

THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

**A STUDY OF THE
PERIOD OF THE JUDGES**

by:
LESTER C. MASSEY

CONQUEST
OF
CANAAN

A SIMPLE WORD PICTURE OF THE PERIOD OF OLD
TESTAMENT HISTORY COVERED BY THE BOOKS OF
JOSHUA, JUDGES AND RUTH BETTER KNOWN AS THE
JUDGES.

ORDER FROM

LESTER C. MASSEY
4702 Arrowhead Trail
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37411

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PREFACE

The events of the desert wanderings of Israel are in all probability some of the most important happenings in human history. This period began a great migration of peoples that ended an old cycle and inaugurated a new one. It came at an ideal time when Greece and Egypt were relatively weak militarily, and the kings of the cities of Canaan were warring among themselves, all of which combined to make it an opportune time for Israel to move into the Land of Promise.

The glorious conclusion of the story of the Exodus and the forty years of wandering saw Israel at the threshold of a challenging experience; an entirely new generation encamped on the east side of Jordan, ready to finally take possession of the land God had promised to Abraham centuries before. All of the previous generation who were twenty years of age and older at the time of their rebellion against Moses at Kadesh-barnea, had died in the wilderness, with the exception of Moses, Joshua and Caleb. Before Moses died at the age of one hundred twenty years, he was permitted to view the land from the east side of Jordan on top of Mt. Nebo, but he was not permitted to cross over into it because of his unbelief at the waters of Meribah. (Num. 20:12) Moses had delegated his leadership of the people of Israel to Joshua (Deut. 31:23), and this work covers the period which began with Joshua and his leadership of the people of Israel. From this time until the time Saul was crowned King of Israel, there is recorded a most trying and yet a most challenging period in the history of Israel. This is known as the period of the judges. During this time, and as long as Israel had competent leadership, they were willing to trust in God, obey His commands, and enjoy His blessings; but their history is somewhat spotted, not only with times of trust, obedience and blessings, but also with times of idolatry, disobedience and punishment.

In this work an attempt has been made to draw a simple word picture covering the books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth. The years covered by these three books stand out in Israel's history as a most trying period as the people attempted to overcome their enemies and to adjust themselves to a new land and a new way of life. No attempt has been made to cover the last two judges of this period, Eli and Samuel, since their history begins in First Samuel chapter one, and should be more profitably studied as a beginning point of the United Kingdom which ended with the death of King Solomon.

Dates are very confusing, especially during their period, since the most learned of Bible scholars have consistently disagreed. It may be well to observe, however, that the Apostle Paul in speaking to the Jews in Antioch concerning this period of their history, said: "And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet." (Acts 13:20) This is the only actual information the scripture affords concerning the period of time covered by this work. Dates which may appear in any Bible as marginal notes are by man's computation only made over the past several centuries.

There is one significant thought which comes to mind when a study is made of this period of Bible history, and that is that God cares for His own and is ever ready and willing to sustain them in times of persecution and distress if they will only listen to Him and follow His commands. This study should encourage God's people in our day in their efforts to place their trust in the Almighty God and look to Him alone in their efforts to combat the forces of evil which lie on every hand.

Much has been written about the Patriarchs, the kings of Israel, their captivity, exile and return, but very little has been written concerning the period of the judges. Therefore, the hope and prayer of the author is that it will be a blessing to those who scan these pages.

At the end of each chapter is a list of topics for discussion which are pertinent to the subject matter and which may be of assistance to any who may desire to use this book for class studies. Every effort has been made to simplify the language so that it may be used for class studies from teens to adults.

The admonition and promise God gave to Joshua as he assumed the leadership of Israel, and launched the conquest of Canaan, is one which could well be heeded by the leaders of God's people in our day:

"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand nor to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."

Joshua 1:7

"Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came came to pass that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give them, even to the children of Israel." (Josh. 1:1-2)

These first two verses of the Book of Joshua are like a curtain opening upon the second act of a drama. The history of Israel had been recorded in the Pentateuch from God's first promise to Abraham, approximately seven centuries through the lives of Isaac and Jacob, the servitude in Egypt, the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings. With the death of Moses the curtain falls upon the first period of Hebrew history. The next period of approximately two hundred years was to be a period of conquest, bloodshed and trial for this people. Yet through it all can be found the actual birth of a nation of God's people.

The authorship of the Book of Joshua is obscure. Some have ascribed it to Joshua himself, but there is reason to doubt that he wrote all of it. Some consider Samuel as the author and some even Ezra. However, there is every reason to believe that it was written sometime before the period of the United Kingdom. Every activity of the people of Israel and their conquest of Canaan is not recorded, because it is evident that in finally occupying the entire land, it required the conquering of many more cities than just the ones mentioned in the text of the books of Joshua and Judges.

The people of Israel were now a completely different generation from the one which had left Egypt forty years before, and they were now face to face with the awesome challenge of taking possession of the land which God had repeatedly told them was theirs. Yet this land was occupied by nations who knew not the God of Israel and they were prepared to fight to retain their homes as well as preserve their lives. They lived in walled cities for the most part, and had their fighting men to protect them. The only difference was that God was on the side of Israel, and He had promised them that He would help them take possession of the land. He had given them a strong and courageous leader in Joshua, and His promise was that they could possess every place that the sole of their foot should tread upon. What more could any people desire?

From the beginning, God's people have required competent leadership, and He has always been willing to provide it just so long as they followed His instructions and would put their complete trust in Him and in the leadership which He provided. In our twentieth century, one of the most urgent needs of God's people is qualified, competent leaders; men who will forget petty personalities and politics, and who will have sufficient vision along with the ability to follow God's every command in leading His people. An elder, or shepherd of God's flock today must of course have the scriptural qualifications before he can even occupy this high position which, if he has, will be demonstrated in his natural ability to lead. He is a leader, not a driver nor a ruler. No one has ever seen a shepherd driving a flock of sheep; he leads them and they follow him whithersoever he goes. Jesus taught this lesson very emphatically. (John 10:4-5) The lack of this proper kind of leadership has been the cause of most of the problems in the Lord's Church over the years.

Joshua was God's selection for leading the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan. (Deut. 31:23) It is certain that Joshua had all the right qualities of leadership, because the first mention of him is when Moses chose him to lead the people in battle against the nomadic Amalekites at Rephidim when they attacked Israel in the Wilderness of Zin. (Ex. 17:8-13) At that time God made a promise to utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. (Ex. 17:14) Several centuries later God commanded King Saul to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites. (I Sam. 15:1-3) The Amalekites continued to be bitter enemies of Israel even in the days of the judges.

Again Joshua is mentioned as one who accompanied Moses part of the way up Mt. Sinai when he received the first two tables of stone, and was the first to meet him on his descent. (Ex. 32:17) Soon afterwards Joshua became one of the twelve spies sent to explore the land of Canaan, and he was one of the two who returned with an encouraging report. It was at this time that the people rebelled against Moses at Kadesh-barnea and refused to enter the land of Canaan; but because Joshua and Caleb were the only two of the spies who encouraged the people to enter at that time, they became the only two survivors who left Egypt at twenty years of age or older who eventually came to the place where they could look across Jordan and view the land of promise which God described as flowing with milk and honey. It was here that God directed Moses, shortly before his death, to invest Joshua solemnly and publicly with definite authority over the people along with Eleazar the Priest.

God knew Joshua's capabilities, just as He knew Moses' ability many years before when He appeared to Moses in Midian on the back side of the desert and directed him back to Egypt to deliver His people from bondage. God even today recognizes the capabilities and talents of those in His Church who can be leaders. The tragedy is that there are so many who could be leaders such as elders, deacons, preachers or teachers, who are not willing to use their abilities in His service. Joshua was not this type of man. The first nine verses of Joshua chapter one contains God's marching orders for him, and there was no way he could misunderstand his duty to God and the people, nor the abundant blessings which would follow if he conducted himself according to God's instructions. God said He would give them "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon." (Josh. 1:3) And again, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life." (Josh. 1:5) And again, "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law -- turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest." (Josh. 1:7) These first nine verses of Joshua chapter one set the pace for him in the years ahead and Joshua, along with Moses, carved his name in the eternal hall of fame as one of the greatest leaders of people the world has ever known.

The success of any great leader is in direct proportion to the respect he demands of the people he is leading and in their willingness to follow, not because of fear, but because they trust their leader, they respect his judgments and they are willing to follow him gladly. This is demonstrated vividly in Joshua's dealings with three of the tribes who wanted to settle on the eastern side of Jordan. Before Moses died, he had promised the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh that they could settle there rather than on the western side usually referred to as Canaan. Now Joshua concurred in Moses' decision, but he demanded that they take their fighting men across Jordan with the rest of the people until they had conquered all the land, after which they could return to their wives, their little ones and their cattle. (Josh. 1:12-15) They promised Joshua that they would do all as he commanded, and in chapter four and verse thirteen it is noted that about forty thousand fighting men of these three tribes crossed Jordan with the others. This incident demonstrates Joshua's exceptional qualities of leadership in resolving a matter which could have been a touchy problem. This incident also points up a most significant thought, and that is that Joshua required all of the people to become involved in the work that had to be done. Qualified leaders in the Lord's Church of our day will see to it

that all are involved in the work of the Church, and that no amount of talent and ability in the congregation will be allowed to lie dormant.

Joshua also demonstrated his strategic wisdom when he sent the two spies to explore Jericho even before they crossed the Jordan. The leader of any army needs to know the strength of the enemy in order to know what kind of tactics he can use to overcome them. He knew that Jericho was a city which could not be easily taken even though he knew God had promised to be with him and help him overcome all obstacles. Yet he wanted to know something about the enemy against whom he was to march. Even though God today promises His people that he will be with them all the way, at the same time it is most important that they know the powers of Satan, and the methods he uses before they can successfully overcome present day obstacles.

It is a familiar story to any Bible student how Rahab received the spies and protected them from the king of Jericho, and eventually made it possible for them to escape with a promise that when the city was taken by the Israelites, she and her family would be spared. After successfully escaping, the spies hid in the mountain for three days before they reported to Joshua what had befallen them. One of the things they learned was that "All of the inhabitants of the land do faint because of us." (Josh. 2:24) Would it not be wonderful if all those in the world today who profess to follow Christ would work together as one solid phalanx against the works of evil in the world to such an extent that Satan and his forces would "faint because of us"?

Of course, Joshua's first problem was to get the people of Israel on the other side of the Jordan. God gave him explicit instructions for this operation and Joshua followed them to the letter. First the priests bearing the ark of the covenant came to the brink of the waters, the people remaining behind a space of two thousand cubits (somewhat over a half mile). Then when the soles of the priests touched the water, all of the water of the river from above them stood up as a wall and all of the water below "failed even to the Salt Sea." (Josh. 3:16) The priests who bore the ark stood in the middle of Jordan on dry ground while all the people passed over on the other side. Joshua had twelve stones taken from the spot where the priests were standing, one stone for each of the twelve tribes, and built a memorial to remind posterity that God had stopped the river Jordan in a miraculous way and allowed the people to cross without any problems. (Josh. 4:9) When the priests came up out of the river bearing the ark,

the water returned to its place, even overflowing its banks as it was before they crossed. (Josh. 4:18)

When they reached the other side of Jordan, the first thing God commanded Joshua was to circumcise every male according to the law. It must be remembered that this was a new generation, and that all those twenty years of age and older who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness, and they did not circumcise those who were born during the forty years of wilderness wandering. (Josh. 5:2-5) They observed the Feast of the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho, and they ate of the corn of the land the self same day. On the morrow, the manna ceased, and the place was called Gilgal. (Josh. 5:9)

Joshua was a young man when he left Egypt (Ex. 33:11) and it has been estimated that he was about seventy years of age when he succeeded Moses as leader of the twelve tribes of Israel. He was the son of Nun, a member of the tribe of Ephraim, and a ruler within his tribe (Num. 13:2), and his complete lineage from Ephraim is recorded in I Chron. 7:20-27.

And so God's chosen Israel, under the expert leadership of Joshua, began one of the most challenging periods of their history. During the conquest of Canaan oftentimes the people would waver, commit sin, or otherwise incur God's displeasure, but as long as Joshua lived he never lost sight of God nor of his responsibility as a leader of God's people. He was consistently and continually strong and of good courage as God had commanded him. But, of course, that was the terms upon which God had predicated His blessings when he was commissioned as leader of the people.

God had chosen this people to be His own, to nurture and bless them as long as they chose to be faithful; but He could not and did not tolerate disobedience, nor rebellion, nor any transgression of His command. He had a purpose in choosing Israel as He did, and He had the right of sovereign authority over them, both as individuals and as a nation. It was His purpose to mold a nation of people through whom eventually He could bring a Messiah into the world, a promise which goes all the way back to the time when He drove Adam and Eve out of the paradise of Eden. (Gen. 3:15) However, God could not mold this nation in the same way a potter would mold a vessel of clay. He was dealing with individuals who made up a nation, and He could not create holiness in them by a mere act of power. He could only produce holiness in them in a manner consistent with the moral agency of man. Even today, God bestows His favors not to compel man, but by His promises

and His blessings He inclines men to exert their own will and in so doing, be willing to follow through their own desires and thereby receive His blessings. God does not by any direct power make people either good or bad, but He continually pleads with them through His word to hear, obey and be blessed in so doing. It is true that through the centuries God has used wicked men to carry out His plans, such as Pharaoh in Moses' day, but God did not make him wicked; it was by his own choice that he refused to see the power of God, and so God used him to implement His plan. This is the manner in which God has dealt with man even from creation.

Now as Israel is encamped at Gilgal, they find themselves face to face with a challenge to either follow Joshua's command, be faithful, obedient, strong and of good courage so as to possess the land which was theirs, or else be afraid, rebel, refuse to accept that which God had promised to Abraham and Moses and return to the land from whence they came. They chose the good way and proceeded on towards Jericho, not knowing as yet how they would be able to overthrow such a fortified city.

As a study of this period from Joshua through Judges is pursued, a most intriguing account is given of Israel's willingness to accept this challenge which involved conquering and driving out the heathen occupants of the land, which they knew not, and adjusting themselves to a new land which was fruitful and productive, a kind of land they had not known before in their lives. And now they are about to go forth and demonstrate to God and to their enemies their faith and their determination to fight under the magnificent leadership of Joshua.

The conquest recorded in Joshua chapters 1 - 12 represent a series of rather grim stories of this period of Israel's history, however the writer, or writers, evidently put together what they were able to gather in their own time after the events actually happened. It is significant that the chief incidents are focused largely on the southern part of the land, which was finally possessed by the tribes of Benjamin, Judah and Ephraim, and one can suspect that most of the narratives came from these sections.

Topics for Discussion: (1) Qualifications and characteristics of a leader. (2) Need for involvement in God's work. (3) The importance of following God's instructions. (d) God's care for His people.

When all the kings of the Canaanites heard how the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan for the Children of Israel to pass over, "their heart melted, neither was their spirit in them any more." (Josh. 5:1) Naturally, the news of a miracle such as this spread rapidly over the land and brought fear to the hearts of the inhabitants on the west of Jordan. Those who inhabited the east side had already been destroyed and the land occupied by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh; and now those on the west side realized that Israel was not just an ordinary enemy, but that their God was helping them in their conquest. Consequently, they were afraid for their own future.

A study of the first portion of the Book of Joshua reveals that there is an unfortunate division of verses between chapters five and six. Chapter six should begin with verse thirteen of chapter five and continue on into chapter six, with verse one of chapter six being considered as a parenthetical statement. To explain this, verse thirteen of chapter five begins by relating a vision Joshua had at Gilgal of a man with a drawn sword standing before him. Of course, the first thought of Joshua was: "Whose side are you on?" At once, the man introduced himself to Joshua as Captain of the Lord's host, which caused Joshua to immediately fall down and worship him, asking for instructions from God as to how he should proceed. It is significant that the command given Joshua here was identical to that given Moses many years before when God spoke to him from a burning bush in Midian. "Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy." And Joshua did so. (Josh. 5:15) There is no indication as to the identity of the man in this vision other than that he was "captain of the Lord's host." This vision was God's assurance to Joshua that He was still with His people, and that they could still expect help from Him as they proceeded to occupy the land on the west of Jordan. This fact is emphasized by the drawn sword, signifying he was ready for battle. Some have suggested that this was a type of Jesus Christ in that today He furnishes His people with the "sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God" with which to fight their spiritual battles, and that He is with them when they use this sword properly. This assurance to the people of Israel was vitally needed by a people about to begin the most challenging task of their history thus far. The actual purpose of the vision of Joshua was that he might have definite instructions as to what procedure he was to follow in taking the city of Jericho. (Josh. 6:2-5)

History records the city of Jericho as one of the oldest occupied sites in the land, possibly in the known world at that time. It is thought that the site of the original Jericho was approximately two miles from Gilgal where the Israelites camped after crossing the Jordan. Excavations have revealed the fact that it was evidently a heavily fortified city, substantiated by the description of the wall which was so thick that people lived within it or upon it. In such a place Rahab lived when she hid the spies and assisted them to escape. (Josh. 2:15) This one fact served all the more to emphasize the miracle which God was about to perform. Another significant fact is that the instructions given to Joshua were most uncommon procedures for an army to use in attacking a heavily fortified city. However, Joshua followed God's commands exactly even though he apparently had no way of knowing just how God would accomplish His promise to give them the city. The Hebrew writer enlarges on this when he said: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about seven days." (Heb. 11:30) This, of course, points up the necessity of taking God at His word without questioning or quibbling as to the how or the why. God's instructions to Joshua would have been considered most foolish by any ordinary leader of an army of fighting men, but not Joshua.

Following God's orders, the people of Israel compassed the city of Jericho once each day for six days and then on the seventh day they compassed it seven times. It is evident that the perimeter of the wall of Jericho was sufficiently small to permit them to encompass it seven times in one day. This is what in our day would be called "a war of nerves". In what order the people marched does not exactly appear from the text. Some seem to think that the fighting men went first, then the seven priests with their trumpets, those who carried the ark, and lastly the people. However, this is a relatively unimportant detail. The question which naturally comes to mind is: Why did God give such unusual instructions? Though none would dare question God's judgment in this instance, it is certain that the procedure given, coupled with the length of time required to carry out the plan, deeply impressed not only the Israelites but the besieged people of Jericho as well with the supernatural power which alone caused the wall to fall. After the completion of the thirteen times of compassing the wall, Joshua gave command to the priests to blow upon their trumpets and to the people to shout, and "the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city." (Josh. 6:20) They utterly destroyed every living creature with the edge of the sword with the exception of Rahab, her family and kindred and all her possessions. This, of course, was according to the agreement

which she had with the two spies earlier when she helped them escape from the city. Afterward they burned the city with fire and all that was therein. (Josh. 6:24)

Let it be remembered that it was not the marching, the blowing of the trumpets, nor the shouting of the people which caused the wall to fall down. It was the power of God, which power only worked when the people by faith were willing to follow His simple instructions. It was not a matter of the work which they performed in their marching, blowing of trumpets and shouting, but merely a simple meeting of God's conditions upon which He based His promise to give them the city. This brings to mind an incident which happened several centuries later when God's prophet told leprous Naaman, captain of the Syrian host, what to do to be cleansed of his leprosy. Elisha commanded him to dip seven times in Jordan and he would be clean. This made Naaman angry that he was told to do such a simple and unusual thing to be healed. He was expecting something else. Yet the story ends with Naaman consenting to do God's will, and when he came up out of Jordan the seventh time "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (II Ki. 5:14) There was no power whatever in the waters of Jordan, it was God's power which cleansed Naaman of leprosy, but that power did not function until Naaman yielded his will to God's, performing a simple act which demonstrated his faith in God. Even in our day, in obeying the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no power in water to forgive sins, but when a penitent believer in Jesus Christ is willing to yield his will to God's and be baptized according to command, then it is God's power, not the water, which takes away his sin. Many other examples could be cited just here, but space does not permit.

God pronounced a curse on any man who would rebuild Jericho. (Josh. 6:26) In connection with this, it is interesting to read the account of Hiel, a man of Bethel, who rebuilt Jericho in the days of Ahab, king of Israel. Here we find God's promise fulfilled. (I Ki. 16:34) There are various opinions of learned men as to just what this curse involved. It says: "Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it." (Josh. 6:26) It is not indicated in the text whether this man would lose his firstborn and his youngest, or whether it merely means that the man who rebuilt the city would encounter so many difficulties it would require a long period of time for him to accomplish it. One thing is certain and that is when God makes a promise He keeps it regardless of the time

involved. It was approximately six hundred years after God pronounced a curse on the man who rebuilt Jericho that Hiel began to rebuild the city.

It must be borne in mind that Joshua waged his battles according to the tradition of his times, and that Christianity of today, with its principles of honor, love, mercy and kindness toward all people, was a much later development of the religion of the God Joshua served. A study of this conquest will reveal that the battles of the Israelites were doubtless little better than brutal assaults on poorly armed villages. Such was the custom of the people in waging war. Each separate encounter is a new and exciting tale as Joshua demonstrated his skill and craftiness as both a military and a spiritual leader.

When Jericho was taken, God instructed Joshua to have the people take from the city only the silver, gold and vessels of brass and of iron, and put them in the treasury of the Lord. (Josh. 6:24) They were not permitted to take any of the spoil for themselves. The only apparent reason for this was that God alone had overthrown the city for them, and the only spoils to be taken were those God wanted put into His treasury.

With Jericho laid waste, Joshua is now faced with the task of taking the city of Ai, about ten or twelve miles northwest of Jericho. It is a significant fact that no record is given that Joshua took counsel of the Lord as to how he should proceed against Ai, but took it upon himself to send men to view the country. These men returned to Joshua with the report that it would take only two or three thousand men to overcome the city and that there was no purpose in involving all the people. (Josh. 7:3) It would seem that their overwhelming success at Jericho with the help of God had made them somewhat over-confident in their ability to take Ai. If Joshua had just taken counsel with God, the story might have been far different.

What Joshua did not know was that one of his fighting men had violated God's command at Jericho, and had secretly taken some of the spoil for himself, namely; a Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold which weighed fifty shekels. (A shekel was about one-half ounce.) If he had known this he would surely have corrected the situation before doing anything else, but instead of asking for God's counsel, he went ahead and sent three thousand men against Ai. As they attacked, the men of Ai came out of the city and smote them to such an extent that they fled before them, and thirty-six of the men of Israel

were slain. Of course, this caused the hearts of the people to "melt and become as water". (Josh. 7:5) Joshua rent his clothes, fell upon his face before the ark of God for the rest of the day, and said: "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us around, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Josh. 7:8-9) This is the way so many of God's people are today, who make important decisions in life without asking for God's direction through the avenue of prayer before proceeding. Then when they meet with life's disappointments and failures, they are quick to blame God for the situation in which they find themselves. No child of God can survive long as such without praying to God for guidance and direction. So here apparently Joshua was ready to give up until God told him what the trouble was. When Joshua finally went to God for help, God was ready and willing to do what was necessary. The decisions men make determine the direction of their lives, and when they fail to take God into account in making these decisions, more than likely they will be in the wrong direction. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not within himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23) These words are as true today as when the prophet Jeremiah spoke them many centuries ago.

God informed Joshua that they were defeated at Ai because one of his men had taken of the accursed thing, that is, the spoil of Jericho, and that sin could not be tolerated in the camp of Israel. He then told Joshua the manner in which He would point out the guilty individual by bringing all the people together by tribes, with the tribes separated by families. God would then point out the tribe, the family and the individual who had brought this situation upon the people. And so Achan, son of Carmi, of the Tribe of Judah, was pointed out in the process. He confessed his sin against God in that he saw the treasures in the ruins of Jericho, coveted them, and took them and buried them in his tent. Achan's punishment was most severe. He and his family, his cattle and his treasures were all taken to the valley of Achor, and they were stoned to death and burned with fire. (Josh. 7:24-25) This brings to mind a statement made by the Apostle Paul: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." (Rom. 11:22)

From this incident can be clearly seen the effect of covetousness, which has destroyed many lives and many souls. Covetousness is a most glaring sin, and one which contributes to a

majority of crimes committed in our day. The most injurious enemy to any country is the individual, led by covetousness, who sins against God and his fellow man as did Achan. It brought destruction upon him and his family and nearly proved the destruction of the camp of Israel. Neither would the Lord turn away from His displeasure until the evil was detected, the crime punished, and the camp purged of sin. Should not this be a warning to God's people in our day?

Following this, God now encouraged Joshua to proceed against Ai, and this time God told him what to do and what strategy to use. The men of Israel were to fight their own battle, using the plan God had given to Joshua. One group of men were to lie in ambush outside the city, unseen by the enemy. Then Joshua took 30,000 men to lure the men of Ai from the city. When Ai attacked Joshua, he and those with him fled from their enemy, causing the men of Ai to think they had again overcome Israel as before. But they did not know of the Israelites in ambush who swarmed into the city after all the fighting men were gone. When they looked back and saw the smoke rising from the city, they knew they had been tricked, and there was nothing they could do. Ai was destroyed, the people slain with the edge of the sword, and the king hanged on a tree. (Josh. 8:28-29) Here at Ai the people were permitted to take of the spoil of the city, presumably since they had actively waged battle themselves against the enemy.

In exploring this incident further, it is possible that the question may arise as to why God required so much strategy in overcoming this city, when He had already promised to deliver Ai into the hands of the Israelites? A diligent study of God's dealings with man through the ages will reveal that God expects man to use all the wisdom and power with which he has been endued in order to accomplish his purposes to do God's will. It would be inconsistent with God's grace for Him to help man in such a way as to render man's God-given resources as useless. Just so, God not only delivered Ai into the hands of Israel, but He also permitted Israel to make use of their God-given wisdom and power to attain their purpose. God's grace has been extended to all men, and He has created them with the ability to choose. Man can either accept God's grace and follow Him, or he can reject it and take the road to destruction. In short, God wants all men to be saved but He does not force them to do His will. He extends His grace and it is up to man to avail himself of that grace.

After the defeat of Ai, Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel to Mount Ebal. (Josh. 8:30) Here Joshua read all the

words of the Law of Moses before all the congregation of Israel, with the women and the children. (Josh. 8:34-35)

Thus far in this study, one outstanding fact is self-evident; that is, man is the product of God's power of creation, yet He gave man a will to do as he chooses. Therefore, God's power cannot manifest itself through man unless man's will concurs and cooperates with God's power to save. Some may say, "Is this not an endeavor to merit salvation by our own works?" This is impossible, unless it can be proven that all of man's mental and physical powers came from himself, independently of the power of the Creator. God offers man salvation and man accepts it only by exercising his will to meet the conditions of acceptance. This is not of merit but of God's grace. And so, it is only in the use of lawful means that man can yield his will to God's will and accept that salvation by grace.

By the same token, Israel could not win their battles if they tolerated sin in their midst, neither could they succeed without yielding their will to God's will. So it has always been and so it shall ever be.

Topics for Discussion: (1) The simplicity of God's commands. (2) The gravity of ignoring God's commands. (3) Does God today help His people to overcome all their obstacles in life?

CHAPTER III GIBEON - THE FOLLY OF DECEPTION

The capture of Ai was only the first step. Beyond lay many other cities all of which had their kings and their fortification, along with fighting men to defend them. The Book of Joshua does not reveal whether some of the important nearby cities like Bethel and Michmash were overcome or by-passed. One can only assume that they were taken either at this time or at some later date. When the kings of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, heard of Joshua's successes, they banded together with one accord to fight against Joshua. (Josh. 9:1-2) Most all of these were groups who had moved in and taken possession of the coastal lands probably because of the declining power of the Grecian and Egyptian empires to resist them.

Gibeon was one of the four cities occupied by the Hivites, just a few miles west of Bethel. They did not join with the other kings to fight against Israel, but they chose to use another strategy, namely, to deceive the enemy. They lied to Joshua and Israel and Joshua allowed himself to be deceived by them. Of course, deception is a strategy which has been used by warring nations since the beginning of time in an effort to confuse the enemy. The Gibeonites portrayed themselves to Israel as a procession of vagabond ambassadors from a far country. They dressed themselves in ragged clothing, put old sacks and winebottles on their asses, and old worn-out shoes upon their feet. The only food they had was dry and mouldy bread. Every indication was that they had been travelling for a long while, which would make their story more believable. At first Joshua was dubious as to their identity, but when they finished their story, he believed it, and made a covenant with them which was sealed by the common tradition of eating together with them. It is estimated that the city of Gibeon was actually only a little more than twenty miles from Gilgal, where the covenant was made. They pretended that in their far away country they had heard of the great things God had done for Israel in Egypt, and that their elders had sent them on a peace mission so that Israel would not destroy them along with all the other Canaanites. (Josh. 9:9-13)

But Joshua made a mistake. They "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." (Josh. 9:14) "And Joshua made peace with them". (Josh. 9:15) After three days, when they came to the cities of the Gibeonites, Israel realized how they had been deceived. God had commanded that every enemy of the land be

destroyed, but now they had given their word to spare the Gibeonites and could not change it. The congregation murmured to Joshua because they could not take of the spoil, and the Gibeonites suffered because Joshua made them to be slaves to Israel from then on. The Gibeonites had no alternative but to accept their fate. (Josh. 9:17-27)

In considering this incident, the question may arise, "Can an individual be honestly deceived?" Was Joshua honest and sincere when he believed the lies of the Gibeonites and made a treaty of peace with them? Surely none would dare to doubt Joshua's honesty and integrity! Yet here is an honest and sincere leader of God's people who allowed himself to be deceived by heathens. The blame rests squarely on the shoulders of Joshua for two reasons. First, he did not take time to investigate the truth of their story, and, second, he "asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." (Josh. 9:14)

How indicative this is of the millions of honest and sincere religious people of the twentieth century who are willing to believe anything and everything they hear without "searching the scriptures to see whether these things are so", as did the Bereans in Paul's day. (Acts 17:11) An individual's religious life is for the most part governed by three factors, namely, tradition, environment and training. Man is so vulnerable to these influences throughout all of his life that he usually becomes indignant when someone attempts to change his direction. Many are not willing to investigate the truth for their own satisfaction, and so they blindly follow the promptings of their traditions, external influences, or their training, either one or all three.

Joshua was so thoroughly convinced of the authenticity of this act of lying and hypocrisy on the part of the Gibeonites that he let his personal convictions lead him to make a mistake of great consequence. If he only had gone to God for counsel instead of trusting in his own judgment, it would have eliminated the problem before it began. On the other hand, Israel was unable to destroy this enemy as God had commanded because Joshua had given his word; neither were the people even allowed to take of the spoil of the Gibeonites. Of course, the Gibeonites paid the penalty of being forced to become servants of the Israelites wherever they went. "And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose." (Josh. 9:27)

A close study of this incident forces the reader into observing that lying is never expedient, even to the saving of one's life. Of course, the Gibeonites were heathens, and nothing better could have been expected from them. However, though they saved their own lives, they were deprived of their political liberty because of their lying deception. Even the good which is sought by unlawful means has God's curse upon it.

It is also of note to see the importance at that time of an oath made in the presence of God. Even though Israel swore to spare the Gibeonites to their own hurt, when they had once bound themselves before God, no change in circumstances could justify a change in the obligation. "Thus, dear reader, shouldst thou fear a lie, and tremble at an oath." (Clarke's Comm. Vol. II, page 41)

Let it be written indelibly upon the hearts of all that no Christian can survive in this life as such, and meet the world with all of its problems, without daily prayer to God for guidance and direction in life.

Topics for Discussion: (1) Other Biblical examples of deception. (Cf. the false prophet in Israel), and others. (2) The necessity for God's people to be constantly in communication with God through prayer, seeking for guidance in life's problems.

CHAPTER IV GOD'S POWER VS. THE KINGS OF CANAAN

The surrender of Gibeon frightened and incensed the surrounding Canaanite cities and those to the south because Gibeon was a great city, and one of the royal cities, with mighty men of valour. (Josh. 10:1-2) Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, sought aid from all the other cities of the south to help him bring Gibeon back into line. Hearing of this conspiracy, the men of Gibeon sent to Gilgal seeking Joshua's help against the league of kings. God spoke to Joshua, encouraging him to give Gibeon the requested aid, and said: "Fear them not, for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee." (Josh. 10:8) From verse nine it seems that Joshua marched all night from Gilgal, a distance of about twenty miles, and having fallen so unexpectedly upon these confederate kings, they were thrown into confusion. Their men were slain with a great slaughter at Gibeon, "and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon." (Josh. 10:10) The five kings who conspired against Gibeon were Adonizedek of Jerusalem, Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth, Japhia of Lachish and Debir of Eglon.

In the course of this battle there are recorded two outstanding miracles which God performed, both designed to help Israel destroy the enemy.

Miracle No. 1. "And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: They were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." (Josh. 10:11) Of much interest is the fact that in one place the word is "stones" and the other place it is "hailstones". As is usually the case, some have contended that it was actually stones in the common acceptation of the word, citing unusual instances in history where it has been reported that such stones have fallen in various places. God could have cast down such stones, because His power is unlimited, and the entire account proves a miracle was performed. It was more likely they were hailstones as expressed in the text, since God has, on other occasions, made use of hailstones to destroy both men and cattle. There is ample proof of this in reading the account of the plague of hail that fell on the Egyptians before the great exodus. (Exod. 9:18)

Miracle No. 2. Apparently Joshua knew that what was left of the enemy after this slaughter would re-group and attack again;

also he saw that the day was drawing to a close and that it would soon be too dark for him to finish the job. "Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon". (Josh. 10:12) "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. -- So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel." (Josh. 10:13-14) These are most remarkable verses. Many noted scientists and astronomers have tried to ascertain how such an event could happen; and many have completely denied the possibility of its occurrence. However it must be remembered that Jesus said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." (Luke 18:27) And so by faith man must take the inspired record just as it is written by inspiration, and give God credit for performing here a most remarkable miracle to assist Joshua in overcoming the enemy. There is no need for any astronomical interpretations as to how it may or may not have been accomplished. It is a fact of God's word, and must be considered as such.

The five kings of Canaan fled from before Joshua's army and hid in the cave of Makkedah. When it was told Joshua, he had great stones rolled in the mouth of the cave to keep them prisoners until the rest of the enemy were slain. He then commanded the Israelites to pursue the enemy which remained and they were all slain "with a very great slaughter, till they were consumed". (Josh. 10:20)

Joshua had returned to Gilgal, but after the end of the battle the Israelites returned to Makkedah where Joshua met them. He ordered that the five kings be removed from the cave and commanded the captains of his men of war to "come near and put your feet upon the necks of these kings." (Josh. 10:24) They did as Joshua commanded and he said unto them: "Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage; for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye shall fight." (Josh. 10:25) Whereupon, he then slew the kings, hanged them on five trees, later placing their bodies back in the cave and sealing the entrance. He then proceeded to destroy all the people of Makkedah with the edge of the sword, along with their king also.

The remaining portion of chapter ten relates briefly other important cities of the south and how they were overcome. The

cities named are Libnah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Hebron and Debir. Joshua completely destroyed these cities and killed "all that breathed". (Josh. 10:40) Having conquered all this southern portion of the land according to God's commands, Israel returned to their camp at Gilgal.

The outstanding thought to be emphasized in a study of this portion of the wars of Joshua is the way in which God demonstrated His power, not only to help His people overcome the enemy, but also to prove to the Canaanites that He was ruler over the nations of the earth. This is exemplified in the showering of hailstones on the enemy, and the miracle of the sun and moon standing still. Anything contrary to nature is a miracle, and many such instances can be found in a study of the Bible where God performed remarkable works which cannot be explained through natural or scientific channels. If, as it is believed by some, that the sun and the moon were objects of worship by the Canaanites, then this miracle could have been calculated to check this superstition and to show them as well as the Israelites the folly of such worship, and that God ruled even the sun and the moon.

Why is it that today faith is so rarely exercised in God's power and goodness. "Ye have not because ye ask not." (Jas. 4:2) By the same token, we ask not because of a lack of faith in God's power, and an over-confident satisfaction with our own ability to solve our own problems in life. Let it be understood that the same God who led His people Israel of old is still ruler of the heavens and the earth, and, if asked in faith, will do everything necessary for the guidance of His people today and for the extension of the borders of His kingdom on earth. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4:13)

Chapter eleven of the Book of Joshua concludes the wars of Joshua, listing the cities of the northern sector which Israel conquered, killing the inhabitants, burning and pillaging the cities. These cities are listed as follows: Hazor, Madon, Shimron, Achshaph, Dor even to Chinneroth (the Sea of Galilee), and to Mount Hermon in the north. (Josh. 11:1-15) "So Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war." (Josh. 11:23) The names of all the kings Moses defeated on the east side of Jordan are found in Joshua 12:1-6. The names of all the kings Joshua defeated on the west side of Jordan are listed in Joshua 12:7-24.

Even though Israel took possession of all the land, it will be learned later that some of the enemy were left, which produced many problems for them, especially during the period of the Judges. God reminded Joshua of this when he was old and stricken in years that there remained much more land to be possessed. (Josh. 13:1) Why did Israel allow any of the Canaanites to remain in the land? Was not the whole land promised to this people as far back as Abraham? Let it be said for a certainty that if Israel had followed the counsel of God throughout the whole conquest, none of the enemy would have been left. One of their first mistakes was when Joshua allowed himself to be deceived and made a treaty with the Gibeonites. Time after time it says that a few of the enemy were allowed to remain, when God had commanded them to destroy "everything that breathed." Their failure to do this caused those who were allowed to remain to be a "thorn in the flesh" to the Israelites as long as they were a nation.

In the very first chapter of the Book of Joshua God promised them "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon -- from the wilderness of Lebanon even unto the great river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast." (Josh. 1:3-4) And again, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." (Josh. 1:5) This was a large extent of land as compared to that which was actually occupied by Israel. From the Great Sea to the River Euphrates would have included all the land eventually occupied by the Assyrians and the Syrians which became the most powerful nations of their time, and proved to become mortal enemies to the kings of Israel at a later date. Yet they could have had this also had they taken God at His word. It would appear that because of their failure to completely take all that God promised that He purposely left some of the enemy close by to plague them from time to time and to remind them of their failure to take the whole land. This should be a grim reminder to God's people today as to the results of not showing their faith in God to the extent that they are willing to put their complete trust in Him, and in so doing, will be able to conquer all the forces of evil which surround them in the world.

Topics for Discussion: (1) The power of God and how it works for His people today. (2) The seriousness of opposing or doubting God's power. (3) God's willingness to help if His people will allow Him to rule their lives.

CHAPTER V DIVISION OF THE LAND - GOD'S ORGANIZATION

It was not God's intention that Israel just be turned loose in the land to follow their own desires and compulsions. Later on it will be demonstrated what happened to them when they did what was right in their own eyes. Man is God's creation, and God has always shown man the right way to conduct his life in order that he may be blessed, not only in a spiritual but also in a material sense. When man fails to follow God's way, he inevitably has problems, and as long as he follows his own way, these problems will loom greater and greater until he is finally overcome of them. On the other hand, as long as man follows God's way, he is promised happiness as well as prosperity. (Psalm 1) Even the casual reader of the history of God's people up to the point of this study, will be impressed with the nature of God toward His people. He is pictured as being powerful, long-suffering, compassionate, just and a God of design. In the Old Testament, even from Abraham, can be found a God who is designing a plan and preparing a people through whom He can bring a Messiah into the world to save the world from sin. This people were the people of Israel.

God instructed Joshua in minute detail how he should divide the land between the tribes, and so the rest of the Book of Joshua is a record of this division, and is descriptive of the borders of each division. At this time it is generally believed that Joshua was about one hundred years of age. He had spent about seven years in the conquest of the land and it is supposed that he took about one year in dividing it between the tribes. Therefore, it can be reasonably calculated that Joshua was about one hundred ten years of age when he died. It is very likely he intended to subdue the rest of the land which God mentioned to him in chapter 13:1 before he divided it among the tribes, but God did not deem it proper for him to do so. God knew the disposition of His people and it appears that He purposed that some of the Canaanites remain in the land to keep them in check and to give the respective tribes an opportunity to prove their faithfulness in driving the remaining enemy from their borders. It is to be remembered that the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh had already chosen their land on the east side of Jordan. This left nine and one-half tribes to have land allotted to them on the west side of Jordan.

For all practical purposes, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were the names of the twelve sons of Jacob. However,

Joseph's inheritance was divided between his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The tribe of Levi was the priestly tribe and they received no land inheritance, but were given cities in which to dwell with their families and their belongings as will be noted later. The members of the tribe of Levi performed the work involved in the worship, the sacrifices, feasts, etc., which were commanded in the Law of Moses. They were assigned duties in connection with the Tabernacle, and their privileges and responsibilities grew rapidly and changed with the changing conditions of Israel through the centuries. In short, they were servants of the priests and the High Priest. They were supported by the tithes which the people were required to give into the Lord's treasury. The Levites were also to pay tithes along with the other tribes. (Num. 18:20-32) This left twelve divisions of the land with the exception that half the tribe of Manasseh lived on the east side and half on the west side of the Jordan River.

Eleazar the Priest, along with Joshua and the heads of the tribes, distributed the inheritance to each by lot. Just how the lot was cast in this instance cannot be exactly determined. In Numbers chapter 34 God names the chiefs of each tribe who were to assist Joshua and Eleazar in dividing the land, and in Numbers chapter 35, God instructed Moses in regard to the cities for the Levites, the priestly tribe. These detailed instructions were given before Moses died and Joshua knew exactly how to carry them out.

It is deemed important to pause just here to make a comparison with the order of the priests in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. The distinction made in the Old Testament between the priests and the people, that is, between the tribe of Levi and the other tribes, is not to be found in the New Testament. However, the Church of the New Testament is not without priests. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the High Priest and it is of His priestly work and sacrifice that the New Testament writers speak. However, when the New Testament Church came into being, there was no special order of priests serving the community of God's people. In the Hebrew Epistle, the author points to the finished ministry of Jesus Christ as High Priest. Every Christian is a priest in his own right, since he can approach God in the name of Jesus Christ the High Priest, who made the supreme sacrifice once and for all on the cross. (Heb. 9:12, 24, 25) Writing to Christians, the Apostle Peter said: "But ye are the chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (I Pet. 2:9) Thus, in the Christian age God

makes no difference in the so-called "clergy" or "laity" such as are found in Catholic and most Protestant circles. The people of old were required to approach God only through the priests and the High Priest, but as Christians man is able to approach and humble himself before the throne of God himself, in and through Jesus Christ, the High Priest. How thankful God's children today ought to be for the privilege of talking to God themselves through Christ!

Now Eleazar, Joshua and the chiefs of the tribes proceeded to divide the land by lot according to God's instructions. Caleb, of the tribe of Judah, who along with Joshua was one of the spies sent into Canaan before the wilderness wandering, requested that the City of Hebron be given to him as a possession. This is the area where the spies had found the giants, or Anakims about fifty years before. Joshua granted Caleb's request and the narrative of this transaction can be read in Joshua chapter 14. Geographic descriptions of the land inheritance of each tribe are to be found in chapters 15, 16 and 17 of the Book of Joshua, naming the boundaries of each tribe. Some few were not satisfied with their portion of the land, but Joshua settled these differences to the apparent satisfaction of all. See chapter 17 verses 12 through 19.

From the whole history of Israel it can be observed that it was difficult to always please the people. In the passage referred to above, the children of Joseph, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were inclined to quarrel with Joshua about their inheritance, but they were treated with firmness and Joshua would not alter the appointment of God, nor reverse the grant made to them. On the other hand they were encouraged to exhibit their strength and realize their ambitions by conquering some of those enemies on their own which remained in the land, possibly the ones God mentioned to Joshua in chapter 13 verse 1. How like God's people today! Slothfulness and dissatisfaction are natural tendencies of man, and so often he requires much training to induce him even to work for his daily bread. He is willing for things to be done as long as someone else will do them. God does not promise to give His people all they want. This would probably require a miracle. But Jesus said, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." The word strait means difficult, and it takes striving to attain it. Many profess to trust in God's grace and mercy, but are not willing to "labor to enter into that rest."

After the division of the land, Joshua took for himself as his own possession, the City of Timnath-Serah in Mount Ephraim. There he built a city and dwelt therein. And so "they made an end of dividing the country." (Josh. 19:49-51)

As God had commanded Moses in Numbers chapter 35, six cities of refuge were set up; three on the west of Jordan, namely, Kedesh, Shechem and Kirjath-arba; and three on the east side of Jordan, namely, Bezer, Ramoth and Golan. (Josh. 20:7-8) These cities were situated at strategic places in the land for easy access. The purpose of these cities was for the protection of those who might accidentally kill another without malice or purpose in doing. It is worthy to note that these six cities are among the ones awarded to the Levites in chapter 21. It is not difficult to see God's reason for this because the person who was forced to flee to a city of refuge was among those who could counsel, instruct him and further encourage him in the application of the Law of Moses to his particular case. This man was required to dwell in that city, until he should stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days; then shall the slayer return to his own city from whence he fled. (Josh. 20:6)

All of the cities awarded to the Levites are described and named in Joshua chapter 21, and again it is repeated that this was according to God's decree to Moses. There were forty-eight cities in all given to the Levites. "And the Lord gave them rest round about according to all that He swore unto their fathers; and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; it all came to pass." (Josh. 21:43-45)

Now Joshua dismissed the fighting men of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh to return to their inheritance on the east side of Jordan, since the task of conquering the land was finished. They were commended for their faithfulness in keeping their promise to help fight against the enemies. (Josh. 22:1-10) When they arrived at their homes they erected an altar, which they intended to be a kind of memorial, or possibly a watch-tower of some kind. The other tribes heard of this and immediately resented this action, feeling that they were establishing some kind of idolatrous worship on the other side of the river; so they gathered themselves together at Shiloh and prepared to fight against their own brethren. (Josh. 22:12) Phineas, son of Eleazar the priest was spokesman for the nine and one-half tribes on the west, and he proceeded to make accusations against the two and one-half tribes on the east, condemning them severely without investigating to see what the motive was in building the altar. They were accused of sin and rebellion against God, and it was now in order for the two and one-half tribes to answer the false accusa-

tion. Though conscious of their own innocence, they permitted Phineas to finish his discourse, even though it contained nothing but false accusations; and then they gave their answer. They very calmly explained that the altar was built not for a burnt offering or a sacrifice, but as a witness between the two sectors on the east and the west of Jordan. Rather than a place for worship or sacrifice, without the authority of the priests, it was a tribute to the fact that both sides were bound together to serve one God. This of course pleased the accusers and they returned to their respective places. "And they called the altar Ed: for it shall be a witness between us that the Lord is God." (Josh. 22:34)

There are many congregations of the Lord's people in the present day who could derive a very profitable lesson from the Reubenites and their associates when it comes to settling differences between brethren. There are too many who are quick to make false accusations against brethren without investigating the whole situation, and there are too many brethren who, when falsely accused, will become angry and leave, sometimes even leaving the Church of the Lord. Brethren, this ought not so to be.

Joshua, now being old, called for all the rulers and the different heads of Israel and related to them how God had been good to His people, how He had kept all of His promises to them, and he exhorted them to be faithful and courageous. He promised them that no enemy would prevail against them as long as they loved and served God. He also warned them of the consequences of disobedience and idolatry. In Joshua's last address to the people, he rehearsed all of the history of Israel from the day they left Egypt up to the present. He warned them of the dangers of apostasy.

This final discourse was a most stirring and moving one. He left out nothing that the people needed to know, and one of the most outstanding statements of all is here quoted: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your father served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell: but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we shall forsake the Lord to serve other Gods." (Josh. 24:16) So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day in Shechem, he wrote these words in the book of the Law of God, and set up a stone for a memorial under an oak, near the sanctuary of the Lord. (Josh. 24:25-26)

Joshua died at the age of one hundred ten years and was buried in the land of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in Mount Ephraim. Here also they buried the bones of Joseph which they had brought from Egypt. Eleazar, the son of Aaron, died and he also was buried in Mount Ephraim.

Thus ends the dramatic story of the conquests of Canaan by Israel under the direction of one of history's greatest leaders, Joshua. He retired from labor only when there was no more work to be done and he was old and stricken in years. He never attempted to rest until Israel was settled in all their possessions. It might be truly said of him what was said of Caesar: "He considered nothing done, while anything remained undone." Here is a great leader retiring from service without the fanfare and glory which most great leaders of the world receive, yet he was the greatest of all Israel in his day, the most patriotic, the most serviceable; and he sought no remuneration other than a place he could call his home. Joshua's love for God, and his humble acceptance of the greatest responsibility in Israel cause him to stand head and shoulders above most of the leaders of world history.

May God's people today never neglect to go back and study diligently the life and qualities of this great man of God.

Topics for Discussion: (1) The importance of a systematic way of doing God's work in the Church today. (2) The art of being able to settle differences among brethren in an amicable way. (3) Dangers of idolatry and apostasy in our day.

CHAPTER VI AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Several learned scholars have undertaken the task of chronologizing the period of the judges. The Book of Joshua covers a very short period of years as compared with the total of the whole period from the Exodus to Samuel, and since dates have so confused scholars of the past, it is not the purpose of this work to make any attempt to set down definite dates. As mentioned before, the Apostle Paul said that "God gave them judges about the space of four hundred fifty years, until Samuel the prophet," (Acts 13:20), yet in I Kings is found the following statement: "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel -- that he began to build the house of the Lord." (I Kings 6:1) Archbishop Usher's chronology accounts for only about three hundred twenty-five years from the crossing of the Jordan to the birth of Samuel, which is generally considered as the period of the judges. Sir John Marsham figures this period to be about four hundred fifty years, and Josephus gives about the same figure. (See Fig. 1). Therefore, since Paul said "about" four hundred fifty years, this can be considered as approximate. For all practical purposes, any dates set by anyone before about 1000 B.C. should be considered as only approximate.

The judges were men, approved of God, who He raised up at crucial times to lead His people against their enemies and out of idolatry. They did not make laws; they only executed God's commands in directing the people. God was their King, the judges were His deputies, and they conducted themselves as such without any exhibition of pomp or political power; only that they were functioning under God's direction.

It seems that each time one of the judges died, there was a period when a new generation would arise who knew not God, or else if they had been taught of Him, they had completely forgotten him, and worshipped the gods of the Canaanites. There is no way of knowing why God did not supply them with an unbroken succession of judges, but there is still that possibility that He was giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their faith in Him by choosing faithful leaders themselves. Their conduct demonstrates most emphatically the tendency of people to drift away from proper ethical and moral standards when there is an absence of competent spiritual leadership. This seems to be the story of the children of Israel from the time they came out of Egyptian bondage until they were finally carried away into Assyrian and

Babylonian captivity. May God's people of this twentieth century read this history and see that there is always among them qualified spiritual leaders to lead them in the right way, to encourage them in their faith, and to warn them of the consequences of disobedience.

The Book of Judges contains twenty-one chapters, but for all practical purposes ends with chapter sixteen, or the death of Samson. The time of the last five chapters is rather obscure, supposed by some to have occurred just after the death of Joshua. All that can be known definitely is that the incidents related in these chapters occurred during the period of the judges.

It will be noted that each time the children of Israel found themselves without a leader, they "did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baal", which was the chief god of the Canaanites. And so, between the entry of Israel into the promised land and the beginning of the reign of King Saul, there was a period of struggles with the Canaanite City-States; there were invasions from new foes from the east who took advantage of their situation; and there were inter-tribal struggles and territorial shifts among the tribes. This condition, coupled with the tendency of the people toward idolatry, necessitated deliverers or judges from time to time, whom God raised up to destroy the enemy, restore proper worship, and bring the people back to their senses.

These studies point up most emphatically the results of forgetting God, the dangers of outside forces of evil, and the adverse influences they can have upon God's people. They also emphasize the urgent need of strong, capable and qualified leaders to direct His people at all times. The urgency still exists in this twentieth century, and can be seen as posing as great a problem in the Church of today as it did for the people in centuries past.

"Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12)

Topics for Discussion: (1) Dates covered by books of Joshua and Judges. (2) The reliability of dates shown in Bibles. (3) God's purpose in appointing judges and their authority.

Figure 1

JOSEPHUS' CHRONOLOGY OF THE JUDGES

	1. Joshua and elders	26	Years
	Anarchy - no leader	10	"
I.	Servitude to Mesopotamians	8	"
	2. Othniel	40	"
II.	Servitude to Moabites	18	"
	3. Ehud and Shamgar	80	"
III.	Servitude to Canaanites	20	"
	4. Deborah and Barak	40	"
IV.	Servitude to Midianites	7	"
	5. Gideon	40	"
	6. Abimelech	3	"
	7. Tola	23	"
	8. Jair	22	"
V.	Servitude to Ammonites	18	"
	9. Jephthah	6	"
	10. Ibzan	7	"
	11. Elon	10	"
	12. Abdon	8	"
VI.	Servitude to Philistines	20	"
	13. Samson	20	"
	14. Eli	30	"
VII.	Servitude to Philistines	20	"
	15. Samuel	<u>12</u>	"
	Total	488	"

"Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the Lord saying, Who shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?" (Jud. 1:1) Thus, bluntly, does the Book of Judges take up the story of the continuing conquest of Canaan. It might appear, in view of all of Joshua's victories, that Canaan should be so sufficiently subdued that no more fighting would be required. Unfortunately, this was not the case. When Joshua was old and stricken in years, the Lord had told him "there remaineth yet much land to be possessed." (Josh. 13:1) Little did the people realize that several more centuries were to pass before the whole land would be conquered and Israel would emerge as a mighty nation under the rule of Saul, David and Solomon. So the Book of Judges is a brief account of this stormy period, relating the exploits of certain of the judges whose victories and accomplishments were of such magnitude as to be recorded in sacred history.

The Lord answered the people's question when He said: "Judah shall go up". (Jud. 1:2) Apparently the immediate danger was in the south since the Canaanites and the Perizzites are mentioned as being overcome by Judah and Simeon. Both were southern tribes and both enemies were from the south country. Caleb was of the tribe of Judah, and a repetition is given of his taking Hebron for his own inheritance, and his promise to give his daughter in marriage to the man who would take the city of Kirjath-sepher. (See Josh. 15:16) Othniel, a kinsman of Caleb was the one who took the city and received Caleb's daughter, Achsah, for his wife. Later Othniel will be mentioned as being the first of the judges to be raised up by the Lord, and his success in delivering the children of Israel from the hands of the Mesopotamians.

The Lord was with Judah, as well as the other tribes in their conquests against the enemies, but time and again the statement is found that "they could not drive out all the inhabitants of the land." God had a purpose in permitting these enemies to remain. They could have driven out all the enemy if they had followed God's instructions from the very beginning, but an angel of the Lord announced God's decision to the people of Israel: "I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Jud. 2:3) Thus the reason given by the angel was they had failed to obey the voice of the Lord to drive out all the enemy. Of course, Israel could have taken the whole land and enjoyed the rich blessings of

all that God had given them. But because of weakness, fear and a lack of faith in God, many of the enemy remained to plague them. This was God's punishment for their not trusting in His promises and in His ability to help them in subduing the whole land. Is this characteristic not exemplified in the present day? God's people could cover the world with the Gospel of Christ as the waters cover the sea in a generation's time if they only had faith to "launch out into the deep", not be afraid of the enemy, Satan, and trust in God for the results.

After Joshua's death, "there arose another generation which knew not God, nor the works which He had done for Israel; and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baal". (Jud. 2:6-11) It would seem that they had not trained their children in the knowledge of God and what He had done for His people. Now they find themselves with no one to whom they can look for guidance and leadership, and because they knew not God and His goodness, they adopted alien customs and served heathen gods which involved a totally different set of moral, ethical and spiritual values. This happened not just once, but many times, and each time the people drifted into idolatry "the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel" and He would allow them to be placed under servitude by one of their enemy nations. Yet, after a while, God would hear their groanings and pleadings for mercy, and would raise up a judge to deliver them. But when this judge died, they would revert to the same condition as before.

The narrative of the Book of Judges should emphasize to those who read it the unlimited mercy God shows for His people, as well as His long-suffering toward those who will repent of their sins and plead for His mercy and love. The same God is concerned for His people in our day if they will only hear His voice, obey His commands, and serve Him faithfully. "Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite!" (Psalm 147:5) Dear reader, think on these things when faced with temptations of life, and place your trust in the God who is able to provide for His own now, even as He did in the long ago. God is the same yesterday, today and forever and is "Long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Pet. 3:9)

And so God's anger with His people caused Him to leave some of the enemy among them to prove them, to chastise them, and to cause them to walk in the way of the Lord as their fathers did before them. It is most important to observe these reasons why God did not completely expel the Canaanites. He had given Israel the

whole land, every foot upon which they would set the sole of their feet: He had promised to drive out the enemy entirely if they would be faithful and follow His ways. As long as they were faithful, God kept His promise, their borders were enlarged and their enemies fled before them. But when they rebelled, the Lord abandoned them, their enemies prevailed against them and they were placed in servitude to them. Each rebellion against God produced a consequent disaster; and each time they humbled themselves before God and repented, there was invariably a divine intervention on their behalf. If Israel had been willing to follow God's directions fully, they could have possessed the land completely in just a few short years. But this was not the case. Instead, they took the daughters of the heathen nations to be their wives, and gave their daughters to the heathens; they forgot God and worshipped and served Baal. All of this happened over a period of approximately ten years after Joshua's death, and the Lord "sold them into the hand of the Mesopotamians, under King Chusan-rishathaim" whom they served for eight years. (Jud. 3:8) Mesopotamia, meaning "between the two rivers", describes the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. This is the land where Abraham lived in Ur of Chaldees when God called him; and also where Isaac was sent to get a wife from his own kindred.

After eight years of servitude and paying of tribute to the Mesopotamians, the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, and He raised up Othniel, kinsman of Caleb in Judah, who delivered them from the enemy. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel and he prevailed against the king of Mesopotamia. "And the land rested forty years." And Othniel died, having been the first of a series of judges who ruled in Israel. (Jud. 3:10-11)

After Othniel's death, the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and again He caused Eglon, king of Moab, to smite them. Moab was assisted by the Ammonites and the Amalekites who were roving desert tribes always ready to war against any enemy. It is significant to note that "The Lord strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord." (Jud. 3:12) Not only did God allow them to fight against Israel, but He also gave them strength to overcome His own people. Again they cried unto the Lord, and He raised up Ehud, of the tribe of Benjamin, to deliver them. Ehud, under the pretense of bearing a present from Israel to Eglon, king of Moab, was brought into the presence of the king. Eglon, a very fat man, was seated in his summer parlor and Ehud requested that all attendants be sent out because he was on a secret mission. When Eglon arose from his seat "Ehud

put forth his left hand, and took his dagger from his right thigh, and thrust into his belly." (Jud. 3:21) The Moabites knew not what had happened to their king, and Ehud escaped before they found him dead. So when Ehud returned to Mount Ephraim, the children of Israel followed him against Moab and slew about ten thousand of them. "And there escaped not a man." (Jud. 3:29) Again the land rested for eighty years.

After Ehud, mention is made of Shamgar, "which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel." (Jud. 3:31) No further details are given of Shamgar's activities.

"And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead, and the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor." (Jud. 4:1-2) This enemy, under Sisera the captain of Jabin's army, oppressed Israel for twenty years, and they were very strong, having nine hundred chariots of iron. Deborah, a prophetess, was judging Israel at that time and they went to her for help. Deborah solicited the help of Barak, son of Abinoam, who assembled an army of ten thousand men from the tribes of Naphthali and Zebulun. When the attack was made, "the Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots and all his host with the edge of the sword before Barak, -- and there was not a man left." (Jud. 4:15-16) Sisera, the captain of the enemy host, met a most untimely death when he was lured into the tent of Heber, the Kenite, to rest. While he was asleep, Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent nail and a hammer and literally drove the spike through Sisera's temples until he was nailed to the ground. So "God subdued on that day Jabin, king of Canaan." (Jud. 4:23) The entire chapter five of the Book of Judges is a song of Deborah and Barak, praising God for His help in overcoming the Canaanites. "And the land had rest forty years." (Jud. 5:31)

Topics for Discussion: (1) The dangers of forgetting God even in our day. (2) The patience and long-suffering of God toward His people. (3) Blessings for the obedient and punishment for the disobedient. (4) Some say today God is too good to destroy anyone.

"Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of Midian seven years." (Jud. 6:1) The Midianites were thought to be nomadic wilderness wanderers who made their way by marauding other tribes and nations. Midian has been considered as the son of Keturah, Abraham's wife (or concubine), and that Midian was one of those sent into the east country by Isaac because he had no inheritance with the son of Sarah. (Gen. 25:1-6) It was to the land of Midian that Moses fled from Egypt, spending forty years of his life there tending sheep for Jethro, the priest of Midian.

It is apparent that the army of the Midianites recognized a weak place in Israel's defense because they plundered the land of the southern part of Israel, took their cattle, and ravaged the land even unto Gaza, which means all the way from the Jordan River to the Great Sea. Israel was forced into the dens and caves of the mountains to protect themselves. So they again cried unto the Lord and He sent a prophet to remind them that they had brought this dreadful condition upon themselves because they had not obeyed His voice. (Jud. 6:10) But again God had compassion upon His people, sent an angel to Gideon in Ophrah, and commissioned him to go against the Midianites and save Israel from their oppression.

Now Gideon was an humble man, and could not believe he had the ability for such an undertaking, however, the angel said "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." (Jud. 6:12) But still Gideon wanted a sign, and requested the angel to tarry a while that he might prepare something for him to eat. It is evident there was some doubt in Gideon's mind as to the angel's authority. So Gideon prepared a kid with unleavened cakes, along with the broth thereof, and he presented it to the angel under an oak tree. The angel put forth the end of his staff and touched the offering and there arose fire out of the rock and consumed it. This was convincing proof to Gideon of the angel's authority, and there he built an altar to the Lord, and said: "Alas, O Lord God! for I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." (Jud. 6:22)

That same night, by the Lord's instructions, Gideon took ten men of his servants and cast down the altar of Baal and destroyed the grove by it. When the men of the city saw what was done to their idolatrous place of worship, and learned that it was Gideon, son of Joash, who was responsible, they sought to kill

him. But Joash said unto them "Will ye plead for Baal? - - if he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar." (Jud. 6:31) Gideon's father then called him Jerubbaal, for he had thrown down the altar of Baal. This name is used with reference to Gideon many times throughout the narrative.

When the Midianites and the Amalekites gathered together for battle and pitched in the Valley of Jezreel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, he blew a trumpet, and assembled an army throughout the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali. But Gideon still had doubts as to his ability to lead an army and he again asked God for a sign. In this Gideon displays a characteristic that has been prevalent ever since God had a people. They are not willing to obey and just trust God to keep His promises but want Him to give them some kind of an outward sign to prove that He will. How foolish for a man who has talked face to face with an angel of God to want proof, not only once but twice. Gideon placed a fleece of wool on the floor and said to God: "If the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry on the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand." (Jud. 6:37) Of course God did as Gideon requested. But still he was not satisfied that he was qualified to be the leader of an army against the Midianites. So he asked God to let the fleece be dry with dew all around it, and it was so. At last he was convinced, and summoned the tribes to battle, gathering an army of 32,000 armed men. The Lord protested to Gideon that this was too many; that if so large an army defeated the Midianites, the victory would be credited to the force of arms rather than to the power of the Lord. So Gideon reduced his army by sending home all those who were afraid to go into battle, leaving ten thousand men. But this was still too many for the Lord, so they were put to a further test. As they were brought to a certain stream which they were to cross, all the men stopped to drink of the water. Three hundred of those men scooped the water up in their hands and drank, while the rest got down upon their knees to drink directly out of the stream. It would seem apparent that these men who drank in this way would of necessity have to lay down their arms to drink, and could be caught unaware by the enemy, while the men who scooped the water up in their hands could hold on to their weapons and watch at the same time. So God chose the three hundred men, and with these Gideon was to face the task of overcoming the combined armies of the Midianites and the Amalekites.

Men and nations have always placed too much confidence in their personal leadership and force of arms. So it has always been and so it shall always be. Just as God showed His power

before Pharoah, then at the Red Sea, at Jericho, and on countless other occasions, here He intended to show Israel that it was not with armed power and force that they would overcome their enemy, but by the power of God. Only by His power and under the leadership of God's appointed, Gideon, could they hope to overcome this formidable enemy. What a lesson for God's people in our present day! Whatever His people accomplish in preaching the Gospel and in fighting the forces of Satan and the world, it is only through the power of the great God who said "I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world."

So God was with Gideon, and promised that He would deliver the host of the Midianites into his hand. Gideon and one of his servants spied on the enemy by night and overheard one of them relating a dream to another of his fellows. It was a strange dream which the man interpreted to mean that Israel would overcome the Midianites. It seems that this was sufficient for Gideon, so he returned to his men, divided them into three companies of one hundred men each, and gave each man a pitcher, a torch and a trumpet. The torches were covered by the pitchers so the enemy could not see the light. In this way Gideon led his men into the midst of the enemy camp under the cover of darkness. Then suddenly as they stood in the midst of the sleeping Midianites, they sounded the trumpets, broke the pitchers, and cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" This strategy threw the camp into instant confusion. They all began to flee, feeling that they were surrounded by Israelites, and they even fought one against the other in the dark. Gideon, taking advantage of their confused state, pursued them until he had captured and killed the two kings of Midian who were the leaders of the army.

Gideon's cleverness and his complete success in overcoming the Midianites led Israel to desire him for their king. "Rule over us, both thou, and thy son and thy son's son, for thou has delivered us from the hand of Midian." (Jud. 8:22) Gideon refused the offer, saying, "The Lord shall rule over you." However, after Gideon's death, anarchy and strife began to afflict his family through the misdeeds of his son, Abimelech. The people also began to drift back into their idolatry and the worship of Baalim. How ungrateful man can be to the great God who bestows so many blessings upon him. "Neither showed they kindness to the house of Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed to Israel." (Jud. 8:35)

The most that can be said of Gideon as a man is that which

the angel said, that he was a "mighty man of valour." He loved his people, risked his life to fight for them; but he would not move without incontestable proofs that God would be with him. He apparently was not an ambitious individual since he refused the kingship when offered to him. His private character was surely not very exemplary, since he had many wives, seventy sons by them, in addition to another son by a concubine he kept at Shechem. But God made use of his might and his bravery as an instrument to deliver His people from their enemy. The Bible is unique in that it tells not only the good about an individual, but the bad as well, and of course, this is one of the many proofs of its inspiration.

After Gideon's death, Abimelech, Gideon's son by his concubine in Shechem, hired assassins to go to his father's house at Ophrah and slay all of the sons of Gideon. However the youngest son, Jotham, escaped. And so the men of Shechem made Abimelech king over them, but his rule was short-lived, lasting only about three years. Abimelech's own people revolted against his rule, and he met his death when a woman threw a millstone from a tower in an effort to kill him. Abimelech commanded his armour bearer to draw his sword and slay him, lest it be said that a woman slew him. "And his young man thrust him through and he died." (Jud. 9:54) Thus the house of Gideon came to a disgraceful end.

There follows in chapter ten a brief account of Tola, of the tribe of Issachar, who judged Israel twenty-three years, and after him Jair, a Gileadite, who judged Israel for twenty-two years. No particular record is given of either of their heroic activities. After this the people again did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baal, Ashtoroth, the gods of the Syrians, of Zidon, Moab, Ammon and the Philistines. (Jud. 10:6) And again the anger of the Lord was hot against His people and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites.

This means that Israel was beset by the enemy from both sides, the Philistines on the west and the Ammonites on the east across Jordan. The Ammonites even came across the Jordan and fought against Judah and Benjamin until they were sore distressed. (Jud. 10:9) "And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God and also served Baalim." (Jud. 10:10)

At this point it appears that God had finally and completely run out of patience with His people because of their repeated re-

bellions and idolatrous escapades with heathen gods. This is the first time God had spoken to Israel in such a manner since He threatened to destroy the whole nation at the foot of Mount Sinai after the building of the golden calf. Read carefully what God said to His people: "And the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines? The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand. Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods which ye have chosen; wherefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry to the gods you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." (Jud. 10:11-14) What a scathing indictment from God Himself against His people! It would seem that their action was so repugnant before God that He wanted nothing more to do with this rebellious people. Yet once again, after listening to their pitiful plea, God demonstrates His abundant capacity for love and mercy in spite of their rebellious actions. "And the children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord; and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." (Jud. 10:15-16) How pitiful was their plea, and how compassionate was their God as he heard their confession of guilt! At last, they were willing to accept any punishment God saw fit to inflict, if only He would deliver them from the oppression of the enemy. Dear reader, how thankful you should be that you have the privilege of serving the same long-suffering and merciful God that Israel served in the long ago!

At this point, Jephthah, the Gileadite, was summoned by his own people to lead an army against the Ammonites and the Moabites. Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan river in the land occupied by half the tribe of Manasseh. Jephthah could be called the hero of trans-Jordan. He was the son of Gilead, but his mother was a harlot, so when he grew older Gilead's legitimate sons cast him out, and he fled into the land of Tob where he surrounded himself with a group of unscrupulous men, probably plunderers and marauders. However, the people of Israel on the east side of Jordan must have recognized in him some special kind of ability similar to Ehud, Barak or Gideon, and they pleaded with him to defend them against the attacking Ammonites and Moabites. As far as can be determined, up to this time God had not been approached as to Jephthah's abilities or qualifications to lead Israel in battle, only the elders of Gilead. But "Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord", (Jud. 11:11) thereby being assured

of divine approval. His most positive answer to the challenge of the Ammonite king serves to erase any doubt as to God's part in directing his activities. Here Jephthah showed his wisdom in counselling with God before undertaking the task placed before him by the elders of Gilead. So often God's people blindly plunge head-on into important decisions without even thinking to ask God for His guidance and direction. Reader, take note, and profit thereby.

Even though Jephthah had God's blessings in this transaction, he must have had a feeling that he would fail, so he made a very rash vow on the eve of the battle that he would offer as a burnt sacrifice "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon." (Jud. 11:31) Ironically, when he returned victorious "behold his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter." (Jud. 11:34) This daughter, unnamed in the narrative, obeyed the demands of her time and accepted her father's vow, begging one favor, that she be allowed two months of solitude and mourning of her fate. At the conclusion of this period, she returned to her father "who did with her according to his vow, which he had vowed." (Jud. 11:39)

An interesting custom here is brought to light, the history or origin of which there seems to be no record. "And it was a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year." (Jud. 11:39-40) Of such a custom there is no other record.

Jephthah's gallant leadership of the trans-Jordan tribes against the children of Ammon is definite proof of the fact that regardless of one's background, he can rise to the heights and fulfill his place in life by taking the challenges as they come and by seeking God's help in overcoming them. Even though Jephthah's family disowned him because he was an illegitimate son, he eventually became the one who led Israel to victory over their enemy.

Topics for Discussion: (1) Gideon's humility, though a great leader. (2) Jealousy and the result of it among God's people. (3) The difference between Gideon and his son, Abimelech.

After Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, the tribe of Ephraim, just across the Jordan to the west, became incensed against him because he had not called upon them for help, and they threatened to destroy Jephthah. They even armed themselves for battle, no doubt jealous about his overwhelming victory and possibly afraid he would acquire too much power. And so Jephthah was forced to fight against his own brethren just because of a misunderstanding, and forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed in the conflict. This was a most regrettable situation between two tribes of Israel, but is a good example of the complete disorganization of the twelve tribes during this period. It would seem they had enough trouble with the heathen nations without fighting among themselves because of inter-tribal jealousies. However, is this not one of the greatest hindrances among professed Christians of the twentieth century in their efforts to carry out the Lord's great commission? Some congregations spend so much time and effort trying to settle problems within their own little group that they have no time to save the lost. What a tragic situation to exist among those who profess to be God's people! Jephthah judged Israel only six years, died and was buried in Gilead.

Following this strange narrative, the Book of Judges moves swiftly to describe the historically unimportant rules of several subsequent judges. Izban of Bethlehem judged Israel for seven years; and after him, Elan of Zebulun, ten years; and after him, Abdon an Ephraimite, eight years.

Chapter 13 of the Book of Judges begins with a most familiar statement: "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines forty years." (Jud. 13: 1) And thus the book plunges into a chronicle of the life and exploits of one of the most colorful characters of the Old Testament, Samson. In every respect, the life and death of Samson is novel in its form and in its concept, and is a complete and distinct departure from the earlier chapters of the Book of Judges which recount only the battles in which they engaged and a few incidents in the lives of the various judges. Samson is unique in that his birth was foretold by an angel who appeared to his mother, the wife of a certain Manoah, of the tribe of Dan. The angel gave explicit instructions that the child should be a "Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death." (Jud. 13:7) This meant that no razor should come to

his head, he should drink no wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing. It was also announced to the mother, "And he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Jud. 13:5) When the child was born, they called him Samson; and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. Even as a child, it is said of him: "And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan." (Jud. 13:25) Thus as a mere child, God began to qualify him for the work to which he had been called.

The life of Samson has puzzled many Bible scholars because of his temperament, his scheming and devious exploits, and his associations with unworthy women. However, in this narrative as in all others of the Old Testament, is found the hand of God working, using a man and his characteristics to accomplish a definite purpose. The life of Samson is just another link in the chain of God's determination to preserve a people unto Himself, through whom He may one day bring a Messiah into the world. This chain of events began when Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, and is continually forged through the centuries of Old Testament history, even up to the birth of Jesus Christ, which was the culmination of God's plan.

Samson, as a young man, went down to Timnath, a Philistine city, and fell in love with one of their daughters. He wanted her for his wife in spite of the pleadings of his mother and father, but of course, they did not realize that even this was a part of God's plan for Samson. (Jud. 14:4) On one of his trips to Timnath, a young lion attacked him, "and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would a kid, and he had nothing in his hand." (Jud. 14:6) A short time later, he went by the place where the lion's carcass lay and there found a swarm of bees with honey in the carcass of the lion. Samson went on his way eating the honey and he also gave of it to his mother and father. Later, when he went down to Timnath to take his bride, a feast was made and thirty companions were brought, at which time Samson expounded a riddle to them. His proposition was that if they could solve the riddle within seven days, he would give them thirty sheets and thirty changes of raiment; but if not, they were to give him the same. This was the riddle:

"Out of the eater came forth meat,
And out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Jud. 14:14)

These thirty companions intimidated Samson's wife to such an extent that she finally seduced Samson into telling her the answer to the riddle, but only after she had pleaded with him for seven

days. So when they met Samson, their answer was, "What is sweeter than honey, and what is stronger than a lion." The infuriated Samson replied, "if ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle." (Jud. 14:18) Enraged, Samson went down to Askalon, another city of the Philistines, slew thirty men, took of their spoil, and paid off his wager, returning to his father's house.

On his return to Timnath, he found that his wife had been given to another man. This angered Samson so that he caught three hundred foxes, took firebrands, tied the foxes tail to tail with a firebrand between each and turned them loose in the grain fields, the vineyards and the olive groves of the Philistines. Of course, this so incensed the Philistines that they killed Samson's wife and her father and followed after Samson to kill him but he hid in the rock of Etam. The Philistines came even unto Judah and demanded that they deliver Samson to them. His brethren, in time, went to where Samson was hiding, begging him to give himself up. So he allowed his own brethren to bind him with new ropes and brought him unto Lehi to deliver him to the Philistines.

But again "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax--and his hands were loosed." (Jud. 15:14) He picked up a new jawbone of an ass and with it he slew one thousand Philistines. It was here that Samson became so thirsty that God "clave a hollow place in the rock" and gave Samson water to drink. The last verse of chapter fifteen says that Samson judged Israel twenty years. Since Israel was in servitude to the Philistines for forty years, it is apparent that Samson's rule was the last twenty years of this period.

Following the slaughter of the Philistines by Samson at Ramoth-Lehi, he further shows his sensual nature by going to Gaza and visiting a woman there who was a harlot. When the people of the city learned that Samson was among them, they secured all the gates, blocked every way of escape, and lay in ambush around the city intending to take him at dawn. However, Samson arose at midnight, took the doors of the gate of the city, with two posts, bars and all, and carried them away from the city to the top of a hill. It is true that Samson was a strong man, but some of these Philistine cities were small and were not surrounded by gigantic walls, gates, etc. such as Jericho. Yet here again he demonstrates his superior strength by tearing away the very gate to the city of Gaza and carrying it away. (Jud. 16:3)

From here, Samson went to the valley of Sorek, where there was a woman he loved, Delilah. It appears that she was a Philistine also and some think she was his wife; others think of her as a concubine. Yet however strong his love for her was, she seemed to have none for him. This fact appears to be true in all of Samson's love affairs. Delilah made an agreement with the Philistines that she would learn the secret of Samson's great strength, in return for eleven hundred pieces of silver. Samson deceived her on three different occasions by lying to her about the secret of his strength. (Jud. 16:7-14) This, of course, was most disconcerting to Delilah as well as to the Philistine lords. Finally she vexed him to the point of "telling her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon my head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb; if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I will become weak, and be like any other man." (Jud. 16:17)

Delilah then made Samson to sleep with his head upon her lap and called for a man to shave off the seven locks of his head. She then began to afflict, taunt or insult him just to see if his strength was really gone, and when she saw that he could not free himself from his bonds, she called for the Philistines. "And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." (Jud. 16:20) This verse is most significant. The Lord had always been with Samson in his crucial moments, and he was certain that he could arise as before, easily break the bonds which held him and overcome his adversaries. But now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him and he knew it not. Is it possible that God's people in this present day could stray so far from the Lord's way that His Spirit would depart from them and they would not know it? It happened to Samson. But this was only the beginning of his punishment. "But the Philistines took him, and put out both his eyes, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house." (Jud. 16:21) What a price Samson had to pay for his sin! This could be an example of what sin can do to people generally. It usually blinds them to the good things of life; it binds them in its own snare, and the price is paid by rendering service to Satan. However, it is most interesting to note that, like the prodigal son, Samson came to himself. "Howbeit, the hair of his head began to grow, after he was shaven." (Jud. 16:22) This means that there was a possibility he might regain his strength and at last overcome the Philistines.

A little later the lords of the Philistines came together to cele-

brate the occasion of Samson's capture and to offer a sacrifice to their god, Dagon. The temple of Dagon was full of people who had gathered for the gala occasion. Samson was ordered to be brought out so that they might "make sport" of him, possibly to insult and ridicule and in general make a spectacle of him. They placed him between the pillars which supported the house so he could be seen by all. Poor blind Samson knew that the end was near for him, and he asked a small lad near him to lead him to the pillars so that he could lean upon them. "Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women." (Jud. 16:27) So Samson called upon the name of the Lord who had departed from him: "O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines! And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which Samson slew at his death were more than they which he slew in life." (Jud. 16:28-30) His brethren came down, took his body, and buried him in the burying place of his father, Manoah.

Samson does not appear to have left any family. Nothing is mentioned of children by any of the women of his life. It might be observed that had he married according to the laws of his people, he might have been more useful and happy. On the other hand, it must be remembered that his desire for the first Philistine woman was permitted of God, (Jud. 14:4), evidently as a means of bringing about the eventual deliverance of Israel from the Philistines. In spite of Samson's strength, he was a man subject to his own passions, showed little judgment in his selection of female friends, and proved himself to be a dupe of their tricks against him. He seldom sought counsel from God, but time and again it says that the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him. For all this, Samson's life is one of the most dramatic portions of the Old Testament; and despite his forays into the comic, the ridiculous, and the knavish types of activities, the closing scene portrays him as a tragic and yet devout individual. In his final captivity, blindness and mistreatment, he forgot the foolhardiness of his youth, and prayed to God to help him wreak vengeance upon his enemies. With that request he died along with all the Philistines, fulfilling his role and delivering his people once more from the enemy.

The story of Samson actually brings the Book of Judges to a close. Chapters 17 through 21 relate narratives of two events which took place during the period of the judges, namely; the migration of some of the Danites northward, and the war against the Benjamites. These are purely historical incidents and are not built around the heroism of any particular individual as is the rest of the book. Several times in these five chapters can be found the statement: "At that time there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

The Danites, evidently having no leader with which to counsel, sought additional territory. They sent five men from Zorah and Eshtaol to spy out the land. As they travelled northward through the land of Ephraim, they came upon a place where Micah, an Ephraimite, had built a place of worship, and had actually hired a Levite to serve his house as a priest. The Danites requested the priest to ask counsel with God, and the priest told them to go in peace. (Jud. 18:6) The Danite spies travelled far to the north and across Jordan where they found an ideal spot at Laish, which they felt would be easily conquered. Reporting back to the people, they prepared six hundred men for battle who, with their families, started for Laish. As they went through Mount Ephraim, they took Micah's ephod, teraphim and graven image, and hired his priest for themselves as they travelled northward. Thus the Danites proceeded to conquer the people of Laish in the very northernmost part of the land of Canaan. This portion, of course, was in addition to their original inheritance in the south, next to the Philistine border. Thus the expression, "from Dan to Beersheba", denoting the entire length of the land from the north to the south which was occupied by the children of Israel.

It would possibly be an injustice to accuse Micah of practicing idolatry in the making of the image. It does not appear that this was his purpose. He was trying to do the best he knew to worship God, even to the hiring of a priest from the tribe of Levi. It must be remembered that at that time there was no ruler in Israel.

Chapters 19 through 21 give an account of a war declared by the leaders of all the tribes of Israel against the tribe of Benjamin, brought on by the ill treatment and murder of a Levite's concubine by the men of Gibeah, which was a Benjamite city. After three attempts to make battle against Benjamin, the other tribes finally overcame them, destroying twenty-five thousand and one hundred men the first day. Only six hundred men escaped and fled to the mountains. However, in order to preserve the tribe of Benjamin,

plans were eventually made and carried out by the other tribes to supply wives for these six hundred men. This is a very unusual story.

Thus ends the Book of Judges; a work which, while it introduces the history of Samuel and of the kings of Israel, it furnishes a supplement to the Book of Joshua, or the conquest of Canaan. This is the only account of the period of Israel's history, revealing times of prosperity and service to God, as well as times of anarchy, confusion and servitude to the heathen nations. The period extended approximately four hundred fifty years. At the end of this period, the people seem to begin to weld themselves together as a nation, which was soon to develop rapidly into one of the greatest of ancient times under Saul, David and Solomon.

Topics for Discussion: (1) Discuss Samson's strength and his weaknesses relative to carrying out his duties as a judge. (2) Discuss verse in Jud. 16:20. (3) Samson's ultimate victory.

Once again, in the Book of Ruth, can be seen the hand of Almighty God working to preserve a people in the land for one purpose, that through them He may one day bring the Messiah into the world. As to time, all that is known is that these happenings occurred during the "days when the judges ruled." (Ruth 1:1) Because of a dirth of food in Judah, Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, were forced to flee from their home in Bethlehem of Judah, and make their abode in the land of Moab. Moab was just across the Jordan from Judah to the east and south, bordering also on the eastern shore of the Salt (Dead) Sea. While in that land, the two sons married Moabitish women, Orpah and Ruth. After Elimelech died, the family remained in Moab about ten years at which time the two sons of Naomi died also, leaving her with the two daughters-in-law.

Naomi, deciding to return to her own people, attempted to persuade Orpah and Ruth to remain in their own land, which Orpah decided to do. However, Ruth clave unto Naomi, desiring to return with her to Bethlehem. Listen to Ruth as she pleads: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." (Ruth 1:16-17)

The story of Ruth as she gleaned in the barley fields of Boaz in Bethlehem is one of the beautiful romances of the Old Testament. Ruth must have been a beautiful woman, since Boaz was immediately attracted to her. For this reason it would appear that she looked different from the rest of the gleaners. And so Boaz showed her many favors, in that she gathered more grain than all the rest of the gleaners. Ruth was also modest as well as industrious which served all the more to attract Boaz' attention and engage his affection for her.

Naomi, knowing that Boaz was a kinsman of her late husband, Elimelech, proceeded to advise Ruth how to conduct herself toward Boaz. It must be stated to Boaz' credit, that in view of the circumstances, he conducted himself as a person of extraordinary prudence and continence, or else the whole incident might have proven fatal for Ruth. However, Naomi's plan was successful, and Boaz, desiring Ruth as his wife, proceeded according to the

law to redeem the inheritance of Elimelech which belonged to Ruth. "So Boaz took Ruth and she was his wife." (Ruth 4:13) Of this union was born a son, Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

And so Ruth, a Moabitess, proselyted to the true God of Israel, became the great grandmother of King David of whom God said "is a man after mine own heart." The lineage of Ruth can be definitely traced down through the kings of Judah to Jesus Christ, who was prophesied to come of the seed of David, as a King to reign over His people. Even today this same Jesus lives and reigns over His kingdom, the Church, and will continue to do so until that day when it shall be delivered up to the Father.

It may be significant to note the fact that Ruth was a Gentile by birth, yet God saw fit to inject her into the lineage of Jesus, the Messiah. Then, too, this may relate to the fact that Jesus came into the world not to save the Jews only, but also the Gentiles.

The Book of Ruth is decidedly refreshing after reading all the accounts of bloodshed and struggle in the books of Joshua and Judges. For all the sentimentality and sweetness of Ruth, she remains one of the most delightful and determined characters in the Bible, and one of the rare women who played a leading role in the history of God's people.

Although no religious doctrine or law is taught in the Book of Ruth, it is filled with the spirit of piety, human kindness, and the honest intentions of good people. This is what makes it so refreshing. It cannot be read without a feeling of being lifted onto a higher plane of life than that which pervades the everyday world.

In short, it is a delightful story, while at the same time it supplies another connecting link in the chain of God's plan to save the world from sin. The reader cannot fail to profit from a careful study of the Book of Ruth.

Topics for Discussion: (1) Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law. (2) Do we see God's providence working in this story? (3) The value of fairness in all of our dealings. (Cf. Boaz).

THE END

