

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 13

Day 1

Joshua Chapter 13. Most of the land was conquered, but not all. Joshua was getting old. It was now time for each Tribe to take responsibility for its inheritance. God gave instructions for Joshua to divide the land among the Tribes. By now, we are accustomed to the way God gave Israel detailed instructions, every step of the way: but pause for a moment and consider the wonder of this. Almighty God, Creator of the Universe entered the affairs of human beings so closely as to guide them through every detail of their mortal lives! Should we expect the same too?

Only one Tribe had no earthly inheritance – the Tribe of Levi. They were the Priests. They lived on earth as ordinary human beings but also knew that their inheritance was in close fellowship with God. They were intercessors, Israel’s link between Heaven and earth. The colours of the curtains of the Tabernacle symbolized this ministry, red for earth, blue for Heaven and a blending of blue and red to make purple, symbolic of their ministry, linking earth with Heaven. Their priestly ministry pointed to Yeshua. It also points to us, who are called to be Priests of the New Covenant, pilgrims on this earth and ministering from earth to Heaven, and from Heaven back to earth.

The land was not completely free of the Canaanites. Even so, Joshua had carried out the Lord’s instructions to settle the Tribes. The Nation was now to be established according to principles that were given on the wilderness journey.

Chapter 14. It may seem strange that lots were cast for the allocation of land. Was it completely by chance that each Tribe was given its inheritance? We cannot be absolutely certain, but from what we do know of the mysterious and wonderful ways of God, we might suppose that the results of the casting of lots was already known. After all, prophecies had already been spoken concerning the Tribes of Israel (by Jacob in Genesis 49, and by Moses in Deuteronomy 33). From the point of view of the Israelites it was a completely fair way of allocating the various kinds of terrain in the Promised Land. The Land of Israel has great variety within a small area - mountains, deserts, fertile valleys, rivers, seashores, and lakes both salt and clear.

Caleb was forty when the spies first went into Canaan. They were a further forty years in the wilderness and now he declares that he is 85 years old. Around five years has passed in conquering the land. All the adults died in the wilderness except Joshua and Caleb. How is it that Caleb can still speak of his continuing good health and strength? He is still able to lead his Tribe to conquer difficult mountainous terrain in the vicinity of Hebron, where we recall that the Patriarchs were buried. There is power in the

blessings of God that, received in faith, sustain His people in miraculous ways. Caleb and Joshua were blessed by God and now Joshua blessed Caleb again – not just nice words, but words of spiritual power that continued to strengthen Caleb for the task ahead.

Chapter 15. In Numbers Chapter 13, we have a list of the representatives of each Tribe who spied out the Land of Canaan. We find that Caleb was from the Tribe of Judah.

We are about one quarter of the way through our reading of the entire Bible, and we have read a lot of detail. We will find it useful, and sometimes necessary, to link passages from different parts of the Bible, as we can here.

In this Chapter we read how Judah was settled, including how Caleb settled at Hebron, giving one of his daughters to his nephew Othniel as a reward for bravery. We will find that this account of Caleb is repeated in the first chapter of Judges, showing that the writer is looking ahead at this point to a later detail in the settling of the Land. Caleb was given his inheritance but did not take it until after the death of Joshua.

There are no other records so detailed, of ancient nations, such as we find for the Children of Israel. They are so vivid in their detail that they seem more like modern history. God has ensured that they retain their relevance, and He continues to speak to us today through them. What is He saying to you today?

Chapter 16. In the next few chapters we will read details of how each Tribe was settled into their allotted territory. There is sufficient detail for archaeologists and historians, even today, to piece together the information and relate it to excavations in the Land of Israel. The maps we have in the backs of our Bibles are the result of this research and we can follow the text of these Chapters while using such maps as reference. The detail of Israel's settlement is given for a reason. The Nation's history is evidence of the way the Living God established His people. We must read our Bibles carefully to discover God's ongoing purpose for both the Land and the people. Even when the Israelites were exiled and their land was occupied by other nations, God still remembered His promise to Abraham that his physical descendants would have perpetual right to the Land. The details we are reading from these chapters in Joshua have relevance today, now that Israel is back in their Land once more. These chapters from ancient history speak to us prophetically and we must take time to listen to what God is saying.

Day 2

Chapter 17. If you are able, continue to study a map of Ancient Israel to locate the areas of the Promised Land allotted to each Tribe. Asher and Naphtali were at the far north, Asher bordering the Great Sea (now called the Mediterranean), and Naphtali extending to the Sea of Galilee. Zebulon was inland to the south of these, and Issachar next to the south, extending to the Jordan River which runs south from the Sea of Galilee. Half of Manasseh was further south, taking a large area because, as we read in this chapter, they were allotted some of the hilly regions. Manasseh had the Great Sea to the West and Jordan to the East. Further south was Ephraim, then Dan and Benjamin. Judah extended into the deep south, where Simeon was also allotted territory. Ephraim and Manasseh had two portions of Land because of God's blessing on Joseph, and the adoption of his sons by Jacob. On the East of the Jordan, the half tribe of Manasseh settled to the north. Gad was further south, bordering the Jordan River on the West and Ammon on the East. Reuben was further south again, in the region of the Salt Sea (also known as the Dead Sea), north of Moab and Edom. Try to become familiar with the layout of the Promised Land and relate the details in these chapters to maps of Bible times. In days following the time of Joshua various incidents were to take place in the history of Israel and you can relate these incidents to the maps of the region.

Chapter 18. As well as locating the areas of tribal inheritance there are maps available that show the location of various cities and towns in Israel. Since the return of Israel to their Land in 1948 archaeologists have been very busy excavating the ancient cities of the Land. It is possible to relate findings with the biblical account and much is now known about the location and history of the main cities. When you have time and can obtain details of modern day Israel, take time to link the conquest of Canaan at the time of Joshua to modern day Israel. It is a miracle taking place before our eyes to see Israel's Land being reborn on its ancient foundations. Shiloh is about 20 miles to the north of Jerusalem. This is where Joshua first set up the Tabernacle when the Land was settled, and this became the location of the Priestly Ministry. It is possible to visit this area today and find an enormous amount of pottery shards, evidence of the times when the Israelites assembled in the area according to the ministry of the Tabernacle established through Moses and passed on to Joshua and later generations. From here Joshua allocated the remaining Land to the Tribes. Read the details carefully. You will refer back to these details in the future.

Chapter 19. Joshua did not seek his own inheritance before allotting everyone else to theirs, the details of which are completed in this chapter. Joshua was the son of Nun from the Tribe of Ephraim. He chose the City of Timnath Serah in the mountains of Ephraim and set to work to build up the city. It is interesting to reflect on the Hebraic principle of inheritance. The Hebrew verb *to inherit* is *nachal*. The Tribes of Israel each inherited their portion of the Promised Land. The Promised Land was a fertile land, described, because of its potential, as a land flowing with milk and honey. It would not produce milk and honey without work, however, and each of the Tribes set about working to establish their inheritance. This principle has been built into Jewish understanding - an inheritance is both received as a gift and worked for. Furthermore, if we were to take time to review the principles of working the Land, especially Leviticus 25, we would recall that God says that the Land is His and that His people are only tenants. Thus Israel's inheritance was in partnership with God and not independent of Him. We

might go even further in our meditations on this principle and consider our inheritance in Yeshua. James, in His Epistle, was clear on the point that faith without works is dead. Hebraic faith is active. We are active inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. Begin to consider these principles as we review the way the Children of Israel now settled their inheritance of land as a place to live and work.

Chapter 20. Everything was to be established according to God's instructions through Moses. In the future there would be many legal disputes and times when justice would be administered to those doing wrong. Justice was to be maintained in all things, and the utmost care taken to give fair trial to those accused, so cities of refuge were established in preparation for those days.

Day 3

Chapter 21. The Levites were not to do ordinary work. Their work was in the service of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, which replaced it at the time of King Solomon. Nevertheless, they needed homes to dwell in and so their families were established in 48 cities distributed among all the tribal territories. This was the next matter that Joshua set in order and it could then be said that, *not one word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.* No new principles have been revealed through the Book of Joshua. What we read is simply a fulfillment of what we studied in the Books of Moses, known as *Torah (teaching)*.

Chapter 22. When the spies went to survey the Promised Land (Numbers 13), all but Joshua and Caleb feared entering the Land. Forty years later, when Israel was preparing to cross the Jordan to possess the Land, two and a half tribes asked if they could set up their homes on the West of the Jordan. This was not out of fear of entering the Land, however, and this was proved by their crossing over to possess the Land with Joshua before taking up an inheritance to the west. When all the other Tribes were settled, therefore, they were allowed to go back over the Jordan and settle.

It was not long before the first crisis occurred. They were not to be a nation independent of their brethren on the East of the Jordan. There was only one place for all Tribes to meet with God, and that was at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. A rumour came to the hearing of Joshua and the Priests that the two and a half Tribes had set up their own altar. Phinehas was sent to investigate. There was even the possibility of war breaking out between the Tribes on the East and those on the West of the Jordan. The matter was settled peacefully and in a God-honouring way. The altar on the West side would be a witness and not replace the altar at Shiloh. There was only one God of Israel and only one place of worship for the Nation.

This may seem a one-time incident, but we learn from it. Wherever God's people are found in the world today there is still only one way to fellowship with God the Father. It is no longer Shiloh, the place, but it is Shiloh the person. The word *Shiloh* comes from a Hebrew root meaning to be tranquil, secure and safe, and is associated with the Messiah. At the time of Joshua, Shiloh was in the region of Ephraim and this was the meeting place with God. In the New Covenant, Shiloh becomes fulfilled in Yeshua, the place where we – all of God's people – come to find fellowship with the Father. This is the meaning of the prophecy to Judah in Genesis 49:10.

Chapter 23. Moses completed his ministry when Joshua was trained and ready to continue the ministry of the Lord, and to lead the Children of Israel across the Jordan. Ministry responsibility was passed on in an ordered way to the next generation. Joshua then completed his ministry and became old. It was nearing the time of his death and the ministry would be passed on, once more, to the next generation. This is how it has been over all generations. We can reflect on this as we read the genealogies in the Bible, Adam, generation by generation to Noah, Noah on to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Jacob to Joseph and then Moses and then Joshua. Eventually we ourselves enter the line of ministerial responsibility, do our part and hand on to the next generation. Death is inevitable from generation to generation and we must face this with the same dignity as the Patriarchs, including Moses and Joshua. In this Chapter, just as Moses had done, Joshua assembled the people and reminded them of God's promises and His

requirements. Read the details again for yourself to note the main emphasis – *love the Lord God with all your heart*. Love, in Hebraic understanding, is proved by its actions. Israel was to cling tightly to God through obedience. The principle is the same for us. Yeshua said, at His parting, *if you love Me you will do what I command you* (John 15). Learn from Joshua so that you might also understand what Yeshua expects of us.

Chapter 24. The Israelites often went back to places of earlier events. The entire Land of Israel is living resource, better than any library. The Patriarchs set up their altars in various places and returned to them from time to time. At other places covenants were made, battles were fought, miracles occurred and much more by the Hand of God. Joshua called the people together at Shechem where Jacob had bought land from Hamor, near Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, where the blessings and cursings of the Covenant had been pronounced. *Choose this day whom you will serve!* was Joshua's challenge in this place of remembrance – *as for me and my house we will serve the Lord!* This was to be Joshua's final major speech to Israel before he died. Like Moses before him, he reminded the Children of Israel of their responsibility, established the Covenant, wrote this in the Book of the Law and set up a stone of remembrance. Like others who had served God before Him, he died full of faith and dignity, having completed the work that he was set to do. Elieazar the High Priest also died and passed on the ministry to his son Phinehas who had been his assistant up to that time, preparing for ministry.

All things are ordered in the lives of God's people. Many things are determined that come to pass years later, showing how God fulfills all of His promises. Among them was the burying of Joseph's bones in Shechem. Hundreds of years before the Exodus from Egypt Joseph commanded that his bones be preserved (Genesis 50:24) and carried up to the Promised Land. The Book of Joshua ends with this being done.

This is yet another moment where we can reflect on the cycles of birth and death, of God's deeds and our remembrance of those deeds, our own responsibility in ministry and the passing on of responsibility to another generation. Pause and reflect on these principles, prayerfully, before God.

Day 4

We will now begin the Book of Judges, continuing to read the records of Israel's history. In one short book we are taken through 400 years of history. Recall the Covenant at Sinai and the conditions agreed in the valley between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. This is the basis on which our understanding of Judges is established. We are to learn that God is faithful to His promises and expects Israel to be faithful to theirs. This is a turbulent period in the history of Israel when at times there is peace and blessing and at other times the enemies of Israel triumph over them. Whenever Israel turned away from their Covenant to follow false gods then the curse of the Covenant resulted. Yet God also raised up deliverers. They are the Judges, *Shoftim* in Hebrew, who were led by God to call the people back to Him and to deliver them from their enemies. As you read the accounts of the Judges ask the Holy Spirit to show you the relevance for today. Above all realize that a Mighty Deliverer was sent to Israel 2000 years ago. His name is Yeshua HaMashiach. He not only opened the way back to fellowship with God, but brought in a New Covenant. We live in a different time from the Judges. Nevertheless, there are still enemies of God deceiving and destroying among the nations of the world in our day, and there are some parallels to be drawn concerning how God protects nations that establish His laws. There are also many people who go the way of false gods: thereby, they go out of the protection of God. In the history of the world there have been times when deliverers have been raised up by God even among Gentile nations. Such nations have been protected when they sought to establish God's laws.

The enemies of God's people are spiritual, as Paul declared in Ephesians Chapter 6. The agents of these spiritual foes come in the form of human beings. In the Book of Judges we read about conflicts with surrounding nations more than about the spiritual enemies, but these physical enemies are those who worship false gods. Therefore, the battle was a spiritual battle even in Israel's day. Israel was commanded to conquer all those who worshipped these gods and to remove all evidence of these gods from their Land. They did not do so and, hence, left themselves vulnerable. Read the details and let God speak to you.

Judges Chapter 1. Joshua had led Israel well, so when he died there was still some momentum to complete the conquest of Canaan. They sought God and the strategy was given. First Judah was to be established. Here, perhaps, is a hint of the coming days, when Yeshua was to come first to the Tribe of Judah to announce the New Covenant. Despite a troubled world, Gods purposes are still being fulfilled.

We are reminded how Caleb settled in Hebron. This Chapter covers a considerable period of time. We read about the settling of the other Tribes. The Chapter is not completed before we read of the first compromises being made. God had decreed that the Canaanites were to be completely driven out, but from verses 22 to 36 we read how Tribe after Tribe compromised and made agreements with them. At first this would not be a major problem and they put the people to work for them, but later we will find that their very presence became a snare to them.

Chapter 2. This Chapter summarises what we will read in the rest of Judges. It is a prophetic picture of how the Tribes, from time to time, would be tempted to follow the gods of the surrounding nations and thereby bring the curses of the Covenant upon themselves. God in His graciousness would raise up deliverers who would restore the people to God, but the cycle of falling away would then resume. How quickly the people wept when the Angel of the Lord first appeared to them to show them that they were falling away, but how easily succeeding generations forgot what God had done for them. Behind

the scenes of Israel's history has been God's resources to maintain peace through victory, but since they are not visible it is easy to forget. This is still true of nations in the entire world today – because God cannot be seen, He is soon forgotten or ignored.

Chapter 3. Because of Israel's weakness in making agreements with the tribes that inhabited Canaan the Lord God used these tribes to test Israel. Just a few years had gone by since the crossing of the Jordan and the situation was permanently changed. If the command of God had been fulfilled completely then the Land of Israel would have been forever a haven of peace, but the weakness of the flesh was already exposed and so Israel would, on this earth, always need to contend with their enemies. They would always be in their Land and on their borders, and God would use them to test His people as to whether they would be totally committed to Him or be tempted to follow other gods. This goes on until today and we must learn the lessons from history that the flesh is too weak of itself to obey God fully. There is a teaching here that points to Judgement Day when the Great White Throne of God will be set up and the only perfect Judge, Yeshua, will sit on the Throne. On that Day, what God intended will be completed. ALL of God's enemies, physical and spiritual, will then be banished from the Eternal Kingdom. Then, and then only, will there be everlasting peace for God's people. To live in that Kingdom we, who wait for this Great Salvation, will be given new spiritual bodies, so that the bodies of flesh that war against God's Laws, will also be put to death.

In this Chapter we read of the first three deliverers of Israel. It did not take very long before Othniel, Caleb's son-in-law, was strengthened by the Lord to judge Israel because they had begun to serve foreign gods. Then again, after forty more years, and after the death of Othniel, Israel was oppressed on account of their evil. Notice that it was the Lord Himself who strengthened their enemies against them before raising up a deliverer in their midst. It was *all of God* even when the enemies prevailed against them. At times of God's judgements, it is He who takes away protection and brings the enemies in to sift His people. Ehud and, then later Shamgar, were the judges of Israel next called to restore Israel to their God and turn back the enemies.

The situations they faced were real and so was the deliverance. The incident also reminds us of spiritual battles that we fight. Notice that Ehud used a small sword, *Cherev* in Hebrew, as his weapon of deliverance. He was among the first of Israel's Judges to bring salvation. The last of Israel's Judges to bring Salvation is Yeshua. In Revelation 1:16 He appeared to John with a sharp two edged sword coming from His mouth. We know from other Scriptures that a sword is symbolic of the Word of God, so the picture in Revelation is about the pure and powerful Word of God being the means of judgement and deliverance of God's people. This reminds us of the Hebrews 4:12, *the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the division of soul a spirit and joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* Ehud's deliverance was a major incident in Israel's history, but also stands symbolic of future and more meaningful deliverance. We wait for the Great Judge to return to destroy His enemies with the Sword of the Spirit. Meanwhile we too will fight smaller battles of deliverance and need to be equipped with the Word of God, brought to us spiritually, as we become mature with our understanding of the Bible.

Chapter 4. There is an order to God's family. Adam was the first man and Eve was given to him as his helper and this became the basis of the way men and women were to cooperate in the family of God. It

is not that men are more important than women, just that there is a structure in the administration of families and congregations that God has ordained. Paul the Apostle reminded Timothy of this when he wrote, *I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man* (2 Timothy 2:12). This is the principle, but because of imperfection, there are exceptions and this was the case at the time of the Judges.

There was no strong leadership in Israel and God raised up a faithful woman, Deborah. She was strong but also humble and knowledgeable in the ways of God. She herself knew that it would be shameful for the men of Israel if she, a woman, led them to victory against their enemies. When the men of God are weak, God will sometimes shame them through the strength of a good woman. It is not that women are despised in God's Kingdom, but in the order of administration men have been given responsibility to lead and women have equally important roles of other kinds. Nevertheless, there are great women of the Bible who rise up head and shoulders above the men at certain times. Such a one was Deborah and also Heber's wife Jael. Deborah was a prophetess who lived in Ephraim. When Sisera came against Israel, the Children of Israel cried out to the Lord for help. Such is the pattern, and will be the pattern to the end of the age. We learn this from the historical account here in Judges. Barak was to be the deliverer of Israel, but Deborah was really the strength behind the deliverance. Read the vivid account in the Chapter, but also note that it was neither Barak, nor Deborah, nor Jael who were the real deliverers. They were simply *God's means* of bringing *His* deliverance to Israel.

Psalm 118. Pause and read this Psalm. You will see how relevant it is to our readings from Judges. It recalls how, when Israel cried out to God, a deliverer was sent. It is also a Messianic Psalm. In our day pressures are going to mount again on Israel. We will study this through the Prophecies of the Bible, and we will witness it through the events of our day. The Great Deliverer is Yeshua and He will return when His own people cry out to Him with the Messianic cry of *blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord* (Psalm 118:26, Matthew 21:9, 23:39).

Day 5

Chapter 5. The Song of Deborah and Barak reflected on the victories of God over His enemies, beginning, *when leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the Lord*. They knew what God had done. Israel had sinned, so God strengthened their enemies against them, so that they would wake up. He strengthened Deborah who helped Barak to be a leader, and God then strengthened the people to defeat their enemies. In this song are principles of God among His people in times of trouble. He leads them to a victory that is needed on account of His judgements against them. He stirs up their enemies. He calls forth repentance. He raises up the leaders. He calls forth praise. He restores them and honours those who served well, and He restores peace to the Land. In this case it was for 40 years, a generation, before the next deliverer was needed. How do you perceive the world around us today? Is God in control even where there are troubles? What is God saying to the world? What is He saying to us, those who know Him and are learning His ways?

Chapter 6. The account of Gideon extends over several chapters. There is a lot of detail, so read the chapters carefully and ask the Lord to highlight passages and principles that are especially relevant to you. We would all like to have the honour bestowed on Gideon, called out as a mighty man in the purposes of God for our generation, but it was God's choosing and not Gideon's. Gideon knew the problems that had developed in Israel because of the way Midian had once more become the Lord's means of sifting Israel. Gideon did not give the appearance of being the mighty man that the Angel of the Lord said he was. He was doing a rather strange thing - threshing wheat in a winepress. To all appearances it would be out of fear, but God knew his potential and, through His Angel, called him a mighty man before he became a mighty leader. Gideon was cautious and tested out whether this really was the Angel of the Lord. He was then proved in the first act of obedience, destroying an altar of Baal. He acted at night, out of caution, but he accomplished the act nevertheless. This is how God trains His mighty men, giving them smaller tasks to accomplish in order that their faith will grow for the bigger tasks ahead. No longer would Gideon be afraid of the Baals. If you have ever confronted the powers of darkness that become entrenched in the communities of the world you will know the spiritual pressures that this brings, and it is indeed an act of bravery to confront them. There is often a spiritual battle behind a physical problem. Behind the altar of Baal was an entrenched spiritual power that was dominating this region of Manasseh in the northern territory of Israel. Gideon was exercised in victory and strengthened by the Lord, now capable of going forward to deliver the entire nation step by step, growing in faith.

Gideon was cautious - that was strength and not weakness. He wanted to be sure that God was inspiring him to lead Israel. God honoured his caution and confirmed his call. God does not want headstrong leaders and He does not want leaders whom He has not called for a certain task. There is a lesson here for all of us.

Chapter 7. Just as Gideon was careful so were the men whom God selected. Out of 32,000 men only 300 were selected. These were the ones who were not fearful of the enemy and who also drank cautiously. This was a time when Israel's enemies might appear at any time and they kept alert even as they drank, not like the majority who focused only on their own immediate needs and were probably rather selfish too. This was to be God's victory and He needed carefully chosen men. One might think

that the Lord did not need any men at all, but God helps His people to victory rather than doing everything for them. It is us with God, and God with us, always, and the key ingredients are faith and obedience. This is what we read in Chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews, where some of the prominent men and women of faith are listed. God uses ordinary men and women like Gideon, gives them strength for the battle, and teaches us His ways through what He has done through them. The barley loaf that one of the Midianites saw in a dream was ordinary bread and symbolic of the ordinary people whom God was using for the victory. There is also symbolism in the pitchers and torches inside. Clay pots are symbolic of the Lord's people and broken clay pots can shine the light of God to defeat the enemies. Not one person, including Gideon, would have conceived of the victory against Midian in this way. He put the fear into the Midianites but the victory was also won by obedience. The symbolism of the clay pots and lamps continues to be a useful illustration even today, after many years have passed. Obedience and faith were key and, with these qualities, Gideon was proved to be a mighty man of valour.

Chapter 8. The victory that begun with 300 men was completed through the gathered Tribes of Israel, who drove Midian back across the Jordan, much weakened from the conflict. Justice was administered, including in the towns of Succoth and Penuel where the leaders would not provide food for the 300.

No sooner had the Land of Israel been resettled than the men of Israel looked to Gideon for leadership and not to God, but Gideon knew better than to allow this. Gideon then made a mistake. He may have meant well, by using the earrings and other ornaments that had been taken from the Ishmaelites, to make a golden ephod. He may have set it up to remind the people that the victory had been from the Lord, but such images were likely to be a snare. Indeed, the Second Commandment is to protect us from turning our worship away from God and towards images. Indeed, it was not long after the death of Gideon that Israel turned once more to follow a false god.

Day 6

Chapter 9. The history of Israel, and indeed of all nations of the world, reveals how when a great leader dies it is likely that the next generation will have a weak leader. In this case it was one of Gideon's own sons who led the nation. Abimelech even killed all but one of his father's sons to usurp the leadership. How soon a generation can forget what God has done and their commitment to Him. It was even at Shechem, the City of Refuge located in the valley between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, where Abimelech was made king. This was, in a way, the first king of Israel – but he did not reign long. This was the region where blessings and curses had been pronounced over Israel on the solemn day when Joshua carried out the instructions of Moses. Jotham, one of Abimelech's brothers, stood on Gerizim, the mount of blessing and pronounced a curse! Did he know that this was the mountain where the Tribes had stood? I would think so. Indeed, the curse would become a blessing because God was behind it to deliver Israel from the wicked leaders. Jotham also spoke an interesting parable, which included reference to the three main trees that would become symbolic of Israel, the olive, the fig and the vine. A counterfeit tree, the bramble, was also mentioned, symbolizing Abimelech the usurper and the judgement that would fall on those who followed him. This chapter is not an account of how Israel was saved from their enemies from *without*, but of salvation from their enemies *within*. If our spiritual adversary cannot defeat us one way, he will try another.

Chapter 10 In some of these chapters we have more detail than in others about this era of Israel's history. In this chapter, several Judges are mentioned only briefly, covering more than fifty years. Notice that the main thread of the history of Israel depends on the quality of the leaders. If they are led well, then they have peace because they follow the teachings of the God of Israel. Then comes a time of falling away to serve other gods. The nation comes under the curse of the Covenant until there is a fresh seeking after God, when Israel cries out to Him. The Covenant with God's people is centred on whether they seek to follow Him wholeheartedly or not. The blessing or curse is, in the Old Covenant, the symptom of their success or failure in this.

Chapter 11. Jephthah was the next leader to arise as a deliverer. Notice that God raises up whom He chooses from a variety of backgrounds. There is always a man prepared but there is no way of guessing who that man might be until God exalts him in the time of need. Gideon was called out of a wine-press. Jephthah was the son of a harlot. God calls and God commissions. God looks on the heart and finds a man who will listen to Him and be faithful. Sometimes circumstances arise that no one would have forecast, such as when Jephthah committed his only daughter as a burnt offering. This is a mysterious section of the account because, on first sight, it appears that Jephthah intended burning his child like a sacrificial animal, but God called for no such sacrifice. Therefore, it is more reasonable to infer from the account that the sacrifice was that his daughter would be dedicated to God, rather like some Nuns dedicate themselves today. She would go childless all her life and so Jephthah would have no grandchildren. His line of descent was sacrificed for the sake of the victory in Israel. Jephthah's daughter was a living sacrifice such as Paul spoke about in Romans 12.

Chapter 12. Next an internal dispute arose between Gilead and Ephraim. The word *sibboleth* means a grain of wheat and *shibboleth* is the same, also associated with a running stream. The word was used to test whether a person came from Ephraim. It is interesting that time has moved on so far in the history of Israel that the Tribes have settled enough in their own territories so that slight modifications in pronunciation of certain words has taken place. In a few chapters of the Bible we have covered a great number of years. The brief records of Israel's history is for the main purpose of reminding us of the struggles resulting from failure to stay in close fellowship with God, and the consequences of worshipping false gods.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Pause and consider what the history of Israel shows us about the need all men and women have of help if they are to be in Covenant relationship with the One True God. Despite all the ups and downs of Israel's relationship with Him, He never abandoned them. When they cried out in repentance for His help, He sent a deliverer. These were the great leaders of faith through history. Faith is what God requires, and we even need help to stand in faith. The greatest deliverer is Yeshua and so great is His victory that He brought in a New Covenant to take away the curse and strengthen us by His Spirit, to grow in faith. Hebrews Chapter 11, contains a review of the heroes of faith whom God raised up prior to the coming of Yeshua. Some of the Judges are in this list. With all this in mind, read this Chapter and also Chapter 12 again, as you meditate on your own position in the Covenant family.
