's desire that there shall be divorce between husband and wife, but allowance is made for it and bounds set for remarriage. Debt is also mentioned. It is not His desire that there will be any debt, but allowance is made so that repayment is fair. There is a great illustration in the principle of not taking millstones to pay a debt. The millstones may not be worth much of themselves but if a man does not have them he would be deprived of more than their face value – he would be deprived of his

living. Notice how God always looks deeper than the surface. His Laws reflect this. We must look into the heart of God's laws, considering what lies behind each one of them.

Chapter 25. Here are more laws to consider, each the result of deep-rooted principles.

There are limits on the humiliation that a guilty person must suffer. The maximum beating with a whip is forty lashes. That is a large number, for a serious crime, but a bound is set, so that mercy is in mind even at the time of the punishment. Paul the Apostle received 40 lashes minus one on several occasions when he preached the Gospel and was thought to be a heretic. This illustrates the way the Jews put a fence around the Torah. God said 40 was the limit, so they did not want to make a mistake through miscounting, so they set the limit at 39. This fence around the Torah is evident in much of Judaism. It is a safety fence so that the Jews would not go beyond the limits set by God. It has some merit, but it fails to take full account of the spirit of Torah which only the Holy Spirit can show us when He brings God's teaching to our hearts.

An example of this is in the principle that *you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads the grain* (verse 4). Even an ox should be fed when it works for us. Paul the Apostle showed that there was also a heart principle behind this. Twice in his letters (1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18), he used it as an illustration of the principle that ministers of the Gospel should be paid for their work. Are you finding that the Holy Spirit is putting these deeper principles on your heart so that you too can be wise, like Paul, in their application? The New Testament does not interpret many of the laws. That is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to each of us, so that, like Paul, we can find spiritual meaning in all of Torah.

In this Chapter we find the principles of the kinsman redeemer. Read this section carefully. You may want to go back to it when you read the story of Ruth, where Boaz became her redeemer. This also speaks of Yeshua - our Great Redeemer. Through the kinsman redeemer a family name is preserved. Notice, by contrast, that the memory of Amalek must be blotted out of the memory of Israel. The last words of the chapter show how uncompromising God is – *you must not forget*. Neither will He forget who His own people are, nor who His enemies are. All this will be revealed on Judgement Day before the Great White Throne. The principles behind our Torah readings have eternal significance.

Chapter 26. Each Israelite was to live by faith. They were to remember that the Living God had chosen them, and remember what He had done for them in bringing them to the Promised Land. The Syrian father mentioned in Verse 5 was Abraham. God made a Covenant with Abraham, promising him that he would have many descendants and that they would inherit the Land of Canaan. Therefore, the offering of the firstfruits was a statement of faith in the Living God, who had fulfilled this promise. The Nation of Israel was redeemed from slavery in Egypt and taken to a Land of milk and honey. All they possessed was a gift from God. Their offering of firstfruits returned to God a portion of what He had given to them and, at the same time, was used to strengthen their fellowship with Him. The offering was both personal and corporate.

The Feast of Firstfruits in Israel pointed to Yeshua. Yeshua became the Firstfruits of those inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven. How can we make our offering to God on account of this? Consider this prayerfully today.

Chapter 27. Read this chapter carefully and pause to reflect on each of the curses that the Levites would speak when all the Tribes were assembled by the two mountains in Canaan. Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal face one another with a narrow valley in between. They are situated about 30 miles north of the City of Jerusalem in the region of what would become Samaria in later years. Israel was in covenant with God according to the terms made at Mount Sinai. In this chapter we find the curse of the Law that we read about in the Book of Galatians. This is the curse that Yeshua removed from those who will live by His Spirit in the New Covenant. The sins that would bring curses upon Israel are still sins before God. The nature of sin was not changed on the Cross, only our ability to learn how to live sinless lives. We will read that Israel did indeed come under the curses of the Torah according to all that they agreed before God, when they carried out Moses' instructions. Please do not take this lightly.

Chapter 28. Do not go on beyond this chapter until you have understood the seriousness of what you read. Herein is our means of understanding all of Israel's history before the coming of Messiah. Two futures lay before this nation, one of blessing and the other of cursing. Every law that was broken brought the nation under the curse. There was forgiveness of sins through sacrifice, but when even the sacrifices were blemished, as will result when sin grows out of control, the curses had to fall on the nation. This is the reason for the trials of Israel throughout all generations. This is a hard truth to accept, so consider it carefully. In considering this truth, do not forget that mercy triumphs over judgement in the heart of God. This, therefore, is the reason why Yeshua came to take the curse away through His suffering on the Cross. It is why Paul was so strong, in his letter to the Galatians, for disciples of Yeshua not to put themselves under the Covenant at Sinai because this would put them under the curse just as Israel was. God's high and holy Torah was made known to Israel. But for sin, this would be the means of fulfilling the Covenant with Abraham, but sin was revealed in Israel's attempts to obey all the conditions of the written Torah. Therefore, they came under the curse that only Yeshua can remove. In removing it He also sent the remedy for sinful hearts, the gift of His Holy Spirit, to change us into His likeness. All this must be in mind as we read Deuteronomy Chapter 28.

When Israel began to fail, in the days of the Kings, God sent Prophets. The Prophets reminded Israel of what is here in Deuteronomy 28, explaining to the people why it was that they were experiencing many kinds of trouble. The Prophets also had a vision of the future. They foretold the coming of Messiah who would save from sin all who have faith in Him, seeking to walk with God in the power of His Spirit.

Be careful not to ridicule Israel for their commitment to be under the curse as well as the blessing. It seems naïve to us, but that is because we know the end of the story. We would have been just the same as them. They were to become examples for us so that we might learn through their experience. Be careful, too, of how you consider the future of Israel. Rejection of Yeshua by the majority of the Jews does bring consequences. Also, attempts at righteousness before God through works of the law will still fail, but God did not send Yeshua so that Israel would be lost forever. For two thousand years there has been a partial blindness, and some are still blind to who He is. This has given Gentiles an opportunity to hear the Gospel, but the time is coming when God will turn again, more fully, to Israel to reveal Yeshua as Messiah. There are many Jews who believe in Yeshua today and there will be many more towards the end of the age. They are not the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, but they *have* suffered so that we might all learn from their suffering.

Please keep all this in balance as you prayerfully consider these chapters from Deuteronomy.

Day 2

Chapter 29. We hear much about the New Covenant and the Old Covenant, but there is much more to the principle of covenant in the Bible. In the days of Ancient Israel, covenants were made between people as well as between man and God. They were made in the most serious of ways on matters of human agreement, and sometimes relating to treaties between nations. If covenants were broken then blood would be shed. Marriage was also considered as a covenant between a man and his wife.

When God made covenant with Israel in the Desert of Sinai, it reflected the principles already known. He gave Laws written on stone. These Laws were both like a wedding agreement and a treaty between a ruler and his people. God betrothed Himself to Israel at Horeb. He also stated the rules by which Israel would become His own people.

God had already made a Covenant with Abraham and with Noah. So other covenants did not replace earlier Covenants but were in addition, sometimes lasting for a certain period of time. Thus we read in Verse 1 of Chapter 29 that God made a covenant with Israel in addition to the one He made with them at Horeb. Later in the Bible we discover that a new and better Covenant replaced the Covenants made in the wilderness, when the Holy Spirit came to write the Law onto the hearts of God's people.

In the wilderness years, the Covenant at Horeb was extended by a new agreement between God and His people: they would be blessed for obedience and cursed for disobedience. This was a moment of decision and of fresh commitment. It is not an easy option to be the people of God!

Verse 29 is very important. God was gradually showing His ways to Israel. They did not know everything at once. As their perfect teacher He showed them what they were to know step by step, and they were to live in the light of His teaching up to that time. As we shall see, there was more to be revealed as time went on.

Chapter 30. Moses foresaw that Israel would, in future days, depart from all that God expected and would be exiled from their Land. This would turn out to be an opportunity for them to consider how they had departed from His ways, turn back to God and be restored to their Land. These Chapters from Deuteronomy help us to understand the history of Israel and the history of the entire world.

Israel has been exiled twice in their history and their land has been taken over by their enemies. Twice they have been put into exile in order that they repent. Repentance means considering what has been done wrong, confessing it to God, turning away from wrongdoing and doing what is right, thereby being forgiven by God and restored to fellowship with Him.

The first exile was when the Assyrians and then the Babylonians, over several years, overran the Promised Land. The Jews were exiled to Babylon for 70 years, around 586 BC, and later returned to their Land. The second exile was in 70 AD when Rome destroyed Jerusalem. The return to the Land is taking place in our day. This time the return is of a completely different nature. We will study this in more detail as we go through the Scriptures and relate them to what we see today. Verses 1 to 6 refer to the return from Babylon, and also to the return taking place in our day. Verse 6 is an indication of the New Covenant that God had in mind even at this time.

God teaches us all through His dealings with Israel. The 6000 years of the history of the earth has been for one supreme purpose – for God to gather a covenant family from all nations. The times of Israel's exile are steps along the way for all nations to understand what He requires of us – it has taken many

years of their suffering for us to learn God's lessons. The return from exile at the time of Babylon did not bring the nation fully back to God. The return from the second exile among all nations will eventually bring the nation to the end purpose of faith in Yeshua the Messiah.

All nations will be judged according to their response to God's dealing with Israel. This is part of the unfolding mystery of God's eternal plan. Verse 7 shows us this. When Israel is to be disciplined by God, the worst of nations is the agent of the discipline, including the Babylonians and the Romans. This is because they themselves will then be judged. All nations should be in awe of God because of these truths, and be careful to seek Him for an understanding of what the Bible says.

Our understanding is incomplete unless Yeshua's Sacrifice on the Cross is central. *Forgive them Father for they know not what they do* were among His dying words. God knew that His Son was always central to His Covenant plans, and Yeshua knows the end purpose of His intercessions for Israel. Despite all that has happened to Israel they have not been abandoned by God, and despite all the curses of the Covenant through Moses, mercy will triumph over judgement. Through Yeshua there is hope. Those who have not come to know salvation through Yeshua are partially blind and not in full fellowship with God, but they are still being helped by Him and not under the fullness of the curse, despite all. Yeshua alone suffered the full extremity of the curse, when He took it upon Himself.

These chapters from Deuteronomy are relevant today, as God's purposes are still being accomplished. The Jews know this. In much Jewish literature available today we find that the Covenant made at the time of Moses is understood as being still relevant. Many devout Jews recognize that their troubles through history are because of disobedience to Torah.

We, who know Yeshua as Saviour, have a duty to study the Scriptures and seek understanding of what we are shown, so that we will be in step with God and understand our times, both for Israel and the Christian Church – indeed for the entire world.

Chapter 31. Moses completed his discourse on the edge of the Jordan and wrote down all that the Israelites should remember. It was called the Book of the Law. This Book of the Law was always to be the reference by which Israel should live. Human beings are forgetful even if they have experienced the mighty works of God, so the Book of the Law was to be read every seven years at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. This command was forgotten from time to time in Israel's history and the Book itself was also lost. Israel suffered on account of this.

Nowadays the Jews, in the Synagogues all around the world, have a special day at the time of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) called Simchat Torah (rejoicing over the Torah). This is in fulfillment of what Moses commanded Israel, in recognition of the beauty of Torah and as a means of remembering the foundational teaching of God.

Moses and Joshua *presented themselves in the Tabernacle of meeting* – how wonderful to read how close God allowed them to come before Him, like men going into the King's Palace, before His throne. It was the time for the transfer of authority to Joshua, but first God gave Moses a prophetic understanding of Israel's future. God knew that days would come, despite all the warnings, when Israel would be disobedient. One final warning was given by Moses.

Chapter 32. The Song of Moses is written in both the present tense and the future tense. It is a clear warning to Israel and a picture of their future. He calls Israel *Jeshurun*. This comes from the Hebrew word *Jashar* meaning *upright*. God's plan for Israel was that they would be *the upright one* showing the world how He will bless His people who walk with Him in obedience. Later God would put the plumb line of His Law against them and find them not to be upright. He would send Prophets to tell them this and call them back to the upright position before God. All this is foretold in the Song of Moses. God, the Great Teacher used a song as a means of reminding Israel. Schoolteachers know that this is an excellent way for schoolchildren to commit truths to memory: God knew this too. It is easier to remember something when it is put into a song. God could not have done more to help Israel. How sad that human sin is so strong as to resist all of these warnings from God. We read in Verses 11 to 14 of Chapter 30, how God had said He was not asking Israel to do something too hard to understand or too difficult to find. Yet, He also knew that Israel would fail and so the Song of Moses is a sad song of reality.

Yet, for Israel and for those who read it today, both Jew and Gentile, it is not the end of the story. There is another song yet to be sung. It is in Revelation 15, and is called the Song of Moses and the Lamb. At the right time the Lamb of God, Yeshua HaMashiach, gave His life for His people. It did not end with their failure in fulfillment of the prophecy of Moses. The end God had in view is revealed mysteriously within all that Israel experienced and is made fully known through Yeshua, so that the mourning in Moses' song will turn to rejoicing in the Song of Moses and the Lamb!

Moses had fulfilled all he had been called to do. Apart from one error at Meribah Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin, he had led God's people in humility and obedience. Now, because of the one transgression he was to go onto Mount Nebo, look over the Promised Land across to Jericho and die there. One transgression of the Law of God is the same as breaking the entire Law.

Day 3

Chapter 33. As you read the Bible be sure to ask God to show you His heart. Too often the Christian Church has misrepresented God. Sometimes God is perceived as having one character in the Old Testament and a different character in the New Testament. The Law is seen as oppressive, as if from a despot, and Yeshua as full of grace and love. God is One God and does not change. Therefore, study the Tanakh (Old Testament) to understand God as He wants to be known through all history. Do not misunderstand His purposes in Israel. He was *always* full of grace and truth. The Covenant through Moses is for a purpose and only part of covenant history.

Chapter 33 reveals the heart of God for His people. Despite all the outworking of blessing and cursing of the Law that Israel would experience, God's final words through Moses were full of love and blessing. Can we say that these final words are from deeper in the heart of God than anything else? Ask Him for yourself as you prayerfully consider what is written in this chapter, words like, "Let Reuben live and not die", "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him", "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out", "Asher is most blessed of sons", and, "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms".

Remember these blessings as you continue to read your Bible. We will discover God's heart for Israel on other occasions. He wept for Jerusalem through the Prophet Jeremiah. He was also in Yeshua when He wept over the City, shortly before suffering on the Cross for His people. He was the One who wept when Lazarus died, causing the people to say, *See how He loved him!* He suffered on the Cross to reconcile the world to Himself.

Chapter 34. Moses, in obedience to God, climbed to the top of Pisgah. God showed him the Land, that been promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He saw the full extent of it and died in faith, knowing the faithfulness of God to His promises. In every generation covenant responsibility is passed on: so it was with Moses. Joshua was commissioned and blessed. He was given all the resources that he needed to continue the ministry. He had been trained at the side of Moses, for many years, for this moment. A new era was about to begin, but with the passing of Moses no Prophet like him arose in Israel, who had known God face to face (*panim l'panim*, in Hebrew).

Only Yeshua could bring to fulfillment what was begun through Moses.

Spend the rest of today reviewing these great truths.

Day 4

We will now begin the Book of Joshua. You will notice that the whole character of the Bible changes at this point. In one sense we simply continue with an account of how Ancient Israel was led by God. We discover, however, that everything we now read is built on the foundations already set in the first five books of the Bible. Deuteronomy ended with the death of Moses and the statement that no-one arose in Israel who knew God as he had. God used Moses to take Israel from Egypt to Canaan and, through him, to establish His Torah (teaching/instruction). From this point on, the teaching of God must be implemented in the Promised Land. The first five books of the Bible, therefore, have been the foundation on which Israel has sought to build their nation ever since.

It is necessary that all of us study and understand what God continues to teach us through the history of Israel. The entire world could know about the God of Creation who calls us to walk with Him, through studying this history. Disciples of Yeshua set the foundation of their faith through this study and thereby understand what Yeshua has accomplished, who He is and what He has fulfilled. There are many views of God. In the coming days there will be many false messiahs. The true Messiah was born a Jew and emerged from the nation of Israel. He came to fulfill Torah.

Joshua is a shadow of Yeshua – notice the similarity of their names. We are like Ancient Israel. When they came out of Egypt, the Red Sea parted. When they went into Canaan, they crossed the Jordan, which also parted. They came *out* from Egypt and *into* the Promised Land with similar miracles. Between these two miracles they were pilgrims in the wilderness. Yeshua, of whom Moses was a type, brought us out of a spiritual Egypt – the life of sin. We are now pilgrims and strangers on this earth, waiting for Him to take us over the spiritual Jordan into the Eternal Kingdom. We must wait for the details of how this will be fulfilled. When the Red Sea closed behind Israel, it was like a door closing and Israel was never to return to Egypt. So it is with our life of sin – the door is closed. Now we wait for the completion of our salvation, as witnesses of Yeshua's saving grace, until we "cross the final river". The principle of *crossing over* is what makes a Hebrew – the word for *Hebrew* is *ivrit* and the word for crossing over is *avar*, which has the same root. We are Hebrews who live by faith like Abraham, crossing over from the life of this world to eternal life in God's Kingdom. We are on the way to completing this as pilgrims in this world.

We wait for the full and final "crossing", but there is a level of fulfillment on this earth, a down-payment as it were. When we left the world of sin we were invited to abide in Yeshua. He gave us of His Spirit and we entered into our new life in Him. This is like a crossing of the Jordan, but it is not in full measure. We must not allow ourselves to live in the shallows of our experience of Yeshua, but go deeper in faith day by day ever deeper into Him. Nevertheless, we cannot live in our present bodies and achieve our full inheritance. The fullness of our inheritance awaits us in the coming Kingdom. That too is like a crossing of the Jordan, from this body, into our new body. There is layer on layer of understanding and experience that is founded on the crossing of the Jordan.

Israel lived within the limits of the revelation that God had given them. Their conquest of Canaan and their life in the Promised Land is the real history of real people. For us, their history is God's way of teaching us, but let us not minimize the reality of the experience of the Israelites – this is what God was doing among His people at that time. They were real people with real experiences.

Let us then follow Israel across the Jordan and see how God speaks to us. Continue to note in your prayer and study diary what you yourself are shown. Sometimes it may be tempting to cut corners and use someone else's commentary, but even the best commentaries do not replace God's personal

leading in your own life. You will come back to these same passages time and again and discover something fresh each time, if you are learning to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Also it is good to share with others what you have noted from your studies and to hear what God has said to them, thereby growing together in prayer and study.

Joshua Chapter 1. Straight away we come to verses that speak to our spirits. Joshua 1:9, for example – *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.* From time to time, such verses are of particular relevance to us. We must always go back to the context of when they were first spoken to ensure that we do not take them too much as a personal promise, independent of their first application. They are echoes of truth to us that relate us to the forefathers of our faith and thereby have ongoing meaning in our lives today. Joshua called the people to be courageous regarding the seemingly impossible task of settling in a land that was inhabited by God’s enemies. Immediately when Moses died, a special authority passed to Joshua for the work to be done. That same authority has passed from generation to generation of God’s people for each new stage of history.

Israel confirmed, as one man, that they would follow Joshua, and so the crossing of the Jordan was about to begin.

Chapter 2. Jericho was visible from where the Israelites crossed the Jordan. The inhabitants of the city would have been watching the great nation making preparations to cross over, and the fear of God would have begun to come upon them. The reputation of Israel had gone before them. Rahab helped the spies and became a member of the nation, so honoured by God as to appear in the genealogy of Yeshua (Matthew 1:5).

Chapter 3. Everything was to be done according to God’s instructions. The main thing that Joshua had learned, in the days when he was Moses’ assistant, was how to trust and obey God. That made him the reliable leader that God could use. If Joshua had been headstrong he was hardly likely to have crossed the Jordan in the manner described in this chapter. The Jordan is not a wide river, even though it was the season of the year when the banks were flooded. It would not have been difficult to build a bridge, but God had a purpose in the way He wanted the river to be crossed. As we now know, it bears much symbolism. It also showed the surrounding nations that Israel’s God was leading them and that they were a people of faith. Israel was led by the symbol of God’s Torah, the Ark of the Covenant, and by the Priests rather than the fighting men. All this points to fulfillment through Yeshua, our Great High Priest, who will lead us into the coming Kingdom. We, like Israel, must be a people of faith and obedience.

Chapter 4. A recurring theme of Scripture is that God’s people must remember where they came from and what God has done. On this occasion, twelve stones were to mark the point of crossing and be an everlasting memorial. Memory is abstract. In the days that were to come, the descendants of those who crossed the Jordan would be told how it happened. They could go back to the place of the crossing and point to the pile of stones, which was a physical reminder of what had taken place, so that memory of the crossing was not lost as if it were fiction. We need to know this. Sometimes we may read the Bible as if it were a story that was made up in later days about an imaginary people! One of our great debts to Israel is that they preserved an accurate account of their history for us, so that we can learn the same

lessons that they learned about God. This time that Israel crossed the Jordan as a nation was remembered through the pile of twelve stones and through the pens of the Hebrew Scribes, who recorded all that Israel experienced at the Hand of God. When you find the time and opportunity you might look into the way the Scribes recorded the Bible for us. They were meticulous in copying of the manuscripts generation by generation. If one error was made in the copying they would reject a manuscript and start again. Israel was trained to remember the mighty works of God through what He taught them as they crossed the Jordan and all through their history. This was for our benefit.

Day 5

Chapter 5. God is not erratic. Everything is ordered and dignified. He is not taken by surprise. He plans ahead and accomplishes His purposes. As the Prophet tells us that He does nothing without revealing it to His Prophets. Sometimes it seems that His plans take a long time to be fulfilled; at other times they are accomplished suddenly and dramatically, but never without preparation. Israel crossed the Jordan to face the giants and God put fear into the hearts of the surrounding nations. There was no doubt about the coming victories. Nevertheless, Israel was to accomplish these victories precisely as God ordained. God's ways are not our ways. Who else would have planned that the first act of obedience would be circumcision of the men? This was an act of consecration. God used it to confirm His covenant and to cut them free of Egypt. All this was timed perfectly for the celebration of Passover on the west side of the Jordan, the first Passover in the Promised Land. In the following years many more Passovers would be celebrated but this Passover would hold a special place in their memory, just as would be remembered the first Passover of all, when Israel came out of Egypt. In the distant future another special Passover would be celebrated – the one Yeshua shared with His disciples. This too was in God's mind even at this early stage of Israel's history – all ordered, timely and planned.

We do well to note Joshua's encounter with the Commander of the Lord's Army. *Are you for us or for our adversary?* was the question. *No*, was the answer: neither for one nor the other, but for the purposes of God. This *no* must be remembered today. God is working out His purposes. He calls us as His own special people and Israel, the nation first called, still has a special place, but His purposes are beyond our personal victories and personal call. God is drawing a covenant family from all nations and Yeshua is exalted high over all. Let us be grateful for inclusion in His family, go where He is going, do what He is doing, but look beyond our personal needs to His greater plan.

A new phase of God's provision began: the daily supply of Manna ceased. This was a significant new beginning for Israel's walk of faith and obedience.

Chapter 6. Seven is the central number associated with the victory of Jericho. Seven priests, seven shofarim (trumpets made from rams' horns) and seven days – then a shout. This reminds us of the time of the Lord's return as prophesied by Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:16): He will come with a trumpet blast and a shout. The victory at Jericho was clearly revealed as a victory from God, to be remembered for all time, preparing the way for the coming of Yeshua. The ruins of Jericho were to be a constant reminder for the entire world even to today. The curse spoken at Jericho is still in force. A recent incident seems to confirm this, when an attempt to rebuild the city was at the cost of a firstborn son of a leader of the Palestinians.

Chapter 7. The first victory was followed by the first catastrophe! We learn about God's sovereignty and man's responsibility – they must work together for good, and it is possible for mankind to sin and spoil the best. The Children of Israel were told clearly by Moses that obedience would lead to victory against their enemies, but disobedience would lead to their enemies triumphing over them. Here, just a few short days into the Promised Land, came the first great reminder that God is not negligent of His Word. Achan thought that his action would go unnoticed. After all, what harm was there in keeping a few choice articles from the great victory at Jericho? Answer – very much harm! Not only this, but also many of the people thought that a pattern had been established in the victory at Jericho and they were now invincible. Off they went to conquer Ai – headstrong, proud, and in their own strength! Embarrassing

and costly defeat followed. How much we all need to learn lessons from this. God's people are to walk with Him in all generations. The battle belongs to the Lord is always our cry, but only according to His instructions and His timing. We will learn this lesson time and again as we read the Bible. Achan was identified in a systematic way when all the tribes assembled before Joshua. He and all his family were removed from the earth along with their possessions. That was the price of his sin. The valley where it happened was aptly named – *The Valley of Achor*, meaning, *The Valley of Trouble*.

Chapter 8. Achan's sin did not go unpunished, but the matter was settled and God encouraged Joshua to proceed. It is wonderful to know how quickly God forgives those who truly repent, and completely frees them to begin again with Him. This is true for our relationship with God just as it was for Israel. Ai was conquered with an entirely different strategy than was Jericho – how important that Israel listened to God on both occasions. This, too, is a lesson for us in all we do.

Joshua assembled the people at the foot of the two mountains, just as Moses had instructed. A traveler through the Land of Israel would pass between these mountains journeying north from Jerusalem. Many of the mountains of Israel stand as symbolic reminders of God's dealings with His people. The ancient City of Shechem was situated there. This was where Simeon and Levi took revenge on the inhabitants of the City when the son of Hamor defiled their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). This contributed to the harsh words of prophecy that Jacob spoke over his sons (Genesis 49:5-7).

You might find it useful to turn back the pages of your Bible and review what Moses instructed Israel to do at the base of Mount Ebal (meaning *bald mountain*), the Mountain of cursing, and Mount Gerizim (meaning *cuttings off*), the Mountain of blessing. Here the Children of Israel determined their future. They would be blessed or cursed according to their obedience or disobedience to the Covenant made at Sinai and taught in the wilderness. It was an appropriate time to confirm the Covenant, after experiencing victory at Jericho, the lesson through Achan and the victory at Ai. They knew what they were doing.

Day 6

Chapter 9. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan and destroyed Jericho there was no doubt that God was at work in their midst. Time moved on and, when we read this chapter, we have the impression that God's presence was not so obvious. This stage of the conquest of Canaan could be mistakenly seen as human initiative alone. The kings of the surrounding nations knew that Israel's God was with them, but they formed an alliance together thinking that Joshua could be defeated. God was not visible to them and perhaps they forgot He was behind the scenes. From time to time throughout history, God has made His presence felt in world affairs, such as in some of the great revivals. At other times history is described more through human acts than through acts of God. We, like Israel, must be careful always to know the closeness of God and our need of His help in all affairs, even when His presence is not easily discernible. Even Joshua failed to consult God when the Gibeonites tricked him into making a covenant with them. They were rewarded for their clever scheme and Israel was forced to keep the covenant that they had rather thoughtlessly made with the Gibeonites. Gibeon became a tribe in coexistence with Israel and became servants. Meanwhile war with the confederacy of the kings of Canaan was soon to take place.

Chapter 10 The last but one verse of this chapter summarises the events of the entire chapter – *All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel.* They had set up camp at Gilgal and first, according to their covenant with the Gibeonites, went out to defeat the kings who attacked their city. Then they went on into a battle that required longer than one whole day. God performed mighty miracles on earth and in the heavens. There is nothing that God cannot do. First He sent great hailstones. Then He stopped the sun. There is much about the created universe that scientists cannot explain. How can the sun stop? Was this the earth coming to a halt? That would have thrown all people off the face of the earth at a thousand miles an hour. How then did the sun stop? Nobody can tell us. God stopped the sun but still the battle had to be fought by humans with swords. There were no weapons such as exist today, ships, aeroplanes, tanks and missiles with immense power - just swords. God controlled the sun so that Joshua could win the battles with swords! God added some hail at the time when it would help. How can we fathom this? How will God help us through our next time of trouble? Shall we ask Him to stop the sun? I don't think that God will do that again, and we must not presume. God does new things to fit the circumstances and also leaves us to do our part with the down to earth tools available for the job at that time.

Chapter 11. Here is another chapter full of the descriptions of how Canaan was conquered. It took forty years of preparation before the Jordan could be crossed. Once crossed, there was conflict after conflict until Israel had taken their inheritance. God was at work alongside Israel in different ways in each of the circumstances. See what principles you learn from this as you consider the details carefully. The end of the Chapter is the beginning of yet another new phase of Israel's history – Israel had received their inheritance, *then the land rested from war.*

Chapter 12. Read this summary of the defeated kings and the cities which Israel had conquered. If you possess a map of the Land of Canaan, which is sometimes at the back of our Bibles, see how much of the detail you can relate to what we know of the land at the time of Joshua. Imagine what happened as Israel took possession of Canaan under the guiding hand of God. Follow the progress on your map. This

is the beginning of the history of the nation of Israel in their own land, a land that was given them as part of God's Covenant with Abraham - as an everlasting possession.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Israel was exiled from the Promised Land twice in their history. Once was at the time of the Kings of Israel several hundred years before the birth of Yeshua. The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires were God's means of discipline for the Tribes of Israel, who departed from obedience of the Torah. The second time was in 70 AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. During all these years of exile God never changed the Covenant promise made to Abraham. He was disciplining Israel according to the Covenant at Sinai which was given through Moses. In our day Israel is returning once more to the Land. It is a special time when we need to understand what God is doing. A New Covenant was cut when Yeshua was sacrificed. This was to replace and fulfill the Covenant at Sinai and to fulfill (not to replace) the Covenant with Abraham. All nations need to study this so that we can be partners with God through the last days of human history when all covenant history is coming to its conclusion. We have studied the conquest of Canaan, under Joshua, this week. Soon, at the end of the age, Yeshua will return to the Land that Joshua conquered all those years ago, and take full possession of what Abraham was promised. Despite all, Joshua did not take full possession of the inheritance. Yeshua will complete the task. Remember that God's ways are not our ways - just as Joshua had to learn this so must we. Spend some time in prayerful consideration of this today. We are to be partners with Yeshua in completion of what was started through His servant Joshua. There are spiritual depths to discover, as well as practical tasks to be done.
