JOSHUA

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Into the land God promised: the Jordan crossed, the walls of Jericho, the sun standing still, and a people called to choose

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Joshua. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

I have had to step into new things many times: at work, at church, as a husband and as a dad. None of those came with a manual. Joshua was told to be strong and courageous because God would be with him. That promise has carried me through every one of those roles.

Joshua is the book of the promise kept. For more than four hundred years God's people had held on to His word to Abraham that his seed would have the land of Canaan. In Joshua they finally cross the Jordan River and go in. The book has some of the best-known stories in the Bible: Rahab and the scarlet cord, the walls of Jericho, the sun standing still. It also has hard chapters of war and judgment, long lists of borders and towns, and a closing call to choose whom we will serve. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Joshua. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Joshua. It picks up the day after Deuteronomy ends. Moses has died on Mount Nebo, and Israel is camped on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. Everything in Joshua rests on what came before it: God's promise of the land to Abraham (Genesis 12:7; 15:18-21), His warning that He would wait until the sin of the Amorites was full (Genesis 15:16), the failure of the first generation at Kadesh (Numbers 14), and the commands Moses gave about the land and its people (Deuteronomy 7; 20). If we read the battles of Joshua

without that context, we will misunderstand them. Read in context, they are God keeping His word and bringing His judgment on nations He had waited on for centuries.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Joshua is history, and this study takes it at its word: God really did stop the Jordan River, bring down the walls of Jericho, and give Israel the land He had sworn to their fathers. The New Testament reads it the same way. Hebrews says that by faith the walls of Jericho fell and that by faith Rahab did not perish (Hebrews 11:30-31), and Stephen spoke of the fathers who brought the tabernacle into the land "with Joshua" (Acts 7:45). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- People and Places: in chapters that bring in many new names, a short list explaining the people, places, and terms.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Some chapters of Joshua are long lists: the kings Israel defeated (chapter 12), the borders and towns of each tribe (chapters 13 to 19), and the cities of the Levites (chapter 21). In those chapters I group the verses into larger sections and say what the list is, why God put it there, and what it teaches us, rather than commenting on every name.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Joshua has 24 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: twenty-four weeks, or about six months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- A faster pace of about nineteen weeks: take the list chapters two at a time (chapters 12 and 13, 15 and 16, 17 and 18, 19 and 20, and 21 with 22) and the rest one at a time.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. In the list chapters you may want to read only the first and last verses of each

section aloud. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Joshua are hard to read. Rahab lies to protect the spies (2:4-6). The cities of Canaan are put under the ban, devoted to destruction, men and women, young and old (6:21; 8:24-26; 10:28-40; 11:10-14), and some people will ask how a loving God could command that. Achan is stoned and burned along with his household (7:24-26), and defeated kings are put to death and hanged on trees (8:29; 10:26). I do not skip these passages, and I try to explain them honestly in their context: God's judgment after long patience, a one-time command for that time and that land, and never a pattern for anyone today. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Some people in your group may have seen war, lost family to violence, or been hurt by people who used God's name to justify cruelty. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Joshua. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Joshua

Joshua is the sixth book of the Bible. It follows the five books of Moses and opens the part of the Old Testament we call the historical books, which run from Joshua through Esther. In the Hebrew Bible it is the first of the Former Prophets, the books that tell Israel's history from God's point of view. The book is named for its main person, Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' helper and the man God chose to lead Israel into the land.

In Israel's history, Joshua covers the time from the crossing of the Jordan to Joshua's death, roughly twenty-five to thirty years. Exodus told how God brought Israel out of Egypt. Numbers told how the generation that came out refused to enter the land and died in the wilderness. Deuteronomy gave Moses' last sermons to their children on the plains of Moab. Joshua tells how those children crossed over, took the land, and divided it among the twelve tribes. Judges picks up the story after Joshua dies.

The theme of Joshua is God's faithfulness to His promise. God had sworn to give Abraham's seed the land, and in Joshua He does it. Near the end of the book, after the land has been divided, the writer stops to say so plainly:

Joshua 21:45 (SLB)

"Not a word fell of every good word which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel; everything came ***to pass***."

Alongside that theme runs a second one. God gives the land, but Israel must take it by faith and obedience. When they trust Him, the walls fall. When one man hides sin in his tent, the army runs from a small town. Joshua's last words call the people to choose: "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (24:15).

Joshua has 24 chapters and 658 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Entering the Land (chapters 1 to 5)

- Chapter 1: The LORD Commissions Joshua
- Chapter 2: Rahab and the Spies
- Chapter 3: Crossing the Jordan
- Chapter 4: The Twelve Memorial Stones
- Chapter 5: Circumcision, Passover, and the Commander of the LORD's Army

Part Two: Taking the Land (chapters 6 to 12)

- Chapter 6: The Fall of Jericho
- Chapter 7: Achan's Sin and the Defeat at Ai
- Chapter 8: The Capture of Ai and the Law at Mount Ebal
- Chapter 9: The Gibeonite Deception

- Chapter 10: The Sun Stands Still and the Southern Campaign
- Chapter 11: The Northern Campaign
- Chapter 12: The Kings Israel Defeated

Part Three: Dividing the Land (chapters 13 to 21)

- Chapter 13: The Land Still to Be Taken and the Tribes East of the Jordan
- Chapter 14: Caleb Receives Hebron
- Chapter 15: The Inheritance of Judah
- Chapter 16: The Inheritance of Ephraim
- Chapter 17: The Inheritance of Manasseh
- Chapter 18: The Tent at Shiloh and the Lot of Benjamin
- Chapter 19: The Remaining Tribes and Joshua's Inheritance
- Chapter 20: The Cities of Refuge
- Chapter 21: The Cities of the Levites

Part Four: Holding the Land (chapters 22 to 24)

- Chapter 22: The Altar by the Jordan
- Chapter 23: Joshua's Farewell to the Leaders
- Chapter 24: The Covenant Renewed at Shechem

Where this book points to Christ: Joshua's own name is the first pointer. In Hebrew it is Yehoshua, which means the LORD saves. Its shorter form, Yeshua, is the name the angel gave to Mary's Son, Jesus, "for He Himself will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Joshua led God's people into the land Moses could not bring them into. Hebrews says that Joshua's rest was not the final rest, and that "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:8-9), a rest we enter by faith in Christ. Rahab, the Canaanite woman saved by faith, became the mother of Boaz and is named in the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Many Bible teachers believe the commander of the army of the LORD, who met Joshua near Jericho and received his worship (5:13-15), was the Son of God Himself before He was born in Bethlehem. Many have also seen the scarlet cord in Rahab's window as a picture of the blood that saves, like the blood on the doorposts at Passover (Exodus 12:13). The New Testament does not name that picture, so I hold it lightly.

Background of the Book

Author: The book does not name one author for the whole, but it says that Joshua wrote at least part of it: "Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God" (24:26). Jewish tradition holds that Joshua wrote most of the book, and that others, likely Eleazar the priest and his son Phinehas, added the account of Joshua's death and burial (24:29-33). Some lines read like an eyewitness. The writer speaks of the land the LORD swore "to give to us" (5:6), and he says Rahab "has dwelt in the midst of Israel to this day" (6:25), which means she was still alive when it was written. Many modern critical scholars believe Joshua was put together centuries later, in the time of the kings or the exile, as part of a longer history running from Deuteronomy through Kings. I take the book at its word: it presents itself as a record made close to the events, and the New Testament treats it as true history.

Who it was written to: The people of Israel, the generation that took the land and the generations after them. Joshua reminded them that the land was a gift from God, that every promise He made had come true, and that they would keep the land only by staying faithful to Him.

Setting: The book opens on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River across from Jericho. After the crossing, Israel's base camp is at Gilgal near Jericho. From there Joshua moves west into the central hill country (Jericho, Ai, and the covenant at Mount Ebal near Shechem), then south (the five kings, Lachish, Hebron, Debir), then north (Hazor and the kings of Galilee). The tabernacle later stands at Shiloh in the hill country of Ephraim (18:1), and the book ends with a covenant meeting at Shechem.

When it was written: Most of it during Joshua's lifetime or soon after, in the late 1400s or early 1300s B.C. The note that Rahab was still living (6:25) and that the Jebusites still held Jerusalem (15:63), which David took about 1000 B.C., both fit an early date.

When the events happened: Most conservative scholars date the exodus about 1446 B.C., based on 1 Kings 6:1, and the crossing of the Jordan forty years later, about 1406 B.C. Caleb's words in 14:7-10 show that the main wars took about seven years. Joshua died at 110 years old (24:29), probably some twenty years after that. Some scholars place the exodus and conquest in the 1200s B.C. instead.

Joshua the man: Joshua was born a slave in Egypt. His name was first Hoshea, and Moses renamed him Joshua (Numbers 13:16). He led Israel's army against Amalek (Exodus 17:9), served as Moses' helper on Mount Sinai and at the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:11), and was one of the twelve spies. He and Caleb alone trusted that God would give them the land (Numbers 14:6-9). God chose him to follow Moses, and Moses laid hands on him before the people (Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9).

The conquest and the ban: The hardest part of Joshua is the command to devote the cities of Canaan to destruction. The Hebrew word is herem, something set apart to the LORD and given over completely to Him, usually by destruction. I deal with it where it comes up in the text, mainly

in chapters 6, 10 and 11. In short, I believe Scripture presents it as God's judgment on nations whose sin He had waited on for more than four hundred years (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:4-5), commanded once, for that time and that land, by God Himself through His prophet Moses. It was never a pattern for any nation, church or person after that, and it is not a pattern for us today.

Purpose: To show that God keeps His promises, that He gave Israel the land He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that His people succeed by trusting and obeying His Word (1:8). Joshua also warns that hidden sin brings defeat, that partial obedience leaves enemies in the land, and that every generation must choose for itself to serve the LORD.

Chapter 1: The LORD Commissions Joshua

Scripture

1:1-9 And it was after the death of Moses, the servant of the LORD, and the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, saying, "Moses My servant has died. And now, arise, pass over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am about to give to them, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot will tread, to you I have given it, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon and to the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea ***toward*** the going in of the sun, will be your territory. No man will stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you; I will not let you go, and I will not forsake you. Be strong and be bold, for you, you will cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them. Only be strong and be very bold, to take care to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn aside from it ***to the*** right or left, so that you may prosper in every ***place*** where you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall meditate on it by day and night, so that you may take care to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your ways successful, and then you will prosper. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and be bold. Do not be terrified, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God ***is*** with you in every ***place*** where you go."

1:10-18 And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are about to pass over this Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD your God is about to give to you to take possession of it.'" And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, saying, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is giving you rest, and He will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave to you beyond the Jordan; and you shall pass over arrayed for battle before your brothers, all the mighty men of valor, and you shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as ***He has*** to you, and they also take possession of the land which the LORD your God is about to give to them. And you shall return to the land of your possession and take possession of it, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave to you beyond the Jordan, ***toward*** the rising of the sun." And they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and to every ***place*** where you send us we will go. According to all that we listened to Moses, so we will listen to you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, just as He was with Moses. Every man who rebels against your mouth and does not obey your words in all that you command him shall be put to death. Only be strong and be bold."

Chapter 1 Preview

Moses is dead. For forty years he had led Israel, spoken with God face to face, and carried the weight of a stubborn people. Now he is buried in Moab, and Israel is camped on the east bank of the Jordan River with the promised land in sight. The question hanging over the camp is simple: what now?

God answers it in the first nine verses. He speaks to Joshua, Moses' helper, and gives him the land, His promise to be with him, and one command repeated three times: be strong and be bold. The secret of that strength is not Joshua's skill as a soldier but the book of the law, kept in his mouth and his heart. In the rest of the chapter Joshua gives his first orders. The people get ready to cross in three days, and the two and a half tribes who already have land east of the Jordan promise to fight alongside their brothers until the job is done.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1-2 *And it was after the death of Moses, the servant of the LORD, and the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, saying, "Moses My servant has died. And now, arise, pass over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am about to give to them, to the sons of Israel.*

"And it was after the death of Moses." The book opens by tying itself to the end of Deuteronomy. Moses had died on Mount Nebo at 120 years old (Deuteronomy 34:5-7). Israel mourned him thirty days. Now the story moves on.

Moses is called "the servant of the LORD." That is the highest title the Bible gives any person. Joshua is called "the minister of Moses," his helper or attendant. Joshua had served Moses for forty years, from the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:9) to the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:11). He learned to lead by serving first.

God's first words are blunt: "Moses My servant has died. And now, arise." The great leader was gone, but God was not. The work did not die with Moses. That is still true. God's servants come and go, and we grieve them, but the LORD Himself carries His work forward. Joshua was to "pass over this Jordan" with all the people into the land God was "about to give" them.

1:3-4 *Every place on which the sole of your foot will tread, to you I have given it, just as I spoke to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon and to the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea* ***toward*** *the going in of the sun, will be your territory.*

"Every place on which the sole of your foot will tread, to you I have given it." God speaks as if it is already done. The land was a gift, settled in heaven. But Israel still had to walk into it. The gift was received one step at a time. That is how God's promises usually work in our lives too. He gives, and we step out in faith and take hold of what He has given.

Verse 4 gives the full borders: from the wilderness in the south to Lebanon in the north, from the great river Euphrates in the east to "the Great Sea," the Mediterranean, in the west. This is the same land God promised Abraham (Genesis 15:18). Israel never held all of it except, for a time, under David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21). I believe God has not forgotten this promise. He swore it to Abraham's seed, and the prophets say He will yet bring Israel back to the land and keep every word (Ezekiel 36:24-28; Romans 11:28-29).

1:5 *No man will stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you; I will not let you go, and I will not forsake you.*

"No man will stand before you all the days of your life." Joshua would face kings, walled cities, giants and chariots. None of them would be able to stand against him. Why? Not because Joshua was great, but because of the next line: "Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you."

Joshua had seen what God did with Moses: the plagues, the Red Sea, the water from the rock. Now God promised the same presence to him. "I will not let you go, and I will not forsake you." Moses had told Joshua the same thing in front of all Israel (Deuteronomy 31:6-8). Hebrews 13:5 takes this promise and gives it to every believer: God Himself has said He will never leave us or forsake us. The promise to Joshua became a promise to the church. If you belong to Christ, you can stand on it today.

1:6-7 *Be strong and be bold, for you, you will cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them. Only be strong and be very bold, to take care to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. Do not turn aside from it* ***to the*** *right or left, so that you may prosper in every* ***place*** *where you go.*

"Be strong and be bold." God says it three times in this chapter (1:6, 7, 9), and the people say it back to Joshua a fourth time (1:18). Why so often? Because Joshua needed it. He was stepping into the shoes of the greatest prophet Israel had known, and he was about to lead a nation into war. Fear was a real danger.

The first reason to be strong is the promise: "you will cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers." Joshua's job was to lead the people into what God had already sworn to give.

The second time, God adds a condition: "Only be strong and be very bold, to take care to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you." The courage God wanted most was not courage on the battlefield. It was courage to obey. It takes more courage to do exactly what God says, without turning "right or left," than to swing a sword. Many leaders have won battles and lost their way. Success "in every place where you go" was tied to staying on the narrow road of God's Word.

1:8 *This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, and you shall meditate on it by day and night, so that you may take care to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your ways successful, and then you will prosper.*

This verse is the heart of the chapter. "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth." The book of the law is the written Law that Moses had just finished (Deuteronomy 31:9, 24-26). God's Word was to be on Joshua's lips, in his conversation, and in his decisions.

"And you shall meditate on it by day and night." To meditate in the Bible does not mean to empty your mind. The Hebrew word has the idea of muttering or speaking under your breath. It means reading God's Word, thinking it over, saying it to yourself, and turning it over again and again

until it shapes the way you think. Psalm 1:2 uses the same words for the blessed man who delights in the law of the LORD.

The goal is not just knowing. It is doing: "so that you may take care to do according to all that is written in it." Then, God says, "you will make your ways successful, and then you will prosper." This is not a promise of money. It is a promise that a life built on obeying God's Word will reach the goal God has for it. Joshua was a general, but God did not give him a battle plan first. He gave him a Bible. That is still the order for us.

1:9 *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and be bold. Do not be terrified, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God **is** with you in every **place** where you go."*

"Have I not commanded you?" God reminds Joshua that this is an order, not a suggestion. Courage is a command. Fear is natural, but God does not leave us to be ruled by it.

"Do not be terrified, and do not be dismayed." The reason is the same one God gave in verse 5: "for the LORD your God is with you in every place where you go." Courage in the Bible is never built on thinking well of ourselves. It is built on knowing who is with us.

Jesus left His disciples with the same promise when He sent them out into the world: "I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Whatever God has called you to, you do not go alone.

1:10-11 *And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, saying, 'Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are about to pass over this Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land which the LORD your God is about to give to you to take possession of it.'"*

Joshua wasted no time. He "commanded the officers of the people." These officers were the men who kept order among the tribes and passed along instructions (Deuteronomy 1:15; 16:18).

The order was plain: "Prepare provisions for yourselves, for within three days you are about to pass over this Jordan." The manna was still falling (it would stop in 5:12), but the people were to gather food for the march as well. Notice that Joshua believed God before he saw anything. The Jordan was at flood stage (3:15), and there was no bridge and no boat. Yet Joshua set the date. Faith acts on God's word before the way is open.

Joshua also repeats God's words: they would "take possession of the land which the LORD your God is about to give to you." The land was God's gift and Israel's task at the same time.

1:12-15 *And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh Joshua said, saying, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is giving you rest, and He will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land which Moses gave to you beyond the Jordan; and you shall pass over arrayed for battle before your brothers, all the mighty men of valor, and you shall help them, until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as* ***He has*** *to you, and they also take possession of the land which the LORD your God is about to give to them. And you shall return to the land of your possession and take possession of it, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave to you beyond the Jordan,* ***toward*** *the rising of the sun."*

Next Joshua turned to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh. These tribes had asked Moses for the rich grazing land east of the Jordan, the land taken from Sihon and Og. Moses agreed on one condition: their fighting men had to cross over and fight with the other tribes until the whole land was taken (Numbers 32).

Joshua reminded them of that promise. "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you." Their families and livestock could stay behind, but "all the mighty men of valor" were to "pass over arrayed for battle before your brothers" and help them.

Only when "the LORD gives rest to your brothers" could they go home. Rest is a key word in Joshua. It means peace in the land, freedom from enemies, a settled home under God's care. These tribes already had their rest. They were not allowed to enjoy it while their brothers were still fighting. That is a lesson for the church. When God has given us rest, we owe it to our brothers and sisters to help them in their battles, not to sit back and relax.

1:16-18 *And they answered Joshua, saying, "All that you have commanded us we will do, and to every* ***place*** *where you send us we will go. According to all that we listened to Moses, so we will listen to you. Only may the LORD your God be with you, just as He was with Moses. Every man who rebels against your mouth and does not obey your words in all that you command him shall be put to death. Only be strong and be bold."*

The eastern tribes answered with a full pledge: "All that you have commanded us we will do, and to every place where you send us we will go." They would listen to Joshua the way they had listened to Moses.

That was a generous promise, and a little bit of an awkward one, since Israel had not always listened to Moses very well. But they added a wise prayer: "Only may the LORD your God be with you, just as He was with Moses." They knew Joshua was only as good as God's presence with him. A wise follower prays for his leaders.

Verse 18 sounds harsh to us: anyone who rebelled against Joshua's word "shall be put to death." Israel was a nation at war under God's direct rule. Rebellion against the leader God had appointed was rebellion against God, and in wartime it could destroy the whole army. Then they ended by saying back to Joshua the very words God had said to him: "Only be strong and be bold." God's encouragement often comes to us twice, once from His Word and once through His people.

Chapter 1 Summary

After Moses died, the LORD spoke to Joshua and told him to lead Israel across the Jordan into the land He was giving them. God promised that every place they walked would be theirs, from the wilderness to Lebanon and from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean, and that no one would stand against Joshua, because God would be with him as He had been with Moses. Three times God told Joshua to be strong and bold, and He tied Joshua's success to keeping the book of the law in his mouth, meditating on it day and night, and doing all that it said. Joshua ordered the people to prepare to cross in three days. He reminded the Reubenites, Gadites and half tribe of Manasseh of their promise to fight with their brothers until the LORD gave them rest, and they pledged to obey Joshua as they had obeyed Moses, praying that the LORD would be with him.

People and Places

- Joshua son of Nun: Moses' helper for forty years, one of the two faithful spies, now Israel's leader. His name means the LORD saves.
- The Jordan: the river running from the Sea of Galilee south to the Dead Sea, the eastern border of Canaan.
- Reubenites, Gadites and the half tribe of Manasseh: the tribes that received land east of the Jordan from Moses (Numbers 32).
- Lebanon and the Euphrates: the northern and northeastern limits of the land God promised.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. What did God tell Joshua to do after Moses died? (1:1-2)

2. What did God promise about every place Joshua's foot would tread, and what borders did He give? (1:3-4)

3. What promise did God make in verse 5, and where does the New Testament give that same promise to believers? (1:5; Hebrews 13:5)

4. How many times in this chapter is Joshua told to be strong and bold, and what was the main thing he needed courage to do? (1:6-9, 18)

5. What three things does verse 8 say Joshua was to do with the book of the law? (1:8)

6. What did Joshua command the people to do, and how does this show his faith? (1:10-11)

7. What had the eastern tribes promised Moses, and how did they answer Joshua? (1:12-18)

8. Joshua stepped into a role after a great leader died. Have you ever had to carry on after someone you relied on was gone? What did God teach you then?

9. What would it look like for you to meditate on God's Word by day and night this week?

10. Where do you need courage right now? How does knowing that the LORD is with you in every place change the way you face it?

Chapter 2: Rahab and the Spies

Scripture

2:1-14 And Joshua the son of Nun sent from Shittim two men ***as*** spies secretly, saying, "Go, see the land, and Jericho." And they went, and they came ***to*** the house of a woman, a prostitute, and her name ***was*** Rahab, and they lay down there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, saying, "Look, men have come here tonight from the sons of Israel to spy out the land." And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who came to you, who came into your house, for they have come to spy out all the land." And the woman took the two men and hid them. And she said, "Yes, the men came to me, and I did not know where they ***were*** from. And the gate was ***about*** to shut at dark, and the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue after them quickly, for you will overtake them." And she had brought them up to the roof and had hidden them among the stalks of flax that were arranged by her on the roof. And the men pursued after them ***on*** the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And they shut the gate after the pursuers had gone out after them. And they had not yet lain down, and she went up to them on the roof. And she said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out from Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who ***were*** beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And we heard, and our heart melted, and there did not rise up any more spirit in any man because of you; for the LORD your God, He ***is*** God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. And now, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have done steadfast love with you, that you also will do steadfast love with the house of my father, and give me a sign of faithfulness, and keep alive my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters and all who ***belong*** to them, and deliver our souls from death." And the men said to her, "Our soul ***is*** in place of yours to die, if you do not tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD gives us the land, that we will do steadfast love and faithfulness with you."

2:15-24 And she let them down by the rope through the window, for her house ***was*** in the wall of the city wall, and she ***was*** dwelling in the city wall. And she said to them, "Go to the hill country, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days until the pursuers return, and afterward you may go on your way." And the men said to her, "We ***will be*** free from this oath of yours which you have made us swear. Look, we are about to come into the land. You shall bind this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all the house of your father. And it shall be ***that*** anyone who goes out from the doors of your house to the outside, his blood ***will be*** on his head, and we ***will be*** free; and anyone who is with you in the house, his blood ***will be*** on our head if a hand is on him. And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you have made us swear." And she said, "According to your words, so ***let*** it ***be***." And she sent them away, and they went. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window. And they went and came to the hill country, and they remained there three days until the pursuers returned. And the pursuers searched all along the way and did not find ***them***. And the two men returned and came down from the hill country, and they passed over and came to Joshua the son

of Nun, and they recounted to him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hand; and also all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us."

Chapter 2 Preview

Before Israel crosses the Jordan, Joshua sends two men to spy out the land and the city of Jericho. They end up at the house of a prostitute named Rahab, whose home is built into the city wall. The king hears about it and sends for them, but Rahab hides them on her roof and sends the king's men off on a false trail.

Then this Canaanite woman says something no one in Jericho had dared to say out loud. She knows the LORD has given Israel the land, and she confesses that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. She asks the spies to spare her family, and they give her a sign: a scarlet cord tied in her window. Rahab is one of the great surprises of the Bible. The New Testament names her as a woman of faith (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25), and Matthew lists her in the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). God's mercy reached into the city under judgment and pulled out a woman everyone else would have written off.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *And Joshua the son of Nun sent from Shittim two men **as** spies secretly, saying, "Go, see the land, and Jericho." And they went, and they came **to** the house of a woman, a prostitute, and her name **was** Rahab, and they lay down there.*

Joshua sent two spies "from Shittim," Israel's camp on the plains of Moab, a few miles east of the Jordan. He sent them "secretly." Forty years earlier Joshua had been one of twelve spies, and the report of the ten had turned the whole nation back in fear (Numbers 13-14). This time he sent only two, and he kept it quiet.

"Go, see the land, and Jericho." Jericho was the first city in Israel's path, a walled town near the fords of the Jordan, guarding the way up into the hill country.

The men "came to the house of a woman, a prostitute, and her name was Rahab." Some have tried to soften this and call her an innkeeper. The Hebrew word is the normal word for a prostitute, and the New Testament calls her the same thing in Greek (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). A house like hers would have been a place where strangers came and went without much notice, which is likely why the spies went there. Scripture does not hide what Rahab was. That makes what God did with her all the more wonderful.

2:2-3 *And it was told to the king of Jericho, saying, "Look, men have come here tonight from the sons of Israel to spy out the land." And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who came to you, who came into your house, for they have come to spy out all the land."*

The spies were not as secret as they hoped. Someone told "the king of Jericho." Canaan was made up of many small city-kingdoms, each with its own king. The king knew exactly why these men had come: "they have come to spy out all the land."

He sent orders to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you." Rahab now had to choose. Turning them in would keep her safe with her own people and her king. Hiding them could cost her her life.

2:4-7 *And the woman took the two men and hid them. And she said, "Yes, the men came to me, and I did not know where they **were** from. And the gate was **about** to shut at dark, and the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue after them quickly, for you will overtake them." And she had brought them up to the roof and had hidden them among the stalks of flax that were arranged by her on the roof. And the men pursued after them **on** the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And they shut the gate after the pursuers had gone out after them.*

Rahab had already hidden the men. Then she told the king's messengers that the men had come but she did not know where they were from, that they had left at dark when the gate was about to shut, and that if the soldiers hurried they would catch them. In fact the spies were up on her flat roof, hidden "among the stalks of flax" laid out there to dry. Flax was used to make linen, and its stalks were spread on roofs in the sun.

The king's men believed her and went off "on the road to the Jordan, to the fords," the shallow crossing places. The city gate was shut behind them.

What about Rahab's lie? Scripture records it, but it never praises it. Hebrews 11:31 praises her faith, and James 2:25 praises her for receiving the messengers and sending them out by another way. Neither one praises her deceit. Rahab was a new believer from a pagan city, and she did not yet know God's ways well. God honored the faith in her heart, even though her way of protecting the spies was not perfect. Bible teachers have long disagreed about whether lying is ever right to save a life. I would say this much: God did not need Rahab's lie, and we should not build a rule for ourselves on it. What God praised was her trust in Him and her courage to side with His people.

2:8-11 *And they had not yet lain down, and she went up to them on the roof. And she said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out from Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who **were** beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And we heard, and our heart melted, and there did not rise up any more spirit in any man because of you; for the LORD your God, He **is** God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.*

Before the spies lay down for the night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. Her words are a confession of faith.

"I know that the LORD has given you the land." She did not say she hoped or guessed. She knew. She also told them what they needed to hear: "the dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you." Forty years earlier the ten spies had said Israel looked like grasshoppers to the people of Canaan (Numbers 13:33). In truth the Canaanites had been afraid of Israel the whole time.

Why were they afraid? Because of what they had heard. The news of the Red Sea, forty years old, still traveled. So did the recent defeat of Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan (Numbers 21:21-35). The whole city heard the same news Rahab heard. They all melted with fear. But only Rahab turned to the God who had done these things.

Then comes her confession: "for the LORD your God, He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath." That is almost word for word what Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 4:39. A Canaanite woman who likely grew up worshiping Baal, the storm god the Canaanites served, had come to the same faith as Moses. She did not just fear Israel's God. She believed He was the only true God.

That is the difference between fear and faith. Everyone in Jericho had heard. Everyone was afraid. Only one household believed and acted on it. Hearing the truth about God is not enough. We must turn to Him.

2:12-14 *And now, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have done steadfast love with you, that you also will do steadfast love with the house of my father, and give me a sign of faithfulness, and keep alive my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters and all who **belong** to them, and deliver our souls from death." And the men said to her, "Our soul **is** in place of yours to die, if you do not tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD gives us the land, that we will do steadfast love and faithfulness with you."*

Rahab asked the spies to "swear to me by the LORD." She used God's covenant name, the LORD, not a general word for a god. She asked them to do "steadfast love" with her family, as she had done with them. The Hebrew word is hesed, which means loyal, faithful love, the kind of love that keeps its promises. She asked for "a sign of faithfulness" and for life for her father, mother, brothers, sisters and all who belonged to them.

Notice that Rahab did not only think of herself. She wanted her whole family saved. That is what real faith does. When we come to know the LORD, we want the people we love to know Him too.

The spies swore: "Our soul is in place of yours to die, if you do not tell this business of ours." They put their own lives on the line for hers. They promised that when the LORD gave them the land, they would deal with her in "steadfast love and faithfulness."

2:15-16 *And she let them down by the rope through the window, for her house **was** in the wall of the city wall, and she **was** dwelling in the city wall. And she said to them, "Go to the hill country, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days until the pursuers return, and afterward you may go on your way."*

Rahab's house was built "in the wall of the city wall." Archaeologists have found that some ancient cities had houses built into or between their double walls. This let Rahab do what she did next: she let the men down "by the rope through the window," outside the city.

She gave them good advice. Go "to the hill country," the rough land west of Jericho, not east to the Jordan where the soldiers were searching. Hide there "three days" until the search was over. The hills west of Jericho are full of caves and ravines, a good place to hide.

2:17-21 *And the men said to her, "We **will be** free from this oath of yours which you have made us swear. Look, we are about to come into the land. You shall bind this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all the house of your father. And it shall be **that** anyone who goes out from the doors of your house to the outside, his blood **will be** on his head, and we **will be** free; and anyone who is with you in the house, his blood **will be** on our head if a hand is on him. And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you have made us swear." And she said, "According to your words, so **let** it **be**." And she sent them away, and they went. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.*

Before they left, the spies spelled out the terms of their oath. "You shall bind this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down." The scarlet cord would mark her house so the army would know to spare it.

She had to "gather to yourself into the house" her whole family. Anyone who went out of the house would be on his own: "his blood will be on his head." Anyone who stayed inside was under the spies' protection.

Many Christians have seen in the scarlet cord a picture of the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts in Egypt (Exodus 12:13). In both cases, a sign of red marked the house, and all who stayed inside under that sign were spared when judgment fell. The New Testament does not draw this picture itself, so I hold it lightly. But the lesson is true either way: safety was found in one place only, inside the house under the sign God's people had given. Our safety from judgment is found in one place only, in Christ, whose blood was shed for us (1 Peter 1:18-19).

"According to your words, so let it be." Rahab sent them away, and she tied the scarlet cord in the window right then. She did not wait for the army to show up. She acted on the promise at once.

2:22-24 *And they went and came to the hill country, and they remained there three days until the pursuers returned. And the pursuers searched all along the way and did not find* ***them****. And the two men returned and came down from the hill country, and they passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they recounted to him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hand; and also all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us."*

The spies did as Rahab said. They hid in the hills three days while the pursuers "searched all along the way" and found nothing. Then they came down, crossed the Jordan, and reported to Joshua.

Their report was the opposite of the report at Kadesh forty years before. "Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hand; and also all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us." They used Rahab's own words. Her testimony became their message to Joshua.

What a turn. Joshua sent spies to scout a military target. God used the trip to save a Canaanite family and to give Israel courage. The two spies came back not with a battle plan but with a report of faith. God was already at work in Jericho before the army ever got there.

Rahab's story does not end here. When Jericho fell, she and her family were saved (6:22-25). She lived among the people of Israel, married Salmon of the tribe of Judah, and became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth. Boaz was the great-grandfather of King David, and from David's line came Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6, 16). A prostitute from a doomed city became an ancestor of the Messiah. There is no one too far gone for God's grace to reach.

Chapter 2 Summary

Joshua secretly sent two spies from Shittim to look over the land and Jericho. They stayed at the house of Rahab, a prostitute whose house was in the city wall. When the king of Jericho sent for them, Rahab hid them under stalks of flax on her roof and sent the king's men off toward the Jordan. She told the spies that the people of Jericho were terrified because of what the LORD had done at the Red Sea and to Sihon and Og, and she confessed that the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. She asked them to swear by the LORD to spare her family. They agreed and told her to tie a scarlet cord in her window and keep her family inside her house. She let them down by a rope, they hid in the hills three days, and they returned to Joshua with the report that the LORD had given them the whole land. The New Testament praises Rahab's faith and lists her in the family line of Jesus.

People and Places

- Shittim: Israel's camp on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan.
- Jericho: an old walled city west of the Jordan, near the river fords, the first city in Israel's path.
- Rahab: a Canaanite prostitute who believed in the LORD, was saved with her family, and became an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

- Sihon and Og: the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan whom Israel defeated (Numbers 21:21-35).

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. Why do you think Joshua sent only two spies, and sent them secretly? (2:1; Numbers 13-14)

2. Where did Rahab hide the spies, and what did she tell the king's men? (2:4-6)

3. What did Rahab say the people of Jericho had heard, and how did it affect them? (2:9-11)

4. What did Rahab confess about the LORD, and how is that different from simply being afraid of Him? (2:11)

5. What did Rahab ask the spies for, and who did she want included? (2:12-13)

6. What was the sign of the scarlet cord, and what were the rules for those in Rahab's house? (2:18-21)

7. How was the spies' report different from the report of the ten spies forty years earlier? (2:24; Numbers 13:31-33)

8. Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 both name Rahab. What does each one praise her for, and what does that teach about faith and works?

9. Rahab wanted her whole family saved. Who in your life do you most want to know the Lord, and how can you pray for them?

10. Rahab's past did not keep her from becoming part of the line of Jesus. Is there anything in your past that makes you think God's grace could not reach you? What does Rahab's story say to that?

Chapter 3: Crossing the Jordan

Scripture

3:1-8 And Joshua rose early in the morning, and they set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, he and all the sons of Israel; and they stayed there before they passed over. And it was at the end of three days, and the officers passed through the midst of the camp. And they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. Only there shall be a distance between you and it, approximately 3,000 feet (2,000 cubits) by measure. Do not draw near to it, so that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed ***this*** way before." And Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders in your midst." And Joshua said to the priests, saying, "Lift up the ark of the covenant and pass over before the people." And they lifted up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel, so that they may know that just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. And you shall command the priests who carry the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'"

3:9-17 And Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Draw near here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God ***is*** in your midst, and ***that*** He will surely dispossess from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites. Look, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is about to pass over before you into the Jordan. And now, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe. And it shall be, when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that are coming down from above, and they shall stand ***in*** one heap." And it was, when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan, with the priests who carried the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who carried the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who carried the ark were dipped in the edge of the waters (and the Jordan is full over all its banks all the days of harvest), and the waters which were coming down from above stood ***still***; they rose up ***in*** one heap very far away from Adam, the city which ***is*** beside Zarethan; and those which were going down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground, until all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan.

Chapter 3 Preview

Israel moves down to the bank of the Jordan and waits three days. The river is in flood, spilling over its banks with the spring harvest. There are no bridges, no boats, and more than a million people with children and livestock. Then the officers give the order: when you see the ark of the covenant move, follow it.

The priests carry the ark into the edge of the water, and the moment their feet touch it, the river stops. The water piles up in one heap far upstream, and the people cross on dry ground while the priests stand in the middle of the riverbed holding the ark. Forty years earlier God parted the Red Sea for their parents. Now He does it again for the children. This chapter is about following God's presence into places we have never been, and trusting Him to open the way when we step out.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *And Joshua rose early in the morning, and they set out from Shittim and came to the Jordan, he and all the sons of Israel; and they stayed there before they passed over.*

"And Joshua rose early in the morning." This is the first of several times Joshua rises early (6:12; 7:16; 8:10). He was not a man who put off what God told him to do.

Israel left Shittim and came down "to the Jordan," a march of several miles. There they camped on the bank "before they passed over." From that camp they could see the river running high and fast. Imagine three days of looking at that water, knowing God had told you to cross it. Sometimes God lets us look hard at the problem before He shows us His answer, so that when He acts, there is no doubt Who did it.

3:2-4 *And it was at the end of three days, and the officers passed through the midst of the camp. And they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. Only there shall be a distance between you and it, approximately 3,000 feet (2,000 cubits) by measure. Do not draw near to it, so that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed* ***this*** *way before."*

"At the end of three days" the officers went through the camp with the orders. "When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it."

The ark of the covenant was a wooden chest covered with gold, about 45 inches long and 27 inches wide and high (Exodus 25:10-22). Inside were the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Its lid, the mercy seat, was where God said He would meet with His people. The ark stood for God's presence and His rule among them. Usually the cloud had led Israel in the wilderness. Now the ark would lead them.

The people had to keep "a distance between you and it," about 3,000 feet, roughly half a mile. Why? Partly out of reverence for God's holiness. But the verse gives the main reason: "so that you may know the way by which you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." With the ark far out in front, everyone in that huge crowd could see where it was going. If they had crowded around it, most people would not have seen anything.

"You have not passed this way before." That is true of every new step in our lives: a new job, a marriage, a loss, old age. We have never been this way. But God has. Our part is to keep our eyes on Him and follow.

3:5-6 *And Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders in your midst." And Joshua said to the priests, saying, "Lift up the ark of the covenant and pass over before the people." And they lifted up the ark of the covenant and went before the people.*

"Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders in your midst." To consecrate means to set yourself apart as holy for God. In Exodus 19:10-15 it meant washing clothes and keeping away from anything that would make them unclean, so they would be ready to meet God. Here it meant the same kind of preparation of body and heart.

Notice the order. First get ready, then God acts. Joshua did not say that the people would do wonders. He said "the LORD will do wonders." Israel's part was to be ready and obedient. The miracle was God's part.

Then Joshua told the priests to lift up the ark and go before the people, and they did. The priests went first. Leaders in God's work are often called to step into the deep water before anyone else does.

3:7-8 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel, so that they may know that just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. And you shall command the priests who carry the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'"*

"This day I will begin to make you great in the eyes of all Israel." God Himself would confirm Joshua as Moses' successor. The people had followed Moses through the Red Sea. Now they would see the same God do the same kind of miracle through Joshua, "so that they may know that just as I was with Moses, I will be with you." God kept the promise He made in 1:5.

Joshua did not have to make himself great. God did it. That is a good lesson for any leader. Authority that God gives does not need to be grabbed.

God's order to the priests was simple: when you reach "the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan." Not just stand on the bank. Walk into the river and stand there.

3:9-11 *And Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Draw near here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God **is** in your midst, and **that** He will surely dispossess from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites. Look, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is about to pass over before you into the Jordan.*

Joshua called the people together: "Draw near here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." Before the miracle came the Word. God wanted them to know what He was about to do, so they would understand why.

"By this you shall know that the living God is in your midst." The gods of Canaan were idols made of wood and stone. Israel's God was alive. The crossing would prove it, and it would also be a pledge: just as surely as God would stop the river, He would "surely dispossess" the seven nations

of Canaan. They are listed here: the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. These were the peoples living in the land, some in the lowlands, some in the hills.

"Look, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth." God was not just Israel's tribal god. He is "the Lord of all the earth." The land of Canaan was His to give, because the whole earth is His.

3:12-13 *And now, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe. And it shall be, when the soles of the feet of the priests who carry the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that are coming down from above, and they shall stand* ***in*** *one heap."*

Joshua told them to choose "twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man for each tribe." He does not say yet what they are for. We find out in chapter 4. Every tribe would have a part in remembering what God did.

Then he told them exactly what would happen. When the priests' feet rested in the water, "the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that are coming down from above, and they shall stand in one heap." Joshua announced the miracle before it happened. That way no one could say it was chance.

3:14-16 *And it was, when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan, with the priests who carried the ark of the covenant before the people, and as those who carried the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who carried the ark were dipped in the edge of the waters (and the Jordan is full over all its banks all the days of harvest), and the waters which were coming down from above stood* ***still****; they rose up* ***in*** *one heap very far away from Adam, the city which* ***is*** *beside Zarethan; and those which were going down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho.*

The people set out, the priests carrying the ark in front. Then comes a small note that makes the miracle much bigger: "the Jordan is full over all its banks all the days of harvest." This was the spring barley harvest, in March or April, when the snow on Mount Hermon melts and the river floods. Normally the Jordan near Jericho can be waded in places. In flood it is wide, deep and fast, and it was out of its banks. God did not choose the easy season. He chose the hardest one.

"The feet of the priests who carried the ark were dipped in the edge of the waters." They had to step into the flood first. The water did not stop and then they stepped in. They stepped in, and then it stopped. Faith often works that way. We take the step God commands before we see the way open.

Then "the waters which were coming down from above stood still; they rose up in one heap very far away from Adam, the city which is beside Zarethan." Adam was a town upstream, likely about eighteen to twenty miles north, and the heap of water stood far up the river in that direction. The water from there down to "the Salt Sea," the Dead Sea, ran off and was cut off, leaving a wide stretch of dry riverbed. "And the people passed over opposite Jericho."

Some have pointed out that in later history, landslides near Adam have dammed the Jordan for hours at a time. Even if God used something like that, the timing is the miracle. The river stopped

at the exact moment the priests' feet touched the water, on the day God said it would, and started again the moment they came out (4:18). That is not chance. That is the living God.

3:17 *And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground, until all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan.*

"And the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan." While the whole nation passed by, the priests stood there holding the ark in the riverbed. The ark was in the place of danger, between the people and the piled-up water. As long as the ark stood there, the water stayed back.

"And all Israel was passing over on dry ground." Not muddy ground. Dry ground, just like the Red Sea (Exodus 14:22). Hundreds of thousands of people, with their children, their animals and their tents, walked across.

God's presence stood in the gap until "all the nation had finished passing over." He did not leave until the last person was across. That is a picture of how God cares for His people. He does not get some of us through. He gets all of us through. Jesus said of those the Father gave Him that He would lose none of them (John 6:39).

Chapter 3 Summary

Joshua and all Israel moved from Shittim to the Jordan and camped there three days. The officers told the people to follow the ark of the covenant when the priests carried it, keeping about half a mile back so everyone could see the way, because they had never gone this way before. Joshua told the people to consecrate themselves because the LORD would do wonders the next day. God told Joshua He would begin to make him great in Israel's eyes, as He had been with Moses. Joshua told the people that the crossing would prove the living God was among them and would drive out the nations of Canaan, and he had them choose twelve men, one from each tribe. Although the Jordan was in flood at harvest time, as soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the river stopped and piled up in a heap far upstream. The priests stood with the ark on dry ground in the middle of the riverbed until the whole nation had crossed over opposite Jericho.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. How long did Israel camp by the Jordan before crossing, and what do you think they thought as they looked at the river? (3:1-2)

2. What was the ark of the covenant, and why were the people told to stay about half a mile behind it? (3:3-4)

3. What did Joshua tell the people to do the day before the crossing, and why? (3:5)

4. What did God say He would begin to do for Joshua that day, and why? (3:7)

5. What two things did Joshua say the crossing would prove? (3:10-11)

6. Why does the note about the Jordan being in flood at harvest time matter? (3:15)

7. When did the water stop, before or after the priests stepped in, and how far upstream did it pile up? (3:15-16)

8. Where did the priests stand while the people crossed, and for how long? (3:17)

9. "You have not passed this way before" (3:4). What new road are you on right now, and what would it mean to keep your eyes on the Lord as you walk it?

10. The priests had to step into the water before it stopped. Is there a step of obedience God is asking you to take before you can see how it will turn out?

Chapter 4: The Twelve Memorial Stones

Scripture

4:1-10 And it was, when all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, and the LORD said to Joshua, saying, "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, and command them, saying, 'Take up for yourselves from here, from the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the feet of the priests stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and set them down in the lodging place where you will stay tonight.'" And Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, "Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and take up for yourselves each man one stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel, so that this may be a sign in your midst. When your sons ask tomorrow, saying, 'What ***are*** these stones to you?' then you shall say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over into the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' And these stones shall be a memorial to the sons of Israel forever." And the sons of Israel did so, just as Joshua had commanded, and they took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place and set them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant stood, and they have been there to this day. And the priests who carried the ark ***were*** standing in the middle of the Jordan until every thing was finished which the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. And the people hurried and passed over.

4:11-24 And it was, when all the people had finished passing over, and the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, before the people. And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of Manasseh passed over arrayed for battle before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them. About forty thousand armed ***men*** of war passed over before the LORD for battle to the plains of Jericho. On that day the LORD made Joshua great in the eyes of all Israel, and they feared him just as they had feared Moses all the days of his life. And the LORD said to Joshua, saying, "Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony, that they come up from the Jordan." And Joshua commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." And it was, as the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the middle of the Jordan, ***that*** the soles of the feet of the priests were drawn out to the dry ground, and the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and went as before over all its banks. And the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the edge of the east of Jericho. And these twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan Joshua set up at Gilgal. And he said to the sons of Israel, saying, "When your sons ask their fathers tomorrow, saying, 'What ***are*** these stones?' then you shall make known to your sons, saying, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had passed over, just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it ***is*** mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God all the days."

Chapter 4 Preview

Chapter 3 told of the crossing. Chapter 4 tells how God made sure it would never be forgotten. While the priests still stood in the riverbed, twelve men, one from each tribe, picked up twelve stones from the place where the priests' feet stood and carried them to the first camp in the land. Joshua set up another twelve stones in the middle of the river itself. The stones were for the children: when your sons ask what these stones mean, tell them what the LORD did.

The chapter also tells us that the eastern tribes kept their word and crossed armed for battle, that God made Joshua great in the eyes of the people, and that the moment the priests stepped out of the riverbed the Jordan came rushing back. Israel camped at Gilgal, and Joshua explained why God did all this: so that all the peoples of the earth would know the LORD's hand is mighty, and so that Israel would fear Him forever.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-3 *And it was, when all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan, and the LORD said to Joshua, saying, "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from each tribe, and command them, saying, 'Take up for yourselves from here, from the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the feet of the priests stood firm, twelve stones, and carry them over with you, and set them down in the lodging place where you will stay tonight.'"*

"When all the nation had finished passing over the Jordan," God spoke to Joshua again. Joshua had already had the twelve men chosen (3:12). Now God gave them their job.

"Take up for yourselves from here, from the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the feet of the priests stood firm, twelve stones." These were not stones from the riverbank. They came from the exact spot where God's power had held back the river, stones that should have been underwater. They were to carry them to "the lodging place where you will stay tonight," their first camp in the promised land.

4:4-7 *And Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the sons of Israel, one man from each tribe. And Joshua said to them, "Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan, and take up for yourselves each man one stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel, so that this may be a sign in your midst. When your sons ask tomorrow, saying, 'What **are** these stones to you?' then you shall say to them, 'Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over into the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.' And these stones shall be a memorial to the sons of Israel forever."*

Joshua called the twelve men and sent them back out "before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan." Each man was to take "one stone on his shoulder." These were big stones, heavy enough to carry on a man's shoulder, large enough to make a real monument.

Then Joshua gave the reason: "so that this may be a sign in your midst." God knew that people forget. Within a generation the miracle could become an old story. So He gave them something

they could see and touch. "When your sons ask tomorrow, saying, 'What are these stones to you?'" the parents would tell them how the waters were cut off before the ark of the covenant.

God expected the children to ask. He also expected the parents to answer. Faith in Israel was passed down at home, from father and mother to son and daughter, through stories of what God had done (Deuteronomy 6:6-7, 20-25). That has not changed. Your children, grandchildren or the young people in your church need to hear from you what God has done in your life. Do you have any stones of remembrance? Do the young people around you know your stories of God's faithfulness?

"These stones shall be a memorial to the sons of Israel forever." A memorial is something that makes us remember.

4:8-9 *And the sons of Israel did so, just as Joshua had commanded, and they took up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the LORD had spoken to Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place and set them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant stood, and they have been there to this day.*

The twelve men did "just as Joshua had commanded," and they carried the stones to the camp.

Then verse 9 adds something new: "Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant stood." So there were two sets of stones, one in the camp and one in the river. The river stones would be covered once the water came back, though at low water they might be seen. "They have been there to this day," the writer adds, which tells us he wrote while they were still there.

4:10-11 *And the priests who carried the ark **were** standing in the middle of the Jordan until every thing was finished which the LORD had commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. And the people hurried and passed over. And it was, when all the people had finished passing over, and the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, before the people.*

The priests kept standing "in the middle of the Jordan until every thing was finished which the LORD had commanded Joshua." Think of how long that must have taken, and how heavy that ark was. They did not move until God said so.

"And the people hurried and passed over." With the river piled up upstream, no one wanted to linger. Once all the people were across, "the ark of the LORD passed over, and the priests, before the people." The ark that went into the river first came out last. God's presence went ahead of them into the danger and stayed until every person was safe.

4:12-13 *And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of Manasseh passed over arrayed for battle before the sons of Israel, just as Moses had spoken to them. About forty thousand armed* ***men*** *of war passed over before the LORD for battle to the plains of Jericho.*

"The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of Manasseh passed over arrayed for battle." They kept the promise they made to Moses (Numbers 32:20-22) and to Joshua (1:16-18). They had their land already. They crossed anyway.

"About forty thousand armed men of war" from those tribes went over "before the LORD for battle to the plains of Jericho." The phrase "before the LORD" reminds us that this was not just Israel's army. It was the LORD's army, fighting under His command. The total count of these tribes' fighting men in Numbers 26 was larger, so it seems some stayed behind to guard their families and cities east of the river.

4:14 *On that day the LORD made Joshua great in the eyes of all Israel, and they feared him just as they had feared Moses all the days of his life.*

"On that day the LORD made Joshua great in the eyes of all Israel." God did what He said He would do in 3:7. "And they feared him just as they had feared Moses all the days of his life." To fear a leader here means to respect him deeply and take his word seriously. Joshua did not earn this by a speech. God gave it to him by doing a miracle through him. The people now knew that the God who had been with Moses was with Joshua.

4:15-18 *And the LORD said to Joshua, saying, "Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony, that they come up from the Jordan." And Joshua commanded the priests, saying, "Come up from the Jordan." And it was, as the priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the middle of the Jordan,* ***that*** *the soles of the feet of the priests were drawn out to the dry ground, and the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and went as before over all its banks.*

God told Joshua to command the priests, who carried "the ark of the testimony," to come up out of the Jordan. The ark is called the ark of the testimony because it held the tablets of the law, God's testimony or witness to His covenant (Exodus 25:16).

Joshua gave the order, and the priests came up. The very moment "the soles of the feet of the priests were drawn out to the dry ground," the waters of the Jordan came back "and went as before over all its banks." The river had stopped when their feet touched the water. It started again when their feet left the riverbed. God marked the beginning and the end of the miracle so clearly that no one could explain it away.

4:19-20 *And the people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the edge of the east of Jericho. And these twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan Joshua set up at Gilgal.*

"The people came up from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month." The first month was Abib, later called Nisan, in March or April. The tenth day was the day, forty years earlier, when Israel

had chosen their Passover lambs in Egypt (Exodus 12:3). In four days they would keep the Passover again, the first one in the promised land (5:10). God's timing was not an accident.

They camped "at Gilgal on the edge of the east of Jericho." Gilgal became Israel's base camp during the conquest. And there "these twelve stones which they had taken from the Jordan Joshua set up at Gilgal."

4:21-24 *And he said to the sons of Israel, saying, "When your sons ask their fathers tomorrow, saying, 'What **are** these stones?' then you shall make known to your sons, saying, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had passed over, just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it **is** mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God all the days."*

Joshua repeated the lesson. When your sons ask, "What are these stones?" tell them, "Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground."

Then Joshua tied this miracle to the first one: "just as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had passed over." Most of the people standing there had been children or not yet born at the Red Sea. Now they had their own Red Sea. God had done for the children what He did for the parents. Every generation needs to see God work in its own day.

Verse 24 gives two reasons God did this. First, "so that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty." The crossing was a message to the nations, and the very next verse tells us the kings of Canaan heard it (5:1). God wanted the whole world to know who He is. Second, "so that you may fear the LORD your God all the days." God's mighty works are meant to lead His own people to reverence and trust, not just for a day but for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 4 Summary

After the nation crossed the Jordan, the LORD told Joshua to have twelve men, one from each tribe, take twelve stones from the middle of the riverbed where the priests stood and carry them to their camp. The stones were a sign so that when children asked what they meant, their parents would tell them how the waters were cut off before the ark. Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan. The priests stood in the riverbed until everything was finished, and the people hurried across. About forty thousand armed men from Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh crossed ahead of Israel as they had promised. That day the LORD made Joshua great in Israel's eyes. When the priests came up from the river, the Jordan returned to flood stage. Israel camped at Gilgal on the tenth day of the first month, where Joshua set up the stones and explained that God dried up the Jordan as He had the Red Sea, so that all peoples would know His mighty hand and Israel would fear Him always.

People and Places

- Gilgal: Israel's first camp west of the Jordan, near Jericho, and their base during the conquest.

- The ark of the testimony: another name for the ark of the covenant, because it held the tablets of the law.
- The first month: Abib (later called Nisan), in March or April, the month of Passover.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. Where did the twelve stones come from, and where were they taken? (4:3, 8)

2. What question did God expect the children to ask, and what were the parents to answer? (4:6-7, 21-22)

3. Where did Joshua set up the second set of stones? (4:9)

4. How long did the priests stand in the river, and when did the ark cross over? (4:10-11)

5. How did the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh keep their promise? (4:12-13; 1:16-18)

6. What happened to the Jordan when the priests came out of the riverbed? (4:18)

7. What two reasons does Joshua give for why God dried up the Jordan? (4:24)

8. Why do you think God connected this crossing to the Red Sea for the younger generation? (4:23)

9. What are some of the stones of remembrance in your own life, times when God clearly worked for you?

10. Who are the young people in your life who need to hear your stories of what God has done? How could you tell them this month?

Chapter 5: Circumcision, Passover, and the Commander of the LORD's Army

Scripture

5:1-12 And it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who ***were*** beyond the Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites who ***were*** by the sea, heard how the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had passed over, and their heart melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel. At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make for yourself knives of flint, and again circumcise the sons of Israel a second ***time***." And Joshua made for himself knives of flint, and he circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this ***is*** the reason why Joshua circumcised ***them***: all the people who came out from Egypt, the males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, when they came out from Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, and all the people who were born in the wilderness on the way, when they came out from Egypt, they had not circumcised. For the sons of Israel had walked forty years in the wilderness until all the nation, the men of war who came out from Egypt, were finished, who had not listened to the voice of the LORD, to whom the LORD had sworn not to let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey. And their sons, ***whom*** He raised up in their place, them Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, for they had not circumcised them on the way. And it was, when all the nation had finished being circumcised, and they remained in their place in the camp until they revived. And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from on you." And he called the name of that place Gilgal to this day. And the sons of Israel encamped at Gilgal, and they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And they ate from the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and roasted ***grain***, on this very day. And the manna ceased on the day after, when they ate from the produce of the land; and there was no longer manna for the sons of Israel, and they ate from the produce of the land of Canaan in that year.

5:13-15 And it was, when Joshua was at Jericho, and he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, a man ***was*** standing in front of him, and his sword ***was*** drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "***Are*** you for us or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No, for I ***am*** the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the ground and bowed down, and he said to him, "What ***is*** my lord saying to his servant?" And the commander of the army of the LORD said to Joshua, "Take off your sandal from on your foot, for the place on which you ***are*** standing, it ***is*** holy." And Joshua did so.

Chapter 5 Preview

Israel is now inside Canaan, camped at Gilgal, a few miles from Jericho. The kings of the land have heard about the Jordan and are terrified. If you were planning a war, this is the moment you would attack. Instead God tells Joshua to stop and circumcise every man who was born in the wilderness. Then Israel keeps the Passover, eats the first food grown in the land, and the manna that fed them for forty years stops.

Before a single battle is fought, God deals with His people's hearts and their covenant with Him. Then Joshua meets a man with a drawn sword near Jericho, who says He is the commander of the army of the LORD. Joshua falls on his face and worships, and he is told to take off his sandal because the ground is holy. The lesson of the chapter is that God's people must belong to God before they can fight for Him, and that the battle is His, not ours.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1 *And it was, when all the kings of the Amorites who **were** beyond the Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites who **were** by the sea, heard how the LORD had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had passed over, and their heart melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the sons of Israel.*

Here we see the effect of the miracle at the Jordan. "All the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea" heard what the LORD had done. The Amorites lived mainly in the hill country. The Canaanites lived mainly along the coast and in the lowlands. Together they stand for all the peoples of the land.

"Their heart melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer." This is exactly what Rahab had told the spies (2:9-11). God had promised that He would send His terror ahead of Israel (Exodus 23:27). The enemies were beaten in their hearts before a sword was lifted.

5:2-3 *At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make for yourself knives of flint, and again circumcise the sons of Israel a second **time**." And Joshua made for himself knives of flint, and he circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins.*

"At that time." With the enemy shaking in fear, God gave a surprising command: "Make for yourself knives of flint, and again circumcise the sons of Israel a second time."

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14). A covenant is a solemn, binding agreement. God had promised to be the God of Abraham and his seed and to give them the land. Every male in Abraham's family was to be circumcised as a mark that he belonged to that covenant. "A second time" does not mean these men were circumcised twice. It means the nation as a whole was being brought back under the sign that the first generation had carried.

Flint knives were used even after metal tools were common, perhaps because the custom was old and sacred. Joshua obeyed, and the place was called "the hill of the foreskins."

Think about the timing. Circumcising every grown man would leave the whole army sore and unable to fight for several days, right next to an enemy city (compare Genesis 34:25). From a military point of view, this was foolish. From God's point of view, it was the most important thing they could do. They had to belong to Him before they could fight for Him.

5:4-7 *And this **is** the reason why Joshua circumcised **them**: all the people who came out from Egypt, the males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, when they came out from Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, and all the people who were born in the wilderness on the way, when they came out from Egypt, they had not circumcised. For the sons of Israel had walked forty years in the wilderness until all the nation, the men of war who came out from Egypt, were finished, who had not listened to the voice of the LORD, to whom the LORD had sworn not to let them see the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing **with** milk and honey. And their sons, **whom** He raised up in their place, them Joshua circumcised; for they were uncircumcised, for they had not circumcised them on the way.*

The text explains why this was needed. The men who came out of Egypt had been circumcised. But "all the people who were born in the wilderness on the way" had not been. Why not? Scripture does not say exactly. It may have been the hardship of the journey, or it may have been part of God's judgment on the generation that refused to enter the land.

That generation "had not listened to the voice of the LORD," so God swore that they would not see "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Numbers 14:22-35). For forty years they walked in the wilderness until the men of war who came out of Egypt had all died.

"And their sons, whom He raised up in their place, them Joshua circumcised." God did not give up on Israel when the first generation failed. He raised up their children and brought them in. That is grace. One generation's unbelief did not cancel God's promise.

The New Testament tells us that the real circumcision God wants is of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Romans 2:28-29). For believers in Christ, Paul says we have been circumcised "with a circumcision made without hands" by Christ, in putting off the old sinful nature (Colossians 2:11). Christians are not commanded to be circumcised in the body (Galatians 5:6). But the principle of this chapter still holds. Before God uses us in His work, He deals with the heart.

5:8-9 *And it was, when all the nation had finished being circumcised, and they remained in their place in the camp until they revived. And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from on you." And he called the name of that place Gilgal to this day.*

After the circumcision, the men "remained in their place in the camp until they revived." that is, until they healed. They were helpless for those days. God protected them, and Jericho did nothing.

Then God said, "This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from on you." A reproach is a shame or disgrace. What was the reproach of Egypt? It may have been the shame of their slavery. Or it may have been the mocking of the Egyptians, who had said God brought Israel out only to kill them in the wilderness (Exodus 32:12; Numbers 14:13-16). Either way, that shame was gone. They were free, in the land, and marked as God's covenant people.

"He called the name of that place Gilgal." The name sounds like the Hebrew word galal, "to roll." Every time they said the name of their camp, they would remember that God had rolled away their shame.

5:10-12 *And the sons of Israel encamped at Gilgal, and they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And they ate from the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and roasted* ***grain****, on this very day. And the manna ceased on the day after, when they ate from the produce of the land; and there was no longer manna for the sons of Israel, and they ate from the produce of the land of Canaan in that year.*

"And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho." The Passover remembered the night God spared Israel's firstborn in Egypt because of the lamb's blood on their doorposts (Exodus 12). Only circumcised men could eat it (Exodus 12:48), so the circumcision came first. As far as Scripture records, this was only the third Passover Israel kept: the first in Egypt, the second at Sinai (Numbers 9:1-5), and now this one, the first in the promised land. Forty years after leaving Egypt, they kept it at the door of the land God promised. The New Testament tells us that Christ is our Passover lamb, who was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The next day they "ate from the produce of the land," unleavened bread and roasted grain. Then "the manna ceased on the day after." For forty years God had fed them with bread from heaven every morning except the Sabbath (Exodus 16:35). Now that there was food in the land, the manna stopped.

God provides in different ways in different seasons. In the wilderness He gave manna, a daily miracle. In the land He gave grain, which they would have to plant and harvest. Both came from Him. We sometimes want God to keep providing in the old way. But when He moves us into a new season, He provides in a new way. Jesus told us that He is the true bread from heaven, the One who gives life to the world (John 6:32-35).

5:13 *And it was, when Joshua was at Jericho, and he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, a man* ***was*** *standing in front of him, and his sword* ***was*** *drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "****Are*** *you for us or for our adversaries?"*

Now the scene changes. "When Joshua was at Jericho," perhaps out alone looking over the walled city he had to take, "he lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, a man was standing in front of him, and his sword was drawn in his hand."

Joshua did what a good soldier does. He walked straight up to the man and asked, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" It was a fair question. A man with a drawn sword near an enemy city had to be one or the other.

5:14 *And he said, "No, for I* ***am*** *the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the ground and bowed down, and he said to him, "What* ***is*** *my lord saying to his servant?"*

"No," came the answer. That is a surprising reply. The man would not take either side the way Joshua meant it. "For I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come."

He had not come to join Israel's side. He had come to take command. The real question is never whether God is on our side, but whether we are on His.

"And Joshua fell on his face to the ground and bowed down." The word for bowing down is the word for worship. Many Bible teachers point out that angels refuse worship in Scripture (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9), and this One accepted it. Joshua then asked, "What is my lord saying to his servant?" The commander of Israel's army became a servant waiting for orders.

5:15 *And the commander of the army of the LORD said to Joshua, "Take off your sandal from on your foot, for the place on which you **are** standing, it **is** holy." And Joshua did so.*

"Take off your sandal from on your foot, for the place on which you are standing, it is holy. And Joshua did so."

These are almost the same words God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). There the angel of the LORD appeared in the fire, and God spoke from the bush. Here the commander of the LORD's army gives Joshua the same command. The ground was holy because God was there.

Who was this commander? Many Bible teachers believe He was the Son of God Himself, appearing before He was born in Bethlehem. This is called a Christophany, an appearance of Christ before His birth. They give several reasons. He accepts worship that angels refuse. He makes the ground holy, just as at the burning bush. And in the next verses, which continue this meeting, the LORD speaks directly to Joshua (6:2). Others believe He was a great angel, perhaps Michael, who is called a chief prince and the protector of Israel (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1). Scripture does not name Him, so both views should be held humbly.

Either way, the lesson for Joshua was clear. Before the battle of Jericho, Joshua needed to know who was really in charge. He was not the commander-in-chief. He was the servant of One far greater. Revelation 19:11-16 shows the Lord Jesus riding out of heaven at the end of the age with the armies of heaven behind Him, the King of kings who judges and makes war in righteousness. The battle belongs to Him. Our job is to bow, listen and obey.

Chapter 5 Summary

When the kings of Canaan heard that the LORD had dried up the Jordan, their hearts melted with fear. At that time the LORD told Joshua to circumcise the men born in the wilderness, because the generation that came out of Egypt had died for not listening to the LORD, and their sons had not been circumcised on the way. Joshua did so at Gilgal, and the men stayed in the camp until they healed. God said He had rolled away the reproach of Egypt, and the place was named Gilgal. Israel kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month on the plains of Jericho, ate the produce of the land the next day, and the manna stopped. Near Jericho, Joshua met a man with a drawn sword who said He was the commander of the army of the LORD. Joshua fell on his face and worshiped, and he was told to take off his sandal because the ground was holy.

People and Places

- Gilgal: Israel's camp near Jericho; the name sounds like the Hebrew word for "roll."
- Circumcision: the sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17).
- Passover: the yearly feast remembering the night God spared Israel's firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12).
- Manna: the bread from heaven God gave Israel for forty years in the wilderness (Exodus 16).
- The commander of the army of the LORD: the One who met Joshua near Jericho and accepted his worship; many believe He was the Son of God before His birth.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. How did the kings of Canaan react when they heard about the crossing of the Jordan? (5:1)

2. What did God command Joshua to do at Gilgal, and why had these men not been circumcised before? (5:2-7)

3. What did God say He had rolled away, and what does the name Gilgal remind us of? (5:9)

4. What feast did Israel keep at Gilgal, and what happened to the manna the day after they ate the produce of the land? (5:10-12)

5. What question did Joshua ask the man with the drawn sword, and how did He answer? (5:13-14)

6. What did Joshua do when he learned who the man was, and what did the commander tell him to do? (5:14-15)

7. What reasons do many Bible teachers give for believing the commander was the Son of God before His birth? (5:14-15; Exodus 3:5; Revelation 19:10)

8. Israel had to belong to God before they could fight for Him. What does it look like for God to deal with your heart before He uses you? (Colossians 2:11)

9. God provided manna in one season and grain in another. Has God changed the way He provides for you in a new season of life? How?

10. Instead of asking whether God is on your side, how would your choices this week change if you asked whether you are on His side?

Chapter 6: The Fall of Jericho

Scripture

6:1-14 And Jericho was shutting ***itself*** and was shut up because of the sons of Israel; no one was going out, and no one was coming in. And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given into your hand Jericho and its king, the mighty men of valor. And you shall go around the city, all the men of war, circling the city one time. Thus you shall do six days. And seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. And on the seventh day you shall go around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be, when ***they*** make a long blast with the horn of the ram, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout ***with*** a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall in its place, and the people shall go up, each man straight before him." And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Lift up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." And he said to the people, "Pass on, and go around the city, and let the armed man pass on before the ark of the LORD." And it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, and the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD passed on and blew the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD ***was*** going after them. And the armed man ***was*** walking before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard ***was*** walking after the ark, walking and blowing the trumpets. And Joshua commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout, and you shall not let your voice be heard, and a word shall not go out from your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout." And he caused the ark of the LORD to go around the city, circling ***it*** one time. And they came ***into*** the camp and stayed in the camp. And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests lifted up the ark of the LORD. And the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD ***were*** walking, walking on, and they blew the trumpets; and the armed man ***was*** walking before them, and the rear guard ***was*** walking after the ark of the LORD, walking and blowing the trumpets. And they went around the city on the second day one time, and they returned ***to*** the camp. Thus they did six days.

6:15-27 And it was on the seventh day, and they rose early at the coming up of the dawn and went around the city according to this manner seven times. Only on that day they went around the city seven times. And it was at the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city! And the city shall be a devoted thing, it and all that ***is*** in it, to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute shall live, she and all who ***are*** with her in the house, for she hid the messengers whom we sent. And only you, keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest you devote ***it*** to destruction and take from the devoted thing, and make the camp of Israel a devoted thing and trouble it. And all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron, it ***is*** holy to the LORD; it shall go into the treasury of the LORD." And the people shouted, and they blew the trumpets. And it was, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted ***with*** a great shout, and the wall fell in its place; and the people went up into the city, each man straight before him, and they captured the city. And they devoted to destruction all that ***was*** in the city, from man and to woman, from young man and to old man, and to ox and sheep and donkey, by the mouth of the sword. And to the two men who had spied out the land Joshua said,

"Go into the house of the woman, the prostitute, and bring out from there the woman and all who ***belong*** to her, just as you swore to her." And the young men who had spied went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all who ***belonged*** to her; and all her families they brought out, and they set them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and all that ***was*** in it. Only the silver and the gold and the articles of bronze and of iron they put ***into*** the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Rahab the prostitute and the house of her father and all who ***belonged*** to her Joshua kept alive; and she has dwelt in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua had sent to spy out Jericho. And Joshua made ***them*** swear at that time, saying, "Cursed ***is*** the man before the LORD who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho; with his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." And the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

Chapter 6 Preview

Jericho is locked up tight. No one goes in and no one comes out. God tells Joshua that He has already given the city into his hand, and then He gives the strangest battle plan in history. For six days the army is to march around the city once a day in silence, with seven priests blowing rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day they are to march around seven times, then the priests will blow a long blast, the people will shout, and the wall will fall.

Israel does exactly what God says, and the wall falls. The city is devoted to the LORD, which means it is given over completely to Him. Its people are put to death, its silver and gold go into the LORD's treasury, and the city is burned. Only Rahab and her family are spared, because she hid the spies. This chapter holds one of the great victories of faith in the Bible (Hebrews 11:30), and it also holds one of the hardest things in Scripture to read, the ban on the cities of Canaan. I will try to deal with both honestly.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-2 *And Jericho was shutting **itself** and was shut up because of the sons of Israel; no one was going out, and no one was coming in. And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given into your hand Jericho and its king, the mighty men of valor.*

"Jericho was shutting itself and was shut up because of the sons of Israel." The city was under siege before Israel did anything. Its people had heard about the Red Sea, Sihon and Og, and the Jordan, and they had locked themselves in. "No one was going out, and no one was coming in."

Then the LORD spoke. This seems to continue the meeting with the commander of the LORD's army in 5:13-15, since the chapter break comes in the middle of it. "See, I have given into your hand Jericho and its king, the mighty men of valor." Notice the tense. God did not say He would give it. He said He had given it. The victory was already settled in heaven. All Israel had to do was walk it out.

6:3-5 *And you shall go around the city, all the men of war, circling the city one time. Thus you shall do six days. And seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. And on the seventh day you shall go around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. And it shall be, when **they** make a long blast with the horn of the ram, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout **with** a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall in its place, and the people shall go up, each man straight before him."*

God's plan made no military sense. The fighting men were to march around the city "one time" each day for six days. Seven priests were to carry "seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark." These were not metal trumpets. A ram's horn, called a shofar, was blown to call people together, to sound alarms, and to announce holy days.

"On the seventh day you shall go around the city seven times." Seven is the number of completion in Scripture, going back to the seven days of creation. Seven priests, seven horns, seven days, seven times around. The whole thing said that this was God's work, complete and perfect.

After the long blast on the horn, "all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall in its place." No siege ramps, no battering rams, no ladders. Just obedience, a shout, and God's power.

Why did God do it this way? So that no one could ever say Israel took Jericho by its own strength. The first city in the land would be God's gift, plain for all to see. He still works this way. Paul says God chose what the world thinks foolish and weak, so that no one could boast before Him (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

6:6-11 *And Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Lift up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." And he said to the people, "Pass on, and go around the city, and let the armed man pass on before the ark of the LORD." And it was, when Joshua had spoken to the people, and the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD passed on and blew the trumpets; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD **was** going after them. And the armed man **was** walking before the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard **was** walking after the ark, walking and blowing the trumpets. And Joshua commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout, and you shall not let your voice be heard, and a word shall not go out from your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout." And he caused the ark of the LORD to go around the city, circling **it** one time. And they came **into** the camp and stayed in the camp.*

Joshua passed God's orders on to the priests and the people. He described the order of the march. Armed men went first, then the seven priests blowing the horns, then the ark of the LORD, then the rear guard.

The ark was in the center of it all. The march was not mainly a parade of soldiers. It was a procession of God's presence around the city. Six times in these verses the ark is mentioned.

Then Joshua gave one more order: "You shall not shout, and you shall not let your voice be heard, and a word shall not go out from your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!'" The army was to

march in total silence. Why? Scripture does not say, but it is easy to guess. A silent army does not boast and does not complain. Forty years earlier, Israel's complaining had kept them out of the land. This time they would keep their mouths shut and let God speak.

On the first day "he caused the ark of the LORD to go around the city, circling it one time." Then they went back to camp. Nothing happened. The walls did not move.

6:12-14 *And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests lifted up the ark of the LORD. And the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD **were** walking, walking on, and they blew the trumpets; and the armed man **was** walking before them, and the rear guard **was** walking after the ark of the LORD, walking and blowing the trumpets. And they went around the city on the second day one time, and they returned **to** the camp. Thus they did six days.*

The next morning, "Joshua rose early" again. Same march, same order, same silence. The priests kept blowing the horns. "Thus they did six days."

Imagine being one of those soldiers. Day after day you walk around the city, and nothing happens. The people on the wall are watching you. Maybe they are laughing. You are not allowed to say a word. It would have been easy to quit or to grumble. But they kept walking. Sometimes faith looks like doing the same faithful thing, day after day, when you cannot see any result yet. Hebrews 11:30 says the walls fell "having been encircled for seven days." The faith was in the walking, not only in the shout.

6:15-16 *And it was on the seventh day, and they rose early at the coming up of the dawn and went around the city according to this manner seven times. Only on that day they went around the city seven times. And it was at the seventh time, the priests blew the trumpets, and Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city!*

On the seventh day they rose "at the coming up of the dawn" because they had seven trips to make. Jericho was not a large city, so seven laps could be done in a day. "Only on that day they went around the city seven times."

At the seventh time, the priests blew the horns, and Joshua finally gave the order the people had waited a week to hear: "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city!" Again, the city was already given. The shout was not a war cry to scare the enemy. It was a shout of faith in a victory God had already won.

6:17-19 *And the city shall be a devoted thing, it and all that **is** in it, to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute shall live, she and all who **are** with her in the house, for she hid the messengers whom we sent. And only you, keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest you devote **it** to destruction and take from the devoted thing, and make the camp of Israel a devoted thing and trouble it. And all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron, it **is** holy to the LORD; it shall go into the treasury of the LORD."*

Before the wall fell, Joshua explained what was to happen to the city. "The city shall be a devoted thing, it and all that is in it, to the LORD." The Hebrew word is herem. It means something set

apart to the LORD and given wholly to Him, so that no person may keep it or use it (Leviticus 27:28-29). Most devoted things were destroyed. Some, like metal, went into God's treasury.

Jericho was the firstfruits of the land. Just as the first part of the harvest belonged to God, the first city belonged to Him entirely. Israel could keep nothing from it.

"Only Rahab the prostitute shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, for she hid the messengers whom we sent." In the middle of the order of judgment comes a word of mercy. God's judgment was never blind. The one who turned to Him in faith was spared.

Then a warning: "keep yourselves from the devoted thing, lest you devote it to destruction and take from the devoted thing, and make the camp of Israel a devoted thing and trouble it." Anyone who took what belonged to God would bring the same judgment on himself and on Israel. Chapter 7 shows that this was not an empty warning.

"All the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron, it is holy to the LORD; it shall go into the treasury of the LORD." Holy means set apart for God. These metals would be used in the worship of the tabernacle.

6:20 *And the people shouted, and they blew the trumpets. And it was, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted* ***with*** *a great shout, and the wall fell in its place; and the people went up into the city, each man straight before him, and they captured the city.*

"And the people shouted, and they blew the trumpets." When the people "shouted with a great shout," the wall "fell in its place." The Hebrew phrase means it fell down flat, or fell beneath itself. "And the people went up into the city, each man straight before him, and they captured the city." With the wall flat, each soldier simply walked straight in from wherever he stood.

Archaeologists have argued for many years about the ruins at Jericho, what they show, and what period they belong to. Some find evidence of walls that collapsed and a city burned at about the right time. Others date the destruction earlier. I mention it so you know the debate exists. My faith does not rest on a dig. It rests on God's Word, and Hebrews 11:30 tells us plainly: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell."

6:21 *And they devoted to destruction all that* ***was*** *in the city, from man and to woman, from young man and to old man, and to ox and sheep and donkey, by the mouth of the sword.*

"And they devoted to destruction all that was in the city, from man and to woman, from young man and to old man, and to ox and sheep and donkey, by the mouth of the sword."

This is one of the hardest verses in the Bible. If it troubles you, that is not a lack of faith. It should trouble us. Men and women, young and old, died that day at God's command. I will not soften what the text says, and I will not explain it away. But I want to set it in the light of the whole Bible, because that is the only way to read it rightly.

First, this was God's judgment, not Israel's anger. God had told Abraham more than four hundred years earlier that his descendants would not receive the land yet, "for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). God waited for centuries. The Law tells us what the sin of Canaan had become: idolatry, sexual sin of every kind, and burning their own sons and daughters in the fire to their gods (Leviticus 18:21-25; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:9-12). God said the land itself was ready to vomit them out. Moses told Israel plainly that they were not getting the land because they were good. "For the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them from before you" (Deuteronomy 9:5). God is the Judge of all the earth, and He will do what is right (Genesis 18:25). He is also the giver and taker of all life, the same God who judged the world in the flood and Sodom with fire.

Second, God was not doing this because He enjoyed it. He says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but in the wicked turning back from his way and living (Ezekiel 33:11). Rahab proves that the door was open. She was a Canaanite of Jericho, and she heard the same news everyone else heard. She turned to the LORD, and she and her whole family were saved. The Gibeonites, in chapter 9, would also be spared. God has always been willing to relent when a nation turns from its evil (Jeremiah 18:7-8; Jonah 3:10). Jericho had forty years of news about the God of Israel, and it shut its gates.

Third, this was not about race. In the very next chapter an Israelite, Achan, falls under the same ban for his sin, and a Canaanite, Rahab, lives in Israel's camp. God later warned Israel that if they did what the Canaanites did, the land would vomit them out too (Leviticus 18:28), and centuries later He sent Israel into exile for the same sins.

Fourth, this was a one-time command for that time and that land. God gave it directly, through Moses, for the cities of these seven nations in Canaan only (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). Even Israel's own law of war was different for other cities (Deuteronomy 20:10-15). It was never a pattern for anyone after that, and it is not a pattern for us. No nation, no church and no person today can point to Jericho to take a life in God's name. When Peter drew a sword, Jesus told him to put it back (Matthew 26:52). Our battle "is not against blood and flesh" (Ephesians 6:12), and we are told to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

And last, what about the children? I do not know all of God's reasons, and Scripture does not give them. I do know that God is just and good, and that He judges with perfect knowledge. I believe we can trust the children of Jericho to the same God who gave His own Son. David said of his son who died as a baby, "I am going to him" (2 Samuel 12:23).

Jericho is a picture of the final judgment, when Christ returns as a righteous Judge (Acts 17:30-31; Revelation 19:11). Every one of us deserves that judgment. The only reason any of us will stand is that Jesus took God's judgment on Himself at the cross. Like Rahab, we can be saved only by turning to the LORD, and only those inside the house He provides will be safe.

6:22-25 *And to the two men who had spied out the land Joshua said, "Go into the house of the woman, the prostitute, and bring out from there the woman and all who **belong** to her, just as you swore to her." And the young men who had spied went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all who **belonged** to her; and all her families they brought out, and they set them outside the camp of Israel. And they burned the city with fire, and all that **was** in it. Only the silver and the gold and the articles of bronze and of iron they put **into** the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Rahab the prostitute and the house of her father and all who **belonged** to her Joshua kept alive; and she has dwelt in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua had sent to spy out Jericho.*

In the middle of the judgment, Joshua remembered the promise. He sent the two spies, the men who knew Rahab and had sworn to her: "Go into the house of the woman, the prostitute, and bring out from there the woman and all who belong to her, just as you swore to her."

The wall had fallen, but somehow Rahab's house, which was built into the wall (2:15), still stood with the scarlet cord in the window. Scripture does not tell us how. The spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, "and all who belonged to her." Not one person in that house was lost. God kept the promise His servants made.

They set them "outside the camp of Israel" at first. Rahab's family were not yet part of the covenant people, and they would have needed to be made clean before coming into the camp (compare Numbers 31:19). Then the city was burned, and the metals went into "the treasury of the house of the LORD."

"And she has dwelt in the midst of Israel to this day." Rahab was still alive when this was written. She was brought into Israel, married Salmon, and became the mother of Boaz and an ancestor of King David and of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). Hebrews 11:31 sums up her life: "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who disobeyed." Notice how Hebrews describes the people of Jericho. They "disobeyed." They had the same chance she had. James 2:25 adds that her faith was proved by what she did when she hid the messengers. Real faith acts.

Rahab is the bright light in this hard chapter. In a city under judgment, one woman believed, and God saved her and everyone who sheltered with her. The same offer stands today. God's judgment is real, but so is His mercy, and it reaches anyone who turns to Him.

6:26 *And Joshua made **them** swear at that time, saying, "Cursed **is** the man before the LORD who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho; with his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates."*

"Cursed is the man before the LORD who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho." Joshua pronounced a curse on anyone who would rebuild Jericho as a fortified city. "With his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates." That man would lose his oldest son when he started and his youngest son when he finished.

This came true about five hundred years later. In the days of the wicked King Ahab, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho and lost his firstborn Abiram and his youngest Segub, "according to the word of

the LORD which He spoke by the hand of Joshua the son of Nun" (1 Kings 16:34). God's Word does not expire. People did live near the site in between (18:21; 2 Samuel 10:5), but no one raised its walls and gates again until Hiel defied the curse.

6:27 *And the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.*

"And the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land." This is what God promised in 1:5 and 3:7. The secret of Joshua's success was not his strategy. It was God's presence. Everyone in Canaan now knew his name, and they knew why.

Chapter 6 Summary

Jericho was shut up tight because of Israel. The LORD told Joshua that He had given the city into his hand, and He commanded the army to march around it once a day for six days, with seven priests blowing rams' horns before the ark, and seven times on the seventh day. Joshua ordered the people to march in silence until he told them to shout. On the seventh day, after the seventh time around, the priests blew the horns, the people shouted, and the wall fell flat. Joshua had declared the city devoted to the LORD, with only Rahab and her household to be spared, and he warned the people not to take anything from it. Israel put the people and animals of Jericho to death, burned the city, and put the silver, gold, bronze and iron in the LORD's treasury. The two spies brought out Rahab and her family, and she lived in Israel from then on. Joshua pronounced a curse on anyone who would rebuild Jericho, and the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread through the land.

People and Places

- Jericho: the walled city near the Jordan, the first city Israel took in Canaan.
- Ram's horn (shofar): a horn blown to call the people, sound alarms and announce holy days.
- Devoted thing (herem): something set apart wholly to the LORD, so that no one may keep it, usually by destruction (Leviticus 27:28-29).
- Hiel of Bethel: the man who rebuilt Jericho in Ahab's day and lost two sons, as Joshua said (1 Kings 16:34).

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What did God say He had already done, before Israel took a step? (6:2)

2. What were Israel's orders for the first six days and for the seventh day? (6:3-5)

3. What was at the center of the march, and why does that matter? (6:6-9)

4. Why do you think Joshua told the people to march in silence? (6:10)

5. What did it mean that Jericho was "a devoted thing" to the LORD, and what warning did Joshua give? (6:17-19)

6. How does this chapter show both God's judgment and His mercy? (6:21-25)

7. Why was the ban on Jericho not a pattern for any people after that time? (Deuteronomy 20:10-18; Matthew 26:52)

8. What does Hebrews 11:30-31 say about the walls of Jericho and about Rahab?

9. Israel had to keep marching day after day before anything happened. Is there an area of your life where you need to keep obeying faithfully even though you cannot see results yet?

10. Rahab was saved because she turned to the LORD when judgment was coming. Have you turned to Jesus Christ for safety from God's judgment? If you have, who do you know that needs to hear about Him?

Chapter 7: Achan's Sin and the Defeat at Ai

Scripture

7:1-15 And the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully ***with*** unfaithfulness in the devoted thing; and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took from the devoted thing, and the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel. And Joshua sent men from Jericho ***to*** Ai, which ***is*** beside Beth-aven, on the east of Bethel, and he said to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up; let about two thousand men or about three thousand men go up and strike Ai. Do not make all the people toil there, for they ***are*** few." And about three thousand men from the people went up there, and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down of them about thirty-six men, and they pursued them before the gate as far as Shebarim, and they struck them down on the descent. And the heart of the people melted and became water. And Joshua tore his clothes and fell on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their head. And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? And if only we had been willing and had remained beyond the Jordan! Please, Lord, what shall I say, after Israel has turned ***its*** back before its enemies? And the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do for Your great name?" And the LORD said to Joshua, "Get yourself up! Why ***is*** this, ***that*** you ***are*** falling on your face? Israel has sinned, and also they have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them; and also they have taken from the devoted thing, and also they have stolen, and also they have deceived, and also they have put ***it*** among their own things. And the sons of Israel are not able to stand before their enemies; they turn ***their*** back before their enemies, for they have become a devoted thing. I will not again be with you unless you destroy the devoted thing from your midst. Arise, consecrate the people, and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "A devoted thing ***is*** in your midst, O Israel. You will not be able to stand before your enemies until you remove the devoted thing from your midst." And you shall be brought near in the morning by your tribes. And it shall be ***that*** the tribe which the LORD takes shall draw near by clans, and the clan which the LORD takes shall draw near by households, and the household which the LORD takes shall draw near by men. And it shall be ***that*** the one who is taken with the devoted thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that ***belongs*** to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful folly in Israel.'"

7:16-26 And Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near by its tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clan of Judah, and he took the clan of the Zerahites; and he brought near the clan of the Zerahites by men, and Zabdi was taken. And he brought near his household by men, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. And Joshua said to Achan, "My son, please give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me, please, what you have done. Do not hide ***it*** from me." And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and thus and thus I have done. And I saw among the spoil one good cloak of Shinar, and

approximately 5 pounds (200 shekels) of silver, and one bar of gold, approximately 20 ounces (50 shekels) ***was*** its weight; and I desired them and took them. And look, they ***are*** hidden in the ground in the midst of my tent, and the silver ***is*** under it." And Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and look, ***it was*** hidden in his tent, and the silver ***was*** under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD. And Joshua took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and his daughters, and his ox and his donkey and his sheep, and his tent and all that ***belonged*** to him, and all Israel with him; and they brought them up ***to*** the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned him with stones, and they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones ***that stands*** to this day. And the LORD turned from the burning of His anger. Therefore ***one*** called the name of that place the valley of Achor to this day.

Chapter 7 Preview

After the great victory at Jericho, the very next battle is a disaster. Ai is a small town, and the spies say only two or three thousand men are needed to take it. But Israel's soldiers run, thirty-six men die, and the whole nation's heart melts like water. Joshua falls on his face before the ark and asks God why.

God's answer is blunt. Israel has sinned. Someone has taken from the devoted things of Jericho and hidden them. Until that sin is dealt with, God will not be with them. Lots are cast, tribe by tribe, family by family, until one man is left: Achan of the tribe of Judah. He confesses that he saw, desired and took a fine cloak, silver and gold, and hid them under his tent. Achan and all that belonged to him are taken to a valley and stoned, and the place is called the valley of Achor, which means trouble. It is a sobering chapter about how seriously God takes sin among His people, and how one person's hidden sin can bring trouble on many.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1 *And the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully **with** unfaithfulness in the devoted thing; and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took from the devoted thing, and the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel.*

The chapter begins by telling us what Joshua does not yet know. "The sons of Israel acted unfaithfully with unfaithfulness in the devoted thing." One man did it, but God counts it against the whole nation. Israel was one covenant people, and what one member did affected all of them.

The man is named with his full family line: "Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah." Judah was the leading tribe, the tribe of the future kings. Sin can come from anywhere, even from the most honored families.

"And the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel." The reader knows trouble is coming. Israel does not.

7:2-5 *And Joshua sent men from Jericho **to** Ai, which **is** beside Beth-aven, on the east of Bethel, and he said to them, saying, "Go up and spy out the land." And the men went up and spied out Ai. And they returned to Joshua and said to him, "Do not let all the people go up; let about two thousand men or about three thousand men go up and strike Ai. Do not make all the people toil there, for they **are** few." And about three thousand men from the people went up there, and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai struck down of them about thirty-six men, and they pursued them before the gate as far as Shebarim, and they struck them down on the descent. And the heart of the people melted and became water.*

Joshua sent men from Jericho to spy out Ai, a town "beside Beth-aven, on the east of Bethel," up in the hill country some ten to fifteen miles west of Jericho. The name Ai means "the ruin" or "the heap."

The spies came back confident. "Do not let all the people go up; let about two thousand men or about three thousand men go up and strike Ai." The town was small. Why tire out the whole army?

On the surface, that sounds reasonable. But notice what is missing. No one asked the LORD. At Jericho God gave the plan. At Ai, Israel made its own plan based on how small the enemy looked. Success at Jericho had made them confident in themselves.

About three thousand men went up, and "they fled before the men of Ai." Thirty-six Israelites died, chased down the slope as far as Shebarim. Then comes a sad turn: "the heart of the people melted and became water." Those were the very words used for the Canaanites (2:11; 5:1). Now Israel was the one melting.

7:6-9 *And Joshua tore his clothes and fell on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust on their head. And Joshua said, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? And if only we had been willing and had remained beyond the Jordan! Please, Lord, what shall I say, after Israel has turned **its** back before its enemies? And the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear, and they will surround us and cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do for Your great name?"*

"Joshua tore his clothes and fell on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD until the evening." He and the elders put dust on their heads, signs of deep grief and mourning.

Joshua's prayer is honest, and some of it sounds like the old complaints of the wilderness. "Why have You brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?" He even wished they had stayed on the other side of the river. That was close to what the grumbling generation had said (Numbers 14:2-3). Joshua was a great man of faith, but he was also a man, and this defeat shook him.

But his prayer ends in the right place. "And what will You do for Your great name?" Joshua was worried about more than Israel's survival. If Israel was wiped out, the nations would say the God of Israel could not keep His promises. Moses had prayed the same kind of prayer

(Exodus 32:11-12; Numbers 14:13-16). When we pray, it is right to care most about God's name and His glory.

7:10-12 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Get yourself up! Why **is** this, **that** you **are** falling on your face? Israel has sinned, and also they have transgressed My covenant which I commanded them; and also they have taken from the devoted thing, and also they have stolen, and also they have deceived, and also they have put **it** among their own things. And the sons of Israel are not able to stand before their enemies; they turn **their** back before their enemies, for they have become a devoted thing. I will not again be with you unless you destroy the devoted thing from your midst.*

God's answer was sharp: "Get yourself up! Why is this, that you are falling on your face?" There is a time for prayer and a time to get up and deal with sin. Joshua's problem was not that God had failed. It was that "Israel has sinned."

God listed the sin in a string of charges: they "transgressed My covenant," they "have taken from the devoted thing," they "have stolen," they "have deceived," and they "have put it among their own things." Each "and also" adds weight. This was not a small slip. It was theft from God, covered with a lie.

Then the hard truth: "they have become a devoted thing." By taking what was under the ban, Israel had brought the ban on itself, just as Joshua warned (6:18). And God said, "I will not again be with you unless you destroy the devoted thing from your midst." The promise of God's presence (1:5) was still true, but God would not fight for a people who hid sin in the camp.

7:13-15 *Arise, consecrate the people, and say, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, for thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "A devoted thing **is** in your midst, O Israel. You will not be able to stand before your enemies until you remove the devoted thing from your midst." And you shall be brought near in the morning by your tribes. And it shall be **that** the tribe which the LORD takes shall draw near by clans, and the clan which the LORD takes shall draw near by households, and the household which the LORD takes shall draw near by men. And it shall be **that** the one who is taken with the devoted thing shall be burned with fire, he and all that **belongs** to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful folly in Israel.'"*

God told Joshua to "consecrate the people" again, as before the Jordan crossing (3:5). They were about to stand before the LORD. "A devoted thing is in your midst, O Israel. You will not be able to stand before your enemies until you remove the devoted thing from your midst."

In the morning they would come forward by tribes, then by clans, then by households, then man by man. "The tribe which the LORD takes" would be chosen, likely by casting lots, small stones or marked objects that God used to give His answer (Proverbs 16:33). The Urim and Thummim, objects kept in the high priest's breastpiece and used to seek God's answer (Exodus 28:30), may also have been used (Numbers 27:21). Scripture does not say exactly how.

The guilty man "shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has done a disgraceful folly in Israel."

Notice that the process took a whole night and a morning. God gave the guilty man time. He could have come forward on his own at any point. He did not.

7:16-18 *And Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near by its tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken. And he brought near the clan of Judah, and he took the clan of the Zerahites; and he brought near the clan of the Zerahites by men, and Zabdi was taken. And he brought near his household by men, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.*

"Joshua rose early in the morning," as he always did when there was hard work to do. He brought Israel near tribe by tribe, "and the tribe of Judah was taken." Then the clan of the Zerahites. Then the household of Zabdi. Then, man by man, "Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken."

Picture the scene. All Israel watching. The circle getting smaller. Achan must have felt his heart pounding as Judah was chosen, then his clan, then his family. Every step was another chance to confess. He waited until there was nowhere left to hide. "Know your sin, that it will find you," Moses had warned (Numbers 32:23). Hidden sin is never hidden from God.

7:19-21 *And Joshua said to Achan, "My son, please give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me, please, what you have done. Do not hide **it** from me." And Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and thus and thus I have done. And I saw among the spoil one good cloak of Shinar, and approximately 5 pounds (200 shekels) of silver, and one bar of gold, approximately 20 ounces (50 shekels) **was** its weight; and I desired them and took them. And look, they **are** hidden in the ground in the midst of my tent, and the silver **is** under it."*

Joshua's words to Achan are surprisingly gentle: "My son, please give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me, please, what you have done. Do not hide it from me." To give glory to God here means to tell the truth and so admit that God is right in His judgment.

Achan finally confessed: "Truly I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel." Then he told the story, and it follows the pattern of sin since the garden of Eden. "I saw" ... "and I desired them and took them" ... "and look, they are hidden." Eve saw that the fruit was good, desired it, took it, and then hid from God (Genesis 3:6-8). David saw Bathsheba, wanted her and took her, and then tried to cover it up (2 Samuel 11). James 1:14-15 tells us that sin grows in the same steps: desire, then sin, then death.

What did Achan take? "One good cloak of Shinar," a costly robe from Babylonia. About five pounds of silver. A bar of gold weighing about twenty ounces. He buried them "in the ground in the midst of my tent." He could not wear the cloak or spend the silver. He just had to have it. That is how greed works. It wants things it cannot even enjoy.

7:22-23 *And Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and look, **it was** hidden in his tent, and the silver **was** under it. And they took them from the midst of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD.*

Joshua sent messengers, and "they ran to the tent." Everything was there, just as Achan said, with the silver underneath. They brought it all out "and they poured them out before the LORD." What was hidden in the dark was laid out in the light for everyone to see (Luke 12:2-3).

7:24-26 *And Joshua took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and his daughters, and his ox and his donkey and his sheep, and his tent and all that **belonged** to him, and all Israel with him; and they brought them up **to** the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned him with stones, and they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones **that stands** to this day. And the LORD turned from the burning of His anger. Therefore **one** called the name of that place the valley of Achor to this day.*

Then comes the hardest part of the chapter. Joshua and all Israel took Achan, the silver, the cloak, the gold bar, "and his sons and his daughters, and his ox and his donkey and his sheep, and his tent and all that belonged to him," to "the valley of Achor."

Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day." Then "all Israel stoned him with stones, and they burned them with fire and stoned them with stones." They raised a great heap of stones over him, "and the LORD turned from the burning of His anger."

This is very hard to read, especially that Achan's sons and daughters were taken to the valley too. Why would God allow children to share their father's punishment, when His own Law said, "sons shall not be put to death for fathers" (Deuteronomy 24:16)? Bible teachers have answered this in a few ways.

Many believe Achan's family knew what he had done. The goods were buried in the floor of the family tent. It is hard to see how they could dig there and hide them for days without the household knowing and keeping the secret. If so, they shared in the sin, and that is why they shared the judgment.

Others point out that by taking devoted things, Achan himself became devoted, along with "all that belongs to him" (6:18; 7:15). In that case the judgment fell on everything under his roof, as it had on Jericho.

Still others note that the text says "all Israel stoned him," singular, and suggest his family was brought to the valley as witnesses, and that the plural "them" in the burning means Achan with his goods and animals. The Hebrew can be read more than one way here.

I do not think we should claim more certainty than the text gives. What is certain is this: God is just, and He did not punish the innocent for the guilty in a way that broke His own Law. He knew every heart in that tent. What is also certain is how serious sin among God's people is. In the early church, God dealt just as seriously with Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit about money (Acts 5:1-11), and "great fear came upon all those who heard these things."

This was a one-time judgment under God's direct command, during a holy war, in the first days of Israel in the land. It is not a model for how churches or families should deal with sin today. The New Testament calls us to confront sin, to restore the one who falls with gentleness (Galatians 6:1), and to forgive the one who repents. Jesus took on Himself the judgment that Achan, and we, deserved. "He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The name Achor means trouble, and it sounds like Achan's own name. 1 Chronicles 2:7 calls him "the troubler of Israel." But the story of the valley of Achor does not end in this chapter. Centuries later God promised, through Hosea, that He would make "the valley of Achor for a door of hope" (Hosea 2:15). The place of trouble would become a door of hope. That is what God does with sin that is confessed and dealt with. He turns the place of judgment into a place of new beginning. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Chapter 7 Summary

Achan of the tribe of Judah took some of the devoted things from Jericho, and the LORD's anger burned against Israel. Not knowing this, Joshua sent about three thousand men against the small town of Ai, and they were routed, with thirty-six killed. Joshua and the elders tore their clothes and lay before the ark until evening, and Joshua asked God why He had brought them over the Jordan and what He would do for His great name. The LORD told him to get up, because Israel had sinned by taking devoted things, stealing and lying, and God would not be with them until the devoted thing was removed. The next morning lots were cast by tribe, clan, household and man, and Achan was taken. He confessed that he saw, desired and took a cloak from Shinar, silver and a bar of gold, and hid them in the ground in his tent. The goods were found and laid before the LORD. Achan, his family, his animals and his goods were taken to the valley of Achor, where Israel stoned and burned them and raised a heap of stones. Then the LORD turned from His anger.

People and Places

- Ai: a small town in the hill country east of Bethel, some ten to fifteen miles west of Jericho.
- Achan: a man of the tribe of Judah who took devoted things from Jericho; called "the troubler of Israel" (1 Chronicles 2:7).
- Shinar: Babylonia, the land of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:2).
- The valley of Achor: the valley where Achan was judged; Achor means trouble. Hosea 2:15 promises it will become a door of hope.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. Whose sin is described in verse 1, and why does God count it against all Israel? (7:1)

2. What advice did the spies give about Ai, and what was missing from Israel's plan? (7:3-4)

3. What happened at Ai, and how did the people react? (7:4-5)

4. What did Joshua pray, and what was his main concern at the end of his prayer? (7:7-9)

5. What sins did God list against Israel, and what did He say He would not do until they were dealt with? (7:11-12)

6. Describe the steps by which Achan was found out. What chances did he have to confess? (7:14-18)

7. What four steps does Achan describe in his confession, and where else do we see that same pattern? (7:21; Genesis 3:6-8; James 1:14-15)

8. What did God later promise about the valley of Achor? (Hosea 2:15)

9. After a great victory, Israel grew overconfident and did not ask the LORD. When have you been most likely to stop praying because things were going well?

10. Is there anything you have hidden that God is asking you to bring into the light? What does 1 John 1:9 promise if you do?

Chapter 8: The Capture of Ai and the Law at Mount Ebal

Scripture

8:1-17 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear, and do not be dismayed. Take with you all the people of war, and arise, go up ***to*** Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai and his people and his city and his land. And you shall do to Ai and to its king just as you did to Jericho and to its king; only its spoil and its livestock you shall plunder for yourselves. Set for yourself an ambush against the city behind it." And Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up ***to*** Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand men, mighty men of valor, and sent them out by night. And he commanded them, saying, "See, you ***are*** lying in wait against the city behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, and all of you be ready. And I and all the people who ***are*** with me will draw near to the city. And it shall be, when they come out to meet us as at the first, that we will flee before them. And they will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, 'They ***are*** fleeing before us as at the first.' And we will flee before them. And you shall rise up from the ambush and take possession of the city, and the LORD your God will give it into your hand. And it shall be, when you have seized the city, ***that*** you shall set the city on fire. According to the word of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you." And Joshua sent them out, and they went to the ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west of Ai. And Joshua stayed that night among the people. And Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people ***to*** Ai. And all the people of war who ***were*** with him went up and drew near and came opposite the city, and they encamped on the north of Ai; and the valley ***was*** between him and Ai. And he took about five thousand men and set them ***as*** an ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west of the city. And they set the people, all the camp which ***was*** on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city. And Joshua went that night into the middle of the valley. And it was, when the king of Ai saw ***it***, and the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out to meet Israel for battle, he and all his people, at the appointed place before the Arabah. And he did not know that an ambush ***was*** against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel let themselves be struck before them, and they fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people who ***were*** in Ai were called together to pursue after them; and they pursued after Joshua and were drawn away from the city. And not a man was left in Ai and Bethel who did not go out after Israel. And they left the city open and pursued after Israel.

8:18-29 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that ***is*** in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the javelin that ***was*** in his hand toward the city. And the ambush rose quickly from its place, and they ran as he stretched out his hand, and they came into the city and captured it; and they hurried and set the city on fire. And the men of Ai turned behind them and saw, and look, the smoke of the city went up to the heavens, and there were no hands in them to flee this way or that way; and the people who were fleeing to the wilderness turned back against the pursuer. And Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city went up, and they turned back and struck the men of Ai. And these came out from the city to meet them, and they were in the middle of Israel, these on this side and those on that side. And they struck them until he had not left to them a

survivor or a fugitive. And the king of Ai they seized alive, and they brought him near to Joshua. And it was, when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they had pursued them, and they had all fallen by the mouth of the sword until they were finished, and all Israel returned ***to*** Ai and struck it by the mouth of the sword. And all who fell that day, from man and to woman, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai. And Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he had stretched out the javelin until he had devoted to destruction all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel plundered for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. And Joshua burned Ai and made it a mound forever, a desolation, to this day. And the king of Ai he hanged on the tree until the time of evening. And as the sun went down Joshua commanded, and they took down his corpse from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and they raised over him a great heap of stones ***that remains*** to this day.

8:30-35 Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on the mountain of Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones on which no one had wielded iron; and they offered up on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and they sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written before the sons of Israel. And all Israel and its elders and officers and its judges ***were*** standing on this side and on that side of the ark, before the priests, the Levites, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the sojourner as well as the native, half of them in front of the mountain of Gerizim and half of them in front of the mountain of Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read aloud all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read aloud before all the assembly of Israel, and the women and the little ones and the sojourners who were going in their midst.

Chapter 8 Preview

With Achan's sin dealt with, God speaks words of comfort to Joshua: do not fear, I have given Ai into your hand. This time God gives the plan. Joshua sets an ambush behind the city, then leads the main army toward the gate and pretends to run away, just as Israel really ran the first time. The men of Ai and Bethel pour out after them and leave the city open. At God's command Joshua stretches out his javelin, the ambush rushes in and sets the city on fire, and the men of Ai are caught between two armies. This time Israel is allowed to keep the spoil and the livestock.

Then the chapter turns from war to worship. Joshua leads all Israel north to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim near Shechem, builds an altar, writes a copy of the law of Moses on stones, and reads every word of the law, the blessings and the curses, to the whole nation, men, women, children and foreigners. Before Israel goes any further into the land, they stop and renew their covenant with God, exactly as Moses had commanded.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1-2 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear, and do not be dismayed. Take with you all the people of war, and arise, go up **to** Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai and his people and his city and his land. And you shall do to Ai and to its king just as you did to Jericho and to its king; only its spoil and its livestock you shall plunder for yourselves. Set for yourself an ambush against the city behind it."*

"Do not fear, and do not be dismayed." These are the same words God spoke in 1:9. After the defeat and the judgment in the valley of Achor, Joshua needed to hear them again. God does not hold confessed sin over His people. Once the sin was dealt with, God came back with encouragement.

"Take with you all the people of war." Last time Israel sent a small force because Ai looked small. This time God told them to bring everyone. "See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai and his people and his city and his land."

Ai would be treated like Jericho, with one difference: "only its spoil and its livestock you shall plunder for yourselves." Achan died for taking what God would have given him a few days later if he had waited. Sin often grabs early what God would have given in His time.

God also gave the plan: "Set for yourself an ambush against the city behind it."

8:3-9 *And Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up **to** Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand men, mighty men of valor, and sent them out by night. And he commanded them, saying, "See, you **are** lying in wait against the city behind the city. Do not go very far from the city, and all of you be ready. And I and all the people who **are** with me will draw near to the city. And it shall be, when they come out to meet us as at the first, that we will flee before them. And they will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, 'They **are** fleeing before us as at the first.' And we will flee before them. And you shall rise up from the ambush and take possession of the city, and the LORD your God will give it into your hand. And it shall be, when you have seized the city, **that** you shall set the city on fire. According to the word of the LORD you shall do. See, I have commanded you." And Joshua sent them out, and they went to the ambush and remained between Bethel and Ai, on the west of Ai. And Joshua stayed that night among the people.*

Joshua chose "thirty thousand men, mighty men of valor, and sent them out by night." He told them to hide behind the city, on the west side, not too far away, and be ready.

His plan was simple. He and the rest of the army would come up to the city from the front. When the men of Ai came out to fight, "as at the first," Israel would run. Ai would chase them, thinking, "They are fleeing before us as at the first." Then the ambush would rise up, take the empty city and set it on fire.

Israel's earlier defeat became part of God's plan. The men of Ai were confident because they had won once. God used their pride against them. And Joshua made sure everyone knew where the plan came from: "According to the word of the LORD you shall do."

The ambush went and waited "between Bethel and Ai, on the west of Ai." Bethel was a town about two miles away. Joshua spent the night with the main army.

8:10-13 *And Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people, and he went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people **to** Ai. And all the people of war who **were** with him went up and drew near and came opposite the city, and they encamped on the north of Ai; and the valley **was** between him and Ai. And he took about five thousand men and set them **as** an ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west of the city. And they set the people, all the camp which **was** on the north of the city, and its rear guard on the west of the city. And Joshua went that night into the middle of the valley.*

Early the next morning Joshua "mustered the people" and marched toward Ai with the elders. They camped on the north side of the city with a valley between them and Ai.

Verse 12 says Joshua "took about five thousand men and set them as an ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west of the city." Verse 3 mentioned thirty thousand. Bible teachers explain this in different ways. Some think there were two groups, a larger force placed to cut off help from Bethel and a smaller ambush close to Ai. Others think verse 12 is telling us more exactly about the same ambush. Scripture does not settle it, and the main point is clear: the trap was set.

That night Joshua went "into the middle of the valley," close enough to be seen in the morning, to draw the enemy out.

8:14-17 *And it was, when the king of Ai saw **it**, and the men of the city hurried and rose early and went out to meet Israel for battle, he and all his people, at the appointed place before the Arabah. And he did not know that an ambush **was** against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel let themselves be struck before them, and they fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people who **were** in Ai were called together to pursue after them; and they pursued after Joshua and were drawn away from the city. And not a man was left in Ai and Bethel who did not go out after Israel. And they left the city open and pursued after Israel.*

The king of Ai saw Israel and acted fast. He and all his men "hurried and rose early and went out to meet Israel for battle." But "he did not know that an ambush was against him behind the city."

Joshua and all Israel "let themselves be struck before them, and they fled by the way of the wilderness." The retreat was a trick, and it worked. Every man in Ai was called out to chase them. Verse 17 adds that "not a man was left in Ai and Bethel who did not go out after Israel." The men of Bethel had come to help Ai. "And they left the city open and pursued after Israel."

Pride makes people careless. The men of Ai were sure they would win again, and they left their home unguarded.

8:18-19 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Stretch out the javelin that **is** in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the javelin that **was** in his hand toward the city. And the ambush rose quickly from its place, and they ran as he stretched out his hand, and they came into the city and captured it; and they hurried and set the city on fire.*

Then the LORD spoke: "Stretch out the javelin that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." A javelin is a short spear. Joshua held it out toward the city, and it became the signal for the ambush.

This reminds us of Moses holding up his staff while Joshua fought Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13). Joshua had seen then that the victory came from God, not from the sword. Now he stood like Moses with his hand stretched out.

"The ambush rose quickly from its place." They ran into the empty city, captured it, and set it on fire.

8:20-23 *And the men of Ai turned behind them and saw, and look, the smoke of the city went up to the heavens, and there were no hands in them to flee this way or that way; and the people who were fleeing to the wilderness turned back against the pursuer. And Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had captured the city and that the smoke of the city went up, and they turned back and struck the men of Ai. And these came out from the city to meet them, and they were in the middle of Israel, these on this side and those on that side. And they struck them until he had not left to them a survivor or a fugitive. And the king of Ai they seized alive, and they brought him near to Joshua.*

The men of Ai looked back and saw "the smoke of the city went up to the heavens." Their home was burning, and they had nowhere to go. "There were no hands in them to flee this way or that way." The Israelites who had been running turned around and attacked.

Now the men of Ai were trapped. The ambush came out of the city behind them, and Joshua's army faced them in front. "They were in the middle of Israel, these on this side and those on that side." The battle was over quickly. The king of Ai was taken alive and brought to Joshua.

8:24-26 *And it was, when Israel had finished killing all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness where they had pursued them, and they had all fallen by the mouth of the sword until they were finished, and all Israel returned **to** Ai and struck it by the mouth of the sword. And all who fell that day, from man and to woman, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai. And Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he had stretched out the javelin until he had devoted to destruction all the inhabitants of Ai.*

When the fighting in the field was done, Israel returned to Ai "and struck it by the mouth of the sword." Verse 25 gives the number: "all who fell that day, from man and to woman, were twelve thousand, all the people of Ai."

This was the same ban, the herem, that fell on Jericho. I explained it more fully in chapter 6, and I will not repeat all of it here. It was God's judgment on the nations of Canaan after more than four

centuries of patience (Genesis 15:16), commanded once, for those nations in that land, and never a pattern for anyone after. It is still hard to read, and it should be.

"Joshua did not draw back his hand with which he had stretched out the javelin until he had devoted to destruction all the inhabitants of Ai." Like Moses with his hands lifted until sundown (Exodus 17:12), Joshua held his position until God's command was fully carried out. Halfway obedience had been Israel's problem at Ai the first time. Joshua did not stop halfway.

8:27-28 *Only the livestock and the spoil of that city Israel plundered for themselves, according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua. And Joshua burned Ai and made it a mound forever, a desolation, to this day.*

This time the people kept the livestock and the spoil, "according to the word of the LORD which He had commanded Joshua." What Achan stole, God now gave freely to all.

"Joshua burned Ai and made it a mound forever, a desolation, to this day." The Hebrew word for mound is tel, the word still used for an ancient ruin hill made up of layers of old cities. The place called "the ruin" was left a ruin. Archaeologists have debated which site was the Ai of Joshua's day, since the ruin long identified with it seems to have been empty at that time. Other nearby sites have been proposed. As with Jericho, the debate does not change what God's Word says happened.

8:29 *And the king of Ai he hanged on the tree until the time of evening. And as the sun went down Joshua commanded, and they took down his corpse from the tree and threw it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and they raised over him a great heap of stones* ***that remains*** *to this day.*

"The king of Ai he hanged on the tree until the time of evening." The king was put to death first, then his body was hung on a tree as a public sign that God's judgment had fallen on him (compare 10:26).

"As the sun went down Joshua commanded, and they took down his corpse." This followed the Law exactly. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 said a body hung on a tree must not stay there overnight, because "one who is hanged is a curse of God." They threw the body at the city gate and raised over it "a great heap of stones." Like Achan's heap in the valley of Achor, it stood as a warning.

Paul quotes this same law about the one hanged on a tree when he writes about the cross. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). The king of Ai hung on a tree for his own sin. Jesus hung on a tree for ours. He took the curse we deserved so that we could receive the blessing.

8:30-31 *Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on the mountain of Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones on which no one had wielded iron; and they offered up on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and they sacrificed peace offerings.*

"Then Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel," on Mount Ebal. This seems like a sudden change. Israel had just taken their second city. Instead of marching on, they traveled about twenty miles north into the heart of the land, to Mount Ebal near Shechem.

Why? Because Moses had commanded it. As soon as they crossed the Jordan, they were to set up large stones on Mount Ebal, plaster them, write the law on them, and build an altar of uncut stones (Deuteronomy 27:1-8). Joshua did it "just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded."

The altar was made of "whole stones on which no one had wielded iron." God did not want human tools shaping His altar (Exodus 20:25). The way to God was by His design, not ours. On it they offered burnt offerings, which were wholly burned to show complete dedication to God, and peace offerings, which were shared in a meal to celebrate fellowship with Him.

Shechem had a long history with God's people. It was where God first promised Abraham the land and where Abraham built his first altar in Canaan (Genesis 12:6-7). Now Abraham's descendants built an altar in the same area, in the land God had given them.

8:32 *And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written before the sons of Israel.*

"And he wrote there on the stones a copy of the law of Moses." This was not the whole five books of Moses. It was likely the laws of the covenant, perhaps the core of Deuteronomy, written on large plastered stones where everyone could read them (Deuteronomy 27:2-3, 8).

The law was written in the land, publicly, so that everyone would know God's Word was the law of this land. A nation that God had planted needed to know what God required.

8:33-35 *And all Israel and its elders and officers and its judges **were** standing on this side and on that side of the ark, before the priests, the Levites, who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the sojourner as well as the native, half of them in front of the mountain of Gerizim and half of them in front of the mountain of Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read aloud all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read aloud before all the assembly of Israel, and the women and the little ones and the sojourners who were going in their midst.*

All Israel stood in two halves, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, with the priests and the ark in the valley between. Moses had commanded this (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:11-13). Six tribes stood on Gerizim for the blessings. Six stood on Ebal for the curses. The valley between the two mountains carries sound well, so the whole people could hear and answer.

Notice who was there: "the sojourner as well as the native." Foreigners living among Israel, like Rahab and her family, stood with them. God's Word was for everyone in the camp.

Joshua "read aloud all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse." Verse 35 drives it home: "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read aloud before all the assembly of Israel, and the women and the little ones and the sojourners." Joshua did not skip the hard parts. Every word was read to every person.

This is the right ending to a chapter that began with sin and defeat. Israel had learned at Ai what happens when one man ignores God's Word. Now the whole nation stood and heard that Word together. Joshua was doing what God commanded in 1:8. The book of the law did not depart from his mouth.

Do we give God's Word that place? Many churches today read very little Scripture aloud. Joshua read all of it, to everyone, including the children. We still need to hear God's Word, all of it, the blessings and the warnings, and we need to teach it to our children.

Chapter 8 Summary

After Achan's sin was dealt with, the LORD told Joshua not to fear and to take all the fighting men against Ai, promising to give him the city and allowing Israel to keep its spoil and livestock. Joshua set an ambush west of the city, then approached from the north and pretended to flee as before. The men of Ai and Bethel chased Israel and left the city open. At the LORD's command Joshua stretched out his javelin, the ambush took and burned the city, and the men of Ai were trapped between the two forces. Twelve thousand people of Ai died, the king was captured and put to death, and his body was hung on a tree until evening and then buried under a heap of stones at the gate. Joshua burned Ai and left it a ruin. Then Joshua built an altar of uncut stones on Mount Ebal, offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, wrote a copy of the law of Moses on stones, and read every word of the law, the blessings and the curses, to all Israel, including the women, children and foreigners, as they stood before Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.

People and Places

- Bethel: a town about two miles from Ai, whose men joined in the battle; later an important place in Israel.
- Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim: two mountains facing each other near Shechem in the center of the land, where the curses and blessings of the law were read.
- Shechem: the town between the two mountains, where God first promised Abraham the land (Genesis 12:6-7).
- Burnt offering: an offering wholly burned on the altar, showing complete dedication to God.
- Peace offering: an offering shared in a meal, celebrating fellowship with God.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. What did God say to Joshua after Achan's sin was dealt with, and what was different about Ai compared with Jericho? (8:1-2)

2. How did Joshua's plan use Israel's earlier defeat? (8:5-6)

3. What did Joshua do with his javelin, and what does that remind you of from Moses' time? (8:18, 26; Exodus 17:8-13)

4. How were the men of Ai trapped? (8:20-22)

5. What did Israel do with the king of Ai's body, and what law were they following? (8:29; Deuteronomy 21:22-23)

6. How does Paul use the law about one hanged on a tree to explain the cross? (Galatians 3:13)

7. What did Joshua do at Mount Ebal, and why did he go there right after taking Ai? (8:30-32; Deuteronomy 27:1-8)

8. Who was present at the reading of the law, and how much of it did Joshua read? (8:33-35)

9. Achan grabbed what God would have given freely a short time later. Is there something you are tempted to grab for yourself instead of waiting on God's timing?

10. Joshua read every word of the law, the blessings and the warnings, to everyone. How much of God's Word do you hear and read each week? What could you change?

Chapter 9: The Gibeonite Deception

Scripture

9:1-15 And it was, when all the kings who ***were*** beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in all the coast of the Great Sea in front of the Lebanon, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard ***of it***, and they gathered themselves together as one to wage war with Joshua and with Israel ***with*** one mouth. And the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, and they also acted with cunning, and they went and made themselves envoys, and they took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins worn out and split and tied up, and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out garments on them; and all the bread of their provision was dry ***and*** had become crumbs. And they went to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant land; and now make a covenant with us." And the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you ***are*** dwelling in our midst; and how shall we make a covenant with you?" And they said to Joshua, "We ***are*** your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who ***are*** you, and where do you come from?" And they said to him, "From a very distant land your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who ***were*** beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who ***was*** in Ashtaroth. And our elders and all the inhabitants of our land said to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We ***are*** your servants; and now make a covenant with us."' This our bread we took warm ***as*** our provision from our houses on the day we came out to come to you; and now look, it is dry and has become crumbs. And these wineskins which we filled ***were*** new, and look, they have split; and these garments of ours and our sandals have worn out from the very great length of the journey." And the men took from their provisions, and they did not ask the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.

9:16-27 And it was at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, and they heard that they ***were*** near to him, and ***that*** they ***were*** dwelling in his midst. And the sons of Israel set out and came to their cities on the third day; and their cities ***were*** Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. And the sons of Israel did not strike them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. And all the congregation grumbled against the leaders. And all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we are not able to touch them. This we will do to them, and let them live, so that wrath will not be on us because of the oath which we swore to them." And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." And they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had spoken to them. And Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We ***are*** very distant from you,' when you ***are*** dwelling in our midst? And now you ***are*** cursed, and a slave shall not be cut off from you, both cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." And they answered Joshua and said, "Because it was certainly told to your servants that the LORD your God had commanded Moses His servant to give you all the land and to destroy all the

inhabitants of the land before you; and we feared greatly for our souls because of you, and we did this thing. And now, look, we ***are*** in your hand. As ***it is*** good and as ***it is*** right in your eyes to do to us, do." And he did so to them, and he delivered them from the hand of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them. And Joshua made them on that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose.

Chapter 9 Preview

After Jericho and Ai, the kings of Canaan finally act. Most of them band together to fight Israel. But the people of Gibeon, a large city only a few miles from Ai, take a different road. They dress up in worn-out clothes and patched sandals, pack dry, crumbling bread and split wineskins, and walk into Israel's camp at Gilgal pretending to be from a far country. They ask for a covenant of peace.

The men of Israel look at the evidence, taste the bread, and make the deal. And the text says plainly what they forgot to do: they did not ask the LORD. Three days later they find out the truth. The Gibeonites live right next door. But Israel has sworn by the LORD, and an oath in God's name must be kept. So the Gibeonites live, and they become woodcutters and water carriers for the house of God. This chapter is about the danger of making decisions without prayer, the weight of a promise made in God's name, and a God whose mercy still reached a people who came to Him the wrong way.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-2 *And it was, when all the kings who **were** beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in all the coast of the Great Sea in front of the Lebanon, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, heard **of it**, and they gathered themselves together as one to wage war with Joshua and with Israel **with** one mouth.*

"All the kings who were beyond the Jordan," meaning west of the river from where the writer stands, heard what had happened. They lived "in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in all the coast of the Great Sea." The Shephelah is the low, rolling foothills between the central mountains and the coastal plain. The list of peoples is the familiar one: Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

"They gathered themselves together as one to wage war with Joshua and with Israel with one mouth." Old rivals put aside their quarrels to fight a common enemy. When God's people begin to move forward, opposition often unites. But the next battle would not start with a sword. It would start with a trick.

9:3-5 *And the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, and they also acted with cunning, and they went and made themselves envoys, and they took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins worn out and split and tied up, and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out garments on them; and all the bread of their provision was dry* ***and*** *had become crumbs.*

"The inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai." Gibeon was a strong city about six miles northwest of Jerusalem, only a short march from Ai. They knew they were next.

"They also acted with cunning." The word "also" may look back to Israel's own trick at Ai. The Gibeonites answered with a trick of their own. They dressed up as envoys from a far country, with "worn-out sacks for their donkeys," wineskins "worn out and split and tied up," patched sandals, old clothes, and bread so dry it "had become crumbs." Every detail was planned to say: we have come a long way.

Satan uses the same method with God's people. He does not always attack openly. Sometimes he comes looking harmless, even friendly. Paul warns that he "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). The danger Israel faced at Gibeon was greater than the danger of armies, because they could not see it coming.

9:6-8 *And they went to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a distant land; and now make a covenant with us." And the men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you* ***are*** *dwelling in our midst; and how shall we make a covenant with you?" And they said to Joshua, "We* ***are*** *your servants." And Joshua said to them, "Who* ***are*** *you, and where do you come from?"*

They came to Joshua "at the camp at Gilgal" and said, "We have come from a distant land; and now make a covenant with us."

The men of Israel were suspicious at first. They said "to the Hivites," which tells us who the Gibeonites were, "Perhaps you are dwelling in our midst; and how shall we make a covenant with you?" They knew the law. God had told them to make no covenant with the peoples of the land (Exodus 23:32; Deuteronomy 7:2). But He had allowed peace with cities far away (Deuteronomy 20:10-15). So the question was where they really came from.

The Gibeonites dodged the question: "We are your servants." Joshua pressed them: "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

9:9-13 *And they said to him, "From a very distant land your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who **were** beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who **was** in Ashtaroth. And our elders and all the inhabitants of our land said to us, saying, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them, and say to them, "We **are** your servants; and now make a covenant with us."' This our bread we took warm **as** our provision from our houses on the day we came out to come to you; and now look, it is dry and has become crumbs. And these wineskins which we filled **were** new, and look, they have split; and these garments of ours and our sandals have worn out from the very great length of the journey."*

Their answer was clever. "From a very distant land your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God." They spoke of the LORD's fame, of what He did in Egypt, and of what He did "to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan." Notice what they left out. They did not mention Jericho or Ai, the recent news. People from a far country would not have heard about those yet. They were careful to tell only old news.

Then they pointed to their evidence. "This our bread we took warm as our provision from our houses on the day we came out to come to you; and now look, it is dry and has become crumbs." The wineskins were new when they filled them, and look at them now. Our clothes and sandals are worn out "from the very great length of the journey."

It was a convincing show. It was also a mix of truth and lies. They really had heard of the LORD. They really were afraid. Their fear of God was real, even if their story was false.

9:14-15 *And the men took from their provisions, and they did not ask the mouth of the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them.*

Here is the key verse of the chapter: "And the men took from their provisions, and they did not ask the mouth of the LORD." They looked at the bread, maybe even tasted it, and judged by what they could see. They had the high priest with the Urim and Thummim right there in the camp, a way God had given to ask Him for direction (Numbers 27:21). They did not use it.

"Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore to them." Joshua and the leaders were not wicked men. They were careless men. They trusted their own eyes on a question that seemed simple.

How often do we do the same? We pray about the big crises. But when something looks easy and obvious, we decide on our own. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to trust the LORD with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding, and to know Him "in all your ways." James 1:5 promises that if we lack wisdom, we can ask God, and He will give it generously. The decisions that look simplest are often the ones where we most need to ask.

9:16-18 *And it was at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, and they heard that they **were** near to him, and **that** they **were** dwelling in his midst. And the sons of Israel set out and came to their cities on the third day; and their cities **were** Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim. And the sons of Israel did not strike them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel. And all the congregation grumbled against the leaders.*

"At the end of three days" the truth came out. These people lived "near to him." Israel marched out and found their cities on the third day: "Gibeon and Chephirah and Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim." These four towns were all within a day's walk.

"The sons of Israel did not strike them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel." The people were angry. "All the congregation grumbled against the leaders." It was not the first time Israel grumbled, but this time they had a point. Their leaders had been fooled.

9:19-21 *And all the leaders said to all the congregation, "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we are not able to touch them. This we will do to them, and let them live, so that wrath will not be on us because of the oath which we swore to them." And the leaders said to them, "Let them live." And they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had spoken to them.*

The leaders answered: "We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we are not able to touch them." An oath in the LORD's name was binding, even if it was made by mistake and gained by a lie. To break it would be to take God's name in vain. "So that wrath will not be on us because of the oath which we swore to them."

Psalm 15:4 describes the person who may dwell with God as one who "swears to his own harm and does not change." The leaders kept their word even though it cost them.

That this mattered to God is clear from what happened about four hundred years later. King Saul, in his zeal, tried to wipe out the Gibeonites. God sent a famine on Israel for three years, and when David asked why, the LORD said it was because Saul "put to death the Gibeonites" (2 Samuel 21:1-2). God held Israel to an oath made in His name centuries before. He takes our promises seriously, because He keeps His own.

Instead of death, the Gibeonites became "cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation." They would do the hard, everyday work of the camp.

9:22-23 *And Joshua called for them, and he spoke to them, saying, "Why did you deceive us, saying, 'We **are** very distant from you,' when you **are** dwelling in our midst? And now you **are** cursed, and a slave shall not be cut off from you, both cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God."*

Joshua called the Gibeonites and asked them, "Why did you deceive us?" Then he gave the sentence: "And now you are cursed, and a slave shall not be cut off from you, both cutters of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God."

Their lie was not excused. They would serve. But look where they would serve: "for the house of my God." They would chop the wood for the altar fires and carry the water for the washings at the tabernacle. The very people who should have been destroyed were brought near to the worship of the true God. What was meant as a curse also put them close to the place of blessing.

9:24-25 *And they answered Joshua and said, "Because it was certainly told to your servants that the LORD your God had commanded Moses His servant to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; and we feared greatly for our souls because of you, and we did this thing. And now, look, we **are** in your hand. As **it is** good and as **it is** right in your eyes to do to us, do."*

The Gibeonites told the truth at last. "It was certainly told to your servants that the LORD your God had commanded Moses His servant to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you; and we feared greatly for our souls because of you, and we did this thing."

They believed what God had said. That is the same thing Rahab believed (2:9-11). The difference is in how they came. Rahab told the truth to Israel and risked her life to help them. The Gibeonites came with a lie. Yet both believed that the LORD's word would come true, and both found a way to live among His people.

"And now, look, we are in your hand. As it is good and as it is right in your eyes to do to us, do." They gave up completely. That is the right posture for anyone who comes to God. We do not bargain. We surrender and trust His mercy.

9:26-27 *And he did so to them, and he delivered them from the hand of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them. And Joshua made them on that day cutters of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose.*

"He delivered them from the hand of the sons of Israel, and they did not kill them." Joshua protected them from the angry crowd. And he made them woodcutters and water carriers "for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose." The place God would choose was the place where the tabernacle and later the temple would stand.

The Gibeonites stayed with Israel. Gibeon later became a city of the priests (21:17). For a time the tabernacle and the great altar stood at Gibeon, and Solomon went there to sacrifice (1 Kings 3:4; 1 Chronicles 16:39). After the exile in Babylon, "the sons of Gibeon" were among those who came back to rebuild (Nehemiah 7:25). A people who came to Israel with a lie ended up serving at God's altar for generations.

There is a warning and a comfort here. The warning is to Israel, and to us: ask the LORD before you decide. The comfort is that God's mercy is wider than we think. The Gibeonites came the wrong way, but they came because they feared the LORD, and they found a place among His people. Whoever comes to God in Christ, He will never cast out (John 6:37).

Chapter 9 Summary

When the kings west of the Jordan heard about Jericho and Ai, they joined together to fight Israel. But the people of Gibeon, a Hivite city nearby, dressed in worn-out clothes and sandals and carried dry, crumbling bread and split wineskins, and they came to Joshua at Gilgal claiming to be from a distant land. They asked for a covenant, speaking of the LORD's works in Egypt and against Sihon and Og. The men of Israel looked at their provisions but did not ask the LORD, and Joshua and the leaders made a covenant of peace with them and swore by the LORD. Three days later Israel learned that Gibeon and its towns were nearby. Because of the oath, Israel did not attack them, though the congregation grumbled. The Gibeonites admitted that they had lied out of fear because they believed the LORD would give Israel the land. Joshua spared them and made them woodcutters and water carriers for the congregation and the altar of the LORD.

People and Places

- Gibeon: a large Hivite city about six miles northwest of Jerusalem, later a city of the priests (21:17).
- Chephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath-jearim: three towns allied with Gibeon.
- The Shephelah: the low foothills between the central hill country and the coastal plain.
- Hivites: one of the peoples of Canaan; the Gibeonites were Hivites (9:7; 11:19).

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. How did the kings of Canaan respond to Israel's victories? (9:1-2)

2. How did the Gibeonites respond, and what did they bring to make their story believable? (9:3-5)

3. Why were the men of Israel suspicious at first? (9:7; Deuteronomy 7:2; 20:10-15)

4. What news did the Gibeonites mention, and what news did they leave out? Why? (9:9-10)

5. What did Israel fail to do before making the covenant? (9:14)

6. Why did Israel keep its oath even after learning the truth? (9:18-20; Psalm 15:4)

7. What happened centuries later when Saul broke this oath? (2 Samuel 21:1-2)

8. Where did the Gibeonites end up serving, and what does that show about God's mercy? (9:23, 27)

9. Israel prayed about Jericho but not about the travelers with dry bread. What kinds of decisions are you most tempted to make without asking God?

10. Have you ever made a promise you later regretted? How does this chapter speak to keeping your word, and to asking God before you give it?

Chapter 10: The Sun Stands Still and the Southern Campaign

Scripture

10:1-15 And it was, when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction (as he had done to Jericho and to its king, so he had done to Ai and to its king), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were in their midst, and they feared greatly, because Gibeon ***was*** a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it ***was*** greater than Ai, and all its men ***were*** mighty men. And Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, and to Piram king of Jarmuth, and to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the sons of Israel." And the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they and all their armies, and they encamped against Gibeon and waged war against it. And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, saying, "Do not let your hands drop from your servants. Come up to us quickly, and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country have gathered together against us." And Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for I have given them into your hand. Not a man of them will stand before you." And Joshua came to them suddenly; all the night he had gone up from Gilgal. And the LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, and He struck them ***with*** a great striking at Gibeon, and He pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and He struck them as far as Azekah and as far as Makkedah. And it was, as they fled before Israel, they ***were*** on the descent of Beth-horon, and the LORD threw down on them great stones from the heavens as far as Azekah, and they died. More ***were*** those who died by the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword. Then Joshua spoke to the LORD on the day the LORD gave the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the eyes of Israel, "Sun, be still at Gibeon, and moon, in the valley of Aijalon." And the sun was still, and the moon stood, until the nation took vengeance on its enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stood in the middle of the heavens and did not hurry to go ***down*** about a whole day. And there has been no day like that before it or after it, ***that*** the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

10:16-27 And these five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. And it was told to Joshua, saying, "The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll great stones to the mouth of the cave, and appoint men over it to guard them. And you, do not stay ***there***; pursue after your enemies and attack their rear. Do not allow them to go into their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand." And it was, when Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished striking them ***with*** a very great striking until they were finished, and the survivors who survived of them went into the fortified cities, and all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace. No one sharpened his tongue against the sons of Israel, against any man. And Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out to me these five kings from the cave." And they did so, and they brought out to him these five kings from the

cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon. And it was, when they brought out these kings to Joshua, and Joshua called for every man of Israel, and he said to the commanders of the men of war who had gone with him, "Draw near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." And they drew near and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed. Be strong and be bold, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you are fighting." And afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging on the trees until the evening. And it was at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they put great stones over the mouth of the cave, ***which remain*** to this very day.

10:28-43 And Makkedah Joshua captured on that day, and he struck it by the mouth of the sword, and its king. He devoted them to destruction and every soul that ***was*** in it; he did not leave a survivor. And he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho. And Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him, from Makkedah ***to*** Libnah, and he fought against Libnah. And the LORD gave it also, and its king, into the hand of Israel; and he struck it by the mouth of the sword, and every soul that ***was*** in it. He did not leave a survivor in it, and he did to its king just as he had done to the king of Jericho. And Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him, from Libnah to Lachish, and he encamped against it and fought against it. And the LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he captured it on the second day, and he struck it by the mouth of the sword, and every soul that ***was*** in it, according to all that he had done to Libnah. Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people until he had not left to him a survivor. And Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him, from Lachish to Eglon; and they encamped against it and fought against it. And they captured it on that day and struck it by the mouth of the sword; and every soul that ***was*** in it he devoted to destruction on that day, according to all that he had done to Lachish. And Joshua went up, and all Israel with him, from Eglon to Hebron, and they fought against it. And they captured it and struck it by the mouth of the sword, and its king and all its cities and every soul that ***was*** in it. He did not leave a survivor, according to all that he had done to Eglon; and he devoted it to destruction and every soul that ***was*** in it. And Joshua turned back, and all Israel with him, to Debir, and he fought against it. And he captured it and its king and all its cities, and they struck them by the mouth of the sword and devoted to destruction every soul that ***was*** in it. He did not leave a survivor. Just as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir and to its king, and just as he had done to Libnah and to its king. And Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negeb and the Shephelah and the slopes, and all their kings. He did not leave a survivor, and he devoted to destruction everything that breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea and as far as Gaza, and all the land of Goshen and as far as Gibeon. And all these kings and their land Joshua captured at one time, for the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.

Chapter 10 Preview

The peace with Gibeon has consequences right away. Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, sees that one of the strongest cities in the land has gone over to Israel, and he gathers four other Amorite

kings to attack Gibeon. The Gibeonites send an urgent call to Joshua. Israel is bound to them by oath, so Joshua marches all night from Gilgal and takes the enemy by surprise. The LORD throws the Amorites into a panic and sends huge hailstones on them as they run, and more die from the hail than from the sword.

Then Joshua prays in front of all Israel, "Sun, be still at Gibeon," and the sun stops in the middle of the sky about a whole day. The five kings, hiding in a cave, are brought out and put to death, and Joshua sweeps through the south of Canaan city by city. It is a chapter of mighty miracles and hard judgment, and its main point is said twice: the LORD fought for Israel.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-2 *And it was, when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai and had devoted it to destruction (as he had done to Jericho and to its king, so he had done to Ai and to its king), and that the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel and were in their midst, and they feared greatly, because Gibeon **was** a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it **was** greater than Ai, and all its men **were** mighty men.*

"Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem." This is the first time Jerusalem is named in the Bible under that name. His name means lord of righteousness, close to the name of an earlier king of Salem, Melchizedek, "king of righteousness," who blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1-2). Salem is generally taken to be Jerusalem (Psalm 76:2). But this king was no Melchizedek. He was a Canaanite king leading the fight against God's people.

He heard about Jericho and Ai, and that Gibeon "had made peace with Israel." That frightened him more than anything, "because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities," bigger than Ai, "and all its men were mighty men." Gibeon was only about six miles from Jerusalem. If Gibeon joined Israel, Jerusalem was exposed.

10:3-5 *And Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem sent to Hoham king of Hebron, and to Piram king of Jarmuth, and to Japhia king of Lachish, and to Debir king of Eglon, saying, "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon, for it has made peace with Joshua and with the sons of Israel." And the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered together and went up, they and all their armies, and they encamped against Gibeon and waged war against it.*

Adoni-zedek sent to four other kings: Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth, Japhia of Lachish, and Debir of Eglon. These were cities of the hill country and the foothills of the south. "Come up to me and help me, and let us strike Gibeon."

They did not attack Israel first. They attacked Gibeon, to make an example of the city that changed sides. When someone turns to the LORD, the old crowd is not always happy about it.

"The five kings of the Amorites" gathered their armies and camped against Gibeon.

10:6-7 *And the men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at the camp at Gilgal, saying, "Do not let your hands drop from your servants. Come up to us quickly, and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites who dwell in the hill country have gathered together against us." And Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor.*

The men of Gibeon sent to Joshua at Gilgal: "Do not let your hands drop from your servants. Come up to us quickly, and save us and help us."

Joshua had every human reason to say no. The Gibeonites had lied to him. But a covenant is a covenant. Israel had sworn to let them live, and that oath meant protecting them. Joshua went up "and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor."

There is a picture of grace here. The Gibeonites came deceitfully, but once they were under the covenant, Israel fought for them as its own. We come to God with nothing to offer, and often with mixed motives, but once we are His in Christ, He does not let His hands drop from us.

10:8-9 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid of them, for I have given them into your hand. Not a man of them will stand before you." And Joshua came to them suddenly; all the night he had gone up from Gilgal.*

"Do not be afraid of them, for I have given them into your hand. Not a man of them will stand before you." God gave Joshua the same promise He gave in 1:5, now for this battle.

"And Joshua came to them suddenly; all the night he had gone up from Gilgal." This was a hard march of about twenty miles, uphill most of the way, climbing some three thousand feet in the dark. The army arrived at dawn and struck before the enemy was ready. God's promise did not make Joshua lazy. It made him bold. He believed God and marched all night.

10:10-11 *And the LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, and He struck them **with** a great striking at Gibeon, and He pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon, and He struck them as far as Azekah and as far as Makkedah. And it was, as they fled before Israel, they **were** on the descent of Beth-horon, and the LORD threw down on them great stones from the heavens as far as Azekah, and they died. More **were** those who died by the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.*

"And the LORD threw them into confusion before Israel." The same word is used of what God did to Egypt at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:24). The Amorite armies panicked. God "struck them with a great striking at Gibeon." He chased them up the pass of Beth-horon, a steep road leading west down out of the hills toward the lowlands, "as far as Azekah and as far as Makkedah."

Then "the LORD threw down on them great stones from the heavens." These were giant hailstones. The text is careful: they fell "as far as Azekah," on the fleeing enemy, not on Israel. "More were those who died by the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword." The battle belonged to the LORD, and He made sure Israel knew it. God asks Job whether he has seen "the storehouses of the hail," which He keeps "for a day of battle and war" (Job 38:22-23). This was such a day.

10:12-14 *Then Joshua spoke to the LORD on the day the LORD gave the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the eyes of Israel, "Sun, be still at Gibeon, and moon, in the valley of Aijalon." And the sun was still, and the moon stood, until the nation took vengeance on its enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stood in the middle of the heavens and did not hurry to go* ***down*** *about a whole day. And there has been no day like that before it or after it,* ***that*** *the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.*

"Then Joshua spoke to the LORD on the day the LORD gave the Amorites before the sons of Israel." Joshua prayed first. Then, "in the eyes of Israel," he spoke to the sun and moon: "Sun, be still at Gibeon, and moon, in the valley of Aijalon."

The sun was over Gibeon to the east and the moon over the valley of Aijalon to the west, which may suggest early morning. Joshua had a long day of battle ahead and an enemy that could escape into its walled cities by nightfall. He needed more daylight.

"And the sun was still, and the moon stood, until the nation took vengeance on its enemies." The writer quotes from "the book of Jashar," a book of Israel's songs and poems about its heroes that has not survived. David's lament for Saul and Jonathan was also recorded there (2 Samuel 1:18). Then the writer adds his own plain statement in prose: "the sun stood in the middle of the heavens and did not hurry to go down about a whole day."

Verse 14 tells us how unique this was: "there has been no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel."

What happened? I take it as a real miracle. The writer is not only quoting a poem. He tells us in plain words, in verse 13 and again in verse 14, that the sun stood in the middle of the sky about a whole day and that there was never a day like it. God made the sun and the moon, and He holds all things together (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). If He chose to lengthen a day, He was able to.

Bible-believing teachers have suggested different ways God may have done it. Some believe God slowed or stopped the turning of the earth, so the sun appeared to stand still. Others believe God made the light last longer in that place, perhaps by bending the sun's light in some way, without stopping the earth. A few think the Hebrew word for "be still," which can also mean "be silent" or "stop," means Joshua asked the sun to stop beating down, so that clouds and hail cooled the day and gave the army strength. Others read it as a sign in the sky, with the sun and moon in a position that the Amorites took as a bad omen. And some think the whole thing is poetic language, taken from a song. The last few views do not fit well with the plain statements in verses 13 and 14, which speak of the sun standing still about a whole day and call that day unique in history.

Scripture tells us what God did, not exactly how He did it. Our job is to believe it, not to explain every detail. We should also not repeat the story, passed around for years, that scientists found a "missing day" in their calculations. That story is not true, and we do not need it. God later moved the shadow back ten steps on the steps of Ahaz as a sign for Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:9-11). The God who rules the heavens can change their course when He chooses.

But notice the heart of verse 14. The wonder is not only that the sun stood still. It is that "the LORD listened to the voice of a man." The Creator of the sun heard Joshua's prayer and answered it. James 5:17 reminds us that Elijah was a man like us, and God answered his prayer. We should not expect God to stop the sun for us, since this day was unique, but we can pray boldly, because the same God listens.

10:15 *And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*

"And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal." This verse is the same as verse 43, and the next verses show Joshua still at Makkedah, far from Gilgal (10:21). Some think verse 15 is the end of the quotation from the book of Jashar. Others think the writer gives the end of the campaign here as a summary and then goes back to tell the rest of the story. Either way, Israel did not go back to camp until the southern campaign was done.

10:16-19 *And these five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah. And it was told to Joshua, saying, "The five kings have been found hidden in the cave at Makkedah." And Joshua said, "Roll great stones to the mouth of the cave, and appoint men over it to guard them. And you, do not stay **there**; pursue after your enemies and attack their rear. Do not allow them to go into their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand."*

"These five kings fled and hid themselves in the cave at Makkedah." Makkedah was a town in the lowlands, west of the hills. Someone found them and told Joshua.

Joshua's orders were quick and wise. "Roll great stones to the mouth of the cave, and appoint men over it to guard them." The kings could wait. The armies could not be allowed to get back into their walled cities. "Pursue after your enemies and attack their rear. Do not allow them to go into their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand."

Joshua kept first things first. The kings were going nowhere. The urgent work was to finish the battle.

10:20-21 *And it was, when Joshua and the sons of Israel had finished striking them **with** a very great striking until they were finished, and the survivors who survived of them went into the fortified cities, and all the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace. No one sharpened his tongue against the sons of Israel, against any man.*

Israel struck the enemy "with a very great striking until they were finished." Then the text adds, "and the survivors who survived of them went into the fortified cities." Some of the enemy did escape. That will matter when we read later that Joshua "did not leave a survivor" in city after city.

"All the people returned to the camp, to Joshua at Makkedah, in peace." Not one Israelite casualty is mentioned. "No one sharpened his tongue against the sons of Israel." That is, no one dared say a word against them. The land was silent with fear.

10:22-25 *And Joshua said, "Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out to me these five kings from the cave." And they did so, and they brought out to him these five kings from the cave: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon. And it was, when they brought out these kings to Joshua, and Joshua called for every man of Israel, and he said to the commanders of the men of war who had gone with him, "Draw near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." And they drew near and put their feet on their necks. And Joshua said to them, "Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed. Be strong and be bold, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you are fighting."*

Then Joshua ordered the cave opened and the five kings brought out: "the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon."

He called the commanders of the army and said, "Draw near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." In the ancient world, putting your foot on the neck of a defeated enemy was a public sign of total victory.

Joshua explained why: "Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed. Be strong and be bold, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you are fighting." The words God had spoken to Joshua in chapter 1, Joshua now spoke to his officers. This was not cruelty for its own sake. It was a lesson in faith. Many more battles were ahead, and Israel's leaders needed to see that the kings of Canaan were not to be feared.

The Bible uses the same picture for Christ's final victory: "He must reign until He has put all the enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25; Psalm 110:1). Our enemies are not flesh and blood, but in Christ the victory is just as sure (Romans 16:20).

10:26-27 *And afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees; and they were hanging on the trees until the evening. And it was at the time of the going down of the sun, Joshua commanded, and they took them down from the trees and threw them into the cave where they had hidden themselves, and they put great stones over the mouth of the cave,* ***which remain*** *to this very day.*

"Afterward Joshua struck them and put them to death, and he hanged them on five trees." As with the king of Ai, the kings were killed first, then their bodies were hung on trees as a sign of God's judgment. "They were hanging on the trees until the evening."

At sunset, following the Law (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), the bodies were taken down and thrown into the cave where the kings had hidden. Great stones were set over the mouth of the cave, and the writer says they remained "to this very day." The cave they hid in became their grave.

This is hard to read. These kings had made war on God's people, and under God's command they received the judgment He had spoken (Deuteronomy 7:24). It was a judgment for that time and that war. It does not give anyone today permission to treat enemies this way. We are told instead to love our enemies and leave vengeance to God (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:19).

10:28-30 *And Makkedah Joshua captured on that day, and he struck it by the mouth of the sword, and its king. He devoted them to destruction and every soul that **was** in it; he did not leave a survivor. And he did to the king of Makkedah just as he had done to the king of Jericho. And Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him, from Makkedah **to** Libnah, and he fought against Libnah. And the LORD gave it also, and its king, into the hand of Israel; and he struck it by the mouth of the sword, and every soul that **was** in it. He did not leave a survivor in it, and he did to its king just as he had done to the king of Jericho.*

The rest of the chapter reads like a war report, short and repetitive, city after city. Joshua took Makkedah "on that day." He "devoted them to destruction and every soul that was in it; he did not leave a survivor." He did to its king what he had done to the king of Jericho.

Then "Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him," to Libnah. "The LORD gave it also, and its king, into the hand of Israel." The same pattern repeats. Notice who gives the victory each time. The LORD gave it.

10:31-33 *And Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him, from Libnah to Lachish, and he encamped against it and fought against it. And the LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel, and he captured it on the second day, and he struck it by the mouth of the sword, and every soul that **was** in it, according to all that he had done to Libnah. Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua struck him and his people until he had not left to him a survivor.*

From Libnah Joshua moved to Lachish, one of the strongest fortress cities in the south. It took two days. "The LORD gave Lachish into the hand of Israel." "Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish." Gezer was a strong city farther north and west. Joshua defeated him and his army. Gezer itself was not taken at this time, and the Canaanites kept living there for a long while (16:10).

10:34-37 *And Joshua passed on, and all Israel with him, from Lachish to Eglon; and they encamped against it and fought against it. And they captured it on that day and struck it by the mouth of the sword; and every soul that **was** in it he devoted to destruction on that day, according to all that he had done to Lachish. And Joshua went up, and all Israel with him, from Eglon to Hebron, and they fought against it. And they captured it and struck it by the mouth of the sword, and its king and all its cities and every soul that **was** in it. He did not leave a survivor, according to all that he had done to Eglon; and he devoted it to destruction and every soul that **was** in it.*

Next came Eglon, taken "on that day," and then Hebron, up in the hill country. Hebron was where Abraham lived and was buried (Genesis 23:19; 25:9-10), and where the spies had seen the sons of Anak forty years before (Numbers 13:22). The city that had frightened the first generation fell to the second.

Joshua struck Hebron, "and its king and all its cities and every soul that was in it." The king of Hebron had already been killed at Makkedah (10:23, 26), so this king was probably a new king who took his place, or the ruler of the city left behind. Scripture does not explain.

10:38-39 *And Joshua turned back, and all Israel with him, to Debir, and he fought against it. And he captured it and its king and all its cities, and they struck them by the mouth of the sword and devoted to destruction every soul that* ***was*** *in it. He did not leave a survivor. Just as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir and to its king, and just as he had done to Libnah and to its king.*

Then Joshua "turned back" to Debir, south and west of Hebron. He took it "and its king and all its cities." The same summary is given: "He did not leave a survivor. Just as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir and to its king."

Later we read that Caleb had to take Hebron again, and his nephew Othniel took Debir (15:13-17; Judges 1:10-13). That tells us the Canaanites who had escaped (10:20) came back into some of these cities after Joshua's army moved on. Joshua broke their power. The tribes would still have to settle and hold the land.

10:40-43 *And Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negeb and the Shephelah and the slopes, and all their kings. He did not leave a survivor, and he devoted to destruction everything that breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea and as far as Gaza, and all the land of Goshen and as far as Gibeon. And all these kings and their land Joshua captured at one time, for the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal.*

These verses sum up the whole southern campaign. "Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negeb and the Shephelah and the slopes, and all their kings." The Negeb is the dry south country. The territory stretched "from Kadesh-barnea and as far as Gaza, and all the land of Goshen and as far as Gibeon." (This Goshen is a region in southern Canaan, not the Goshen in Egypt.)

Verse 40 says he "devoted to destruction everything that breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded." This is the ban again, the herem, which I explained at 6:21. It was God's judgment on the nations of Canaan, whose sin He had waited on since the days of Abraham (Genesis 15:16), for practices like burning their children to their gods (Deuteronomy 12:31). It was commanded once, for those nations in that land. It is not a pattern for any people today, and no one may use it to justify violence in God's name.

How should we read "everything that breathed" and "he did not leave a survivor"? The chapter itself says some escaped into fortified cities (10:20), and later chapters show Canaanites still in Hebron, Debir and Jerusalem (15:13-17, 63; Judges 1). Many Bible-believing scholars think these phrases describe the complete defeat of the armies and cities that fought, in the sweeping language of war reports of that time. Others take the words strictly for the cities named and see the later Canaanites as people who fled and returned. Either way, Israel carried out God's command, and the land was not yet fully possessed.

"All these kings and their land Joshua captured at one time," meaning in one campaign. "For the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel." That is the key to the chapter, said in verse 14 and again here. Joshua marched all night and fought all day, but the hail, the panic, the sun standing still and every city taken had one source.

Then "Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to the camp at Gilgal." The southern campaign was over.

Chapter 10 Summary

When Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard that Gibeon had made peace with Israel, he and four other Amorite kings, of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon, attacked Gibeon. The Gibeonites called for help, and Joshua marched all night from Gilgal and took the enemy by surprise. The LORD threw the Amorites into confusion and sent great hailstones on them as they fled down the pass of Beth-horon, killing more with hail than Israel killed with the sword. Joshua prayed, and before all Israel he told the sun to stand still at Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Aijalon. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky about a whole day, and there has been no day like it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man. The five kings hid in a cave at Makkedah. After the battle Joshua had them brought out, had his commanders put their feet on their necks, and told Israel not to fear, then put the kings to death and hanged them on trees until evening. Joshua then took Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron and Debir, defeated the king of Gezer, and struck the whole south from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza and Gibeon, because the LORD fought for Israel.

People and Places

- Adoni-zedek: king of Jerusalem, who led the five Amorite kings against Gibeon.
- Jerusalem: a Jebusite city in the hill country, later David's capital.
- Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon: the other four cities of the southern alliance.
- Beth-horon: a steep pass leading west from the hills near Gibeon down toward the lowlands.
- Azekah, Makkedah and the valley of Aijalon: places in the lowlands west of Gibeon.
- The book of Jashar: a lost book of Israel's songs and poems, also quoted in 2 Samuel 1:18.
- Kadesh-barnea, Gaza and Goshen: places marking the southern and western limits of the campaign; this Goshen is in southern Canaan, not Egypt.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. Why did Adoni-zedek and the other kings attack Gibeon instead of Israel? (10:1-5)

2. Why did Joshua go to help the Gibeonites, even though they had deceived him? (10:6-7; 9:15)

3. What did God promise Joshua, and how did Joshua respond to that promise? (10:8-9)

4. What two things did the LORD do to the Amorite armies besides Israel's sword? (10:10-11)

5. What did Joshua say to the sun and moon, and what happened? (10:12-13)

6. What does verse 14 say was unique about that day? (10:14)

7. Why did Joshua have his commanders put their feet on the necks of the kings, and what did he tell them? (10:24-25)

8. What phrase is repeated in verses 14 and 42, and why is it the key to this chapter? (10:14, 42)

9. God heard Joshua's prayer in the middle of a battle. What battle are you facing where you need to pray boldly and trust that God listens? (James 5:16-18)

10. Joshua kept his covenant with Gibeon even though it meant an all-night march. How does God's faithfulness to those who are His encourage you when you feel unworthy?

Chapter 11: The Northern Campaign

Scripture

11:1-15 And it was, when Jabin king of Hazor heard, and he sent to Jobab king of Madon and to the king of Shimron and to the king of Akshaph, and to the kings who ***were*** on the north in the hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the Shephelah, and in the heights of Dor on the west, ***to*** the Canaanites on the east and on the west, and the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpah. And they went out, they and all their armies with them, a people as numerous as the sand that ***is*** on the shore of the sea for multitude, and horses and chariots very many. And all these kings met, and they came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to wage war with Israel. And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I ***am*** giving all of them slain before Israel. Their horses you shall hamstring, and their chariots you shall burn with fire." And Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them at the waters of Merom suddenly, and they fell on them. And the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel, and they struck them and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and as far as Misrephoth-maim and as far as the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they struck them until he had not left to them a survivor. And Joshua did to them just as the LORD had said to him: their horses he hamstrung, and their chariots he burned with fire. And Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor, and its king he struck with the sword; for Hazor formerly, it ***was*** the head of all these kingdoms. And they struck every soul that ***was*** in it by the mouth of the sword, devoting ***them*** to destruction; there was not left anything that breathed. And Hazor he burned with fire. And all the cities of these kings and all their kings Joshua captured, and he struck them by the mouth of the sword; he devoted them to destruction, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. Only, all the cities that were standing on their mounds, Israel did not burn them, except Hazor alone; Joshua burned ***it***. And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock the sons of Israel plundered for themselves. Only, every man they struck by the mouth of the sword until they had destroyed them; they did not leave anything that breathed. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses His servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He did not set aside a thing from all that the LORD had commanded Moses.

11:16-23 And Joshua took all this land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the Shephelah and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its Shephelah, from Mount Halak that goes up ***to*** Seir, and as far as Baal-gad in the valley of the Lebanon under Mount Hermon. And all their kings he captured, and he struck them and put them to death. Many days Joshua made war with all these kings. There was not a city that made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; everything they took in battle. For it was from the LORD to strengthen their heart to meet the battle with Israel, in order to devote them to destruction, so that there would be no favor for them, but in order to destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; with their cities Joshua devoted them to destruction. There were not left Anakim in the land of the sons of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did they remain. And

Joshua took all the land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions, by their tribes. And the land had rest from war.

Chapter 11 Preview

With the south broken, the kings of the north make their move. Jabin, king of Hazor, the greatest city in northern Canaan, calls together kings from the hills, the valleys and the coast. They come with an army as many as the sand on the seashore, with horses and chariots, the most feared weapons of that day. Israel has no chariots at all.

God tells Joshua not to be afraid, and that by this time tomorrow the enemy will be dead. Joshua strikes by surprise at the waters of Merom and routes them. As God commands, he hamstrings the horses and burns the chariots, and then he takes Hazor and burns it. The rest of the chapter sums up years of war: the whole land taken from south to north, the kings defeated, the giants called the Anakim cut off from the hill country. Only Gibeon made peace. The chapter ends with three words of relief: the land had rest.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1-3 *And it was, when Jabin king of Hazor heard, and he sent to Jobab king of Madon and to the king of Shimron and to the king of Akshaph, and to the kings who **were** on the north in the hill country, and in the Arabah south of Chinneroth, and in the Shephelah, and in the heights of Dor on the west, **to** the Canaanites on the east and on the west, and the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites under Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpah.*

"When Jabin king of Hazor heard." By now every king in Canaan had heard. Hazor was the largest city in the land, in the far north above the Sea of Galilee. Verse 10 calls it "the head of all these kingdoms." Archaeologists have found that Hazor was a very large city, many times the size of Jericho.

Jabin sent to the kings of Madon, Shimron and Akshaph, and to the kings "on the north in the hill country," in the Arabah (the Jordan valley) south of "Chinneroth" (the Sea of Galilee), in the lowlands, and in the heights of Dor on the coast. He called the Canaanites east and west, and the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Hivites "under Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpah." This was the whole north rising up at once.

Jabin may have been a royal title used by more than one king of Hazor, since another Jabin of Hazor oppressed Israel in the days of Deborah (Judges 4:2).

11:4-5 *And they went out, they and all their armies with them, a people as numerous as the sand that **is** on the shore of the sea for multitude, and horses and chariots very many. And all these kings met, and they came and encamped together at the waters of Merom to wage war with Israel.*

"They went out, they and all their armies with them, a people as numerous as the sand that is on the shore of the sea for multitude, and horses and chariots very many." This was the biggest army Israel had faced. Chariots were the tanks of the ancient world. On open ground they could run down foot soldiers with ease. Israel had none.

"All these kings met, and they came and encamped together at the waters of Merom." Merom was a spring or stream in the hill country of Galilee, a few miles from Hazor. From there the allied army could move out onto the plains where chariots were strongest.

When Joshua looked at that army, it must have looked like the end. But God had already promised that "no man will stand before you" (1:5). The size of the enemy never changes the size of God.

11:6 *And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I **am** giving all of them slain before Israel. Their horses you shall hamstring, and their chariots you shall burn with fire."*

"Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I am giving all of them slain before Israel." God told Joshua not only that He would win, but when: by this time tomorrow.

Then came a strange command: "Their horses you shall hamstring, and their chariots you shall burn with fire." To hamstring a horse means to cut the tendon at the back of its leg, so it can no longer be used for war. God did not want Israel to keep the enemy's chariots. Why not? A chariot army would have been a great asset. But God knew Israel's heart. If they had chariots, they would trust in chariots. God later told Israel's future kings not to multiply horses (Deuteronomy 17:16). David wrote, "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

That is still a word for us. The tools God gives us are good, but they are not our strength. When we start to trust our money, our skills or our programs more than the Lord, it is time to cut the hamstrings and burn the chariots.

11:7-9 *And Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them at the waters of Merom suddenly, and they fell on them. And the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel, and they struck them and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and as far as Misrephoth-maim and as far as the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they struck them until he had not left to them a survivor. And Joshua did to them just as the LORD had said to him: their horses he hamstrung, and their chariots he burned with fire.*

"Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them at the waters of Merom suddenly." Like at Gibeon, Joshua struck by surprise. He did not wait for the chariots to get onto open ground. He hit them in the hills where chariots were useless.

"The LORD gave them into the hand of Israel." Israel chased them in three directions: northwest "as far as Great Sidon," a Phoenician city on the coast, west to "Misrephoth-maim," and east "as far as the valley of Mizpeh." The great army was scattered.

"And Joshua did to them just as the LORD had said to him: their horses he hamstrung, and their chariots he burned with fire." He obeyed to the letter, even when it meant destroying weapons that could have been useful.

11:10-11 *And Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor, and its king he struck with the sword; for Hazor formerly, it **was** the head of all these kingdoms. And they struck every soul that **was** in it by the mouth of the sword, devoting **them** to destruction; there was not left anything that breathed. And Hazor he burned with fire.*

"Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor, and its king he struck with the sword; for Hazor formerly, it was the head of all these kingdoms." The leader of the northern league was the main target.

"They struck every soul that was in it by the mouth of the sword, devoting them to destruction; there was not left anything that breathed. And Hazor he burned with fire." Hazor was put under the ban, like Jericho. I dealt with the meaning of the ban at 6:21 and 10:40, and the same truths apply: God's judgment on nations He had waited on for centuries, a command given once for that land, never a pattern for today. Archaeologists have found a heavy layer of burning at Hazor, and some date it to Joshua's time, though others date it later.

11:12-15 *And all the cities of these kings and all their kings Joshua captured, and he struck them by the mouth of the sword; he devoted them to destruction, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. Only, all the cities that were standing on their mounds, Israel did not burn them, except Hazor alone; Joshua burned **it**. And all the spoil of these cities and the livestock the sons of Israel plundered for themselves. Only, every man they struck by the mouth of the sword until they had destroyed them; they did not leave anything that breathed. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses His servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He did not set aside a thing from all that the LORD had commanded Moses.*

Joshua took "all the cities of these kings and all their kings." He "devoted them to destruction, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded."

Verse 13 adds a detail: "all the cities that were standing on their mounds, Israel did not burn them, except Hazor alone." The other cities were left standing for Israel to live in, just as Moses had said Israel would receive "great and good cities which you did not build" (Deuteronomy 6:10). Hazor was burned because it was the head of the rebellion.

This time Israel kept "all the spoil of these cities and the livestock." The people were struck down "until they had destroyed them; they did not leave anything that breathed."

Verse 15 is the summary of Joshua's whole life as a leader: "Just as the LORD had commanded Moses His servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He did not set aside a thing

from all that the LORD had commanded Moses." God's Word passed from the LORD to Moses to Joshua, and Joshua obeyed it all. That is the kind of servant God uses. Not perfect, but faithful.

11:16-17 *And Joshua took all this land: the hill country and all the Negeb and all the land of Goshen and the Shephelah and the Arabah and the hill country of Israel and its Shephelah, from Mount Halak that goes up **to** Seir, and as far as Baal-gad in the valley of the Lebanon under Mount Hermon. And all their kings he captured, and he struck them and put them to death.*

Now the writer steps back and looks at the whole conquest. "Joshua took all this land." He lists the regions: the hill country, the Negeb in the south, the land of Goshen, the Shephelah (the foothills), the Arabah (the Jordan valley), and "the hill country of Israel and its Shephelah."

The borders run "from Mount Halak that goes up to Seir," a mountain in the far south toward Edom, "as far as Baal-gad in the valley of the Lebanon," under Mount Hermon in the far north. That is well over 150 miles from end to end. "All their kings he captured, and he struck them and put them to death."

11:18-20 *Many days Joshua made war with all these kings. There was not a city that made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon; everything they took in battle. For it was from the LORD to strengthen their heart to meet the battle with Israel, in order to devote them to destruction, so that there would be no favor for them, but in order to destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

"Many days Joshua made war with all these kings." These chapters can make it sound as if it all happened in a few weeks. It did not. From Caleb's words in 14:7-10, the main wars seem to have lasted about seven years.

"There was not a city that made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon." Every other city chose to fight. Gibeon proved that peace was possible. But no other city sought it.

Then comes a hard verse: "For it was from the LORD to strengthen their heart to meet the battle with Israel, in order to devote them to destruction, so that there would be no favor for them." What does it mean that God strengthened, or hardened, their hearts?

The same thing is said of Pharaoh in Exodus. There we read that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15, 32), and that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12). Both are true. God did not take tender, seeking hearts and force them to rebel. The Canaanites had already heard about the LORD for forty years, and like Rahab they knew the truth (2:9-11). Rahab turned to God. The rest chose to fight. God's hardening is His judgment on people who have already set themselves against Him. He gives them over to what they have chosen (Romans 1:24-28).

This is sobering. There is a point where God stops holding back a person or a people from the path they insist on taking. The answer is not to argue with God about it. The answer is to turn to Him while He can be found (Isaiah 55:6), and as Hebrews warns, "today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

11:21-22 *And Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel; with their cities Joshua devoted them to destruction. There were not left Anakim in the land of the sons of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did they remain.*

"Joshua came at that time and cut off the Anakim from the hill country." The Anakim were the giants, the sons of Anak, who had terrified the ten spies forty years earlier. "We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers," they had said (Numbers 13:33). The very people who had kept the first generation out of the land were driven out by the second. They had lived in Hebron, Debir, Anab and throughout the hill country.

"There were not left Anakim in the land of the sons of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod did they remain." These were cities of the coastal plain that would later become Philistine cities. Gath is worth remembering. About four hundred years later a giant named Goliath came out of Gath to defy the armies of Israel, and a shepherd boy named David brought him down (1 Samuel 17:4). The enemy left in the land came back to cause trouble later.

11:23 *And Joshua took all the land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions, by their tribes. And the land had rest from war.*

"Joshua took all the land, according to all that the LORD had spoken to Moses." That is, he broke the power of the kings and their armies across the whole land. As chapter 13 will show, there were still areas to be settled and some peoples still to be driven out (13:1-6). God had said He would drive them out little by little, so the land would not become wild and empty (Exodus 23:29-30). Joshua took the land. The tribes would have to take possession of it.

"And Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions, by their tribes." An inheritance is property passed down within a family. Israel did not buy the land or earn it. It was given to them as sons receive from their father.

"And the land had rest from war." After years of fighting, there was peace. God had kept His word. That rest was real, but Hebrews 4:8-9 tells us it was not the final rest: "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have been speaking about another day after these things. So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." The final rest is found in Christ, who said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Chapter 11 Summary

When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard of Israel's victories, he gathered the kings of northern Canaan, an army as many as the sand on the seashore with many horses and chariots, and they camped at the waters of Merom. The LORD told Joshua not to be afraid, because by that time the next day He would give them all into Israel's hand, and He commanded Joshua to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots. Joshua attacked suddenly, routed the army, and did as the LORD commanded. He took Hazor, the head of these kingdoms, put it under the ban and burned it, and took the other northern cities without burning them, keeping their spoil and livestock. Joshua

obeyed everything the LORD commanded Moses. Over many days he took the whole land from Mount Halak in the south to Baal-gad under Mount Hermon in the north. No city made peace except Gibeon, because the LORD hardened the hearts of the others to fight. Joshua cut off the Anakim from the hill country, leaving them only in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod. He gave the land to Israel as an inheritance by tribes, and the land had rest from war.

People and Places

- Jabin: king of Hazor, who led the northern alliance; possibly a royal title (compare Judges 4:2).
- Hazor: the largest city in northern Canaan, north of the Sea of Galilee.
- The waters of Merom: a spring or stream near Hazor where the northern kings camped.
- Chinneroth: the Sea of Galilee.
- Sidon: a Phoenician city on the coast north of Canaan.
- The Anakim: a people of giants, the sons of Anak, who frightened the spies in Numbers 13.
- Gaza, Gath and Ashdod: cities on the coastal plain, later Philistine cities; Goliath came from Gath.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. Who led the northern kings, and what made their army so frightening? (11:1-5)

2. What did God promise Joshua, and what did He command him to do with the horses and chariots? (11:6)

3. Why do you think God did not want Israel to keep the chariots? (11:6, 9; Psalm 20:7)

4. Why was Hazor burned when the other cities were not? (11:10-13)

5. How does verse 15 sum up Joshua's obedience? (11:15)

6. How long did the wars of conquest take, and how do we know? (11:18; 14:7-10)

7. What does verse 20 say about the hearts of the Canaanite kings, and how do the stories of Pharaoh and Rahab help us understand it? (11:20; Exodus 8:15; 9:12)

8. What happened to the Anakim, and where did some of them remain? (11:21-22; 1 Samuel 17:4)

9. What are the "chariots" in your life, things you are tempted to trust more than the Lord?

10. The land had rest from war, but Hebrews says a greater rest remains. Have you entered the rest Jesus offers? What keeps you from resting in Him? (Hebrews 4:8-9; Matthew 11:28)

Chapter 12: The Kings Israel Defeated

Scripture

12:1-6 And these ***are*** the kings of the land whom the sons of Israel struck, and they took possession of their land beyond the Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the wadi of Arnon as far as the mountain of Hermon, and all the Arabah eastward: Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, ruling from Aroer, which ***is*** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the middle of the wadi, and half of the Gilead, and as far as Jabbok the wadi, the territory of the sons of Ammon; and the Arabah as far as the sea of Chinneroth eastward, and as far as the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, eastward, the way of Beth-jeshimoth, and from the south under the slopes of the Pisgah; and the territory of Og king of the Bashan, of the remnant of the Rephaim, who dwelt in Ashtaroth and in Edrei, and ruling over the mountain of Hermon and over Salecah and over all the Bashan as far as the territory of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and half of the Gilead, the territory of Sihon king of Heshbon. Moses the servant of the LORD and the sons of Israel struck them; and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it ***as*** a possession to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh.

12:7-24 And these ***are*** the kings of the land whom Joshua and the sons of Israel struck beyond the Jordan westward, from Baal-gad in the valley of the Lebanon and as far as Mount Halak that goes up toward Seir; and Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel ***as*** a possession according to their divisions, in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in the Arabah and on the slopes and in the wilderness and in the Negeb, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which ***is*** beside Bethel, one; the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one; the king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hepher, one; the king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; the king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one; the king of Shimron-meron, one; the king of Akshaph, one; the king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; the king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam of the Carmel, one; the king of Dor, of the height of Dor, one; the king of Goiim of Gilgal, one; the king of Tirzah, one. All ***the*** kings ***were*** thirty-one.

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapter 12 closes the first half of Joshua with a roll call of victory. Before the book turns to dividing the land, it lists the kings God gave into Israel's hand. First come the two kings east of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, defeated under Moses. Then come thirty-one kings west of the Jordan, defeated under Joshua, each one followed by a single word: one.

A list of kings may not look like much to study. But this chapter is a record of God's faithfulness, the kind of list Israel could read and remember. Every name was once a king who looked too strong to beat. Every "one" is a promise kept. In this chapter I group the kings by region and say what the list teaches, rather than commenting on every name.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1-3 *And these **are** the kings of the land whom the sons of Israel struck, and they took possession of their land beyond the Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the wadi of Arnon as far as the mountain of Hermon, and all the Arabah eastward: Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, ruling from Aroer, which **is** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the middle of the wadi, and half of the Gilead, and as far as Jabbok the wadi, the territory of the sons of Ammon; and the Arabah as far as the sea of Chinneroth eastward, and as far as the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, eastward, the way of Beth-jeshimoth, and from the south under the slopes of the Pisgah;*

"These are the kings of the land whom the sons of Israel struck, and they took possession of their land beyond the Jordan toward the rising of the sun." The list starts in the east, with the land already taken before Moses died.

The first is "Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon." His kingdom ran from the river Arnon, which flows into the Dead Sea from the east, north to the river Jabbok, which flows into the Jordan. It included half of Gilead and the eastern side of the Jordan valley down to the Salt Sea, the Dead Sea. Sihon refused to let Israel pass through his land in peace and came out to fight them, and God gave him into their hand (Numbers 21:21-31; Deuteronomy 2:26-36).

12:4-5 *and the territory of Og king of the Bashan, of the remnant of the Rephaim, who dwelt in Ashtaroth and in Edrei, and ruling over the mountain of Hermon and over Salecah and over all the Bashan as far as the territory of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and half of the Gilead, the territory of Sihon king of Heshbon.*

The second is "Og king of the Bashan, of the remnant of the Rephaim." The Rephaim were a people of giants, like the Anakim. Og was the last of them in his region, and his iron bedstead was about thirteen and a half feet long (Deuteronomy 3:11). He ruled from Ashtaroth and Edrei over Bashan, the rich plateau east of the Sea of Galilee, north to Mount Hermon and the borders of the Geshurites and Maacathites, and over the other half of Gilead (Numbers 21:33-35).

Israel would sing about these two kings for centuries. Psalm 136:19-22 names Sihon and Og and then says God gave their land "as an inheritance," and after each line comes the refrain, "for His steadfast love is forever." These victories were not just military history. They were proof of God's love.

12:6 *Moses the servant of the LORD and the sons of Israel struck them; and Moses the servant of the LORD gave it **as** a possession to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh.*

"Moses the servant of the LORD and the sons of Israel struck them." Moses gave this land "as a possession to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh" (Numbers 32).

Why list Moses' victories in a book about Joshua? Because the conquest was one work of God, begun under Moses and finished under Joshua. The writer ties the two leaders together. Joshua

did not start something new. He carried on what God had begun through Moses. In the same way, every generation of God's people builds on what God did through those before them.

12:7-8 *And these **are** the kings of the land whom Joshua and the sons of Israel struck beyond the Jordan westward, from Baal-gad in the valley of the Lebanon and as far as Mount Halak that goes up toward Seir; and Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel **as** a possession according to their divisions, in the hill country and in the Shephelah and in the Arabah and on the slopes and in the wilderness and in the Negeb, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites:*

Now the list turns west: "the kings of the land whom Joshua and the sons of Israel struck beyond the Jordan westward." The borders are the same ones given in 11:17, from "Baal-gad in the valley of the Lebanon" in the north to "Mount Halak that goes up toward Seir" in the south.

Verse 8 lists the kinds of land: the hill country, the Shephelah (foothills), the Arabah (the Jordan valley), the slopes, the wilderness and the Negeb (the dry south). It also lists the peoples: Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Every region and every people of the land is covered.

"Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel as a possession according to their divisions." That looks ahead to chapters 13 to 21.

12:9-16 *the king of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which **is** beside Bethel, one; the king of Jerusalem, one; the king of Hebron, one; the king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one; the king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one; the king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one; the king of Hormah, one; the king of Arad, one; the king of Libnah, one; the king of Adullam, one; the king of Makkedah, one; the king of Bethel, one;*

The first part of the list follows the order of the story we have just read.

- Jericho and Ai, the first two cities (chapters 6 and 8).
- Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon, the five kings of the southern league who died at Makkedah (chapter 10).
- Gezer, whose king came to help Lachish and was defeated (10:33).
- Debir, Makkedah and Libnah, taken in the southern campaign (10:28-39).

The list also names some kings we have not read about in detail: Geder, Hormah and Arad in the south, and Adullam in the foothills. Arad was the Canaanite king who attacked Israel in the wilderness, and Hormah was the place where Israel defeated his people (Numbers 21:1-3). Bethel, whose men joined the battle at Ai (8:17), is listed too.

Notice the word "one" after every king. Each defeat is counted separately. It is a simple way of saying that God won every one of these battles. None was lost. None was forgotten.

12:17-24 *the king of Tappuah, one; the king of Hepher, one; the king of Aphek, one; the king of Lasharon, one; the king of Madon, one; the king of Hazor, one; the king of Shimron-meron, one; the king of Akshaph, one; the king of Taanach, one; the king of Megiddo, one; the king of Kedesh, one; the king of Jokneam of the Carmel, one; the king of Dor, of the height of Dor, one; the king of Goiim of Gilgal, one; the king of Tirzah, one. All **the** kings **were** thirty-one.*

The second part of the list covers kings of the central and northern land, many of them not described in the chapters before.

- Tappuah, Hepher, Aphek and Lasharon, towns of the central hills and the coastal plain.
- Madon, Hazor, Shimron-meron and Akshaph, the kings of the northern league led by Jabin (chapter 11).
- Taanach, Megiddo, Kedesh, Jokneam of the Carmel and Dor, cities along the great valley and the coast, guarding the main roads of the land.
- Goiim of Gilgal and Tirzah. Goiim means nations. Tirzah would later become the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel for a time (1 Kings 15:33).

Megiddo is worth a word. It guarded the main pass through the hills and saw many battles in history. Its name lies behind Armageddon, "the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon," where the armies of the world will gather at the end of this age (Revelation 16:16). The Lord Jesus will return in power and defeat them (Revelation 19:11-21).

"All the kings were thirty-one." Thirty-one kings, thirty-one victories, all from the hand of God.

But there is something to notice. Defeating a king did not always mean Israel lived in his city. Judges 1:27 tells us that Manasseh did not drive out the people of Taanach, Dor or Megiddo. Bethel had to be taken again (Judges 1:22-26). Joshua broke the power of these kings. The tribes still had to finish the work, and in many places they did not. That is where the next part of the book, and the book of Judges, picks up.

That is a lesson for us. In Christ the victory over sin and Satan is already won (John 12:31; Colossians 2:15). But we still have to live out that victory day by day, and leave no corner of our lives where the enemy is allowed to stay. Hebrews 11:33 speaks of those "who through faith conquered kingdoms." Faith won those victories in Joshua's day, and faith still lays hold of what God has promised.

Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 lists the kings Israel defeated. East of the Jordan, under Moses, Israel defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon between the Arnon and the Jabbok, and Og king of Bashan, the last of the Rephaim, who ruled from Ashtaroth and Edrei as far as Mount Hermon. Moses gave their land to Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. West of the Jordan, under Joshua, Israel defeated thirty-one kings from Baal-gad in the north to Mount Halak in the south, through the hill country, foothills, Jordan valley, slopes, wilderness and Negeb. They included the kings of Jericho, Ai, the five southern cities, Gezer, Debir, Makkedah, Libnah and the northern league of Hazor, along with others not described in detail, each one counted as a victory God gave.

People and Places

- Sihon: king of the Amorites in Heshbon, east of the Jordan (Numbers 21:21-31).
- Og: king of Bashan, the last of the Rephaim in his region (Deuteronomy 3:11).
- The Arnon and the Jabbok: rivers east of the Jordan marking the south and north ends of Sihon's land.
- Bashan and Gilead: rich highlands east of the Jordan.
- Megiddo: a fortress city guarding the main pass through the hills; its name lies behind Armageddon (Revelation 16:16).
- Tirzah: a city later used as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 15:33).

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. Which two kings east of the Jordan are listed first, and who led Israel against them? (12:1-6)

2. Why do you think the writer includes Moses' victories in a book about Joshua? (12:6)

3. What kinds of land and which peoples are named in verse 8? (12:7-8)

4. Which kings in this list have we already read about in chapters 6 to 11? (12:9-24)

5. What is the effect of the word "one" after every king? (12:9-24)

6. How many kings west of the Jordan did Israel defeat? (12:24)

7. What does Psalm 136:19-22 say about Sihon and Og, and why is that refrain important?

8. What does Judges 1:22-27 show about the difference between defeating a king and living in his land?

9. If you made a list of the victories God has given you, what would be on it? Why might it help to write it down?

10. Christ has already won the victory over sin, but we still have to live it out. Is there a corner of your life where you have let the enemy stay? What would it take to deal with it?

Chapter 13: The Land Still to Be Taken and the Tribes East of the Jordan

Scripture

13:1-7 And Joshua was old, come into the days; and the LORD said to him, "You are old, come into the days, and very much ***of*** the land remains to take possession of it. This ***is*** the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all the Geshurites, from the Shihor, which ***is*** on the face of Egypt, and as far as the border of Ekron northward, it is reckoned to the Canaanites; the five rulers of the Philistines, the Gazites and the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; and the Avvim; from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah, which ***belongs*** to the Sidonians, as far as Aphek, as far as the border of the Amorites; and the land of the Gebalites, and all the Lebanon toward the rising of the sun, from Baal-gad under the mountain of Hermon as far as the entrance of Hamath; all the inhabitants of the hill country from the Lebanon as far as Misrephoth-maim, all the Sidonians. I Myself will dispossess them from before the sons of Israel. Only make it fall to Israel for an inheritance, just as I have commanded you. And now, divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half of the tribe of Manasseh."

13:8-14 With it the Reubenites and the Gadites have received their inheritance, which Moses gave to them beyond the Jordan eastward, just as Moses the servant of the LORD gave to them: from Aroer, which ***is*** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the city that ***is*** in the middle of the wadi, and all the plain ***of*** Medeba as far as Dibon; and all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the border of the sons of Ammon; and the Gilead, and the territory of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and all the mountain of Hermon, and all the Bashan as far as Salecah; all the kingdom of Og in the Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei; he was left of the remnant of the Rephaim; and Moses struck them and dispossessed them. And the sons of Israel did not dispossess the Geshurites and the Maacathites; and Geshur and Maacah have dwelt in the midst of Israel until this day. Only to the tribe of the Levites he did not give an inheritance; the fire offerings of the LORD, the God of Israel, that ***is*** its inheritance, just as He had spoken to it.

13:15-33 And Moses gave to the tribe of the sons of Reuben by their clans. And the territory was theirs from Aroer, which ***is*** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the city that ***is*** in the middle of the wadi, and all the plain by Medeba; Heshbon and all its cities that ***are*** in the plain: Dibon and Bamoth-baal and Beth-baal-meon, and Jahaz and Kedemoth and Mephaath, and Kiriathaim and Sibmah and Zereth-shahar on the mountain of the valley, and Beth-peor and the slopes of the Pisgah and Beth-jeshimoth, and all the cities of the plain, and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses struck, him and the leaders of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the princes of Sihon, dwelling in the land. And Balaam the son of Beor, the diviner, the sons of Israel killed with the sword among their slain. And the border of the sons of Reuben was the Jordan, and ***its*** border. This ***was*** the inheritance of the sons of Reuben by their clans, the cities and their villages. And Moses gave to the tribe of Gad, to the sons of Gad, by their clans. And the territory was theirs: Jazer and all the cities of the Gilead, and half of the

land of the sons of Ammon, as far as Aroer, which ***is*** on the face of Rabbah; and from Heshbon as far as Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim as far as the territory of Debir; and in the valley: Beth-haram and Beth-nimrah and Succoth and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, the Jordan and ***its*** border, as far as the end of the sea of Chinnereth, beyond the Jordan eastward. This ***was*** the inheritance of the sons of Gad by their clans, the cities and their villages. And Moses gave to the half of the tribe of Manasseh; and it was for the half of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh by their clans. And their territory was from Mahanaim, all the Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of the Bashan, and all the towns of Jair that ***are*** in the Bashan, sixty cities; and half of the Gilead, and Ashtaroth and Edrei, the cities of the kingdom of Og in the Bashan, ***were*** for the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh, for half of the sons of Machir by their clans. These ***are what*** Moses gave as an inheritance in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan ***at*** Jericho, eastward. And to the tribe of the Levites Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, He ***is*** their inheritance, just as He had spoken to them.

Chapter 13 Preview

The wars of chapters 6 to 12 are over, and the book now turns to its second great task, dividing the land. Joshua is old, and the LORD tells him plainly that much of the land is still not taken. The Philistine coast in the south and the Lebanon in the north are still in enemy hands. God promises to drive those peoples out Himself, and He tells Joshua to divide the land anyway, by faith, as if it were already in Israel's hand.

The rest of the chapter looks back east of the Jordan, to the land Moses had already given to Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh. It traces their borders and lists their towns. Twice it says that the tribe of Levi received no land, because the LORD Himself was their inheritance. Chapters 13 to 19 are mostly lists of borders and towns. As I said in the Introduction, I group them into larger sections and say what each list is and what it teaches, rather than comment on every name.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1 *And Joshua was old, come into the days; and the LORD said to him, "You are old, come into the days, and very much **of** the land remains to take possession of it.*

"And Joshua was old, come into the days." We are not told his exact age here, but he died at 110 (24:29), and the main wars were over about seven years after the crossing (14:7-10). He may have been close to ninety or a hundred by now.

Then the LORD said something that sounds hard at first: "very much of the land remains to take possession of it." Joshua had broken the power of the kings (chapter 12), but Israel did not yet live in all of it. God did not hide that from him. He told His servant the truth, and then He told him what to do next.

That is a word for older believers. Joshua was old, but God still had work for him. His part now was not to lead armies but to settle God's people in their inheritance. Our work for God may change as we age, but it does not end.

13:2-6 *This **is** the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all the Geshurites, from the Shihor, which **is** on the face of Egypt, and as far as the border of Ekron northward, it is reckoned to the Canaanites; the five rulers of the Philistines, the Gazites and the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; and the Avvim; from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah, which **belongs** to the Sidonians, as far as Aphek, as far as the border of the Amorites; and the land of the Gebalites, and all the Lebanon toward the rising of the sun, from Baal-gad under the mountain of Hermon as far as the entrance of Hamath; all the inhabitants of the hill country from the Lebanon as far as Misrephoth-maim, all the Sidonians. I Myself will dispossess them from before the sons of Israel. Only make it fall to Israel for an inheritance, just as I have commanded you.*

God listed "the land that remains." In the southwest was the coast of the Philistines, from the Shihor near Egypt up to Ekron, with their five rulers in the five cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. The Philistines would trouble Israel for centuries, all the way to the days of Samson, Saul and David. In the north lay the land of the Sidonians on the coast, the Gebalites (the people of Byblos) and the Lebanon mountains toward Hamath.

Then God made a promise: "I Myself will dispossess them from before the sons of Israel." The work was not up to Joshua's strength. It was up to God. Israel's part was to trust Him and to go in when He led. "Only make it fall to Israel for an inheritance, just as I have commanded you." Joshua was to divide even the land not yet taken. That was faith. He was to write the names of the tribes on land the enemy still held, because God had promised it.

God does the same with us. He gives us promises before we see them fulfilled, and He asks us to live as though His word is already settled. It is.

13:7 *And now, divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half of the tribe of Manasseh."*

"And now, divide this land for an inheritance to the nine tribes and the half of the tribe of Manasseh." An inheritance is property handed down in a family. In Israel the land was not owned by the king or the nation. It was the LORD's land (Leviticus 25:23), given to each tribe, clan and family, to be passed down from father to son. That is why these lists matter so much. Each name on them was a home that God gave to a real family.

13:8-13 *With it the Reubenites and the Gadites have received their inheritance, which Moses gave to them beyond the Jordan eastward, just as Moses the servant of the LORD gave to them: from Aroer, which **is** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the city that **is** in the middle of the wadi, and all the plain **of** Medeba as far as Dibon; and all the cities of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, as far as the border of the sons of Ammon; and the Gilead, and the territory of the Geshurites and the Maacathites, and all the mountain of Hermon, and all the Bashan as far as Salecah; all the kingdom of Og in the Bashan, who reigned in Ashtaroth and in Edrei; he was left of the remnant of the Rephaim; and Moses struck them and dispossessed them. And the sons of Israel did not dispossess the Geshurites and the Maacathites; and Geshur and Maacah have dwelt in the midst of Israel until this day.*

Before the western tribes get their land, the writer reminds us of the eastern ones. Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had asked Moses for the rich grazing land east of the Jordan, and he gave it to them on the condition that their fighting men would cross over and fight with their brothers (Numbers 32). Their land ran from Aroer on the Arnon River in the south, through the plain of Medeba and the kingdom of Sihon, up through Gilead and Bashan, the old kingdom of Og.

Verse 13 adds a small but sad note: "the sons of Israel did not dispossess the Geshurites and the Maacathites." These two small peoples near Bashan stayed. It is the first of several notes like this in the land chapters (15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13). Later, David married a daughter of the king of Geshur, and her son Absalom fled there after he murdered his brother (2 Samuel 3:3; 13:37-38). What we leave in place often comes back to trouble us.

13:14 *Only to the tribe of the Levites he did not give an inheritance; the fire offerings of the LORD, the God of Israel, that **is** its inheritance, just as He had spoken to it.*

"Only to the tribe of the Levites he did not give an inheritance." The Levites were the tribe set apart to serve at the tabernacle, the tent where God met with Israel. From them came the priests, the family of Aaron, who offered the sacrifices. Instead of land they received "the fire offerings of the LORD," their share of the sacrifices and gifts the people brought (Numbers 18:8-24; Deuteronomy 18:1-2).

That does not mean they were left out. It means God Himself took care of them. Chapter 21 shows that they were given towns to live in all over Israel.

13:15-23 *And Moses gave to the tribe of the sons of Reuben by their clans. And the territory was theirs from Aroer, which **is** on the edge of the wadi of Arnon, and the city that **is** in the middle of the wadi, and all the plain by Medeba; Heshbon and all its cities that **are** in the plain: Dibon and Bamoth-baal and Beth-baal-meon, and Jahaz and Kedemoth and Mephaath, and Kiriathaim and Sibmah and Zereth-shahar on the mountain of the valley, and Beth-peor and the slopes of the Pisgah and Beth-jeshimoth, and all the cities of the plain, and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, whom Moses struck, him and the leaders of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the princes of Sihon, dwelling in the land. And Balaam the son of Beor, the diviner, the sons of Israel killed with the sword among their slain. And the border of the sons of Reuben was the Jordan, and **its** border. This **was** the inheritance of the sons of Reuben by their clans, the cities and their villages.*

Reuben's land came first. It lay in the south, on the high plain between the Arnon and Heshbon, with towns like Dibon, Medeba, Jahaz and Beth-peor.

Two names in this list bring back old memories. Beth-peor was near the place where Israel sinned with the women of Moab and worshiped the Baal of Peor (Numbers 25), and it was near there that Moses was buried (Deuteronomy 34:6). And verse 22 says that "Balaam the son of Beor, the diviner, the sons of Israel killed with the sword." A diviner is someone who tries to learn hidden things or the future by signs and magic. Balaam was hired to curse Israel, but God turned his curse into blessing (Numbers 22-24). Then he taught Moab how to lead Israel into sin (Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14), and he died fighting against God's people (Numbers 31:8). He knew a great deal about God, and he still loved money more. Knowing about God is not the same as following Him.

13:24-28 *And Moses gave to the tribe of Gad, to the sons of Gad, by their clans. And the territory was theirs: Jazer and all the cities of the Gilead, and half of the land of the sons of Ammon, as far as Aroer, which **is** on the face of Rabbah; and from Heshbon as far as Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim as far as the territory of Debir; and in the valley: Beth-haram and Beth-nimrah and Succoth and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon king of Heshbon, the Jordan and **its** border, as far as the end of the sea of Chinnereth, beyond the Jordan eastward. This **was** the inheritance of the sons of Gad by their clans, the cities and their villages.*

Gad's land lay north of Reuben's, in Gilead, from Heshbon up to Mahanaim, and down in the Jordan valley through Succoth "as far as the end of the sea of Chinnereth." Chinnereth is the old name of the Sea of Galilee, from a Hebrew word that may mean harp, perhaps for its shape. Mahanaim was where Jacob saw the angels of God, and Succoth was where he built shelters for his cattle (Genesis 32:1-2; 33:17). Gad was living on ground their father Jacob had walked.

13:29-31 *And Moses gave to the half of the tribe of Manasseh; and it was for the half of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh by their clans. And their territory was from Mahanaim, all the Bashan, all the kingdom of Og king of the Bashan, and all the towns of Jair that **are** in the Bashan, sixty cities; and half of the Gilead, and Ashtaroth and Edrei, the cities of the kingdom of Og in the Bashan, **were** for the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh, for half of the sons of Machir by their clans.*

The half tribe of Manasseh received the north, "all the Bashan," the kingdom of Og, including "all the towns of Jair that are in the Bashan, sixty cities." Bashan was a high, rich plateau known for its oaks and its strong cattle (Psalm 22:12; Amos 4:1). The land was given to the family of Machir, the son of Manasseh, a family of fighters (17:1).

13:32-33 *These **are what** Moses gave as an inheritance in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan **at** Jericho, eastward. And to the tribe of the Levites Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, He **is** their inheritance, just as He had spoken to them.*

"These are what Moses gave as an inheritance in the plains of Moab." Then, for the second time in the chapter, the writer stops to say that Levi had no land: "the LORD, the God of Israel, He is their inheritance, just as He had spoken to them."

Notice the change from verse 14. There the Levites' inheritance was the offerings. Here it is the LORD Himself. Which would you rather have, a field or the God who owns all the fields? David understood this when he wrote, "The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup" (Psalm 16:5). Peter tells believers today that we are "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), and that our inheritance is kept in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4). Like the Levites, we may hold the things of this world loosely, because God Himself is ours.

Chapter 13 Summary

Joshua was old, and the LORD told him that much land remained to be taken, from the Philistine cities in the southwest to the Lebanon and the land of the Sidonians in the north. God promised to drive those peoples out Himself and told Joshua to divide the land among the nine and a half tribes anyway. The chapter then describes the land Moses had already given east of the Jordan. Reuben received the plain from the Arnon to Heshbon, Gad received Gilead and the Jordan valley up to the Sea of Galilee, and half of Manasseh received Bashan, the kingdom of Og. Israel did not drive out the Geshurites and Maacathites. Balaam the diviner was killed among Israel's enemies. Twice the chapter says that the tribe of Levi received no land, because the offerings of the LORD, and the LORD Himself, were their inheritance.

People and Places

- The five rulers of the Philistines: the lords of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron on the southern coast.
- Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh: the two and a half tribes that settled east of the Jordan (Numbers 32).

- Balaam the son of Beor: the diviner hired to curse Israel, who later led them into sin (Numbers 22-25; 31:8, 16).
- Chinnereth: the old name of the Sea of Galilee.
- Bashan: the high plateau east of the Sea of Galilee, once the kingdom of Og.
- Levites: the tribe set apart to serve at the tabernacle; the priests came from Aaron's family within it.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. What did the LORD tell Joshua about his age and about the land? (13:1)

2. Which regions were still not taken, and what did God promise to do about them? (13:2-6)

3. Why do you think God told Joshua to divide land the enemy still held? (13:6-7)

4. Which two peoples did Israel fail to drive out east of the Jordan? (13:13)

5. What happened to Balaam, and what does his life warn us about? (13:22; Numbers 31:8, 16)

6. Which tribes received the land east of the Jordan, and on what condition had Moses given it? (13:8-31; Numbers 32)

7. What was the inheritance of the Levites, according to 13:14 and 13:33?

8. Joshua was old, but God still gave him work to do. What does that say to older believers, and to the way we treat them?

9. God asked Joshua to act on His promise before he saw it. What promise of God are you being asked to live by right now?

10. The Levites had the LORD as their inheritance. How would your life change if you truly believed that God Himself is your portion (Psalm 16:5)?

Chapter 14: Caleb Receives Hebron

Scripture

14:1-15 And these ***are what*** the sons of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel gave them as an inheritance, by the lot of their inheritance, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes and the half of the tribe. For Moses had given the inheritance of the two tribes and the half of the tribe beyond the Jordan; and to the Levites he did not give an inheritance in their midst. For the sons of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim; and they did not give a portion to the Levites in the land, except cities to dwell in, and their pasturelands for their herds and for their property. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did; and they divided the land. And the sons of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know the word that the LORD spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning you at Kadesh-barnea. A son of forty years ***was*** I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him back word just as ***it was*** in my heart. And my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, and I, I followed fully after the LORD my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be to you for an inheritance and to your sons forever, because you have followed fully after the LORD my God.' And now, look, the LORD has kept me alive, just as He spoke, these forty-five years from when the LORD spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now, look, I ***am*** this day a son of eighty-five years. I ***am*** still this day strong, just as on the day Moses sent me; as my strength ***was*** then, so my strength ***is*** now, for battle and to go out and to come in. And now, give to me this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day; for you heard on that day that Anakim ***were*** there, and cities great ***and*** fortified. Perhaps the LORD ***will be*** with me, and I will dispossess them, just as the LORD spoke." And Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore Hebron became Caleb's, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, for an inheritance until this day, because he followed fully after the LORD, the God of Israel. And the name of Hebron formerly ***was*** Kiriath-arba; he ***was*** the great man among the Anakim. And the land had rest from war.

Chapter 14 Preview

Chapter 14 opens the division of the land west of the Jordan. Eleazar the priest, Joshua and the heads of the tribes give out the land by lot, just as the LORD had commanded through Moses. But before the first tribe receives its land, one old man steps forward with a request.

Caleb is eighty-five. Forty-five years earlier, he and Joshua were the only two of the twelve spies who trusted God to give Israel the land. Now he reminds Joshua of the promise Moses made him that day, and he asks for the hill country of Hebron, the very place where the giants lived who had frightened the other spies. Caleb's story is one of the brightest in the Bible. It shows what it looks like to follow the LORD fully for a whole lifetime.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-5 *And these **are what** the sons of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel gave them as an inheritance, by the lot of their inheritance, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes and the half of the tribe. For Moses had given the inheritance of the two tribes and the half of the tribe beyond the Jordan; and to the Levites he did not give an inheritance in their midst. For the sons of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim; and they did not give a portion to the Levites in the land, except cities to dwell in, and their pasturelands for their herds and for their property. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did; and they divided the land.*

"And these are what the sons of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan." The land was given by three kinds of leaders together: "Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes." Eleazar was Aaron's son and the high priest after him. The priest is named first, because this was God's work before it was anyone else's.

It was done "by the lot of their inheritance, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses" (Numbers 26:52-56; 34:13-29). The lot was a way of letting God decide, perhaps by drawing marked stones from a container before the LORD. Scripture does not tell us exactly how it was done. It does tell us who was behind it: "Into the lap the lot is thrown, and from the LORD is its every judgment" (Proverbs 16:33). No tribe could complain that Joshua played favorites. God placed every family where He wanted it.

Verses 3 and 4 explain the count. There were still twelve tribes with land, even though Levi had none, because Joseph had become two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 48:5). The Levites received "cities to dwell in, and their pasturelands" instead.

"Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did." That line is worth stopping on. This time they obeyed. After forty years of grumbling in the wilderness, a new generation did what God said.

14:6 *And the sons of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know the word that the LORD spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning you at Kadesh-barnea.*

"And the sons of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal." Caleb came with the men of his own tribe, the tribe of Judah, before any land was given out. Gilgal was still the base camp near Jericho.

He is called "Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite." The Kenizzites are named in Genesis 15:19 among the peoples living in Canaan in Abraham's day. Many Bible teachers think Caleb's family came from that people and had joined Israel, perhaps back in Egypt or at the exodus, and were counted as part of Judah. Others think Kenaz was simply a man of Judah and Kenizzite means a son of Kenaz (15:17). If the first view is right, then Caleb was another outsider, like Rahab, brought into God's people by faith, and he became one of its greatest leaders.

Caleb opened with the promise: "You know the word that the LORD spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning you at Kadesh-barnea." He did not come asking for a favor. He came holding God's word. Kadesh-barnea was the oasis south of the land where Israel had camped when the spies were sent out (Numbers 13-14). Joshua had been there. He remembered.

14:7-8 *A son of forty years **was** I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him back word just as **it was** in my heart. And my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, and I, I followed fully after the LORD my God.*

"A son of forty years was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land." Caleb told his story. Twelve men went in for forty days. All twelve saw the same land, the same fruit, the same walled cities and the same giants. Ten of them came back and said, in effect, that Israel could not do it. Caleb said, "We shall surely go up, and we shall take possession of it, for we shall surely prevail over it" (Numbers 13:30).

"I brought him back word just as it was in my heart." Caleb told the truth as he saw it, and what he saw was shaped by faith in God. The ten saw giants and felt like grasshoppers (Numbers 13:33). Caleb saw the same giants and measured them against God.

"And my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, and I, I followed fully after the LORD my God." He did not say this to boast. It was simply what happened. The other spies' fear spread through the whole camp, and the people wept all night and talked of going back to Egypt (Numbers 14:1-4). Caleb stood against the whole nation, and they wanted to stone him for it (Numbers 14:10).

What does it mean to follow the LORD fully? The Hebrew phrase pictures filling up the space behind someone, walking so close behind Him that there is no gap. It is not a man who never sinned. It is a man whose heart did not split between God and fear, God and comfort, God and the crowd. Three times in this chapter that phrase is used of Caleb (verses 8, 9 and 14). God Himself said it of him first: "because another spirit has been with him and he has fully followed after Me" (Numbers 14:24).

14:9 *And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be to you for an inheritance and to your sons forever, because you have followed fully after the LORD my God.'*

"And Moses swore on that day." Caleb quoted the oath: "Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be to you for an inheritance and to your sons forever, because you have followed fully after the LORD my God." The record of that promise is in Numbers 14:24 and Deuteronomy 1:36.

Where had Caleb's foot trodden? Numbers 13:22 tells us that the spies "came to Hebron," and that the sons of Anak lived there. Hebron was the place that broke the courage of the ten. It was the place Caleb was promised. He had walked that ground at forty, and he had carried the promise in his heart for forty-five years, through every grave the wilderness dug.

14:10-11 *And now, look, the LORD has kept me alive, just as He spoke, these forty-five years from when the LORD spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now, look, I **am** this day a son of eighty-five years. I **am** still this day strong, just as on the day Moses sent me; as my strength **was** then, so my strength **is** now, for battle and to go out and to come in.*

"And now, look, the LORD has kept me alive, just as He spoke, these forty-five years." Think about what Caleb had lived through. He watched a whole generation die in the desert, more than six hundred thousand men, one funeral after another, because of unbelief (Numbers 14:29-35). He had done nothing to deserve that long wait, but he had to wait anyway, because he belonged to the people. He did not grow bitter. He saw every year of it as God keeping His word: "the LORD has kept me alive, just as He spoke."

The forty-five years also help us date the conquest. Caleb was forty at Kadesh in the second year after the exodus. Thirty-eight more years in the wilderness bring us to the crossing, so the wars in the land had taken about seven years.

"I am this day a son of eighty-five years. I am still this day strong, just as on the day Moses sent me." Caleb was not talking about retirement. "As my strength was then, so my strength is now, for battle and to go out and to come in." To go out and to come in was a way of saying to lead in war and in daily life. At eighty-five he was asking for the hardest assignment in the land.

That is a word for anyone who thinks their usefulness to God is over. Isaiah says that "those who wait for the LORD will renew power" (Isaiah 40:31). Not everyone keeps Caleb's body at eighty-five, and Scripture does not promise that we will. But everyone can keep Caleb's heart.

14:12 *And now, give to me this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day; for you heard on that day that Anakim **were** there, and cities great **and** fortified. Perhaps the LORD **will be** with me, and I will dispossess them, just as the LORD spoke."*

"And now, give to me this hill country of which the LORD spoke on that day." Caleb could have asked for a quiet valley. He asked for the mountains. He named the danger himself: "for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, and cities great and fortified." The Anakim were the tall people the spies had feared most (Numbers 13:28, 33; Deuteronomy 9:2). Caleb wanted the very place that had made Israel turn back. He wanted to prove to a new generation that God was able.

Then he said, "Perhaps the LORD will be with me, and I will dispossess them, just as the LORD spoke." Is that doubt? I don't believe so. Caleb did not doubt God's promise. He ended the sentence with it: "just as the LORD spoke." The "perhaps" is humility. Caleb did not assume that he was owed God's help or that his own strength would win. Everything rested on the LORD being with him. A man of faith is sure of God and not too sure of himself.

14:13-14 *And Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore Hebron became Caleb's, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, for an inheritance until this day, because he followed fully after the LORD, the God of Israel.*

"And Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance." Two old friends stood together. Forty-five years before, they had stood alone against the whole nation, and the people had picked up stones to throw at them. Now one was the leader of Israel, and the other was receiving the reward God promised. Joshua did not hesitate. He blessed him.

"Therefore Hebron became Caleb's," and it stayed his "until this day, because he followed fully after the LORD, the God of Israel." The writer gives the reason a third time. Hebron was not given because Caleb was the strongest or the richest. It was given because he trusted and followed God.

Chapter 15 and Judges 1 tell us that Caleb did take it. He drove out the three sons of Anak (15:14; Judges 1:20). Later, Hebron was given to the priests as one of the Levite cities and a city of refuge, while Caleb kept its fields and villages (21:11-13). Caleb's prize became a place of safety and of worship for all Israel.

Hebron was also full of history. Abraham had lived there and built an altar to the LORD (Genesis 13:18). Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah and Jacob were buried there in the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:19; 49:29-31; 50:13). The place where Israel's fathers were buried in hope became the home of the man who believed God's promise to those fathers.

14:15 *And the name of Hebron formerly **was** Kiriath-arba; he **was** the great man among the Anakim. And the land had rest from war.*

"And the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath-arba." Kiriath-arba means the city of Arba. Arba "was the great man among the Anakim," the father of that people (15:13). The city named for the greatest of the giants now belonged to a man of faith.

"And the land had rest from war." This same line closes chapter 11 (11:23). It reminds us that the main wars were over. The rest was not yet complete, as Hebrews 4:8-9 says, but God had given His people a time to settle and to build.

Caleb's story points us forward. God promised Caleb an inheritance and kept him alive to receive it. He has promised every believer an inheritance that cannot fade, "reserved in the heavens for you" (1 Peter 1:4), and He keeps us by His power until we receive it. Caleb waited forty-five years. We may wait a lifetime. But the promise does not fail. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

Chapter 14 Summary

Eleazar the priest, Joshua and the heads of the tribes divided the land west of the Jordan among the nine and a half tribes by lot, as the LORD had commanded through Moses. The Levites received cities and pasture lands but no territory, and Joseph counted as two tribes. Before the lots were cast, Caleb came to Joshua at Gilgal with the men of Judah. He reminded Joshua of the promise Moses swore to him at Kadesh-barnea, when he was forty and the only spy besides

Joshua to follow the LORD fully. Now, at eighty-five and still strong, he asked for the hill country where the Anakim lived. Joshua blessed him and gave him Hebron, formerly Kiriath-arba, because he had followed the LORD fully. And the land had rest from war.

People and Places

- Eleazar: the son of Aaron and high priest after him, who shared the work of dividing the land.
- The lot: a way of letting the LORD decide, used to give each tribe its land (Proverbs 16:33).
- Caleb the son of Jephunneh: the spy from Judah who, with Joshua, trusted God at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 13-14).
- Kadesh-barnea: the oasis south of Canaan where Israel camped when the spies were sent out.
- Anakim: a people of very tall men in the hill country, feared by the ten spies (Numbers 13:33).
- Hebron (Kiriath-arba): a hill town of Judah where Abraham lived and the patriarchs were buried; Caleb's inheritance.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. Who divided the land, and how was it done? (14:1-2)

2. Why were there still twelve tribes with land even though Levi received none? (14:3-4)

3. What promise did Caleb remind Joshua of, and where was it made? (14:6, 9)

4. What did the other spies do to the people, and what did Caleb do? (14:8)

5. How old was Caleb, and what did he say about his strength? (14:10-11)

6. Which land did Caleb ask for, and why was it the hardest place to ask for? (14:12; Numbers 13:22, 33)

7. Why did Caleb receive Hebron, according to verse 14?

8. Caleb said "perhaps" and "just as the LORD spoke" in the same sentence. How can a believer be sure of God and humble about himself at the same time? (14:12)

9. Caleb waited forty-five years for a promise because of other people's unbelief. How do you handle a long wait that is not your fault?

10. What would it look like for you to follow the LORD fully, with no gap between you and Him? Is there an area where your heart is divided?

Chapter 15: The Inheritance of Judah

Scripture

15:1-19 And the lot for the tribe of the sons of Judah by their clans was to the border of Edom, the wilderness of Zin toward the south, at the end of the south. And their south border was from the end of the Salt Sea, from the bay that faces toward the south. And it goes out to the south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and it passes on toward Zin, and it goes up on the south of Kadesh-barnea, and it passes on ***to*** Hezron, and it goes up toward Addar, and it turns around toward Karka. And it passes on toward Azmon, and it goes out ***at*** the wadi of Egypt, and the ends of the border are toward the sea. This shall be to you ***the*** south border. And the east border ***is*** the Salt Sea as far as the end of the Jordan. And the border on the north side ***is*** from the bay of the sea at the end of the Jordan. And the border goes up ***to*** Beth-hoglah, and it passes on north of Beth-arabah, and the border goes up ***to*** the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben. And the border goes up toward Debir from the valley of Achor, and northward turning to Gilgal, which ***is*** opposite the ascent of Adummim, which ***is*** on the south of the wadi; and the border passes on to the waters of En-shemesh, and its ends are at En-rogel. And the border goes up ***by*** the valley of the son of Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites on the south, it ***is*** Jerusalem; and the border goes up to the top of the mountain that ***is*** on the face of the valley of Hinnom westward, which ***is*** at the end of the valley of Rephaim northward. And the border bends from the top of the mountain to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, and it goes out to the cities of the mountain of Ephron, and the border bends ***to*** Baalah, it ***is*** Kiriath-jearim. And the border turns around from Baalah westward to the mountain of Seir, and it passes on to the slope of the mountain of Jearim on the north, it ***is*** Chesalon, and it goes down ***to*** Beth-shemesh, and it passes on ***to*** Timnah. And the border goes out to the slope of Ekron northward, and the border bends toward Shikkeron, and it passes on ***to*** the mountain of Baalah, and it goes out ***to*** Jabneel, and the ends of the border are toward the sea. And the west border ***is*** toward the Great Sea and ***its*** border. This ***is*** the border of the sons of Judah all around by their clans. And to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a portion in the midst of the sons of Judah, according to the mouth of the LORD to Joshua: Kiriath-arba, the father of the Anak, it ***is*** Hebron. And Caleb dispossessed from there the three sons of the Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, those born of the Anak. And he went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; and the name of Debir formerly ***was*** Kiriath-sepher. And Caleb said, "Whoever strikes Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give to him Achsah my daughter for a wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it; and he gave to him Achsah his daughter for a wife. And it was, when she came, and she urged him to ask from her father a field; and she got down from on the donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What ***is it*** for you?" And she said, "Give to me a blessing; for you have given me the land of the Negeb, and you shall give to me springs of water." And he gave to her upper springs and lower springs.

15:20-44 This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Judah by their clans. And the cities at the end of the tribe of the sons of Judah toward the border of Edom in the Negeb were: Kabzeel and Eder and Jagur, and Kinah and Dimonah and Adadah, and Kedesh and Hazor and Ithnan, Ziph and Telem and Bealoth, and Hazor-hadattah and Kerioth-hezron, it ***is*** Hazor, Amam and Shema and Moladah, and Hazar-gaddah and Heshmon and Beth-pelet, and Hazar-shual and

Beersheba and Biziothiah, Baalah and Iim and Ezem, and Eltolad and Chesil and Hormah, and Ziklag and Madmannah and Sansannah, and Lebaoth and Shilhim and Ain and Rimmon; all the cities ***were*** twenty-nine, and their villages. In the Shephelah: Eshtaol and Zorah and Ashnah, and Zanoah and En-gannim, Tappuah and Enam, Jarmuth and Adullam, Socoh and Azekah, and Shaaraim and Adithaim and Gederah and Gederothaim; fourteen cities and their villages. Zenan and Hadashah and Migdal-gad, and Dilean and Mizpeh and Joktheel, Lachish and Bozkath and Eglon, and Cabbon and Lahmas and Chitlish, and Gederoth, Beth-dagon and Naamah and Makkedah; sixteen cities and their villages. Libnah and Ether and Ashan, and Iphtah and Ashnah and Nezib, and Keilah and Achzib and Mareshah; nine cities and their villages.

15:45-63 Ekron and its towns and its villages; from Ekron and westward, all that ***is*** beside Ashdod, and their villages; Ashdod, its towns and its villages; Gaza, its towns and its villages, as far as the wadi of Egypt, and the Great Sea and ***its*** border. And in the hill country: Shamir and Jattir and Socoh, and Dannah and Kiriath-sannah, it ***is*** Debir, and Anab and Eshtemoh and Anim, and Goshen and Holon and Giloh; eleven cities and their villages. Arab and Rumah and Eshan, and Janum and Beth-tappuah and Aphekah, and Humtah and Kiriath-arba, it ***is*** Hebron, and Zior; nine cities and their villages. Maon, Carmel and Ziph and Juttah, and Jezreel and Jokdeam and Zanoah, Kain, Gibeah and Timnah; ten cities and their villages. Halhul, Beth-zur and Gedor, and Maarath and Beth-anoth and Eltekon; six cities and their villages. Kiriath-baal, it ***is*** Kiriath-jearim, and Rabbah; two cities and their villages. In the wilderness: Beth-arabah, Middin and Secacah, and Nibshan and City of Salt and Engedi; six cities and their villages. And the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the sons of Judah were not able to dispossess them; and the Jebusites have dwelt with the sons of Judah in Jerusalem until this day.

Chapter 15 Preview

Judah's lot comes first, and it is the largest and most detailed list in the book. The chapter traces Judah's borders on all four sides, from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, and from the wilderness of Zin in the south up to the valley of Hinnom just below Jerusalem. In the middle of the list comes a short story: Caleb takes Hebron, offers his daughter to the man who captures Debir, and gives her the springs she asks for.

Then the writer lists Judah's towns by region: the dry Negeb in the south, the Shephelah or foothills in the west, the Philistine plain, the hill country and the wilderness by the Dead Sea. The chapter ends with a quiet failure. Judah could not drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem. Judah was the tribe of David, and later of Jesus Christ, so this land would one day hold Bethlehem and the throne of David.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-12 *And the lot for the tribe of the sons of Judah by their clans was to the border of Edom, the wilderness of Zin toward the south, at the end of the south. And their south border was from the end of the Salt Sea, from the bay that faces toward the south. And it goes out to the south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and it passes on toward Zin, and it goes up on the south of Kadesh-barnea, and it passes on **to** Hezron, and it goes up toward Addar, and it turns around toward Karka. And it passes on toward Azmon, and it goes out **at** the wadi of Egypt, and the ends of the border are toward the sea. This shall be to you **the** south border. And the east border **is** the Salt Sea as far as the end of the Jordan. And the border on the north side **is** from the bay of the sea at the end of the Jordan. And the border goes up **to** Beth-hoglah, and it passes on north of Beth-arabah, and the border goes up **to** the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben. And the border goes up toward Debir from the valley of Achor, and northward turning to Gilgal, which **is** opposite the ascent of Adummim, which **is** on the south of the wadi; and the border passes on to the waters of En-shemesh, and its ends are at En-rogel. And the border goes up **by** the valley of the son of Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites on the south, it **is** Jerusalem; and the border goes up to the top of the mountain that **is** on the face of the valley of Hinnom westward, which **is** at the end of the valley of Rephaim northward. And the border bends from the top of the mountain to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah, and it goes out to the cities of the mountain of Ephron, and the border bends **to** Baalah, it **is** Kiriath-jearim. And the border turns around from Baalah westward to the mountain of Seir, and it passes on to the slope of the mountain of Jearim on the north, it **is** Chesalon, and it goes down **to** Beth-shemesh, and it passes on **to** Timnah. And the border goes out to the slope of Ekron northward, and the border bends toward Shikkeron, and it passes on **to** the mountain of Baalah, and it goes out **to** Jabneel, and the ends of the border are toward the sea. And the west border **is** toward the Great Sea and **its** border. This **is** the border of the sons of Judah all around by their clans.*

"And the lot for the tribe of the sons of Judah by their clans was to the border of Edom." These verses walk the borders of Judah like a surveyor. The south border ran from the southern tip of the Salt Sea (the Dead Sea), past the ascent of Akrabbim (the scorpion pass) and south of Kadesh-barnea, to the wadi of Egypt and the sea. A wadi is a stream bed that is dry most of the year and runs with water after rain. The wadi of Egypt was the dry stream bed that marked the edge of Egypt's land, south of Gaza. The east border was the Dead Sea itself. The west border was "the Great Sea," the Mediterranean.

The north border (verses 5-11) is the most detailed, because it was shared with Benjamin and ran through places Israel knew well: the stone of Bohan, the valley of Achor where Achan was stoned (7:26), and En-rogel, a spring just outside Jerusalem. Then it "goes up by the valley of the son of Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites on the south, it is Jerusalem." The border ran along the valley just south of the city, so Jerusalem itself sat on the line between Judah and Benjamin. The valley of Hinnom later became a place of idol worship where children were burned (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31). Its name, Gehenna in the New Testament, became a word for hell (Matthew 5:22).

Why give so much detail? Because borders protected families. A clear line meant that no one could move a boundary stone and steal his neighbor's land (Deuteronomy 19:14). God cared about justice down to the property line.

15:13-14 *And to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a portion in the midst of the sons of Judah, according to the mouth of the LORD to Joshua: Kiriath-arba, the father of the Anak, it **is** Hebron. And Caleb dispossessed from there the three sons of the Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai, those born of the Anak.*

"And to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a portion in the midst of the sons of Judah, according to the mouth of the LORD to Joshua." This is the gift of 14:13, and now we see Caleb take it. "Caleb dispossessed from there the three sons of the Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai." These were the same three names the spies saw at Hebron forty-five years earlier (Numbers 13:22). The giants who had frightened a nation were driven out by an old man who trusted God.

Judges 1:10 says that Judah struck these three, and Judges 1:20 says Caleb drove them out. Both are true. Caleb led the men of his tribe.

15:15-17 *And he went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; and the name of Debir formerly **was** Kiriath-sepher. And Caleb said, "Whoever strikes Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give to him Achsah my daughter for a wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it; and he gave to him Achsah his daughter for a wife.*

Caleb then went against Debir, "and the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher." Kiriath-sepher means the city of the book or of the scribe. Joshua had taken Debir in the southern campaign (10:38-39), but its people had come back, as often happened.

Caleb made an offer: "Whoever strikes Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give to him Achsah my daughter for a wife." To us this sounds strange. In that time a father arranged his daughter's marriage, and Caleb wanted a man of courage and faith for her, a man like himself. Othniel took the city. He is called "the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb." Judges 1:13 adds that he was younger than Caleb. Some read this as Caleb's younger brother, which would make Achsah his niece. Others read it as Caleb's nephew, a son of Caleb's younger brother Kenaz. Either way, Othniel later became the first judge of Israel, the man God raised up to save His people (Judges 3:9-11). Caleb's choice proved good.

15:18-19 *And it was, when she came, and she urged him to ask from her father a field; and she got down from on the donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What **is it** for you?" And she said, "Give to me a blessing; for you have given me the land of the Negeb, and you shall give to me springs of water." And he gave to her upper springs and lower springs.*

"And it was, when she came, and she urged him to ask from her father a field." Achsah was a woman of faith like her father. She got down from her donkey, a sign of respect before a request, and Caleb asked, "What is it for you?"

"Give to me a blessing; for you have given me the land of the Negeb, and you shall give to me springs of water." The Negeb is the dry south. Land without water could not grow much. She asked boldly, and Caleb gave her more than one spring: "upper springs and lower springs."

This little story is told again in Judges 1:12-15, so it mattered to Israel. Achsah asked her father for a blessing because she trusted his goodness. Jesus told us to ask our Father in heaven the same

way, because He gives good things to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:7-11). She had land. She asked for what made the land live. In Christ, God gives us not only a place but living water (John 4:14).

15:20-32 *This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Judah by their clans. And the cities at the end of the tribe of the sons of Judah toward the border of Edom in the Negeb were: Kabzeel and Eder and Jagur, and Kinah and Dimonah and Adadah, and Kedesh and Hazor and Ithnan, Ziph and Telem and Bealoth, and Hazor-hadattah and Kerioth-hezron, it **is** Hazor, Amam and Shema and Moladah, and Hazar-gaddah and Heshmon and Beth-pelet, and Hazar-shual and Beersheba and Biziothiah, Baalah and Iim and Ezem, and Eltolad and Chesil and Hormah, and Ziklag and Madmannah and Sansannah, and Lebaoth and Shilhim and Ain and Rimmon; all the cities **were** twenty-nine, and their villages.*

"This is the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Judah by their clans." Now the towns are listed by region, starting in the far south, "toward the border of Edom in the Negeb."

These were the towns of the dry country: Kabzeel, Moladah, Beersheba, Hormah and Ziklag among them. Beersheba was where Abraham dug a well and called on the name of the LORD (Genesis 21:31-33), and the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" later meant the whole land from north to south (Judges 20:1). Ziklag was later given to David by a Philistine king when he was running from Saul (1 Samuel 27:6).

The total is "twenty-nine, and their villages," though more than twenty-nine names appear. Some names may be villages joined to a main town, some may be pairs that name one place, and some were later given to Simeon (19:1-9). Scripture does not explain the count, and I won't pretend to.

15:33-47 *In the Shephelah: Eshtaol and Zorah and Ashnah, and Zanoah and En-gannim, Tappuah and Enam, Jarmuth and Adullam, Socoh and Azekah, and Shaaraim and Adithaim and Gederah and Gederothaim; fourteen cities and their villages. Zenan and Hadashah and Migdal-gad, and Dilean and Mizpeh and Joktheel, Lachish and Bozkath and Eglon, and Cabbon and Lahmas and Chitlish, and Gederoth, Beth-dagon and Naamah and Makkedah; sixteen cities and their villages. Libnah and Ether and Ashan, and Iphtah and Ashnah and Nezib, and Keilah and Achzib and Mareshah; nine cities and their villages. Ekron and its towns and its villages; from Ekron and westward, all that **is** beside Ashdod, and their villages; Ashdod, its towns and its villages; Gaza, its towns and its villages, as far as the wadi of Egypt, and the Great Sea and **its** border.*

The next list is "In the Shephelah," the low hills between the high hill country and the coastal plain. This was good farmland and the border zone with the Philistines. It held Zorah and Eshtaol, the home of Samson (Judges 13:2, 25), Adullam, where David hid in a cave (1 Samuel 22:1), and Socoh and Azekah, between which David fought Goliath (1 Samuel 17:1). It held Lachish, Eglon, Makkedah and Libnah, cities from the southern campaign (chapter 10), and Keilah, which David later rescued (1 Samuel 23:1-5).

Verses 45-47 then give Judah the Philistine cities on the coast: Ekron, Ashdod and Gaza, "as far as the wadi of Egypt, and the Great Sea." God gave Judah land it did not yet hold (13:2-3). Judges 1:18-19 says Judah took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron for a time but could not drive out the

people of the plain, and the Philistines were soon strong again. The gift was real. The taking was still to be done.

15:48-62 *And in the hill country: Shamir and Jattir and Socoh, and Dannah and Kiriath-sannah, it **is** Debir, and Anab and Eshtemoh and Anim, and Goshen and Holon and Giloh; eleven cities and their villages. Arab and Rumah and Eshan, and Janum and Beth-tappuah and Aphekah, and Humtah and Kiriath-arba, it **is** Hebron, and Zior; nine cities and their villages. Maon, Carmel and Ziph and Juttah, and Jezreel and Jokdeam and Zanoah, Kain, Gibeah and Timnah; ten cities and their villages. Halhul, Beth-zur and Gedor, and Maarath and Beth-anoth and Eltekon; six cities and their villages. Kiriath-baal, it **is** Kiriath-jearim, and Rabbah; two cities and their villages. In the wilderness: Beth-arabah, Middin and Secacah, and Nibshan and City of Salt and Engedi; six cities and their villages.*

"And in the hill country." This was the backbone of Judah, the high ridge running south from Jerusalem. It included Debir, Hebron, Maon and Carmel, where Nabal and Abigail lived (1 Samuel 25:2-3), Ziph, where David hid from Saul (1 Samuel 23:14), and Kiriath-jearim, where the ark of the covenant stayed for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2).

The last region is "In the wilderness," the dry land falling down to the Dead Sea, with six towns including Engedi, a spring in the desert where David spared Saul's life in a cave (1 Samuel 24:1-7).

Bethlehem does not appear in this list in the Hebrew text, even though it was a town of Judah (Judges 17:7; Ruth 1:1). It was small, and its time had not yet come. Micah later said that from little Bethlehem would come the ruler of Israel (Micah 5:2), and Matthew tells us that Jesus was born there (Matthew 2:1-6).

Every one of these towns was a real place, and many of them became part of the story of God's work in the generations after Joshua. Lists like this remind us that God's history happens in real places to real people.

15:63 *And the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the sons of Judah were not able to dispossess them; and the Jebusites have dwelt with the sons of Judah in Jerusalem until this day.*

"And the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the sons of Judah were not able to dispossess them." This is the sad last line of the chapter. Judah had taken giants at Hebron, yet it could not take the Jebusite fortress. Judges 1:8 says Judah once captured and burned the city, but the Jebusites held on to the strong hill, and Judges 1:21 says Benjamin did not drive them out either. "The Jebusites have dwelt with the sons of Judah in Jerusalem until this day."

That phrase tells us this was written before David. About 1000 B.C. David captured the stronghold of Zion and made Jerusalem his capital (2 Samuel 5:6-9). The city Judah could not take became the city of the great King (Psalm 48:2; Matthew 5:35). What Judah left undone, God finished in His own time through David, and one day the Son of David will reign there.

Why could Judah not do it? The text does not say God failed. Elsewhere, Israel's failure is tied to their unbelief and disobedience (Judges 2:1-3). Caleb's faith took Hebron. Where faith was weak, the enemy stayed.

Chapter 15 Summary

Judah's lot reached from the border of Edom and the wilderness of Zin in the south to the valley of Hinnom below Jerusalem in the north, and from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean. Caleb received Hebron, drove out the three sons of Anak, and offered his daughter Achsah as wife to whoever took Debir. Othniel captured it and married her, and at her request Caleb gave her upper and lower springs in the Negeb. The chapter then lists Judah's towns by region: the Negeb, the Shephelah, the Philistine plain, the hill country and the wilderness by the Dead Sea. But Judah could not drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, and they still lived there when the book was written.

People and Places

- Negeb: the dry southern region of Judah.
- Shephelah: the low foothills between Judah's hill country and the coastal plain.
- The valley of Hinnom: the valley south of Jerusalem on Judah's border, later a place of idol worship; its name lies behind Gehenna.
- Othniel the son of Kenaz: the man who took Debir and married Achsah; later the first judge of Israel (Judges 3:9-11).
- Achsah: Caleb's daughter, who asked her father for springs of water.
- Jebusites: the people who held Jerusalem until David took it (2 Samuel 5:6-9).

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What were the four borders of Judah's land? (15:1-12)

2. Where did the north border run past Jerusalem, and what later happened in that valley? (15:8; 2 Kings 23:10)

3. Which three sons of Anak did Caleb drive out of Hebron, and where had we heard their names before? (15:14; Numbers 13:22)

4. What did Caleb offer to the man who captured Debir, and who took it? (15:16-17)

5. What did Achsah ask her father for, and what did he give her? (15:18-19)

6. Which places in Judah's lists became important later in the life of David? (15:20-62)

7. What could Judah not do, and who finally did it? (15:63; 2 Samuel 5:6-9)

8. Achsah asked boldly for a blessing because she trusted her father. How does Matthew 7:7-11 encourage you to ask your heavenly Father?

9. Caleb's faith took Hebron, but Judah left the Jebusites in Jerusalem. Is there a stronghold in your life that you have given up on? What would trusting God with it look like?

10. God cared about clear borders so no family would be cheated. How should that shape the way we treat other people's property and rights?

Chapter 16: The Inheritance of Ephraim

Scripture

16:1-10 And the lot for the sons of Joseph went out from the Jordan ***at*** Jericho, to the waters of Jericho eastward, the wilderness going up from Jericho in the hill country ***to*** Bethel. And it goes out from Bethel toward Luz, and it passes on to the territory of the Arkites ***at*** Ataroth. And it goes down westward to the territory of the Japhletites, as far as the territory of Beth-horon the Lower, and as far as Gezer, and its ends are toward the sea. And the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance. And the territory of the sons of Ephraim by their clans was ***this***: and the border of their inheritance eastward was Ataroth-addar as far as Beth-horon the Upper, and the border goes out toward the sea, Michmethath on the north; and the border turns around eastward ***to*** Taanath-shiloh, and it passes by it on the east ***to*** Janoah, and it goes down from Janoah ***to*** Ataroth and toward Naarah, and it touches Jericho, and it goes out ***at*** the Jordan. From Tappuah the border goes westward ***to*** the wadi of Kanah, and its ends are toward the sea. This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Ephraim by their clans, and the cities set apart for the sons of Ephraim in the midst of the inheritance of the sons of Manasseh, all the cities and their villages. And they did not dispossess the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; and the Canaanites have dwelt in the midst of Ephraim until this day, and they became forced labor, serving.

Chapter 16 Preview

After Judah, the next lot goes to the sons of Joseph, the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Chapter 16 first gives the southern border of Joseph's land as a whole, running from the Jordan at Jericho west through Bethel to Gezer and the sea. Then it traces the borders of Ephraim, the younger son who received the greater blessing from Jacob.

The chapter is short, and it ends with a warning sign. Ephraim did not drive the Canaanites out of Gezer. Instead they let them stay and made them forced labor. It looked like a good deal. In time it became a snare.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-4 *And the lot for the sons of Joseph went out from the Jordan **at** Jericho, to the waters of Jericho eastward, the wilderness going up from Jericho in the hill country **to** Bethel. And it goes out from Bethel toward Luz, and it passes on to the territory of the Arkites **at** Ataroth. And it goes down westward to the territory of the Japhletites, as far as the territory of Beth-horon the Lower, and as far as Gezer, and its ends are toward the sea. And the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance.*

"And the lot for the sons of Joseph went out from the Jordan at Jericho." The line of Joseph's land began at the Jordan, ran up through the wilderness "from Jericho in the hill country to Bethel," and then went west past Beth-horon the Lower to Gezer, "and its ends are toward the sea."

Joseph's sons received one of the best parts of the land, the wide central hill country, with good rain, forests and valleys. Jacob had blessed Joseph as "a son of a fruitful one" (Genesis 49:22), and Moses had asked for the best gifts of heaven and earth on his land (Deuteronomy 33:13-17). Here we see those blessings come true on the ground.

"And the sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, received their inheritance." Manasseh was the older son, but Ephraim is described first. That fits Genesis 48:14-20, when Jacob crossed his hands and put his right hand on the younger boy's head. God often chooses the younger and the weaker, so that His grace is plain (1 Corinthians 1:27).

16:5-9 *And the territory of the sons of Ephraim by their clans was **this**: and the border of their inheritance eastward was Ataroth-addar as far as Beth-horon the Upper, and the border goes out toward the sea, Michmethath on the north; and the border turns around eastward **to** Taanath-shiloh, and it passes by it on the east **to** Janoah, and it goes down from Janoah **to** Ataroth and toward Naarah, and it touches Jericho, and it goes out **at** the Jordan. From Tappuah the border goes westward **to** the wadi of Kanah, and its ends are toward the sea. This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Ephraim by their clans, and the cities set apart for the sons of Ephraim in the midst of the inheritance of the sons of Manasseh, all the cities and their villages.*

These verses trace Ephraim's own borders. The southern line ran from Ataroth-addar to Beth-horon the Upper. The northern line, shared with Manasseh, ran through Michmethath and Tappuah to the wadi of Kanah and the sea. On the east it came down through Janoah and Naarah to the Jordan near Jericho.

Ephraim's land held important places. Shiloh, where the tabernacle would soon stand (18:1), was in Ephraim. Joshua himself was from Ephraim (Numbers 13:8) and would be buried there (24:30). Later, Ephraim became the leading tribe of the northern kingdom, so much that the prophets used the name Ephraim for the whole northern kingdom of Israel (Hosea 11:8).

Verse 9 adds that some "cities set apart for the sons of Ephraim" lay inside Manasseh's land. The two brother tribes were tied together, with towns inside each other's borders (17:8-9). They were meant to live as family.

16:10 *And they did not dispossess the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; and the Canaanites have dwelt in the midst of Ephraim until this day, and they became forced labor, serving.*

"And they did not dispossess the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer." Gezer was a strong city guarding the road from the coast up to the hills. Joshua had defeated its king (10:33; 12:12), but its people were still there.

"And they became forced labor, serving." Ephraim made them work for them. To Ephraim it looked practical. Why fight when you could put your enemies to work? But God had commanded Israel to drive these nations out, because they would teach Israel to worship their gods (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:17-18). Taking their labor instead of obeying God was a compromise. Judges 1:29 tells the same story, and Judges 2:1-3 says what it cost: the nations left in the land became thorns in Israel's sides, and their gods a snare.

Gezer stayed Canaanite for centuries, until a Pharaoh of Egypt captured it and gave it to his daughter, Solomon's wife (1 Kings 9:16).

What do we do with sin we have not dealt with? We often do what Ephraim did. We don't let it rule us openly, so we think it is under control. We make it serve us. But sin we keep around is never really our servant. Paul says we are slaves of whatever we obey (Romans 6:16). The only safe way to deal with it is to put it to death by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5).

Chapter 16 Summary

The lot for the sons of Joseph ran from the Jordan at Jericho up through the hill country to Bethel, and then west past Beth-horon the Lower to Gezer and the sea. Ephraim's own land lay between Ataroth-addar and Beth-horon the Upper in the south and the wadi of Kanah in the north, down to the Jordan near Jericho in the east, with some of its towns inside Manasseh's land. But Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites of Gezer. They let them stay and made them forced labor.

People and Places

- Ephraim: Joseph's younger son, blessed above his older brother by Jacob (Genesis 48:14-20); the tribe of Joshua.
- Bethel: the town where Jacob saw the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:19), on the border of Ephraim and Benjamin.
- Gezer: a strong city on the road from the coast to the hills, left in Canaanite hands (1 Kings 9:16).

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Where did the southern border of Joseph's land begin and end? (16:1-3)

2. Why do you think Ephraim is described before Manasseh, the older brother? (16:4-5; Genesis 48:14-20)

3. What important places, later in Israel's story, were in Ephraim's land? (16:5-9; 18:1; 24:30)

4. Why might some of Ephraim's cities have been inside Manasseh's land? (16:9)

5. What did Ephraim do with the Canaanites of Gezer instead of driving them out? (16:10)

6. Why had God commanded Israel to drive these nations out? (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:17-18)

7. What did the nations left in the land become to Israel, according to Judges 2:1-3?

8. Ephraim made its enemies work for it. How do people today try to keep a sin "under control" instead of putting it away?

9. What does Romans 6:16 teach about sin we try to make our servant?

10. Is there something God has told you to put out of your life that you have only put to work instead? What would it take to obey Him fully?

Chapter 17: The Inheritance of Manasseh

Scripture

17:1-18 And the lot was for the tribe of Manasseh, for he ***was*** the firstborn of Joseph: for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, because he was a man of war, and the Gilead and the Bashan were his. And it was for the sons of Manasseh who remained, by their clans: for the sons of Abiezer and for the sons of Helek and for the sons of Asriel and for the sons of Shechem and for the sons of Hepher and for the sons of Shemida. These ***were*** the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the males, by their clans. And as for Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, there were no sons for him, except daughters; and these ***are*** the names of his daughters: Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. And they drew near before Eleazar the priest and before Joshua the son of Nun and before the leaders, saying, "The LORD commanded Moses to give to us an inheritance in the midst of our brothers." And he gave to them, according to the mouth of the LORD, an inheritance in the midst of the brothers of their father. And the portions of Manasseh fell, ten, apart from the land of the Gilead and the Bashan, which ***is*** beyond the Jordan, for the daughters of Manasseh inherited an inheritance in the midst of his sons; and the land of the Gilead belonged to the sons of Manasseh who remained. And the territory of Manasseh was from Asher ***to*** Michmethath, which ***is*** on the face of Shechem; and the border goes to the right, to the inhabitants of En-tappuah. The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh; and Tappuah, at the border of Manasseh, ***belonged*** to the sons of Ephraim. And the border goes down ***to*** the wadi of Kanah, southward of the wadi. These cities ***belonged*** to Ephraim in the midst of the cities of Manasseh; and the border of Manasseh ***was*** on the north of the wadi, and its ends were toward the sea. Southward ***belonged*** to Ephraim, and northward to Manasseh, and the sea was its border; and they touch Asher on the north, and Issachar on the east. And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Beth-shean and its towns, and Ibleam and its towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and its towns, and the inhabitants of En-dor and its towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and its towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and its towns, the three of the height. And the sons of Manasseh were not able to take possession of these cities, and the Canaanites were determined to dwell in this land. And it was, when the sons of Israel became strong, and they put the Canaanites to forced labor, and they did not utterly dispossess them. And the sons of Joseph spoke with Joshua, saying, "Why have you given me ***as*** an inheritance one lot and one portion, and I ***am*** a numerous people, since thus far the LORD has blessed me?" And Joshua said to them, "If you ***are*** a numerous people, go up for yourself to the forest, and you shall cut down for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is narrow for you." And the sons of Joseph said, "The hill country will not be found ***enough*** for us, and chariots of iron ***are*** among all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley, for those who ***are*** in Beth-shean and its towns and for those who ***are*** in the valley of Jezreel." And Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, "You ***are*** a numerous people, and you have great strength; you shall not have one lot ***only***, for the hill country shall be yours; for it ***is*** forest, and you shall cut it down, and its ends shall be yours; for you shall dispossess the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, though they ***are*** strong."

Chapter 17 Preview

Chapter 17 gives the land of the other half of Manasseh, west of the Jordan, north of Ephraim. It names the clans of Manasseh, and it tells how the five daughters of Zelophehad came to Eleazar and Joshua to claim the inheritance God had promised them through Moses. They received it.

Then the chapter shows two weaknesses. Manasseh could not drive the Canaanites out of the strong cities of the great valley, and the sons of Joseph complained to Joshua that their land was too small. Joshua's answer is wise and a little sharp. If you are as great as you say, go and clear the forest, and drive out the Canaanites, chariots of iron and all.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-2 *And the lot was for the tribe of Manasseh, for he **was** the firstborn of Joseph: for Machir the firstborn of Manasseh, the father of Gilead, because he was a man of war, and the Gilead and the Bashan were his. And it was for the sons of Manasseh who remained, by their clans: for the sons of Abiezer and for the sons of Helek and for the sons of Asriel and for the sons of Shechem and for the sons of Hepher and for the sons of Shemida. These **were** the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the males, by their clans.*

"And the lot was for the tribe of Manasseh, for he was the firstborn of Joseph." Manasseh had two parts. The family of Machir, "a man of war," already had Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan (13:29-31). Now the rest of the clans received land west of the Jordan: Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hepher and Shemida.

One of those names would become famous. Gideon, the judge, came from the clan of Abiezer (Judges 6:11, 15). God was laying out the homes of men and women He would use in later generations.

17:3-6 *And as for Zelophehad the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, there were no sons for him, except daughters; and these **are** the names of his daughters: Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. And they drew near before Eleazar the priest and before Joshua the son of Nun and before the leaders, saying, "The LORD commanded Moses to give to us an inheritance in the midst of our brothers." And he gave to them, according to the mouth of the LORD, an inheritance in the midst of the brothers of their father. And the portions of Manasseh fell, ten, apart from the land of the Gilead and the Bashan, which **is** beyond the Jordan, for the daughters of Manasseh inherited an inheritance in the midst of his sons; and the land of the Gilead belonged to the sons of Manasseh who remained.*

"And as for Zelophehad the son of Hepher," the writer says, "there were no sons for him, except daughters." Their names are written down: "Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah." In a list of clans named after men, five women are named.

Their story began in Numbers 27:1-11. Their father had died in the wilderness with no son. Under the usual custom the land passed to sons, so his name and his family's share would have been lost. The five sisters came to Moses and asked for an inheritance. Moses took their case to the LORD,

and the LORD said, "The daughters of Zelophehad are speaking right" (Numbers 27:7). God gave them their father's share and made a law for every family like theirs.

Now, years later, they came to Eleazar and Joshua and reminded them: "The LORD commanded Moses to give to us an inheritance in the midst of our brothers." Like Caleb, they came holding God's word. And Joshua gave it to them, "according to the mouth of the LORD."

This tells us something about God. He cared about women who had no father and no brother to speak for them. He heard their case, and He made sure His promise reached them too. "The daughters of Manasseh inherited an inheritance in the midst of his sons." In Christ the same is true: men and women alike are "heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:29).

17:7-11 *And the territory of Manasseh was from Asher **to** Michmethath, which **is** on the face of Shechem; and the border goes to the right, to the inhabitants of En-tappuah. The land of Tappuah belonged to Manasseh; and Tappuah, at the border of Manasseh, **belonged** to the sons of Ephraim. And the border goes down **to** the wadi of Kanah, southward of the wadi. These cities **belonged** to Ephraim in the midst of the cities of Manasseh; and the border of Manasseh **was** on the north of the wadi, and its ends were toward the sea. Southward **belonged** to Ephraim, and northward to Manasseh, and the sea was its border; and they touch Asher on the north, and Issachar on the east. And Manasseh had in Issachar and in Asher Beth-shean and its towns, and Ibleam and its towns, and the inhabitants of Dor and its towns, and the inhabitants of En-dor and its towns, and the inhabitants of Taanach and its towns, and the inhabitants of Megiddo and its towns, the three of the height.*

Manasseh's land ran from the border of Asher in the north down to Michmethath near Shechem and the wadi of Kanah, where it touched Ephraim. Tappuah was shared. The land around it was Manasseh's, but the town itself belonged to Ephraim. The two brothers lived side by side.

Manasseh was also given towns inside the land of Issachar and Asher: Beth-shean, Ibleam, Dor, En-dor, Taanach and Megiddo. These were the fortress cities along the great valley of Jezreel and the coast, guarding the main roads through the land. If Manasseh held them, Israel held the north.

17:12-13 *And the sons of Manasseh were not able to take possession of these cities, and the Canaanites were determined to dwell in this land. And it was, when the sons of Israel became strong, and they put the Canaanites to forced labor, and they did not utterly dispossess them.*

"And the sons of Manasseh were not able to take possession of these cities, and the Canaanites were determined to dwell in this land." The Canaanites dug in. They would not leave.

Later, "when the sons of Israel became strong," they made the Canaanites forced labor, but "they did not utterly dispossess them." It is the same compromise we saw with Ephraim at Gezer (16:10). When Israel was weak, they did not drive them out. When Israel was strong, they still did not drive them out. They put them to work.

Beth-shean shows what this cost. Generations later, after Saul died in battle, the Philistines hung his body on the wall of Beth-shean (1 Samuel 31:10). A city Manasseh left standing became the place of Israel's shame.

17:14-15 *And the sons of Joseph spoke with Joshua, saying, "Why have you given me **as** an inheritance one lot and one portion, and I **am** a numerous people, since thus far the LORD has blessed me?" And Joshua said to them, "If you **are** a numerous people, go up for yourself to the forest, and you shall cut down for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is narrow for you."*

"And the sons of Joseph spoke with Joshua." They asked, "Why have you given me as an inheritance one lot and one portion, and I am a numerous people?" They complained that they had only one share for two large tribes. Joshua's own tribe, Ephraim, was among them, and they may have expected special treatment.

Joshua did not give in, and he did not get angry. He took their words and turned them back on them: "If you are a numerous people, go up for yourself to the forest, and you shall cut down for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim." In other words, if you are as big as you say, use your strength. The hill country was still covered with forest, and there was more room if they were willing to work for it.

That is still good counsel. Many of us complain that God has not given us enough, when He has given us more than we have worked to take hold of. Joshua did not play favorites, even with his own tribe.

17:16-18 *And the sons of Joseph said, "The hill country will not be found **enough** for us, and chariots of iron **are** among all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley, for those who **are** in Beth-shean and its towns and for those who **are** in the valley of Jezreel." And Joshua said to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, "You **are** a numerous people, and you have great strength; you shall not have one lot **only**, for the hill country shall be yours; for it **is** forest, and you shall cut it down, and its ends shall be yours; for you shall dispossess the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, though they **are** strong."*

The sons of Joseph pushed back: "The hill country will not be found enough for us, and chariots of iron are among all the Canaanites who dwell in the land of the valley." Chariots with iron fittings were the heavy weapons of that day. On the flat land of the valley of Jezreel, foot soldiers could not stand against them.

Joshua answered again, firm and kind: "You are a numerous people, and you have great strength." You will not have just one lot, "for the hill country shall be yours; for it is forest, and you shall cut it down." And then he said what they did not want to hear: "for you shall dispossess the Canaanites, though they have chariots of iron, though they are strong."

Joshua remembered something they seemed to have forgotten. At the waters of Merom, the northern kings came with "horses and chariots very many," and God gave them into Israel's hand (11:4-9). Chariots had not stopped the LORD then. They would not stop Him now.

The real problem was not iron. It was faith. Caleb was eighty-five and asked for the giants. Joseph's sons were a great people and were afraid of chariots. The difference was not strength. It was trust in God.

Chapter 17 Summary

Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn, received land in two parts. The family of Machir already had Gilead and Bashan east of the Jordan, and the other clans received land west of the Jordan, north of Ephraim. The daughters of Zelophehad, who had no brothers, reminded Eleazar and Joshua of the LORD's command through Moses, and they received an inheritance among their father's brothers. Manasseh was also given strong cities in Issachar and Asher, including Beth-shean, Taanach and Megiddo, but they could not drive out the Canaanites there, and later put them to forced labor. The sons of Joseph complained that their land was too small. Joshua told them to clear the forested hill country and to drive out the Canaanites, even though they had chariots of iron.

People and Places

- Machir: the firstborn of Manasseh, whose family held Gilead and Bashan.
- Abiezer: a clan of Manasseh, the family of Gideon (Judges 6:11).
- The daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah, who received their father's inheritance (Numbers 27:1-11).
- Beth-shean, Taanach and Megiddo: fortress cities along the valley of Jezreel, left in Canaanite hands.
- Chariots of iron: war chariots with iron fittings, strong on flat ground.

My chariots of iron are failure, falling flat on my face, and not pleasing God. Those fears can keep me from obeying. Caleb asked for the hill country anyway. I want that kind of faith.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. Why did Manasseh receive land on both sides of the Jordan? (17:1-2; 13:29-31)

2. Who were the daughters of Zelophehad, and what did they ask for? (17:3-4)

3. What had the LORD said about their request in the days of Moses? (Numbers 27:7)

4. Which strong cities was Manasseh given, and why did they matter? (17:11)

5. What did Manasseh do with the Canaanites instead of driving them out? (17:12-13)

6. What did the sons of Joseph complain about, and how did Joshua answer? (17:14-15)

7. What were they afraid of, and what did Joshua tell them they would still do? (17:16-18)

8. What does God's answer to the daughters of Zelophehad teach about His care for people who have no one to speak for them? Who might that be in your church or town?

9. The sons of Joseph wanted more land but did not want to clear the forest. Where are you asking God for more when you have not yet used what He has given you?

10. Caleb asked for giants; Joseph's sons were afraid of chariots. What "chariots of iron" make you afraid to obey God, and what do you remember of His help in the past?

Chapter 18: The Tent at Shiloh and the Lot of Benjamin

Scripture

18:1-10 And all the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled ***at*** Shiloh, and they caused the tent of meeting to dwell there; and the land was subdued before them. And there remained among the sons of Israel seven tribes who had not divided their inheritance. And Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Until when ***are*** you slack to go to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given to you? Provide for yourselves three men for ***each*** tribe, and I will send them, and they shall arise and walk about in the land and describe it in writing according to their inheritance, and they shall come to me. And they shall divide it into seven portions. Judah shall stand on its territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall stand on their territory on the north. And you, you shall describe the land in writing ***in*** seven portions, and you shall bring ***it*** to me here, and I will cast a lot for you here before the LORD our God. For there is no portion for the Levites in your midst, for the priesthood of the LORD ***is*** their inheritance; and Gad and Reuben and the half of the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastward, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave to them." And the men arose and went, and Joshua commanded those who went to describe the land in writing, saying, "Go and walk about in the land, and describe it in writing, and return to me; and here I will throw a lot for you before the LORD in Shiloh." And the men went and passed through the land, and they described it in writing by cities in seven portions on a scroll, and they came to Joshua, to the camp ***at*** Shiloh. And Joshua threw a lot for them in Shiloh before the LORD; and there Joshua divided the land to the sons of Israel according to their divisions.

18:11-28 And the lot of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin came up by their clans, and the territory of their lot went out between the sons of Judah and the sons of Joseph. And the border on the north side was theirs from the Jordan; and the border goes up to the slope of Jericho on the north, and it goes up in the hill country westward, and its ends are toward the wilderness of Beth-aven. And the border passes on from there toward Luz, to the slope of Luz southward, it ***is*** Bethel; and the border goes down ***to*** Ataroth-addar, on the mountain that ***is*** on the south of Beth-horon the Lower. And the border bends, and it turns around on the west side southward, from the mountain that ***is*** on the face of Beth-horon southward; and its ends are at Kiriath-baal, it ***is*** Kiriath-jearim, a city of the sons of Judah. This ***is*** the west side. And the south side ***is*** from the end of Kiriath-jearim, and the border goes out westward, and it goes out to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah. And the border goes down to the end of the mountain that ***is*** on the face of the valley of the son of Hinnom, which ***is*** in the valley of Rephaim northward; and it goes down ***by*** the valley of Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites southward, and it goes down ***to*** En-rogel. And it bends from the north, and it goes out ***to*** En-shemesh, and it goes out to Geliloth, which ***is*** opposite the ascent of Adummim, and it goes down ***to*** the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben. And it passes on to the slope opposite the Arabah northward, and it goes down toward the Arabah. And the border passes on to the slope of Beth-hoglah northward, and the ends of the border are at the bay of the Salt Sea northward, at the end of the Jordan southward. This ***is*** the south border. And the Jordan borders it on the east side. This ***is*** the inheritance of the sons of Benjamin by its borders all around, by their clans. And the cities of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin by their clans were: Jericho and

Beth-hoglah and Emek-keziz, and Beth-arabah and Zemaraim and Bethel, and Avvim and Parah and Ophrah, and Chephar-haammonah and Ophni and Geba; twelve cities and their villages. Gibeon and Ramah and Beeroth, and Mizpeh and Chephirah and Mozah, and Rekem and Irpeel and Taralah, and Zela, Haeleph, and the Jebusite ***city***, it ***is*** Jerusalem, Gibeah, Kiriath; fourteen cities and their villages. This ***is*** the inheritance of the sons of Benjamin by their clans.

Chapter 18 Preview

The whole congregation gathers at Shiloh, in the hill country of Ephraim, and sets up the tent of meeting there. The land is under Israel's control, but seven tribes still have not received their inheritance. Joshua asks them a pointed question: how long will you put off taking the land the LORD has given you? He sends out three men from each tribe to walk the land and write it down in seven parts, and then he casts lots for them before the LORD.

The first of the seven lots falls to Benjamin. Its small territory sits between Judah and Joseph, and the chapter gives its borders and its towns. Benjamin's land held Jericho, Bethel, Gibeon, Ramah, Mizpeh and Jerusalem itself, places where much of Israel's later history would happen.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1 *And all the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled* ***at*** *Shiloh, and they caused the tent of meeting to dwell there; and the land was subdued before them.*

"And all the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled at Shiloh, and they caused the tent of meeting to dwell there." The tent of meeting is another name for the tabernacle, the portable tent where God met with His people and where the ark of the covenant was kept. Until now the camp had been at Gilgal near the Jordan. Now the center of worship moved into the middle of the land.

Shiloh was in Ephraim, north of Bethel. It stayed the place of worship through the days of the judges, and it was there that Hannah prayed for a son and young Samuel heard the LORD call him (1 Samuel 1:3; 3:1-10). Later, because of the sins of the priests and the people, the ark was taken from Shiloh, and God let the place be ruined. Jeremiah used it as a warning to Jerusalem: "For go, please, to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of My people Israel" (Jeremiah 7:12).

"And the land was subdued before them." The rest of the land would be divided from the place where God dwelt among His people. That is the right order. God first, then everything else.

18:2-7 *And there remained among the sons of Israel seven tribes who had not divided their inheritance. And Joshua said to the sons of Israel, "Until when **are** you slack to go to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given to you? Provide for yourselves three men for **each** tribe, and I will send them, and they shall arise and walk about in the land and describe it in writing according to their inheritance, and they shall come to me. And they shall divide it into seven portions. Judah shall stand on its territory on the south, and the house of Joseph shall stand on their territory on the north. And you, you shall describe the land in writing **in** seven portions, and you shall bring **it** to me here, and I will cast a lot for you here before the LORD our God. For there is no portion for the Levites in your midst, for the priesthood of the LORD **is** their inheritance; and Gad and Reuben and the half of the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan eastward, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave to them."*

"And there remained among the sons of Israel seven tribes who had not divided their inheritance." Five tribes had their land (Reuben, Gad, half of Manasseh in the east; Judah, Ephraim and the other half of Manasseh in the west). Seven still did not.

Joshua said, "Until when are you slack to go to take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given to you?" Slack means slow, careless, putting things off. The wars were over and life at camp was easy. Maybe they were content with what they had, or afraid of the work and the fighting still ahead. Whatever the reason, they were sitting still while God's gift waited for them.

Joshua's plan was practical: "Provide for yourselves three men for each tribe." They would walk the land, "describe it in writing," divide it into seven parts, and bring the record back. Judah held the south and Joseph the north, so the seven parts would come from the rest. The Levites were left out again, "for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance," and the eastern tribes already had their land.

"I will cast a lot for you here before the LORD our God." The survey was man's work. The choosing was God's.

What has God given you that you have been slow to take hold of? Peter says God's power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Many believers live like those seven tribes, saved and safe in the camp, but slow to step into what God has given.

18:8-10 *And the men arose and went, and Joshua commanded those who went to describe the land in writing, saying, "Go and walk about in the land, and describe it in writing, and return to me; and here I will throw a lot for you before the LORD in Shiloh." And the men went and passed through the land, and they described it in writing by cities in seven portions on a scroll, and they came to Joshua, to the camp **at** Shiloh. And Joshua threw a lot for them in Shiloh before the LORD; and there Joshua divided the land to the sons of Israel according to their divisions.*

"And the men arose and went." They walked through the land, "and they described it in writing by cities in seven portions on a scroll, and they came to Joshua, to the camp at Shiloh." This is one of the first land surveys we know of in Scripture, and it was done carefully, city by city.

"And Joshua threw a lot for them in Shiloh before the LORD; and there Joshua divided the land to the sons of Israel according to their divisions." Notice the words "before the LORD." This was not a game of chance. It was done in God's presence, at His tent, trusting Him to give each tribe its place.

18:11-20 *And the lot of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin came up by their clans, and the territory of their lot went out between the sons of Judah and the sons of Joseph. And the border on the north side was theirs from the Jordan; and the border goes up to the slope of Jericho on the north, and it goes up in the hill country westward, and its ends are toward the wilderness of Beth-aven. And the border passes on from there toward Luz, to the slope of Luz southward, it* ***is*** *Bethel; and the border goes down* ***to*** *Ataroth-addar, on the mountain that* ***is*** *on the south of Beth-horon the Lower. And the border bends, and it turns around on the west side southward, from the mountain that* ***is*** *on the face of Beth-horon southward; and its ends are at Kiriath-baal, it* ***is*** *Kiriath-jearim, a city of the sons of Judah. This* ***is*** *the west side. And the south side* ***is*** *from the end of Kiriath-jearim, and the border goes out westward, and it goes out to the spring of the waters of Nephtoah. And the border goes down to the end of the mountain that* ***is*** *on the face of the valley of the son of Hinnom, which* ***is*** *in the valley of Rephaim northward; and it goes down* ***by*** *the valley of Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites southward, and it goes down* ***to*** *En-rogel. And it bends from the north, and it goes out* ***to*** *En-shemesh, and it goes out to Geliloth, which* ***is*** *opposite the ascent of Adummim, and it goes down* ***to*** *the stone of Bohan the son of Reuben. And it passes on to the slope opposite the Arabah northward, and it goes down toward the Arabah. And the border passes on to the slope of Beth-hoglah northward, and the ends of the border are at the bay of the Salt Sea northward, at the end of the Jordan southward. This* ***is*** *the south border. And the Jordan borders it on the east side. This* ***is*** *the inheritance of the sons of Benjamin by its borders all around, by their clans.*

"And the lot of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin came up." Benjamin's land was a small strip "between the sons of Judah and the sons of Joseph." It ran from the Jordan in the east up into the hill country to the west.

The north border went from the Jordan up past Jericho to Bethel (here also called Luz, its old name) and down to Ataroth-addar and Beth-horon. The west side ran south to Kiriath-jearim. The south border is the same line as Judah's north border (15:5-9), traced the other way, through the spring of Nephtoah, down "the valley of Hinnom to the slope of the Jebusites," past En-rogel and the stone of Bohan, to the north end of the Salt Sea.

Benjamin was the youngest son of Jacob, and Rachel died giving birth to him (Genesis 35:16-18). Moses had said of Benjamin, "The beloved of the LORD, he dwells in security beside Him," and he added, "between His shoulders he dwells" (Deuteronomy 33:12). The words picture Benjamin carried close to God. Many see that fulfilled in the temple, which stood in Jerusalem on the line between Benjamin and Judah.

18:21-28 *And the cities of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin by their clans were: Jericho and Beth-hoglah and Emek-keziz, and Beth-arabah and Zemaraim and Bethel, and Avvim and Parah and Ophrah, and Chephar-haammonah and Ophni and Geba; twelve cities and their villages. Gibeon and Ramah and Beeroth, and Mizpeh and Chephirah and Mozah, and Rekem and Irpeel and Taralah, and Zela, Haeleph, and the Jebusite* ***city****, it* ***is*** *Jerusalem, Gibeah, Kiriath; fourteen cities and their villages. This* ***is*** *the inheritance of the sons of Benjamin by their clans.*

Benjamin's towns are listed in two groups. The first, in the east, includes Jericho, Beth-hoglah and Bethel, twelve towns. The second, in the west, includes Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, Mizpeh, Gibeah and "the Jebusite city, it is Jerusalem," fourteen towns.

Think how much of the Bible happened in this small tribe. Jericho was the first city taken. Gibeon was the city that tricked Joshua and was then defended by God (chapters 9-10). Ramah was the home of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:17). Mizpeh, or Mizpah, was where Samuel gathered Israel to pray and where Saul was chosen king (1 Samuel 7:5; 10:17-24). Gibeah was Saul's home town (1 Samuel 10:26), because Israel's first king came from Benjamin. And the apostle Paul, centuries later, was "of the tribe of Benjamin" (Philippians 3:5).

The smallest tribe received a land full of history. God does not measure His people by their size.

Chapter 18 Summary

The whole congregation gathered at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there. Seven tribes had still not received their inheritance, and Joshua asked how long they would be slack to take the land the LORD had given them. He had them choose three men from each tribe, who walked the land and described it in writing, city by city, in seven portions on a scroll. Then Joshua cast lots for them at Shiloh before the LORD. The first lot fell to Benjamin, whose land lay between Judah and Joseph, from the Jordan to Kiriath-jearim. Its towns included Jericho, Bethel, Gibeon, Ramah, Mizpeh, Gibeah and Jerusalem.

People and Places

- Shiloh: a town in Ephraim where the tabernacle stood from Joshua's day until the time of Eli and Samuel (1 Samuel 1-4; Jeremiah 7:12).
- The tent of meeting: the tabernacle, where God met with His people and the ark of the covenant was kept.
- Benjamin: Jacob's youngest son and the small tribe named for him; the tribe of King Saul and the apostle Paul.
- Gibeon, Ramah, Mizpeh and Gibeah: towns of Benjamin important in the stories of Joshua, Samuel and Saul.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. Where did Israel set up the tent of meeting, and why does it matter that worship moved there first? (18:1)

2. How many tribes had not yet received their inheritance? (18:2)

3. What question did Joshua ask them, and what does "slack" mean? (18:3)

4. What did Joshua tell the surveyors to do, and how was the land finally divided? (18:4-10)

5. Where was Benjamin's land, and which tribes lay on either side? (18:11)

6. Which towns in Benjamin's list became important later in Israel's history? (18:21-28)

7. What happened to Shiloh later, and why did Jeremiah point to it? (Jeremiah 7:12)

8. What do you think made the seven tribes slow to take their land? What makes believers slow to take hold of what God has given us?

9. Joshua cast the lots "before the LORD." Where in your plans do you need to stop and seek the LORD before you decide?

10. Benjamin was the smallest tribe, yet God gave it a rich place in His story. How does that encourage you if you feel small or unimportant?

Chapter 19: The Remaining Tribes and Joshua's Inheritance

Scripture

19:1-16 And the second lot came out for Simeon, for the tribe of the sons of Simeon by their clans; and their inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the sons of Judah. And they had in their inheritance Beersheba, and Sheba, and Moladah, and Hazar-shual, and Balah, and Ezem, and Eltolad, and Bethul, and Hormah, and Ziklag, and Beth-marcaboth, and Hazar-susah, and Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhen: thirteen cities and their villages; Ain, Rimmon, and Ether, and Ashan: four cities and their villages; and all the villages which ***were*** around these cities as far as Baalath-beer, Ramah of the Negeb. This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Simeon by their clans. From the portion of the sons of Judah ***was*** the inheritance of the sons of Simeon, for the portion of the sons of Judah was too great for them; and the sons of Simeon received an inheritance in the midst of their inheritance. And the third lot came up for the sons of Zebulun by their clans; and the border of their inheritance was as far as Sarid. And their border goes up westward, and ***to*** Maralah, and it touches Dabbesheth, and it touches the wadi which ***is*** in front of Jokneam. And it turns back from Sarid eastward, ***toward*** the rising of the sun, to the border of Chisloth-tabor, and it goes out to Daberath, and it goes up ***to*** Japhia. And from there it passes on eastward, toward the sunrise, to Gath-hepher, to Eth-kazin, and it goes out ***to*** Rimmon, which is turned ***toward*** Neah. And the border turns around it from the north of Hannathon, and its extremities are ***at*** the valley of Iphtahel, and Kattath, and Nahalal, and Shimron, and Idalah, and Bethlehem: twelve cities and their villages. This ***is*** the inheritance of the sons of Zebulun by their clans, these cities and their villages.

19:17-31 For Issachar the fourth lot came out, for the sons of Issachar by their clans. And their border was to Jezreel, and Chesulloth, and Shunem, and Hapharaim, and Shion, and Anaharath, and Rabbith, and Kishion, and Ebez, and Remeth, and En-gannim, and En-haddah, and Beth-pazzez. And the border touches Tabor, and Shahazimah, and Beth-shemesh; and the extremities of their border are ***at*** the Jordan: sixteen cities and their villages. This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Issachar by their clans, the cities and their villages. And the fifth lot came out for the tribe of the sons of Asher by their clans. And their border was Helkath, and Hali, and Beten, and Akshaph, and Allammelech, and Amad, and Mishal; and it touches Carmel westward, and Shihor-libnath. And it turns back ***toward*** the rising of the sun ***to*** Beth-dagon, and it touches Zebulun and the valley of Iphtahel northward, Beth-emek and Neiel; and it goes out to Cabul on the left, and Ebron, and Rehob, and Hammon, and Kanah, as far as great Sidon. And the border turns back ***to*** Ramah, and as far as the fortified city of Tyre; and the border turns back ***to*** Hosah, and its extremities are at the sea, from the region to Achzib, and Ummah, and Aphek, and Rehob: twenty-two cities and their villages. This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Asher by their clans, these cities and their villages.

19:32-51 For the sons of Naphtali the sixth lot came out, for the sons of Naphtali by their clans. And their border was from Heleph, from ***the*** terebinth in Zaanannim, and Adami-nekeb, and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum; and its extremities were ***at*** the Jordan. And the border turns back

westward ***to*** Aznoth-tabor, and it goes out from there to Hukkok; and it touches Zebulun on the south, and Asher it touches on the west, and Judah ***at*** the Jordan ***toward*** the rising of the sun. And the fortified cities ***are*** Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth, and Adamah, and Ramah, and Hazor, and Kedesh, and Edrei, and En-hazor, and Yiron, and Migdal-el, Horem, and Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh: nineteen cities and their villages. This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali by their clans, the cities and their villages. For the tribe of the sons of Dan by their clans the seventh lot came out. And the territory of their inheritance was Zorah, and Eshtaol, and Ir-shemesh, and Shaalabbin, and Aijalon, and Ithlah, and Elon, and Timnah, and Ekron, and Eltekeh, and Gibbethon, and Baalath, and Jehud, and Bene-berak, and Gath-rimmon, and Me-jarkon, and Rakkon, with the territory opposite Joppa. And the territory of the sons of Dan went out from them; and the sons of Dan went up and waged war with Leshem, and they captured it and struck it by the mouth of the sword, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it; and they called Leshem "Dan," according to the name of Dan their father. This ***is*** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Dan by their clans, these cities and their villages. And they finished dividing the land for possession by its borders; and the sons of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun in their midst. According to the mouth of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it. These ***are*** the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel gave as a possession by lot at Shiloh before the LORD, ***at*** the entrance of the tent of meeting. And they finished apportioning the land.

Chapter 19 Preview

The last six lots are cast at Shiloh. Simeon receives towns inside Judah's land in the south. Zebulun, Issachar, Asher and Naphtali receive the north, from the valley of Jezreel to the coast of Tyre and Sidon and the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Dan receives land near the coast, but loses it, and part of the tribe moves far north and takes a city it renames Dan.

When every tribe has its place, Israel gives Joshua his own inheritance last of all. He asks for a town in the hill country of Ephraim, and he builds it and lives there. The division of the land ends where it began, at Shiloh, before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-9 *And the second lot came out for Simeon, for the tribe of the sons of Simeon by their clans; and their inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the sons of Judah. And they had in their inheritance Beersheba, and Sheba, and Moladah, and Hazar-shual, and Balah, and Ezem, and Eltolad, and Bethul, and Hormah, and Ziklag, and Beth-marcaboth, and Hazar-susah, and Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhen: thirteen cities and their villages; Ain, Rimmon, and Ether, and Ashan: four cities and their villages; and all the villages which **were** around these cities as far as Baalath-beer, Ramah of the Negeb. This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Simeon by their clans. From the portion of the sons of Judah **was** the inheritance of the sons of Simeon, for the portion of the sons of Judah was too great for them; and the sons of Simeon received an inheritance in the midst of their inheritance.*

"And the second lot came out for Simeon," and "their inheritance was in the midst of the inheritance of the sons of Judah." Simeon did not get a territory of its own. Its towns, Beersheba, Moladah, Hormah, Ziklag and others, were taken from Judah's southern list (15:26-32, 42).

Why? Verse 9 gives the practical reason: "for the portion of the sons of Judah was too great for them." Judah had more than it needed. But there is a deeper reason. When Jacob blessed his sons, he spoke of the violence of Simeon and Levi at Shechem and said, "I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:7; Genesis 34). Both tribes ended up scattered. Levi was scattered in honor, as priests and teachers in towns all over Israel (chapter 21). Simeon was absorbed into Judah. God's word through Jacob came true, but even in judgment He gave Simeon a home among his brothers.

The list of towns says "thirteen cities" in verse 6, though fourteen names appear. Sheba may be another form of Beersheba, since 1 Chronicles 4:28 leaves it out. Small differences like this in town counts are common in old lists.

19:10-16 *And the third lot came up for the sons of Zebulun by their clans; and the border of their inheritance was as far as Sarid. And their border goes up westward, and **to** Maralah, and it touches Dabbesheth, and it touches the wadi which **is** in front of Jokneam. And it turns back from Sarid eastward, **toward** the rising of the sun, to the border of Chisloth-tabor, and it goes out to Daberath, and it goes up **to** Japhia. And from there it passes on eastward, toward the sunrise, to Gath-hepher, to Eth-kazin, and it goes out **to** Rimmon, which is turned **toward** Neah. And the border turns around it from the north of Hannathon, and its extremities are **at** the valley of Iphtahel, and Kattath, and Nahalal, and Shimron, and Idalah, and Bethlehem: twelve cities and their villages. This **is** the inheritance of the sons of Zebulun by their clans, these cities and their villages.*

"And the third lot came up for the sons of Zebulun." Zebulun's land lay in lower Galilee, north of the valley of Jezreel, between Mount Carmel and Mount Tabor. Its towns included Japhia, Gath-hepher, Nahalal and a northern Bethlehem, a different town from Bethlehem in Judah.

Gath-hepher was the hometown of the prophet Jonah (2 Kings 14:25). And this region of Zebulun and Naphtali is the "Galilee of the nations" that Isaiah said would see a great light (Isaiah 9:1-2).

Matthew tells us that this was fulfilled when Jesus made His home in Capernaum and began to preach there (Matthew 4:12-17). Nazareth itself, where Jesus grew up, lay in this part of Galilee, a few miles from Japhia.

19:17-23 *For Issachar the fourth lot came out, for the sons of Issachar by their clans. And their border was to Jezreel, and Chesulloth, and Shunem, and Hapharaim, and Shion, and Anaharath, and Rabbith, and Kishion, and Ebez, and Remeth, and En-gannim, and En-haddah, and Beth-pazzez. And the border touches Tabor, and Shahazimah, and Beth-shemesh; and the extremities of their border are **at** the Jordan: sixteen cities and their villages. This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Issachar by their clans, the cities and their villages.*

"For Issachar the fourth lot came out." Issachar received the rich valley of Jezreel and the land east to the Jordan. Its towns included Jezreel, Shunem, En-gannim and the border at Mount Tabor.

This valley was good farmland and also the main road through the land, so it saw many battles. Jacob had said Issachar would see "the land, that it was pleasant" (Genesis 49:15). Shunem was later the home of the woman who gave the prophet Elisha a room, and whose son God raised to life (2 Kings 4:8-37). Jezreel later became a royal city of King Ahab (1 Kings 21:1).

19:24-31 *And the fifth lot came out for the tribe of the sons of Asher by their clans. And their border was Helkath, and Hali, and Beten, and Akshaph, and Allammelech, and Amad, and Mishal; and it touches Carmel westward, and Shihor-libnath. And it turns back **toward** the rising of the sun **to** Beth-dagon, and it touches Zebulun and the valley of Iphtahel northward, Beth-emek and Neiel; and it goes out to Cabul on the left, and Ebron, and Rehob, and Hammon, and Kanah, as far as great Sidon. And the border turns back **to** Ramah, and as far as the fortified city of Tyre; and the border turns back **to** Hosah, and its extremities are at the sea, from the region to Achzib, and Ummah, and Aphek, and Rehob: twenty-two cities and their villages. This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Asher by their clans, these cities and their villages.*

"And the fifth lot came out for the tribe of the sons of Asher." Asher received the coastland in the far northwest, from Mount Carmel north "as far as great Sidon" and "the fortified city of Tyre." Twenty-two cities are counted.

Asher was given land it never fully held. Judges 1:31-32 says Asher did not drive out the people of Acco, Sidon and the other coastal cities, "and the Asherites dwelt in the midst of the Canaanites." Tyre and Sidon remained Phoenician cities, rich trading powers that later sold cedar to Solomon and gave Ahab his wife Jezebel (1 Kings 5:1-10; 16:31). What Asher did not take shaped Israel for centuries.

19:32-39 *For the sons of Naphtali the sixth lot came out, for the sons of Naphtali by their clans. And their border was from Heleph, from **the** terebinth in Zaanannim, and Adami-nekeb, and Jabneel, as far as Lakkum; and its extremities were **at** the Jordan. And the border turns back westward **to** Aznoth-tabor, and it goes out from there to Hukkok; and it touches Zebulun on the south, and Asher it touches on the west, and Judah **at** the Jordan **toward** the rising of the sun. And the fortified cities **are** Ziddim, Zer, and Hammath, Rakkath, and Chinnereth, and Adamah, and Ramah, and Hazor, and Kedesh, and Edrei, and En-hazor, and Yiron, and Migdal-el, Horem, and Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh: nineteen cities and their villages. This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali by their clans, the cities and their villages.*

"For the sons of Naphtali the sixth lot came out." Naphtali received upper Galilee and the west side of the Sea of Galilee, with "fortified cities" like Chinnereth, Hazor, Kedesh and Hammath. Hazor was the great city Joshua had burned (11:10-11). Kedesh would soon be named a city of refuge (20:7).

Naphtali's land later held the towns where Jesus did much of His ministry, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:13). The great light Isaiah promised shone first in the land of these northern tribes.

19:40-46 *For the tribe of the sons of Dan by their clans the seventh lot came out. And the territory of their inheritance was Zorah, and Eshtaol, and Ir-shemesh, and Shaalabbin, and Aijalon, and Ithlah, and Elon, and Timnah, and Ekron, and Eltekeh, and Gibbethon, and Baalath, and Jehud, and Bene-berak, and Gath-rimmon, and Me-jarkon, and Rakkon, with the territory opposite Joppa.*

"For the tribe of the sons of Dan by their clans the seventh lot came out." Dan received a small piece of land west of Benjamin, between Judah and Ephraim, running down to the coast "opposite Joppa." Its towns included Zorah, Eshtaol, Aijalon, Timnah and Ekron.

This is Samson's country. He was from the tribe of Dan, born at Zorah, and his story is set between Zorah, Eshtaol and Timnah (Judges 13:2, 25; 14:1).

19:47-48 *And the territory of the sons of Dan went out from them; and the sons of Dan went up and waged war with Leshem, and they captured it and struck it by the mouth of the sword, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it; and they called Leshem "Dan," according to the name of Dan their father. This **is** the inheritance of the tribe of the sons of Dan by their clans, these cities and their villages.*

"And the territory of the sons of Dan went out from them." The sense is that Dan's land slipped away from them. Judges 1:34 explains that the Amorites pushed the Danites back into the hills and would not let them come down into the valley. So part of the tribe went north, attacked Leshem, struck it, and "called Leshem Dan, according to the name of Dan their father."

Judges 18 tells the full story, where the city is called Laish. The writer of Joshua tells it here so the record of Dan's land is complete. It is not a proud story. The Danites who moved north also set up a carved idol and a false priesthood in their new city (Judges 18:30-31), and centuries later

Jeroboam put one of his golden calves there (1 Kings 12:28-30). The tribe that did not hold its own inheritance went looking for an easier one and lost its way with God.

19:49-51 *And they finished dividing the land for possession by its borders; and the sons of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun in their midst. According to the mouth of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim; and he built the city and dwelt in it. These **are** the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel gave as a possession by lot at Shiloh before the LORD, **at** the entrance of the tent of meeting. And they finished apportioning the land.*

"And they finished dividing the land for possession by its borders; and the sons of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun in their midst."

Joshua was the leader of the nation, yet he took his share last. He did not choose the best land first. He waited until every tribe had its place. That is the heart of a servant. Jesus said that whoever wants to be great must be the servant of all (Mark 10:43-45), and He Himself "did not come to be served, but to serve."

"According to the mouth of the LORD they gave him the city which he asked for, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim." Like Caleb, Joshua had a promise from God (Numbers 14:30). He asked for a modest town in the hills of his own tribe, "and he built the city and dwelt in it." At the end of his life, he would be buried there (24:30).

"These are the inheritances which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel gave as a possession by lot at Shiloh before the LORD." The division of the land ends the way it began in 14:1, with the same three groups of leaders, and with the LORD at the center. "And they finished apportioning the land."

God had promised Abraham that his seed would have this land (Genesis 12:7; 15:18). Now every tribe had a name on it. As believers, we look forward to an inheritance of our own, and Peter tells us it is "imperishable and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens for you" (1 Peter 1:4). God finished this one. He will finish that one too.

Chapter 19 Summary

The last six lots were cast at Shiloh. Simeon received towns inside Judah's land, because Judah's share was too large for it. Zebulun received lower Galilee, Issachar the valley of Jezreel and the land east to the Jordan, Asher the coast from Carmel to Tyre and Sidon, and Naphtali upper Galilee and the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. Dan received land west of Benjamin down to the coast near Joppa, but lost much of it, and part of the tribe went north, captured Leshem and renamed it Dan. When the division was finished, the people gave Joshua the town he asked for, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim, and he built it and lived there. Eleazar, Joshua and the heads of the tribes finished dividing the land by lot at Shiloh before the LORD.

People and Places

- Simeon: the tribe that received towns inside Judah (Genesis 49:7).
- Zebulun and Naphtali: the Galilee tribes; their land is the "Galilee of the nations" where Jesus preached (Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:12-17).
- Issachar: the tribe of the valley of Jezreel; Shunem was its town.
- Asher: the tribe of the northern coast, which did not drive out Tyre and Sidon (Judges 1:31-32).
- Dan: the tribe of Samson, part of which moved north to Leshem (Laish) and renamed it Dan (Judges 18).
- Timnath-serah: Joshua's town in the hill country of Ephraim.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. Why did Simeon receive towns inside Judah's land? (19:1, 9; Genesis 49:7)

2. Which prophet came from Gath-hepher in Zebulun? (19:13; 2 Kings 14:25)

3. How does Isaiah 9:1-2, fulfilled in Matthew 4:12-17, connect with the land of Zebulun and Naphtali?

4. What coastal cities did Asher receive but not take? (19:28-29; Judges 1:31-32)

5. What happened to Dan's land, and what did part of the tribe do? (19:47; Judges 1:34; 18)

6. When did Joshua receive his inheritance, and what did he ask for? (19:49-50)

7. Where and before whom was the land divided? (19:51)

8. Dan lost its inheritance and went looking for an easier one. What can happen when believers give up on the place God has given them?

9. Joshua took his share last. What would it look like for you to put others first in your home, church or work?

10. God finished dividing the land just as He promised. What promise of God in the New Testament are you trusting Him to finish?

Chapter 20: The Cities of Refuge

Scripture

20:1-9 And the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Give for yourselves the cities of refuge of which I spoke to you by the hand of Moses, for a manslayer who strikes a soul unintentionally, without knowledge, to flee there; and they shall become for you a refuge from the avenger of blood. And he shall flee to one of these cities, and he shall stand ***at*** the entrance of the gate of the city, and he shall speak his words in the ears of the elders of that city; and they shall gather him into the city to themselves, and they shall give him a place, and he shall dwell with them. And if the avenger of blood pursues after him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, for without knowledge he struck his neighbor, and he ***was*** not hating him before. And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the high priest who shall be in those days. Then the manslayer shall return, and he shall come to his city and to his house, to the city from which he fled.'" And they consecrated Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba, that ***is*** Hebron, in the hill country of Judah. And from the other side of the Jordan ***at*** Jericho eastward they gave Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities of appointment for all the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst, for anyone who strikes a soul unintentionally to flee there, and he shall not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation.

Chapter 20 Preview

With the land divided, the LORD reminds Joshua of a command He gave through Moses: set apart cities of refuge. A person who killed someone by accident, with no hatred and no plan, could run to one of these cities and be safe from the relative who wanted revenge. The elders would hear his case at the gate, take him in, and protect him until he stood trial before the congregation. If he was found innocent of murder, he stayed in the city until the high priest died, and then he could go home.

Israel set apart six cities, three on each side of the Jordan, spread out so that no one in the land was too far from one. The chapter is short, but it shows God's justice and His mercy working together. It also gives us a picture that the New Testament uses when it speaks of believers as those "who have fled for refuge" to the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:18).

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-3 *And the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Give for yourselves the cities of refuge of which I spoke to you by the hand of Moses, for a manslayer who strikes a soul unintentionally, without knowledge, to flee there; and they shall become for you a refuge from the avenger of blood.*

"And the LORD spoke to Joshua." Apart from 13:1, this is the only time in the land chapters that the LORD speaks directly. He told Joshua, "Give for yourselves the cities of refuge of which I spoke to you by the hand of Moses." The law of these cities is in Numbers 35:9-34 and Deuteronomy 19:1-13. Moses had already named the three east of the Jordan (Deuteronomy 4:41-43). Now that Israel lived in the land, the rest had to be named.

The cities were "for a manslayer who strikes a soul unintentionally, without knowledge." A manslayer is someone who has caused another person's death. "Unintentionally" means it was not planned and not done in hate. Deuteronomy 19:5 gives an example: two men cut wood in the forest, the head of an axe flies off the handle, and it kills the other man.

"They shall become for you a refuge from the avenger of blood." The avenger of blood was the nearest male relative of the person who died. The Hebrew word is go'el, the same word used for a kinsman-redeemer, the relative who bought back family land or a family member sold into slavery (Leviticus 25:25, 47-49; Ruth 3:9). In a land without police, the go'el was responsible for seeing that a killer paid for the life he took (Numbers 35:19). But anger does not wait to ask whether a death was an accident. The cities of refuge stopped a family's grief from turning into another killing.

20:4-5 *And he shall flee to one of these cities, and he shall stand **at** the entrance of the gate of the city, and he shall speak his words in the ears of the elders of that city; and they shall gather him into the city to themselves, and they shall give him a place, and he shall dwell with them. And if the avenger of blood pursues after him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, for without knowledge he struck his neighbor, and he **was** not hating him before.*

"And he shall flee to one of these cities, and he shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city, and he shall speak his words in the ears of the elders of that city." The gate was where the elders sat to judge cases (Ruth 4:1-2). The man who fled had to tell what happened.

If his story was believable, "they shall gather him into the city to themselves, and they shall give him a place, and he shall dwell with them." The city did not just let him in. It took him in, gave him a place to live, and made him one of its own.

"And if the avenger of blood pursues after him, then they shall not deliver the manslayer into his hand, for without knowledge he struck his neighbor, and he was not hating him before." Inside the walls he was safe. No one could drag him out.

This was not a hiding place for murderers. Numbers 35:16-21 and Deuteronomy 19:11-13 say clearly that a person who killed on purpose, out of hatred, was to be handed over. The city protected the innocent. It did not hide the guilty. God's mercy never cancels His justice.

20:6 *And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the high priest who shall be in those days. Then the manslayer shall return, and he shall come to his city and to his house, to the city from which he fled.'"*

"And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the high priest who shall be in those days." Two steps are named here. First came a trial before the congregation, where the facts would be judged (Numbers 35:24-25). If the death was found to be an accident, the manslayer went back to the city of refuge and lived there.

Then came a set time: "until the death of the high priest." When the high priest died, the manslayer was free to go home. "Then the manslayer shall return, and he shall come to his city and to his house, to the city from which he fled." Numbers 35:26-28 adds that if he left the city before that, the avenger could find him and kill him without guilt.

Why the death of the high priest? Scripture does not explain it fully. A life had been lost, even by accident, and the land was not to be left stained with blood (Numbers 35:33). The high priest stood before God for the whole nation, and his death seems to have closed the matter, so that the manslayer could go free. Many Bible teachers see in this a picture of Christ, our great High Priest, whose death sets us free. The New Testament does not make that link in so many words, so I hold it as a picture, not a teaching. But the picture is a beautiful one. Our freedom does not come from our own goodness. It comes through the death of the High Priest.

20:7-9 *And they consecrated Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba, that* ***is*** *Hebron, in the hill country of Judah. And from the other side of the Jordan* ***at*** *Jericho eastward they gave Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh. These were the cities of appointment for all the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst, for anyone who strikes a soul unintentionally to flee there, and he shall not die by the hand of the avenger of blood until he stands before the congregation.*

"And they consecrated Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, and Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and Kiriath-arba, that is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah." Consecrated means set apart as holy for God's purpose. These were the three cities west of the Jordan, in the north, the middle and the south.

East of the Jordan, the three cities Moses had named were "Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain, from the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead from the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan from the tribe of Manasseh." Again: south, middle, north. Look at a map and you will see that the six cities are spread evenly through the land. No one was more than a day or so from safety. Deuteronomy 19:3 even told Israel to prepare the roads to them.

All six were also Levite cities (chapter 21). The men who taught God's law and served at His altar were the ones who watched over those who fled. That is fitting. Refuge was found among the people of God's presence.

Verse 9 adds an important word. These cities were "for all the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst." A sojourner was a foreigner living in Israel. The protection was not only for Israelites. Any person could run there.

Now think about the picture the New Testament gives us. Hebrews 6:18 speaks of God's promise and His oath, two things "in which it is impossible for God to lie," given so that "we who have fled for refuge may have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope being set before us." The writer of Hebrews does not name the cities of refuge, but the words fit them well. A person in danger ran for his life. He did not stroll. He did not wait. He ran to the place God had appointed, and inside its walls he was safe.

Every one of us stands in a worse danger than that manslayer. We are not innocent. The Bible says "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). But God has provided a refuge, and His name is Jesus. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Like the cities, He is near, the road to Him is open, and anyone can come, Israelite or foreigner. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

There is one difference. The cities of refuge could only protect the innocent. Christ receives the guilty who come to Him, because He took our guilt on Himself at the cross. The question is not whether we are good enough to enter. The question is whether we have run to Him.

Chapter 20 Summary

The LORD told Joshua to set apart the cities of refuge He had commanded through Moses. A person who killed someone by accident could flee to one of them, tell his case to the elders at the gate, and be taken in and protected from the avenger of blood. He would live there until he stood trial before the congregation and until the death of the high priest, and then he could return home. Israel set apart Kedesh in Naphtali, Shechem in Ephraim and Hebron in Judah west of the Jordan, and Bezer in Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in Gad and Golan in Bashan in Manasseh east of the Jordan. These cities were for Israelites and for foreigners living among them.

People and Places

- City of refuge: a city where a person who killed someone by accident could find protection until trial (Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19).
- Manslayer: a person who caused someone's death.
- Avenger of blood (go'el): the nearest relative of the one who died, responsible for seeing that a killer paid for the life taken; the same word as kinsman-redeemer.
- High priest: the chief priest who stood before God for the nation; the manslayer could go home after his death.
- Sojourner: a foreigner living among the people of Israel.
- Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth in Gilead and Golan: the six cities of refuge.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. Where had God first given the command about cities of refuge? (20:2; Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19)

2. Who were the cities for, and who were they not for? (20:3; Numbers 35:16-21)

3. What did the man who fled have to do when he reached the city? (20:4)

4. What two things had to happen before he could go home? (20:6)

5. Name the six cities of refuge and say how they were spread out in the land. (20:7-8)

6. Who besides Israelites could use the cities of refuge? (20:9)

7. How do the cities of refuge show both God's justice and His mercy?

8. Hebrews 6:18 speaks of "we who have fled for refuge." What does it mean to run to Christ for refuge, and not just walk toward Him someday?

9. The cities of refuge protected only the innocent, but Christ receives the guilty who come to Him. What does that tell you about the gospel?

10. God made sure no one was too far from a city of refuge. Who in your life is far from God, and how could you help clear the road for them?

Chapter 21: The Cities of the Levites

Scripture

21:1-8 And the heads of the fathers of the Levites drew near to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, and their pasture lands for our livestock." And the sons of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, according to the mouth of the LORD, these cities and their pasture lands. And the lot came out for the clans of the Kohathites; and ***there*** were for the sons of Aaron the priest, of the Levites, from the tribe of Judah and from the tribe of the Simeonites and from the tribe of Benjamin, by lot, thirteen cities. And for the sons of Kohath who were left ***there were***, from the clans of the tribe of Ephraim and from the tribe of Dan and from the half of the tribe of Manasseh, by lot, ten cities. And for the sons of Gershon ***there were***, from the clans of the tribe of Issachar and from the tribe of Asher and from the tribe of Naphtali and from the half of the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, by lot, thirteen cities. For the sons of Merari by their clans ***there were***, from the tribe of Reuben and from the tribe of Gad and from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. And the sons of Israel gave to the Levites these cities and their pasture lands, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, by lot.

21:9-26 And they gave from the tribe of the sons of Judah and from the tribe of the sons of Simeon these cities which ***one*** called by name; and ***they*** were for the sons of Aaron, of the clans of the Kohathites, of the sons of Levi, for the first lot was theirs. And they gave them Kiriath-arba, the father of the Anak, that ***is*** Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, and its pasture lands around it. And the field of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession. And to the sons of Aaron the priest they gave the city of refuge of the manslayer, Hebron and its pasture lands, and Libnah and its pasture lands, and Jattir and its pasture lands, and Eshtemoa and its pasture lands, and Holon and its pasture lands, and Debir and its pasture lands, and Ain and its pasture lands, and Juttah and its pasture lands, Beth-shemesh and its pasture lands: nine cities from these two tribes. And from the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon and its pasture lands, Geba and its pasture lands, Anathoth and its pasture lands, and Almon and its pasture lands: four cities. All the cities of the sons of Aaron, the priests, ***were*** thirteen cities and their pasture lands. And for the clans of the sons of Kohath, the Levites who were left of the sons of Kohath, and the cities of their lot were from the tribe of Ephraim. And they gave them the city of refuge of the manslayer, Shechem and its pasture lands in the hill country of Ephraim, and Gezer and its pasture lands, and Kibzaim and its pasture lands, and Beth-horon and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh and its pasture lands, Gibbethon and its pasture lands, Aijalon and its pasture lands, Gath-rimmon and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the half of the tribe of Manasseh, Taanach and its pasture lands, and Gath-rimmon and its pasture lands: two cities. All the cities, ten, and their pasture lands ***were*** for the clans of the sons of Kohath who were left.

21:27-45 And to the sons of Gershon, of the clans of the Levites, from the half of the tribe of Manasseh, the city of refuge of the manslayer, Golan in Bashan and its pasture lands, and Beeshterah and its pasture lands: two cities. And from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion and its

pasture lands, Daberath and its pasture lands, Jarmuth and its pasture lands, En-gannim and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Asher, Mishal and its pasture lands, Abdon and its pasture lands, Helkath and its pasture lands, and Rehob and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Naphtali, the city of refuge of the manslayer, Kedesh in Galilee and its pasture lands, and Hammoth-dor and its pasture lands, and Kartan and its pasture lands: three cities. All the cities of the Gershonites by their clans ***were*** thirteen cities and their pasture lands. And for the clans of the sons of Merari, the Levites who were left, from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam and its pasture lands, Kartah and its pasture lands, Dimnah and its pasture lands, Nahalal and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer and its pasture lands, and Jahaz and its pasture lands, Kedemoth and its pasture lands, and Mephaath and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Gad, the city of refuge of the manslayer, Ramoth in Gilead and its pasture lands, and Mahanaim and its pasture lands, Heshbon and its pasture lands, Jazer and its pasture lands: all the cities ***were*** four. All the cities of the sons of Merari by their clans, who were left of the clans of the Levites, and their lot was twelve cities. All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the sons of Israel ***were*** forty-eight cities and their pasture lands. These cities were each city and its pasture lands around it; so ***it was*** for all these cities. And the LORD gave to Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. And the LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers; and not a man of all their enemies stood before them; all their enemies the LORD gave into their hand. Not a word fell of every good word which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel; everything came ***to pass***.

Chapter 21 Preview

The Levites had no territory of their own, but they were not forgotten. Their leaders come to Eleazar, Joshua and the heads of the tribes at Shiloh and remind them of God's command to give the Levites towns to live in, with pasture for their animals. The tribes give forty-eight cities, chosen by lot, spread through every part of the land.

The chapter lists those cities by the four Levite families: the priests, the sons of Aaron, and the rest of the Kohathites, the Gershonites and the Merarites. Then the writer steps back and says one of the great summary statements of the Bible. The LORD gave Israel all the land He swore to their fathers, He gave them rest, and not one of His good words failed. Everything came to pass.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1-3 *And the heads of the fathers of the Levites drew near to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And they spoke to them at Shiloh in the land of Canaan, saying, "The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, and their pasture lands for our livestock." And the sons of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, according to the mouth of the LORD, these cities and their pasture lands.*

"And the heads of the fathers of the Levites drew near to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun." Like Caleb (14:6) and the daughters of Zelophehad (17:4), the Levites came holding God's

word: "The LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to give us cities to dwell in, and their pasture lands for our livestock." That command is in Numbers 35:1-8. Pasture lands were the open fields around a town where animals could graze.

"And the sons of Israel gave to the Levites from their inheritance, according to the mouth of the LORD." Every tribe gave up some of its own towns. They did it without argument. The tribes gave, the Levites received, and God's word was obeyed.

21:4-8 *And the lot came out for the clans of the Kohathites; and **there** were for the sons of Aaron the priest, of the Levites, from the tribe of Judah and from the tribe of the Simeonites and from the tribe of Benjamin, by lot, thirteen cities. And for the sons of Kohath who were left **there were**, from the clans of the tribe of Ephraim and from the tribe of Dan and from the half of the tribe of Manasseh, by lot, ten cities. And for the sons of Gershon **there were**, from the clans of the tribe of Issachar and from the tribe of Asher and from the tribe of Naphtali and from the half of the tribe of Manasseh in Bashan, by lot, thirteen cities. For the sons of Merari by their clans **there were**, from the tribe of Reuben and from the tribe of Gad and from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve cities. And the sons of Israel gave to the Levites these cities and their pasture lands, just as the LORD had commanded by the hand of Moses, by lot.*

The Levites were divided by their three sons of Levi: Kohath, Gershon and Merari (Exodus 6:16-19). The Kohathites were split again, because Aaron's family, the priests, came from Kohath.

The lots fell like this:

- The sons of Aaron, the priests: thirteen cities from Judah, Simeon and Benjamin.
- The rest of the Kohathites: ten cities from Ephraim, Dan and the western half of Manasseh.
- The Gershonites: thirteen cities from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and the eastern half of Manasseh in Bashan.
- The Merarites: twelve cities from Reuben, Gad and Zebulun.

Notice where the priests' cities ended up. They were in Judah and Benjamin, the area around Jerusalem, where the temple would later be built. No one in Joshua's day could have planned that. But God placed the priests near the place He would one day choose for His name (Deuteronomy 12:5).

21:9-19 *And they gave from the tribe of the sons of Judah and from the tribe of the sons of Simeon these cities which **one** called by name; and **they** were for the sons of Aaron, of the clans of the Kohathites, of the sons of Levi, for the first lot was theirs. And they gave them Kiriath-arba, the father of the Anak, that **is** Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, and its pasture lands around it. And the field of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession. And to the sons of Aaron the priest they gave the city of refuge of the manslayer, Hebron and its pasture lands, and Libnah and its pasture lands, and Jattir and its pasture lands, and Eshtemoa and its pasture lands, and Holon and its pasture lands, and Debir and its pasture lands, and Ain and its pasture lands, and Juttah and its pasture lands, Beth-shemesh and its pasture lands: nine cities from these two tribes. And from the tribe of Benjamin, Gibeon and its pasture lands, Geba and its pasture lands, Anathoth and its pasture lands, and Almon and its pasture lands: four cities. All the cities of the sons of Aaron, the priests, **were** thirteen cities and their pasture lands.*

The list begins with the priests' cities. The first is "Kiriath-arba, the father of the Anak, that is Hebron." Hebron went to the priests, but "the field of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as his possession." Caleb kept his inheritance, and the town became a priestly city. He shared the prize he had waited forty-five years for. Hebron was also a city of refuge (20:7).

The other priestly cities included Libnah, Debir, Beth-shemesh, Gibeon, Geba and Anathoth. Anathoth comes up again later. It was the home of the priest Abiathar, whom Solomon sent there (1 Kings 2:26), and of the prophet Jeremiah, "from the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin" (Jeremiah 1:1). Beth-shemesh was the town where the ark came back from the Philistines on a cart (1 Samuel 6:12-15).

21:20-26 *And for the clans of the sons of Kohath, the Levites who were left of the sons of Kohath, and the cities of their lot were from the tribe of Ephraim. And they gave them the city of refuge of the manslayer, Shechem and its pasture lands in the hill country of Ephraim, and Gezer and its pasture lands, and Kibzaim and its pasture lands, and Beth-horon and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Dan, Eltekeh and its pasture lands, Gibbethon and its pasture lands, Aijalon and its pasture lands, Gath-rimmon and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the half of the tribe of Manasseh, Taanach and its pasture lands, and Gath-rimmon and its pasture lands: two cities. All the cities, ten, and their pasture lands **were** for the clans of the sons of Kohath who were left.*

The rest of the Kohathites received ten cities in Ephraim, Dan and the western half of Manasseh. The first was "the city of refuge of the manslayer, Shechem." Shechem was where Abraham first built an altar in the land (Genesis 12:6-7), and where Joshua would gather Israel to renew the covenant (24:1).

Gath-rimmon is named twice, in verses 24 and 25. The parallel list in 1 Chronicles 6:70 gives a different name for Manasseh's town. A copyist likely repeated the name from the line above. The count of two cities from Manasseh still stands.

21:27-33 *And to the sons of Gershon, of the clans of the Levites, from the half of the tribe of Manasseh, the city of refuge of the manslayer, Golan in Bashan and its pasture lands, and Beeshterah and its pasture lands: two cities. And from the tribe of Issachar, Kishion and its pasture lands, Daberath and its pasture lands, Jarmuth and its pasture lands, En-gannim and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Asher, Mishal and its pasture lands, Abdon and its pasture lands, Helkath and its pasture lands, and Rehob and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Naphtali, the city of refuge of the manslayer, Kedesh in Galilee and its pasture lands, and Hammoth-dor and its pasture lands, and Kartan and its pasture lands: three cities. All the cities of the Gershonites by their clans **were** thirteen cities and their pasture lands.*

The Gershonites received thirteen cities in the north: Golan in Bashan, a city of refuge, and towns in Issachar, Asher and Naphtali, including Kedesh in Galilee, another city of refuge.

21:34-42 *And for the clans of the sons of Merari, the Levites who were left, from the tribe of Zebulun, Jokneam and its pasture lands, Kartah and its pasture lands, Dimnah and its pasture lands, Nahalal and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Reuben, Bezer and its pasture lands, and Jahaz and its pasture lands, Kedemoth and its pasture lands, and Mephaath and its pasture lands: four cities. And from the tribe of Gad, the city of refuge of the manslayer, Ramoth in Gilead and its pasture lands, and Mahanaim and its pasture lands, Heshbon and its pasture lands, Jazer and its pasture lands: all the cities **were** four. All the cities of the sons of Merari by their clans, who were left of the clans of the Levites, and their lot was twelve cities. All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the sons of Israel **were** forty-eight cities and their pasture lands. These cities were each city and its pasture lands around it; so **it was** for all these cities.*

The Merarites received twelve cities: four in Zebulun, four in Reuben, including Bezer, a city of refuge, and four in Gad, including Ramoth in Gilead, a city of refuge, and Heshbon, Sihon's old capital.

"All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the sons of Israel were forty-eight cities and their pasture lands." Six of them were cities of refuge.

Why scatter the Levites all over the land? First, because it fulfilled God's word. Jacob had said Levi would be scattered in Israel (Genesis 49:7). What began as a judgment on Levi's violence at Shechem became a blessing, after Levi stood with the LORD at the golden calf (Exodus 32:26-29). God turned the scattering into a calling.

Second, the Levites were the teachers of God's law. Moses said of them, "They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:10), and later Levites went through the towns of Judah teaching the people from the book of the law (2 Chronicles 17:8-9). With Levites in every region, no tribe was far from someone who knew God's Word.

That is still God's plan. He does not put all His people in one place. He scatters us into neighborhoods, workplaces and towns, as "a royal priesthood," so that we may proclaim His excellencies wherever we live (1 Peter 2:9).

21:43 *And the LORD gave to Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it.*

Now the writer steps back from the lists and tells us what they all mean: "And the LORD gave to Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it."

This sentence goes all the way back to Abraham. God said to him, "To your seed I have given this land" (Genesis 15:18). He repeated it to Isaac and to Jacob (Genesis 26:3; 28:13). For more than four hundred years the promise waited, through slavery in Egypt and forty years in the wilderness. Now it was kept. Notice who did it. "The LORD gave." Israel fought, but the gift was His.

You might ask how the writer can say all the land, when chapter 13 said much remained and the tribes failed to drive out the Canaanites. That is a fair question. Here is how I understand it. God did give the whole land into Israel's hand. No enemy could stand against them, and every tribe had its inheritance. The power of the Canaanites was broken. What remained was Israel's part, to go in and live in what God had given, and Joshua will warn them in chapter 23 that God would keep driving out the rest if they stayed faithful (23:5, 12-13). The gift was complete. The taking of it was not.

There is also a larger answer. God promised Abraham land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18). Israel held that much only for a time under David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21). I believe God will yet give Israel the whole land in the kingdom of the Messiah, because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). What Joshua saw was a real fulfillment, and it was also a down payment on a greater one still to come.

21:44 *And the LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers; and not a man of all their enemies stood before them; all their enemies the LORD gave into their hand.*

"And the LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers." Rest is a big word in Scripture. It means the end of wandering and fighting, a home where God's people could live in peace and worship Him. Moses had promised it (Deuteronomy 12:9-10). Now Israel had it.

"And not a man of all their enemies stood before them." God had told Joshua on the first day, "No man will stand before you all the days of your life" (1:5). He kept that promise to the letter. "All their enemies the LORD gave into their hand."

Yet Hebrews 4:8-9 tells us this was not the final rest. "For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have been speaking about another day after these things." David, centuries later, was still calling people to enter God's rest (Psalm 95:7-11). So "there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." That rest is found in Christ. He says, "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Joshua's rest was a picture. Jesus' rest is the real thing.

21:45 *Not a word fell of every good word which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel; everything came* ***to pass****.*

"Not a word fell of every good word which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel; everything came to pass."

"Not a word fell" means not one promise dropped to the ground unkept. Think about how many promises that covers. God promised Abraham a land, a nation and a seed. He promised to bring Israel out of Egypt with great judgments. He promised manna, water from the rock, victory over Sihon and Og, a dry path through the Jordan, and that Jericho's walls would fall. He promised Caleb Hebron and Joshua his presence. Every one came true.

Joshua will say the same thing to the people before he dies (23:14). Solomon will say it again when he dedicates the temple: "not one word has fallen from all His good word which He spoke by the hand of Moses His servant" (1 Kings 8:56). Each generation that trusted God found the same thing.

What does this mean for us? It means that the God who kept every word to Israel will keep every word to us. Paul says, "For as many as are the promises of God, in Him is the Yes" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Every promise God has made finds its yes in Jesus Christ. He has promised to forgive all who confess their sins (1 John 1:9), never to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), to finish the work He began in us (Philippians 1:6), to come again and take us to be with Him (John 14:2-3), and to keep His covenants with Israel. Not one of those words will fall to the ground.

When you doubt God's promises, read this verse again. Then look back at your own life and count the words He has already kept. The same God holds the ones still ahead.

Chapter 21 Summary

The leaders of the Levites came to Eleazar, Joshua and the heads of the tribes at Shiloh and asked for the cities and pasture lands the LORD had commanded through Moses. The tribes gave forty-eight cities by lot: thirteen from Judah, Simeon and Benjamin for the priests, the sons of Aaron; ten from Ephraim, Dan and half of Manasseh for the other Kohathites; thirteen from Issachar, Asher, Naphtali and half of Manasseh for the Gershonites; and twelve from Reuben, Gad and Zebulun for the Merarites. Hebron went to the priests, while its fields stayed with Caleb, and all six cities of refuge were Levite cities. So the LORD gave Israel all the land He swore to their fathers. He gave them rest on every side, no enemy stood before them, and not one of His good words failed. Everything came to pass.

People and Places

- Levites: the tribe set apart to serve the LORD, who received cities but no territory.
- Kohathites, Gershonites and Merarites: the three families of Levi (Exodus 6:16-19); the priests, Aaron's sons, came from the Kohathites.
- Pasture lands: the open land around a town for grazing animals (Numbers 35:1-8).

- Anathoth: a priestly town in Benjamin, the home of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1).
- Rest: God's gift of peace and a settled home in the land, a picture of the greater rest in Christ (Hebrews 4:8-9).

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. What did the Levites ask for, and on what did they base their request? (21:1-2)

2. How many cities did each of the four Levite groups receive, and from which tribes? (21:4-7)

3. What happened to Hebron, and what did Caleb keep? (21:11-12)

4. How many Levite cities were there in all, and how many were cities of refuge? (21:41; chapter 20)

5. How did God turn Jacob's words about Levi in Genesis 49:7 into a blessing?

6. What three things does 21:43-45 say the LORD did for Israel?

7. How can 21:43 say the LORD gave Israel "all the land" when some of it was not yet taken? (13:1; 23:5)

8. According to Hebrews 4:8-9, why was Joshua's rest not the final rest? Where do we find the true rest?

9. God scattered the Levites so every tribe would have teachers of His Word. Where has God placed you, and who around you needs to hear His Word?

10. "Not a word fell" (21:45). Which of God's promises have you seen Him keep in your own life? Which one do you need to trust Him for now?

Chapter 22: The Altar by the Jordan

Scripture

22:1-9 Then Joshua called the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half of the tribe of Manasseh, and he said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and you have listened to my voice in all that I have commanded you. You have not forsaken your brothers these many days until this day, and you have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, just as He spoke to them. And now, turn and go for yourselves to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. Only take great care to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you: to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cling to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." And Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents. And to the half of the tribe of the Manassites Moses had given ***a possession*** in Bashan, and to its ***other*** half Joshua had given ***a possession*** with their brothers on the other side of the Jordan westward. And also when Joshua sent them away to their tents, and he blessed them, and he said to them, saying, "With great riches return to your tents, and with very much livestock, with silver and with gold and with bronze and with iron and with very many garments. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers." And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites returned and went from the sons of Israel, from Shiloh, which ***is*** in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession in which they had taken possession, according to the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

22:10-20 And they came to the regions of the Jordan which ***are*** in the land of Canaan, and the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar great in appearance. And the sons of Israel heard, saying, "Look, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites have built the altar opposite the land of Canaan, at the regions of the Jordan, on the side of the sons of Israel." And the sons of Israel heard ***it***, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled ***at*** Shiloh to go up against them to war. And the sons of Israel sent to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and ten leaders with him, one leader, one leader for a father's house, for all the tribes of Israel; and each man ***was*** the head of the house of their fathers; they ***were*** for the thousands of Israel. And they came to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them, saying, "Thus says all the congregation of the LORD: 'What ***is*** this unfaithfulness with which you have acted unfaithfully against the God of Israel, to turn back today from after the LORD, by your building for yourselves an altar, by your rebelling today against the LORD? ***Is*** the iniquity of Peor little for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves until this day, and the plague was among the congregation of the LORD, and you, you are turning back today from after the LORD? And it shall be, you rebel today against the LORD, and tomorrow He will be angry with all the congregation of Israel. And surely, if the land of your possession ***is*** unclean, pass over for yourselves into the land of the possession of

the LORD, where the tabernacle of the LORD dwells, and take possession in our midst; and against the LORD do not rebel, and against us do not rebel, by your building for yourselves an altar besides the altar of the LORD our God. Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully ***with*** unfaithfulness in the devoted thing, and on all the congregation of Israel ***there*** was wrath? And he ***was*** one man; he did not perish ***alone*** in his iniquity.'"

22:21-34 And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites answered, and they spoke with the heads of the thousands of Israel, "God, God, the LORD! God, God, the LORD! He knows, and Israel, let him know! If ***it was*** in rebellion, and if in unfaithfulness against the LORD, do not save us this day, to build for ourselves an altar to turn back from after the LORD; and if to offer up on it burnt offering and grain offering, and if to make on it sacrifices of peace offerings, the LORD Himself shall require ***it***. And if not from anxiety, from a matter, we have done this, saying, 'Tomorrow your sons will say to our sons, saying, "What ***is there*** to you and to the LORD, the God of Israel? And the LORD has put a border between us and you, sons of Reuben and sons of Gad, the Jordan. You have no portion in the LORD." And your sons will make our sons cease from fearing the LORD.' And we said, 'Let us now act for ourselves to build the altar, not for burnt offering and not for sacrifice, but it ***is*** a witness between us and you and between our generations after us, to do the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings, and your sons shall not say tomorrow to our sons, "You have no portion in the LORD."' And we said, 'And it shall be, when they say ***so*** to us and to our generations tomorrow, and we shall say, "See the copy of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, not for burnt offering and not for sacrifice, but it ***is*** a witness between us and you."' Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and to turn back today from after the LORD, by building an altar for burnt offering, for grain offering, and for sacrifice, besides the altar of the LORD our God which ***is*** before His tabernacle." And Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the congregation and the heads of the thousands of Israel who ***were*** with him heard the words which the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the sons of Manasseh spoke, and it was good in their eyes. And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Manasseh, "Today we know that the LORD ***is*** in our midst, because you have not acted unfaithfully ***with*** this unfaithfulness against the LORD. Then you have delivered the sons of Israel from the hand of the LORD." And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest and the leaders returned from the sons of Reuben and from the sons of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the sons of Israel, and they brought back word to them. And the word was good in the eyes of the sons of Israel, and the sons of Israel blessed God, and they did not say to go up against them to war, to destroy the land in which the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad were dwelling. And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar, "For it ***is*** a witness between us that the LORD ***is*** God."

Chapter 22 Preview

The fighting men of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had crossed the Jordan with their brothers and fought beside them for years, as they promised Moses. Now Joshua praises them, charges them to love and serve the LORD, blesses them, and sends them home with a rich share of the spoil.

On the way home, at the Jordan, they build a huge altar. The rest of Israel hears about it and thinks they have turned away from the LORD, and the whole congregation gathers at Shiloh to go to war against them. But first they send Phinehas the priest and ten leaders to ask what is going on. The eastern tribes explain that the altar is not for sacrifice at all. It is a copy, a witness, so that their children will never be told they have no part in the LORD. The misunderstanding is cleared up, war is avoided, and God is praised. This chapter is a lesson in zeal for God's truth, and in the patience to listen before we judge.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-4 *Then Joshua called the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half of the tribe of Manasseh, and he said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and you have listened to my voice in all that I have commanded you. You have not forsaken your brothers these many days until this day, and you have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, just as He spoke to them. And now, turn and go for yourselves to your tents, to the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.*

"Then Joshua called the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half of the tribe of Manasseh." Back in Numbers 32 and in Joshua 1:12-18, these tribes had promised that their fighting men would cross the Jordan and fight until their brothers had rest. They had kept that promise for about seven years, away from their wives and children and homes.

Joshua praised them: "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and you have listened to my voice in all that I have commanded you. You have not forsaken your brothers these many days until this day." That is high praise. They had finished what they started.

"And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, just as He spoke to them. And now, turn and go for yourselves to your tents." Their duty was done. They could go home.

Good leaders say thank you. Joshua did not just send them off. He told them plainly what they had done well. Paul did the same in his letters, thanking God for the faithfulness of the churches (Philippians 1:3-5). A word of honest praise can carry a person a long way.

22:5 *Only take great care to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you: to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cling to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."*

Before they left, Joshua gave them a charge: "Only take great care to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you." Then he summed up that law in five short phrases: "to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cling to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul."

Love comes first. Obedience flows from it. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind (Matthew 22:37-38). Joshua knew the

eastern tribes would be separated from the tabernacle by the Jordan River, and that distance can cool a heart. So he told them to "cling to Him." To cling is to hold on tight, the word used of a husband holding fast to his wife (Genesis 2:24). Faith that lasts is not a set of rules kept at arm's length. It is holding on to God Himself.

22:6-9 *And Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents. And to the half of the tribe of the Manassites Moses had given **a possession** in Bashan, and to its **other** half Joshua had given **a possession** with their brothers on the other side of the Jordan westward. And also when Joshua sent them away to their tents, and he blessed them, and he said to them, saying, "With great riches return to your tents, and with very much livestock, with silver and with gold and with bronze and with iron and with very many garments. Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers." And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites returned and went from the sons of Israel, from Shiloh, which **is** in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession in which they had taken possession, according to the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses.*

"And Joshua blessed them and sent them away." Verse 7 reminds us that Manasseh had land on both sides of the Jordan, so this half of the tribe was leaving the other half behind.

Joshua sent them home rich: "With great riches return to your tents, and with very much livestock, with silver and with gold and with bronze and with iron and with very many garments." Then he added, "Divide the spoil of your enemies with your brothers." The men who stayed home to guard the families east of the Jordan were to share in the spoil. This follows the rule Moses set after the war with Midian (Numbers 31:27), and David later made it a law in Israel (1 Samuel 30:24-25). Those who serve behind the lines share in the reward.

"And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites returned and went from the sons of Israel, from Shiloh." They set out for "the land of Gilead," east of the Jordan.

22:10-12 *And they came to the regions of the Jordan which **are** in the land of Canaan, and the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar great in appearance. And the sons of Israel heard, saying, "Look, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites have built the altar opposite the land of Canaan, at the regions of the Jordan, on the side of the sons of Israel." And the sons of Israel heard **it**, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled **at** Shiloh to go up against them to war.*

"And they came to the regions of the Jordan which are in the land of Canaan." Before they crossed, while they were still on the west side, they "built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar great in appearance." It was big, and it could be seen from far off.

"And the sons of Israel heard." The news spread fast. "Look, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites have built the altar." To the other tribes this looked like rebellion. God's law said there was to be one place of sacrifice, the place the LORD would

choose, where His tabernacle stood (Leviticus 17:8-9; Deuteronomy 12:5-14). Another altar meant another worship. It could mean idolatry.

"And all the congregation of the sons of Israel assembled at Shiloh to go up against them to war." That sounds extreme, but they were obeying Deuteronomy 13:12-15, which told Israel to deal with any town that turned to other gods. They had just seen what one man's sin at Jericho had cost the nation. They were willing to fight their own brothers rather than let idolatry take root.

Their zeal was right. Their facts were not yet in. What they did next is what kept the zeal from becoming a disaster.

22:13-20 *And the sons of Israel sent to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and ten leaders with him, one leader, one leader for a father's house, for all the tribes of Israel; and each man **was** the head of the house of their fathers; they **were** for the thousands of Israel. And they came to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the half of the tribe of Manasseh, to the land of Gilead, and they spoke with them, saying, "Thus says all the congregation of the LORD: 'What **is** this unfaithfulness with which you have acted unfaithfully against the God of Israel, to turn back today from after the LORD, by your building for yourselves an altar, by your rebelling today against the LORD? **Is** the iniquity of Peor little for us, from which we have not cleansed ourselves until this day, and the plague was among the congregation of the LORD, and you, you are turning back today from after the LORD? And it shall be, you rebel today against the LORD, and tomorrow He will be angry with all the congregation of Israel. And surely, if the land of your possession **is** unclean, pass over for yourselves into the land of the possession of the LORD, where the tabernacle of the LORD dwells, and take possession in our midst; and against the LORD do not rebel, and against us do not rebel, by your building for yourselves an altar besides the altar of the LORD our God. Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully **with** unfaithfulness in the devoted thing, and on all the congregation of Israel **there** was wrath? And he **was** one man; he did not perish **alone** in his iniquity.'"*

Instead of marching first, Israel sent a delegation: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and ten leaders with him," one from each of the western tribes. Phinehas was a good choice. Years before, at Peor, he had stood up for the LORD's honor when Israel fell into idolatry, and God had praised his zeal and stopped a plague (Numbers 25:7-13).

They came to Gilead and spoke plainly. "What is this unfaithfulness with which you have acted unfaithfully against the God of Israel, to turn back today from after the LORD, by your building for yourselves an altar, by your rebelling today against the LORD?"

They reminded them of two past sins. The first was "the iniquity of Peor," when Israel worshiped the Baal of Peor and twenty-four thousand died in the plague (Numbers 25:1-9). "From which we have not cleansed ourselves until this day." The second was Achan: "Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully with unfaithfulness in the devoted thing, and on all the congregation of Israel there was wrath?" (chapter 7). Their point was simple. Sin in one part of God's people affects all of it. "You rebel today against the LORD, and tomorrow He will be angry with all the congregation of Israel."

Then they made a generous offer: "if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over for yourselves into the land of the possession of the LORD, where the tabernacle of the LORD dwells, and take possession in our midst." If you feel cut off over there, come and live with us. We will share our land with you. Only "against the LORD do not rebel, and against us do not rebel."

That is how to confront a brother. They named the sin they feared. They gave the reasons from God's Word and Israel's history. And they offered a way back, at a cost to themselves. Jesus taught the same pattern: go to your brother, tell him his fault, and try to win him (Matthew 18:15).

22:21-23 *And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half of the tribe of the Manassites answered, and they spoke with the heads of the thousands of Israel, "God, God, the LORD! God, God, the LORD! He knows, and Israel, let him know! If **it was** in rebellion, and if in unfaithfulness against the LORD, do not save us this day, to build for ourselves an altar to turn back from after the LORD; and if to offer up on it burnt offering and grain offering, and if to make on it sacrifices of peace offerings, the LORD Himself shall require **it**.*

The eastern tribes answered with an oath: "God, God, the LORD! God, God, the LORD!" In Hebrew these are three names of God: El, Elohim, Yahweh, the Mighty One, God, the LORD. They said it twice. It was the most solemn way they could call on Him as witness.

"He knows, and Israel, let him know!" They appealed first to God, who sees the heart, and then to their brothers. "If it was in rebellion, and if in unfaithfulness against the LORD, do not save us this day." If they had built the altar to offer sacrifices, "the LORD Himself shall require it." They were willing to be judged by God Himself.

22:24-29 *And if not from anxiety, from a matter, we have done this, saying, 'Tomorrow your sons will say to our sons, saying, "What **is there** to you and to the LORD, the God of Israel? And the LORD has put a border between us and you, sons of Reuben and sons of Gad, the Jordan. You have no portion in the LORD." And your sons will make our sons cease from fearing the LORD.' And we said, 'Let us now act for ourselves to build the altar, not for burnt offering and not for sacrifice, but it **is** a witness between us and you and between our generations after us, to do the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings, and your sons shall not say tomorrow to our sons, "You have no portion in the LORD."' And we said, 'And it shall be, when they say **so** to us and to our generations tomorrow, and we shall say, "See the copy of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, not for burnt offering and not for sacrifice, but it **is** a witness between us and you."' Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD and to turn back today from after the LORD, by building an altar for burnt offering, for grain offering, and for sacrifice, besides the altar of the LORD our God which **is** before His tabernacle."*

Then they explained. "We have done this" out of "anxiety," worry about the future. They feared that one day the western tribes' children would say to their children, "What is there to you and to the LORD, the God of Israel?" The Jordan was a real border. In later years, people on the west side might look across the river and say, "You have no portion in the LORD." And the result would be that "your sons will make our sons cease from fearing the LORD."

So they built the altar "not for burnt offering and not for sacrifice, but it is a witness between us and you and between our generations after us." It was a copy of the LORD's altar at Shiloh, a full-size reminder that said, in effect, that they worshiped the same God at the same altar as their brothers. If anyone ever questioned them, their children could point to it and say, "See the copy of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made."

"Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD." They agreed with the western tribes completely about the one true altar "before His tabernacle." They had the same convictions. They had simply been misunderstood.

They were thinking about their children. That is a good thing for any parent to think about. Will our children know that they belong to the LORD? Will they be taught to fear Him? Moses told Israel to teach God's words to their children at home and on the road (Deuteronomy 6:7). The eastern tribes wanted to make sure the river would never come between their children and God.

Some Bible teachers ask whether building the altar without telling anyone first was wise. Others point out that Scripture never faults them, and that Phinehas and all Israel accepted their answer. Either way, the story shows how much fear can grow when no one explains, and how much it helps when someone asks.

22:30-31 *And Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the congregation and the heads of the thousands of Israel who **were** with him heard the words which the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the sons of Manasseh spoke, and it was good in their eyes. And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Manasseh, "Today we know that the LORD **is** in our midst, because you have not acted unfaithfully **with** this unfaithfulness against the LORD. Then you have delivered the sons of Israel from the hand of the LORD."*

"Phinehas the priest and the leaders of the congregation" heard what the eastern tribes said, "and it was good in their eyes." They listened, and they believed them.

Phinehas said, "Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not acted unfaithfully with this unfaithfulness against the LORD." He was not disappointed that there would be no fight. He was glad. His zeal had been for God's honor, not for a battle. "Then you have delivered the sons of Israel from the hand of the LORD." The eastern tribes' faithfulness had kept the whole nation out from under God's judgment.

This is the balance we need. Phinehas was zealous for the truth, ready to act against real sin. But he was just as ready to listen, and quick to rejoice when he found that his brothers were faithful. James says, "let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). How many church splits and family fights could have been avoided if someone had first asked what the other person meant.

22:32-34 *And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest and the leaders returned from the sons of Reuben and from the sons of Gad, from the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the sons of Israel, and they brought back word to them. And the word was good in the eyes of the sons of Israel, and the sons of Israel blessed God, and they did not say to go up against them to war, to destroy the land in which the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad were dwelling. And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar, "For it **is** a witness between us that the LORD **is** God."*

Phinehas and the leaders went back to Canaan and reported. "And the word was good in the eyes of the sons of Israel, and the sons of Israel blessed God, and they did not say to go up against them to war." What could have been a civil war ended in worship.

"And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad called the altar, For it is a witness between us that the LORD is God." The name of the altar was its message. It did not point to itself. It pointed to the LORD.

God's people today are also divided by many rivers: language, distance, background and custom. Paul tells us to be "diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Christ has broken down the wall between Jew and Gentile and made them one in Himself (Ephesians 2:14). What holds believers together is not the side of the river we live on. It is the one altar, the cross of Jesus Christ, where we all find our portion in the LORD.

Chapter 22 Summary

Joshua praised the fighting men of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh for keeping their promise to fight beside their brothers. He charged them to love the LORD, walk in His ways, keep His commandments, cling to Him and serve Him with all their heart, and then blessed them and sent them home with great spoil to share with their brothers. At the Jordan they built a large altar. The rest of Israel thought they had rebelled, and gathered at Shiloh to go to war. First they sent Phinehas and ten leaders, who warned them by the sins of Peor and Achan and offered them land west of the Jordan. The eastern tribes swore by the LORD that the altar was not for sacrifice but was a copy of the LORD's altar, a witness that their children had a portion in the LORD. Phinehas and the leaders were satisfied, Israel blessed God and did not go to war, and the altar was named as a witness that the LORD is God.

People and Places

- Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh: the eastern tribes, whose fighting men had served beside their brothers (Numbers 32; Joshua 1:12-18).
- Phinehas: the son of Eleazar the priest, known for his zeal at Peor (Numbers 25:7-13).
- Peor: the place in Moab where Israel worshiped the Baal of Peor and a plague killed twenty-four thousand (Numbers 25:1-9).
- The altar by the Jordan: a large copy of the LORD's altar, built as a witness and not for sacrifice.

I have judged people before I knew the facts many times in my life. The details are different each time, but the root is the same. People were not living up to my expectations, or I was not seeing them do what I thought they should. Israel asked first before acting. I need to do the same.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. What had the eastern tribes promised, and how did Joshua praise them? (22:1-4; Numbers 32)

2. What five things did Joshua charge them to do? (22:5)

3. What did Joshua tell them to do with the spoil, and why? (22:8)

4. Why did the rest of Israel think the altar was rebellion? (22:11-12; Deuteronomy 12:5-14)

5. Which two past sins did Phinehas and the leaders mention, and why? (22:17, 20)

6. What generous offer did they make to the eastern tribes? (22:19)

7. Why did the eastern tribes say they built the altar? (22:24-28)

8. How did Phinehas respond when he heard their answer, and what does that show about his heart? (22:30-31)

9. Israel had zeal for the truth and also the patience to ask first. When have you judged someone before you knew the facts? What would "swift to hear" (James 1:19) look like for you this week?

10. The eastern tribes worried that their children would be cut off from the LORD. What are you doing to make sure the next generation knows they belong to Him?

Chapter 23: Joshua's Farewell to the Leaders

Scripture

23:1-16 And it was, many days after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around, and Joshua was old, advanced in days, and Joshua called for all Israel, for its elders and for its heads and for its judges and for its officers, and he said to them, "I am old; I am advanced in days. And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations before you, for the LORD your God, He ***is*** the One who fights for you. See, I have made these nations that remain fall to you as an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, and all the nations which I have cut off, and the Great Sea ***at*** the going in of the sun. And the LORD your God, He will push them out from before you, and He will dispossess them from before you, and you shall take possession of their land, just as the LORD your God spoke to you. And you shall be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so as not to turn aside from it ***to the*** right or ***to the*** left, so as not to go among these nations, these that remain with you; and of the name of their gods you shall not make mention, and you shall not make ***others*** swear ***by it***, and you shall not serve them, and you shall not bow down to them. But to the LORD your God you shall cling, just as you have done until this day. And the LORD has dispossessed from before you great and mighty nations; and ***as for*** you, not a man has stood before you until this day. One man of you chases a thousand, for the LORD your God, He ***is*** the One who fights for you, just as He spoke to you. And you shall take great care for your souls, to love the LORD your God. For if you surely turn back and cling to the remainder of these nations, these that remain with you, and intermarry with them, and go in among them and they among you, you shall surely know that the LORD your God will not continue to dispossess these nations from before you; and they shall become for you a trap and a snare, and a scourge in your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground which the LORD your God has given you. And look, I ***am*** going today in the way of all the earth, and you know with all your heart and with all your soul that not one word has fallen of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you; all have come ***to pass*** for you; not one word of it has fallen. And it shall be, just as every good word which the LORD your God spoke to you has come on you, so the LORD will bring on you every evil word, until He has destroyed you from off this good ground which the LORD your God has given you, when you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them; and the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."

Chapter 23 Preview

Many years have passed since the land was divided. Joshua is old and near the end of his life, and he calls together the leaders of Israel: the elders, heads, judges and officers. He does not talk about himself. He talks about the LORD, who fought for Israel, and about what Israel must do now that the battles are over.

His message comes down to a few plain points. Remember what the LORD has done. Be very strong to obey the book of the law of Moses. Do not mix with the nations still left in the land, do not even speak the names of their gods, and cling to the LORD. Love Him. Then Joshua gives a

warning that runs both ways. God kept every good word He promised. If Israel turns to other gods, He will just as surely keep every word of warning.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-2 *And it was, many days after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around, and Joshua was old, advanced in days, and Joshua called for all Israel, for its elders and for its heads and for its judges and for its officers, and he said to them, "I am old; I am advanced in days.*

"And it was, many days after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around, and Joshua was old, advanced in days." We do not know how many years had passed since chapter 21, but it was long enough for Joshua to grow very old. He died at 110 (24:29).

"And Joshua called for all Israel, for its elders and for its heads and for its judges and for its officers." These were the men who would lead after him. Moses had given his last words to the people in the book of Deuteronomy. Now Joshua did the same. "I am old; I am advanced in days." He knew his time was short, and he wanted to use it well.

Many places in Scripture record the last words of godly leaders: Jacob (Genesis 49), Moses (Deuteronomy 31-33), David (1 Kings 2:1-4) and Paul (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Last words tend to be the most important words. What would you want to say to the people you love, if you knew you had only a little time left?

23:3-5 *And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations before you, for the LORD your God, He **is** the One who fights for you. See, I have made these nations that remain fall to you as an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, and all the nations which I have cut off, and the Great Sea **at** the going in of the sun. And the LORD your God, He will push them out from before you, and He will dispossess them from before you, and you shall take possession of their land, just as the LORD your God spoke to you.*

"And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations before you, for the LORD your God, He is the One who fights for you." Joshua started with what they had seen with their own eyes. He did not point to himself. He said the LORD fought for you. Joshua was the general, but he gave God all the credit.

"See, I have made these nations that remain fall to you as an inheritance for your tribes." Some nations were still in the land, but Joshua had already assigned their land to the tribes by lot. Then he gave a promise: "the LORD your God, He will push them out from before you, and He will dispossess them from before you, and you shall take possession of their land, just as the LORD your God spoke to you."

The work was not finished, but God was not finished either. The same God who had fought for them would keep on fighting, as long as they kept on trusting.

23:6-8 *And you shall be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so as not to turn aside from it **to the** right or **to the** left, so as not to go among these nations, these that remain with you; and of the name of their gods you shall not make mention, and you shall not make **others** swear **by it**, and you shall not serve them, and you shall not bow down to them. But to the LORD your God you shall cling, just as you have done until this day.*

"And you shall be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so as not to turn aside from it to the right or to the left." These are almost the same words God spoke to Joshua at the very beginning (1:7-8). Joshua had lived by them for his whole life as leader. Now he passed them on.

Why does obeying God's Word take strength? Because the pull to drift is strong. It takes courage to keep walking straight when the people around you turn right or left.

Then Joshua named the danger: "so as not to go among these nations, these that remain with you." He was not telling Israel to hate their neighbors. He was telling them not to mix with them in a way that would draw them into their worship. He went on: "and of the name of their gods you shall not make mention, and you shall not make others swear by it, and you shall not serve them, and you shall not bow down to them." Each step goes further than the one before. First you speak the names, then you swear by them, then you serve them, then you bow down. Idolatry rarely starts with bowing. It starts with getting comfortable.

"But to the LORD your God you shall cling, just as you have done until this day." Again, the word is cling (22:5). The best defense against false gods is holding tight to the true one.

23:9-11 *And the LORD has dispossessed from before you great and mighty nations; and **as for** you, not a man has stood before you until this day. One man of you chases a thousand, for the LORD your God, He **is** the One who fights for you, just as He spoke to you. And you shall take great care for your souls, to love the LORD your God.*

"And the LORD has dispossessed from before you great and mighty nations; and as for you, not a man has stood before you until this day." This is the promise of 1:5, kept.

"One man of you chases a thousand, for the LORD your God, He is the One who fights for you, just as He spoke to you." This echoes the promises of the Law. Moses said that when Israel obeyed, five of them would chase a hundred and a hundred would chase ten thousand (Leviticus 26:8; compare Deuteronomy 32:30). The numbers did not matter. God did.

"And you shall take great care for your souls, to love the LORD your God." Here is the heart of it. Joshua had just told them to obey the law, to stay away from idols, and to cling to the LORD. Now he told them what would make all of that possible: love Him. Obedience without love becomes a burden. Love makes obedience a joy (1 John 5:3). "Take great care for your souls" means guard yourselves carefully. Love for God has to be guarded, or it cools.

23:12-13 *For if you surely turn back and cling to the remainder of these nations, these that remain with you, and intermarry with them, and go in among them and they among you, you shall surely know that the LORD your God will not continue to dispossess these nations from before you; and they shall become for you a trap and a snare, and a scourge in your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground which the LORD your God has given you.*

Then came the warning. "For if you surely turn back and cling to the remainder of these nations." Notice the word cling again. You will cling to something. Either you cling to the LORD (verse 8), or you will cling to the nations. There is no third choice.

Joshua named one of the main ways this would happen: "and intermarry with them, and go in among them and they among you." Marriage to people who worshiped other gods would bring those gods into Israel's homes. This was not about race. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite both married into Israel after they turned to the LORD (Ruth 1:16). It was about faith. Solomon later ignored this, and his foreign wives "turned aside his heart" after other gods (1 Kings 11:1-4). Paul gives the same principle to believers: "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

If Israel did this, "the LORD your God will not continue to dispossess these nations from before you; and they shall become for you a trap and a snare, and a scourge in your sides and thorns in your eyes." Joshua piled up pictures of pain: a trap that catches an animal, a whip on your sides, thorns in your eyes. The sin Israel tolerated would wound them. And it would end "until you perish from off this good ground which the LORD your God has given you."

Sadly, Judges 2:1-3 tells us that the next generation did just this, and God said those nations would be thorns in their sides and their gods a snare. Joshua's warning came true.

23:14 *And look, I **am** going today in the way of all the earth, and you know with all your heart and with all your soul that not one word has fallen of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you; all have come **to pass** for you; not one word of it has fallen.*

"And look, I am going today in the way of all the earth." That means he was about to die, the road every person on earth must walk.

Then Joshua said almost the same words as 21:45, but this time as a personal witness to the people: "and you know with all your heart and with all your soul that not one word has fallen of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you; all have come to pass for you; not one word of it has fallen."

He was not asking them to take his word for it. He was asking them to look at their own lives. You know it, he said, with all your heart and soul. They had seen the Jordan stop. They had seen Jericho fall. They were living in houses they did not build. Every good word had come true.

That is a good test for our own faith. Look back. What has God promised you in His Word, and how has He kept it? When we remember how faithful He has been, it gets easier to trust Him for what is still ahead.

23:15-16 *And it shall be, just as every good word which the LORD your God spoke to you has come on you, so the LORD will bring on you every evil word, until He has destroyed you from off this good ground which the LORD your God has given you, when you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them; and the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."*

Then Joshua turned the same truth around. "And it shall be, just as every good word which the LORD your God spoke to you has come on you, so the LORD will bring on you every evil word." The "evil word" means the word of disaster, the curses God warned about in the Law if Israel broke His covenant (Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 28:15-68). God's faithfulness cuts both ways. If He keeps His promises, He also keeps His warnings.

"When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them; and the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."

This too came true. Centuries later, after many warnings through the prophets, the northern kingdom was taken into exile by Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:7-18), and Judah was taken to Babylon in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25). The same God who gave the land took His people out of it when they turned to idols. Yet even then, He promised to bring them back (Jeremiah 29:10-14), and He did. And He has promised that one day He will restore Israel fully (Romans 11:25-29).

For us, this is a sober word. God's grace is not a license to sin. "Let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). The believer in Christ is safe from condemnation (Romans 8:1), but a believer who turns from God to idols will reap real sorrow and loss. Joshua's message still stands: remember, obey, cling, love.

Chapter 23 Summary

Many years after the LORD had given Israel rest, Joshua, now very old, called the elders, heads, judges and officers of Israel. He reminded them that the LORD had fought for them, and he promised that the LORD would drive out the nations still left in the land. He charged them to be very strong to obey the book of the law of Moses, not to mix with the nations or mention, swear by, serve or bow to their gods, but to cling to the LORD and love Him. One of them would chase a thousand, because the LORD fought for them. But if they clung to the nations and intermarried with them, God would stop driving them out, and the nations would become a trap, a whip and thorns until Israel perished from the land. Joshua said that he was about to die, and that they all knew not one of God's good words had failed. In the same way, if they broke the covenant and served other gods, every word of warning would come on them, and they would perish quickly from the good land.

People and Places

- Elders, heads, judges and officers: the leaders of Israel's tribes, clans and towns.
- The book of the law of Moses: the written law God gave through Moses (1:8).

- "The way of all the earth": a way of saying death, the road every person walks.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. Whom did Joshua call together, and why do you think he chose that moment? (23:1-2)

2. Who did Joshua say had fought for Israel? (23:3, 10)

3. What did Joshua promise about the nations still left in the land? (23:4-5)

4. What did Joshua tell Israel to do with the book of the law of Moses? Where have we heard those words before? (23:6; 1:7-8)

5. List the steps toward idolatry in verse 7. What is the opposite of those steps? (23:7-8)

6. What would happen if Israel clung to the nations and intermarried with them? (23:12-13)

7. What did Joshua say Israel knew "with all your heart and with all your soul"? (23:14)

8. How does God's faithfulness to His good words also warn us about His words of judgment? (23:15-16)

9. Joshua said idolatry begins with mentioning the names of false gods. What small steps of compromise do believers often take today before they fall into bigger sin?

10. Joshua said to love the LORD and to take great care for your souls. What helps you keep your love for God from growing cold?

Chapter 24: The Covenant Renewed at Shechem

Scripture

24:1-13 And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and he called for the elders of Israel and for its heads and for its judges and for its officers; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'On the other side of the River your fathers dwelt from long ago, Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, and I led him through all the land of Canaan, and I multiplied his seed, and I gave him Isaac. And I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau; and I gave to Esau the mountain of Seir to take possession of it; and Jacob and his sons went down ***to*** Egypt. And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I struck Egypt, just as I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out. And I brought your fathers out from Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued after your fathers with chariotry and with horsemen ***to*** the Red Sea. And they cried out to the LORD, and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and He brought the sea over them, and it covered them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you dwelt in the wilderness many days. And I brought you to the land of the Amorites who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them from before you. And Balak the son of Zippor, the king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel; and he sent and called for Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. And I was not willing to listen to Balaam; and he surely blessed you, and I delivered you from his hand. And you passed over the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the lords of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Girgashites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, and it drove them out from before you, the two kings of the Amorites; not by your sword and not by your bow. And I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwelt in them; vineyards and olive trees which you had not planted, you are eating.'

24:14-33 And now, fear the LORD and serve Him in integrity and in truth; and remove the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that ***were*** on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. And I and my house, we will serve the LORD." And the people answered and said, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God, He ***is*** the One who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves, and who did these great signs before our eyes, and kept us in all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. And the LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, and the Amorites, the inhabitants of the land. We also, we will serve the LORD, for He ***is*** our God." And Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He ***is*** a holy God; He ***is*** a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and make an end of you, after He has done good to you." And the people said to Joshua, "No, but the LORD we will serve." And Joshua said to the people, "You ***are*** witnesses against yourselves that you have

chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "Witnesses." "And now, remove the foreign gods which ***are*** in your midst, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and to His voice we will listen." And Joshua made a covenant with the people on that day, and he set for them a statute and a judgment at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a great stone and set it up there under the oak that ***was*** at the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, "Look, this stone shall become a witness against us, for it has heard all the sayings of the LORD which He spoke with us; and it shall become a witness against you, lest you deny your God." And Joshua sent the people away, each man to his inheritance. And it was after these things, and Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, a son of a hundred and ten years. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance at Timnath-serah, which ***is*** in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash. And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lengthened days after Joshua, and who knew all the work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. And the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the portion of the field which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money; and they became an inheritance for the sons of Joseph. And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which had been given to him in the hill country of Ephraim.

Chapter 24 Preview

Joshua gathers all the tribes of Israel one last time, at Shechem, the place where God first promised Abraham the land. He speaks for the LORD and tells Israel's story from God's side: "I took," "I gave," "I sent," "I brought." From Abraham's idol-worshiping family beyond the Euphrates, through Egypt and the sea, the wilderness, Balaam and Jericho, to the land they now live in, every step was God's grace.

Then Joshua calls them to a choice. Fear the LORD, serve Him in integrity and truth, and put away the other gods. If serving the LORD seems wrong to you, choose today whom you will serve. "And I and my house, we will serve the LORD." The people promise three times to serve the LORD. Joshua makes a covenant with them, writes the words in the book of the law, and sets up a great stone as a witness. The book ends with three burials: Joshua, the bones of Joseph, and Eleazar the priest.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1 *And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and he called for the elders of Israel and for its heads and for its judges and for its officers; and they presented themselves before God.*

"And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem." Shechem lay in the hill country between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Abraham built his first altar in Canaan there when God said, "To your seed I will give this land" (Genesis 12:6-7). Jacob buried his household's idols under the oak near Shechem (Genesis 35:4). Joshua had read the blessings and curses of the Law there after Ai (8:30-35). It was the right place to renew the covenant, the solemn agreement between God and His people.

"And they presented themselves before God." This was not a political rally. It was a worship meeting, held in God's presence.

24:2 *And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'On the other side of the River your fathers dwelt from long ago, Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.*

"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel." Joshua spoke as a prophet. The words that follow are God's own words.

God began with a surprise: "On the other side of the River your fathers dwelt from long ago, Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods." The River is the Euphrates. Abraham's family lived in Ur of the Chaldeans and then in Haran, in what is now Iraq and southern Turkey (Genesis 11:27-32). And they "served other gods."

That is a humbling place to start Israel's story. Israel did not begin with a good family that found God. It began with an idol-worshiping family that God found. Terah served other gods, and the text says "your fathers," which seems to include Abraham's household before God called him. Scripture does not tell us what Abraham himself believed before the LORD spoke to him. It only tells us that God came to him first: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2).

This is the gospel in Joshua. God's people were not chosen because they were better. They were chosen by grace. Paul says Abraham believed "on the One who justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5). Every believer has the same story. We were not seeking God. He sought us. And the pull of those old idols stayed in the family for generations (Genesis 31:19; 35:2), as Joshua is about to show.

24:3-4 *And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, and I led him through all the land of Canaan, and I multiplied his seed, and I gave him Isaac. And I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau; and I gave to Esau the mountain of Seir to take possession of it; and Jacob and his sons went down* ***to*** *Egypt.*

"And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, and I led him through all the land of Canaan, and I multiplied his seed, and I gave him Isaac." Count the verbs. I took. I led. I multiplied. I gave. God did all of it. Abraham's part was to believe and go (Hebrews 11:8).

"And I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau; and I gave to Esau the mountain of Seir." God was even generous to Esau, giving him the land of Edom. "And Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt." That one line covers the whole story of Joseph and the years in Egypt. The promised land was given to Abraham's line, but first they had to leave it.

24:5-7 *And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I struck Egypt, just as I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out. And I brought your fathers out from Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued after your fathers with chariotry and with horsemen* ***to*** *the Red Sea. And they cried out to the LORD, and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and He brought the sea over them, and it covered them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you dwelt in the wilderness many days.*

"And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I struck Egypt." The plagues are summed up in a few words. "And afterward I brought you out." Then came the Red Sea. Egypt chased them "with chariotry and with horsemen," and "they cried out to the LORD, and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians" (24:7; see Exodus 14:19-20). "He brought the sea over them, and it covered them."

"And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt." Some of the older people standing at Shechem had seen it as children. It was a memory, not a legend. "And you dwelt in the wilderness many days," forty years of it.

24:8-10 *And I brought you to the land of the Amorites who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them from before you. And Balak the son of Zippor, the king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel; and he sent and called for Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. And I was not willing to listen to Balaam; and he surely blessed you, and I delivered you from his hand.*

"And I brought you to the land of the Amorites who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan." These were Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21-35). "I gave them into your hand."

Then "Balak the son of Zippor, the king of Moab," tried a different weapon. He hired Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22-24). But God said, "I was not willing to listen to Balaam; and he surely blessed you, and I delivered you from his hand." Every time Balaam opened his mouth to curse, God turned it into blessing.

24:11-13 *And you passed over the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the lords of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Girgashites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, and it drove them out from before you, the two kings of the Amorites; not by your sword and not by your bow. And I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwelt in them; vineyards and olive trees which you had not planted, you are eating.'*

"And you passed over the Jordan and came to Jericho." The seven nations of Canaan fought against them, "and I gave them into your hand."

"And I sent the hornet before you, and it drove them out from before you, the two kings of the Amorites; not by your sword and not by your bow." God had promised the hornet in Exodus 23:28 and Deuteronomy 7:20. Some take it as real swarms of hornets that drove the enemy out of hiding. Others take it as a picture of the panic and terror God sent ahead of Israel (2:9-11; Exodus 23:27). Either way, the point is the same: "not by your sword and not by your bow." Jacob

had once spoken of land he took "with my sword and with my bow" (Genesis 48:22). Now God says it was not their sword at all.

"And I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwelt in them; vineyards and olive trees which you had not planted, you are eating." Moses had warned that when this happened, they must not forget the LORD (Deuteronomy 6:10-12). Everything they had was a gift. That is grace. The same is true of us. We did not earn our salvation. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; the gift is of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

24:14 *And now, fear the LORD and serve Him in integrity and in truth; and remove the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.*

After telling what God had done, Joshua called for a response. "And now, fear the LORD and serve Him in integrity and in truth." The order matters. God's grace comes first. Our service comes after, as an answer to it. Joshua did not say, serve God so He will save you. He said, God has saved you, so serve Him.

To fear the LORD is to honor Him with awe and reverence, to take Him seriously as God. To serve Him "in integrity" means with a whole heart, not divided. "In truth" means faithfully, sincerely, without pretending.

Then he said something that may surprise us: "and remove the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD." Some of the people standing at Shechem still had idols. Some had carried them out of Egypt (Ezekiel 20:7-8). Israel had seen the Jordan stop and the walls fall, and some of them still kept little gods at home. Joshua told them to get rid of them.

We can do the same, singing about God on Sunday and keeping idols at home. An idol is anything we trust, love or serve in God's place: money, pleasure, success, a relationship, our own comfort. John ends his first letter, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

24:15 *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that* ***were*** *on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. And I and my house, we will serve the LORD."*

"And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve."

Joshua was not saying that it does not matter which god they chose. He had just told them to serve the LORD. He was using a hard kind of logic. If you think serving the LORD is a bad thing, after all He has done for you, then go ahead and pick some other god. But be honest about it. Make a choice. Do not pretend to serve the LORD while you keep idols in your tents.

And look at the choices he gave them. "Whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling." The gods of Mesopotamia had not saved anyone. Terah's gods left him in Haran. The gods of the Amorites had just lost to the LORD. Their worshipers were gone, and Israel was living in their houses. Who

would choose those gods? Joshua was making the point plain. There is no real choice except the LORD.

Elijah later said the same thing on Mount Carmel: "How long will you be limping on the two crutches? If the LORD is the God, walk after Him" (1 Kings 18:21). Jesus said, "No one is able to serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). Everyone serves something. The question is never whether we will serve. It is whom.

Notice the word "today." Joshua did not say think it over and get back to me. He said choose today. Hebrews quotes the Psalms with the same urgency: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8). Tomorrow is not promised.

Then Joshua made his own choice public: "And I and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Joshua was an old man with nothing left to prove, yet he stood before the whole nation and said where he stood, before he knew what the crowd would do.

And he spoke for his house, his whole household. In that day the head of a family led its worship. Joshua took responsibility for the spiritual direction of his home. He could not believe for his children, but he could lead them, teach them and set the example. Fathers and mothers today have the same calling: to bring up their children "in the discipline and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

This verse is often hung on the walls of Christian homes, and that is a good thing, if it is more than a decoration. It is a decision made "today," and made again every day. Has your house made that choice? Have you?

24:16-18 *And the people answered and said, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God, He **is** the One who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves, and who did these great signs before our eyes, and kept us in all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. And the LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, and the Amorites, the inhabitants of the land. We also, we will serve the LORD, for He **is** our God."*

"And the people answered and said, Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods." Their reasons were the same story Joshua had just told. The LORD brought us out of Egypt, "from a house of slaves." He "did these great signs before our eyes, and kept us in all the way in which we went." He "drove out from before us all the peoples."

"We also, we will serve the LORD, for He is our God." That is the right answer for the right reason. They would serve Him because of who He is and what He had done.

24:19-20 *And Joshua said to the people, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He **is** a holy God; He **is** a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression and your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and make an end of you, after He has done good to you."*

Joshua's reply is startling: "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression and your sins."

Why would Joshua say that, right after they promised to serve the LORD? He was not trying to talk them out of it. He wanted them to understand what they were promising. A holy God is completely pure and set apart from sin. A jealous God does not share His people with other gods (Exodus 20:5; 34:14). His jealousy is not petty. It is the jealousy of a faithful husband for his wife. To serve Him would mean everything, not part.

"He will not forgive your transgression" does not mean God never forgives. The Law was full of forgiveness through sacrifice (Leviticus 4-6), and God had forgiven Israel many times (Numbers 14:19-20). It means He will not overlook deliberate rebellion, turning from Him to idols, as if it did not matter. "If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and make an end of you, after He has done good to you."

Joshua also knew human nature. In their own strength, they could not keep this promise. Their history proved it, and Judges would prove it again. That is the lesson of the whole Old Testament. We cannot serve God by our own power. We need a new heart, and God promised one in the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27). Through Christ we receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, who makes us able to serve Him. Jesus said, "apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5).

24:21-24 *And the people said to Joshua, "No, but the LORD we will serve." And Joshua said to the people, "You **are** witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." And they said, "Witnesses." "And now, remove the foreign gods which **are** in your midst, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The LORD our God we will serve, and to His voice we will listen."*

"And the people said to Joshua, No, but the LORD we will serve." They meant it.

Joshua made it formal: "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." "And they said, Witnesses." They were putting their own names on the promise.

Then Joshua said the hardest thing again: "And now, remove the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." A promise to serve God means nothing if the idols stay. To incline your heart means to bend it toward Him, to lean your whole life in His direction.

For the third time the people answered: "The LORD our God we will serve, and to His voice we will listen."

24:25-28 *And Joshua made a covenant with the people on that day, and he set for them a statute and a judgment at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a great stone and set it up there under the oak that* ***was*** *at the sanctuary of the LORD. And Joshua said to all the people, "Look, this stone shall become a witness against us, for it has heard all the sayings of the LORD which He spoke with us; and it shall become a witness against you, lest you deny your God." And Joshua sent the people away, each man to his inheritance.*

"And Joshua made a covenant with the people on that day, and he set for them a statute and a judgment at Shechem." This was a renewal of the covenant made at Sinai, for a new generation in a new land.

"And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God." As I said in the Background, this is one place where the book tells us Joshua wrote at least part of it. He added this covenant to the Law Moses had written (Deuteronomy 31:24-26).

"And he took a great stone and set it up there under the oak that was at the sanctuary of the LORD." This may well be the same oak near Shechem where Jacob had buried his family's idols (Genesis 35:4). Then Joshua said, "Look, this stone shall become a witness against us, for it has heard all the sayings of the LORD which He spoke with us." A stone cannot hear, of course. Joshua was speaking in a vivid way: the stone would stand long after they were gone, a silent reminder of their promise.

"And Joshua sent the people away, each man to his inheritance." It was his last act as leader. Each family went home to the land God had given them, with a promise on their lips.

24:29-31 *And it was after these things, and Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, a son of a hundred and ten years. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance at Timnath-serah, which* ***is*** *in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash. And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lengthened days after Joshua, and who knew all the work of the LORD which He had done for Israel.*

"And it was after these things, and Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, a son of a hundred and ten years." At the start of the book, only Moses was called "the servant of the LORD" (1:1). Joshua was called "the minister of Moses." Now, at the end, Joshua has the same title. There is no higher title a person can have.

His age is the same as Joseph's when he died (Genesis 50:26). "And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance at Timnath-serah," the town he had asked for and built (19:50).

"And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lengthened days after Joshua, and who knew all the work of the LORD which He had done for Israel." Joshua's leadership bore fruit. While he and those who had seen God's works were alive, Israel stayed faithful.

But notice what the verse leaves unsaid. What about after the elders died? Judges 2:10 answers: "another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD, and also the work which He had done for Israel." The generation that saw God's works stayed faithful. The next generation

had not seen them, and no one had taught them well. Faith must be passed on. Psalm 78:6-7 says we tell God's works to the next generation, "that they may set their confidence in God."

24:32 *And the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the portion of the field which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money; and they became an inheritance for the sons of Joseph.*

"And the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they buried at Shechem." This closes a story that began more than four hundred years before. Joseph, dying in Egypt, made Israel swear: "God will certainly visit you, and you shall bring up my bones from here" (Genesis 50:25). Moses carried those bones out of Egypt on the night of the exodus (Exodus 13:19). They went through the Red Sea, forty years of wilderness, and across the Jordan. Now they were laid to rest in the promised land.

Hebrews 11:22 counts this as an act of faith. "By faith Joseph, dying, made mention concerning the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones." Joseph was sure God would keep His promise, even though he would not live to see it. God kept it.

They buried him "in the portion of the field which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money" (24:32; see Genesis 33:19). It "became an inheritance for the sons of Joseph."

24:33 *And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which had been given to him in the hill country of Ephraim.*

"And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which had been given to him in the hill country of Ephraim." Eleazar had served beside Joshua in dividing the land (14:1; 19:51). His son Phinehas, whom we met at the altar by the Jordan (chapter 22), carried on as priest after him (Judges 20:28).

The book ends with three graves: Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar. That may seem like a sad ending, but it is not. All three were buried in the land God promised, even Joseph, who died in Egypt. God had kept His word to each of them.

Yet each of them died. Joshua could give Israel the land, but he could not give them eternal rest. Hebrews says God was speaking of "another day" after Joshua (Hebrews 4:8). That rest comes through a greater Joshua, Jesus, whose name means the LORD saves. Joshua's tomb is still closed. Jesus' tomb is empty. He leads His people not just into a land, but into eternal life.

Chapter 24 Summary

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel before God at Shechem. Speaking for the LORD, he told Israel's story from God's side: their fathers beyond the Euphrates served other gods, and God took Abraham, gave him Isaac, brought Jacob's family down to Egypt, sent Moses and Aaron, brought Israel through the Red Sea, defeated the Amorites, turned Balaam's curse into blessing, and gave them a land they had not worked for. Joshua called them to fear the LORD, serve Him in integrity and truth, and put away other gods, and to choose that day whom they would serve; he and his

house would serve the LORD. The people promised three times to serve the LORD. Joshua warned them that the LORD is holy and jealous, made a covenant with them, wrote the words in the book of the law of God and set up a great stone as a witness. Joshua died at 110 and was buried at Timnath-serah, and Israel served the LORD through the days of the elders who outlived him. Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem, and Eleazar the priest was buried in the hill country of Ephraim.

People and Places

- Shechem: the town between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim where Abraham built his first altar in Canaan and Joshua renewed the covenant.
- The River: the Euphrates, beyond which Abraham's family lived and served other gods.
- Terah: Abraham's father (Genesis 11:26-32).
- The hornet: the means God used to drive out Israel's enemies (Exodus 23:28).
- Covenant: a solemn agreement between God and His people, with promises and duties.
- Timnath-serah: Joshua's town and burial place in the hill country of Ephraim.
- Eleazar: Aaron's son and high priest, who served with Joshua.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. Why was Shechem a fitting place for this covenant meeting? (24:1; Genesis 12:6-7)

2. Where did Israel's story begin, and what did Abraham's family serve? (24:2)

3. How many times does God say "I" in verses 3-13? What does that teach about who saved Israel?

4. What did God say about the land, cities and vineyards Israel now had? (24:13)

5. What three things did Joshua tell the people to do in verse 14?

6. Why did Joshua say, "You will not be able to serve the LORD"? (24:19-20)

7. How did the people answer, and what did Joshua tell them they must do with the foreign gods? (24:21-24)

8. What happened after Joshua and the elders died? (24:31; Judges 2:10) How can a church or family keep that from happening?

9. Joshua said, "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve." What "gods" compete for your service today, and have you made your choice?

10. Joshua said, "I and my house, we will serve the LORD." What would it look like for your household to make and live out that choice?

Conclusion

Joshua begins at the edge of the Jordan, with Moses dead and a whole nation waiting on the far bank. It ends with three graves in the land of promise. In between, God did everything He said He would do. He stopped the river, brought down the walls of Jericho, fought for Israel against the kings of the south and the north, and gave every tribe its inheritance by lot before Him at Shiloh. Near the end of the book the writer stops to say it plainly: "Not a word fell of every good word which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel; everything came to pass" (21:45).

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, Joshua shows us a God who is both faithful and holy. He waited more than four hundred years before He judged the nations of Canaan, and He saved Rahab and her house when she turned to Him. He gave the land as a gift, but He also called His people to take it by faith and obedience. When one man hid sin in his tent, Israel ran from Ai. When the tribes made peace with the Canaanites instead of driving them out, those nations became thorns in their sides. And when the wars were over, Joshua's last words were a call to choose: "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve" (24:15).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God and help you grow in your walk with Him. Every part of Joshua points beyond itself. Joshua could lead Israel into the land, but Hebrews tells us that if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day, "So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). That rest is found in Jesus, whose name is the same as Joshua's, the LORD saves. He is the refuge we flee to, like the cities of refuge, and in Him every promise of God is Yes (2 Corinthians 1:20). Caleb waited forty-five years for Hebron. We wait for an inheritance kept in heaven for us, and for the day when Christ returns and keeps every word He has spoken to His church and to Israel.

Rahab was saved because she believed the LORD and hung the scarlet cord in her window. Joseph's bones were carried for forty years because he believed God would keep His word. Salvation has always been by grace through faith. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and serve, and make Joshua's choice your own: "And I and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.