

# Under The Fig Tree



## WEEK 9

### Introduction

The Five Books of Moses are foundational to all Bible study. Each time you study them you will find new paths to follow through the Bible, as different themes are emphasized. This week we continue in the Book of Numbers. What will you record in your prayer and study diary? Are you filled with anticipation at what the Holy Spirit will show you? Read each chapter carefully. It is surprising what you can miss if you are not attentive to your studies.

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### Day 1

Chapter 21. In a few short chapters we have followed the Children of Israel through many years of their journey in the wilderness. In this chapter we find them on the borders of the Land of Canaan. Israel would, by now, be well known among the tribal nations in the vicinity. They would have been observed in their encampments and on their journeys. Rumours would have spread about how the God of Abraham brought them out of Egypt, and how He led them. Imagine what you would have thought had you seen this great nation in ordered procession through the wilderness. You may have feared what this great army could do to you. You may have wanted to remove them from the face of the earth. This has typified Israel's history throughout the ages. In this chapter we read about the reaction of some of the surrounding nations.

There are some interesting points to consider. Among them is how God deals with His own people, teaching them and correcting them, whilst at the same time delivering them from their enemies. The God of Israel made a covenant with Abraham and we must remember this. There is an end in view for Israel and all nations must consider this in their dealings with them. Whoever blesses Abraham will be blessed by God; whoever curses Abraham will be cursed by God. This is how God will deal with Israel's friends and Israel's enemies, whilst also disciplining His own people. Just as Israel was not defeated by the surrounding nations in Moses' day, they will have God's help until the end of time, even though at times they suffer difficult situations.

Through Moses, Israel was given instructions on how to be the people of God. Therefore, though saved from their enemies, they underwent discipline. Hence the account of the serpents fits perfectly within the account of deliverance from the nations in this chapter.

We cannot pass this account by without noting that the serpent on the pole is a prophetic picture of Yeshua on the Cross. Isaiah 53 is relevant and so also is the teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:21. All this is relevant to our reading today.

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Chapter 22. Israel was on the Eastern border of the river Jordan and soon to cross over. The other nations had their own gods and their own prophets. It is not a surprise that they thought they could harm Israel spiritually by bringing a curse upon them. Nations who thought to destroy them physically failed, but would a curse be effective? Well, possibly, but we find that the God of Israel turned the proposed curse into a blessing. Through the mouth of a donkey the prophet Balaam was made to look quite foolish and brought under the discipline of God.

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Chapter 23. Rulers of all nations should read these chapters of the Bible and realize that this is an accurate account of the history of the Living God, shepherding His people. It reminds us of Psalm 2, where we understand that all nations will fail if they set themselves against the God of Israel. This incident may also come to mind when we study of the Prophet Elijah, later in our studies. Elijah challenged the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel at the time of the Kings of Israel. God, in various ways, will ensure that His covenant purposes through Israel are fulfilled, whatever challenges are set before His people. Israel may not have understood what was going on at the time of Balak and Balaam, who looked down on them from a hidden place in the hills, but God was at work to prevent a curse falling on His people from the lips of Balaam. Indeed, through this incident Balaam was learning about the God of Israel and feared doing wrong. Three times he blessed Israel when he was supposed to curse them. Read the details. This account from ancient history has relevance today as we perceive the nations rising once more against Israel, now returned to their own land after 2000 years of the Lord's discipline among the nations. Those who bless Israel will be blessed: those who curse them will be cursed. This time the curse was turned to a blessing.

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Chapter 24. The longer term purposes of God were revealed to Balaam. Not only did he bless Israel rather than curse them. He also prophesied accurately concerning the coming of the Messiah. Looking, as it were into the future, he said – *I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel....* Read the entire prophecy. It is about Yeshua and what will eventually be fulfilled in days of judgement upon the nations. Israel was blessed and not cursed this time. One day Yeshua would be revealed to gather the nation together in fulfillment of the Covenant promise to Abraham. Balaam perceived this truth and saw it in the distant future. This prophetic truth is revealed time and again in various forms throughout the Scriptures. This is the most important part of what we learn from this study of a false prophet being made to prophesy accurately through his encounter with the God of Israel. Israel's future lay beyond the Promised Land which they were soon to enter. It was beyond the practical issues of Torah. It was foretold in all the types and shadows of God's dealing with them, and it is revealed in what Balaam prophesied here. Read the details carefully and see what the Holy Spirit teaches you.

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## Day 2

Chapter 25. The Apostle Paul taught that disciples of Yeshua should not be yoked together with unbelievers. This is most strongly interpreted in terms of marriage, where there can be the danger of a wrong spirit compromising the believer's walk with God. It can also apply in any area where an alliance can lead to weakening the life and witness of a believer. This teaching is foundational to the understanding of Acts 15 where, at the Council of Jerusalem, new believers were warned against the practices of the day which would cause them to be drawn into an alliance with false spirits and into spiritual adultery.

Paul's imagery reminds us of two oxen yoked together to plough a field. If one pulls a different way from the other, then either the second one resists or it is forced to follow the other. In either case, tension ensues, which at worst leads to the wrong furrow being dug. This is a message for today as much as it has ever been. False religions and worldly systems are rising that demand compromise through false alliances. It is best to avoid such alliances, or trouble will eventually ensue. The evil one will never compromise with true believers and, in the end, will seek to dominate. This is also the reason why John, in the Book of Revelation, when being shown the last great apostasy on the earth, was told, *come out of her my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues* (Revelation 18:4).

In this chapter, we see Israel once more coming under a subtle attack. In previous chapters we saw how wars were waged against them from which God delivered them. We also saw how God turned away a curse and turned it into a blessing at the time of Balak and Balaam. Balak and Balaam were also behind the new problem that Israel confronted in this chapter. Yeshua made reference to this when He warned the Church in Pergamos not to put stumbling blocks before the Children of Israel (Revelation 2:14). Balaam and Balak typify any people who seek to destroy the identity of Israel by leading them into spiritual adultery with false gods.

Israel was soon to cross over into the Promised Land and satan mounted yet another attack on them to destroy them as an identifiable people. Balak and Balaam were the agents of satan, even though satan is not named in the chapter. This time the Israelite women were seduced into sexual immorality with the Moabites. This resulted in a bondage to the false god baal. If this had been allowed to continue, in just one generation Israel would be lost as an identifiable people and led into bondage with satan. Satan, through various means, therefore, had tried to destroy them so that they would not be the people of the One True God and a true witness in the world. Through the action of Phinehas, God's anger was withheld, but not before 24,000 Israelites died from a plague.

What we read here has been true of all generations. Satan has sought to destroy the Children of Israel through wars, deception and false alliances. The Covenant with Abraham has been challenged time and again. Israel remains an identifiable people to this day, but they have suffered great trials for this to be so. It will be the same for all of God's people right to the time when Yeshua returns. At the end of time there will be a *time of Jacob's trouble* such as never before. This will be both an attack of satan who will deceive all nations, and it will be used to discipline Israel in preparation for the return of Yeshua.

It is interesting to consider the origins of the nations mentioned in this chapter. They were the Moabites and the Midianites. Their territory was on the East of the River Jordan, along with Ammon and Edom. This is the land of Jordan in the modern era. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died (Genesis 25:1-4). Recall also how Moses had fled to Midian from Egypt (Exodus 2:15). The Moabites originated from the time of Lot, through one of his sons

(Genesis 19:33-37). Esau, Jacob's brother, was also called Edom (Genesis 25:30) and was the founder of the Edomites. He married several of the daughters of the local tribes, including one of the daughters of Ishmael (Genesis 36). It was the Ishmaelites who bought Joseph and took him down to Egypt. Ammon was another nation founded by a son of Lot (Genesis 19:36). Thus the Children of Israel had travelled through territories owned by near relatives. We can understand how they might have considered it reasonable to intermarry with these people. God had not, however, brought them to this point to allow them to lose their identity as the Covenant people. He had taken them from the line of descent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for His eternal purposes. These purposes were to be made clearer as the years moved forward, even until today. To fulfill His Covenant plan Israel will remain the chosen nation until the end. There is very much to study on this issue, but it is foundational to the way we understand the Covenant purposes of God, and the history of Israel.

Israel was not to be lost among the Moabites. It is very important to realize, however, that the reverse of this could have been true; Moab could have become followers of the God of Israel, and counted among the tribes. At the time of the Judges a certain Moabitess called Ruth swore allegiance to the God of Israel. God so honoured her among His people that she became the great grandmother of King David, from whose Kingly line Yeshua was to come!

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Chapter 26. Here we have the record of the second census. It was of the same nature as the first one around forty years earlier, but now a generation had died in the wilderness and the younger generation had been prepared to go forward into the Promised Land. It is an interesting exercise to compare the numbers of fighting men recorded for each tribe in the two censuses. At the second census the nation was roughly the same size as at the first, having just over 600,000 fighting men (those aged 20 or more) and just over 20,000 Levites (those aged one month or more). Read the details carefully. You may be surprised how the Holy Spirit shows you something new. If you are a true disciple of Yeshua grafted into the Olive Tree along with faithful Israel, this is a record of *your* family history too – by adoption. Who on this earth knows so much about their family ancestry as the children of the Living God!?

There seems to be one difference in the second census. This time God prepares the people for their inheritance of land. This was not mentioned at the first census. God promised this second generation that they would inhabit the Land - and so they would. He had not spoken quite so clearly to their fathers, who died in the wilderness over forty years of wandering. Could it have been that He knew that they were not ready, even when the spies were sent into the Land? If so, we should have a sense of awe at our God, who knows the way we will react at decision points about our future and the future that He has planned for His people. Even taking account of our sin and its consequences, God's plan will not fail and all will come about at a determined time known to Him. His ultimate purposes will not be thwarted, though generations pass away.

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Chapter 27. Tribal inheritance was allocated. This is a very important part of Israel's history. Once they were settled in the Land they would gradually build up cities in their allotted territory. Many of those cities are known today through modern archaeological excavations. Much of what we find today in the Land of Israel traces back to what we are reading here today in our Bibles. All was put into order ready for the crossing of the Jordan, including the various anomalies that had to be settled such as the allocation of inheritance to the daughters of Zelophehad, so that their father's name could be preserved.

This chapter also contains the wonderful account of the commissioning of Joshua. Joshua had been Moses' assistant. He had accompanied him in his entire ministry, including times in the close presence of God. His time had come and Moses' time was passing. The transfer of ministry responsibility was accomplished in dignity and in faithful obedience. This is how the baton of spiritual ministry passes from generation to generation. It would be good if God's people learned from how Moses was able to recognize the moment. Hundreds of years later, Yeshua came to the earth. His name is closely linked with the name *Joshua*. Joshua was a forerunner. Joshua led Israel into the Promise Land. The Promised Land is a metaphor of the Kingdom of Heaven. When Yeshua's time came He was appointed by God to lead His people on into a new era of God's Kingdom purposes, ultimately to take us to the Eternal Kingdom where He would go and prepare a place for us. It is a pity that the leaders of Israel, the Sanhedrin, the Scribes and the rabbinical authorities did not together recognize the moment that was foreseen in the handing over of authority from Moses to Joshua, as symbolic of their recognizing the authority of Yeshua. There is still some blindness to be removed today. Nevertheless, though many generations have passed since Yeshua's first coming, eventually a generation of the Children of Israel will recognize that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel. It is a pity that Yeshua's first coming was not fully appreciated. Much suffering would have been saved, as foretold by Yeshua when He wept over Jerusalem.

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Chapter 28. Israel had been saved from the subtle attempts to destroy them as an identifiable people. They were soon to enter their inheritance. How were they to maintain their allegiance to the One True God? There was no change, no new rules, no modifications that made them like the surrounding nations. They were to bring sacrifices and offerings just as had already been prescribed for the ministry of the Tabernacle, and they were to celebrate the Feasts of the Lord in exactly the same way as they had already been instructed. Moses gave them their instructions once more. Read what they were required to do and consider if this has relevance to us. There is one way to God the Father and that is through Yeshua HaMashiach His Son, who fulfils all of the types and shadows of what we read in this chapter. This chapter contains a relevant and important teaching for us that is at the foundation of our faith, just as it is for all Israel.

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## Day 3

Revelation Chapters 5 to 7. Let us turn again to the Book of Revelation. There are parallels to be drawn between the wilderness journey, the entry into Canaan, and the coming Kingdom of Heaven. If we do not note these parallels we are likely to read Revelation in isolation and, thereby, find difficulty in understanding the message. When Israel came out of Egypt there was a spiritual dimension to their experience. God came down from the Highest Heaven to dwell among His people. In addition there were spiritual parallels to all that happened on earth. The Tabernacle, for example, was a pattern of what exists in Heaven. So too, the battles fought on earth had their parallels in Heaven. We have enough information in the Scriptures to confirm this, even though we do not know the full details. Thus when John was shown heavenly visions, described in the Book of Revelation, it was a view into a domain that already existed at the time of Moses, and has been relevant to life on earth over all time.

Israel was not shown what John saw, because it was not the time for the fulfillment of the prophecies for the last days. Nevertheless, what we learn in the Books of Moses is a preparation for our understanding of Revelation.

Revelation Chapter 5. We have much more of the Bible to study before we can consider every aspect of the Book of Revelation. The Prophet Daniel gives us some preparation for what we read in this chapter. Daniel prophesied to Judah while the nation was in exile in Babylon. Some of what he was shown pointed to the return from exile. Some pointed to the end times. Daniel was told that some truths were closed up until the end times. He was promised that the final redemption of his people would take place in what, to him, was the distant future. We now know more fully that all Israel had waited for the coming Messiah. Until the Messiah came the final part of the plan of salvation could not be completed. Yeshua HaMashiach is the Messiah and He is the Lamb that was slain. Thus what is described in Chapter 5 of Revelation is a heavenly vision whose foundations were in the Books of Moses and were later foreseen by the biblical Prophets. What had been sealed up at the time of Daniel could now be opened up by Yeshua, because the time was fulfilled. This is what happened when the seals were taken off to reveal and release the final work of God on this earth. This is what we read in this chapter, so let us spend some time considering the details.

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Chapter 6. Adam and Eve sinned and were banished from the Garden of Eden. This was among the saddest days of human history. All the sickness, pain, famine, wars and tribulation of this earth followed as a consequence. The history of salvation is the golden thread that God has woven through the trials of this fallen world, so we should not be surprised if this increases towards the end of the age. In fact, Yeshua said that we should not be alarmed when these things take place. Revelation Chapter 6 is what Yeshua foretold in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Salvation is in God's hands and He alone knows what to do and what it will take to accomplish His purposes. Evil will arise to such a pitch in this world that many people will flee from it to seek the Living God - many who would not be so ready to seek Him in times of comfort and ease! This is at the root of our understanding as to why the tribulations described in Revelation 6 must take place. In the midst of a world of hunger, deception, famines and disease, God's people will stand as a great witness even to the death. This is the time of salvation and perfecting of believers who become true witnesses of the Living God.

When Israel was in the wilderness they alone were the people of the Living God. They were a testimony and witness to Him to show the world what God wanted them to know. Now, at the end of the age, it is a different wilderness walk. Many of the lessons are taken to the deeper spiritual level within the life of

the Holy Spirit. He is teaching men and women from every nation to be witnesses, preparing for the coming Kingdom of Heaven. We are like Israel on the edge of the Jordan, but now our inheritance is in the world that is to come.

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Chapter 7. One of the reasons for turning to this chapter, while we are still reading Numbers, is to note the parallels between the census on the edge of Jordan and the numbers of the Tribes of Israel found in the Kingdom of Heaven. We do not know if the number 12,000 for each of the Tribes is symbolic or literal. What we do know is that, just as God counted and identified the numbers and names of the Israelites who crossed Jordan, so He promises that, when the final census is taken for the Kingdom of Heaven, there will be a gathering from each of the Tribes of Israel. Actually, Dan is not listed here. Dan committed spiritual adultery in the Promised Land by setting up altars to false gods. This could be the reason. God saved Israel from being lost by intermarriage among the Moabites, and in many other ways, but the Tribe of Dan still fell away some years later. It is interesting that the Hebrew word *Dan* is related to judgement. Genesis 49:17-18 contains what Jacob prophesied of Dan. We understand God's judgement through Dan. He gave ground to satan and suffered the consequences, becoming like a snake in the highway. Dan suffered the judgement that all the other Tribes would have suffered had they too been lost among the nations through one or other of satan's schemes. Much conflict and deception has arisen on this earth for the very purpose of destroying the identity of the Tribes of Israel and thereby discrediting the Covenant that God made with Abraham. This goes on today, and was a central reason for the Second World War and the Holocaust. Yet, God has promised that, when the final census is taken, just as more than 600,000 went into the Promised Land, so 144,000 (at least) will be identifiable as from the Tribes of Israel. They are mentioned again in Revelation 14 as being virgin, meaning pure. They will be pure in the sense that they did not intermarry and so lose identity, and they will be pure in that they were cleansed through the atoning blood of Yeshua HaMashiach.

There is an old hymn that goes, *when the roll is called up yonder I'll be there*. This speaks of the census that God will take of all His people drawn from every nation. It is the final census, a parallel with the census on the borders of Jordan, but then for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. There will be some from every Tribe, first from all the Tribes of Israel (though we do not know what the final result for Dan will be) and some from every other Tribe of the earth, all called into the blessings from the Covenant God made with Abraham. Understanding of this begins with the history of Israel on the edge of the Jordan.

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## Day 4

Numbers Chapter 29. The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread were fulfilled when Yeshua became the sinless Passover Lamb. These were the Spring Feasts, marking the beginning of the year around the time of the early harvests when Israel dwelt in the Promised Land. The Feast of Firstfruits was fulfilled when Yeshua presented Himself to the Father at His Ascension into Heaven. Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks, was fulfilled at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All of the offerings pointed to Yeshua. He completed what began here in the wilderness and was rehearsed year after year in the Promised Land. Chapter 29 of Numbers contains the Autumn Feasts. They point to a great Trumpet blast from Heaven to announce the return of Yeshua, when He will bring in the final stage of the Day of Atonement, where the High Priest returns from the Holiest Place to announce salvation to those who live by faith in the One True God. Then Yeshua will tabernacle (live with) His people forever. We do not know the full details of how this will take place but we know that the Israelites rehearsed this year after year through their Feasts and their offerings. They all point to Yeshua and blend together in Him. Here on the banks of the Jordan River they were reminded of the exact offerings to be made year after year until the coming of Messiah. On the one hand they were complete in themselves as what God required for the time being. On the other hand they form a prophetic picture to be fulfilled in the future. Think of both these things as you read this chapter. Wasn't it worth a yearly rehearsal for these most important events that were to be fulfilled one day in the distant future?

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Chapter 30. *Let your yes be yes and your no be no*, taught Yeshua. God requires His people to be clear in their commitments, their oaths and their promises. He expects us to be like Him. We must be careful, like Israel, to not make rash promises. A careless promise may be a great mistake and we will be held to our word. A commitment to God is everlasting and this, and the consequences, must be considered carefully. This applies to promises we make to God when we come to Him for salvation, as well as to promises relating to other issues. We must ensure that we understand what we are doing. Binding ourselves to God is making enemies of the world. God keeps all of His promises. That is a great assurance. We are called to be like Him and keep our promises despite any problems this may bring to us on this earth. God's Covenant Promise to Abraham, confirmed by an oath, had the consequence of death on the Cross for Yeshua. Promises Israel made also have had consequences for them over the years. We will study this through their history at the times of the Judges and Kings, and through the ministry of the Prophets. Chapter 30 requires careful reading in preparation for this.

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Chapter 31. Moses' last task before sending the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, under the leadership of Joshua, was to destroy the Midianites, who had become enemies of God through Balaam and Balak. They were to have been the means by which satan would have destroyed the identity of God's people and caused God's Covenant to fail. Satan is not identified here, but he was the god, in many forms, whom the nations served. The judgement may seem harsh, but God knows how He must deal with His enemies. This is the same God who will destroy all His enemies one day. All of mankind should consider what happened to Midian and seek to follow the God of Israel and not oppose Him. They should renounce all other gods: they are satan in one form or another. There have been nations in the world right up to the present day who have tried in both overt and covert ways to destroy the identity of Israel. They should read this chapter of Numbers and realize that they have put themselves into the same situation as Midian. We can learn from the Crusades of "Christendom"; we can learn from those who have sought to destroy the Jews through Greek philosophical ideas; we can learn from the



Nazis. In fact we can learn from every ideology that is rising in the world today. Only true believers and disciples of the God of Israel, who came to save us through His Son Yeshua HaMashiach, will understand His Covenant purposes and ongoing promises to Israel. All other religions and ideologies will eventually, in covert or overt ways, turn against Israel and all who ally themselves with the God of Israel. We must learn this as we consider the judgement on the Midianites. Read this chapter carefully. It is very relevant.

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Isaiah 9:1-7. Before we complete Numbers, let us turn to Chapter 9 of Isaiah. We will read the entire Book of Isaiah later in the year, so we will simply refer to just a few verses today. This is a prophecy concerning the coming of Yeshua HaMashiach. When Isaiah wrote this prophecy Israel was being disciplined by God at the hand of Assyria. Being part of God's family does not mean that life will be easy. God disciplines His family as a father disciplines his children. This was true of Israel in the wilderness. It was also true in the Promised Land. It is still true today. He teaches us and He disciplines us in various ways.

This chapter from Isaiah begins with the word *nevertheless*. Even though, at times, the days were bleak for Israel under the discipline of God, He made a Covenant with Abraham and so, whatever it takes, the Israel of God will eventually triumph over its enemies, both spiritual and physical. Therefore, in the midst of a time of Israel's discipline, God gave Israel a promise that pointed to the coming of the Saviour, Yeshua HaMashiach. The prophecy foretold the birth of Yeshua in Bethlehem and a promise of the coming Kingdom. It is likened to the time when Midian was defeated at the hand of Moses. This was a harsh time for the Midianites but, for Israel, a time of release from oppression. The victory and the division of the spoil, that we read about in Numbers, is what Isaiah recalled in the prophecy. He tells us that this was a foretaste of the greater victory of our Saviour, one greater than Moses. Yeshua disarmed the spiritual enemies of God's people on the Cross. That is where the victory was declared. On Judgement Day, when *all* nations will stand before Him, this victory will be finalized when all of God's enemies are sentenced so that His people can live in peace forever, free of all bondage. This is what the defeat of Midian foreshadows.

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## Day 5

Numbers Chapter 32. As you read the final chapters of Numbers make careful note of the details. Some of the information may seem a little dry, but remember that this is the exact account of the way the Tribes of Israel settled into their Land as a nation. This is particularly relevant today. We are at a time when Israel is resettling in the same land after 2000 years. Questions arise as to where the various Tribes have gone. We know more about Judah than any other tribe but God has a plan for the end times that includes all Israel. In Chapter 32 we learn that two and a half tribes settled on the East side of the Jordan River. These were the tribes of Gad, Reuben and half of Manasseh. We might wonder why God allowed these tribes to settle there. Perhaps their presence formed a protected zone on Israel's border so that future conflicts could be subdued more easily. Perhaps it was a beginning of the wider witness to the world. These tribes could only inhabit this fertile territory after they had taken their part in the conquest of Canaan. This was quite different from the time when the previous generation feared to enter Canaan because of the giants.

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Psalm 80 and John 15. In Psalm 80 Israel is likened to a vine that the Lord planted. It was written later than the conquest of Canaan. It was at a time when Israel was under the discipline of God after they had settled in the Land. The Psalm recalls the days when they were first planted as a nation. Verses 8 to 11 remind us of when two and a half tribes settled on the east of Jordan, spreading out from Canaan towards the rising sun. It is as though the fruitful branches of the vine extended over the river from where it was planted in Canaan. This was God's picture of fruitful Israel bringing blessing to the nations, but Psalm 80 also takes us forward to the reality of their failure when they were cut down like a fruitless vine on account of the sins of the nation. On the plains of the Jordan there was vision and hope but this was not fulfilled in the days of the Judges and Kings. This Psalm points more fully to John 15 where Yeshua declares Himself to be the fruitful vine in which His people dwell. Indeed, in Him we bear fruit among all nations and in Him is the promise of Israel fulfilled. God surely foresaw all of this even as Israel camped on the shores of the Jordan, ready to inhabit the Land of Canaan.

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Numbers Chapter 33. No-one knows the exact locations of the places where Israel set up camp on their journey through the wilderness. Nevertheless, if you have a map in your Bible, you can gain a rough idea of the journey from Egypt to Canaan. The Bible contains the exact record of the journey. Read it carefully and see if you can imagine this journey. Recall the crossing of the Red Sea, the encampment at Sinai where the Law was given, the building of the Tabernacle and the journey from place to place. Each camp was set up according to the instructions given to Moses, which we have read in detail. God led by the pillar of fire by night and pillar of cloud by day, and rested on the Tabernacle when they camped. Imagine this ordered community going from place to place. Now all this was in the past and Moses gave instructions for settling in the Promised Land.

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Chapter 34. Through Moses, God gave precise instructions for the boundaries of the Promised Land and brought chosen leaders together to discuss the plan for advancing into the Land. This was like a military campaign, where the commander-in-chief briefed his leaders on the strategy for the occupation. There was no room for poor discipline. *The Commander-in-Chief (God Himself)* had a precise strategy and demanded absolute obedience. If possible, have a map of the Promised Land open as you read this

chapter. There is often one at the back of our Bibles. Try to imagine the gathering of the leaders to discuss the strategy. All this really did happen and was an immense military operation.

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## Day 6

Chapter 35. Justice and Mercy are two themes that interweave throughout the Bible. God's Covenant with Israel is not simply a humanistic social charter: it deals deeply with matters of life and death. Ultimately we know that, through Yeshua, mercy triumphs over judgement, with justice being totally satisfied. In our reading of Numbers we know that God pronounced judgement on the nations that opposed Him. Some of those nations were completely removed from the face of the earth. In isolation this may seem harsh, but here, in Numbers 35, we see something more of the heart of God. Even the accused murderer is to be given refuge whilst his case is settled, and then, only after a fair trial, he is to be given the death sentence if there are two or more reliable witnesses. The cities of refuge bear testimony to the way God administers His justice. This does not mean that there is any compromise. It means that there must be care in the administration of justice, particularly on matters of life and death.

This same care was intended to underpin all law enforcement in the entire world. All of our countries were intended to be administered according to God's laws and according to His balance of justice and mercy. Where leaders of nations have achieved this over the history of the world, particularly since the Gospel has gone out to the world, their nations have been blessed. Note carefully the serious consequences of blood guilt. Those who murder, are guilty of blood-guilt and if their own life does not pay the penalty for their blood-guilt then the land is considered polluted. This has not changed since the time of Noah (Genesis 9:6-7). It comes from the Covenant God made with Him after the Flood. It is confirmed in the Covenant principles given through Moses, and still applies today. The death of Yeshua on the Cross brought an exchange of life for life – His life given so that we might have eternal life. This, too, is a matter of life and death. Even this, however, does not negate God's principles of justice on this earth. The two criminals who were crucified with Him still suffered the penalty for their crimes even though one was promised eternal life through faith, expressed in his dying moments on the Cross beside Yeshua. Take careful note of what you read today.

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Chapter 36. We complete our reading of Numbers with what might seem to be an odd theme. Moses put everything in order before the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan under the leadership of Joshua, but why should a relatively small matter concerning the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad be the central subject of this last chapter? The answer lies in both the principle and the detail. The principle is that God is concerned with preserving the identity of the Tribes. For all eternity this is so, as we confirm from the Book of Revelation concerning the 144,000. On the one hand He dealt harshly with the Midianites and with those who committed adultery with them when intermarriage took place. On the other hand He shows, through this incident in Chapter 36, that He wants to preserve the inheritance and identity of each of the Tribes. The detail that we read here is also important. Every general principle is maintained through attention to fine detail. The entire universe is kept in order through the interaction of minute atoms and molecules too small for the eye to see. God's Covenant purposes are maintained through attention to the details of the lives of all His people. Take encouragement from this as David did when he wrote Psalm 19. That is how much God cares about our lives if we are His children born again into His Kingdom through faith in Yeshua.

Let us next turn to one of the Prophets. Malachi is an appropriate choice.

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Malachi Chapter 1. The history of Israel can be considered on several levels. If Israel were just any nation we might simply consider her history on this earth, but Israel is also the chosen nation, central to

God's covenant plan. Thus all people are intended to learn eternal truths through studying her history. We have completed four of the five Books of Moses. This has given us a detailed account of the ancient nation of Israel prior to the crossing of the Jordan. We must remember that this is an account of a real people not a fictional story or legend. Indeed, through adoption or physical descent, all members of God's family read their family history in the pages of the Bible. We have considered what God is teaching us through the history of Israel. Of all the descendants of Adam and Eve this nation was chosen so that we might all realize our limitations in a sinful body and a sinful world, so that we might seek salvation through Yeshua HaMashiach. We can weave many paths through the Scriptures to search out God's teaching. Now we have finished Numbers, let us turn to Malachi to develop some of the themes appropriate to Israel's life in the Promised Land, looking ahead, even before we read the account of the conquest of Canaan.

Moses was a Prophet. He knew God face to face. He led the Children of Israel to the borders of Canaan as God instructed. When they crossed over they established the nation first under the Judges and then under the Kings. We will continue to study the history of Israel and to learn lessons from their history, as we read other books of the Bible. We have seen how careful God was to establish His principles of justice and mercy in the nation, but time and again Israel fell away. At such times God sent Prophets to remind the people of God's teaching, and to urge them to maintain their right walk with God. Embedded in the ministry of the Prophets was also another message, namely the vision of the coming Messiah.

Malachi was such a Prophet. We know that God is concerned for the detail of the lives of His people. At the time of Malachi, in every area of life the community had lost its way. In particular, family life was breaking down. Malachi referred to the principles of family life to show Israel how they had fallen a way from fellowship with God. Malachi reminded Israel that they were chosen as God's own special child. Esau had been neglected in comparison to Jacob and his descendants yet, for all God had done for them, they had turned away from Him. This was first identified through the offerings that were being made. Humanly speaking we can understand how Israel would have been tempted to take the least of their flocks for sacrifice – after all they would be burned up: but God looks at the heart, and the motivation behind a poor offering is a sinful heart. Through their poor offerings, Israel demonstrated that they had distanced themselves, spiritually, from God.

We cannot ignore the implications of this in our own acts of worship and sacrifice today. Yeshua is God's perfect sacrifice and if we try to bypass this truth, trying any other means of satisfying God, then we might as well be offering an imperfect sacrifice just as the Israelites were. This applies to the way we remember the Lord's death when we share the bread and wine at the Communion Table, just as much as when Israel offered their sacrifices to God at the Temple. Malachi spoke to Israel concerning their offerings: we remember one perfect offering – Yeshua Himself - who replaces all the sacrifices and offerings made throughout all of Israel's history. We, too, can learn from Malachi.

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Chapter 2. Blessing and Cursing can be very close. God can turn the circumstances of life that were once blessed into something that is cursed. This is what He said would happen to Israel. They distanced themselves from Him as evidenced in their offerings. As a consequence the Priests were no longer ministering as they ought, and the people were not being properly instructed in the teaching of God. One thing followed another. Recall how, at the time of Moses, many Israelites intermarried with the Midianites, thus committing spiritual adultery with the gods of Midian. Now, here again, at the time of Malachi, spiritual adultery is taking place. This followed on from the way husbands were neglecting

their wives. They neglected their wives and they also committed adultery with false gods. Divorce in the families of Israel was paralleled with a betrayal of God, who was like a husband to Israel. God proclaimed that He hates divorce and it is for this reason. It is a result of the sinful tendency of the heart to betray vows that are intended to bind us together with God forever. Paul the Apostle reminds us of this principle in Ephesians 5. Marriage at the human level is an exact parallel and training ground to our marriage with God. Malachi was sent to remind Israel of this. Israel was betrothed to God through Covenant in the wilderness and was now acting like a harlot.

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## Day 7

### A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

We have studied deep and detailed issues in the Book of Numbers and it will be good to pause to reflect on these a little more today. As part of this reflection we will also complete our readings from the Prophet Malachi. Malachi spoke to Israel many years after the time of Moses but it is useful to look ahead to the time when God's people put themselves into difficulty with God again, despite all that they learned in the wilderness years.

Malachi Chapter 3. The Israelites were in difficulty because they had turned away from God. This began when they did not take seriously enough the commandments God had given them for sacrifice and offerings. We recall the details of this given by Moses on the banks of the Jordan. Israel did not know the future God had in store for them, so they slipped away. Malachi reminded them that God would, one day, come more fully among them. Chapter 3 contains the prophecy concerning the coming of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Yeshua. This also points to when Yeshua will come, for a second time. There were days of preparing the way at the time of John the Baptist and there will be days of preparation prior to Yeshua's return at the end of the age. Therefore, before the days of judgement on the whole earth, Israel must return to God and walk with Him. He has a wonderful future in store for His people, but they must persevere on this earth to obtain that inheritance. At the time of Malachi, the symptom of their departure from God was in their blemished offerings, so now they were called back to Him through the restoration of their offerings. This was a call to a fresh start, first at the Altar of Sacrifice and then, as a consequence of the heart change, through the restoration of their nation by means of God's blessings.

This appeal from Malachi brought godly fear among those who understood the message, and they covenanted together to make a fresh start with God. They remembered who He is and returned to Him with true reverence and awe.

This is the sort of restoration that we need in our church congregations from time to time, especially as the days draw near for the Lord's return. Like Israel fell away, so can we, into worldliness, compromise, and ultimately to following false gods. The symptoms will be the same for us as it was for them, namely in the breakdown of family life and society in general. We are at the edge of a type of Jordan, waiting for Yeshua to lead us into the Eternal Kingdom.

Chapter 4. Here is the prophecy concerning both the first and second coming of Yeshua. Each time of His coming was to be preceded by a prophetic voice calling to repentance and preparation. This happened when John the Baptist preached to the crowds at the Jordan River. Repentant sinners, called to the Jordan for a baptism of repentance, were intended to remember Israel's first crossing of the Jordan at the time of Moses and Joshua. It will happen again in the last days prior to the Lord's return, not at the banks of the physical river, but in a spiritual parallel.

Malachi called Israel to remember what God taught them through Moses and maintain their walk and witness on this earth. This same message comes to us in our own generation to be interpreted afresh in light of Yeshua's first coming. Notice that the message of Malachi is given in terms of family stability (hearts of fathers to children and children to fathers). When there is family stability then the Kingdom of God is in order. Our family life truly reflects and typifies the relationship between our Father in Heaven and His children on earth. He is both like a Father to us and like a husband to us. Both these family metaphors speak of our relationship with Him.

Moses led the family of God to the Jordan River and instructed them about family life. The Prophecy of Malachi is a call to return to God so that His broken family might be restored. God is building a family through our families!

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