

Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

April 17 – Joshua 8: 30 – 35

After the Israelites gain a strong footing in the Promised land they renew the covenant just as Moses had instructed them to do in Deuteronomy 27.

Deuteronomy 27:9-13 *Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, "Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give tells you today." ¹¹ On the same day Moses commanded the people: ¹² When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. ¹³ And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.*

As you read this passage try to mentally picture the layout and what is going on. As the Israelites stand before the Lord to renew their covenant vows, half of the tribes stand at the foot of Mount Ebal and pronounce curses on those who would break the law. The other half of the tribes stand at the foot of Mount Gerizim and pronounce blessings on those who would keep the law. According to God's instructions in Deuteronomy 27 on Mount Ebal a monument is built that is made of stones which are covered in plaster and the 10 Commandments are inscribed in the plaster. It is significant that this monument to the law was placed on Mount Ebal, the same mount that had the curses, because as Paul tells us if we rely on the law for our righteousness it can only bring a curse.

Galatians 3:10 *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."*

So how do we get to the blessings? Stop and think about what this passage tells us is in the valley between the mount of curses and mount of blessings—it is an altar where sacrifice can be made. It is only through a sacrifice that we can come to the blessings. Christ's sacrifice on the cross removed the curse of the law.

Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."*

That is how the curse of sin is removed from our lives, but that still doesn't get us to the blessing. It is the sacrifice of Christ that does that

as well, because the sacrifice of Christ doesn't just remove the curse of sin it also brings the blessing of righteousness.

Romans 3:21-22 *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*

Consider the words of Psalm 32, and give thanks for the blessing of forgiveness and righteousness that we have in Christ.

Psalm 32: 1 – 2 *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

April 18 – Joshua 14: 6 – 14

Today's reading contains the amazing story of Caleb. As you may recall Caleb was one of the 12 spies sent out by Moses to explore the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua came back with a good report about the land. Only Caleb and Joshua believed that God would give them this land just as He had promised. Because of their faith Caleb and Joshua were the only two people from their generation who were allowed by God to enter the Promised Land. Now that the Israelites have established themselves in the land, it is time for the land to be divided among the tribes and the families. Caleb is 85 years old. What kind of land do you think he would ask for? Wouldn't you expect him to ask for a prime piece of land that would be easy to settle into? You might, but that is not what Caleb asks for. He asks for the high country, the unsettled country. The part of the country that still has people who seem like giants living in it. Caleb is just as confident today as he was 40 years earlier that God would grant him success and victory over all who would stand opposed to him.

We have those same precious promises in Christ.

1 John 5:4-5 *everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

We too can be assured of victory, assured of overcoming the world, if we will just stand firm in our faith.

*No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.*

*No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand.*

Keith Getty, Stuart Townsend "In Christ Alone"

April 19 – Joshua 24: 1 – 27

As Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, his first task was to conquer the land, second to settle the land, and third to teach the Israelites how to worship in the land. The first 22 chapters of the book of Joshua deal with the conquest of the land and the division of the land among the 12 tribes. Now in chapters 23 and 24, Joshua reminds the Israelites that this land they have been given is a gift of God's grace, and if the Israelites want to continue to live in that grace and in God's blessing, they must be faithful and uphold their part of the covenant. That is the pattern of all of the covenants that God makes with his people. God freely gives us His grace with no strings or conditions attached to it, but then He call us to respond to the grace that He has shown to us by worshipping Him alone and living in obedience to His rule in our lives.

That is why in chapter 24 Joshua starts by reminding the Israelites of all that God has done for them. To do this, Joshua starts by pointing out that Abraham, the father of Israel, wasn't even a worshipper of God when he was first called by God. The same is true for us.

Ephesians 2:1-7 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved.*

We were nothing before God called us and showed his mercy in our lives. We were dead in our sins, we were following our own sinful natures, but then God intervened in our lives and changed everything by showing us His grace. But God doesn't stop with just showing us grace. In verses 3 to 13 of Joshua 24, Joshua reminds the Israelites of God's covenant faithfulness, as He worked to make Israel into a great nation and brought them into their inheritance in the Promised Land. Notice in verses 12 to 13 that Joshua reminds the Israelites that it was God who did everything for them. The same is true for us. God is the one who works in us to make us what He wants us to be. We can cooperate in the process, but we are a work of God from start to finish, and God is the one who is doing it all.

Ephesians 2:6-10 *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Based on all that God had done for Israel, Joshua calls the Israelites to make a decision about who they will worship and serve as they live in the Promised Land. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve....but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." The choice we have in this process is how we will respond to God's grace in our lives. Will we worship and serve Him, or will we worship other things and serve ourselves? There is only one logical choice. Think of what Paul says in Romans 12:

Romans 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.*

April 20 – Judges 1: 1 – 2: 5

After Joshua's death there is a vacuum of human leadership in Israel. The Book of Judges chronicles that vacuum. Joshua had led Israel well, in conquering significant parts of the Promised Land and settling the Israelites there, but there was still much to be done. As the Book of Judges opens, we get an update on the progress the various tribes were making toward the complete conquest of the land. Some of the reports are quite encouraging, but overall, Judges 1 tells the story of a faltering and incomplete conquest. In fact, Judges 1 really tells the story of compromise. Pay close attention to verses 21 – 35.

In these verses there are three main themes that get repeated over and over again:

1. The tribes 'did not drive out' their enemies. (21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33).
2. Having not driven them out, they thought they might as well carry on and simply live alongside them. (21, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33).
3. In fact, instead of driving them out, the Israelites decided they would keep them under their control and make these idolatrous and wicked Canaanite people slaves and forced labourers. (28, 30, 33, 35).

From a human standpoint this may have seemed like a good plan, but it would lead to Israel's downfall. God had repeatedly warned Israel that this was not to happen, and laid out clearly what would happen if they disobeyed His commands by allowing other nations to continue living in the land.

Exodus 34:11-16 *Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ¹² Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. ¹³ Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. ¹⁴ Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. ¹⁵ "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. ¹⁶ And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.*

God knew that these evil people and their evil ways would become a trap and lead Israel astray, which as you read the history of Israel, is exactly what happened. Why did the Israelites disobey God and compromise with these evil people? Because they thought they were strong enough spiritually to live alongside of the evil without being influenced by it.

1 Corinthians 10:11-12 *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

This is where the book of Judges comes back and speaks directly to us as Christians. God has commanded His believers today not to compromise with the world.

1 John 2:15-17 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-- comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 *Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony can there be between Christ and the Devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹⁷ Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you.*

¹⁸ And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. "

God tells us this for the same reason that He commanded Israel not to make any agreements with the nations they had to drive out, because how easy it is for us to be wrongly influenced and led away from the truth.

The truth is, if we, like the Israelites, are making compromises regarding our faith, we may be able to handle it for a while, but eventually we will give in. That is why the Bible tells us to flee from Satan and temptation.

James 4:7 *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

2 Timothy 2:22 *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

1 Timothy 6:10-11 *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.*

1 Corinthians 10:13-14 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. ¹⁴ Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*

For Israel, the beginning of their downfall was a failure to fully obey God. They thought they could dabble around the edges of sin without succumbing to its power, but they were wrong and so are we when we think this way. Jesus, our savior, our example, lived a perfectly sinless life because he cared more about pleasing the Father and doing the Father's will than anything else. As we focus on Jesus and what he did for us at the cross, our love for him should increase, which in turn should increase our desire to serve him. So, as a result of that, our desire to dabble in temptation will diminish.

Philippians 4:8 *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-- think about such things.*

April 21 – Judges 2: 16 – 3: 6

There are several significant things in these verses that we should notice. First, we can see the whole pattern of the Book of Judges in these verses. Israel sins and forsakes God, God disciplines Israel by raising the countries around them to plunder and mistreat the Israelites,

God then raises up a judge who calls the Israelites to repentance, and then God uses the judge to defeat the people who are oppressing the Israelites. Unfortunately, this pattern repeats itself over and over again during the 400 years that the Book of Judges covers.

The second thing we can see in this passage is the importance of remembering what God has done for us through Christ. What is the reason that the Israelites keep falling into sin? Look at verses 10, 11 and 12 of chapter 2. It is because they forgot what God had done. The basis for Israel's obedience was always remembering what God had done for them leading them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The same is true for us. The basis for our obedience is the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

If we forget that sacrifice, it will directly impact our obedience. We must learn to love Christ more than we love our sin. Remembering is the first step in learning to love Christ more.

1 Corinthians 1:26 - 2:1 *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*

That is why observing the Lord's Supper is so important for us to observe, and to take seriously when we do observe it.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

The third thing we should take away from today's reading is the reason why God allows these foreign nations to continue to exist and be a problem for the Israelites. It's found beginning in chapter 2, verse 20,

and continuing to chapter 3, verse 2. God allowed these nations to continue to exist to test the faith of the Israelites and train them. It is the same reason God allows suffering to come into our lives—to test our faith and to train us.

James 1:2-4 *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

April 22 – Judges 3: 7 – 11

In today's reading we see the first cycle of sin, discipline, repentance, and deliverance in the Book of Judges. The Israelites had sinned by falling into idol worship, and because of their sin God gave them over to the King of Aram for 8 years. After 8 years of being subject to the King of Aram's oppression they cried out to God for deliverance and God raised up a man named Othniel to be their judge and deliverer.

Othniel came from good stock—he was Caleb's nephew. The name Othniel means 'Lion of God' and in verse 10 we read that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." When Israel had forgotten God, the Lord does two things; First, He allows them to be defeated by that which their own hearts were being drawn to – prideful independence. Second, God raised up a deliverer who will remind them again of the power of God and their constant need to looking and relying upon God for His power in their life. In the Old Testament it was an unusual phenomenon for the Spirit of the Lord to come upon a man, but because of Jesus it is the normal thing for those who belong to God.

On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples Peter quotes this prophecy from the Book of Joel:

Acts 2:17-18 *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

Stop and think about this. All Christians have the Spirit and the power of the Lord upon them, just as Othniel did, because of Jesus. Jesus, in fact, promised that this would be the case.

Acts 1:8 *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The writers of the New Testament (especially Paul) were constantly trying to focus our attention on the fact that knowing God's life and power is critical if we are to be effective in our Christian life.

2 Peter 1:3 *His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*

Ephesians 3:16-21 *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.*

Notice how this story ends in Judges 3:11. Because of the power of the Lord that came upon Othniel the land had peace for 40 years. Knowing the power of the Lord through the Spirit of the Lord brings peace to our lives. That's why Paul prayed this prayer for the believers in Ephesus.

Ephesians 1:18-23 *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Paul's prayer is just as true for us today! We too must see and know "the incomparably great power for us who believe."

April 23 – Judges 3: 12 – 30

This story is one of the more fascinating stories in all the Bible. When I was teaching Sunday School to a group of middle school boys they loved the gory details of this story of deliverance. Once again, Israel has fallen into idol worship. Once again, God has disciplined Israel this time by giving them over to the King of Moab. Once again, God raises up a deliverer, Ehud, the left handed judge. Ehud made for himself a two-edged sword which he plunged into the belly of this overweight king, bringing his oppression of Israel to an end. A two edged sword was how holy war was fought in the Old Testament. As Christians, we too

are called to fight a holy war. We too are called to use the sword—not a sword made of steel, but the sword of God’s Word.

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

The defeat of the enemy comes first through meditating on the word of God, then in allowing that meditation to overflow in praise and thankfulness. And finally, we see from this passage in Judges, that the enemy is defeated as the double-edged sword is thrust into the enemy’s side. For us, (and especially when trials arise) this means using the word of God as Jesus did to defeat the enemy in the wilderness. It means declaring the truth of the word, declaring the promises of God. It means using the truth of God’s word as your basis of praise and thankfulness to Him. It means renewing your mind with its truth when the arrows of doubt from the enemy flood in. Submit yourself to God, resist the enemy with the use of the sword of God’s Word and he will flee from you! This is how the cycle of sin and oppression is defeated in our lives as we engage in Holy War against Satan—the prince of this world.

Ephesians 6:17 *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*