

Studies from the Scriptures

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

One God, One People, One Land

John Stevenson

Redeemer Publishing

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To Paula

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A special and heartfelt thanks to
Lou Ellen Hardy
for her priceless work in
proofreading, questioning,
and suggesting

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FORWARD

I was raised in a Christian family, my parents having professed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ when I was still very young. It became something of a family tradition that the family would sit around the dining room table each evening after supper and read through a chapter or two of the Bible. These regular Bible readings knew no limitations and they took us from Genesis to Revelation. As a young boy, I found the narratives of the Historical Books to be particularly adept at catching the imagination. Characters like Joshua, Gideon, David, and Elijah numbered among my boyhood heroes. By the time I came to Bible College and seminary, I was already well versed in the stories of the Historical Books.

But knowing the stories of those narratives and understanding their historical and theological significance are not the same thing. I am indebted to a long line of college and seminary professors that helped to deepen my understanding of these books and their impact upon the redemptive story of the Bible.

My journey to the college classroom where I currently teach followed a circuitous route that involved a career as a fire fighter, rising through the ranks to become a battalion chief. It was an active profession and perhaps contributed to my penchant for the Historical Books of the Old Testament, for they are filled with action and activity.

The Christian faith is a religion rooted in history. While it contains certain theological suppositions, its doctrines are largely statements of historical fact. One need only to go through the Apostles' Creed to see that it is primarily a listing of who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do in history.

The same holds true for the Hebrew Scriptures. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God who delivered the Israelites and brought them through the Red Sea. He is the God who spoke to the fathers through the prophets and He is the God who judged His people when they sinned and who restored them when they repented. He is the God who has worked and who continues to work in history.

INTRODUCTION

One God, One People, One Land

The Bible is unabashedly monotheistic. While this seems to be stating the obvious, it is a statement that attains a striking contrast when compared to the regular and near exclusive polytheism of antiquity. It is commonly asserted that the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten was the world's first monotheist, but if we accept the Hebrew Bible's dating of the Exodus Event (as opposed to the alternate rendition given in the Greek Septuagint), then we find that Akhenaten's monotheism was preceded by that of Moses by at least a generation. Indeed, it might be argued that, if we take the events of the Exodus Event at face value, then the later Akhenaten might have had good reason to consider the wisdom of directing worship to a single deity, for Egypt had witnessed her greatest defeat at the hands of the single God of a host of nation-slaves.

As the book of Joshua opens, both Moses and Akhenaten have passed on and while Egypt has since returned to its polytheistic roots, the nation of Israelites will be called to continue in the worship of Yahweh and their sole and exclusive God. The question that will be set before them will be whether they will continue in their faithfulness to the One true God or whether they will engage in the idolatry of the rest of the world. This same question will remain as one of the three major themes throughout the remainder of the Historical Books of the Old Testament.

Complementing this theme are its two counterparts: that Israel was called to be one people and that they were promised a land. As the Israelites first enter the land under Joshua, the first of these themes is already under siege as two and a half tribes of Israel have already decided that the Promised Land does not hold as much promise to them. They have elected to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River where they will settle on these lands rather than take an inheritance in Canaan. They are given permission to do so, although their men will be required to offer their military service to Joshua, in effect, fighting for a land they will not inherit.

Once the conquest of the Promised Land is completed, or at least, as near complete as takes place within the pages of Joshua's account, the tribes settle in their allotted territories and quickly lose all sense of their united national purpose. Though we continue to refer to Israel throughout the days of the

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Judges as a separate and distinct people group, there seems to be lacking a unity to that group and there are even instances to be found in which the various tribes of Israel are warring against one another. It is only when Saul is recognized as king that we see a brief time of national unity and even this does not continue when David is recognized as the successor to Saul, for the recognition of his kingship is to be found only in Judah for the first seven years of his reign.

So it is that the only continuous period of Israelite unity takes place in the last thirty-three years of the reign of David and the entire reign of his son Solomon. Once Solomon has passed from the scene, the old tribal divisions again assert themselves and the people are divided, this time into the north and the south.

Joshua & Judges	Saul-Solomon	Judah & Israel	Judah Alone
The tribes exhibit a certain degree of unity in times of crisis	United nation, though this is not the case with first seven years of David's reign	Israelites divided into northern kingdom of Israel & southern kingdom of Judah	After the northern kingdom taken into captivity, Judah is alone
Limited unity	Unity	No Unity	

The two-kingdom period involves the most obvious era of disunity as the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah are often to be seen as competitors and even at war with one another. Any hope for a complete reconciliation seems to vanish when, in 721 B.C., the northern kingdom is taken away into a captivity from which it does not return. And yet, there are suggestions within the Historical Books that we should not consider the idea of one people to have been abandoned. This is seen in the days of Josiah, long after the ten tribes of Israel had gone away into captivity, when the effects of Josiah's repentance were felt *in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, even as far as Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins* (2 Chronicles 34:6). In the same way 2 Chronicles 35:18 speaks of the presences of both Judah and Israel at the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem. This is explained in 2 Chronicles 34:9 when we see a reference to monies collected *from Manasseh and Ephraim, and from all the remnant of Israel, and from all Judah and Benjamin and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* This idea of a remnant is echoed in the prophets who spoke of a remnant of

Israel surviving the judgment of God.

A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

22 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea,

Only a remnant within them will return;

A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.

(Isaiah 10:21-22).

The apostle Paul cites this same prophecy in Romans 9:27-28 to show that God's promise of one people always involved a remnant and that it has its ultimate fulfillment in the ingrafting of Gentiles into that remnant to form a new covenant community so that, within this spiritually organic body made up of both Jew and Gentile, *all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26)*.

The promise of a land for the people of God hearkens back to the days of Abraham when he was told of a land that God would give to him and to his descendants. Accordingly, he was told to go forth from his country, his relatives, and his father's house to a land which God would show him (Genesis 12:1). When he came to the Promised Land, he found it inhabited and domesticated so that, at the end of his life, Abraham described himself as merely a stranger and a sojourner in the land of Canaan (Genesis 23:4). The Abraham narrative comes to a close with that patriarch owning only the small plot of ground in which he and his wife are to be buried. By the time we complete the book of Genesis, the Israelites are not even sojourning in the land of Canaan, for they have now relocated to Egypt.

More than four hundred years later, the book of Joshua opens with the Israelites preparing to return once again to the land of promise. It is no less inhabited than when they departed. This time they will be entering, not as strangers and sojourners, but as invaders and conquerors. This picture is often morally problematic to our 21st century sensitivities but should be viewed in the context of the earlier promise of the Lord that such a judgment was to be delayed for hundreds of years because *the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete (Genesis 15:16)*. Thus Israel is used in this instance as the tool of judgment against the inhabitants of Canaan in the same way that other nations will later be used as a tool for judgment again unfaithful Israel.

While the book of Joshua records the conquest of the land, we learn from Joshua 13:1 that this conquest was not completed in Joshua's day. In

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addition to various fortified cities that successfully held out, the Israelites found they were often able to take possession of the hill country; but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had iron chariots (*Judges 1:19*). It was not until the days of David and Solomon that the land was completely subjugated. In *2 Samuel 7:1* we read of David's reign and how *the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies*. This carried over into the reign of Solomon of whom we read:

So Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (1 Kings 4:25).

This idea of each man enjoying his own vine and fig tree was to become a byword both for the glory days of Solomon as well as for the promise of a prosperity to come. The prophets would look forward to a time when:

*Each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:4).*

“In that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree.” (Zechariah 3:10).

Instead of a return to the glory days of Solomon, the Historical Books tell us how first the northern kingdom of Israel and then the southern Kingdom of Judah were each taken away into captivity. Israel was taken by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. and Judah fell to Babylon in 586 B.C. The former never returned; the latter saw a series of limited returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

The historical books come to a close with a remnant of the Jews back in their land as one people worshiping one God, yet there is an obvious expectation of more to come. One thing they lack is the manifest presence of God. This had been evident in the days of the wilderness wanderings when the glory cloud would rest on the tabernacle and when the Israelites were accompanied by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. That manifestation saw a return at the completion of Solomon's temple when, once again, the cloud filled the temple as the presence of the Lord was seen in this most visible manner.

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One can imagine the attitude of expectancy in which the Jews of the days of Zerubbabel completed the rebuilding of the temple and its final dedication. Would it happen again? Would the presence of the Lord again return to His temple as He had done before?

Instead, the Old Testament closes with a promise, found in the pages of Malachi, the last of the prophets. It is a promise that the Lord would suddenly come to His temple (Malachi 3:1), but that coming would be preceded by the sending of Elijah the prophet who would prepare the way, restoring the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 3:5-6).

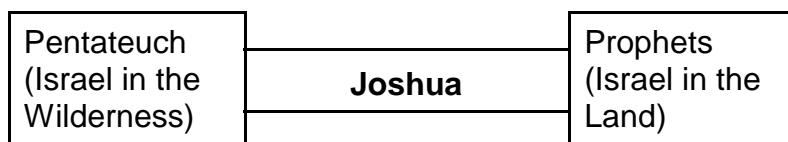
The Old Testament ends on this note with one people in one land serving one God. Yet there is an expectation in this final note that there is a symphony to come that will involve a greater presence of the living God, a greater people bound, not to a small section of real estate in the Middle East, but who shall be as numerous as the sands of the sea and as the stars of the sky, and a heavenly country of which the earthly is but a pale reflection.

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40).

JOSHUA

The Book of the Conquest

The book of Joshua heads the *Nabi'im* – the collection of books known as “the Prophets.” These books cover the period of Israel's history from the entrance into the promised land to the Babylonian Exile. Joshua is the bridge which brings the people of God from the Wilderness wanderings into the land.



THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The book of Joshua takes up where Deuteronomy leaves off with the Israelites about to enter the promised land.

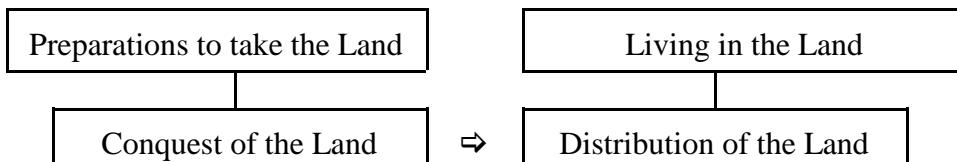
Deuteronomy	Joshua
Israelites in the Wilderness.	Israelites entering into the Promised Land.
A vision for faith.	A venture of faith.
Israel promised an inheritance.	Israel takes possession of its inheritance.
Faith in principle.	Faith in action.
Possibility.	Realization.

Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses. The book of Joshua will end with the death of Joshua. As the book of Joshua opens, Moses has just died. Before his death, he had laid his hands upon Joshua who was to be the new leader. This book can be divided into two parts.

1. The first part details the actual taking of the land.
2. The second part deals with the distribution of that land to the various tribes of Israel.

Joshua - The Book of the Conquest			
1:1 - 5:15	6:1 - 12:24	13:1 - 22:9	22:10 - 24:33
Preparations to take the Land	Conquest of the Land	Distribution of the Land	Living in the Land
Remembrance	Action	Inheritance	Remembrance
Initial Appeal	In the Land		Closing Appeal

This book is actually arranged in the format of a large chiastic parallel. Thus, it can be seen that this book begins and ends with a focus upon the Covenant of the Lord with His people.



This is the message of the book of Joshua. It is that God has been faithful to keep His promises regarding a land and an inheritance for His people. Because God has been faithful in the keeping of His covenant relationship, so also the people of Israel are to be faithful in keeping the terms of the covenant.

AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

The author of the book is not specifically identified within the book, although there is the occasional use of the plural pronoun ("we"), indicating his identification with the Israelites coming into the land.

For the sons of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, that is, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished because they did not listen to the

voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord had sworn that He would not let them see the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Joshua 5:6).

This could be an editorial “us” and does not automatically mandate that the writer had been in the wilderness (verse 1 of the same chapter has a similar plural pronoun, but only in certain Hebrew manuscripts).

1. Likewise, there is an indication that Rahab was still living at the time of the writing of this book (Joshua 6:25).
2. The Talmud states that this book was written by Joshua himself, that Eleazar wrote the section detailing Joshua's death and that Phinehas added the verses telling of Eleazar's death.
3. However, there are several other events about which Joshua could not have written, since they took place after his death.
 - Caleb's conquest of Hebron (Joshua 15:13-14 with Judges 1:1, 10, 20).
 - Othniel's capture of Debir (Joshua 15:15-19 with Judges 1:1; 1:11-15).
 - The migration of Dan to Leshem (Joshua 19:47 with Judges 17:18 indicates that this was a time when idolatry was permitted; this did not take place until after the death of Joshua - Joshua 24:31).
 - The town of Zephath had its name changed to Hormah in the days of the Judges (Joshua 12:14; 15:30 with Judges 1:16-17).
4. There are also certain factors which indicate later editorial additions to the book. On several occasions we are given the modern equivalents for older names of places (Joshua 15:9,49,54).

Joshua 6:24 makes reference to “silver and gold and vessels of bronze and iron” that were saved for the “House of the Lord.” This phrasing has been taken to indicate that Joshua was written after the building of the Temple. However, it is possible that the *Beyth-Yahweh* is merely used to describe the “dwelling-place of the Lord.”

An example of this type of usage is seen in instances where Abraham describe his house (Genesis 14:14; 15:2-3; 17:12-13) and in Exodus 23:19 soon after the construction of the Tabernacle.

The book also gives an evaluation of the elders who outlived Joshua.

And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the Lord which He had done for Israel. (Joshua 24:31).

5. The book of Joshua also makes reference to other written documents in the book of Jasher (10:13) and of a written description of the land which Joshua ordered to be written (18:9).

JOSHUA AS THE SECOND MOSES

The book of Joshua seems to contain a number of deliberate parallels that are meant to make us see Joshua as the successor to Moses. The following parallel is pointed out by Dale Allison (1997:27).

Moses	Joshua
Sends spies into the land (Numbers 13)	Sends spies into the land (Joshua 2)
The song of the Sea: “All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away, terror and dread fall upon them” (Exodus 15).	Rahab says: “The fear of you has fallen upon us and... all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you” (Joshua 2).
Israel celebrates the Passover and shortly afterward eats manna (Exodus 12).	Israel celebrates the Passover and afterward the manna dries up (Joshua 5:10-13).
Moses has a vision and is told: “Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground (Exodus 3:5).	Joshua has a vision and is told: “Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground (Joshua 5:15).
When Moses, with the staff of God, holds up his hands, the battle goes to Israel (Exodus 17).	When Joshua stretches out his hand with its sword, the victory goes to Israel (Joshua 8).

<p>Moses delivers a farewell speech that includes a reference to his old age (Deut 31:2), promises future victory over people of the land (31:3-5), calls for obedience to the Torah (31:12-13, and sets forth the alternative of serving God or other gods and the consequent blessings and curses (30:15-20).</p>	<p>Joshua delivers a farewell speech that includes a reference to his old age (Josh 23:2), promises future victory over people of the land (23:4-5), calls for obedience to the Torah (23:6), and sets forth the alternative of serving God or other gods and the consequent blessings and curses (23:6-16).</p>
<p>Moses mediates a covenant; the people say: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Ex 24:7).</p>	<p>Joshua mediates a covenant; the people say: “The Lord our God we will serve, Him we will obey” (Joshua 24:24).</p>

THE CHARGE TO JOSHUA (JOSHUA 1)

“Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.” (Joshua 1:6).

Four times in this chapter, Joshua is told to “be strong and courageous.” But that is not all. Before Moses died, he told Joshua twice to “be strong and courageous” (Deuteronomy 31:6-7). And again, when the Lord commissioned Joshua, He told him to “be strong and courageous” (Deuteronomy 31:23).

And now, in this opening chapter of Joshua, the Lord tells him three times to “be strong and courageous” (1:6,7,9) and then the people of Israel respond by charging Joshua to “be strong and courageous” (1:18). When this sort of repetition takes place in the Scriptures, one can be certain that there is a reason for it.

1. Why is this repeated so many times? It is because Joshua was going to need strength and courage.
 - a. First, God told Joshua to be strong and courageous because he would have to take the land (1:6).

The good news is that God had given Him the land; the bad

news was that He gave it to someone else first. Joshua was facing a land of walled cities. And to make matters worse, he had no siege engines.

- b. Secondly, God told Joshua to be strong and courageous because he would have to obey God's law (1:7). It takes courage to obey God when everybody else isn't. It takes even more courage to obey God as a leader and to condemn sin when public opinion says it's okay.
- c. Thirdly, God told Joshua to be strong and courageous because the Lord would be with him (1:9). A leader has to fake it, even when he doesn't feel it. Inside, the leader is often scared to death. But it helps a leader to know that he is not alone.

Joshua was called to conquer a land. We have been called to conquer the world. Our calling is to make disciples of every nation. Our weapons are different, for we do not fight against flesh and blood. But the need for strength and courage is no less.

2. Second Best.

In the midst of this charge to Joshua, there is also a charge and a call to the two and a half tribes which had chosen lands on the east bank of the Jordan to be their inheritance.

And to the Reubenites and to the Gadites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, "Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, 'The Lord your God gives you rest, and will give you this land.' Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but you shall cross before your brothers in battle array, all your valiant warriors, and shall help them, until the Lord gives your brothers rest, as He gives you, and they also possess the land which the Lord your God is giving them. Then you shall return to your own land, and possess that which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise." (Joshua 1:12-15).

This is the story of the two and a half tribes who took God's second best. In Numbers 32, these tribes looked at the land to the west of the Jordan River and they said to themselves, "This sure is a lot better than the wilderness." And so, they sent representatives to Moses and asked for this land as their inheritance. This was God's second best. It was to cost them dearly.

- a. First, it was not flowing with milk and honey.
It was better than the wilderness, but it was not as good as the promised land.
- b. Secondly, they were to serve as a buffer state between Israel and the other nations of the world. This meant that every time the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Assyrians, or the Babylonians got mad, they first attacked these two and a half tribes.
- c. Third, they had to go into the Promised Land and fight for land that would not be their own. While they were there, they would see what they had given up.

There is a lesson here about the danger of settling for second best; for taking what you see instead of that which God has promised. I have seen far too many girls who married the first guy who came along and who, in doing so, got God's second best. Don't take second best and don't be second best.

SPYING OUT THE LAND (JOSHUA 2)

1. Rahab: *Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. (Joshua 2:1).*

A lot of Christians have trouble accepting the fact that there is a prostitute in the Bible. Not only that, but in the New Testament she is praised.

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had

welcomed the spies in peace. (Hebrews 11:31).

Not only is she praised, her name is found in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). She is said to be the mother of Boaz and the wife of Salmon.

Some commentaries have tried to suggest that Rahab was only an innkeeper. But that isn't true. This woman was a prostitute. She was an *ishih zonah* - a woman of harlotry. There is a lesson here. It is that the church is not a gathering for good people. The church is a hospital for sinners. We say we believe that, but our actions often show that we don't. We become proud of our own righteousness.

2. Rahab's Deception.

And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land."

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it came about when it was time to shut the gate, at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."

But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. (Joshua 2:3-6).

Rahab lied through her teeth. And yet, she is praised in the New Testament and held up as an example of faith. How can we reconcile this? Rahab is never commended for her lying. She is commended for her faithfulness. The heroes (and heroines) of the Bible are real people who had real problems just like you and me. They are not stained-glass saints. They are real people.

David is described as a man after God's own heart. He was the greatest king of Israel. His reign was considered the golden age. He wrote beautiful songs of worship to the Lord. There are a lot of good things that the Bible tells us about David. But the Bible never commends him for his affair with Bathsheba.

Peter was a great apostle. He stood up for the faith and was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. Jesus gave to him the keys of the kingdom. But the Bible never praises Peter for denying Jesus.

We live in a fallen world. That means that sometimes decisions are grey. Sometimes it is not a decision between good and bad. Sometimes it is a decision between two bad things. Sometimes you have to decide which is the best between two evils.

This does not mean that I believe in situational ethics. The Bible does not teach that the end justifies the means. Wrong is still wrong. But it does teach that I live in a fallen world. Sometimes I may have to choose between what is bad and what is worse. However, it is important when making such a grey decision to never call it anything less than sin.

3. Rahab's Reason.

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.

"For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

"And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." (Joshua 2:8-11).

The Exodus from Egypt had taken place 40 years earlier. But it had not been forgotten. It was still the topic of discussion in Canaan. They recognized that the God of Israel had devastated the greatest and most powerful nation on earth. Rahab had come to believe in the God who divided the Red Sea and who preserved the Israelites in the wilderness. And so, she seeks to join herself to the covenant community. She asks for salvation both for herself and for her family.

4. The Scarlet Cord.

And the men said to her, "We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord

of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household." (Joshua 2:17-18).

The very rope that provided a way of escape for the two spies would also be the sign of salvation for Rahab and her family. It enabled the spies to escape from Jericho and it would enable Rahab and her family to escape the destruction of Jericho.

Matthew tells us that Rahab was a part of Jesus' genealogy, presumably through Joseph, which was His claim to the throne of David. Also a part of that genealogy was a Canaanite woman named Tamar. When she gave birth to twins, the midwives tied a scarlet thread to the hand of the firstborn. It was this same firstborn whose descendants later went on to sit on the throne of Israel.

The use of this cord also has strong similarities with the covenantal sign of Passover, that of the blood on Israelite houses on the night of the slaughter of the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:7, 13, 22-23).

There is a scarlet cord running from Genesis to Revelation. It is the picture of the shed blood of the Messiah of Israel. Archaeologists tell us that as far back as we can go in human history, man has always felt that something ought to be sacrificed as a substitute and as an appeasement for sin. It is rooted in all of society. God has given a universal consciousness of the need for a sacrifice. It all comes to focus upon a hill called Golgotha where a Jewish rabbi was nailed between two crossbeams.

5. The Report of the Spies.

And they said to Joshua, "Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us." (Joshua 2:24).

Joshua had picked his spies carefully. He had learned from his previous experience. Forty years earlier, twelve spies had been sent into the land of Canaan. Only two had returned with a positive report. This time, only two spies are sent. I can't help but wonder if ten others were interviewed and told, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

The land of Canaan had not changed. The people were not any shorter. The walls of the cities were not any lower. But these

spies knew that they could win. Sometimes we need to be told that we can win. We look at our situation and it seems to be hopeless. That is when we need a word of encouragement. That is when we need to be told that we can win.

INCIDENT AT THE JORDAN (JOSHUA 3-4)

As we come to these two chapters, there is a hermeneutical rule of which we need to be aware. It is that the amount of space devoted to a subject is indicative of the importance that God has given to that subject.

You will notice that the writer of Joshua gives two chapters to the crossing of the Jordan. He does this because God sees that particular act as very important to His redemptive program. The writer could have covered this in four sentences. He could have said...

They came to the Jordan.

It was flooded.

God stopped the waters.

They crossed over.

But He did not do this. We should not do it either. You can apply this rule to the entire Bible. The importance of a passage can be determined by the amount of space given over to it. This provides an important caution to believers. It is that you need to be careful not to major in the minors.

There is a corollary to this. The amount of time you devote in your life will give evidence to the subjects that you think are important. How much time do you spend with your family? How about time in the Word? How much do you pray?

1. Following the Ark.

And it came about at the end of three days that the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people, saying, "When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.

However, there shall be between you and it a distance of about 2,000 cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which

you shall go, for you have not passed this way before." (Joshua 3:2-4).

The ark of the covenant is mentioned a number of times in this chapter. The Hebrew word for "ark" is 'aron. It is the same word which describes the coffin into which the body of Joseph was placed (Genesis 50:26). It describes a box or a chest. In modern Hebrew, it is used to refer to a closet.

The ark was a wooden box overlaid with gold. It was the symbolic representation of the presence of God among His people. Inside the ark were the tablets of the Law. The ark was covered with a top of pure gold. It was known as the "mercy seat." This was the throne of God.

As the Israelites prepare to enter into the land, it will be the ark which leads them. For the past 40 years, they have followed the presence of God in a pillar of fire and a column of smoke through the wilderness. Now they will continue to follow the presence of God. But now it will be in the form of the ark.

They are instructed to keep a distance of about 1000 yards from the ark. There is to be no familiarity with it. It is to be considered holy and set apart from the ordinary. We would have been making little arks and selling them as souvenirs. We might have been tempted to place the ark in a fence and set out television cameras around it and charged an admission to come and see it.

If there is a danger in American Christianity, it is that we tend to forget that we worship the God of the universe. He is not Santa Claus. He is not sweet. He is not a genie in a bottle that you rub and get three wishes. He is not a sweet little old man who is slightly hard of hearing. He is God.

2. The Preparation of Consecration.

Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." (Joshua 3:5).

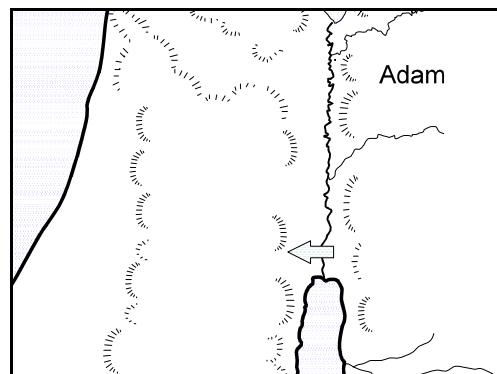
The phrase "consecrate yourselves" is translated from *hithkadashu*, the Hithpa'el imperative of *kadash*, to make holy. The Israelites were called to be holy, set apart to God. They were cut out from the rest of the world and separated to be a special people. They ate different food. They wore different clothes. They worshiped a different God. We are called to be different. We have been

sanctified - set apart to God.

3. The Stopping of the Waters..

So it came about when the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan with the priests carrying the ark of the covenant before the people, and when those who carried the ark were dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks all the days of harvest), that the waters which were flowing down from above stood and rose up in one heap, a great distance away at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan; and those which were flowing down toward the sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. So the people crossed opposite Jericho. (Joshua 3:14-16).

Notice that the passage does not say that the waters were parted, but that the upstream waters stopped flowing (the downstream waters continued on their way, leaving dry land). What is more, the location at which the waters stopped is the city of Adam. This city was located 16 miles



upstream, near the point where the Jabbok flows into the Jordan. At this point, there are high clay banks reaching some 40 feet over the river. This area is subject to landslides. It was reported by Albright that during an earthquake in 1927, these banks collapsed, damming the river for a period of nearly twenty four hours.

4. Memorial Stones.

“Then Joshua set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan at the place where the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the covenant were standing, and they are there to this day.” (Joshua 4:9).

As the Israelites crossed through the dry riverbed of the Jordan, Joshua had two groups of stones set up. They were memorial stones. They were to be a constant reminder of the power of God which was able to stop the waters of the Jordan so that they could cross over.

Remembering is important. Nostalgia can be good. It is good to remember God and His faithfulness. We need reminders. The Lord's Supper is such a reminder. The real danger in Christianity is that we forget. That is how we fall into sin. Every time a Jew walked past that stack of rocks, he would be reminded of the power and the goodness of God.

There were actually two stacks of rocks. The first group is seen in verse 8. They are twelve stones taken from the riverbed and placed outside the river.

But there is also a second group.

This group is seen here in verse 9. This group is also composed of twelve stones. But they are not placed outside the river. They are placed "in the middle of the Jordan." It seems like a funny place to place memorial stones, doesn't it? After all, who is going to see them at the bottom of the river?

Let me suggest that, in the same way that the first group was to remind the Israelites of the faithfulness and the power of God, so also this second group of stones would also be a reminder to the Israelites.

But when would they see this second group? Only in the dry season when the level of the river lowered. During the dry season, when the crops were in danger of dying and the people were praying for the coming rains, these stones in the middle of the river would become visible. They would be a reminder that God is faithful, even in the dry season.

5. The Crossing: *...and the people hurried and crossed (Joshua 4:10b).*

Notice that the people went across quickly. Why quickly? Why did they hurry? I think that it was because they were afraid. These people had grown up in the desert and I don't think they knew

The NIV translates this differently in order to suggest that there was only a single stack of rocks. However, if the stones in Joshua 4:8 were meant to be understood as the same stones as those mentioned in Joshua 4:9, then we would have expected to see the article with the word "stones." Instead the syntax suggests that verse 9 is disjunctive, indicating a contrast with verse 8.

how to swim. They were afraid to cross the Jordan. But they crossed anyway. It is okay to be afraid to cross the Jordan. But it is not okay to stay on the wrong side.

6. The Results of the Crossing.

Now it came about when all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard how the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer, because of the sons of Israel. (Joshua 5:1).

When the Israelites saw the miracle of the Jordan River, they were impressed. They thought that the reason God had done this was so that they could cross over. That was one reason. But there was also another. It was so that the other nations would see the miracle and they would fear the Lord. Do you see the application of this? We are some of the nations who have heard of that miracle. We should fear the Lord as a result.

CIRCUMCISION & PASSOVER (JOSHUA 5)

1. Circumcision.

At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make for yourselves flint knives and circumcise again the sons of Israel the second time.” (Joshua 5:2).

The covenant sign of circumcision had been given to Abraham. When the Israelites had come out of Egypt in the Exodus, they had reintroduced this covenant sign. But there is now a new generation. And they had not partaken in the sign of the covenant. They are called to do so now. This was a sign of their faith (Romans 4:11).

This event put the army of Israel in a vulnerable position for several days. And to make matters worse, they were right under the shadow of Jericho. But when you are obeying the commands of the

Lord, it is okay to be vulnerable.

2. The Passover.

While the sons of Israel camped at Gilgal, they observed the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month on the desert plains of Jericho. (Joshua 5:10).

God's army had taken the sign of the covenant (circumcision) and now ate at the Lord's Table (Passover). These preparations were necessary for them to go forth and to conquer the land.

The church today has a similar preparation to undergo. We must take the sign of the covenant (baptism) and eat at the Lord's Table before we can take the sword of the Spirit forth to conquer the nations.

3. The Manna Removed.

And the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year. (Joshua 5:12).

When the people moved into the promised land, were circumcised, and partook of the Passover, the manna stopped. There is a principle here. God helps those who can't help themselves. God also helps those who can help themselves, but He helps them in a different way. When I was a new believer, everything just seemed to fall into my lap. I would walk up to someone and ask, "Do you want to meet Jesus?" and they would answer, "Yes, will you tell me how?" I didn't know anything about apologetics. I wasn't particularly good at explaining my faith. But that was okay because God could use me where I was.

But I want you to know that it isn't as easy as it used to be. Nowadays God sends me the agnostic and the hardened atheist. Why? Because He knows that I can handle it.

4. Confrontation with an Angel.

Now it came about when Joshua was by

Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" (Joshua 5:13).

Joshua issues a challenge to this unknown warrior. It is in the form of a question: "Whose side are you on?" Joshua knew that it is impossible to remain neutral in God's battles. You always choose sides. And even if you try to remain neutral, the truth is that you have chosen a side.

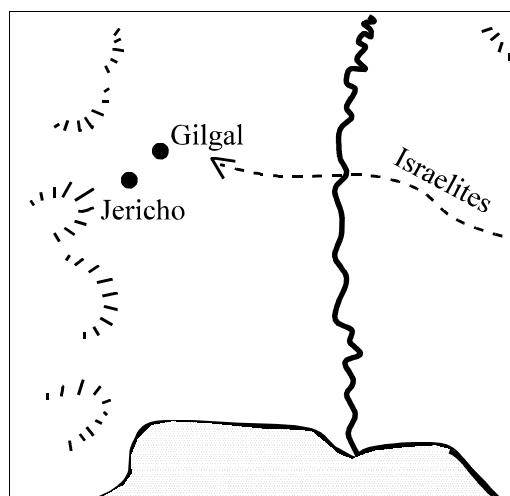
And he said, "No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" (Joshua 5:14).

The captain of God's army does not say that he is on Joshua's side. Rather it is Joshua who is on His side. Here is the principle. The battle is the Lord's. It is His conflict. We are merely soldiers under His command.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST JERICHO

1. The City of Jericho.

As the Jordan River nears the Dead Sea, the river valley widens to a width of about 10 miles. On the western edge of this wide valley lies the ancient city of Jericho.



The site of the Old Testament city is a mound rising up 50 feet above the surrounding bedrock of the southern Jordan valley (Jericho is 825 feet below sea level). It is located about 10 miles to the NW of the mouth of the Dead Sea and directly west of fords which make it possible to cross the Jordan except during the rainy season.

There is a natural spring known as Ain es-Sultan which originally attracted settlers to this site. This oasis gave the city its nickname, “City of Palm Trees.”

The city was fairly small (only 6 acres), but held a strategic position at the hub of four major roads radiating outward to Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron, and eastward to the fords across the Jordan.

2. Instructions to March around the City.

The first battle within the Promised Land is one which the Lord Himself would fight, completely apart from the strength of the Israelites. The instructions given to Joshua were limited to marching orders. I can't help but to think that the Israelites might have been tempted to think they were a bit foolish for merely marching around the city each day and then going home. But they obeyed the word of the Lord. This is what obedience is all about. Obeying even when you do not see the reason for it.

3. The Falling of Jericho's Walls.

So the people shouted, and priests blew the trumpets, and it came about, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, that the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city. (Joshua 6:20).

No siege engines were needed to take this city. This is a good thing because siege machines were largely unknown at this time in history. The Lord brought the walls down. Some have speculated that an earthquake was involved (the area is prone to earthquakes). But the passage does not mention any such additional phenomenon. It merely says that the walls fell.

This was no small breach in the wall. These walls fell in such a way so that every Israelite warrior surrounding the city could go straight into the city.

4. The Destruction of the City.

And they burned the city with fire, and all that was in it. Only the silver and gold and articles of

bronze and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord. (Joshua 6:24).

How could a good God do such terrible things to the city of Jericho? Our sensitivities are offended by this account. What is the answer? We must be very careful in judging a different culture by 20th century standards. Life was harsh in those days. The standards were different. There are several fallacies which we have bought into and which need to be dispelled.

- a. There is a noble primitive savage and we shouldn't try to destroy their culture.

Margaret Mead was an anthropologist who wrote about the nobility of the savages of New Guinea. She described them as wonderful, gentle people without guilt or harshness. But this has since been revealed to be completely false. The primitive aborigines were brutal and harsh.

The culture of Jericho was equally harsh. They would murder their children in religious orgies by throwing their screaming bodies into flames of fire. They were a plague on the landscape.

- b. God is sweet, kind, and gentle and will always forgive every misdeed.

We are idolaters. We think of a god of our own making and we put him up on a shelf and take him down to worship him once in a while. Spiro Agnew once said, “The vice president is like adding maternity benefits to social security - it's there but you don't need it.” We look at God that way. He is there but we don't need Him. And that is blasphemy.

- c. Sin is only a manifestation of our humanness. It means very little to God and therefore should not mean very much to us.

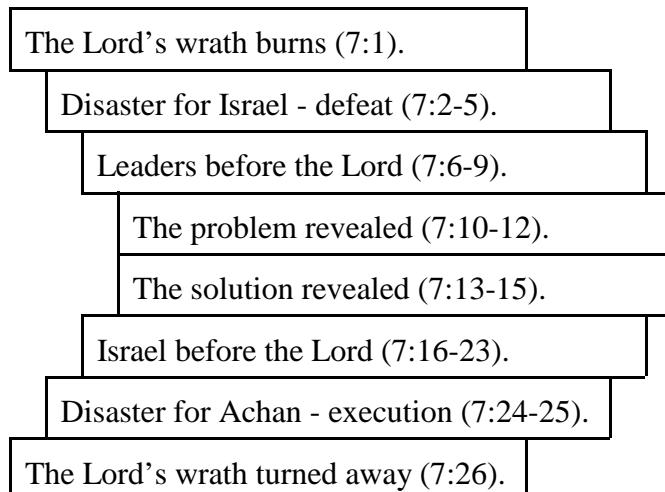
God had given a prophecy of the judgment of the Amorites in Genesis 15:15-16. He said that judgment would be a long time coming because “the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full.” God waited until the badness of the people of Canaan had reached its maximum limits.

d. Sin is your own business. It doesn't affect others.

God told His people to destroy everything in the land because He knew that if they didn't, it wouldn't be long before they were infected with the same sin. Sin is a cancer. It spreads.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST AI

If Jericho was a great victory for the Israelites, then Ai marked their first defeat under Joshua's command. The chapter is given in a chiastic format.



1. The Sin of Achan.

But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel. (Joshua 7:1).

God had said that everything in Jericho was to be burned as a sacrifice to Him. Nothing was to be taken from it. The entire city was to be a first fruit offering to Him. But Achan decided to take some of the valuables for himself. Verse 21 says that he took an ornate Babylonian robe along with some silver and gold. By doing so, Achan was transferring his allegiance and his love from Israel to

Jericho - from God to gold.

Notice that the passage says that “the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel.” The stolen treasures were supposed to be burned as a sacrifice to the Lord. And when the sacrifice was withheld, that “burning anger” which would have been appeased in the sacrifice was now directed toward the people of Israel. This is a picture of Jesus. He is the perfect sacrifice who has appeased the anger of God (we call this doctrine “propitiation”). Without the sacrifice of Jesus, we are left to face God’s anger.

There is a lesson here. It is a dangerous thing to rob God. Achan was killed for it. And so were Ananias and Saphira in the New Testament. In both cases, their sin was an attempt to rob the Lord and then to hide their sin and lie about it.

2. The City of Ai.

The city of Ai is always found in the Hebrew with the definite article, “the heap” or “the ruin.” Joshua 7:2 indicates that Ai was “east of Bethel.”

The modern site of Et Tell is generally thought to be the location of the ancient city of Ai (about two miles from Bethel).

3. Israel’s Defeat at Ai.

Ai was so small that it was not considered to be worth the mobilization of the entire force of the Israelites. The spies who went in and observed it advised that only a token force of 2000 to 3000 men would be needed to take the city.

And the men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of their men, and pursued them from the gate as far as Shebarim, and struck them down on the descent, so the hearts of the people melted and became as water. (Joshua 7:5).

The battle at Ai goes the exact opposite of what had taken place at Jericho. At Jericho, everything had gone completely right. At Ai, everything goes completely wrong. Why did the Israelites suffer such a setback? A number of reasons have been offered.:

- It has been pointed out that there is no mention of prayer prior to the attack on Ai.

- Furthermore, it is obvious that the Israelites exhibited an overconfidence.

But the real reason for the defeat has nothing to do with these two surface reasons. The real reason is because God's command had been ignored and there was sin in the camp. A little sin goes a long way.

3. The Prayer of Joshua.

And Joshua said, "Alas, O Lord God, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been willing to dwell beyond the Jordan!" (Joshua 7:7).

These words sound familiar. The Israelites had said the same thing to Moses by the edge of the Red Sea. This time, it is Joshua who is saying it. He was discouraged (remember all those times he had been warned to be strong and courageous?). Joshua complains to God. There is nothing wrong with such a prayer. It is one thing to complain to God; it is quite another to complain about God. Joshua goes to the Lord with his complaints and the Lord answers his prayer.

So the Lord said to Joshua, "Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things." (Joshua 7:10-11).

Notice the corporate nature of sin. God doesn't single out Achan. He considers the entire nation to be guilty. Here is the principle. Your sin affects others. There is no such thing as a solitary sin. This is why church discipline is so important. Sin is a cancer that infects the entire body. It must be cut out.

4. The Execution of Justice.

Armed with this information, Joshua used a system of casting lots to determine the guilty party. In this instance, the lot fell upon Achan and a search of his tent revealed the stolen goods.

And Joshua said, "Why have you troubled us? The Lord will trouble you this day." And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. (Joshua 7:25).

This punishment seems unduly harsh. This man and his family are put to death for stealing a few tidbits. The problem is that we have an inadequate view of justice.

- A total of 36 men had just died for Achan's sin.
- His family had participated in his crime (he buried the items in their midst).
- Achan had ample time to confess and to seek the Lord's forgiveness. He was standing quietly by, hoping that someone else would be punished for his sin. When they started throwing stones, Achan and his family would have been up there throwing stones, too.

Here is the principle. In the midst of the battle, you cannot afford the luxury of leniency. Treason is bad at any time. But it is worse when you are fighting for your life. We are fighting for eternal life.

And they raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the valley of Achor to this day. (Joshua 7:26).

There is a play on words here. The phrase in verse 25, "Why have you troubled us?" is literally "why have you *achored* us?" He goes on to say the "the Lord will trouble you this day (*achor*). And so, the valley was given the name, the Valley of Trouble (*Achor*). This valley is mentioned in a prophecy given by the prophet Hosea. It is a prophecy of hope.

*"Then I will give her vineyards from there,
And the valley of Achor as a door of hope.
And she will sing there as in the days of her youth,
As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt."*
(Hosea 2:15).

God is talking about the same place. He promises to make the Valley

of Achor a Valley of Hope. There is a lesson here. It is that there is no sin that is so horrible that God cannot take it and make it into a Valley of Hope.

5. Second Campaign at Ai.

Now the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not fear or be dismayed. Take all the people of war with you and arise, go up to Ai; see, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land.” (Joshua 8:1).

We are given more details on the military strategy of the taking of Ai than any other battle in Canaan. Joshua's plans are careful and detailed. There is a reason for this. It is because Joshua knew that it is always harder to reclaim lost ground. Once you have been defeated, it is always harder to win that victory.

When I was a lot younger, I used to be able to do handstands on a high bar. One of the most impressive parts was a dismount in which I would bring my legs over the bar and then fall backwards, swinging out and doing a flip in the air before landing on my feet. I was doing this on a tree one day when I overcompensated and landed flat on my back. It was a rather high tree and I hit hard enough to knock the wind out of me. It hurt and it hurt badly. I want you to know that I was never able to do that flip again. I would get ready for it and then I would freeze. Why? Because it is always harder to reclaim lost ground.

Most archaeologists identify Ai with the modern site of Et-Tel, about two miles southeast of Bethel. There is a problem with this identification. Et-Tel was uninhabited from 2200 to 1200 B.C. Furthermore, in the early Bronze Age when Et-Tel was inhabited, it was a city covering 27 acres with a stone wall 25 feet wide and 30 feet high. This does not match the description given by the spies that this was a town of only a few men. When the spies had checked it out, they had suggested that Joshua only send in a few troops (Joshua 7:3). I am forced to conclude that the site of Ai is still unknown.

Even now, Joshua didn't really need 30,000 men to take Ai. He could have taken himself and two toddlers and it would have been enough. But in Joshua 8:1, the Lord tells him, “Take all the people of war with you.” Why? Because it is always harder to reclaim lost ground.

So Joshua rose with all the people of war to go up to Ai; and Joshua chose 30,000 men, valiant warriors, and sent them out at night.

And he commanded them, saying, "See, you are to ambush the city from behind it. Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city. And it will come about when they come out to meet us as at the first, that we will flee before them.

"And they will come out after us until we have drawn them away from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing from before us as at the first.' So we will flee before them.

"And you shall rise from your ambush and take possession of the city, for the Lord your God will deliver it into your hand." (Joshua 8:3-7).

The taking of Ai was to be through a carefully laid trap. It would involve a pretended rout in which the enemy would be tricked into pursuit while a much larger force would come in from behind and take the undefended city. Yet with all of these elaborate plans, it is the Lord who is going to deliver Ai into the hand of Israel.

With the power of God, even the great city of Jericho could be taken. Without the power of God, not even the little town of Ai could be taken.

6. Altar at Ebal.

Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal" (Joshua 8:30).

We would think that this is a bad time for prayer of revival. They were involved in a major military campaign. They are surrounded by enemies. But this really is the best time.

a. The necessity for definition.

...Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the sons of Israel... (Joshua 8:31).

The great danger of the church is that, as we become involved

in our society, that we become like our society. God tells His people that they are different. He gives them a new identity.

You are not like the world. Go down to Shechem and you will find an altar there. It will remind you of who you are.

b. The necessity of remembering.

Have you noticed how many times Joshua has said, "These stones are here to this day" (4:9; 4:21-22; 7:25; 8:29)? In each case, the stones were there to remind you of what God had done. God knows that we will forget unless there are reminders. That is why we have the Lord's Supper. It is a reminder to us of what God has done.

c. The necessity of rededication.

The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics says that things run down. This takes place in every area of life. It works in life itself. You get older and your body begins to break down. If you have owned a car, then you know that things run down. Cars break down. Commitments run down, too. You will always tend to take the point of least resistance as your commitment runs down. You cannot run your spiritual engine on yesterday's gasoline.

d. The necessity of reaffirmation.

We need to constantly reaffirm the truths that we hold. In a society which bombards us with all sorts of ungodly thinking, we need to tell ourselves and remind ourselves what we believe.

e. The necessity of emotion.

Sometimes we neglect the emotional content of our faith. But God created emotions. We are to worship the Lord with our heart as well as with our mind. Christianity is not merely an intellectual exercise. If you have never been excited about God, then you probably have never met Him.

The Mountains of Ebal and Gerizim faced one another. Between

them lay an ancient well which had been excavated by Jacob - it was known as Jacob's Well. It would be here that Jesus would one day spend an afternoon talking to a Samaritan woman.

And all Israel with their elders and officers and their judges were standing on both sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, the stranger as well as the native. Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had given command at first to bless the people of Israel. (Joshua 8:33).

This was a solemn memorial. Half of the people standing on Mount Gerizim. Half of them standing on Mount Ebal. One side reading the blessings of the covenant. The other side reading the curses of the covenant (see the instructions given in Deuteronomy 27:11-14).

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE KINGS OF THE SOUTH

1. The Deception of the Gibeonites.

The city of Gibeon was the next in line from Ai and Bethel. It would be the next to fall if the Israelites continued their westward march. And so, the people of Gibeon came up with a plan. They determined to deceive the Israelites.

They had several of their ambassadors dress up in their oldest clothes and they gathered some moldy bread and they set out for the Israelite camp, all of five miles away. When they arrived, they told a yarn about how their clothes and the food had been new at the outset of their journey and, on this basis, they negotiated a peace treaty with Israel. Joshua and the people were properly suspicious and they went on to conduct a proper and careful investigation.

- “*Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?*” (9:7).
- “*Who are you, and where do you come from?*” (9:8).

They asked all the right questions. That is not the problem. The

problem is that the Israelites, for their part, “*did not ask for the counsel of the Lord*” (Joshua 9:14). They did not utilize the heavenly resources. They figured that they could handle this one on their own.

The problem is a lack of faith. Here is the question. Do you only ask of God as a means of last resort? Or do you go to God as a means of first resort? This sin is the sin of independence from God. When they found out how they had been deceived, the Israelites were in something of a quandary as to what to do.

And the sons of Israel did not strike them because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the Lord the God of Israel. And the whole congregation grumbled against the leaders.

But all the leaders said to the whole congregation, “We have sworn to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, and now we cannot touch them. 20 This we will do to them, even let them live, lest wrath be upon us for the oath which we swore to them.” (Joshua 9:18-20).

There are those who were in favor of ignoring the oath and attacking the Gibeonites. But the leadership prevails. This cannot be done because it would involve breaking an oath that had been made in the name of the Lord. It would involve bringing dishonor upon the name of the Lord.

Do you hold the honor of God in such high esteem that you are willing to suffer loss rather than to see His name dishonored by your actions? You should. There is a lesson here. It is that there are times when Christians are called to live with the results of their folly. Israel made a poor decision and now Israel would have to live with those results.

There are Christians today who have made bad decisions. Perhaps it was in entering into a marriage with an unbeliever. That is one of the worst possible decisions one can make. But if you have done this, you are called to remain in that marriage as long as you are able. You are called to be a faithful and loving marriage partner and to make every attempt to make that marriage work. What is at stake in your marriage is nothing less than the honor of God.

In the case of the Gibeonites, it was determined that the oath would be honored and that they would become servants of Israel.

But Joshua made them that day hewers of

wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the Lord, to this day, in the place which He would choose. (Joshua 9:27).

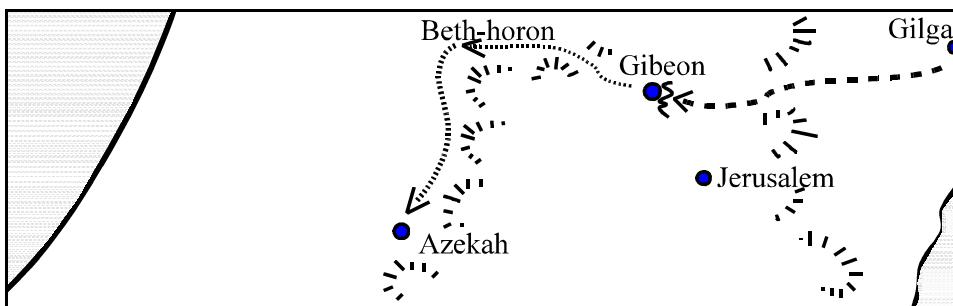
2. The Battle of Gibeon.

It was not long before this new treaty between Gibeon and Israel brought a swift retaliation from the kings of southern Canaan.

Now it came about when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had captured Ai, and had utterly destroyed it (just as he had done to Jericho and its king, so he had done to Ai and its king), and that the inhabitants of Gideon had made peace with Israel and were within their land, that he feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, like one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all its men were mighty. (Joshua 10:1-2).

The kings of the south determine to make an example of Gibeon for having entered into an alliance with the Israelites. The cities of Gibeon sent messengers to Joshua, asking that they honor their covenant and come to their aid. Joshua responds by making a forced all-night march and attacking this federation.

And it came about as they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, that the Lord threw large stones from heaven on them, as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword. (Joshua 10:11).



This Amorite League was thrown into a panic by the unexpected

appearance of the Israelites in their rear and they fled westward down the pass of Beth-horon before turning southward. As they retreated, they were confronted with an even more terrifying enemy - great stones falling from the sky.

- These stones were *Min-HaShamaim* - “from heaven.”
- They were thrown by Yahweh.
- This phenomenon took place “as far as Azekah.”
- These stones caused a great loss of life upon the enemies of Israel. We are not told whether any Israelites were killed by the falling stones.

However, later in the same verse there is a slightly different phrase. It is translated “hailstones.” The question is whether the “large stones” mentioned in the first part of the verse are the same as the “stones of hail” described at the end of the verse.

Then Joshua spoke to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel,

*“O sun, stand still at Gibeon,
And O moon in the valley of Aijalon.”
So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped,
Until the nation avenged themselves of their
enemies.*

*Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped
in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for
about a whole day. (Joshua 10:12-13).*

This account cites another book that also evidently contained an independent testimony to this event. It is described as the Book of Jashar. We do not have the Book of Jashar, but the writer of this account was evidently familiar with it and might have even had a copy to which he could refer.

There have been several different interpretations offered for this passage.

- a. Poetical Interpretation: Both the command and its fulfillment are seen as poetical language consisting in an appeal for renewed strength and vigor for the warriors of Israel.

- The command to "stand still" is the Hebrew Qal Imperative of *damas*. It can mean both "be still" or "be silent."
- The fact that the moon is also called to stand still is seen as an indication of the poetical nature of the passage. The moon would have been no help in providing light if the sun remained in the sky.

On the other hand, if the sun literally set leaving only the light of the moon, then the call for the moon's light to assist them would make sense.

- An alternate poetic interpretation is that Joshua was calling for the sun to be still in shining so brightly. This interpretation says that the last thing Joshua wanted was more sunlight - rather, he was seeking relief from the heat of the day. Joshua's prayer was answered by an icy hailstorm which both cooled the attackers and destroyed many of the enemy.

Some have suggested that this is descriptive of a solar eclipse, but we are able to plot which solar eclipses were visible in Palestine and none of them fit the date of Joshua.

An obvious problem with this interpretation is that the moon is also said to have stayed. There would be no reason for this since the moon gives off no heat.

b. Literal Interpretation: The passage explains the words of Joshua by saying that "the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day." The phrase "the sun stopped" can carry the idea of standing still.

Furthermore, the passage goes on to explain its terms by describing how that the sun "did not hasten to go down for about a whole day" (literally, "did not hurry to go for a complete day").

If we adopt the literal interpretation, then we are still left with

another question: Is this a localized phenomenon, or was it caused by a stopping of the rotation of the entire planet?

- A localized phenomenon could have been caused by refraction of the light of the sun and the moon (a mirage) in which they appeared to be out of their regular phases.
- The other way for this miracle to have taken place would have been for the earth to stop its movement. Considering that the earth rotates at a speed of about 1000 miles per hour at the equator, this would have caused massive earthquakes and seismic disturbances of epic proportions.

Such a phenomenon would have resulted in a long afternoon, a long evening, a long night, depending upon what part of the world the observer stood.

No matter which interpretation we choose, it should be recognized that this was seen as an unprecedented miracle.

And there was no day like that before it or after it, when the Lord listened to the voice of a man; for the Lord fought for Israel. (Joshua 10:14).

You cannot believe the Bible without also believing in miracles. Many people want to take the miracles out of the Bible.

- a. Whether one believes in miracles or does not believe in miracles has absolutely nothing to do with whether or not miracles are true.

Philosophers have said that the supernatural cannot take place. And so, they have tried to define miracles out of existence.

But that doesn't make miracles go away. Reality has nothing to do with public opinion.

- b. To deny miracles is to deny the Bible.

There is a great debate on the date of the book of Daniel. The

critics want to date it in the 2nd century B.C. Why? Because it clearly predicts things that did not happen until the 2nd century B.C. They have already decided that there is no such thing as predictive prophecy. Since Daniel records prophecy and since there is no such thing as prophecy, then Daniel could not have written this prophecy and it must have been written after the fact.

Question: Do you live a supernatural life? If you woke up one morning to find that God had left, how would it affect your life? What is it in your life that can only be explained in the terms of the supernatural?

God intervenes in history. You look at your present situation and you ask, "Why doesn't He intervene now?"

- (1) God intervenes when a great promise has been made. God has given promises and He will move heaven and earth to fulfill those promises. God is very concerned about His good name. He does not want His name blemished by an unfulfilled promise.
- (2) God intervenes when great faith is present. Remember the story of David and Goliath? The people said, "He is too big to hit." And David replied, "He is too big to miss." Jesus spoke about mountain-moving faith. If you believe, then nothing is impossible.

And it came about when they brought these kings out to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the chiefs of the men of war who had gone with him, "Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came near and put their feet on their necks. (Joshua 10:24).

This was done to increase the faith of the people. It was a public presentation that God was stronger than

the kings of Canaan. Here is the lesson - it is that God is bigger than your problems.

- (3) God intervenes when a great cause is attempted. He gears the degree of His intervention to the degree of your commitment.
- (4) God intervenes when a great emphasis is needed.

And Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one time, because the Lord, the God of Israel, fought for Israel. (Joshua 10:42).

Notice why Joshua won. It was because the Lord was on his side. God is doing something with Joshua which will teach us something about God for the next 3000 years. The point is that God does supernatural miracles for HIS benefit, not for yours.

- (5) God intervenes when a great grace is manifested.

"The Lord did not set His love on you nor chose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples." (Deuteronomy 7:7).

God didn't choose Israel because they were so wonderful. He chose Israel because He is so wonderful. It was grace. The same is true of us.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE KINGS OF THE NORTH

1. The Northern Alliance.

Just as the Amorite Kings of the south had formed an alliance, so also the kings in the area of Galilee formed an alliance. The leader of this coalition is said to have been Jabin, king of Hazor. This is not

too surprising. Hazor was the largest city in all of Canaan. It had massive ramparts of beaten earth and a heavily protected wall surrounded by a deep ditch.

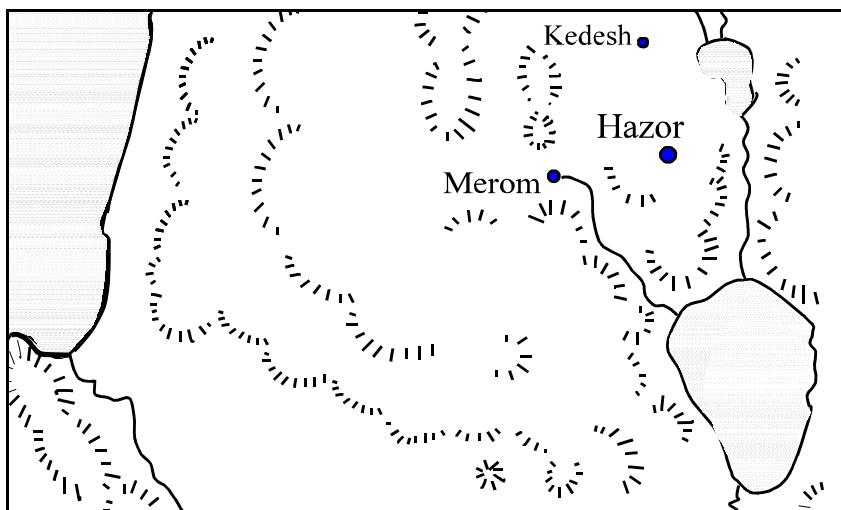
To make matters worse, the Northern Federation was able to field horse-drawn chariots. These were light chariots with spoked wheels and had an incredible mobility. They were to ancient warfare what the armored tank was to modern warfare.

2. The Battle of Merom.

So Joshua and all the people of war with him came upon them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and attacked them.

And the Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, so that they defeated them, and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim and the valley of Mizpeh to the east; and they struck them until no survivor was left to them. (Joshua 11:7-8).

Merom was centrally located among the cities of the Northern Federation. Its disadvantage lay in the fact that this was an area of rolling hills and thick forests, thus negating the strength and mobility of their chariot corps.



It seems likely that they had intended to use this area only as a rendezvous for their combined forces (Joshua 11:7 indicates that this was a surprise attack).

3. Destruction of the Chariot Corps.

And Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him; he hamstrung their horses, and burned their chariots with fire. (Joshua 11:9).

God ordered Joshua to destroy the best military weapons he had ever seen. Joshua was a general. When he saw these weapons, his mouth started watering. He said to himself, “Boy, if I had a few hundred of those chariots and horses, there isn't anything I wouldn't be able to do.” But God told him to destroy the chariots and to render the horses useless. This goes against all human logic.

There is a principle here. If you have chariots and horses, you begin to depend upon chariots and horses instead of depending upon the Lord. If you have only God, then you will depend upon God.

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the father on the children, and on the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Deuteronomy 5:8-10).

Every god that you have that isn't God, He will destroy. God wants to be your God. If you put anything else in first place, He will destroy it.

4. Joshua's Obedience.

Just as the Lord had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses. (Joshua 11:15).

Joshua is a study in submission. He was successful because he did it God's way. He made it a point to do all of the Lord's commands and to leave nothing undone. Even though he was now the leader of Israel he took the commands that had been handed down from Moses

and acted upon them.

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and concerning the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Hebrews 11:7).

We are to submit to God's authority. He has set authorities over us: family, church, government.

5. Summary.

Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings. (Joshua 11:18).

It took a long time. Why didn't God wipe them out immediately? He could have, but He didn't. There is a principle here. It takes a long time to win a war. Cults promise a quick way. They promise instant answers. But there are no instant answers in the Christian life.

SUMMARY OF THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

If we are not careful, we will fall into the trap of thinking that the conquest of the land took place within a very brief period of time. However, a closer look reveals that only a few key battles are recorded and that the conquest of Canaan took many years.

1. Even at the death of Joshua, there would remain a number of areas still to be taken. These strongholds of defense would include the following:

- The territories of the Philistines (Joshua 13:1-13 with Judges 3:1-3).
- Megiddo and the other cities of the Valley of Jezreel (Joshua 17:11 with Judges 1:27).
- Dor, Gezer, and other cities along the Coastal Plain (Joshua 13:4; 16:10; 17:11; Judges 1:27; 1:29).
- Jerusalem (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21).

It has been noted that the Israelites had difficulties conquering the cities of the lowlands - possibly due to the fact that these cities often had both high ramparts and iron chariots.

2. There is no record of Egyptian interference, even though Egypt was still one of the leading world powers of the day. The Amarna Tablets bear witness of the lack of action taken by Egypt toward the threat of the Habiru.¹

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND

As can be seen from this chart, the major portion of this section deals with the Distribution of the Land to the various tribes of Israel.

The Distribution of the Land			
13:1	Introduction	Special Allotments	East of the Jordan
13:8	Two & a half Tribes		
14:1	Caleb		West of the Jordan
15:1	Judah	Major Allotments to the nine Tribes	
16:1	The Sons of Joseph		
18:1	Remaining 7 Tribes		
20:1	Cities of Refuge	Special Provisions	Both Sides of the Jordan
21:1	Levi		
21:43	Summary Statement		

Reading through much of this portion of Joshua is a bit like reading through the telephone book. You don't know the names and they don't mean a lot to you. But it would be different if you took an old personal address book and had a walk down "memory lane." This would be full of old friends and would likely bring back many fond memories.

¹ Among the inscriptions of the Amarna Tablets are a number of letters from the king of Jerusalem to Amenhotep III asking for help against invaders known as the Habiru. At one point, this letter says: *The Habiru are plundering all the lands of the king. If no troops come in this very year, then all the lands of the king are lost.* (King of Jerusalem).

These chapters would have meant a lot more to the original recipients of the book of Joshua. After all, they were living in the land that was portioned out. It was their inheritance and their possession.

We also have an inheritance. It is not a physical inheritance, but one reserved in heaven for us.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:16-17).

1. Special Allotments (Joshua 13-14)

We have already seen the story of the 2 ½ Tribes which chose for themselves the lands on the east bank of the Jordan and therefore took second best. Because of their impatience, they had fought for a land that they could not now inherit. As a result, there would develop something of a schism between those Israelites living on the west bank and those living on the east bank.

The next special allotment is given to Caleb. He comes to Joshua and asks: “*Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord has spoken.*” (Joshua 14:12).

If I had been Caleb, I might have said, “Joshua, I’m not as young as I used to be. Why don’t you give me a little peaceful place where I can live quietly?” But Caleb didn’t feel the need to do that. Caleb had a big God. How big is your God? Perhaps the reason He only does a little is because you think so little of Him.

Caleb didn’t have the best pedigree. His relatives had come into the Israelite community through the back door. He was the descendant of one of the sons of Judah and Tamar. He was part Canaanite. But he was given a portion from among the Jews.

"And now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today.

*I am still as strong today as I was in the day
Moses sent me; as my
strength was then, so
my strength is now,
for war and for going
out and coming in.”
(Joshua 14:10-11).*

Caleb was a man who realized that everything he got was from God. A turtle on a gatepost realizes that he didn't get there by himself.

Notice to what it is that Caleb attributes his long life. Not in the eating of health food. Not a regular program of exercise. Not good luck - or good genes. It is the promise of the Lord that has kept Caleb healthy and going strong.

*Every good thing bestowed and every perfect
gift is from above, coming down from the Father of
lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting
shadow. (James 1:17).*

There is a saying that the Scots are a race of self-made men, thereby relieving the Almighty of a terrible responsibility. But the truth is that there are no self made men. God makes all men and, in the best of our accomplishments, we can give Him the credit.

2. Complaint from the Tribes of Joseph (Joshua 17).

One of the promises that was initially given to Abraham regarded an inheritance of the land of Canaan. In Genesis 13:14-15, the Lord had Abram look to the north and the south and the east and the west and told him that all those lands on which he could lay his eyes would be given to his descendants. In these chapters of Joshua we read of the fulfillment of that promise.

When we come to chapter 17, we see a complaint from the tribes that were descended from Joseph:

*Then the sons of Joseph spoke to Joshua,
saying, “Why have you given me only one lot and one
portion for an inheritance, since I am a numerous
people whom the Lord has thus far blessed?”*

*And Joshua said to them, “If you are a
numerous people, go up to the forest and clear a place
for yourself there in the land of the Perizzites and of
the Rephaim, since the hill country of Ephraim is too*

narrow for you.”

And the sons of Joseph said, “The hill country is not enough for us, and all the Canaanites who live in the valley have chariots of iron, both those who are in Beth-shaen and its towns, and those who are in the valley of Jezreel.”

And Joshua spoke to the house of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, “You are a numerous people and have great power; you shall not have one lot only, but the hill country shall be yours. For though it is a forest, you shall clear it, and to its farthest borders it shall be yours; for you shall drive out the Canaanites, even though they have chariots of iron, and though they are strong.” (Joshua 17:14-18).

The double tribe of Joseph brought a complaint to Joshua. It was that their inheritance was too small. I cannot help but wonder whether they thought they would get special privileges because Joshua was from Ephraim - one of the tribes of Joseph.

Complaint #1: The land is too small.	Answer: Clear the forests from the hill country.
Complaint #2: There is still not enough land and the Canaanites have iron chariots.	Answer: You are a numerous and a powerful people - use your numbers and your power to drive out the Canaanites.

A lot of Christians are like these two tribes. They complain that they have not been given enough.

- ♦ Enough money.
- ♦ Enough good looks.
- ♦ Enough ability.

What they often need to do is to use the gifts and abilities and resources that they have been given.

3. Shiloh.

Then the whole congregation of the sons of Israel assembled themselves at Shiloh, and set up the tent of meeting there; and the land was subdued before them. (Joshua 18:1).

Shiloh was the site of an ancient Canaanite town dating to the time of Abraham. It had been deserted for several hundred years by the time of the Israelite conquest.

We are not told why Shiloh was chosen as the site for the Tabernacle. Perhaps it was because this was a central location for all the tribes of Israel. Another possibility is that it was considered to be uncontaminated by pagan religion due to its having been deserted for such a long time. This was to be the center of worship until the time of Samuel.

4. A Survey of the Land.

Then the men arose and went, and Joshua commanded those who went to describe the land, saying, "Go and walk through the land and describe it, and return to me; then I will cast lots for you here before the Lord in Shiloh.

So the men went and passed through the land, and described it by cities in seven divisions in a book; and they came to Joshua to the camp at Shiloh.

And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord, and there Joshua divided the land to the sons of Israel according to their divisions. (Joshua 18:8-10).

The Israelites had no maps or drawings of the land. This made it rather difficult to divide the land among the various tribes. And so, before such a distribution could be made, Joshua ordered that three men be commissioned from each tribe who would do the work of a surveyor, traveling through the land and writing out a detailed description. It was also their job to divide the land into seven distinct parcels (two and a half tribes already had their land on the east bank of the Jordan). They would try to be as even as possible, since it was not known which parcel their own tribe would inherit.

When the job was completed, these descriptions were brought back to Joshua and he cast lots before the Lord. The implication was that the Lord was making the decision as to where each tribe would

live.

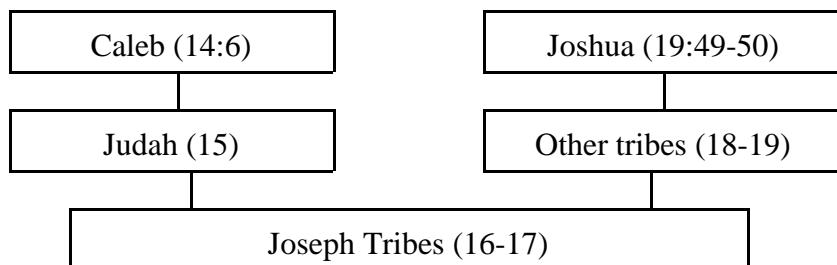
*The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision is from the Lord. (Proverbs 16:33).*

There is an ongoing principle from this passage. It is not that we cast lots to decide where we are going to live, but it is that the Lord is still in control over where men live. He has determined our times and the boundaries of our habitation (Acts 17:26).

5. A Portion Given to Joshua.

When they finished apportioning the land for inheritance by its borders, the sons of Israel gave an inheritance in their midst to Joshua the son of Nun. 50 In accordance with the command of the Lord they gave him the city for which he asked, Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim. So he built the city and settled in it. (Joshua 19:49-50).

This section concludes with the inheritance that is awarded to Joshua. There is an interesting pattern that can be seen that begins and ends with Caleb and Joshua. It is made up of all of the portions that were given to the tribes on the west side of the Jordan.



6. Cities of Refuge.

Then the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Designate the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, that the manslayer who kills any person unintentionally, without premeditation, may flee there, and they shall become your refuge from the avenger of blood.'" (Joshua 20:1-3).

The concept of the Cities of Refuge had been set forth in Numbers 35:6-34. Such a concept was needed to keep the peace in the absence of a police force. It was to be implemented in the case of manslaughter - when a man had been killed either by accident or in an unpremeditated altercation. In such a case, it would often be the inclination the friends and family of the deceased to see that justice was done. But to stop blood feuds from starting, six cities were designated as places of refuge. These were cities belonging to the tribe of Levi. No vengeance was to be taken within these cities.

Cities West of the Jordan	Cities East of the Jordan
Kedesh Shechem Hebron	Bezer Ramoth Golan

These cities were distributed throughout the length of Canaan. A person who had caused the death of another could flee here until a trial could be arranged.

“And he shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment...” (Joshua 20:6a).

The cities of refuge pointed to the value of human life as having been made in the image of God.

- The life of the slayer was spared until the case could be heard.
- The city of refuge became a virtual prison for the one who had taken a life.

Verse 6 tells us that the party who was guilty of unintentional manslaughter was a prisoner in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. After that time, no vengeance could be taken against him. By the same token it is through the death of Jesus Christ, our high priest, that we are set free from our imprisonment.

7. An Offending Altar.

And the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad

and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned home and departed from the sons of Israel at Shiloh which is in the land of Canaan, to go to the land of Gilead, to the land of their possession which they had possessed, according to the command of the Lord through Moses. (Joshua 22:9).

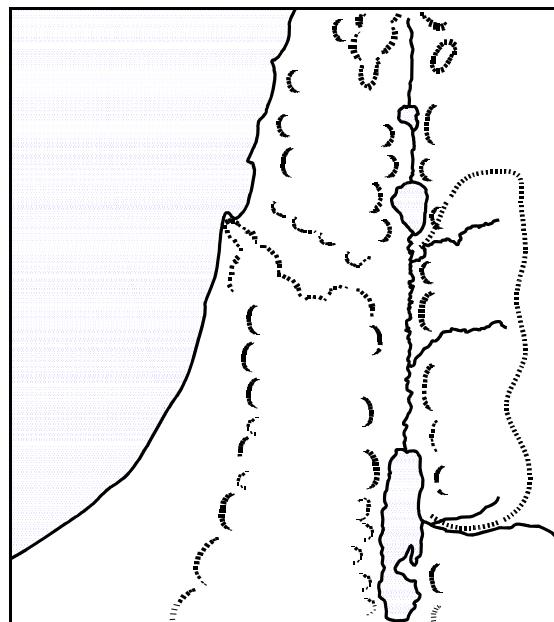
These are the two and a half tribes who had opted for second-best. They had asked for their inheritance to be the lands on the east side of the Jordan River. They were granted their request on the condition that they first cross over and fight alongside the rest of Israel to take the land of Canaan. But now the fighting is finished. And so, they are permitted to return home.

And when they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance. (Joshua 22:10).

When news of the construction of this altar reaches the other tribes of Israel, they jump to the conclusion that these two and a half tribes have apostatized. After all, the only proper place to build an altar is at the tabernacle and there is only one tabernacle.

Therefore the Israelites prepare themselves for war against the two and a half tribes. But before they march, they send Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the high priest along with a representative from each of the ten tribes.

When they meet, the leaders of the two and a half tribes explain that the altar which they have constructed is not an altar for



burnt offerings or for sacrifice, but rather a mound of memorial stones. It is to remind the Israelites who live in Canaan that there are people of the covenant who do not live in the land of Canaan but that they are no less children of the covenant.

Instead of intending to divide the nation, this altar was to be a symbol of their unity. There is a lesson here. All too often, we tend to judge people's actions in the worst possible light. The better part of wisdom is that we make certain of all the facts before passing judgment. We are called to be righteous in our judgments and that demands a care toward both accuracy and grace.

COVENANT RATIFICATION & CHARGE

22:1	23:1	24:1
An Offending Altar	Joshua's Final Charge	
	To the Elders	To the People
People to People	Leader to Leaders	Leader to People
Take Care not to Offend Others	Be Certain to Warn Others	Be Faithful to Challenge Others

Joshua 24 describes the renewal of the covenant. It was to take place at Shechem, the place where Jacob had first purchased a portion of land (Genesis 33:18-19). This was the first place where Abraham had built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 12:6-7).

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God. (Joshua 24:1).

This chapter follows the five-fold outline for a covenant (this same outline is the one we saw for the entire book of Deuteronomy).

- The Suzerain is Identified (24:2).
- The Historical Record of the past relationship between the Suzerain and His vassal subjects (24:2-13).
- The Stipulations which the Suzerain imposes upon His vassals (24:14-15).

15).

- The warning of cursing for disobedience (24:19-20). The normal form called for both blessing in the case of obedience as well as cursing in the case of disobedience.
- Witnesses are set forth - the people themselves serve as witnesses against themselves (24:21-24).

But that is not all. A memorial stone is set up which is to also serve as a witness of the covenant (24:26-27).

So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. (Joshua 24:25).

The terms of this covenant were put in writing. Literally, the Hebrew says that “Joshua **cut** a covenant...” This may have involved the sacrificing of an animal.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, lest you deny your God.” (Joshua 24:26-27).

Joshua set up a large stone near the tabernacle. It was to be a memorial-stone and would serve as a witness of the covenant. It is reminiscent of the time that Jesus was entering the Temple in Jerusalem to the praises of the people. When the Jewish authorities heard these praises, they objected. Jesus replied, “If these become silent, the stones will cry out!” (Luke 19:40).

24:29	24:32	24:33
Death of Joshua	Burial of Joseph	Death of Eleazar
Buried in the Hill Country of Ephraim	Buried at Shechem (inheritance of Joseph's sons)	Buried in the Hill Country of Ephraim

There is a sense in which the narrative begun in Genesis comes to a final completion here at the end of Joshua. Genesis ends with a promise that the bones of Joseph will be returned to the Promised Land. Joshua closes with the fulfillment of that promise.

JUDGES

The Age of Heroes

The book of Judges is a book of action. It contains great deeds as well as great failures. It is a book of both victory and defeat. Often graphic in its contents, it is not a book for the squeamish.

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK

Both the title found in the Greek Septuagint as well as our common English title of this book are taken from the Hebrew Title.

- Greek: *Kritai*.
- Hebrew: *Shophatim* from the Hebrew root *shaphat*, “to judge.”

The Shophatim had more than mere judicial roles. They also served as military leaders in times of crisis. They were men whom God would raise up to lead His people in those difficult times.

The book of Judges forms the bridge between the Conquest of the Land under Joshua and the establishment of the Monarchy under Saul, David and Solomon. Prior to the book of Judges, we read of the nation of Israel being led by the Lord through the mediatorial ministries of Moses and Joshua.



After the book of Judges, we shall see kings appointed to rule God’s people. During this transitional period, Israel was led by a varied group of “Judges.” This was a dark period of Israel’s history. It was a period of failure and of lawlessness.

THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The book of Judges takes up where Joshua leaves off, with the death of Joshua as the Israelites have taken residence in the promised land.

Joshua	Judges
A story mostly of Victory	A story mostly of Defeat
One man is prominent	A number of men and women are presented
Israel's Faith	Israel's Apostasy
Israel taking a stand for God	Israel turning away from God
Freedom	Servitude
The sin of the Canaanites is judged	The sin of the Israelites is judged

The narrative of Judges takes place over a period of over 300 years. It is a period when the Israelites are making the transition from having been a nomadic nation freshly escaped from Egypt to the status of a new nation, firmly established in their own land. This book can be divided into three parts.

1. Introduction - a Faltering Conquest (1:1 - 2:4).

The first two chapters form an introduction to the book, setting forth what are to be the overall themes and patterns of this period of Israel's history.

2. Cycles of Apostasy (2:5 - 16:31).

The central chapters set forth the history of the judges in a series of cycles of apostasy, repentance, and deliverance.

3. Anarchy under the Levites (17:1 - 21:25).

The last five chapters form an appendix which portray the darkest days of the period of the Judges.

Judges - The Book of Heroes		
1:1	3:1	17:1
The Pattern of Failure Established	The Career of the Judges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Othniel • Deborah • Gideon • Jephthah • Samson 	The Pattern of Sin Illustrated in two parallel accounts of Heinous Sins.
The entire period is presented in summary form	Chronological accountings of the period	Non-chronological accounts which characterized the period

DATE OF WRITING

We are not told either who is the writer or when this book is written. But there are several factors which indicate that it was written early in the Israelite monarchy.

1. The Jebusites are said to live in Jerusalem “to this day” (Judges 1:21). Since the city was taken by the Israelites early in David’s reign, this is an indication that the book was written before the fall of Jerusalem to David.
2. Sidon is described as the chief city of Phoenicia (Judges 18:28). However, by the reign of Solomon, Tyre had become their chief city.
3. Conversely, there is evidence to show that it was written after Saul had become king.

Four times, the author contrasts the political situation in the days of the Judges with that of his own day, saying, “*In those days Israel had no king*” (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The way in which the phrase is used seems to indicate that a monarchy was still viewed as something positive. It has been argued that this points to a time of writing before the Divided Kingdom and before either Judah or Israel had seen any ungodly kings.

4. Judges 18:30 refers to "the captivity of the land."

And the sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land. (Joshua 18:30).

The most obvious interpretation is that this refers to either the Babylonian or Assyrian Captivity. This phrase would have been added either after Samaria had fallen to Assyria (this was the beginning of the captivity of that portion of the land) or after Jerusalem had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar.

Does this mean that the book could not have been penned until after the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C.? Not necessarily. It is entirely possible that this chronological note could have been changed and “updated” by a later editor. Nevertheless, these factors point to the possibility of a gap between the events described in the book of Judges and the recording of those events within this book.

	1400	1043	931	721	586
Joshua	Period of the Judges	Saul, David & Solomon	Period of the Divided Monarchy	Samaria into Captivity	Judah taken in Babylonian Captivity
		Possible Periods of the Writing of the book of Judges			

On the other hand, Jewish and early church traditions point to Samuel as the author of the book of Judges. While there is no definite internal evidence that this is the case, it is certainly a possibility.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

1. The book of Judges illustrates the disastrous effects of compromise.

The Israelites had been told to take the land and to completely wipe out all of the inhabitants. Because they did not obey this command, they were seduced into worshiping the false gods of the people of the

land, always with catastrophic consequences.

- The book of Judges is written as an apologetic for Israel's monarchy. It shows Israel's need for a king.

Especially in the latter part of the book, we are treated to a series of spectacles of the results of Israel's apostasy and then reminded that "in those days Israel had no king" (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

- Without a king the tribes faltered in their conquest of the land.
- The office of judge was only able to bring sporadic relief from the cycles of apostasy.
- The priests and Levites failed to provide social or religious stability in the absence of a king.

There is also a strong anti-Benjamite slant to the closing chapters of the book, indicating that it was written after David had come to power.

THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF JUDGES

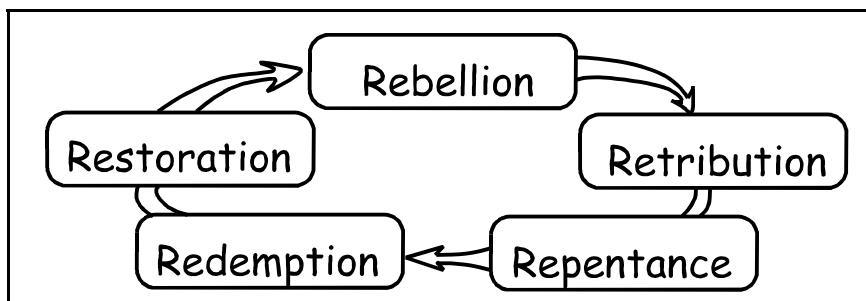
The first two chapters of Judges set the stage for the remainder of the book. They present a pattern, both of victorious conquest as well as of crushing defeat.

1:1	A Partial Conquest	Judah & Simeon - Success!
1:12		Othniel & Caleb
1:17		Judah & Simeon - Failure!
1:22		House of Joseph - Success!
1:27		Manasseh Ephraim Zebulun Asher Naphtali Dan
2:1	A Pattern for Failure	Angel of the Lord - A Promise of Judgment
2:6		Death of Joshua & the Coming of the Next Generation

2:11		Cycles of... Rebellion Retribution Repentance Redemption Restoration
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Now it came about after the death of Joshua that the sons of Israel inquired of the Lord, saying, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" (Judges 1:1).

It has been suggested that the phrase, "Now it came about after the death of Joshua," is to be regarded as a title heading for the whole book, especially in light of the fact that Joshua is seen alive in chapter 2. But such an interpretation is not necessary. Chapter 2 can easily be seen to be a flashback as the author steps back to view the entire period of the Judges, beginning with the career of Joshua. This chapter sets forth the pattern of the central part of the Book of Judges. It is a cyclical pattern.



1. The Coming of the New Generation.

And that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. (Judges 2:10).

The generation which came out of the Wilderness and which took the promised land committed itself to follow the Lord. But this had little impact upon the next generation as they did not make the same decision to follow the Lord that their parents had made. They departed from the ways of the Lord. Why? Was it because there was

no training in the home? Perhaps. After all, Proverbs 22:6 says to “train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” But such training is no guarantee of spirituality on the part of the children. And the spiritual walk of parents is not automatically passed on to children.

There is a principle here. It is that the spirituality of one generation is no guarantee of spirituality in the next generation. The most that parents can do is to train up their children in the way in which they ought to go. But those children must develop their own relationship with the Lord. This is not to downplay the importance of training up children in the way of the Lord. We are responsible for the upbringing of tomorrow’s church. The church has always been only a generation away from extinction. Its only chance is always the new generation.

2. The Rebellion of Idolatry.

Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger. (Judges 2:11-12).

Their sin was the fundamental sin which underlies all other sins. It was the sin of idolatry. They “served the Baals.” Here is the principle. You will always serve something. Either you will become a servant of the Lord, or else you will serve another god. It might be a god of your own making.

- Money.
- Power.
- Popularity.

Whatever it is, it involves idolatry. This does not necessarily mean that the Israelites completely abandoned the outward worship of the Lord. It is possible that they continued to give lip service at the tabernacle. But they also began to worship the Baalim and the Ashtaroth (Judges 2:13).

This mixture of true religion and false is known as “syncretism.” It is a smorgasbord type of religion, combining some

true and some false. Satan is a master of this type of counterfeit. He presents himself as an angel of light. He mixes truth with lies and the result is poison (like mixing a teaspoon of arsenic into a full cup of coffee).

The modern term for syncretism is “pluralism.” It is the idea that our culture should be a mixture of many religious ideas and that they all have equal value. Pluralism includes the idea that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

3. Retribution - The Judgment of God.

And the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord has sworn to them, so they were severely distressed. (Judges 2:14-15).

When we read this, we are inclined to think of God as a fierce and a terrible Judge who is angry with those who have transgressed His law. And so we should. He IS described in these terms. But He is also a God of grace. And in the midst of this judgment, there is a message of grace. You see, the enemies which God raised up were not only designed to judge Israel - they were also designed to drive Israel back to the Lord.

There is another reason that God raised up these enemies. It is seen in Judges 3:1-2. It is so that “the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war” (Judges 3:2). This seems to refer to the fact that the military capabilities of the Israelites were honed by their having to fight their enemies.

Many years ago I was involved in the martial arts. There is a lesson I learned there. It is that shadow boxing has limited value. There comes a time when you have to go out and spar against an actual opponent. The same is true of being a Christian witness. You can take dozens of classes and attend a host of seminars on personal evangelism. But you won’t really learn how to share your faith until you go out and do it.

4. Redemption - The Lord Raised up Judges.

Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16).

The word “judge” is the Hebrew word *shaphat*. When used as a verb, it usually carries the idea of the passing of some type of verdict and its resulting sentence. And yet, there is evidence that the judges of Israel did more than merely hear legal cases.

The related Akkadian word *shapitu* carried the idea of an “officer.” The Phoenician *shuphetim* described the “regents” and the Carthaginian *suphetes* were the “chief magistrates.” Hence, it seems that the judges of Israel served as leaders to the nation. This leadership involved two aspects:

- A part of this leadership involved the hearing of legal cases.
- Another part of this leadership sometimes involved military action - delivering the people of God from their oppressors..
- A third feature of the judge’s ministry seems to have been that of a teacher and a prophet. This is seen in verse 17.

And yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do as their fathers. (Judges 2:17).

The fact that not listening to their judge is equated with turning to other gods indicates that one of the ministries of the judge was to call people to worship the Lord.

The Central section of the book of Judges (chapters 3-17) focuses upon the varied ministries of the Judges. Some of these judges are mentioned only in passing. Only a few are described in detail.

OPPRESSOR	JUDGE	TRIBE	SCRIPTURE
Mesopotamia	Othniel	Judah	Judges 3:8
Moabites	Ehud	Benjamin	Judges 3:9-30

Philistines	Shamgar	-	Judges 3:31
Canaanites	Deborah	Ephraim	Judges 4-5
Midianites	Gideon	Manasseh	Judges 6-8
Abimelech	-	Manasseh	Judges 9
	Tola	Ephraim	Judges 10:1-2
	Jair	Gilead	Judges 10:3-6
Ammonites	Jephthah	Gilead	Judges 10:10-12:7
	Ibzan	Judah	Judges 12:8-10
	Elon	Zebulun	Judges 12:11-12
	Abdon	Ephraim	Judges 12:13-15
Philistines	Samson	Dan	Judges 13-16

It should not be assumed that this is necessarily a chronologically progressive account. There seem to be places where the ministry of the judges had a certain amount of overlap.

EHUD

1. The Oppression of Moab.

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees.

And the sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. (Judges 3:12-14).

The Moabites and the Ammonites were descendants of Lot. The Israelites had in the past deliberately avoided military conflict with Moab and Ammon for this reason. But this did not stop these two kingdoms from invading Israel. Eglon, the king of Moab, formed an

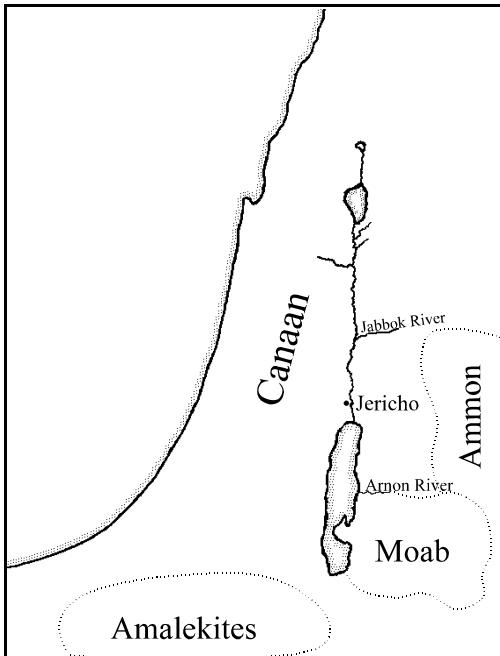
alliance in order to invade Israel. It involved three kingdoms:

- a. Moab.

The kingdom of Moab was located on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea between the Zered and the Arnon Rivers.

- b. Ammon.

The Ammonites lived to the north east of Moab. In past years, they had been pushed eastward off their homeland along the eastern bank of the Jordan by the Amorites. Their new home was located to the east of the Amorites on the border of the desert and east of the headwaters of the Jabbok River. Their capital city, Rabbath-ammon, still stands today as the capital city of Jordan. It is known simply as Amman.



- c. Amalekites.

The Amalekites lived in the Negev to the south of Canaan. They were descendants of Esau and were initially one of the desert tribes of Edom.

The “city of the palm trees” is a designation for Jericho (Deuteronomy 34:3). Though the city had been destroyed by Joshua and remained uninhabited, the site remained an important one due to its control of the important trade route through the center of Canaan.

The site of the Old Testament city is a mound rising up 50 feet

above the surrounding bedrock of the southern Jordan valley (Jericho is 825 feet below sea level). It is located about 10 miles to the NNW of the mouth of the Dead Sea and directly west of fords which make it possible to cross the Jordan except during the rainy season.

There is a natural spring known as Ain es-Sultan which originally attracted settlers to this site. This oasis gave the city its nickname, “City of Palm Trees.” The site held a strategic position at the hub of four major roads radiating outward to Gerizim, Jerusalem, Hebron, and westward to the fords across the Jordan.

2. Ehud the Man.

Judges 3:15-26 tells the story of Ehud and his premeditated murder of Eglon, king of Moab (perhaps “assassination” is a better word). Ehud is the hero of the story. It was the Lord who raised him up to be a deliverer for the Israelites (3:15). This act would serve as an impetus for an uprising against Moab.

But when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. (Judges 3:15).

Ehud was a “left-handed man,” literally, “a man bound in his right hand.” There is a play on words here. He was a “left handed man” but he was also a Benjamite, a “son of the right hand.” The fact that Ehud was left-handed was significant.

In that culture, a left-handed man was considered something of a social misfit. The right hand was normally the social hand (we still speak of extending the “right hand of fellowship”). The left hand was used solely for matters of personal hygiene. It was considered the unclean hand. That is why in matters of judgment, the condemned would be placed at the left hand of the king (remember this the next time you look at the judgment of the sheep and the goats and see what happens to those whom Christ places at His left hand). And yet, it was this social misfit that God chose to deliver the Israelites from their oppressors. There is a lesson here. It is that God uses the unusable. Even Jesus was described as “the stone that the builders rejected.”

3. The Assassination of Eglon.

And Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak.

And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man.

And it came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.

But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilead, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he said, "Keep silence." And all who attended him left him.

And Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat.

And Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out.

Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them. (Judges 3:16-23).

The very thing that made him a social outcast was utilized by Ehud in carrying out his execution of the king.

Ehud makes his escape while the servants wait outside the king's room, thinking that he is merely taking his time in matters of personal hygiene ("he is only relieving himself in the cool room" - 3:24).

It is not only mentioned that Eglon was fat (3:17), but we are given graphic details of his fat closing in over the haft of the assassin's blade (3:22). Furthermore, we are given a glimpse of the embarrassment of the servants as we view their thoughts of their master (3:24-25).

4. Military Deliverance.

Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah.

And it came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was in front of them.

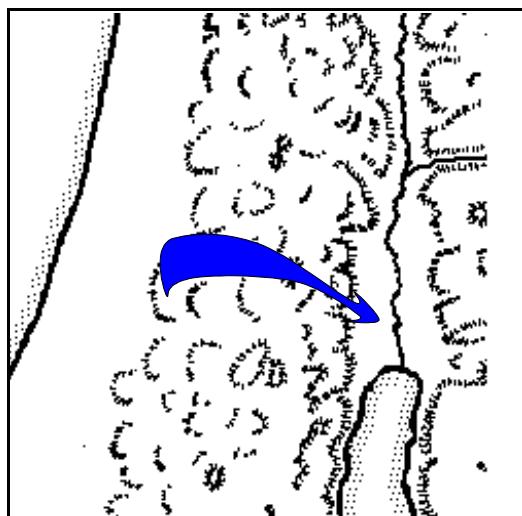
And he said to them, “Pursue them, for the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands,” So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross.

And they struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped.

So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years. (Judges 3:26-30).

Ehud did not stop with the assassination of the Moabite king. In this, he was not like the Israelites who had taken the land but who had failed to take the opportunity to completely drive out the Canaanites. He escaped only to rally the Israelites. While he had previously gone against the enemy alone, now he walked at their head.

Perhaps there is a principle of leadership to be found here. It is that if you will do the right thing when you are alone, then when you are not alone, others will follow. Ehud's military strategy was as cunning as his assassination ploy had been. He first marched to the fords of the Jordan on the east side of Jericho, captured these, and thereby cut off the retreat of the enemy. By doing so, he denied them any attempt to rally and return. The period of peace that ensued was 80 years - the longest of any period during the days of the judges.



They seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab

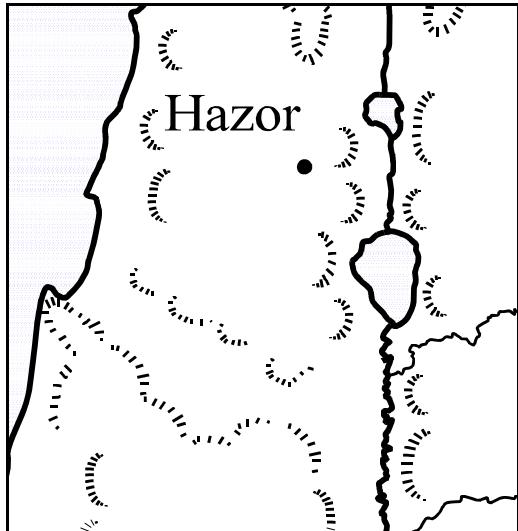
DEBORAH

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died.

And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

And the sons of Israel cried to the Lord; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years. (Judges 4:1-3).

Ancient Hazor has been identified with Tell el-Qeday. It is located nine miles north of the Sea of Galilee. The site is made up of an oval-shaped tell of about 25 acres and a much larger plateau covering an area of 175 acres. This made Hazor one of the largest cities in Canaan. What made Hazor so formidable was the fact that it boasted a chariot corps numbering 900 chariots. It must be remembered that chariots were to the ancient world what the armored tank has been to the modern world.



Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

And she used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. (Judges 4:4-5).

Throughout most of antiquity, women had a fairly low standing in society. And yet, this woman was known as a prophetess and a judge. She was a housewife and a mother (Judges 5:7 mentions that she was a mother in Israel). But that did not stop the Lord from speaking through her.

Here is the principle. Women are not excluded from ministry. I am not advocating that women should hold offices within the church (though Deborah certainly did hold an exalted office in the nation of Israel). But I am

saying that women have an important ministry within the church.

Now she sent and summoned Barak, the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, “Behold, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded, ‘Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun, 7 and I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon; and I will give him into your hand.’”

Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” (Judges 4:6-8).

Barak said that he would go, but only on one condition. He would only go if Deborah would come along. Barak believed that the Lord was with Deborah. He wasn't so certain that the Lord was with him. And so, he wanted to bring someone along who would guarantee the presence of the Lord. By insisting that Deborah come, Barak was showing true faith. But he was also showing weak faith.

And she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. (Judges 4:9).

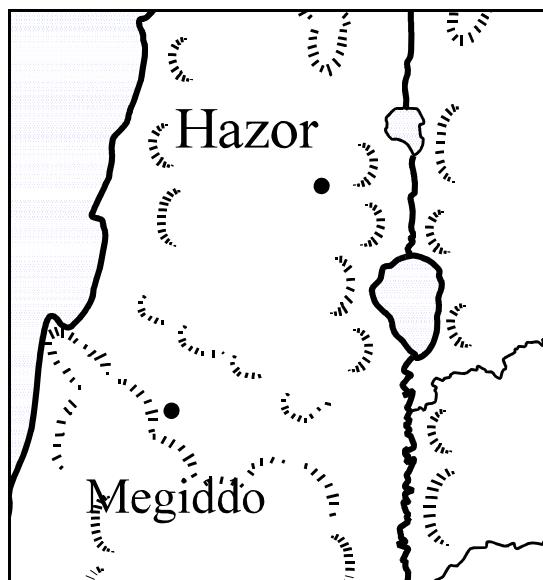
If I gave a quiz in the average Sunday school class, quite a few would recognize the name of Deborah. But not that many would remember the name of Barak.

As the battle commenced, the forces of Sisera consisted of a large chariot corps mobilized “from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon” (Judges 4:13). We know the location of the river Kishon. It is a fairly small stream that runs in a northwesterly direction along the southern part of the Valley of Jezreel, emptying out into the Mediterranean just north of Mount Carmel.

What is interesting is the other place-name mentioned. It is *Harosheth-hagoyim*. As near as I can make out, it seems to mean “the cutting of the nations.” The key city of this valley, although not mentioned in this text, is the ancient walled city of Megiddo. It is from this that we get the Hebrew “Armageddon” (*Har-Megiddo* - “Mount of Megiddo” - the problem being is that Megiddo is not on a mountain, it is a hill on the edge of a valley).

In the historical account of the passage, we read that “the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army” (4:15). The passage makes it quite clear that the instrument which the Lord used to accomplish this was Barak and the Israelites.

Judges 5 follows up the battle with a song of victory. In this song, Deborah says that “the torrent of Kishon swept them away” (5:21), seemingly a reference to the Kishon River overflowing its banks, although whether this is simply poetic imagery or whether it actually happened in the course of the battle is difficult to tell. As I read this account, I am struck by the “coincidence” of its echoing repetition in the book of Revelation.



- The kings of the nations (*Ha-Goyim*) are described as being gathered together to the place known as Har-Megiddo (Armageddon).
- It is the Lord who goes and fights for His people.
- There is a “torrent” in Judges while Revelation describes blood “to the horse’s bridle.”

This was the original battle of Armageddon.

*The kings came and fought;
Then fought the kings of Canaan
At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;
They took no plunder in silver. (Judges 5:19).*

This battle was to become the pattern for the victory of the Lord against the powers of darkness. The church (the new Deborah) is still called to a battle.

And the good news is that the Lord still promises the victory.

And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army, with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. (Judges 4:15).

How did Barak and his 10,000 under-equipped foot soldiers manage to defeat a chariot corps of 900 war chariots? This was like having a bunch of Indians defeat a modern mechanized armor division. And what is more, they did it in open terrain. They were on the valley of Megiddo. This was perfect territory for chariot warfare. The Israelites had no right to win.

But God was bigger than Sisera's chariot corps. In her song of victory, Deborah says that "the earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, even the clouds dripped water" (Judges 5:4). Furthermore, she says that "the torrent of Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon" (Judges 5:21 - this torrent of Kishon is also mentioned in Psalm 83:9).

If this is not merely figurative language, then it is possible that the Lord brought about a rainstorm and a flooding of the Kishon River to turn the valley floor into mud, thereby immobilizing Sisera's chariot force. The Israelites were unaffected by this adverse weather and attacked their enemies, routing them.

As Sisera flees on foot, he will come into contact with another woman who will be used of the Lord. It is noteworthy that this woman was married to a man who had rejected the Lord.

Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh. (Judges 4:11).

Heber had come from a distinguished family. He was a descendant of the father-in-law of Moses. But he had long since disassociated himself from his fellow Israelites. Instead of living with them, he had parted from their company and had pitched his tent in the area of Kedesh Naphtali on the southwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. He had also made an alliance with the Canaanite city of Hazor and the enemies of the people of God.

Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. (Judges 4:17).

This man had made peace at a time where there ought to have been no peace. He made peace with the enemies of Israel. Is there a lesson here? Perhaps it is that there are certain alliances into which we ought not enter. Though I believe in the unity of the church, there are certain people with whom we should not be united.

Apparently, the wife of Heber understood this principle. When Sisera sought refuge within her tent, she at first acquiesced, feeding him and hiding him under a rug within her tent.

Discussion Question: Did Jael do wrong by offering hospitality and then murdering her guest?

But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. (Judges 4:21).

In such a way, the prophecy was fulfilled. It was by the hand of a woman that Sisera met his end. As Deborah describes the slaying of Sisera (5:23-27), there is a picture of the spiritual war that was introduced in Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15	Deborah's Song
The woman.	“Most blessed of women is Jael”
The wife of Adam who had fallen into sin.	“The wife of Heber the Kenite”
He shall bruise you on the head.	“She struck Sisera, she smashed his head; and she shattered and pierced his temple”

As a result of this victory, there are 40 years of peace in the land (Judges 5:31). It is a peace that is broken again by invaders.

GIDEON

Gideon's story is a lesson of what God can do with a man who will simply say, “Yes” to God. The interesting thing about him is that he initially

seems to have been inclined to say, “No.” It wasn’t that he was a fearless man. Indeed, there are several evidences that he dealt with real fear. It was that he overcame that fear to obey the Lord.

Only a fool is without fear. Indeed, the Bible speaks of the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom. The brave man is one who faces his fear and does what needs doing in spite of that fear. Here is the point. You are to be afraid of that which is worthy of your fear. And in the long run, only God is worthy of your fear.

“And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28).

There is One whom you ought to fear. The Lord is truly worthy of our fear, for only He has power over both body and soul.

6:1	Gideon's Call	Oppression at the hands of Midian
6:7		A Prophet
6:11		Angel of the Lord
6:25	Gideon's Commitment	Pull down Altar to Baal
6:33		Call to Arms
6:36		Laying out the Fleece
7:1	Gideon's Conquest	Reduction of his Forces
7:9		Spying out the Enemy
7:15		Sharing the Strategy
7:19		The Battle
7:24	Ephraim	Their Involvement
8:1		Their Contention
8:4	Gideon's Conquest	Rejection by Succoth & Penuel
8:10		Victory at Karkor
8:13		Accounting at Succoth & Penuel
8:18		Death of Zebah & Zalmunna
8:22	Gideon's Culpability	Offer of Kingship

8:24		The Ephod at Ophrah
8:29		Many wives
8:31		Abimelech

1. Oppression at the hands of Midian.

Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord gave them into the hands of Midian seven years. (Judges 6:1).

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4). They settled in the lands of Arabia to the east of the Gulf of Aqabah where they adopted a nomadic lifestyle.

In Judges 3:8 and 4:2 we read that the Lord sold the Israelites into the hands of their enemies. This time He gave them away. This period lasted for seven years. For seven years, the Midianites made successive raids into Canaan. They always came at the time of the harvest. They would wait until the Israelites had done all the work of planting and cultivating, and then they would swarm over the land, taking the crops at will. Their invasion of the land at such a time was likened unto a plague of locusts (Judges 6:5).

2. Gideon's Call.

Then the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak that was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press in order to save it from the Midianites. (Judges 6:11).

In verses 11 and 12 He is called the “angel of the Lord.” When we come to verse 14 He is simply called “the Lord.” This should not confuse us. The angel of the Lord always represents the very presence and message of God.

Gideon wasn't expecting such an angelic visitor. He was expecting Midianites. That is why he was beating wheat in a place where you didn't normally beat wheat. He was in hiding.

And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and

said to him, “The Lord is with you, O valiant warrior.” (Judges 6:12).

Gideon didn't look much like a valiant warrior. He looked more like the “before” picture on a “before & after” poster. He was here in hiding doing “woman's work” (the grinding of grain was considered to be the work of women - Exodus 11:5). But God declared him to be a “valiant warrior.” That is what God does with us, too. He justifies us. He declares us to be righteous, not because we are righteous, but because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ which has been reckoned to us. He says, “I have declared you to be righteous - now be righteous.”

3. Gideon's Requests for a Sign.

Gideon didn't make only one request for a sign. He made three such requests (though he acted in faith and obedience prior to making the last two requests).

Request #1	“Show me a sign” (Fire springs from the rock and consumes the offering).	Judges 6:17-22
Request #2	Let dew be on the fleece while the ground remains dry.	Judges 6:36-38
Request #3	Let the fleece be dry while dew is on the ground.	Judges 6:39-40

Was Gideon wrong to ask for a sign? It should be noted that the reason he asked for a sign was to make certain that he had not misunderstood the Word of the Lord (Judges 6:36). The first sign involved Gideon preparing an offering of meat, bread, and broth and bringing it to the angel of the Lord. These were placed on a rock.

Then the angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened bread, and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. Then the angel of the Lord vanished from his sight. (Judges 6:21).

I can't help but wonder if the charred surface of that rock was to serve

as a constant reminder that the Lord had been there. Indeed, Gideon chose to immortalize that place by building an altar there.

Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and named it The Lord is Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezites. (Judges 6:24).

If I had been there, I might have named it “the place of the burning rock.” But I wasn’t. Perhaps Gideon realized something that is all too easily missed. He named it, “The Lord is Peace.” He understood that the fact that a sacrifice had been accepted by God was a sign of peace between God and men.

4. Gideon Destroys the Altar of Baal.

Now the same night it came about that the Lord said to him, “Take your father’s bull and a second bull seven years old, and pull down the altar of Baal which belongs to your father, and cut down the Asherah that is beside it; 26 and build an altar to the Lord your God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly manner, and take a second bull and offer a burnt offering with the wood of the Asherah which you shall cut down.” (Judges 6:25-26).

Baal was the storm god of the Canaanites. The word “Baal” means “lord” or “master.” It is used in modern Hebrew to describe a “husband.” Baal was the god who was said to produce rain which was so necessary to the raising of crops and cattle. He was also the god of reproduction and produce. The Israelites had begun to worship this false god. As a sign of their worship, they had built an altar to Baal.

Then Gideon took ten men of his servants and did as the Lord had spoken to him; and it came about, because he was too afraid of his father’s household and the men of the city to do it by day, that he did it by night. (Judges 6:27).

The tearing down of this altar was no simple affair. A Baal altar found at Megiddo measured 26 feet across and 4 feet high. It was made of stones cemented together with dried mud. Next to it would be an “Asherah” - a fertility symbol.

So loyal were the Israelites to the worship of Baal that Gideon feared to destroy the altar by day. The account goes on to show that his fear was not misplaced, for the Israelites respond by demanding his death and it is only when his father intercedes for him that he is allowed to live.

Then the men of the city said to Joash, “Bring out your son, that he may die, for he has torn down the altar of Baal, and indeed, he has cut down the Asherah which was beside it.”

But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.”

Therefore on that day he named him Jerubbaal, that is to say, “Let Baal contend against him,” because he had torn down his altar. (Judges 6:30-32).

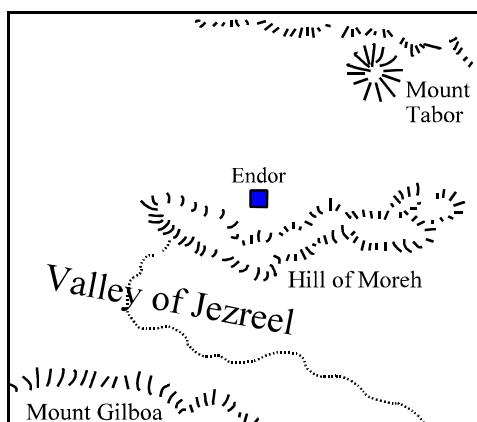
There is a play on words here. Gideon is given the nickname “Jerubbaal” because it was suggested by his father that they should “let Baal contend against him” (literally, “let Baal *jerub* him”).

5. The Reduction of Gideon’s Forces.

Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him, rose early and camped beside the spring of Harod; and the camp of Midian was on the north side of them by the hill of Moreh in the valley (Judges 7:1).

The last chapter mentioned that the Midianites had a camel corps (Judges 6:5). These would have been the desert version of cavalry and, as such, would be more suited to warfare on the open plains as opposed to mountain terrain.

With this in mind, they had moved their forces



into the Valley of Jezreel and had encamped near the village of Endor on the north side of the Hill of Moreh. Gideon and his forces encamped to the south of the Midianites with only the ridge of Moreh separating the two forces. It was a time of tension with battle in the air. And it was now that the Lord instructed Gideon to whittle down his forces. When we get to Judges 8:10, we shall see that the entire force of the Midianites numbered 135,000 men. The Israelites at the outset were outnumbered nearly four to one.

32,000 men	<i>“Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him depart”</i>	22,000 leave
10,000 men	<i>“Separate everyone who laps like a dog”</i>	9,700 sent home
300 men	<i>“I will deliver you with the 300 men.”</i>	

It is not that these 300 were so great. It is that God is very big. It isn't the size of the army that counts; it's the size of the God in the army.

6. The Battle.

And he divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers.

And he said to them, “Look at me, and do likewise. And behold, when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. 18 When I and all who are with me blow the trumpet, then you also blow the trumpets all around the camp, and say, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon.’” (Judges 7:16-18).

This isn't much of a battle strategy. In one hand they would hold a trumpet. In the other hand they would hold a pitcher and a torch. What's wrong with this picture? They had no weapons! But that is okay, because the Lord would be their sword.

And when they blew 300 trumpets, the Lord set the sword of one against the other even throughout the whole army; and the army fled as far as Beth-shittah toward Zererah, as far as the edge of Abel-melolah, by

Tabbath. (Judges 7:22).

The attack was set for the “middle watch.” This was in the dead of night when the camp would be filled with slumber. Suddenly there was a clattering of shattered pottery and 300 swirling lights around the camp.

The main lesson here is not about the quality of soldiers or the value of a surprise attack. Rather it is that we see it is the Lord who gave the victory against overwhelming numbers.

The battle quickly turned into a rout. The army of the Midianites fled back the way they had come. As they retreated, the other tribes of Israel were called to join in.

Then Gideon and the 300 men who were with him came to the Jordan and crossed over, weary yet pursuing. (Judges 8:4).

Gideon knew that victory would not be complete without destroying the military might of the Midianites. With this in mind, he began a chase of the Midianites that was to take him 150 miles.

And he said to the men of Succoth, “Please give loaves of bread to the people who are following me, for they are weary, and I am pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.”

The leaders of Succoth said, “Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your army.?”

And Gideon said, “All right, when the Lord has given Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands, then I will thrash your bodies with the thorns of the wilderness and with briars.” (Judges 8:5-7).

As we read a bit further, we find that Gideon received this same repulse from the town of Penuel. These were Israelite towns. They were inhabited by those two and a half tribes which had elected to remain on the east bank of the Jordan River.

Succoth	Declined to assist Gideon through the sharing of provisions.	<i>“I will thrash your bodies with thorns & briars”</i>
Penuel		<i>“I will tear down this tower”</i>

Do you see what has happened? The men of Succoth and Penuel are no longer identifying themselves with the covenant people of God. They want to “play it safe.” They have not yet chosen sides in the conflict.

I wonder if there are not those today who are similar. “Fence-sitters” in the cause of Christ. Not against the Lord, but not with Him, either. The Lord allows no such “fence-sitting.”

“He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.” (Matthew 12:30).

We are involved in a great spiritual war. The weapons of our warfare are not spears or arrows - or even torches and pots. They are spiritual weapons. But the battle is no less real. And you are called to choose sides. If you are not on a side, then you have already chosen.

7. Offer of Kingship.

Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, “Rule over us, both you and your son, also your son’s son, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.”

But Gideon said to them, “I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.” (Judges 8:22-23).

Gideon did not let his victory go to his head. In this he is to be commended. He was offered the position of a king and he instead gave the glory and the credit of his victory to the Lord. Yet he does make a request from the spoils of the victory.

8. The Ephod at Ophrah.

Yet Gideon said to them, “I would request of

you, that each of you give me an earring from his spoil." For they had gold earrings, because they were Ishmaelites. (Judges 8:24).

The people agree to this request and a total of 1700 shekels (about 42 pounds) of gold along with other ornaments are gathered and given to Gideon.

And Gideon made it into an ephod, and placed it in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, so that it became a snare to Gideon and his household. (Judges 8:27).

An “Ephod” was an apron-looking garment. It was worn by the high priest. It was the badge of priesthood (Judges 17:5). It was held in place by a waistband and associated with the Urim and Thummim which were kept within a breastplate.

What caused Gideon to do such a thing? Was it pride? Or the sudden wealth that was awarded him? He had faced the hoards of Midian and won. He faced the temptation of sudden wealth and lost. We often do not realize what a snare of prosperity can be. The epistle of James warns us of the snare of riches. The point can be made that whatever you own owns you.

ABIMELECH

Gideon’s closing years were a time of great prosperity. A part of this prosperity was in the fact that he had no less than seventy sons. One of these sons was by a concubine from Shechem. His name was Abimelech, meaning “My father the king.” Often when a ruler dies, his son succeeds him. But what happens when that ruler has seventy sons? The answer is - Trouble!

Following the death of his father, Abimelech goes to Shechem and raises support to build for himself a throne and to establish himself as king. They supply him with funds by which he hires a band of “worthless and reckless fellows” - bad and wanton men. Seventy pieces of silver are used to hire these men who help to murder seventy brothers.

Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah, and killed his brothers the sons of Jerubbaal, seventy men, on one

stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, for he hid himself.

And all the men of Shechem and all Beth-millo assembled together, and they went and made Abimelech king, by the oak of the pillar which was at Shechem. (Judges 9:5-6).

There is an interesting play on words as the men of Shechem “made king Abimelech as king” (literally, “they *meleched* Abimelech”). Shechem was a Canaanite city. It had been there in the days of Jacob (see Genesis 34 for the story of Dinah and the people of Shechem). They were used to the idea of a king and were especially prone to accept a man whose mother came from their city. Thus, the advent of Abimelech was as an anti-Israelite king.

Jotham, the youngest and only surviving son of Gideon, goes to Mount Gerizim and pronounces a curse upon the city of Shechem. It begins with a parable in which the trees embark upon a quest for a king. Nobler trees such as the olive and the fig and even the vine refuse such a position. But the bramble bush agrees.

“And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.’” (Judges 9:15).

The picture is obvious. The more noble trees such as the olive and the fig tree represent the past leaders of Israel, Moses and Joshua and the judges who had refused to take the mantle as king, but who instead had recognized that the Lord was the true king of Israel. Finally the bramble bush had accepted the title, even though the bramble has no shade by which it is able to shade the mighty cedars. He is likening the bramble bush to Abimelech and to the men of Shechem who had accepted him as king and who had put to death all of the other sons of Gideon.

There is a motif established here of a false anointed one.

Shechem lies on the saddle ridge between the twin peaks of Gerizim and Ebal. This is significant as these were the two mountains upon which Joshua had all of the Israelites stand and recite the blessings and the cursings of the law. It is here that Jotham pronounces a curse upon those who had recognized the kingship of Abimelech and who therefore endorsed his murderous actions:

“...let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the

men of Shechem and Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech.”
(Judges 9:20).

The rest of this chapter deals with the fulfillment of this curse. Following a three year reign, “*God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem*” (Judges 9:23). Abimelech captures a rebellious Shechem and burns its tower fortress to the ground, sowing the city with salt. This is possibly related to the concept of a “covenant of salt.” The idea was that salt would preclude anything from growing in that location in the future. Abimelech then goes on to attack Thebez. This is another city within the realm of Manasseh and located some 6 miles to the northeast of Shechem. It is here that Abimelech is killed.

So Abimelech came to the tower and fought against it, and approached the entrance of the tower to burn it with fire.

But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head, crushing his skull.

Then he called quickly to the young man, his armor bearer, and said to him, “Draw your sword and kill me, lest it be said of me, ‘A woman slew him.’” So the young man pierced him through, and he died. (Judges 9:52-54).

Abimelech’s death is an ignoble one - he is killed by a lowly weapon (the millstone) and at the hands of a woman. This is reminiscent of the death of Sisera.

Sisera	Killed by a woman	Tent peg through the head
Abimelech		A millstone crushed his head

This motif of the crushed head of the enemy of God harkens back to the prophecy of the seed of the serpent from Genesis 3:15. It is a continuation of that motif. Once again we see the enemy of God being crushed by the seed of the woman.

JEPHTHAH

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of

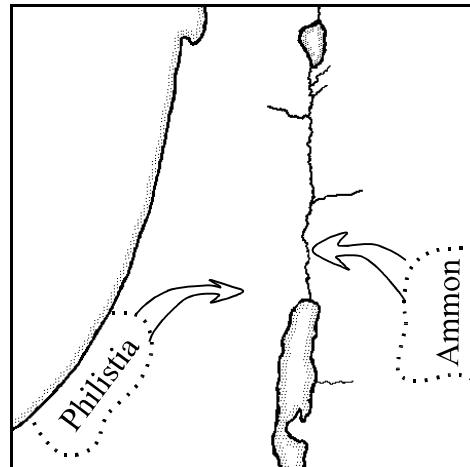
Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him.

And the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. (Judges 10:6-7).

Once again the Israelites turned away from the Lord and indulged in the pagan practices of the nations around them. This time, judgment came from two separate directions.

- ♦ The Philistines.

These were a group of warriors known as the “Sea Peoples.” They had attempted an invasion of Egypt and had only barely been repulsed in the days of Rameses III. They had subsequently founded five cities on the seacoast area of southwestern Canaan.



- ♦ The Ammonites.

These were the descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his daughter. They were located to the southeast of Gilead.

It is the second of these two groups that is of foremost interest in this passage. The Philistines become a major concern as we examine Samson. Thus, Jephthah will be to the eastern tribes what Samson will be to the tribes of the west.

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah.

And Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, “You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.”

So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about

Jephthah, and they went out with him. (Judges 11:1-3).

Jephthah was illegitimate. As such, he was a social outcast and was stripped of any rights to inheritance. This was no fault of his own. He was being persecuted for the sins of his parents. Those who speak of sexual sins as merely “a matter between consenting adults” normally forget the repercussions that such activities have upon the children.

Jephthah was forced to live in exile in “the land of Tob.” This was the area to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee that would later be known as the Decapolis. Here he became the leader of a group who are described as “worthless fellows” - “empty men”). The same term was used of the men who followed Abimelech (Judges 9:4).

And it happened when the sons of Ammon fought against Israel that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob; 6 and they said to Jephthah, “Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon.” (Judges 11:5-6).

It must have taken a great deal for the elders of Gilead to swallow their pride and come to Jephthah. They ask that he come and be their “chief.” In verse 11 they make him “head and chief” over them . It is interesting that Jephthah makes the elders repeat the promise before he finally accepts their offer. Before seeking a military resolve, Jephthah sends messengers to the king of the Ammonites in an attempt to negotiate a peaceful resolve. Several arguments are given.

- ♦ Israel took only the land of the Amorites and then only after being attacked when they sought safe passage through that land (Judges 11:15-22).
- ♦ It was the Lord who drove out the Amorites, something that Chemosh, the god of the Ammonites had failed to do (Judges 11:23-24).
- ♦ This land had now been the uncontested property of the Israelites for the past 300 years (Judges 11:26).

Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mispah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. (Judges 11:29).

This is only the second time up to this point that it had been said of one of the judges that “*the Spirit of the Lord came upon*” him. It is an indication

that Jephthah was trusting in the Lord for this victory. Indeed, Hebrews 11:32 lists Jephthah as one of those who “*by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight*” (Hebrews 11:33-34).

So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand.

And he struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. (Judges 11:32-33).

We are not told the specific strategy used, only that it was the Lord who gave the victory. The result was not only that the Ammonites were pushed back into their own land, but that the entire line of fortresses which divided the lands of Israel from those of Ammon now fell to the Israelites.

Prior to the battle, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord that if he was victorious then upon his return “*whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering*” (Judges 11:31). Upon his victorious return, the first one to come out of the door of his house was his daughter. He responds in sorrow.

And it came about when he saw her, that he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take it back.” (Judges 11:35).

She asks for a two month respite to mourn “because of my virginity” (Judges 11:37).

And it came about at the end of two months that she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, 40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year. (Judges 11:39-40).

This passage has led to some difficult questions since the natural

reading seems to indicate that Jephthah engaged in human sacrifice, putting his own daughter to death in order to fulfill his foolish vow. There are two possibilities:

- ♦ Jephthah did not actually have her put to death, but only sacrificed her in the sense of wholly dedicating her to the service of the Lord.
- ♦ Jephthah actually performed a human sacrifice, putting his daughter to death as a sacrifice to God.

Evidences have been offered for both of these interpretations.

Dedicated to God	Human Sacrifice
Being a Judge, Jephthah must have been God-fearing and so would not have violated the Law	The promise of a simple animal sacrifice would hardly be a convincing vow in this situation
The Spirit of the Lord comes on Jephthah and he is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as being one of faith	This does not take place while the Spirit of the Lord is on him and he is not commended for this action
Daughter bewails her virginity and Judges 11:29 makes comment that “she knew not a man”	The burnt offering involves death in all 286 Old Testament occurrences
Exodus 38:8 and 1 Samuel 2:22 speak of women in service of the Tabernacle	If it was a frequent practice for women to serve in the Tabernacle, then why would this be a case for mourning?
Human sacrifice would have been clearly understood as a violation of God’s Law; public opinion would have disallowed it	Human sacrifice was viewed as a last ditch effort in battle (2 Kings 3:27).
Leviticus 27:1-8 allows for redemption of humans vowed for sacrifice	There is little evidence of Jephthah’s knowledge of the Law

Deuteronomy 12:31 warns that the Israelites were not to engage in the pagan practices of the Canaanites, “*for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.*” On the other hand, we read in 1 Samuel of how Saul sought to put his own son, Jonathan, to death in fulfillment of a similar vow (1 Samuel 14:44-45).

Discussion Question: Obviously, a man in ancient Israel who swore an oath to the Lord was duty-bound to keep it (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23). But God’s Law also forbids human sacrifice via the Sixth Commandment against killing. Are we obligated to keep oaths, even if it leads to the breaking of the Law? Or does an oath which leads to the breaking of the Law automatically render itself null and void, leaving us free to disregard the oath?

Matthew 14:1-12 presents another such case of a foolishly given oath. It is the story of Herod Antipas who gave a carte blanche oath to Salome and as a result murdered John the Baptist.

In Matthew 21:28-32 Jesus told a parable of two sons who were asked to go and work in their father’s vineyard. The first refused and then changed his mind. He was commended, even though he acted contrary to what he said he would do, because he acted in keeping with his father’s will.

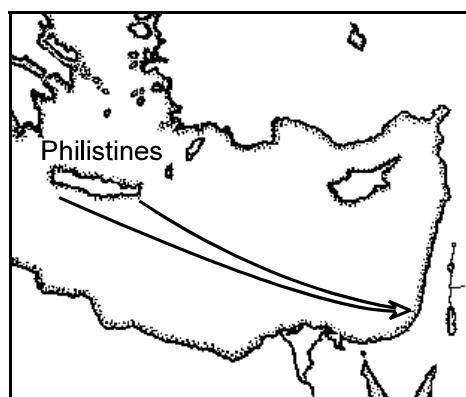
SAMSON

Samson is a study in paradoxes. As such, he is not an exemplary example. He is a man of great physical strength, but of great moral weakness. He is heroic in his victories as well as in his defeats.

Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. (Judges 13:1).

We have already made mention of the advent of the five cities of the Philistines upon the shores of southwest Canaan.

- Their name: The word “Philistine” is not a Hebrew



or even a Semitic word. It seems to be Indo-European in origin. It is from this name that we derive the term “Palestine.”

- Their origins: Genesis 10:14 identifies the tribal origins of the Philistines as a Hamitic people coming from the Casluhim (See also Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7; Deut. 2:23 and 1 Chron. 1:12). The most plausible theory is that these were related either to the Minoans of Crete or to the Mycenaeans of early Greece. Egyptian records speak of an invading group of “Sea Peoples” who were barely repulsed by Rameses III in 1188 B.C. It is probable that the Philistines were among these Sea Peoples.
- Their cities: With the exception of Ekron, the five major cities of the Philistines were all originally Canaanite cities which were taken over by the Philistines. From their position on the coast, they controlled the major trade route into Egypt.
 - (1) Ashkelon was the only city to have its own harbor and so it was the major seaport for the Philistines. Letters from Ashkelon appear among the Amarna Tablets in Egypt.
 - (2) Gaza was located 3 miles inland from the coast of the Mediterranean. The city was situated on a high hill 100 feet above the surrounding plain. It boasted 15 fresh water wells.
 - (3) Ashdod was originally inhabited by the Anakim. The city boasted a temple to their god Dagon. It would be here that the Philistines would bring the captured Ark in the days of Samuel.
 - (4) Ekron is the only city to have been built by the Philistines and not merely taken over.
 - (5) Gath (means “Winepress”) was the home of the Anakim, a race of giants, one of whom was Goliath. As there were several towns by the name of Gath, the exact location of this city has not yet been determined.

The Scallion Onion derives its name from Ashkelon.

These five cities lie within the area that today is known as the Gaza Strip. When we read of the Philistines, we should remember that we are not speaking of a group who were culturally backwards. To the contrary, they represented the educated culture of the day. They possessed the secret of smelting iron ore and they possessed cities that engaged in trade across the

Mediterranean.

1. Promise of Samson's Birth.

The parents of Samson were of the tribe of Dan. The woman of this marriage was barren. This was the worst possible condition that anyone in the ancient world could face. In a day when there was no social security, it meant that there would be no one to care for them in their old age.

a. Agent of the promise.

Judges 13:3 says that “the angel of the Lord” appeared to the wife of Manoah and promised that a son would be born who would begin to deliver Israel (reminiscent of the “seed motif”). In verse 6 we read her description of him. She calls him “a man of God” whose appearance “was like the appearance of the angel of God.” When Manoah requests the name of the angel, he is asked, “*Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?*” (*Judges 13:18*). The noun form of this word is seen in Isaiah 9:6 where we read that the name of the Promised Son shall be called “**wonderful** Counselor.”

b. Instructions and a promise.

“For behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and no razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.” (*Judges 13:5*).

The requirements of the Nazarite Vow had been set forth in Numbers 6:2-8. It was a “vow of dedication.” Indeed, the word “Nazarite” comes from the Hebrew word *nazar*, “to separate.” Samson was to be separated unto God from the womb. While those who partook of the Nazarite Vow generally only did so for a limited time, Samson was to be a permanent Nazarite.

c. The repetition of the announcement.

There is a literary device that is used in this passage in which details of the announcement of the angel is given to the wife and then she relates that same announcement to her husband, yet some of the details are different. As the reader, you are supposed to read these two announcements and you are supposed to note the differences. This same literary device is seen in Genesis 3 when the woman relates the instructions of God regarding the eating of the forbidden fruit to the serpent and then adds the injunction, “Neither shall you touch it.” In this case, the woman relates both more and less than was originally told to her from the angel.

Her Addition	Her Omission
She adds a reference to “the day of his death” (13:7).	She fails to mention that he would be a deliverer (13:5).

These two aspects are going to be connected in the Samson narrative. It is in Samson’s death that he will do his greatest work of deliverance. In this, he is a type of another who also did His greatest work of salvation in His death.

2. Birth and Early Life.

Then the woman gave birth to a son and named him Samson; and the child grew up and the Lord blessed him.

And the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him in Mahanch-Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol. (Judges 13:24-25).

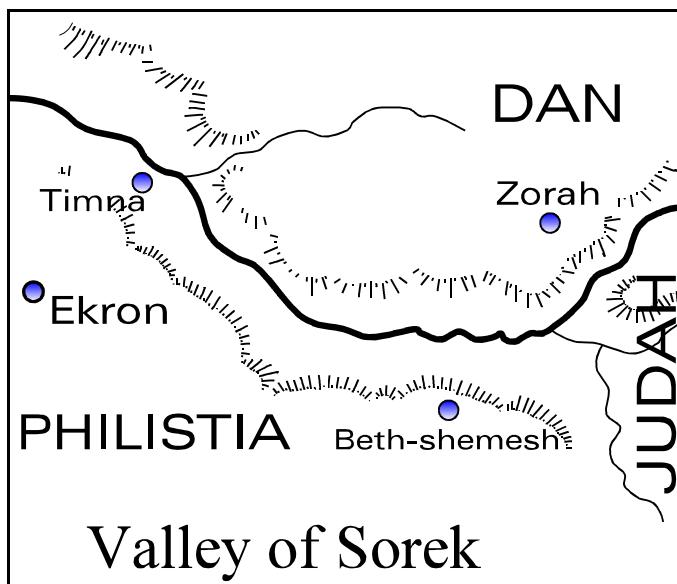
The name “Samson” seems to be taken from the Hebrew word *shemesh*, “sun.” Perhaps this was because he was born only a few miles away from Beth-Shemesh (“House of the Sun”). As such, it was a Canaanite name, for they worshiped the sun.

At some point in his life, the Spirit of God “began to stir” within Samson. Perhaps this stirring was with reference to his great strength. We should not necessarily think of Samson as a great muscleman. Rather, he seems to have been an ordinary man gifted with extraordinary strength.

3. His Desire for a Philistine Woman.

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. (Judges 14:1).

Samson lived in a cross-cultural community. The Sorek Valley hosted both Israelite, Canaanite and Philistine towns.



As Samson came of marital age, his eye fell upon a Philistine woman. In verse 3 he says to his father, “*Get her for me, for she looks good to me.*” Again in verse 7 we read that “*she looked good to Samson.*” In both these cases, the Hebrew says literally, “She is right in my eyes.” This is a refrain which we will see throughout the closing chapters of the book of Judges when “*every man did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

Samson was a He-Man with a “she-weakness.” He had a tendency toward lust that was to conquer him. But the real point of this story is how God used Samson in spite of his failures. It is a story of the sovereignty of God.

Judges 14:4 says that all of his troubled relationships were “*of the Lord, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.*” The judges had two different types of ministry. Some were called to judge. Others were called to deliver Israel from her enemies (the best of the judges did both, like Deborah). This brings up a question. Why

is the name of Samson mentioned in Heb 11:32 as an example of a man of faith? It certainly is not because Samson was faithful to God. He broke every one of the requirements of the Nazarite Vow. He wasn't faithful, but he did believe God and he called upon the Lord (Judges 16:28). He was not afraid to ask God for big things, even when he knew that he did not deserve them.

Perhaps we can learn something from this. I know that I do not deserve to expect a positive answer from God when I pray. If Samson teaches me anything, he teaches me about the grace of God and that God answers the prayer of faith, even when the one who offers it is a sinful, fallen, and marred person.

4. The Wedding Incident.

Wedding feasts were no short affair. They customarily lasted as long as a week (14:17). The groom would throw a great party to which he would invite all of his friends. Since the wedding was taking place in a Philistine town, it was a group of Philistines who came to attend the feast.

Normally, custom mandated that the wedding feast be at the house of the groom. But this was not the case here. Instead of this Philistine girl associating herself with the people of God, Samson was associating himself with the Philistines. In the midst of the feast, Samson proposes a riddle and a very expensive wager.

So he said to them, “Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” (Judges 14:14).

After three days, the Philistine guests have not discovered the answer, so they threaten his bride with death and with the destruction of her father's home. She, in turn, solicites the answer from Samson and betrays him.

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of them and took their spoil, and gave the changes of clothes to those who told the riddle. And his anger burned, and he went up to his father's house. (Judges 14:19).

Samson's attack on the Philistines was motivated, not from

spiritual reasons, but merely of revenge. Revenge is one of the most natural human responses. And also one of the most destructive.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. (Romans 12:19).

The lesson will be illustrated in the case of Samson as his conflict with the Philistines escalates to the point where he is ultimately defeated. Remember that the Lord was using his strength in spite of his impure motivations. This is the first of several escalating conflicts with the Philistines.

Verse	Incident	Number Killed
14:19	Samson kills men of Ashkelon to take their clothes in payment	30 men
15:5	Samson burns farmlands of Philistines	Unknown
15:8	Samson strikes with a great slaughter	Unknown
15:15	Samson breaks ropes that bind him and fights with the jawbone of an ass	1000 men
16:30	Samson pushes down the house of Dagon, killing all within	More than he had killed in his life

5. In the Time of Wheat Harvest - An Escalating Vengeance.

The anger of his vengeance temporarily cooled, Samson returns to take his wife, only to find that she has been given to another man. Samson takes this as a further insult and takes up a career as an arsonist, burning up a great number of the fields of the Philistines. The Philistines respond by burning the home of his would-be bride and her father. They die in the flames, she suffering the very death she had sought to avoid in initially betraying Samson. The escalation continues as Samson “struck them ruthlessly with a great slaughter” (Judges 15:8). Following this, Samson escapes to a refuge in a cave

near the town of Etam (a mere 2 miles from Bethlehem) in the territory of Judah.

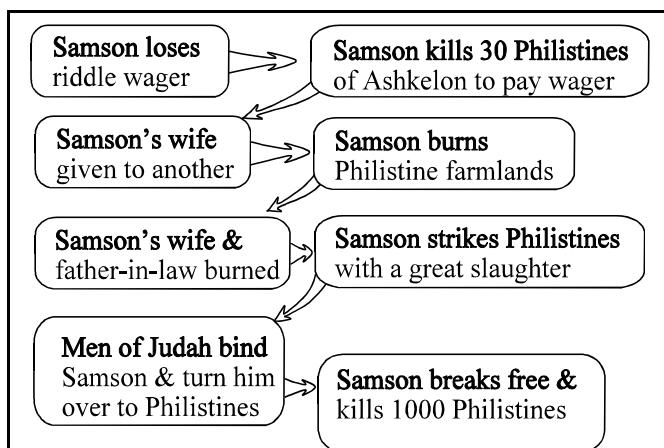
6. The Lehi Incident - the Jawbone of an Ass.

Samson's actions had already brought retribution upon his bride and father-in-law. Now the Philistines invade the territory of Judah, putting pressure upon the Israelites to turn Samson over to them. They agree and Samson is bound and made a captive of the Philistines.

When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, so he reached out and took it and killed a thousand men with it. (Judges 15:14-15).

The name “Lehi” means “jawbone.” It seems likely that it was given this designation following this event. This was Samson’s greatest victory to date. It can only be attributed to the working of God through him. When the killing was completed, Samson became aware of a great thirst. He asks the Lord for water and the Lord answers his prayer, making water to come from the “hollow place.” Throughout this section, we have seen an escalating conflict between Samson and the Philistines.



These numerical increases that are mentioned are all the more striking when we see them as a whole and note the multiples of three:

30 Philistines are killed by Samson
300 foxes are used to set the first to the Philistine fields
3,000 Philistines will be killed in Samson's final act

We have already been told that the Lord was bringing this about. We must keep in mind that he is the true hero of this story.

7. The Gates of Gaza.

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her.

When it was told to the Gazites, saying, "Samson has come here," they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. And they kept silent all night, saying, "Let us wait until the morning light, then we will kill him."

Now Samson lay until midnight, and at midnight he arose and took hold of the doors of the city gate and the two posts and pulled them up along with the bars; then he put them on his shoulders and carried them up to the top of the mountain which is opposite Hebron. (Judges 16:1-3).

This is the second time a woman became the source of trouble for Samson. Perhaps as many as 20 years had passed since his last encounter with the Philistines (Judges 15:20).

While they lie in wait for him, he literally breaks out of the city, carrying the city gates with him. This had a special significance in the ancient world. A city was considered to be no stronger than its gates. To have the gates carried off was the height of humiliation for this city and would bring shame to that people. This was of great consequence in an honor/shame culture and would bring honor to the Lord who had granted such a victory.

Hebron is located nearly 40 miles to the east of Gaza. Furthermore, it is uphill all the way, rising to a height of 3000 feet above sea level. Apparently, Samson took these gates there as a trophy of the strength of the God of Israel.

8. Samson and Delilah.

After this it came about that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. (Judges 16:4).

Though Delilah is not described as a Philistine, her name does not seem to be Semitic in origin and so it is likely that she was a Philistine. The lords of the Philistines offer her a large bribe if she will discover the secret of Samson's great strength. Samson is at first evasive, telling her lie after lie. But ultimately he relents. Delilah is quick to make use of this information and, while he is sleeping, she has his head shaved.

Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison

However, the hair of his head began to grow again after it was shaved off. (Judges 16:21-22).

The gouging of the eyes of a hated prisoner was common in the ancient world. It assured him a fate of servitude. He is brought to Gaza, the city which he had humiliated by carrying away the gates. Thrown into prison, he is assigned the duty of grinding mill by hand (the large animal-powered mills were not yet in use).

9. Samson's Death.

Now the lords of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god, and to rejoice, for they said, "Our god has given Samson our enemy into our hands." (Judges 16:23).

Dagon was the god of the Philistines. Though the name is similar to *dag*, the Hebrew word for “fish,” more recent archaeological studies have identified Dagon as a Canaanite deity which had been borrowed by the Philistines. In Ugaritic literature he is the father of Baal. Dagon was the god of **grain**. Perhaps this was why Samson had been given the task of grinding grain in the prison. They attributed this victory, not to Samson's disobedience, but to the power of their own god. In the midst of their celebration, they have Samson brought

out for their amusement. In the midst of this entertainment, Samson prays one last time to the Lord.

Then Samson called to the Lord and said, “O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”

And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and braced himself against them, the one with his right hand and the other with his left.

And Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” And he bent with all his might so that the house fell on the lords and all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he killed in his life. (Judges 16:28-30).

Samson's last act was one which was designed both to avenge his treatment at the hands of the Philistines as well as to deliver a blow against the false god that was being proclaimed in place of the Lord. His is the story of a man with great strength and great weakness. In one sense, it is a tragedy, for his personal life was his undoing. In another sense, the Lord took this tragic life and brought about a victory for the people of God. What made the difference? How can we see Samson as the victor instead of Samson the blind suicide bomber? It is by recognizing that, in spite of all his failings, Samson had faith. It is for this reason he is listed in Hebrews 11 in that great hall of faith. He bears witness to us that God is able to take a sinful man and through such a tool do great things.

It is interesting to note the parallels as well as the contrasts between Samson and Jesus Christ. Both exhibited an impossible birth, both were deliverers, each was betrayed by a loved one, and each did his greatest work in his death. On the other hand, one came on the scene with his physical strength, the other was known for his gentleness. One was about revenge while the other was about forgiveness.

The story of Samson is the story of the Lord battling with the Philistines, the arch enemies of Israel. It ends with the death of both Samson as well as the Philistines and this anticipates the rise of a king in Israel who will finish the work of defeating the Philistines. David will be that king who accomplishes this victory. Yet we cannot help but be reminded of the Greater

Son of David who defeats the enemies of the Lord through His own death. It is a reminder of the redemptive story that ties together all the stories of the Bible.

WHEN THERE WAS NO KING IN ISRAEL

The entire book of Judges can be arranged in a large parallel known as a Chiasm. It begins with a two-part prologue. It ends with a two-part epilogue. In the middle are all of the stories of the Judges.

The Prologue established that the book of Judges would be primarily a story of great defeat. Though there would be heroes and times of victory, these would never last. As we come to the last two narratives, this theme of spiritual defeat comes to the forefront.

Prologue in Two Parts (1:1–2:5)

Othniel Narrative (3:7-11)

Ehud Narrative (3:12–31)

- Judge is a social outcast
- Deals with oppressors on the east bank of the Jordan

Deborah-Barak Narrative (4:1–5:31)

- Woman slays enemy of God with a blow to the head

Gideon Narrative (6:1–8:32)

Abimelech Narrative (8:33–10:5)

- Woman slays enemy of God with a blow to the head

Jephthah Narrative (10:6–12:15)

- Judge is a social outcast
- Deals with oppressors on the east bank of the Jordan

Samson Narrative (13:1–16:31)

Epilogue in Two Parts (17:1–21:25)

The Epilogue follows a similar pattern to the Prologue in that it is plainly divided into two separate stories. The first story concerns the Tribe of Dan. The second story deals with the Tribe of Benjamin.

- Neither story speaks of Baal worship. Where there is sin involving worship, it involves worshiping the Lord in an improper way.
- The closing refrain for both of these stories is that “in those days there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This describes a period of anarchy, when men were doing what was right in their own eyes.
- Both of these narratives seem to take place early in the period of the Judges. This means the sins which these narratives illustrate would grow in severity as time passed.

The first narrative will tell the story of how the tribe of Dan relocated from their original inheritance near the land of the Philistines to the northernmost part of Israel on the slopes of Mount Hermon at the headwaters of the Jordan River. You will remember that Samson was from the tribe of Dan and his story is in close proximity to the land of the Philistines, so this story is set in the period after the Samson narrative.

Now there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah. (Judges 17:1).

With this verse, we are introduced to an even darker section of what has already been a dark period of the history of Israel. This is a portrayal of a man who had drifted away from the Lord. The story begins with a theft of silver. Micah is the guilty party and he returns the stolen silver to his mother, not because of any feelings of remorse, but because she has put a curse on it. He is doing the right thing for the wrong reason. As a result, she rewards him by giving a portion of it back to him in order “*to make a graven image and a molten image*” (17:3).

And the man Micah had a shrine and he made an ephod and household idols and consecrated one of his sons that he might become his priest. (Judges 17:5).

This man had further disobeyed the law by making his own place of worship. It is described as a shrine, literally, a “house of gods.” He had filled it with *teraphim* - small household idols which were common among the Canaanites. Finally, he had disregarded the Levitical priesthood and had appointed one of his own sons to be a priest.

This is the picture of a man who is seeking to approach God on his own terms. It is a religion of superstition. It is noteworthy that archaeological finds from this period attest to the pluralism of the Jews and how quick they were to adopt the pagan practices of the Canaanites whom they had displaced.

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 17:6).

This is the first of four times that we will be told that “there was no king in Israel.” From the context of these statements, it is evident that not even the Lord was considered to be the king. This was a period of anarchy.

Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, and he was staying there. (Judges 17:7).

Bethlehem was not one of the cities which had been set aside for the Levites. This means that this man had either rejected or had denied his inheritance from the Lord.

Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah. (Judges 17:8).

This man was an opportunist, out for the best possible deal. He didn’t care for the city to which he had been assigned, so he set out to find a better place. Levites were not to be opportunistic. They were to be the Lord’s. But this man was only interested in profit. And when he was offered wages, room and board to serve as a priest in Micah’s shrine, he agreed.

So Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. (Judges 17:12).

Levites were not qualified to serve as priests. Only a descendant of Aaron could be a priest. And such a priest could only conduct his priestly duties at the Tabernacle. This did not stop Micah from using this Levite as his own family priest.

Then Micah said, “Now I know that the Lord will prosper me, seeing I have a Levite as priest.” (Judges 17:13).

Again, we can see that Micah was trying to approach the Lord on his own terms. He felt that the Lord might bless him simply because he had hired a Levite as priest. It’s a little like the person who thinks that he is acceptable to God simply because his parents were Christians or because he is affiliated

with a certain denomination.

It was a sin to worship the Lord in the wrong way. God was very clear in stating that they were to worship in the place which He had chosen (Deuteronomy 12:11; 16:7). There is a principle here. It is that it is possible to do the right thing in the wrong way. It is not merely the results which count and the ends do not always justify the means.

In those days there was no king in Israel; and in those days the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for themselves to live in, for until that day an inheritance had not been allotted to them as a possession among the tribes of Israel. (Judges 18:1).

When the land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, Dan received the hills and lowlands to the west of Jerusalem (Joshua 19:40-48). However, it was one thing to be awarded that land, it was another thing to take possession of it.

The first chapter of Judges relates how “*the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country*” and “*did not allow them to come down to the valleys*” (Judges 1:34). Because of this situation, the people of Dan determined to look for another place to live. Do you see what they are doing? They are rejecting the inheritance which was given to them by God and seeking another inheritance - one that will be more easily obtained. In doing so, they are seeking for that which “is right in their own eyes.”

So the sons of Dan sent from their family five men out of their whole number, valiant men from Zorah and Eshtaol, to spy out the land and to search it; and they said to them, “Go, search the land.” And they came to the hill country of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there. (Judges 18:2).

In their quest for a homeland, they send out a group of five representatives to find a place where they can live. These five find lodging with Micah and, while they are there, ask the Levite-turned-priest to inquire of the Lord as to whether they shall be prosperous.

And the priest said to them, “Go in peace; your way in which you are going has the Lord’s approval.” (Judges 18:6).

This priest proclaims the Lord’s sanctions upon the actions of the Danites. This brings up a question. Was this man speaking from the Lord?

Was he speaking truly? We do not know. The passage does not say either way.

The Danite scouts continue their northward journey, coming at last to the city of Laish, located just south of Mount Hermon close to one of the tributaries of the Jordan River. The mound of the site rises today 75 feet above the surrounding grassland. They choose this site to be the new homeland of the tribe of Dan.

Then from the family of the Danites, from Zorah and from Eshtaol, six hundred men armed with weapons of war set out. (Judges 18:11).

When this 600-man force comes to the home of Micah, they help themselves to his idols, images, and the priestly garments. When the priest challenges them, they offer him a position as priest over their tribe and he accepts. Micah challenges their actions, but to no avail.

Then they took what Micah had made and the priest who had belonged to him, and came to Laish, to a people quiet and secure, and struck them with the edge of the sword, and they burned the city with fire.

And there was no one to deliver them, because it was far from Sidon and they had no dealings with anyone, and it was in the valley which is near Beth-roab. And they rebuilt the city and lived in it.

And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father who was born in Israel; however, the name of the city formerly was Laish. (Judges 18:27-29).

Laish was an ancient city. Gates from this city dating back to Abraham's day have now been excavated in the area of Dan (see photo of the gate of Laish). This city was taken by the tribe of Dan and became their new home. The city of Dan was to become the northern boundary of the nation of Israel. But if they thought that this was to be the best of all possible locations, they were mistaken. Dan was located midway between Sidon and Tyre on the seacoast and Damascus on the edge of the Syrian Desert. When the king of Damascus went to war against Israel, the first city that he would attack would be Dan (1 Kings 15:20).

The closing section of the book of Judges, related in chapters 19-21, is perhaps the darkest ever described in the pages of the Bible.



Archaeological excavation of the gate of Laish.

1. Setting for the Story.

Now it came about in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite staying in the remote part of the hill country of Ephraim, who took a concubine for himself from Bethlehem in Judah. (Judges 19:1).

Once again we see the locations of Ephraim and Bethlehem as the backdrop to the story. Once again there is a Levite involved. And once again, one of the Tribes of Israel is seen in the role of a “villain.”

Judges 17 - 18	Judges 19 - 21
Micah lived in the hill country of Ephraim	The Levite lived in the hill country of Ephraim
The Levite was from Bethlehem.	His concubine’s father lived in Bethlehem.
The Tribe of Dan are the “villains.”	The Tribe of Benjamin are the “villains.”

Throughout most of the book of Judges, the villains of the narratives were outsiders who came to oppress the people of Israel. But in these two narratives, the villains are within the covenant community.

2. Journey to Bethlehem.

The Levite of this story has a concubine who “played the harlot,” ending up at her father’s home in Bethlehem. He goes to fetch her and ends up staying in the home of his father-in-law for several days. Finally, getting a late start, he leaves with his servant and concubine and begin the journey home.

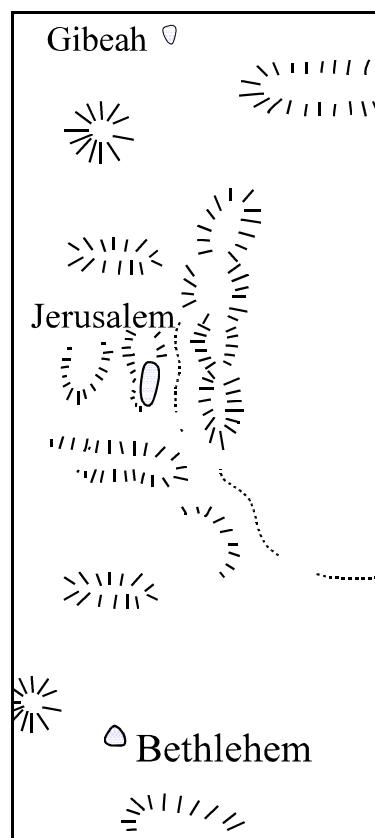
Their route takes them past the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, but they determine to bypass this city because it is a Canaanite city. They continue on until they come to Gibeah, a city of Benjamin (19:14).

The name “Gibeah” is Hebrew for “hill.” Archaeological finds show the site of this small city to have been only three miles north of Jerusalem. It would be from this city that Saul would come.

It seems ironic that, having avoided Jerusalem because of its pagan inhabitants, this Levite and his concubine should be rewarded with such an inhospitable attitude from those of Gibeah. Such an attitude is even more striking when we remember that King Saul will come from the town of Gibeah (1 Samuel 10:26).

And they turned aside there in order to enter and lodge in Gibeah. When they entered, they sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night. (Judges 19:15).

Gibeah was not all that big of a city. It did have a fortress with four corner towers and an open square in the middle. Perhaps this is where the Levite and his party prepared to spend the night. However, at this time, an “old man” from the hill country of Ephraim who had been temporarily working and living in Gibeah came in from the fields and invited the party to lodge at his house.



3. The Attack of the “Worthless

Fellows.”

While they were making merry, behold, the men of the city; certain worthless fellows, surrounded the house, pounding the door; and they spoke to the owner of the house, the old man, saying, “Bring out the man who came into your house that we may have relations with him.”

Then the man, the owner of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my fellows, please do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not commit this act of folly.

“Here is my virgin daughter and his concubine. Please let me bring them out that you may ravish them and do to them whatever you wish. But do not commit such an act of folly against this man.” (Judges 19:22-24).

The description of them as “worthless fellows” is literally “men who were sons of Belial.” This is a figure of speech and it is not necessary to view “Belial” as a proper name. This is markedly similar to the incident with Lot and the two angels in the city of Sodom (Genesis 19:4-8). In that instance, there were angelic visitors to the city of Sodom who found refuge with Lot. In the middle of the night, men of Sodom surrounded his house in an endeavor to sexually abuse his visitors. Now it is happening again, not in Sodom, but in an Israelite city.

Genesis 19:4-8	Judges 19:22-24
Takes place in Sodom, a Canaanite city of the Jordan Valley	Takes place in Gibeah, an Israelite city in the hill country
Two angels staying with Lot, an outsider who is currently living in the city	Levite and his party stay with a man of Ephraim who is currently living in the city
In both cases, the men of the city come to the house where the visitors are staying and demand that they be turned over to them to be sexually abused.	

Lot attempts negotiations by offering his two virgin daughters.	Old man attempts negotiations by offering his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine.
The angels intercede and strike the men of Sodom with blindness.	Levite sacrifices his concubine to save himself.

It is noteworthy that both of these stories reflect the devalued estate of women as it existed in the ancient world. The Bible is not herein condoning such a devaluation. It is merely accurately reporting it. This tells me something about the Bible. The Bible does not look at mankind through rose-colored glasses. It presents real people as they commit real sins.

4. A Grisly Message.

When he entered his house, he took a knife and laid hold of his concubine and cut her in twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout the territory of Israel.

And it came about that all who saw it said, "Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up!" (Judges 19:29-30).

The cutting up of the body of the woman would find its parallel in the actions of King Saul when he cut seven oxen into pieces and sent them throughout the territory of Israel as a call to arms (1 Samuel 11:7). That would serve as an echo of this event.

Call to Arms in Judges 19	Call to Arms in 1 Samuel 15
The slain body of the concubine is cut into twelve pieces and sent to the tribes of Israel.	Saul takes his own oxen and cuts them into twelve pieces and sends them to the tribes of Israel

The reason for the call was because of the great sin committed by the men of Gibeah.	The reason for the call was to gather Israel to save Jabesh-Gilead from the great subjugation of the Ammonites.
Benjamin takes a stand against the other tribes of Israel and is all but destroyed.	Benjamin leads the other tribes of Israel and brings salvation to Jabesh-Gilead.

As a result of this call to arms, representatives of all twelve tribes gather together at Mizpah. It must have been a huge force.

5. The Gathering at Mizpah.

Then all the sons of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, came out, and the congregation assembled as one man to the Lord at Mizpah. (Judges 20:1).

The word “Mizpah” appears each time with the definite article and means “the watchtower.” The exact location of this place is unknown. Apparently, it was located near Shiloh where the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were kept. It seems to have remained as the place of meeting for the Tribes of Israel from the time of Samuel to the days of the Maccabees (1 Samuel 7:5-12; 10:17; 2 Kings 25:23; 1 Maccabees 3:46).

When the story of the incident is related, the tribes of Israel determine to punish the town of Gibeah. But the people of Benjamin disagree and they even go so far as to go to war against the other tribes over this issue.

6. War with Benjamin.

And the sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel. (Judges 20:14).

In the ensuing battle, Benjamin is victorious and 22,000 men of the tribe of Judah are slain. After weeping and praying before the Lord, the Israelites ask the Lord if they should go up again. The Lord says to go up. They do and this time they lose 18,000 men.

They go and weep before the Lord again and fast and pray for an entire day, offering sacrifices to the Lord. They ask again whether they should go up against Benjamin. Again, the Lord says to go up. This time, they formulate an ambush, pretending to retreat and drawing the people of Benjamin away from the city of Gibeah while a hidden force enters the city and sets it to the torch.

But when the cloud began to rise from the city in a column of smoke, Benjamin looked behind them; and behold, the whole city was going up in smoke to heaven.

Then the men of Israel turned, and the men of Benjamin were terrified; for they saw that disaster was close to them. (Judges 20:40-41).

As the battle became a rout, a total of 25,000 of the tribe of Benjamin were destroyed. This brings up a question. Why did the Israelites lose the initial two battles? Why did they have to lose 40,000 men before gaining the victory? We are not told. We are told of no sin on their behalf. We read of no lack of faith. We are left with no reason at all.

There is an important lesson here. It is that you can do all the things you are supposed to and still experience failure for no obvious reason. Remember the example of Job? We can see the reason for the tragic events in his life, but he was not privy to these reasons. Here is the lesson. Just because bad things happen for no apparent reason does not mean that there is no reason. Just because things go wrong when I am doing everything right is no excuse to stop doing right.

7. The Survivors of Benjamin.

Those of the tribe of Benjamin who survived the war with Israel numbered a scant 600 men (Judges 20:47). This raised a problem.

Now the men of Israel had sworn in Mizpah, saying, "None of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage." (Judges 21:1).

The oath against Benjamin was an oath to cut off Benjamin from intermarriage with the rest of the tribes of Israel. And to make matters worse, the Israelites had destroyed all of the Benjamite cities and had

either killed or taken captive all of the women of those cities.

In the months that followed, the Israelites pondered their options. They could not go back on their oath to the Lord. They were unwilling to allow the tribe of Benjamin to become extinct. And so, they came up with a twofold plan.

Plan #1: Operation Jabesh-gilead	This city was punished for not participating in the military action against Benjamin. All are put to the sword except 400 virgins who are given in marriage to the men of Benjamin.
Plan #2: Operation Shiloh	Benjamites are allowed to “kidnap” wives from the Daughters of Shiloh who come down to dance at the festival.

We noted at the outset that these two narratives, the first story concerning the Tribe of Dan, and now this second story dealing with the Tribe of Benjamin are set when “in those days there was no king in Israel” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). They both have their beginning in the town of Bethlehem, the town from which King David will ultimately emerge. There is a reason for this. It is to suggest that the answer to the grievous situation in Israel in the days of the Judges was to be found in a king who would come from Bethlehem. From our vantage point in history, we can see that the real answer to the problem faced by Israel was to come from David’s Greater Son who was to be born in Bethlehem.

RUTH

The Romance of Redemption

The story is told of how Dr. Samuel Johnson, the famous 18th century writer, once took a copy of the book of Ruth and read it before a London gathering of free-thinkers and philosophers, presenting it as if it were of modern composition. Thinking it was of recent creation, they were resounding and unanimous in their praise of the manuscript. It was only then that Dr. Johnson informed them that it was taken from a book which they had rejected - the Bible.

In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth does not appear after Judges. Instead, it is found in the Writings as one of the five Megilot ("Scrolls"), each of which was read at one of the feasts of the nation of Israel.

Megilot Scrolls	
Song of Solomon	Passover
Ruth	Pentecost
Lamentations	9th of Ab (Anniversary of Jerusalem's destruction)
Ecclesiastes	Feast of Tabernacles
Esther	Purim

In the modern Hebrew Bible, Ruth stands between the Song of Solomon and Lamentations, with sorrow on one side and rejoicing on the other. The fact that Ruth is read on Pentecost is perhaps suggestive to the Christian. Pentecost suggests the birthday of the church and when we look at the story of Ruth, we see a love story that reminds us of our relationship with Christ.

In the Septuagint, as well as in the Latin Vulgate and the Talmud, the book of Ruth follows Judges. There is a reason for this. Ruth seems to be closely associated with the last several chapters of the book of Judges. In Josephus' accounting of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures, Ruth is deemed as a part of the book of Judges.

Judges 17 - 21	Ruth
Says four times that “ <i>there was no king in Israel.</i> ”	Begins with the words, “ <i>when the judges governed...</i> ”
Levite from Bethlehem	Concubine from Bethlehem
A Spiritual Desert	An Oasis amidst the Desert
Depicts the need of a King	Presents the lineage of the King

Although there is an association with the Judges, Ruth does not share any of the great and momentous deeds, the clamor of battle, or the spiritual failings which are so prevalent in that book. If Judges is a book of failure, then Ruth is a book of quiet victory.

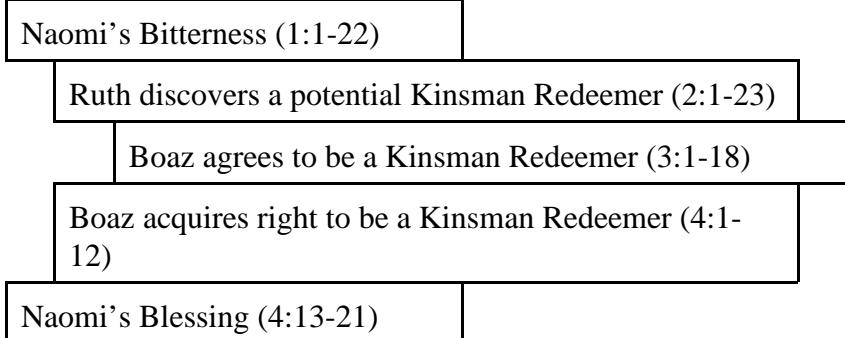
DATE OF WRITING

There seems to have been a significant passage of time between the events which the book of Ruth describes and the recording of those events.

1. The story is said to take place “in the days when the judges governed” (Ruth 1:1). This indicates that it was written in a time when the judges were no longer governing.
2. Ruth 4:7 speaks of a custom “in former times in Israel” which was evidently no longer in practice at the time of writing.
3. The fact that David is mentioned at the end of Ruth indicates that it was written after he had become King in Israel. The fact that Solomon is not mentioned indicates that Solomon had not yet come to the throne.

OUTLINE OF RUTH

The story of Ruth is presented in a chiastic format. It begins “when the judges governed.” It ends with the genealogy of the reigning King.



PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

1. Ruth is a book about loyalty and love. The heroine of the story is Ruth and it is her loyalty to her mother-in-law as well as to the Lord which is featured.
2. The book also has something to say regarding the missionary ministry which Israel was to have to the world. Ruth, a Moabitess, became the recipient of special blessings as she came to believe in the God of Naomi. This book teaches us that God is no respecter of persons.

The word “love” is completely absent from the book of Ruth, though it is a story of love on several levels.
3. The book elevates the role of godly women in the overall redemptive plan of God. This is one of two books in the Bible that is named after a woman. There is an interesting contrast between Ruth and Esther.

Ruth	Esther
A Gentile girl who married an Israelite.	An Israelite girl who married a Gentile.
“Built the house of Israel”	Saved the people of Israel
Her descendant was David, the King of Israel.	She was married to the King of Persia.
Rural setting.	A Royal Palace.

4. This book also highlights the genealogy of King David and shows the reversal of the curse which had been laid on the people of Moab.

“No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 23:3).

There was a ten-generation curse placed upon the people of Moab and Ammon during the days of Moses because of their inhospitality toward Israel. There is no record of a Moabite or an Ammonite being accepted into the assembly of God’s people for the next ten generations after Moses. But this changes with Ruth. She not only enters the assembly of God’s people, but she is also included in the royal line of David. Indeed, she is mentioned in the Messianic line of Matthew 1.

SETTING FOR THE STORY (RUTH 1:1-4)

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. (Ruth 1:1).

The story begins “in the days when the judges judged.” This connects us directly back to the book of Judges. This was the period when, as we were reminded four times in the closing chapters of the book of Judges, “there was no king in Israel.” Just as the last two stories of the book of Judges took place in or around Bethlehem, so this story will be set in Bethlehem. In doing so, these narratives anticipate the king who will come from the tiny village of Bethlehem. They show to us a need for such a king.

Of the 85 verses within the book of Ruth, there are only 8 that do NOT begin with the 'ו' conjunctive ("and").

At the same time, the book of Ruth is different from the last two narratives of the book of Judges. They are dark and somber, the story of Ruth begins in a time of difficulty, but its end is full of hope. This is by design.

Have you ever notice how, when you visit a jewelry store, the salesperson will often place the jewelry upon a black velvet background. They do that for a reason. It is because the gems stand out all the more brightly when placed against a black backdrop. The book of Ruth is like that. Its backdrop against the dark days of the Judges makes it shine all the more brightly. It is a book of hope and it calls us to hope for better times ahead that

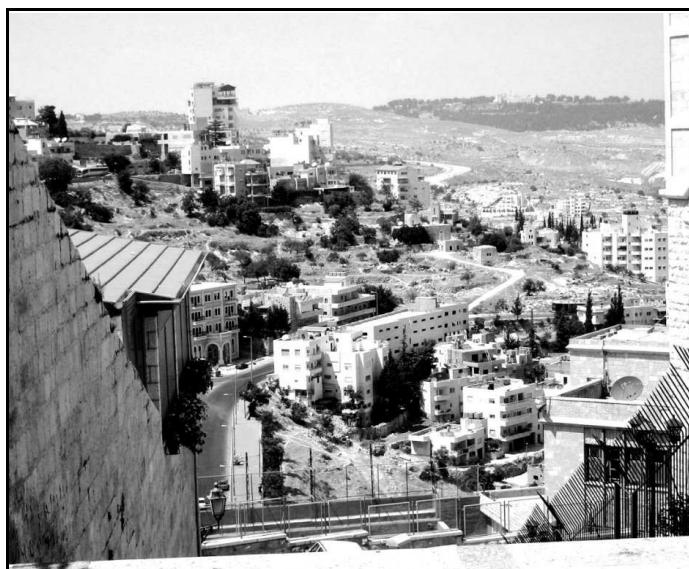
are brought by a once and future king.

1. A Famine in the Land.

What this meant for an agricultural economy is difficult for us to comprehend. A famine involved complete financial devastation and could lead ultimately to starvation. What is ironic is that there was a famine in a place named and known for its bread.

2. Bethlehem in Judah.

The name “Bethlehem” is a compound of two words meaning “House of Bread.” The small town is located on the spur of an east-west ridge 4 miles to the south of Jerusalem. It is surrounded on three sides by lush, fertile farmlands. It is bad enough when famine strikes. But when famine strikes the “House of Bread” then things can become desperate. This was the problem which arose. There was no bread in the House of Bread.



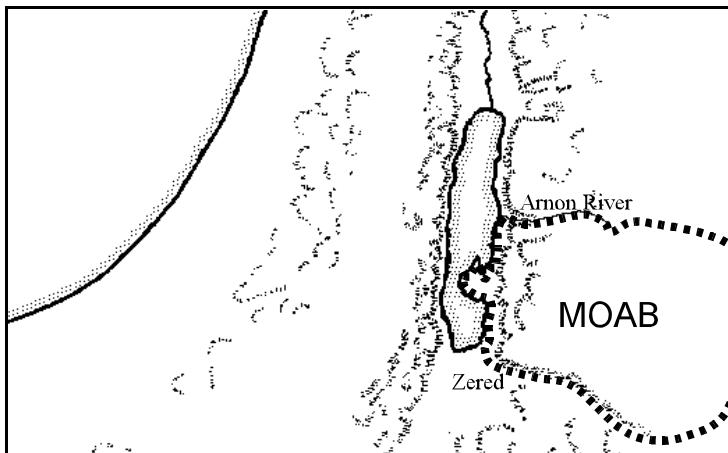
Modern Bethlehem

As our story opens, the land is beset with a famine. It impacts the land and it impacts a family that was living in the tiny village of Bethlehem. The beginning of this story serves to remind us that, out of the worst kind of circumstances, God is able to weave something wonderful. Ruth is a lesson that you should not judge the circumstances until the last chapter is over. Indeed, this book would

be a book of tragedy were it not for the last chapter.

3. The Land of Moab.

Moab was located to the east of the Dead Sea, its northern border being the Arnon River and its southern border being the Zered Wadi. Rising up from the Dead Sea, 1300 feet below sea level, the land rises up to a large plateau.



The Moabites were the descendants of Lot through his incestuous relations with his daughter. Moab had refused the Israelites permission to pass through their land in the days of Moses. During the days of the Judges, the Moabites had invaded the territory of Israel until being driven out by Ehud. Moab was now considered to be an accursed nation.

“No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”
(Deuteronomy 23:3-4).

We have already become well acquainted with the people of Moab in our study of the book of Judges. It was by the sword of Ehud that the king of Moab had been slain after he had afflicted the Israelites for eighteen years. When an Israelite thought of Moab, he thought of a dangerous enemy. Now the nation of accursed people becomes a haven for this Hebrew man and his family. The cursing will be ultimately turned into blessing.

There is a lesson here. It is that God can use anyone. He loves to confuse the orthodox by using the kind of people we wouldn't use. He brings a Messiah out of Nazareth, a King out of Bethlehem, disciples from a fishing boat, and the Son of God from a rough-hewn cross.

3. Departure from the Land.

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. (Ruth 1:2).

If there were newspapers published at that time they would have taken no notice of this family of four as they made their way to Moab. They would have reported on the latest events on the national scene. Their stories would have been on the famine, or on the prospects for another raid by the Amorites. But in God's economy, the story of Ruth is the real story.

Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and

The Mishnah (Yevamot 8:3) restricted this prohibition to males based on a reading that is somewhat obscured in translation: "*Lo yavo Ammoni*" "An Ammonite shall not come". In Hebrew, Ammoni is male, the female is "Ammonit". Now, of course, in Hebrew the male gender is supposed to include the female when the intent is to include both. The scriptural justification for this ruling was not only that Boaz married Ruth, but that Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was the son of an Ammonite woman.

The restriction was completely abolished (Berakhot 28a), reportedly in the first century, on the basis that "Sennacherib has long since mixed up all the nations" so that the contemporary inhabitants of the lands of Moab and Ammon could not be said to be descended from the Moabites and Ammonites of the Bible.

she was left with her two sons.

And they took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. (Ruth 1:2-4).

Elimelech means “God is King” and stands in contrast to the kingly name Abimelech “My father is King.” And yet, when things got tough, this man had departed from the inherited land of his king and went to find a home in Moab.

Were things worse for Elimelech and his family than they were for the other inhabitants of Bethlehem who stayed behind? We do not know. There were evidently some who chose not to leave, but to remain in Bethlehem. We do know that neither Elimelech nor his sons ever saw their homeland again. After Elimelech had died, his two sons found for themselves wives among the Moabites, something that was forbidden in the Law (Deuteronomy 7:1-3; 23:3).

The book of Ruth neither commands nor condemns the actions of Elimelech and his sons. The point is not whether they sinned. The point is what God brought about in the midst of tragedy. Here is the lesson.

Trying to blame the tragedy that takes place in this book on the actions of Elimelech is akin to the actions of the three friends of Job.

You can't call a tragedy a tragedy until the entire story is known and the entire story is never known this side of heaven.

NAOMI'S BITTERNESS (RUTH 1:5-18)

1:3	1:5	1:6	1:18
Three Funerals		Three Decisions	
Death of Elimelech Death of Mahlon and Chilion		Naomi decides to return Orpah elects to stay in Moab Ruth determines to follow Naomi	

1. The Death of Naomi's Sons.

Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and

the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. (Ruth 1:5).

There are few things more tragic than a widow. One of them is a widow who has also lost her children. That was not a day of social security or life insurance. Such a state would leave Naomi unprotected in a harsh world.

2. A Yearning for Home: *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food. (Ruth 1:6).*

Naomi determines to return home to Bethlehem. Why? Because there is food there. And perhaps for another reason as well - because the “Lord had visited His people.”

3. Naomi’s Care for her Daughters-in-Law.

But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

“Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.” (Ruth 1:11-13).

This retort of Naomi is Hebraic humor. It is not the humor of the light comedian. It is a grim humor. She is saying, “I have nothing more to offer you.” Under the Levitical Law, a widow who had borne no children was to be given to the surviving brother of the deceased so that she might through such a union bear heirs to the estate of the deceased. But in this case there were no surviving brothers. And Naomi says, “There aren’t any on the way.”

4. Ruth’s Commitment.

Orpah finally is convinced to return to her people. She leaves and we do not hear from her again. Ruth determines otherwise.

But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.

“Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.” (Ruth 1:16-17).

This is a solemn oath. It is a commitment of loyalty, not only to Naomi, but to the Lord. Are you loyal to your friends, even when they are wrong? I don't mean being a “yes-man.” I do mean continuing to look out for their best interests.

British Prime Minister Lord Melbourne criticized the newspaper for their lack of support of his government. They wrote back, “We always support you when you are right.” He replied, “I don't need your support when I'm right. I need it when I am wrong.” There is enough wrong in the midst of us to go for a long way. We need to be loyal to one another, even when we are wrong.

5. Naomi's Return.

So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came about when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?”

And she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

“I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (Ruth 1:19-21).

There is a play on words here. The name “Naomi” seems to carry the idea of “sweet” or “pleasant.” It is used in the Proverbs where we read...

*Stolen water is sweet;
And bread eaten in secret is pleasant (Proverbs 9:17).*

Naomi had been known as the one who was *pleasant*. But now she insists that she be known as “Mara,” meaning “bitter.” It seems as

though Naomi had kept everything bottled up back in Moab. But now she is back home. Home is where you can let it all out. She is bitter and her bitterness is directed against God.

6. Barley Harvest.

So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. (Ruth 1:22).

We tend to think in terms of a harvest taking place in the fall. But in Palestine, the first harvest began in the spring. There was even a feast to commemorate this harvest. It was known as the Feast of the Firstfruits. Indeed, the book of Ruth came to be associated with this particular feast. It is into this setting that we read of the return of Naomi and Ruth. Even though Ruth had never been to Bethlehem, it is still described as a “return.”

IN THE FIELDS OF BOAZ (RUTH 2)

The first chapter of Ruth reads a lot like the first chapter of Job. Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. There was a famine and Naomi lost her home and then her husband died and then her two sons died. She lost everything except her daughter-in-law.

Chapter One	Chapter Two
Begins with a Famine	Begins in the Season of Harvest
In Moab	In Bethlehem
The Shadow of Death	The Specter of New Life

With this chapter comes relief. This is a chapter of hope as it opens by introducing Boaz.

Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. (Ruth 2:1).

Boaz was “a man mighty of wealth.” He also happened to be a relative of the deceased Elimelech. Here we see the “accident” of God’s providence. Things don’t happen just by chance. They happen because there is a divine design. Accidents do happen, but they are not just accidents, for they are a part of God’s providence.

And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.”

So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. (Ruth 2:2-3).

Notice that Ruth is called “Ruth the Moabitess.” This title shall be used a total of five times throughout this book. It is a constant reminder that she was a cultural outsider. Ruth’s request was considered acceptable among the poor of Israel. The Law actually provided for the poor to enter a field on the heels of the reapers.

“When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 23:22).

This was the Israelite version of social security. The Law mandated that the leavings of the field reapers were to be left behind for the poor and the alien to take. Ruth fit into both of these categories. She had no other means of caring for herself and Naomi.

The significant point of the story is that she happened to pick the field which belonged to Boaz. The Hebrew says that she “chanced a chance” or “her chance chanced.” There is a lesson here. It is that chance is not blind; its path is directed under the eyes of the Lord. God is not only concerned with kings and princes and great battles. He is also concerned with the mundane and the everyday happenstance. They are all within the realm of His plan.

Boaz arrives and sees Ruth working in the fields. We can tell from his statements that he is immediately interested in her. That interest is seen in a series of ascending questions and interactions. First he asks about her and then he speaks to her.

Come and eat (2:14).
Help yourself to the water jars (2:9).
Stay here and do not go to the other fields (2:8).
Who is she? (2:5).

By the time we get to verse 11, we find that Boaz has done some detailed investigation of Ruth. He has asked around about her. He is taken by what he has heard. In verse 8, he refers to her as “my daughter,” indicating that he was considerably older than she.

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?”

And Boaz answered and said to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know.” (Ruth 2:10-11).

There is a play on words here which does not come through in our English translation. Ruth says, “*Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me* (לְהַפִּירֵנִי - *LeHakkiyreni*), since I am a *foreigner* (נָכְרִיָּה - *Nakkriyah* - *foreigner, one who is conspicuous or noticeable*)?” Foreigners were noticeable and such notice could often result in unwelcome attention, but the attention given by Boaz was of a kindly nature.

Ruth is cognizant of the special attention which is being accorded her. She knows that she is a foreigner. To make matters worse, she is from Moab. Moab has been an enemy of Israel. There is nothing in the Law that says Boaz has to go to the lengths which he has gone. Her question is a legitimate one. The words of Boaz to Ruth are strikingly similar to that which the Lord spoke to Abraham.

Genesis 12:1	Ruth 2:11
Now the Lord said to Abram...	All that you have done has been reported to me...

Go forth from your country And from your relatives And from your father's house,	How you left your father and mother and the land of your birth,
To the land which I will show you.	And came to a people that you did not previously know

While Ruth is not a physical descendant of Abraham, she shows herself to be a spiritual descendant of him by demonstrating the faith of Abraham. And so, Boaz pronounces the Lord's blessing upon Ruth.

“May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.” (Ruth 2:12).

In this blessing, Ruth is said to be seeking refuge under the wings of the Lord. This will be echoed in the following chapter when Ruth comes to Boaz to seek shelter under his wings.

ON THE THRESHING FLOOR (RUTH 3)

In this chapter the plot thickens. While the meeting of Chapter 2 was by chance, the meeting which shall take place in Chapter 3 is contrived.

Chapter Two	Chapter Three
In the Fields	On the Threshing Floor
At the beginning of the Harvest	At the end of the Harvest
Ruth's Service	Ruth's Request

We are not told how much time passed between the events of chapter 2 and the events of chapter 3. It could have been a number of days or even weeks.

Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My

daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?

“And now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.

“Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.

“And it shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what to do.” (Ruth 3:1-4).

Naomi's question, “*My daughter, shall I not seek security* (Hebrew is “rest”) *for you*” points to the fact that the lot of a widow was a difficult one. Gleaning was at best a haphazard livelihood. Therefore, Naomi wishes something better for her daughter-in-law.

Naomi instructs Ruth as to her preparations; she is to look her best. Her best clothes would be none too fancy. But it appears they were able to afford a little perfume, as the word “anoint” indicates. Naomi gives Ruth some very practical and down-to-earth advice.

- Wash yourself.
- Put on your best clothes.
- Anoint yourself (use perfume).
- Wait until the work is done and he has finished eating and drinking.

It seems that Naomi has already picked out Boaz as the future husband for Ruth. We are not told whether or not she was aware of the fact that there is a nearer kinsman (identified in chapter 4). This may have been an issue of ignorance. Or it may have been that she knew that this man was already married and was therefore not the best choice (Ruth 4:6).

After the sheaves of grain were collected, they would be placed in a large pile and then beaten with stones and spikes to separate the husks of grain from the straw on which it grew. Then a winnowing fork would be used to throw the grain into the air. The wind would carry away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain would fall to the ground.

Threshing was often done in late afternoon and evening, when a wind might arise to separate chaff from grain. The threshing floors of Palestine were found in a high, outdoor, open area which had been stamped down to make the ground hard.

When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet, and lay down. (Ruth 3:7).

At harvest time people would camp out. As the owner of the land, Boaz would have had a place to himself, with his servants sleeping at other places in the vicinity. Ruth waits until Boaz is sound asleep and then she comes to him.

And it happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet.

And he said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.” (Ruth 3:8-9).

Boaz was startled by something, so he turned, or bent over, and saw Ruth lying at his feet. In reply to Boaz' question, Ruth identifies herself as a maidservant, again taking a lowly position. Ruth uses a very expressive metaphor here in asking him to spread his covering over her. The word “covering” (כָּנָף) here is the same word which is used in Ruth 2:12 where we read, “*May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose WINGS you have come to seek refuge.*” The term can describe both a “wing” as well as the edge of a garment.

She calls Boaz a “close relative” (גָּאֵל, go’el). This makes her request a formal one, and she is looking to him to resolve the legal question of redemption. Keil and Delitzsch say that the word “covering” (rendered “skirt” in the KJV) refers to the corner of the blanket which Boaz had over him. A man and wife sleeping together would share this blanket. The act of covering Ruth with part of the blanket would have been symbolic of a proposal of marriage. This is seen In Ezekiel 16:8 where the Lord describes His own actions toward Israel: “*Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine,*” declares the Lord God.

“A man shall not take his father’s wife so that he shall not uncover his father’s SKIRT.” (Deuteronomy 22:30).

However, we are not told that Boaz took this action of covering Ruth with his robe. There was a legal question to be resolved before Boaz could marry Ruth. But Boaz does begin the process here which eventually leads to

their marriage.

Then he said, “May you be blessed of the Lord, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich.” (Ruth 3:10).

Boaz's reply is immediate and positive. He thinks that Ruth has shown more kindness now than when she first came to the fields. The earlier kindness was that shown by Ruth in not leaving Naomi and in gleaning to provide for their needs. To this she has now added a further evidence of her regard for family relationships.

Ruth has not followed natural inclinations but has shown a responsible attitude to the family in looking to her Go'el for marriage. Boaz knows that she could have married some other eligible young man in Bethlehem; but she did not let these types of personal inclinations rule her. This seems to indicate that Boaz was not a young man. There was likely a significant age difference between them. This is reinforced as he refers to her in verse 11 as "my daughter."

“And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. (Ruth 3:11).

The word translated "city" is literally "gate." As we shall see in the next chapter, the city gates was the usual place of public assembly, the place for business, judgment, and for receiving news.

Ruth is described as a "woman of excellence." The term is nearly identical to the description of Boaz in Ruth 2:1 as a "man of wealth." It is also used in Proverbs 31:10 to describe an "excellent wife." This description would seem to preclude the possibility that there was anything immoral going on between Ruth and Boaz.

“And now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.

“Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning.” (Ruth 3:12-13).

Boaz affirms that he certainly is a kinsman; but he goes on to point out that there was a man nearer of kin than he. Ruth may have been unaware of

the complexities of the family relationships and the legal implications.

Boaz binds his word with an oath. Indeed, this was the strongest possible oath: “*As the Lord lives.*” To break such an oath would be to break the third commandment and thus take the name of the Lord in vain.

So she lay at his feet until the morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the floor.” (Ruth 3:14).

The phrase, “*before one could recognize another*” was an idiom used to describe the time before dawn. Though they had done nothing immoral during the night, Boaz takes steps to protect Ruth’s reputation.

Mishnah, Yeb. 2:8 states if a man was suspected of having intercourse with a Gentile woman he could not perform levirate marriage with her.

REDEEMED! (RUTH 4:1-12)

Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
In the Fields	The Threshing Floor	In the Gate
Boaz Sees	Boaz Loves	Boaz Marries

According to the Law of Moses, it was the Lord who was the actual owner of the land which He had given to His people for an inheritance. The Israelites merely had the use of the land which the Lord had given. They were stewards of God’s land. Because of this, the existing possessor of the a portion of land could not part with it or sell it, but it was to remain in his family forever.

When anyone was obliged to sell his land, such as by reason of poverty, it was the duty of the nearest relation to redeem it. Even if it should not be redeemed, it would automatically come back in the next Year of Jubilee to its original owner (Leviticus 25:10-28). Therefore, no actual sale took place in our sense of the word. A sale was actually just a lease, or the sale of the yearly produce of the land until the Year of Jubilee.

The custom of Levirate marriage, or the marriage of a brother-in-law, actually predated the Mosaic Law (Genesis 38), but was also sanctioned by the Law (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). If an Israelite who had been married died without children, it was the duty of his brother to marry the widow, his sister-in-law,

that he might establish his brother's name in Israel by begetting a son who should take the name of the deceased brother, that the name should not become extinct in Israel.

This son was then the legal heir of the landed property of the deceased uncle. The Law imposed this obligation upon the living brother, but it allowed him to renounce the obligation if he would take on himself the disgrace connected with such a refusal.

Early Israel had no police force. When a person was assaulted, robbed or murdered, it fell to the nearest kinsman to bring the criminal to justice and to protect the lives and property of relatives. This obligation was called "redeeming", and the man who was responsible for fulfilling this duty was known as a "redeemer" (Hebrew: *go-el*). The job of redeemer would fall to full brothers first, then to uncles who were the father's brothers, then to full cousins, and finally to the other blood relatives of the family (Leviticus 25:48). There were four requirements for the redeemer.

- (1) The redeemer must be a near kinsman.
- (2) The redeemer must be able to pay the redemption price.
- (3) The redeemer must be willing to redeem.
- (4) The redeemer must be free from that which caused the need for redemption - he must be free himself.

Jesus fulfilled all four of these requirements for the human race. He became a man and so is the kinsman of the human race. He was able to pay the price by virtue of being the sinless Son of God. He was willing to redeem. And he was free of the sin which bound us.

The nation of Israel as a whole required a Redeemer to redeem the lands which had been taken over by foreign powers, so they looked to Jehovah to become their *go-el*.

Now Boaz went up to the gate; and sat down there, and, behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. (Ruth 4:1).

The gate of a town or village played a large part in the cities of Judah in these times. Excavations reveal that cities in Palestine were very closely built, with no large open spaces like the Roman forum or the Greek agora. There was some space at the gate for people to gather and do business, and the gate was the center of city life. By coming to the gate, Boaz was in the right place to conduct legal business.

*And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said,
"Sit down here. So they sat down. (Ruth 4:2).*

The idea here was to gather a sort of jury to hear the transaction and exercise some kind of judicial function. Elders had far-reaching powers. In this case, the matter was relatively minor, and the elders really had little to do or decide. But any transaction that was witnessed by the elders, and attested to by them, was of absolute validity.

In later times, ten men were required for a synagogue service, and some commentators suggest that ten was a quorum.

Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech.

"So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem it." (Ruth 4:3-4).

Boaz addresses the kinsman and informs him that Elimelech, who was related to both of them, owned some land near Bethlehem, and that the land had to be redeemed in Naomi's favor.

The phrase, "I thought to inform you" in verse 4 is the Hebrew idiom, "I said I will uncover your ear."

The title to the land would have stayed with Elimelech's family, and such a purchase would have been equivalent to a lease. To redeem the land at this time would have required a payment to the occupant for the balance of his lease. Upon Elimelech's death, the ownership of the land would have passed to his sons.

*Further, you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying,
"If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter.*

"And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers.

"And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers.

"And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his nearest relative in his own family, and he shall possess it; and it shall be a statutory ordinance to the

sons of Israel, just as the Lord commanded Moses.” (Numbers 27:8-11).

This passage shows very clearly the sequence of inheritance: first, sons; then, daughters; then, brothers; then, uncles; then, the next nearest kinsman. The widow is not mentioned in the line of inheritance!

On the other hand, it seems from this passage in Ruth that Naomi had legal rights to the land and could realize some money from it. But Ruth was the widow of Mahlon and would have had similar rights.

Verse 4 makes it clear that the kinsman is the nearer relative and Boaz is the next in line. The kinsman is quite ready to buy the land and is prepared to come up with the money. However, Boaz brings up a slight complication.

Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance.” (Ruth 4:5).

The problem was that the ownership of the land was bound up with the requirement of a Levirate marriage. To take the land, one must also take Ruth.

And the closest relative said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it.” (Ruth 4:6).

The fact that marriage with Ruth must accompany the redemption of the field changed the whole picture for the kinsman. It is not clear what prevented the kinsman from fulfilling his obligation. He was ready to buy the field, so the money was not an issue. But he could not marry Ruth. There are several possible reasons for this:

- a. One possibility is that he did not want to marry a Moabite woman. That would have been understandable, and it probably would not have been held against him.
- b. Another reason is that paying for the land and taking on the responsibility for caring for Ruth and Naomi would have involved a considerable expense. He would pay for the land, but the land would stay with Naomi's family. So his own family would suffer the loss of some of their own inheritance.

- c. It is also possible that the kinsman may already have been married and not wanted to have a second wife. He might have been smart enough to know that his wife wouldn't be happy with him bringing home a new wife - and a foreigner at that.
- d. The reason that the kinsman gave for not wishing to marry Ruth was because he felt that such a marriage might jeopardize his own inheritance (4:6). He was eager to preserve his own lineage. And in doing so, he missed the opportunity to be a part of an eternal lineage.

Whatever the reason, the kinsman was emphatic about it, even repeating his statement so there would be no doubt.

Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter; a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel.

So the closest relative said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself.” And he removed his sandal. (Ruth 4:7-8).

The author of Ruth describes this as a “custom in former times.” This indicates that this ritual was no longer practiced in his day. Keil and Delitzsch suggest that the custom arose from the fact that fixed property was taken possession of by treading upon the soil, and thus, taking off the shoe and handing it to another was a symbol of the transfer of a possession or right of ownership.

“Every place on which the sole of your foot shall tread shall be yours...” (Deuteronomy 11:24).

In this case, there was only a symbolic transfer of the rights to purchase a property, not a transfer of the land itself. The act of handing over the shoe to Boaz was undoubtedly designed to indicate visually to the elders that a formal agreement had been reached.

Then Boaz said to the elders, and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.

“Moreover I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the

deceased may not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today." (Ruth 4:9-10).

Here Boaz begins his speech to the elders and people. They listen in an official capacity as leaders of the city and as legal witnesses before the "court." Boaz says he will "raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance" that is, he will provide a son who will carry on the name of the deceased. Then he states the same proposition in the negative, "*that the name of the deceased may not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place.*"

If a mere man could love an outcast, redeem her and bring her into fellowship with himself, how much more is God able to love all the outcasts of the world, redeem them, and bring them into fellowship with Himself.

The man who was a closer kinsman rejected Ruth because he wished to protect his own family inheritance. But Boaz, by willing to give up his own family genealogy for that of this outcast Moabitess ends up becoming a part of the most fabulous genealogy in history -- that of the Messiah. We never again hear from this other man. We do not even know his name. But the name of Boaz is repeated again and again, even in the pages of the New Testament.

Boaz concludes by reminding his hearers that they are all witnesses. Indeed, they came to be witnesses of what seemed to be a relatively unimportant proceeding, but which, from our perspective, turns out to be one of the building blocks of God's plan of redemption through the ages.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in to her. And the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. (Ruth 4:13).

The Lord "enabled her to conceive." Though she had previously been married, that marriage had not been blessed with children. Ruth had hitherto been barren.

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the Lord who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.

"May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to

him.”

Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and because his nurse.

And the neighbor women gave him a name, saying “A son has been born to Naomi.” So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:14-17).

The last spoken words in the book of Ruth come from the lips of these women. They were the same women who saw Naomi’s return to Bethlehem when she insisted that she no longer be called Naomi (“sweet”) but rather Mara (“bitter”). While the book of Ruth opens with Naomi’s bitterness, it now closes with Naomi’s blessedness. She was blessed because she finally had a grandchild. This child would be reckoned as Mahlon’s.

Chapter 1	Chapter 4
The women see Naomi’s bitterness.	The women see Naomi’s blessedness
Naomi loses her children.	Naomi gains a child in the child of Ruth and Boaz.

It is because of this that Naomi is said to have a Redeemer. Note that the redeemer is not Boaz. The redeemer is the child which had been born. It is the birth of this child that would take away Naomi’s reproach of childlessness. It is this child who would take care of her in her old age. And it is this child of whom it is said, “*May his name become famous* (נָרְפָּא - “be called”) *in Israel.*”

Do you see the point? It is through the birth of a baby born in Bethlehem that Naomi is going to find her redemption. This baby has a name which shall be proclaimed both in Israel and throughout the world. For whoever calls upon this name shall be saved.

The story of Ruth and Naomi presents to us a paradigm for looking at the nation of Israel. Like Naomi, the nation of Israel was going to be removed from the land of promise as she goes as a captive in the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities. Like Naomi, she will return to the land, but in a state of bitterness and of struggle and of sorrow over the loss of past glories. Like Naomi, she will eventually find redemption in the birth of a baby in Bethlehem.

Israel	Naomi
Taken from the land in the Assyrian and Babylonian Captivities	Taken from the land to Moab where her husband and sons die
Returns to the land, but in a lesser state of glory	Returns to the land in poverty
Finds her eventual redemption in the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem	Finds her redemption in the birth of a baby in Bethlehem

A genealogy is, to say the least of it, a curious way to end a book. The author does not tell us why he has done this, and we are left to guess.

Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, 19 and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, 20 and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, 21 and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, 22 and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David. (Ruth 4:18-22).

Note the way the genealogy begins. “*Now these are the generations of Perez.*” It is the same formula which is found throughout Genesis. There are ten names mentioned. The unimportant names are left off to preserve this number. That is how many names we see in the genealogy from Adam to Noah and that is how many names we see in the genealogy from Noah to Abraham. Those were carefully stylized genealogies and this is also a carefully stylized genealogy.

Through the book in all its artless simplicity there runs the note that God is supreme. He watches over people like Naomi and Ruth and Boaz and directs their paths. He never forgets His saving purposes. The child of the marriage of Boaz and Ruth was to lead in due course to the great King David, the man after God’s own heart, the man in whom God’s purpose was worked out.

These events in Moab and Bethlehem played their part in leading up to the birth of David. But that is not all. David is not an end unto himself. He is merely the forerunner of the Messiah. He is the king whose ultimate Son was the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Here is the point. God’s hand is over all history. God works out His purpose, generation after generation. Limited as we are to one lifetime, each of us sees so little of what happens. But we need to realize that God is

working out salvation, even among little people like Ruth and Boaz and such a little out-of-the-way place as Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was a nowhere place. These were unknown people. But they gave rise to a king. It was a backward country town that saw some people who were faithful in the midst of hard times. As a result, they saw a baby in a manger and angels and awe-struck shepherds.

1nd & 2nd SAMUEL

The Rise of Kings

While the spotlight of the Judges often shown on very ordinary men, that of 1st and 2nd Samuel focuses upon those who are prophet, priest, and king. These three offices are those which are held by Christ. He is the supreme prophet and priest and king. This means that as we read through the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel, we will find ourselves continually reflecting upon how these books foreshadow the person of Jesus.

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK

The books which we know as First and Second Samuel were originally written as a single book. There is no break between these two in the Masoretic Text. How did it become divided? The scroll of Samuel was probably too large and too cumbersome to be handled as a single scroll, so it was divided into two parts.

1. The Hebrew Title: Samuel.

The Hebrew Title is named after the first major character to appear in the book. This is misleading, since Samuel dies in the middle of 1st Samuel and is not mentioned at all in 2nd Samuel. On the other hand, Samuel served as the king-maker for both of the kings whose careers are presented in this book.

2. The Greek Title.

The Septuagint groups the books of Samuel with those of Kings and refers to them collectively as “the Books of Kingdoms.” Thus, the Septuagint has 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Kingdoms.

3. The Latin Title.

Jerome’s Latin Vulgate borrowed the title from the Septuagint and modified it to read *Libri Regum* - “Books of Kings.”

The books of Samuel introduce us to the Kings of Israel. This also marks the unification of the Kingdom of Israel following the period of disunity under the Judges.

Israel United			Israel Divided	Judah Alone	Exile	Return	
Saul	David	Solomon					
40 Years	40 Years	40 Years	210 Years	135 Years			
		Assyrian Captivity 721 B.C.			Babylonian Captivity 586 B.C.		
1 & 2 Samuel		1 & 2 Kings; 1 & 2 Chronicles			Ezekiel Daniel	Ezra Nehemiah	

THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The books of Samuel take up where Judges leaves off. The tribes of Israel are living in the land, but are beginning to lose their national unity. There is no king in Israel and each man is doing what is right in his own eyes.

The books of 1st & 2nd Samuel take us through the establishment of the monarchy of Israel via the careers of three men: Samuel, Saul, and David.

David established the Royal line.
Saul was the first King of Israel.
Samuel was the last of the Judges and the first of the Prophets (of whom Moses was a forerunner).

We are reminded that these two books were first written as a single unit when we note that they begin and end with a song. These songs serve as bookends for the 1st and 2nd Samuel narrative.

<p>The Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-11)</p> <p>Note: Promise of an anointed king in verse 10.</p>	<p>The Song of David (2 Samuel 22)</p> <p>Note: Eternal promise to descendants of David in verse 51.</p>
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The first song looks forward to a future king. The second looks to God's promise of an eternal kingship and is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. The books of 1st and 2nd Samuel can be outlined as follows:

1 st Samuel			2 nd Samuel	
1 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 31	1 - 10	11 - 24
The Rise and Fall of Saul			The Rise and Fall of David	
Samuel	Saul reigns	David runs	David reigns	David's troubles

DATE OF WRITING

We are not told who is the writer or when this book is written. As a part of Second Samuel, it seems evident that it was written after the death of David. It is noteworthy to see how often we read of something taking place "until this day," indicating that some considerable time has passed between the event and its written presentation.

1 Samuel 5:5	<i>Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.</i>
1 Samuel 6:18	<i>...the large stone on which they set the ark of the Lord is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite.</i>
1 Samuel 27:6	<i>...therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day.</i>
1 Samuel 30:25	<i>And so it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day.</i>
2 Samuel 4:3	<i>...the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and have been aliens there until this day</i>

The mention of "kings of Judah" in 1 Samuel 27:6 might imply that the division between Judah and Israel had already taken place at the time of this writing. It is also noteworthy that these instances seem to lessen during the

reign of King David, possibly indicating that the events described therein were that much closer to the writing of this book.

The Babylonian Talmud states that “*Samuel wrote the book that bears his name*” (Baba Bathra 14b), later clarifying this to refer to those chapter which take place before Samuel’s death (Samuel dies in 1 Samuel 25:1). If this is the case, then a later writer would have used the account penned by Samuel as he penned the books.

1. As the books of 1 & 2 Samuel were written as a complete unit, they had to have been written after the reign of King David.
2. After the Division of Israel.

1 Samuel 27:6 describes the city of Ziklag as belonging “to the kings of Judah to this day.” This seems to indicate that the account is written after the division of the Kingdom. In the same way, 1 Samuel 18:16 speaks of how “all Israel and Judah loved David.”

3. The fact that the books of 1 & 2 Samuel contain less Aramaisms than are found in the books of Kings might indicate that it was written at an earlier period.
4. Written Prior to the Babylonian Captivity.

The quote from 1 Samuel 27:6 (mentioned above) indicates that these books were written at a time when the Kings of Judah were still reigning.

Saul	David	Solomon	Israel Divided	Judah Alone	Exile
			Assyrian Captivity 721 B.C.	Babylonian Captivity 586 B.C.	
Period of Narrative		Written during this period			

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

The two institutions of the Monarchy and the Prophetic Order come to light within the books of Samuel. Indeed, the man Samuel gives rise to both of these. He will be the last Judge of Israel. He will also serve as an acting

priest, following in the stead of Eli's wicked sons, as well as king-maker of Israel's first two kings.

1. To Define the Monarchy of Israel as it related to the Rule of God over the nation. These books show the need of a king and both the wrong motives as well as the right motives in desiring a king. It has been said that Saul was a king after the heart of the people while David was a king after God's own heart.
2. To Legitimize the Reign of King David. It has been suggested that the two books of Samuel set forth an apologetic for the Kingship of the House and Lineage of David.
 - a. The failure of the nation under Eli shows the need of a king.
 - b. The sin of Saul and the later actions of his descendants show that the Lord has rejected Saul as king and set the House of David in his place.

This does not mean that David is presented through rose-colored glasses. His sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah are presented in open view and with no justification of his sin. However, the death of David is not described in this book (it is not seen until 1 Kings). We have noted that 1 & 2 Samuel gives internal evidence of being written well after David's reign, yet his death is not considered to be germane to the message of the book. This is because this is not primarily a biography of either Saul or David but rather a history of the Kingdom of God and its development during the reigns of these first two kings.

3. To Emphasize the Importance of Following the Lord and Obeying His Statutes.

The books of Samuel relate both the triumphs and the tragedies of Saul and David as they were obedient to the Lord and as they were disobedient.

Saul's obedience leads to victory. His disobedience leads to defeat and the loss of the nation. David's obedience leads to victory and a throne. His disobedience leads to murder and revolt within his own family. In both cases, we learn that it is not enough to begin well. The race goes to the one who runs and who keeps on running well.

Both Saul and David had good beginnings. But sin entered in and brought tragic consequences.

Here is the point. The Kingdom of God grows and develops in spite of our sins. The question is not whether the Kingdom is going to grow. The question rather is whether we are going to be a part of that Kingdom or whether we are going to be cut off and cast aside.

4. To Teach the Grace of God.

Especially in the case of David, we are witness to a wonderful picture of the mercy of God. Though he suffers greatly from the consequences of his sin, David is forgiven his sin and continues to trust in the Lord. From his experiences, we learn that failure can be overcome through repentance and faith.

RISE OF SAMUEL (1 SAMUEL 1-3)

As the book opens, Samuel is not yet born. Eli is the high priest over the nation. There is no king. Neither is there mention of any judge, although this was the period when the judges judged over Israel. And yet, the book opens, not with kings or judges or national occurrences, but with a family. In this, it is similar to the book of Ruth.

1. The Prayer of Hannah.

This story is set in the days of the judges. It was a troubled time and this is a troubled family. We could even call it a dysfunctional family.

Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite.

And he had two wives: the name of the one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. (1 Samuel 1:1-2).

This story begins with a family. They live in the hill country of Ephraim, the land that would later be known as Samaria. Ramathaim means “two heights” (dual). Its singular form is “Ramah.” 1 Chronicles 6 lists Samuel’s ancestors as coming from the Kohathite branch of the tribe of Levi, though not from the priestly line of Aaron. Thus, when his father is called an “Ephraimite” it is an indication of where he lived, not his tribal origins. The Levites had no tribal inheritance of their own. The Lord was their inheritance. And so, they could be found residing in the lands of all 12 tribes. There is an interesting parallel in this opening description of this man with the opening of the Samson account in the book of Judges.

Judges 13:2	1 Samuel 1:1-2
<i>And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites</i>	<i>Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim</i>
<i>whose name was Manoah...</i>	<i>and his name was Elkanah</i>
<i>...and his wife was barren and had borne no children.</i>	<i>...but Hannah had no children.</i>

In both cases, a child is given to the barren wife and this child is dedicated to the Lord for a special purpose. In both cases, the sign of this vow would be that the hair of the child would not be cut.

In verse 6 we read that Hannah’s barrenness was a source of contention between the two wives. Actually, it was probably the fact that there were two wives that brought about this contention. Hannah’s barrenness was regularly used to demean her.

2. Worship in Shiloh.

Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were priests to the Lord there. (1 Samuel 1:3).

Shiloh was a city in the hill country of Ephraim to the north of Bethel (20 miles north of Jerusalem). Shiloh had been the place of worship in Canaan since the days of Joshua (Joshua 18:1). The Tabernacle

and the Ark of the Covenant were located here. It was here that the regular sacrifices were made. It was Elkanah's regular practice to come here once a year to lead his family in worship. Unfortunately, the attitudes within his family were anything but worshipful. Instead, there was friction in the family. Contention on the way to church. Nagging in the narthex. The very thing that was supposed to reflect the unity of God's people became instead a source of bickering, frustration, and tears.

Elkanah would give a double portion to Hannah which would make Peninnah jealous and then Peninnah would provoke Hannah about her barrenness and Hannah would cry to Elkanah. When Hannah goes to Elkanah with her tears, he tries to comfort her, asking, "*Am I not better to you than ten sons?*" (1:8 — note that he echoes the blessing given to Naomi in Ruth 4:15).

3. Hannah's Prayer.

Hannah comes to the tabernacle (described here as the "temple of the Lord") with her prayer and her tears.

Her Request	<i>Give Thy maidservant a son</i>
Her Vow	<i>I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life</i>

The Lord answers her prayer and she subsequently has a son whom she names "Samuel." The name "Samuel" can either mean "name of God" or "God who hears." He was given this name because she had asked of the Lord and He had heard her prayer. But when we come to chapter 3, we shall see Samuel hearing the voice of God. There is an interesting contrast and comparison to be seen between Samuel and Jesus.

Samuel	Jesus
He was born to take away his mother's shame.	He was born to take our shame upon Himself.

He was a prophet.	He was the ultimate prophet.
He was a king maker.	He is the King of kings.

4. Dedicated to the Lord.

Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the Lord in Shiloh, although the child was young. (1 Samuel 1:24).

It was common in Biblical times for breast-feeding to take place until the child was two or three years of age (2 Maccabees 7:27 describes a mother who had nursed her son until the age of three).

Though the child was still very young, Hannah brings him to the place of worship in Shiloh to dedicate him to the service of the Lord.

5. Samuel and the Sinful Sons of Eli.

There is a continuing contrast between the person of Samuel versus the sons of Eli. In chapter 1 (1:16), Eli had accused Hannah of being “a worthless woman” בַת־בְּלִיעֵל (- a daughter of belial). 1 Samuel 2:12 says that “*the sons of Eli were worthless men*” בָנֵי בְלִיעֵל (- sons of belial). The term “belial” is a compound which seems to indicate “without profit, worthless.” The second chapter of 1 Samuel continues this contrast. It is a contrast between the sinful sons of Eli versus young Samuel who was “*growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men*” (2:26).

The Sons of Eli	Samuel
Bullied the worshipers, despising the offering of the Lord (2:12-17).	Ministering to the Lord wearing a linen Ephod supplied annually by his mother (2:18-19).

Seducing female worshipers who had come to the tabernacle (2:22).	Elkanah and Hannah blessed and given more children (2:20-21).
Reproved by Eli for their sinful activities (2:22-25).	Growing in stature and in favor both with the Lord and with men (2:26).

Things come to a head when a man of God comes to Eli and prophesies how his house will come to an end because of the wickedness of his sons (1 Samuel 2:27-31). Both Eli and his sons will be judged. His sons will be judged for their sins, and Eli will be judged for participating in the fruits of their sins. He had “grown fat” on the offerings which should have gone to the Lord. He had done so without rebuking them (3:13).

Verse	Fulfillment
2:34 <i>“This will be the SIGN to you... Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them shall die.”</i>	<i>And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died (1 Samuel 4:11).</i>
2:35 <i>“I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest... I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always”</i>	Samuel & his Descendants (1 Chronicles 6:23; 6:33). Zadok & his Descendants (1 Chronicles 29:22). The ultimate fulfillment is Christ who became our High Priest.

Notice the contrast. It is the same contrast which always divides humanity. It is the contrast between those who are faithful to the Lord and those who reject the word of the Lord. Even though Hophni and Phinehas are physical descendants of Aaron, their priesthood becomes a false and a rejected priesthood. Even though Samuel is not of the right pedigree to be a proper priest, he is the one whom God will choose.

The last descendant of Phinehas will be the priest Abiathar who will seek to crown Adonijah as king instead of Solomon (1 Kings 1:7).

The theme begun in Genesis 3:15 continues here in this passage. Hophni and Phinehas have shown themselves to be followers of the Serpent. They shall be replaced by Samuel, the promised seed of the woman. The lesson of this passage applies to more than priests and prophets and Bible teachers. The New Testament teaches that all believers are part of a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). The question is to what priesthood you belong.

	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
Failure	Penniah sinks to obscurity	Eli & Sons condemned	Eli's line is to end
Victory	Hannah has Samuel	Samuel grows great before the Lord before men	Replaced by an enduring house

The prophecy of the demise of the sons of Eli is followed by a similar revelation that is given to the young Samuel. This is prefaced by the observation that *word from the Lord was rare in those days, visions were infrequent* (1 Samuel 3:1). This reminds us that the Old Testament was not an era when God was constantly speaking through His prophets. Knowing this will help us to understand that there are periods of history when prophecy is not to be found.

As Eli and Samuel lay sleeping, the Lord called to Samuel (3:4). Samuel had never before heard the voice of the Lord. And so, it is only natural that he assumed that Eli was calling to him. This happened three times. After the third time, Eli realized that there was no one else in the Tabernacle and that the Lord was calling Samuel.

This is a wonderful picture of God coming quietly to His Tabernacle. He came to where the ark was. He did this ultimately in the person of Jesus. The incarnation took place when God “tabernacled” with men.

Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail. 20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. (1 Samuel 3:19-20).

Samuel will be ultimately seen as prophet, priest, and king-maker. His ministry was recognized the entire length of the land. As such, he is the bridge that spans the last of the judges to take us to the period of the kings.

THE ARK OF THE LORD

The entire book of Samuel consists of contrasting “ups and downs.” In chapters 4-7, those changing fortunes focus primarily upon the Ark of the Covenant. As goes the ark, so will go the fortunes of the people surrounding the ark.

	Chapters 1-3	Chapters 4-6	Chapter 6-7
Failure	Eli's Line ↘	Ark Lost ↘	People of Beth-shemesh struck down ↘
Victory	Samuel ↗	Ark Returned ↗	Philistines struck down ↗

1. Defeat at the hands of the Philistines.

Thus the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek.

And the Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield. (1 Samuel 4:1-2).

For years there had been discord between the Philistines in the lowlands and the Israelites who lived in the hills. Indeed, the reason that the Israelites lived in the hills is because the Philistines had iron chariots and this gave them greater mobility in the lowlands and made them masters of the coastal areas (Judges 1:19). But now, for the first time, the Israelites fight a pitched battle against the Philistines. The result is disastrous.

1 Samuel 4:1 tells us that this battle took place at Ebenezer. It was at this time that this place received that name. The name “Ebenezer” (אֶבֶן חֶזֶר) is a compound made up of the joining of two words.

- אֶבֶן (eben) is the word for “stone.”
- חֶזֶר (ezer) is the word, “help.”

It therefore means “the stone of help.” Unfortunately, there was no help for the people of Israel on that day. The Israelites suffered a great defeat, losing 4,000 men on the battlefield.

So the people sent to Shiloh and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. (1 Samuel 4:3-4).

In light of their defeat, the Israelites determine to bring the ark of the covenant with them into their next battle against the Philistines. They are thinking of it as a good luck charm. The second battle is another defeat for Israel.

First Battle of Ebenezer	4,000 Israelites killed
Second Battle of Ebenezer	30,000 Israelites killed The ark is taken Hophni & Phinehas are killed

When Eli hears the news that the ark has been taken, he falls backward off his seat, breaks his neck and dies “*for he was old and heavy*” (4:18).

2. The Ark in the Land of the Philistines.

Chapter 5 records the travels of the ark of the covenant after it had fallen into the hands of the Philistines.

Verse	City	Occurrences
5:1	Ashdod	Idol of Dagon is found on its face. The next day, it is again on its face, this time with head and hands removed. People broke out with tumors.
5:8	Gath	A very great confusion and the men of the city smitten with tumors.

5:10	Ekron	A very great confusion. The men who did not die were smitten with a physical affliction.
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The ark was considered to be the throne of God. God was described as “*the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim*” (4:4). Since the God of Israel was invisible, His presence could only be determined by the place where He would sit.

“Dagon” (דָּגוֹן) was the god of the Philistines. Though the name is similar to דָּג (dag), the Hebrew word for “fish,” more recent archaeological studies have identified Dagon as a Canaanite deity which had been borrowed by the Philistines. In Ugaritic literature he is the father of Baal. Dagon was the god of **grain** (דָּגָן, *dagan*). The significance of the idol being found face down before the ark of the Lord is obvious. The following day, when the people found the idol again face down and this time with its head and hands removed, it is an obvious indication that Yahweh had defeated Dagon in battle and had removed these battle trophies, much the same way that David would later remove the head of Goliath.

We are struck by the superstition of both Israel and the Philistines in their dealings with the Ark. But we are often guilty of similar superstitions when we play our own pseudo-spiritual games in an attempt to manipulate the Almighty.

In 1 Samuel 5:6 we read that the inhabitants of Ashdod were afflicted with “tumors.” The Hebrew term (עֲפָלִים, *ephalim*) refers to a “swelling” and can indeed refer to a tumor or a boil or a physical swelling. Aren Maeir has suggested that this is a reference to male sexual dysfunction, noting that it is specifically the males who were so afflicted in 1 Samuel 5:9 and that examples of small vial-shaped vessels have been discovered that seem to represent uncircumcised, non-erect phalluses. This is significant because 1 Samuel 6:4 describes the Philistines fashioning golden *ephalim* to send as an offering.¹

No matter how we understand these *ephalim*, a motif is introduced in this chapter. It is the motif of the hand of the Lord. Though the term is used as early as the book of Exodus, it is not

¹ *Did Captured Ark Afflict Philistines with E.D.?*, Biblical Archaeology Review, May-June 2008.

commonplace until we get to this chapter.

5:6	<i>“Now the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites...”</i>
5:7	<i>“...His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god.”</i>
5:9	<i>“...the hand of the Lord was against the city...”</i>
5:11	<i>“...the hand of God was very heavy there.”</i>
6:3	<i>“...it shall be known why His hand is not removed from you.”</i>
6:5	<i>“...perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land.”</i>
6:9	<i>“...His hand that struck us...”</i>
7:13	<i>“And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.”</i>

There are several lessons that we learn from this chapter.

- God wins, even when those who claim His name do not win. The defeat of the Israelites did not constitute a defeat for the Lord.
- Idolatry is not exclusively an Old Testament sin. There are other forms of idolatry besides bowing down to a graven image. 1 John 5:21 warns to guard yourselves from idols.
- In Colossians 3:5, Paul is listing a number of sins and when he comes to greed, he states that it *amounts to idolatry*. If there is something for which Americans are known, it is their greed and materialism. This verse teaches that this is nothing less than a modern form of idolatry.

3. The Ark Returns to Israel.

After seven months of passing the ark from city to city, the Philistines determine to send it back home to the land of the Israelites. They do so, sending it back with an offering of five golden tumors and five golden mice (hoping that this would take away the plagues of tumors). They place these along with the ark onto a cart pulled by two cows.

And the cows took the straight way in the direction of Beth-shemesh; and they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. And the lords of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh.

Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see it.

And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stood there where there was a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. (1 Samuel 6:12-14).

Beth-shemesh is located on the east end of the Sorek Valley, near to where Samson had lived. Its name means “house of the sun.” It had been allotted in the days of Joshua to the priests (Joshua 21:16).

These people, working out in their fields, look up to see a strange procession. A pair of oxen pulling a cart on which rests the throne of God. Behind them come five kings and all of their retainers. It was as though the Lord were leading all of the enemies of Israel in a triumphant parade. The people of Beth-shemesh respond in worship, taking apart the cart on which the ark was transported and using both the wood and the oxen as a sacrifice to the Lord.

And He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck down all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck down the people with a great slaughter. (1 Samuel 6:19).

The Philistines had suffered because of the presence of the ark in their cities, but the Israelites were no less immune to the results of a careless treatment of the ark. It is not as though they were ignorant of the importance of the ark. These were Levites. They would have been familiar with the requirements of the Law. They would have known that, in the days in the Wilderness, only the sons of Aaron had been permitted to handle the ark - that even they did not presume to look within the ark, but reverently covered it with a veil each time

they were required to move it (Numbers 4:5-20).

There is a lesson here. It is dangerous to trifle with the Lord. He is very big and very powerful and we must never think that we have a handle on Him. Sometimes we get to thinking that God is a Presbyterian. Or a Republican. Or a Charismatic. And we think that we have placed Him into our nice, neat package. Suddenly, He does something like this and we find ourselves with a proper awe of the Lord.

The number translated as 50,070 men reads differently in the Hebrew text (70 men, 50,000 men). Aside from the fact that there were not this many men in the town of Beth-shemesh, the construction of the Hebrew suggests that this reading might be the result of a textual error, even though this is not apparent from either the Massoretic text or from the Septuagint.

4. The Ark in Kiriath-jearim.

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the Lord and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord.

And it came about from the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim that the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. (1 Samuel 7:1-2).

Demoralized by the death of their men, the people of Beth-shemesh sent the ark 10 miles up the road to the town of Kiriath-jearim (only 8 miles from Jerusalem). It is placed into the keeping of Abinadab and his son Eleazar. The ark will remain there until being brought to Jerusalem in the days of David.

This was a period of lamentation. The people of Israel “lamented after the Lord.” Why? Because their place of worship had been destroyed and their God was in a state of banishment.

5. Victory Returns to Israel.

Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “if you return to the Lord with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the Lord and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the

hand of the Philistines.”

So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth and served the Lord alone. (1 Samuel 7:3-4).

It was not only the priests and spiritual leaders of the nation who had been in sin. The Israelites had begun to engage in idol-worship. Samuel calls for repentance. This repentance is threefold:

- Remove the foreign gods.
- Direct your hearts to the Lord.
- Serve Him alone.

Notice that they were not merely called to serve the Lord. They were called to serve God alone. They are to serve Him and are to serve no other. Jesus pointed out this principle when He said that “*no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other*” (Matthew 6:24).

Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” (1 Samuel 7:7-8).

What was it that caused the Philistines to attack Israel at this particular time? It was because they heard that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah. Perhaps they viewed this gathering as a military threat.

Samuel views this as a spiritual battle. He does not outwardly prepare the men for battle. He doesn’t beat any plowshares into swords. He doesn’t suggest an armament plan or devise a strategy. Instead, he performs an act of worship.

Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and

confused them, so that they were routed before Israel.

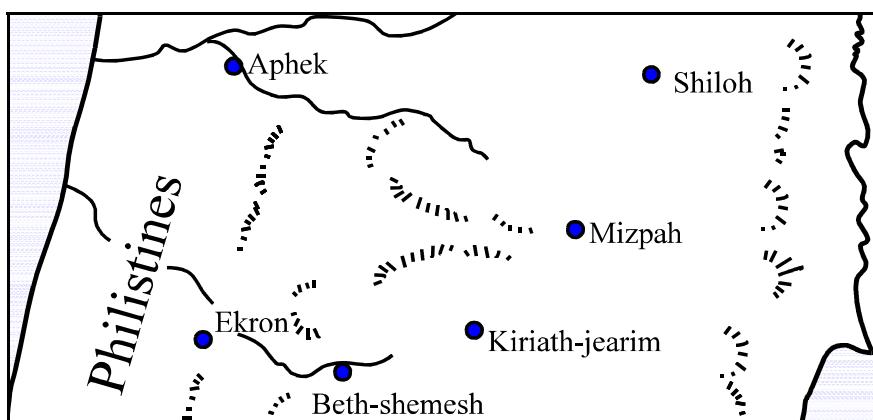
And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car. (1 Samuel 7:10-11).

The Lord wins the battle and He does so in a way that is reminiscent of the days of Joshua. You remember the story. Joshua was fighting an alliance of five kings and he called upon the sun and the moon to stand still and they obeyed him. The Lord sent great hailstones against the enemies of Israel which killed more than were killed in the fighting. The Israelites pursued their enemies down the descent of Beth-horon.

Now it happens again. An alliance of five kings. A prayer to the Lord. An answer from the skies. A victory in which the Israelites pursue their enemies down the valley. This is the same valley in which lies Beth-car.

If I had been there prior to the battle, I might have been tempted to say, “Hey guys, I know that God used to do this sort of thing, but times have changed. That was a long time ago in another age and God doesn’t do that sort of thing anymore.” There is a lesson here. It is that we dare not underestimate the power of God.

Then Samuel took a stone and set it as far as below Beth-car and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.” (1 Samuel 7:12).



This does not seem to be the same Ebenezer as the one mentioned in chapter 4:1 and 5:1. That first Ebenezer was located

near Aphek (4:1). This Ebenezer is between Mizpah and Shen. That first Ebenezer was a place of defeat. This second Ebenezer is a stone of victory. And so, Samuel establishes it as a memorial.

THE RISE OF KING SAUL

From the days in the wilderness, God had told the Israelites that one day they would have a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). And yet, it had been understood up to this point that GOD was their king. When the Israelites had offered the kingship to Gideon, he had refused, insisting that “*the Lord shall rule over you*” (Judges 8:23). That changes as we come to this chapter. For the first time, there will be a legitimate king over Israel.

Chapter 8	Chapter 9	Chapter 10	Chapter 11	Chapter 12
A King Requested	A King Chosen		King Goes Forth	Kingdom Admonished
The People request a king	Saul comes to Samuel	Saul Anointed	Saul’s call to arms	Samuel’s call to commitment

The need for a king is introduced as we look at the character of the two sons of Samuel.

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel.

Now the name of his first-born was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba.

His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice. (1 Samuel 8:1-3).

Chapter 7 ends on a positive note. The Lord has delivered the Israelites from the Philistine threat and Israel repossesses all of the disputed holdings from Ekron to Gath (7:14). But over the course of years, Samuel grew older and was succeeded by his two sons. Their judging was

It is questionable whether it was proper for Samuel to appoint his sons as judges in the first place. The office of judge was an appointment from the Lord and was not passed from father to son.

characterized by dishonesty and corruption. They followed after a perversion of justice. There is a parallel here between Samuel and Eli. They both judged Israel. They both had two sons. Their sons acted wickedly and were rejected. Perhaps Samuel had learned his parenting skills from Eli. The good news is that he does not seem to have been partaking in their sinful behavior the way in which Eli did. Because his sons were not fit to succeed him, the Israelites perceived a need for a king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; 5 and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.” (1 Samuel 8:4-5).

In verse 1, Samuel had **appointed** his sons to be judges over Israel. Now the elders ask Samuel to **appoint** a king to judge them. There are several things which ought to be mentioned in defense of Israel's request for a king:

- The request was initiated because of the ungodly successors to Samuel. In verse 20 they shall add that they are seeking one who would fight their battles.
- Instead of seeking a king on their own, they sought the right man from the spokesman of the Lord.
- God had told the Israelites that one day they would have a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-17).

Nevertheless, their request was perceived as a rejection, not only of Samuel and his sons, but even of the Lord who tells Samuel that “*they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them*” (8:7). One of the problems with a king was that many of the surrounding nations considered their kings to be gods. The Lord issues a warning of what it will mean for the Israelites to have a king to reign over them.

- He will draft your sons into his military (8:11).
- He will conscript people to do his plowing and harvesting and to manufacture his weapons of war (8:12).
- He will take your daughters for household duties (8:13).
- He will take your lands and vineyards and groves and give them to his retainers (8:14).
- He will tax the produce of your land (8:15).
- He will take your servants and animals (8:16).
- He will take you (8:17).

They have come and asked the Lord for a king. Before it is all over, they will come and ask God to take their king back (8:18). There is a lesson here. It is that you be careful what you pray for. You might get it.

The scene suddenly shifts to a young man named Saul. He is described as one of valiant heritage and of personal distinction.

“...a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel, from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people.” (1 Samuel 9:2).

The word translated “handsome” is תּוֹב (tov, “good”). We would say that he was “a fine figure of a man.” He was a man’s man, literally head and shoulders above the rest of his countrymen. Furthermore, he seems to have initially been a capable leader and one who was willing to follow the Lord. Unfortunately, he does not stay that way. The career of Saul is set forth in three acts, each of which consists of several parallel scenes.

	Act 1	Act 2	Act 3
Scene 1	Saul meets Samuel and is anointed by him (9-10)	Saul meets Samuel and is condemned by him (15).	Saul meets Samuel and his death is foretold (28).
Scene 2	Success in battle with the help of God (11).	Success in battle with the help of David (17-18).	Failure in battle and suicide (31).
Scene 3	Saul’s failure before Samuel and Jonathan (13-14).	Saul’s failure before David (19-26).	

1. Saul’s Anointing.

Saul comes on the scene, not seeking a kingdom or a throne, but looking for some lost donkeys. As they are about to give up on their quest, Saul’s servant suggests that they go and inquire from the local Seer about the missing donkeys. They discuss this plan. Saul is reluctant because they have no gift to give to the Seer. But the servant has a quarter of a shekel of silver. This was not a coin, for coinage would not be invented until the 7th century B.C. This was a

weight.

Meanwhile, the Lord had revealed to Samuel that a man was coming from the tribe of Benjamin who would be anointed as the deliverer of the Israelites. Thus, when Saul arrives at the gate of the city, he is met by Samuel who informs him that the donkeys have been found and then proceeds to invite him as the guest of honor to a special dinner.

Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head, kissed him and said, “Has not the Lord anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?” (1 Samuel 10:1).

What was the significance of anointing someone with oil? It was a sign of sanctification - of setting apart for a special purpose. It was also a sign of the Spirit of God. Isaiah would later write:

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted... (Isaiah 61:1a).*

Saul is given three signs which are to serve as witnesses that this anointing is truly from God.

Sign #1	Two men inform him that the donkeys have been found.
Sign #2	Three men on their way to worship the Lord give him two loaves of bread.
Sign #3	Saul meets a group of prophets and the Spirit of God comes upon him and he prophesies.

The third of these signs is particularly striking and has been the subject of considerable speculation.

When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them.

And it came about, when all who knew him previously saw that he prophesied now with the

prophets, that the people said to one another, “What has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?”

And a man there answered and said, “Now, who is their father?” Therefore it became a proverb: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Samuel 10:10-12).

This mysterious experience would be repeated later in Saul's life (see 1 Samuel 19:20-24). What was this experience and why did it take place.? It was a manifestation of the filling of the Holy Spirit. It took place as a confirmation that Saul was to be the next king of Israel.

Does this mean that the filling of the Spirit must always be accompanied with such a sign? Not at all. Here it is accompanied by prophesying. In Acts 2 it is accompanied by tongues and flames of fire. In Exodus 28:3 and 31:3 is was accompanied by skilled workmanship on the part of the designers of the tabernacle. In Judges 15:14 it resulted in Samson's great strength. In Acts 4:8 is was accompanied by a holy boldness.

What is the point? It is that God does always have to do things the same way. We ought to be careful when building doctrines based on historical passages.

2. Saul's Public Selection as King.

Thereafter Samuel called the people together to the Lord at Mizpah (1 Samuel 10:17).

The name “Mizpah” means “watchtower” -- literally, “place of watching.” There were several Mizpahs throughout the land. This Mizpah was likely the place where the Lord had last delivered the Israelites from the attack of the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:5-11). It had since become one of the regular points along Samuel's traveling circuit (1 Samuel 7:16).

Thus Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot.

Then he brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its families, and the Matrike family was taken. And Saul the son of Kish was taken; but when they looked for him, he could not be found.

Therefore he inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" So the Lord said, "Behold, he is hiding himself by the baggage."

So they ran and took him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward.

And Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen? Surely there is no one like him among all the people." So all the people shouted and said, "Long live the king!" (1 Samuel 10:20-24).

There is a touch of irony here. When we first saw Saul, he was being sent to look for missing donkeys. Now it is Saul who is missing and the people go looking for him. They find him hiding by the baggage.

Remember, being a king was not something for which Saul had been seeking. He had come on the scene seeking nothing but a pair of lost donkeys. Now that he has been chosen, he is still reluctant to take up the mantle of kingship.

There will come a time when that mantle of kingship will be taken away from Saul and he will be equally reluctant to give it up. Perhaps there is a lesson here for us. It is that we shall find it much easier to take things up and to give things up as we realize that they are given and taken by the Lord. Anything coming into your life comes via a nail-scarred hand. Anything that is taken away is taken by that same hand.

3. Saul's Mixed Reception.

And Saul also went to his house at Gibeah; and the valiant men whose hearts God had touched went with him.

But certain worthless men said, "How can this one deliver us?" And they despised him and did not bring him any present. But he kept silent. (1 Samuel 10:26-27).

What happened after Saul had been proclaimed the first king of Israel? Did he move into the royal palace? He did not. There was no royal palace into which he could move. And so, when the celebration was over, there was nothing else for him to do but to

return home. When next we see him, he will be at the south end of a northbound team of oxen.

Israel at this time was nothing more than a scattered and disunited collection of tribes. This was not a unified nation. You couldn't even get them to agree on what to eat for lunch. They also did not agree that Saul should be their new king, no matter what Samuel had told them. But this changed dramatically when Saul led the Israelites to victory in battle.

4. Saul's Victory against the Ammonites.

Now Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, “Make a covenant with us and we will serve you.”

But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, “I will make it with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel.”

And the elders of Jabesh said to him, “Let us alone for seven days, that we may send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to deliver us, we will come out to you.” (1 Samuel 11:1-3).

There was bad blood between the Ammonites and the Israelites. The Ammonites were descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with one of his daughters (the name Ammon means “my father”). They occupied the territory north of the Arnon River and east of the Dead Sea. They had joined Moab in invading Israel and taking Jericho in the days of Ehud (Judges 3:12-13). They had also warred with Israel in the days of Jephthah and had been defeated by him, losing a number of their border cities to him (Judges 10-11).

Now they were back. The city which they were now attacking was Jabesh-gilead. By strange coincidence, this is the same city which had been destroyed by the Israelites for not joining in the punitive attack against the tribe of Benjamin following the incident at Gibeah in which a Levite's concubine was raped and then dismembered (Judges 19-21).

The city had since been rebuilt and was again inhabited. It is now being attacked, not by Israel, but by Ammon. Because of her

past history, it seems doubtful that anyone will come to her aid. Except for a man from the tribe of Benjamin - Saul's tribe. And specifically, a man of Gibeah, Saul's city.²

Judges 19-21	1 Samuel 11
Takes place when Israel had no king.	Becomes the confirming event of Saul's kingship.
Gibeah becomes a city destined to be destroyed for her sins.	Gibeah becomes the city from which salvation goes forth.
Jabesh-gilead refuses to join in Israel's call for punishment against wicked Gibeah.	Jabesh-gilead is besieged and asks for help from Israel.
Benjamin becomes the object of attack.	Benjamin becomes the leader in this holy war.

Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry.

And he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, “Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.” Then the dread of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out as one man.

And he numbered them in Bezek; and the sons of Israel were 300,000, and the men of Judah 30,000. (1 Samuel 11:6-8).

² Scroll 4QSam^a of the Dead Sea Scrolls contains the following additional paragraph by way of explanation:

“Nahash king of the Ammonites sorely oppressed the Gadites and the Reubenites, and he gouged out all their right eyes and struck terror and dread in Israel. Not a man was left among the Israelites beyond Jordan whose right eye was not gouged out by Nahash king of the Ammonites, except for seven thousand men who fled from the Ammonites and entered Jabesh Gilead.” (4QSam^a).

Just as the Israelites had been called to arms against Gibeah by the cutting up of the body of the murdered concubine, so this time two oxen are cut up and their pieces sent throughout the land as a call to arms. Gibeah which was formerly in need of the heavy hand of punishment has now become the rallying point of salvation for God's people.

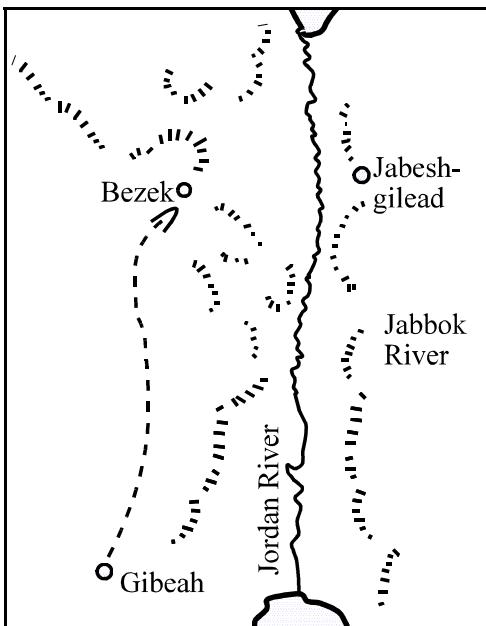
It is possible that the term **נִלְנָה** ("thousand") is to be understood in a more general sense as a military unit.

And it happened the next morning that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the camp at the morning watch, and struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day. And it came about that those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together. (1 Samuel 11:11).

Having assembled at the town of Bezek on the mountains of Gilboa, Saul and his force cross the Jordan River and attack the Ammonites just before sunrise. The result is an overwhelming victory.

It is noteworthy that it would be at this same locale on the mountains of Gilboa that Saul would eventually fight his last battle. And when his body is mutilated and hung up on the wall of the city of Bethshan, it will be men of Jabesh-gilead who will rescue the body and give it a proper burial.

Flushed with their victory, the people call for the death of those who had originally refused to follow Saul as king. Saul refuses, requiring leniency, pointing out that it is the Lord who has



accomplished deliverance.

5. Saul's Coronation at Gilgal.

Then Samuel said to the people, “Come and let us go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom there.”

So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they also offered sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly. (1 Samuel 11:14-15).

Gilgal was located on the western bank of the Jordan River. It was here that Joshua and the Israelites first camped after crossing the Jordan River. They had built a monument here of 12 memorial stones. And it was here that the Israelites had renewed the covenant, circumcising all of the men in the camp. Gilgal will be the scene both of Saul's coronation, his rebuke, and his ultimate rejection as king.

THE FALL OF KING SAUL

Saul is the story of a great beginning. But the spiritual life is not limited to beginnings. It is not a sprint. It is, instead, a marathon. Saul had made an excellent beginning. This young man who had come on the scene looking for lost donkeys had instead found himself as the redeemer of Israel and her first king. The tragedy of his story begins in chapters 13-15.

Chapter 13	Chapter 14	Chapter 15
Jonathan's victory over the Philistines at Geba	Jonathan's victory over the Philistine garrison at Michmash	Saul's victory over the Amalekites
Saul disobeys the law by offering sacrifices	Saul makes an oath of hunger which Jonathan inadvertently disobeys	Saul disobeys God by sparing the life of Agag, king of the Amalekites.

1. The Years of Saul's Reign.

1 Samuel 13:1 has several variant readings which have puzzled

scholars over the years. This is reflected in the various English translations.

KJV & NKJV	<i>Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel...</i>
NAS	<i>Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel.</i>
NIV	<i>Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.</i> (Taken from a few late manuscripts of the LXX).
RSV	<i>Saul was...years old when he began to reign; and he reigned...and two years over Israel.</i>

The King James Version attempts to reflect the Hebrew numerals of the Massoretic Text. However, this phrasing seems out of character and most scholars today believe it to be in error. Indeed, a literal rendering of the Hebrew text would read: “*Saul was a year old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years over Israel.*” The Septuagint omits the entire verse. The Latin Vulgate translates the Hebrew literally. Acts 13:21 says that Saul reigned for 40 years, but this might be a round number (the NAS translators viewed 32 years of Saul’s reign + 7½ years of Ishbosheth).

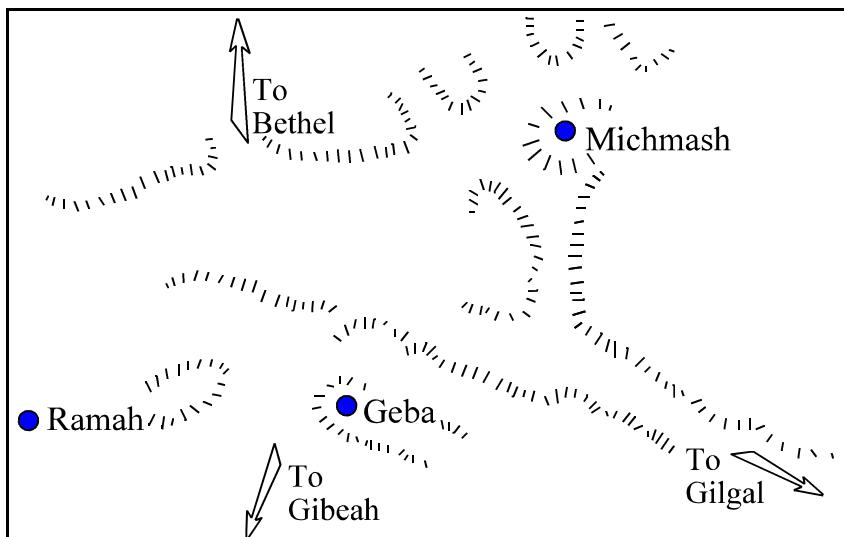
2. Attack on the Geba Garrison.

Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent.

And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear.”

And all Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal. (1 Samuel 13:2-4).

The Philistines had last been mentioned in chapter 7 where they had been driven from the territory of Israel and had retreated to their own cities by the sea. Now they were back. They had infiltrated east into the mountains of central Canaan, establishing a garrison at Geba.



Saul had split his meager forces into two parties. There were 2000 men under his command both at Michmash and stationed in the hill country around Bethel. Another 1000 were with Jonathan to the south at Gibeah. Jonathan was able to take the initiative, capturing the garrison at Geba. This had the same effect as kicking over a hornets nest. It infuriated the Philistines and brought about an immediate retaliation.

Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; and they came up and camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

And when the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits.

Also some of the Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. (1 Samuel 13:5-7).

The Philistine response to the destruction of their garrison was an all-out invasion of the Israelite territories. They boasted a thoroughly modern army against the under-equipped and untrained Israelite militia. Saul was forced to retreat to Gilgal. This was the place where the Israelites had first crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land under Joshua. The memorial stones still stood here. But in the face of this overwhelming enemy, the people were not remembering the past victories of the Lord. Instead, they were hiding. Some were going back across the Jordan to find refuge on the east bank.

For many years, the Philistines had kept the process of smelting iron ore a closely guarded secret. This gave them a monopoly on iron weapons.

3. Decision at Gilgal.

Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him. (1 Samuel 13:8).

Samuel had promised to meet Saul at Gilgal within seven days of his arrival there. But it wasn't a recent promise. He had made this promise all the way back in 1 Samuel 10:8. Saul arrives in Gilgal and waits the seven days. But there is no Samuel. And the Philistines are getting closer. And Saul's army is shrinking quickly. Finally, Saul decides that he can wait no longer and he calls for the sacrifices to be brought and he offers them himself.

What was his sin? Not in merely offering the sacrifice, for David and Solomon both did the same thing (2 Samuel 24:25; 1 Kings 3:15). Saul's sin was in disobeying the command of the Lord as given through Samuel. Immediately he finds himself confronted by Samuel.

"To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

And it came about as soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, that behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him. (1 Samuel 13:10).

Samuel questions the actions of Saul ("What have you done?"). Saul

immediately begins a process of rationalization.

Rationalization #1: "I saw that the people were scattering from me" (13:11).

Who is at fault? It is the people. "I'm merely their representative and I have to go along with whatever they decide."

Rationalization #2: "You did not come within the appointed days" (13:11). Samuel is also at fault.

Rationalization #3: "The Philistines were assembling at Michmash" (13:11). Saul also blames the circumstances.

Rationalization #4: "The Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord" (13:12). Who is number 4 on Saul's fault list? God himself. "He apparently is not going to help me, so I had better buy him off."

Rationalization #5: "I forced myself and offered the burnt offering" (13:12).

"The people, Samuel, the circumstances and you, God, twisted my arm, and I just could not help myself."

Do you see what is missing in Saul's reasoning? There is a complete lack of repentance. He is remorseful for the results of his sin, but he does not admit his guilt.

It is ironic that Gilgal was both the scene of Saul's coronation as well as of the announcement that the kingdom would go to another.

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him

as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." (1 Samuel 13:13-14).

The judgment against Saul is that he will not be the founder of a dynasty. It shall not be his descendants who sit upon the throne of Israel. This distinction shall be given to another.

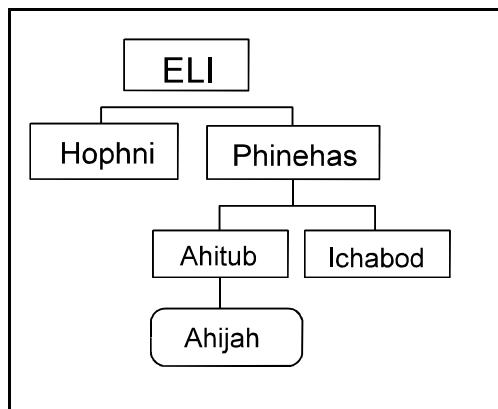
4. Saul and Jonathan.

Saul's bad situation had gotten a lot worse. The Philistine threat was growing. The number of his forces had been reduced to a mere 600 (13:15). Samuel had come and gone. And the Lord was not on his side. In the midst of this bleak outlook, victory comes at the hands of Jonathan.

And Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men, 3 and Ahijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the Lord at Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan was gone. (1 Samuel 14:2-3).

Saul had moved from Gilgal back to his home town of Gibeah. He still had his 600 men and he had added to his entourage the new high priest, Ahijah, the great-grandson of Eli in all of his priestly finest.

Why is Ahijah mentioned along with his ancestry? Perhaps it is to point to the company which Saul was keeping - the son of an accursed line of priests.



Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the Lord

will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained to save by many or by few.” (1 Samuel 14:6).

The Philistines had established an outpost at the top of one of the passes leading to Michmash. This was the objective to which Jonathan now turned his attention.

And his armor bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, and here I am with you according to your desire.” (1 Samuel 14:7).

Jonathan’s armor bearer had no less faith. An armor bearer in those days was often a teenage boy who was not yet considered of age. The armor that he carried would consist of a giant shield nearly the size of a man. It was a two-handed job and so he would depend upon the warrior on whose behalf he was bearing the armor. They decide upon a plan. They will approach the Philistine outpost guarding Michmash and reveal their position.

- If the Philistines call for them to wait, then they will stand their ground and wait.
- If the Philistines call for them to come up, then they will go up, believing that the Lord has given the victory.

Did you notice anything about this plan? There was no plan for either retreat or defeat. There is no third option. They assume that there will be eventual victory and that it will either come now or it will come later.

Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some of them to death after him.

And that first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land.

And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling. (1 Samuel 14:13-15).

Up to this point, the Philistines thought of the Israelites only

in terms of those who came down from the mountains to have their farm implements sharpened. Nothing to fear from them. They were nothing but a band of backwoods farmers. But this farmer does some plowing that leaves 20 professional soldiers dead. There is an interesting parallel between the stories of Jonathan and Gideon, the judge of Israel.

Gideon	Jonathan
Went alone with a servant into the camp of the Midianites.	Went alone with his armor bearer against the Philistines.
Sets forth the fleece as a sign of God's victory.	Sets the invitation of the Philistines to come up as the sign of God's victory.
The Midianites are thrown into a panic by Gideon's 300.	The Philistines are thrown into a panic by Jonathan and his armor bearer.
In their panic, the Midianites fought one another.	Every man's sword was against his fellow (14:20).
Reinforcements come from Ephraim.	Reinforcements come out of hiding in Ephraim (14:22).

Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food. (1 Samuel 14:24).

Saul thought to motivate the Israelites to fight harder, and so he places them under an oath and a curse, forbidding them to eat. As a result, the fighting men of Israel find themselves running out of energy. The result is exactly the opposite of what Saul had desired - “*the slaughter of the Philistines has not been great*” (14:30).

Jonathan hadn't heard about the oath which his father made. And so, when he comes upon some honey dripping from a honeycomb, he partakes of it.

At the day's end, the Israelites came upon the spoil which the Philistines had left in their retreat. Since they were now famished,

they “*took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood*” (14:32). To eat blood was a sin against the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-16).

- Saul wants to go on attacking the Philistines and taking spoil all night and “not leave a man of them.”
- The priest suggests they “draw near to God.” When Saul does this, there is no answer from the Lord. Saul reasons that this must be because of some sin among the Israelites.
- Saul says, “Let’s cast lots and find out who the sinner is. Even if it is my own son I will kill him.” Within a few minutes, he finds himself confronted with the folly of his own words.
- When they cast the lots, they find out it is indeed Saul’s son, Jonathan, the hero, who had brought about this great deliverance in Israel. Saul declares his intention to have Jonathan executed. Jonathan, in a great display of faith and loyalty, agrees to give up his life.
- The Israelites intervene, demanding that Jonathan’s life be spared.

5. Saul and the Amalekites

Up to now Saul has only forfeited the right of his line to rule Israel. In Chapter 15 we will see the climax of his life and the loss of his kingship. This begins with God’s Command to Strike the Amalekites.

Then Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the Lord.

"Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt.

"Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" (1 Samuel 15:1-3).

The Amalekites were among the descendants of Esau. They were a nomadic desert tribe who lived in the northern Sinai. The fighting between the Amalekites and the Israelites went all the way back to the wilderness wanderings.

- The Amalekites had dogged the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness, picking off any who lagged behind (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).
- It was the Amalekites who had repulsed the initial attempt of Israel to enter the promised land at Kadesh-Barnea.
- In the days of the Judges, the Amalekites had joined the Moabites and the Ammonites in invading Israel and taking Jericho (Judges 3:12-14).
- The Amalekites had joined the Midianites to invade Israel in the days of Gideon (Judges 6:3).

Because of this, every living thing of Amalek's is to be put to death. If this seems cruel, remember that this is the same God who promised Abraham that if there were ten righteous men in Sodom he would spare the whole valley, the whole cesspool, not just Sodom but Gomorrah, Zeboim, Admah, and Bella, all five cities of the plain. The Amalekites were a cancer in the land of Canaan. Like a cancer, they were to be completely exterminated. It isn't wise to leave a few cancer cells behind and it isn't wise to leave a bit of sin behind.

Oftentimes we read such a passage and find difficulty with it. Our real problem is that we have too light a view of sin. The question is not why God ordered the destruction of the Amalekites, but why hasn't He also ordered our own destruction when we are completely deserving of that judgment. Jesus summed this up perfectly when He pointed to such judgments and then said, "*I tell you... unless you repent, you will all likewise perish*" (Luke 13:3).

So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt.

And he captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. (1 Samuel 15:7-8).

Saul responded in obedience to the Lord. He gathered together a huge force and moved down and conquered the Amalekites. This does not mean that each and every Amalekite was destroyed. They would continue to be a force with which to be reckoned. In David's day, they would be responsible for the destruction of the city of Ziklag and the capture of a number of Israelite prisoners (1 Samuel 30:1).

But Saul and the people spared Agag and the

best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. (1 Samuel 15:9).

Agag was probably a dynastic title like “pharaoh” (see Numbers 24:7). It may have come from the Akkadian *agagum*, “to become angry.” Ancient kings would sometimes keep the kings whom they captured, keeping them as a living monument to their success. Judges 1:6-7 tells of Adonai-bezek who had kept a retinue of 70 conquered kings with their thumbs and big toes amputated. Perhaps Saul rationalized that, since all of the other kings were doing this, he would act in the same way. What is ironic is how Saul had been ready to put his own son to death in the previous chapter but was now unwilling to execute a wicked king.

But this is not all. Saul and the people also took for themselves the choice pick of the flocks of the conquered Amalekites. These things had been dedicated by God for destruction, but they decided that these things were too good for God. They were committing the sin of Achan who had stolen some of the spoil from Jericho.

And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the LORD.”

But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?”

And Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.” (1 Samuel 15:13-15).

Notice the pronouns. “**I** have been obedient. **They** brought the oxen and sheep. The **people** spared the best to sacrifice to the Lord **your God**.” When Samuel points out his disobedience, Saul argues that the purpose of the spoil was to bring sacrifices to the Lord. It is like the little boy who was caught with his hand in the cookie jar and who exclaimed, “I was getting it for you!”

And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as much

delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry, because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.” (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

God ordained sacrifices in the Old Testament. Sacrificing was a part of obedience to God. But it is not the mere act of killing an animal which was pleasing to God. God isn’t really impressed with a bunch of dead animals. What impresses God is the giving of self. When you take that which you own and for which you have worked and give it to God, that involves a real sacrifice. And the best kind of sacrifice is the giving of yourself in obedience.

Saul asks Samuel for forgiveness. Samuel replies that the consequences of Saul’s sin will be long-lasting. Samuel will not even travel the same path as the fallen king.

But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.”

And as Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.

So Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you.

“And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.” (1 Samuel 15:26-29).

Having been told that his kingdom would be taken from him, Saul instinctively did what came natural. He reach out to hold on. To hold on to his kingdom. To hold on to his status. To hold on to Samuel. And in the process, he ripped a portion of Samuel’s cloak, bringing a fitting illustration to the prophetic words.

Do you remember the reaction of Eli when he was told that his sons would not follow him in the priesthood? There had been an acceptance of God’s will. Saul is different. He wants to hold on. The rest of the book of 1 Samuel will be the account of Saul trying to hold on.

Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul.

And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Samuel 15:34-35).

Saul would see Samuel one more time. But it would take place after Samuel had died. And it would take place on the eve of his own death.

THE RISE OF DAVID

Chapter 15 of 1 Samuel ends with Saul having been rejected as the King of Israel. As he grasps Samuel's cloak and tears it, he is told that the kingdom of Israel will be torn from him and given to another. This other is a young shepherd boy named David.

Chapter 16		Chapter 17	Chapter 18
David Introduced		David on the field of battle	David in the Court of Saul
To Samuel	To Saul		
David Anointed by Samuel	David plays for Saul	David slays Goliath	David becomes the object of Saul's fear

Saul had been the people's choice for king, though he had also been sanctioned by God. Now Saul would be rejected in favor of a new king. The anointing of a boy from Bethlehem to be the new king of Israel is a reminder to us that David's greater Son was also from Bethlehem and that He was anointed, not merely with oil, but with the very Spirit of God.

Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him. (1 Samuel 16:14).

The Spirit had departed from Saul. But the empty house which has been swept clean is now replaced by an "evil spirit." The startling thing about this evil spirit was that it was from the Lord. What was the nature of this spirit? It was not necessarily a demon. Rather, it was a messenger from God - and angel sent on an errand of trouble. This should not surprise us.

The Israelites had already seen the Lord send an angel of death against the firstborn of the Egyptians.

Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. 16 Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well." (1 Samuel 16:15-16).

We are meant to see Saul and David in contrast. We can note that this contrast extends throughout their lives.

Saul	David
From the tribe of Benjamin	From the tribe of Judah
First seen looking for his father's donkeys.	First seen caring for his father's sheep.
Head and shoulders above the rest of the men of Israel.	The youngest and least impressive of eight brothers.
God's Spirit is removed from Saul.	The Spirit of the Lord comes mightily upon David.
An evil spirit from the Lord terrorizes Saul.	David's playing of the harp causes evil spirit to depart from Saul.
Anointing by Samuel followed by Saul's defeat of Nahash and the Ammonites.	Anointing by Samuel followed by David's defeat of Goliath and the Philistines.

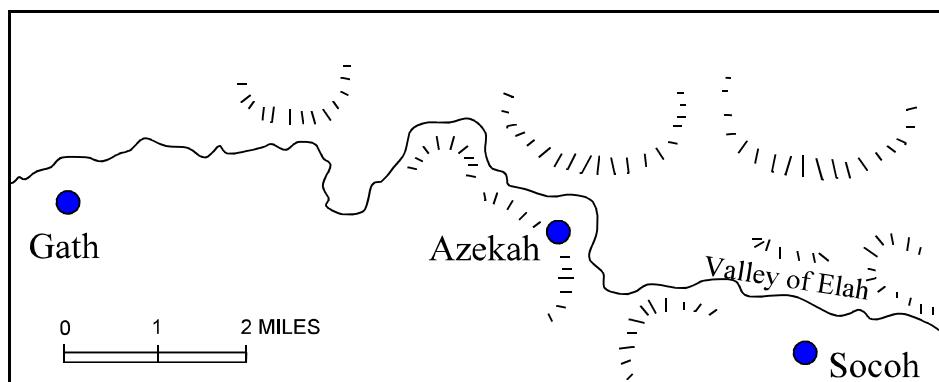
In each case, the anointing brought about the promise of great things that were to follow, yet it was given at a time when none of the accomplishments had yet been actualized. This is significant because we also have an anointing from the Lord (1 John 2:20). It is not an anointing that is based on anything you have done. It is an anointing based on the deeds of another. Yet it is also promissory of great things to come. That was soon realized when Israel was faced with a challenge.

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; and they were gathered at Socoh which belongs to Judah, and they camped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim.

And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and camped in the valley of Elah, and drew up in battle array to encounter the Philistines.

And the Philistines stood on the mountain on one side while Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with the valley between them. (1 Samuel 17:1-3).

As you leave the coast land area of Palestine along the Mediterranean and move eastward, the first geographical feature you encounter is a range of low foothills known as the Shephelah. Over the years the streams flowing down from these hills have cut deep gorges known as Wadis. The Valley of Elah is one such Wadi.



The Philistines held the seacoast plains of Canaan. The Israelites held the mountains. The Shephelah was the contested area between. This would be the scene of the confrontation. Located about fifteen miles west of Bethlehem, this Wadi served as a pass from east to west (the stream disappears entirely in the dry season leaving a riverbed of small round stones).

Then a champion came out from the armies of the Philistines named Goliath, from Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.

And he had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was clothed in scale-armor which weighed five thousand shekels of bronze. 6 He also had bronze greaves on his legs and a bronze javelin slung between his shoulders. 7 And the shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and the head of his spear

weighed six hundred shekels of iron; his shield-carrier also walked before him. (1 Samuel 17:4-7).

The name “Goliath” seems to be Indo-European in origin. He is described as having the latest armaments in modern warfare. When we put these together, we are presented with the following description:

Item	Description	Equivalent
Height	<i>six cubits and a span</i>	9 feet, 8 inches
Armor	<i>5000 shekels of bronze</i>	125 pounds
Head of his Spear	<i>600 shekels of iron</i>	15 pounds

The height of Goliath has brought about considerable speculation since there has been no man in recorded history to achieve such stature. The Hebrew manuscript of Samuel found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QSam) contains a textual variant in this description putting him instead at four cubits and a span, making him six feet nine inches. This reading is confirmed both by the Vaticanus, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, as well as in the Antiquities of Josephus.³

This does not negate the fact that Goliath was the equivalent of a human tank. He would have looked indestructible. To even get to him, one would have to get past the large figure-eight shield which was held by his armor bearer. We ought to take note of how the Hebrew readers of this book would have viewed this description.

- David, the promised future King, goes out to fight the one who is at **enmity** with God's people
- The giant is described in terms of his height (6 cubits) and his armor with **scales** and the head of his spear (600 shekels)
- He kills the giant with a blow to the **head**.

Do you see it? This description is given in terms of the prophecy that was given back in Genesis 3:15. It was the promise of one who would come from the seed of the woman and who would vanquish the seed of the serpent with a blow to the head. Of course, we know that the ultimate fulfillment of

³ For more on this topic, see the article by J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath," Journal of the Evangelical Society, December 2005. Vol 48:4.

that prophecy was not in David, but in the Son of David. It was fulfilled in David's greater son, Jesus Christ, who conquered our giant.

And he stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, and said to them, “Why do you come out to draw up in battle array? Am I not the Philistine and you servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves and let him come down to me.

“If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will become your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall become our servants and serve us.” (1 Samuel 17:8-9).

Warfare in the ancient world was a violent and bloody affair (this is true for war in any age). It was not uncommon for 20 or 30 thousand men to fall in a single battle. Goliath was a part of a highly cultured race. He offers a relatively peaceful alternative. A representative from each of the two warring nations will fight and decide the issue. Instead of thousands falling in battle, only one man shall die. It is in this context that David volunteers to represent Israel.

And David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine.” (1 Samuel 17:32).

The fact that David succeeded in actually trying on the armor of Saul indicates that it must have come close to fitting. Otherwise he would not have been able to don it in the first place. Remember that Saul was head and shoulders over all of Israel (10:23). His armor would have been sized as an extra-extra large.

David was not a little boy. But neither was he used to fighting in armor. He was untrained in its use. He was unaccustomed to moving about while carrying this additional weight. And so, David put the armor of Saul aside, content to wear the armor of God.

And he took his stick in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd’s bag which he had, even in his pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:40).

A sling consisted of two long cords tied to a pocket at the center. The slinger would place a stone in the pocket, whirl to ends of the cord and then

release one of them, letting the stone fly at its target. I have used a sling before and I admit that it takes a lot of practice. The sling was one of the accepted weapons of the Israelites. It was not dependent upon the ironworks of the Philistines. There had been an entire brigade of 700 slingers from the tribe of Benjamin who could “*sling a stone at a hair and not miss*” (*Judges 20:16*).

Then the Philistine came on and approached David, with the shield-bearer in front of him.

When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, with a handsome appearance.

And the Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

*The Philistine also said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.” (*1 Samuel 17:41-44*).*

Military soldiers worked in teams of two. The warrior would be preceded by his shield-bearer. This was a full-time job in itself because the shields that were then in use were large body shields. The shield-bearer was in charge of defense while the warrior was in charge of offense. This same sort of tactic was used by Jonathan in *1 Samuel 14*.

This was not merely a battle between two men. At stake here was the honor of the Lord of hosts. David was here as the representative, both of the people of God as well as of the Lord Himself. There is a parallel here between David and the last son of David.

David	Jesus Christ, Son of David
Son of Jesse	A shoot from the stem of Jesse (<i>Isaiah 11:1</i>).
Chastised by his older brother.	He came to His own and those who were His own did not receive Him (<i>John 1:11</i>).
Refused to wear the armor of Saul.	Laid aside His glory to take the form of a man.

He met Goliath as the representative of Israel.	He went to the cross as our representative, dying for our sins.
He also served as the representative of the Lord.	He served as the mediator between God and men.
He used a rock.	He is the Rock.
He won the victory through the death of Goliath.	Won the victory through His own death, burial, and resurrection.

David wins the battle against Goliath, but we have already seen that this was the Lord's battle and it is really the Lord who has won the victory. Do you remember the incident of the Ark within the Temple of Dagon? There is an interesting similarity with the fall of Dagon and the fall of Goliath.

Ark Versus Dagon	David Versus Goliath
The Ark had been captured by the Philistines and placed in the Temple of Dagon.	Goliath saw in David an easy victory.
Dagon was found face down before the Ark.	Goliath fell on his face.
Dagon was found with his head removed which led to an enduring practice.	David cut off Goliath's head and kept it as a trophy.
Dagon was seen by all to be a dead idol of stone.	The Lord is seen to be the living God (17:26).

Chapter 18 begins with Saul's son, Jonathan, coming to love David and make a covenant with him. The chapter ends with Saul's daughter, Michal, coming to love David and marry him. The point of the narrative is that, except for Saul, everyone will come to love David. Indeed, this can be viewed as a play on his name, for the name David means "beloved." But as everyone else comes to love David, Saul will be moved by jealousy to fear and even to hate David. The reason for this is because Saul is seeking to hold onto his own kingdom rather than seeking that which is the will of the Lord.

18:1	18:6	18:10	18:13	18:20
Jonathan loves David	Women sing David's praises	Saul throws spear at David	David prospers before the people	Michal loves David
Saul sets David over the men of war.	Saul looks on David with suspicion	Saul is afraid of David	Saul dreads David	Saul is even more afraid of David

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. (1 Samuel 18:1).

Jonathan recognized in David a kindred spirit despite very different backgrounds. Jonathan was the son of a king and heir to the throne. David was a simple shepherd boy. Jonathan was a fully mature man in his prime. David was still a relatively young man, though he had gained the respect of men due to his victory over Goliath. They had both achieved overwhelming victory in a time when defeat seemed probable. They both were renown as heroes. This naturally kindred spirit led to a close friendship.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. (1 Samuel 18:3-4).

It has become increasingly popular to assert that the love between Jonathan and David was a homosexual relationship. The truth is that the Hebrew word used here for love is never used of homosexual relationships in the Bible. This same word is used in 1 Kings 5:1 where we read that King Hiram of Tyre had loved David all the days of his life. This usage indicates the friendly relations between two neighboring kings.

Both Saul and Jonathan began by loving David. When David first came to the court of Saul and played the harp in his presence, we read that “*Saul loved him greatly*” (16:21). Now, as Jonathan came to know this remarkable young man, he also came to love him. The gift of his own personal weapons was made greater by the fact that weapons were not common among the Israelites. At the start of the campaigns against the Philistines, there had been only two sets of weapon in the entire army of

Israel. One set had belonged to Saul. The other set was Jonathan's — now given to David. In Jonathan's attitude and actions toward David, we see a picture of Christ's love put into action for us.

Jonathan	Jesus
Loved David as himself	Loved us as Himself
Entered into a covenant with David	Established a new covenant with us
Gave his possessions to David	Blessed us with every spiritual blessing
Stripped himself of the signs of his princely prerogatives	Laid aside the prerogatives of His deity to go to the cross

And it happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments.

And the women sang as they played, and said, "Saul has slain his thousands. And David his ten thousands." (1 Samuel 18:6-7).

As the victorious Israelites made their way back to their homes, they were greeted in each Israelite town and village with singing and rejoicing - the ancient equivalent of a ticker-tape parade. At the heart of the celebration were the two heroic figures: Saul and David. The fact that Saul was held up as a heroic figure was rather gracious. He hadn't done anything heroic recently. But Saul didn't see it that way. Indeed, he saw it through the green eyes of jealousy.

Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?"

And Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on. (1 Samuel 18:8-9).

In verse 5 we read that David's promotion “*was pleasing in the sight [eyes] of all the people and also in the sight [eyes] of Saul's servants.*” Now we read that *Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him* (literally, *it was displeasing in his eyes*). Saul knew from Samuel's prophecy that the kingdom had already been snatched from him by God and given to another. Saul was on the lookout for such a man. Here was one whose praises the people of the land were proclaiming. There is a contrast here between David and Saul. It is a contrast that has been developing for the past three chapters.

	DAVID	SAUL
Chapter 16	David is given God's Spirit	God's Spirit departs from Saul and he is given an evil spirit.
Chapter 17	David faces Goliath in faith and victory.	Saul fears Goliath.
Chapter 18	David is loved by others, even those of Saul's family.	Saul tries to murder David and have him killed.

Then Saul said to David, “Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the Lord's battle.” For Saul thought, “My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” (1 Samuel 18:17).

Saul had originally promised that whoever killed Goliath would have the hand of his daughter in marriage. Perhaps David had been a bit too young for that. Or perhaps Saul had conveniently forgotten his promise. But now he offers his daughter to David. Unfortunately, his motives leave something to be desired.

Saul wants David dead. But he doesn't want to do the deed himself (he had already tried that and it hadn't worked). Instead, he will try to set it up so that the Philistines will kill him. Does this sound familiar? A later king would suppose, “If I put Uriah the Hittite in the forefront of the battle...”

But David said to Saul, “Who am I, and what is my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be the king's son-in-law?”

So it came about at the time when Merab, Saul's

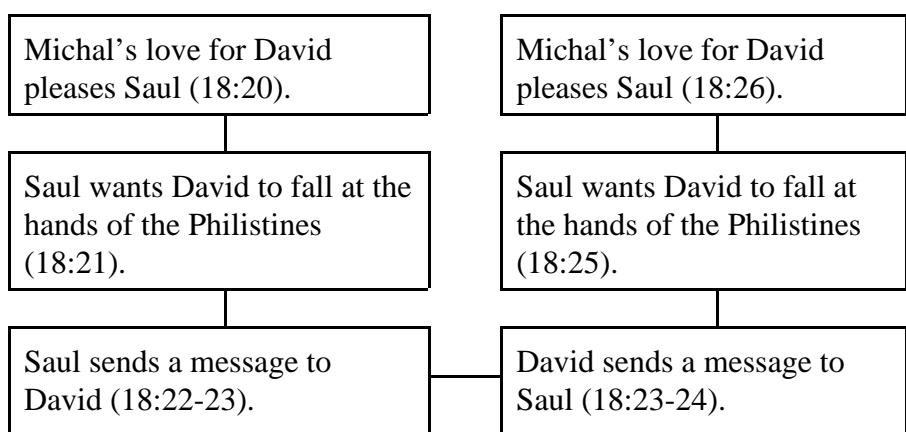
daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife. (1 Samuel 18:18-19).

David was a man of true humility. He was not seeking Saul's throne. He was not even seeking the hand of one of Saul's daughters. And so, the daughter that had originally been promised to the slayer of Goliath was given to another. Instead, David was given Michal, the younger daughter of Saul, to be his wife.

Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. When they told Saul, the thing was agreeable to him.

And Saul thought, "I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David, "For a second time you may be my son-in-law today." (1 Samuel 18:20-21).

Just as Jonathan had developed a love for David, so also Michal, Saul's youngest daughter, also developed a love for him. Instead of making Saul mad, it pleased him, not because his attitude had changed toward David, but because he saw this as an opportunity to entrap him. This scene is played out in the form of a chiasm:



The offer of marriage is made again to David, who objects that he is "*a poor man and lightly esteemed*" (18:23). He is told that he will be given the king's daughter in marriage for a dowry

One of the walls in the mortuary temple of Rameses III depicts what seems to be a pile of foreskins collected as a means of determining the body count following a battle.

of 100 Philistine foreskins. David responds with not 100, but 200 such trophies from the Philistines.

When Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, 29 then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David's enemy continually. (1 Samuel 18:28-29).

The story of David is a story of a once and future king. It is the story of one from Bethlehem who was lowly esteemed in the eyes of men, but who was a man after God's own heart. It is the story of one who was obedient to authority, even such authority that would put him in jeopardy.

The rest of 1 Samuel is taken up with Saul's various pursuits of David. Throughout these pursuits, both people and even the circumstances conspire to assist David while every hand of man and God are against Saul. David is assisted by Saul's daughter, by the high priest, by the king of Moab, by "chance" situations, by Abigail, and even by the Philistines.

19:1	20:1	21:10	22:6	24:1	26:1
David flees the presence of Saul	David & Jonathan make a covenant	David flees to Gath	Saul Pursues David		
			1st Pursuit	2nd Pursuit	3rd Pursuit
David assisted by Michal	David assisted by Ahimelech	David assisted by the king of Moab	David encouraged by Jonathan	David cuts Saul's robe	David takes Saul's spear & jug
The Lord assists David			David assisted by situation	Abigail assists David	David flees to Gath

Throughout all of these incidents, David maintains his integrity, refusing to lift up his hand against the anointed of the Lord. The point is that David is seeking God's kingdom while Saul is seeking his own kingdom. As the section moves to its final climax, the closing chapters of the first book of Samuel constantly shift back and forth between David and Saul.

27:1	28:1	29:1	31:1
DAVID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comes to Gath • Given Ziklag • Secretly raids the enemies of Israel 	SAUL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks of the witch of Endor. • Is condemned by Samuel. 	DAVID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accompanies Philistines to Battle. • Sent back home. Finds home burned. • Rescues his people. 	SAUL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defeated. • Commits suicide. • His body is dishonored.
Victory	Spiritual Defeat	Victory	Defeat & Death
Appears to be one with the Philistines.	Has fellowship meal with a medium.	Is delivered from Philistines & lives.	Fights Philistines & dies.

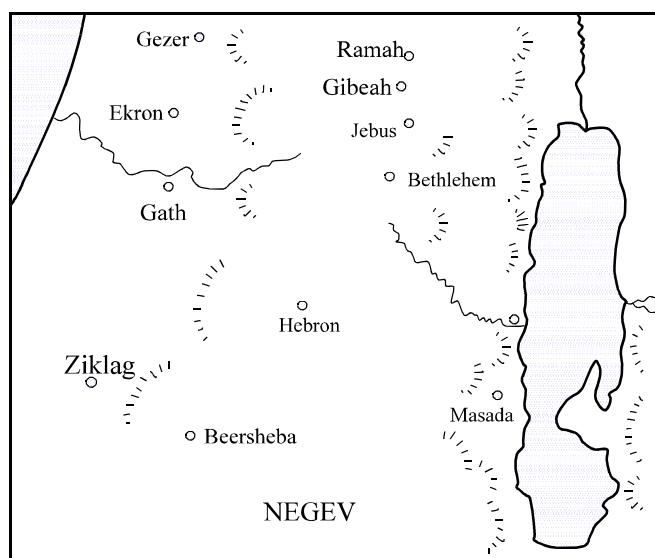
For a time, David lives in Gath with his men. But this began to be uncomfortable both for David as well as for the Philistines.

After all, David had made his reputation as “David the Giant Philistine-Killer.” They still remembered the popular song that told of how Saul had slain his thousands and David his ten thousands. They knew that those numbers referred to how many Philistines David had slain.

David is given the city of Ziklag. This city had originally been claimed both by the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:31) as well as by the tribe of Simeon (Joshua 19:5; 1st Chronicles 4:30). It was a border town, laying in the no-man’s land between Israel and Philistia.

This was the time of the beginning of the Iron Age and the Philistines enjoyed a

While Saul is losing to the Philistines, David is being given a city from the hands of the Philistines.



monopoly on the secret of smelting iron. But this changed radically after David became king. Could it be that he stole the secret of iron-smelting and brought it to the Israelites?

Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, “Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men.”

And David said to Achish, “Very well, you shall know what your servant can do.” So Achish said to David, “Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.” (1 Samuel 28:1-2).

As the Philistines prepared an invasion force to strike at the very heart of Israel, David found himself drawn into the service of Achish. He was appointed

There is a touch of irony here as David who made his start cutting off the head of Goliath is now made “guardian of the head” of Achish.

bodyguard — literally, “guard of my head” (שָׁמֵר לְרַאשֵּׁי). Furthermore, this was not to be a temporary appointment. It was to be forever — permanent. David’s deception put him in the position of having to fight against the people of God in open warfare. There is a parallel here between the loyalty which David promises toward the Philistines and the oath by which Saul binds himself to the medium of Endor. Each is being put into a precarious position and the suspense deliberately builds to see how this will be resolved.

David pretends loyalty to the Philistines (27).

Saul binds himself by an oath and a meal to a medium (29).

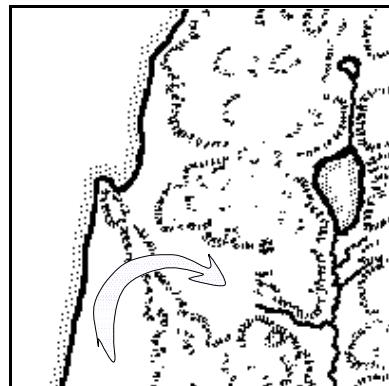
Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah his own city. And Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists. (1 Samuel 28:3).

We read of the death of Samuel back in chapter 25. Why is it mentioned here again? It is because now Saul was feeling that loss. He desperately needed a word from the Lord and Samuel was no longer available to give it. Furthermore there was no one else to serve as a substitute for Samuel as all of the mediums and spiritists had been removed from the land. Saul could

not even go to the high priest because he had murdered the high priest and his entire family.

So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa. (1 Samuel 28:5).

Shunem is located in the Valley of Jezreel at the southern foot of Mount Moreh, nine miles east-northeast of Megiddo. Mount Gilboa is several miles to the south on the southeastern edge of the Valley of Jezreel. Instead of coming up the narrow mountain passes as they had in the past, the Philistines now moved across the wide open plains of Jezreel. Here they could maneuver their chariot corps to full effect. If this military operation was successful, it would result in splitting the land in two.



When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly.

When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. (1 Samuel 28:6-7).

Saul had every reason to fear. The Philistines were big and they had the best in military weaponry and there were a lot of them. His seeking was met with silence. God had already given His message to Saul. There would be nothing more forthcoming.

Then Saul said to his servants, “Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.” And his servants said to him, “Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor.” (1 Samuel 28:7).

The Hebrew word for Medium is ‘Ob (עֹב). This is a Hittite loan-word. It originally was used to describe a pit and spoke of the place of departed spirits. It came to be used both of the spirits of the dead as well as of those who were supposedly able to contact those spirits.

“Your voice shall also be like that of a SPIRIT from the

ground” (Isaiah 29:4).

“Do not turn to MEDIUMS or spiritists...” (Leviticus 19:31).

The Mosaic Law strictly forbade God’s people from consulting mediums. The penalty for such actions was death. In accordance with God’s law, Saul had ordered that mediums and spiritists be driven from the land. And yet, he now seeks to consult with one. He is directed by his servants to the town of En-dor, located on the northern slope of Little Hermon. He determines to make his way to this spiritual brothel in order to partake in a seance.

Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, “Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you.”

But the woman said to him, “Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?”

And Saul vowed to her by the Lord, saying, “As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment come upon you for this thing.” (1 Samuel 28:8-10).

To arrive at Endor from Mount Gilboa would have involved a long 8-mile detour around the Philistine forces. Saul took this route under the cover of night. The woman of Endor at first refuses to participate. It is not until Saul takes a solemn oath invoking the name of the Lord that she agrees to participate.

Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” And he said, “Bring up Samuel for me.”

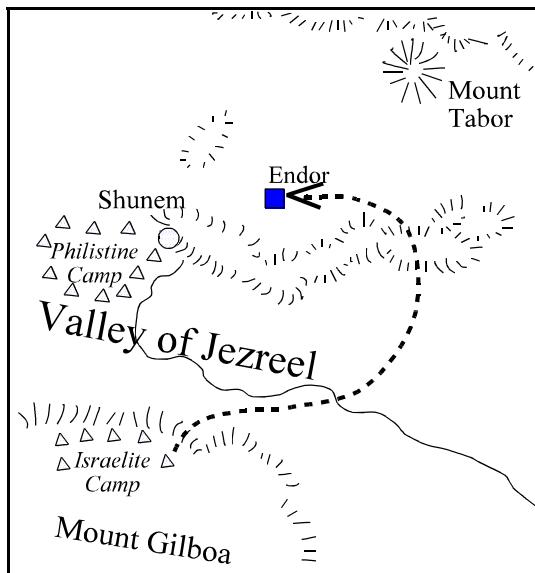
When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, “Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul.”

And the king said to her, “Do not be afraid; but what do you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I see a divine being [אֱלֹהִים], Elohim] coming up out of the earth.”

And he said to her, “What is his form?” And she said, “An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe.” And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage. (1 Samuel 28:11-14).

This passage has troubled theologians for hundreds of years. There have been three alternate interpretations offered for this passage.

- This was truly Samuel speaking from the grave. This interpretation takes the passage naturally when it says that “*the woman saw Samuel*” (28:12).
- This was a demonic manifestation pretending to be Samuel. This view was held by Augustine.
- This was a trick of the woman. This is perhaps supported by the Septuagint which uses a term in this passage which is also used of ventriloquists.



The reason for the varied interpretation is because people do not care for the implications of what happened - that a seance was actually able to bring back Samuel from the dead. However, this need not be considered as normative. Just because Samuel actually appeared to the medium in this instance does not give credibility to all such mediums.

Evidently, only the woman saw the form of Samuel, for Saul asked in verse 14, “*What is his form?*” and did not realize that it was Samuel until she had given a description of the prophet. Notice what it was about the description which identified the visionary arrival as Samuel. It was the fact that he was an old man who was “*wrapped with a robe*” (28:14). Saul remembered that robe. He could not help but remember how Samuel had predicted the loss of the kingdom and had turned to go and how he, Saul, had grabbed the robe of Samuel and had torn it. He had been told that in just such a manner the kingdom would be torn from his grasp.

Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and answers me no more, either through prophets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you make known to me what I should do.” (1 Samuel

28:15).

Saul wants a word from the Lord, but Saul has consistently ignored the word from the Lord that has been given to him. There is a principle here. It is that no second word from the Lord is given until the first word is heard.

And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary?

“And the Lord has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David.

“As you did not obey the Lord and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day.

Moreover the Lord will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!” (1 Samuel 28:16-19).

While in the past the Lord had delivered Israel from the Philistine threat on more than one occasion, now Israel would be delivered by God into the hands of the Philistines (verse 19). This prophecy is fulfilled the next day.

And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua the sons of Saul. (1 Samuel 31:2).

The battle went against Israel and Saul began a retreat back up the mountain of Gilboa. Of the four sons of Saul, three were killed, including Jonathan. As volley after volley of Philistine arrows fell upon the hapless Israelite army, Saul was seriously wounded. The nature of the wound would prevent his escape and the Philistines were closing in. Saul knew of the reputation of the Philistines. They had captured Samson and had gouged out his eyes and had made a public spectacle of him. Saul fears the worst. He fears that he will be both tortured and humiliated. And so, he takes his own life.

The Philistines take the body of the Lord's anointed king and mutilate it, placing it on display on the walls of a nearby city.

David had cut off the head of the Philistine champion. Now the Philistines do the same to Saul.

Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh, and burned them there. (1 Samuel 31:11-12).

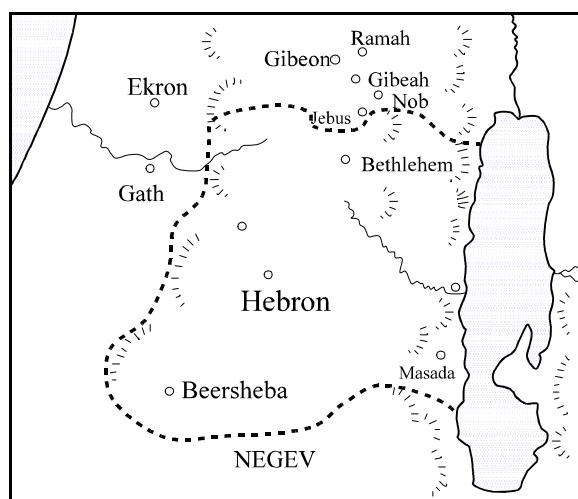
Jabesh-gilead was the city which Saul had rescued at the very beginning of his reign (1 Samuel 11). This was a city on the east bank of the Jordan. When they had been besieged by the Ammonites and threatened with the disfigurement of having the right eye of every man gouged out, it was Saul who had led the forces of Israel to fight on their behalf. The men of Jabesh-gilead remember the debt which they owed their king and place themselves at risk by coming to rescue his mutilated corpse. Thus, the bodies of Saul and his sons which were first humiliated are now honored.

DAVID AS KING OVER JUDAH

Then the men of Judah came and there anointed David king over the house of Judah" (2 Samuel 2:4a).

David had already been anointed by Samuel. Now he is anointed by the men of Judah and becomes the king over that tribe. His first act of kingship is to commend the honorable actions of the men of Jabesh-gilead. The obvious conclusion is that David's rule over Judah was not the action of a rebel who was usurping authority, but one who had gone out of his way to honor the Lord's anointed one.

The other tribes follow Ish-bosheth, one of the surviving sons of Saul for seven years. David steers clear of the political intrigue during this period, but Ish-bosheth is ultimately killed and David's kingship is extended over all of Israel. There is an interesting parallel between how David became king of Judah and



how he now becomes king over all Israel.

2 Samuel 1:1 - 3:5	2 Samuel 3:6 - 5:16
Ammalekite tries to curry favor with David by bringing news of Saul's death.	Abner seeks to curry favor with David by negotiating the delivery of the kingdom.
Ammalekite is killed (1:14-16).	Abner is murdered (3:22-32).
David laments over Saul and Jonathan (1:17-21).	David laments over Abner (3:33-34).
David anointed (2:1-7).	David anointed (5:1-5).
David defeats Israel (2:8-32).	David takes Jerusalem (5:6-10).
Children born to David in Hebron (3:2-5).	Children born to David in Jerusalem (5:13-16).

The wording used in 2 Samuel 3:1 is striking. The tribes of Israel come to David and say, *We are your bone and your flesh*. This language harkens back to Genesis 2 where Adam says of his newly created bride:

*This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh (Genesis 2:23).*

Something similar is happening here in this passage. Israel comes to David and they enter with him into a covenant of kingship. They bind themselves to David in the way a wife binds herself to a husband. David is not only to be Israel's king; he will also be Israel's bridegroom.

David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years.

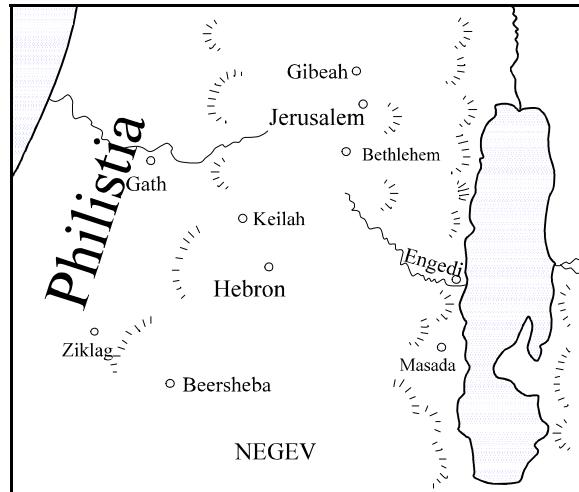
At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah. (2 Samuel 5:4-5).

It has been theorized by modern scholars that the 40 year reigns ascribed to Moses, to Eli, to David and to Solomon are merely to be understood as a long, undetermined number of years. But this passage gives a breakdown of what comprised those forty years.

Up to this time, David had been reigning in Hebron. Hebron was

centrally located in Judah and would always be associated with that tribe. If the other tribes were to accept the concept of a unified nation, it would be necessary to have a capital city which had no former associations. Jerusalem was such a city.

Jerusalem was a city of the Jebusites. They had been living here before the days of Abraham. One of their kings had been Melchizedek, a priest of God. But now it was merely a Canaanite city. The Israelites under Joshua had been unable to drive out the Jebusites (Joshua 15:63). And even though the Israelites had captured and burned Jerusalem early in the days of the Judges (Judges 1:8), the Jebusites had returned to rebuild and refortify their city.



Now the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, and they said to David, “You shall not come in here, but the blind and lame shall turn you away”; thinking, “David cannot enter here.”
(2 Samuel 5:6).

The old city of Jerusalem was built upon a high ridge and was surrounded on three sides by steep ravines. An approaching enemy would have to climb to the top of the ridge and then would find himself facing high fortifications with no room to maneuver. Furthermore, Jerusalem had its own internal water supply. A tunnel had been carved into the mountain leading down to a pool which was in turn fed by a natural spring. The boast of the city was that, even if these fortifications were manned by blind and lame, they would be enough to keep out any enemy.

Nevertheless, David captured the stronghold of Zion, that is the city of David. (2 Samuel 5:7).

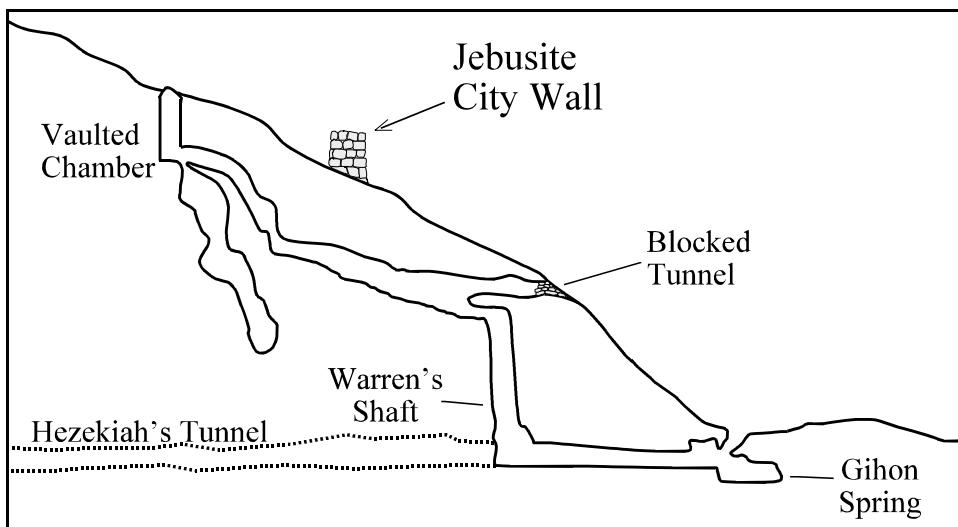
The word “Zion” (זִוְן) seems to refer to a “high place” or a “place of protection.” The term is rare in the historical books.

And David said on that day, “Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him reach the lame and the blind, who are hated by David’s soul, through the water tunnel.” (2 Samuel 5:8a).

Located on the east side of the city is the Gihon Spring. It is the city’s only local source of fresh water. Unfortunately, the spring is located at the bottom of the ridge upon which the city was built. The Jebusites resolved this problem by excavating a tunnel through the bedrock which went beneath the city walls and then down a vertical shaft to the spring.

The shaft was discovered by Captain Charles Warren of the British Engineers in 1867. He and his sergeant entered the Gihon Spring, followed the narrow tunnel into the mountainside, and came upon a vertical shaft rising nearly 40 feet straight up. It was possible for the inhabitants of Jerusalem to stand at the top of the shaft and drop a bucket with a line attached and draw up water. Apparently, this was the route used to capture the city of Jerusalem. David’s forces would have crept in through this route to come up inside the city gates.

Now David had said, “Whoever strikes down a Jebusite first shall be chief and commander.” And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, so he became chief. (1 Chronicles 11:6).



So David lived in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. (2 Samuel 5:9).

Jerusalem now became David's capital city. Because it was in previously unoccupied territory, it was considered to be free of any tribal associations. The "Millo" (מִלּוֹא) was the original fortification around which the city was built (the word **מִלּוֹא** means "to fill"). Its exact location remains uncertain.

Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David with cedar trees and carpenters and stonemasons; and they built a house for David. (2 Samuel 5:11).

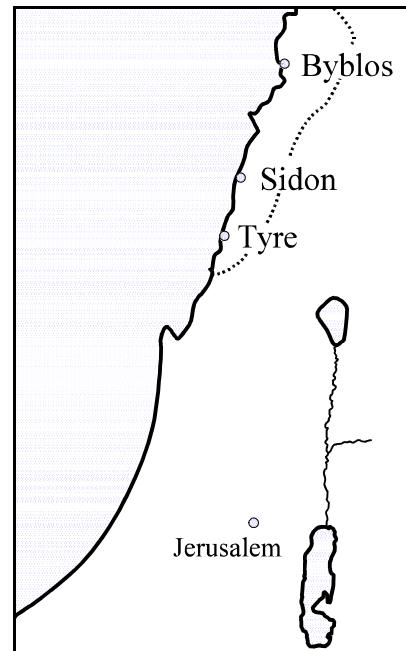
The Phoenicians were the great sea power of that day (they were the only sea power of that day). They also had a great natural resource in forests of cedar trees - this resource of lumber had contributed to making them the sea power which they had come to be.

The major cities of Phoenicia were Byblos (from which we get our word "Bible"), Sidon, and Tyre. As powerful as the king of Tyre was, he still saw the need of an alliance with David. And yet, David was not carried away with his fame and good fortune.

And David realized that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel. (2 Samuel 5:12).

Success and power always bring temptations which are difficult to resist. We can see time and time again the specter of a successful man who develops an over-inflated ego, leading him to sin. The key to resisting such temptation is the realization of the sovereignty of God and the fact that we owe any success to Him.

Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, 2 that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." (2 Samuel 7:1-2).



David's next concern was a permanent dwelling in which to house the ark. Since the days of the Wilderness Wanderings, the ark had been kept within the Tabernacle - a tent designated as the "Tent of Meeting." In those early days, it was necessary for this structure to be a tent, for the Israelites were a nomadic people and they required a portable place of worship.

But that had now changed. They now had a land in which the Lord had given them rest. They had a capital city. And David felt that it was appropriate that a permanent place of worship be established - a House of God.

"...The Lord also declares to you that the Lord will make a house for you." (2 Samuel 7:11b).

While David had desired to build a house for the Lord, God says that it is He who will build a house for David.

"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant [seed] after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his kingdom forever. 14 I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, 15 but my lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

The promise to David revolves around the establishment of a SEED. This takes us all the way back to Genesis 3:15. It was there that the Lord had promised Adam and Eve that there would come One who would be of the seed of the woman. This Seed would crush the serpent's head. He would be the destroyer of the works of Satan. This promise is fulfilled in two parts. The immediate fulfillment will be in the person of Solomon. He will be the seed who will build a house in the name of the Lord. It will be Solomon who constructs the temple of God in Jerusalem. Solomon will found the Davidic dynasty. But the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in Jesus.

Dead Sea Scroll 4Q Florilegium, a midrash scroll, shows that the Qumran scribes took the "son" in verse 14 to be a reference to Messiah.

Solomon	Jesus
Son of David.	Ultimate son of David.
Established the united monarchy of Israel.	Established the kingdom of God upon earth.
Built the temple.	He is the temple.
Established a kingdom that would continue until 586 B.C.	Established an eternal kingdom that will never end.
Chastened because of his iniquity.	Took upon Himself the sins of the world.

The first part of verse 14 (“*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me*”) is quoted twice in the New Testament.

- Hebrews 1:5 quotes it in a context that speaks of Jesus as the Son of God.
- 2 Corinthians 6:18 gives a partial quote as the Lord tells US that “*I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me.*”

The implications of this are striking. This passage refers, not only to Solomon, not only to Jesus, but also to us. We are a part of the house of God that He promises to establish.

The book of 2nd Samuel can be divided into two major sections corresponding to the two major parts of David’s reign. There is a rising action and then there is a falling action. What links these two parts together is the narrative of David’s sin.

1:1	11:1	13:1
Rising Action	David’s Sin & Repentance	Falling Action
David’s Reign Prospering		David’s Reign Troubled

Chapters 11-12 form the central and pivotal section of 2 Samuel. It is presented in a chiastic format. The first section will be the road of David’s sin. The second section will be the road to David’s repentance and restoration.

David sends Joab to besiege Rabbah (11:1).

David sleeps with Bathsheba who becomes pregnant (11:2-5).

David has Uriah killed (11:6-17).

Joab sends a message about the murder (11:18-27).

The Lord sends David a messenger (12:1-14).

The Lord strikes David's son who dies (12:15-23).

David sleeps with Bathsheba who becomes pregnant (12:24-25).

Joab sends for David to come and take Rabbah (12:26-31).

This passage hardly presents David in a good light. He manages to disobey three of the ten commandments:

- Coveting
- Adultery
- Murder.

David attempts to cover up his sin with the murder of Uriah. He is brought to repentance only when the prophet Nathan comes and confronts him with his sin. Nathan does this by coming to David and telling the story of a great injustice that involves a rich man taking a poor man's little lamb. David is enraged at this story of injustice and, when he calls for justice to be done, Nathan points out that David has just declared his own judgment.

Nathan then said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I also gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10 Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’” (2 Samuel 12:7-10).

David's anger was stopped cold by the simple pronouncement of Nathan: "You are the man!" This is a pronouncement of his sin. He has already pronounced judgment upon himself. He will suffer the consequences of his sin. Because of his sin, the sword will never depart from his house. Because of his sin, others will die.

There is a contrast here between David and David's greater descendant. A thousand years later, the Son of David would stand in this same city before a Roman governor who would proclaim, "Behold the man!" (John 19:5).

David	Jesus
He figuratively took another man's lamb and killed it.	He was the figure of the Lamb who was put to death.
He sinned against God.	He was obedient to the point of death.
Anointed to be king.	Anointed by the Holy Spirit.
Murdered a man in order to take his wife.	Gave up his own life to purchase a bride.
He sinned resulting in death to a number of his sons.	He took our sins upon Himself, resulting in life to all who believe.

Jesus is the Second David. He is the Man. He is the One who died in your place. If you will behold the Man, you will live. If you come before the Lord wanting to hear and to judge the sins of others, you will go away empty. But if you come to hear of the terrible truth of your own sins, then you will be ready to receive God's salvation.

The words of Nathan are presented in the format of a covenant lawsuit. The format of this lawsuit is such that we first read of the suzerain's past faithfulness to the vassal. David has acted the part of an unfaithful vassal to his Lord, the God of Israel.

"Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.''" (2 Samuel 12:11-12).

The rest of the book of 2nd Samuel is going to be a fulfillment of this prophecy. David has succeeded in conquering all of his surrounding enemies. But God is going to raise up an enemy from his own household. One from his own family will rise against him. And in the same manner that he has taken another man's wife, one will come and will sleep with his wives. Instead of doing such a deed in secret, this will be accomplished openly and in the sight of all Israel. All shall witness the shame of David. From the same rooftop on which David had initially looked down to see Bathsheba, his son Absalom will conduct a rooftop orgy with the wives of David (2 Samuel 16:20-22). We see a growing parallel between David and his previous sin with Bathsheba versus the ongoing situations with his children.

David's Sin	David's Children
David lusts for Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah	Amnon lusts for Tamar, his half-sister.
David sends for Bathsheba and commits adultery with her.	Amnon pretends to be sick and then rapes Tamar.
David secretly plots to have Uriah put to death.	Absalom plots to murder his half-brother Amnon.
Nathan comes and tells a story that turns out to be a parable designed to bring David to repentance.	Joab has a woman of Tekoa come and tell a story that turns out to be a parable designed to bring Absalom back home.

David faces a threat similar to the threat that Saul had once thought was coming from David. Saul had thought that David was going to rebel against him and now, years later, Absalom actually did institute a rebellion against David.

Saul	David
Thought that David was going to rebel	Seems slow to see that Absalom was in rebellion
He immediately moves against David	He refuses to move against Absalom
Consumed with protecting his own position	Focused on submission to the Lord

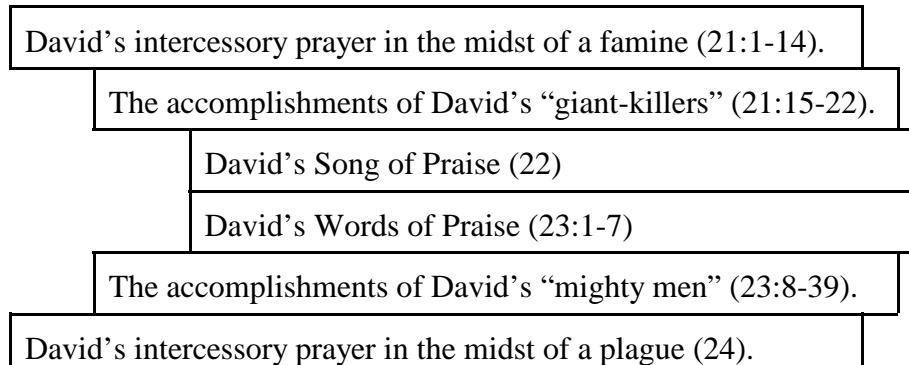
Absalom's rebellion resulted in David having to flee Jerusalem. He pursued the forces of David but was then met with a crushing defeat in which he was killed. Absalom got what he deserved. By contrast, Jesus got what we deserved. He died in our place, paying the penalty of our sins.

Absalom	Jesus
His glorious, princely hair was caught and led to his death.	He left his glory to come to earth to die.
He was caught in a tree.	He died on a tree.
He was pierced by his enemies.	He was pierced by the Roman soldier
He got what he deserved.	He got what we deserved.

The story ends with the death of Absalom and with David's heartbreak over the loss of his son. It is in this instance that we see David as a man of sorrows. In seeing him in such a light, we are reminded of the second David. David says, "I wish I had died instead of you." The Second David says, "I did die instead of you."

CHIASTIC APPENDIX TO 2ND SAMUEL

The last four chapters of 2nd Samuel are presented in a chiastic arrangement that has praise at its center and that is flanked by an intercessory prayer of David at the beginning and at the end:



David faces two temptations in the last chapter of this book. The first

temptation will see him failing. The second temptation will see his success.

- To Count Success on the World's Scale.
- To Give to God that which is Easy to Give.

The first temptation involved David taking a census of the people. What was wrong with numbering the people? After all, there were numberings that took place both before this and after this that were allowed and even ordered by God.

We are not specifically told why it was wrong for David to engage in this numbering. We can speculate that it was because he would use this information to elevate his own status, exalting himself.

In 1 Chronicles 21:1 this temptation is ascribed to Satan. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we read that it was the anger of the Lord that moved David to number Israel. There is a lesson here. It is that even the temptations of Satan must first pass through a nail-scarred hand.

Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have acted very foolishly." (2 Samuel 24:10).

David recognizes his sinful actions and the sinful attitudes that spurred them and he takes it to the Lord in repentance. He does not make excuses. He confesses his guilt and asks for forgiveness.

When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the LORD says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I may do to you. ' ' "

13 So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to Him who sent me."

14 Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man." (2 Samuel 24:11-14).

David throws himself upon the mercies of the Lord. That does not mean there will not be physical suffering as consequence for his actions, but it does reflect an understanding of God's forgiveness and God's goodness.

So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. (2 Samuel 24:15).

There is a contrast between David and the Son of David. David sinned and brought great destruction upon the people. The Son of David was without sin and, by His obedience, He brought life to many.

When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity, and said to the angel who destroyed the people, “It is enough! Now relax your hand!” And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. (2 Samuel 24:16).

This is the second time the Lord intervened on this selfsame spot. It was here that Abraham had once prepared to slay his son, Isaac, in obedience to the command of the Lord. The angel of the Lord had been sent to provide a substitute. Now again, the wave of death is halted on this spot.

So Gad came to David that day and said to him, “Go up, erect an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” 19 And David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded. (2 Samuel 24:18-19).

David was told to go and erect an altar on the site where the plague of destruction had halted. It was to serve as a testimony to what God had done in the past and also what God would do in the future in sending His Son to die on our behalf. This would also be the site of the future temple.

And Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over toward him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king. 21 Then Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” And David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be held back from the people.”

22 And Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. 23 Everything, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the LORD your God accept you.”

24 However, the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. (2 Samuel 24:20-24).

Araunah offers to give to David both the threshing floor as well as the sacrifices and the wood on which to make the offering. David refuses. He will pay the price himself. The fact that the plague had stopped here indicates that Araunah and his cattle had been spared. In this, Araunah is a picture of us while David is a picture of Christ who has paid the price on our behalf.

David says that he will not offer that as a sacrifice which has cost him nothing. That is a fundamental principle of a sacrifice -- it imposes a cost to the giver. This echoes the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf and underscores the corollary to this principle. It is that it cost God to forgive your sins. The cost was His only begotten Son and it was a cost that was paid in blood.

1st & 2nd KINGS

The Book of the Kings

The books that we know as First and Second Kings record the history of Israel from the death of David to the Babylonian Captivity. But they are much more than a mere history of Israel. They are primarily theological in nature in that they trace God's relationship with His Covenant people through their breaking of His covenant and their resulting punishment at the hands of their enemies. In particular, we see God's dealing with the leaders of the nation - her prophets, priests and kings.

DEVELOPING A CHRONOLOGY OF KINGS

The books of Samuel and Kings cover the historical period from Samuel to the Exile into Babylon.

1 st Samuel	2 nd Samuel	1 st Kings	2 nd Kings
Samuel & Saul	Saul & David	Solomon & Divided Kingdom	Fall of the Divided Kingdoms

The narrative runs smoothly in 1 Kings 1-11 because we are following the history of only one kingdom. But from 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 17 the author deals with both the Northern Kingdom of Samaria and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, shifting back and forth between these two. After 2 Kings 17 and the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the flow of history is again smooth as we read only of the Southern Kingdom.

1 Kings 1-11	1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 17	2 Kings 18-25
United Kingdom under Solomon	Northern Kingdom Southern Kingdom of Judah	

1. Old Testament writers did not use a universal reference point in establishing dates. Instead, they used various sorts of regal dating

methods (“In the 4th year of Hezekiah...”). This makes it difficult to be exact in establishing dates for Old Testament events.

2. Regal Reckoning.

The first year of a king might refer to the first year in which he served as regent or it might refer to his first year upon the throne.

3. Accession versus Non-accession Year Reckoning.

Accession Year Reckoning	Accession Year	1 st Year	2 nd Year
Non-Accession Year Reckoning	1 st Year	2 nd Year	3 rd Year

Both types of reckoning were used in ancient times to determine which year it might be. Furthermore, in the Non-Accession Method, the last year of one ruler would be the same as the first official year of his successor. Such a year would count twice. Edwin Thiele suggests that these two differing systems were used at different times in Israel’s history (1977).

	Accession Year Dating	Non-Accession Year Dating	Accession Year Dating
Judah	Rehoboam to Jehoshophat	Jehoram to Joash	Amaziah to Zedekiah
Israel	-	Jeroboam to Jehoahaz	Jehoash to Hoshea

4. The Assyrian Eponym List.

It was the custom in Assyria to name each year after one of the officers of the state — an eponym. We have records of a consecutive list of Assyrian eonyms from 853 to 703 B.C. The Assyrians also included records of solar eclipses. Total eclipses were visible in Nineveh in 832, 763 and 585 B.C. By correlating the eclipses with the Eponym Lists, we have reliable dates for the years from 892 to 648 B.C.

PURPOSE OF KINGS

To understand the purpose of this book, one must first understand the date and circumstances of its writing. The last event recorded in 2 Kings 25:27-30 is the release of Jehoiachin from prison during the 37th year of his imprisonment in 560 B.C. [597 B.C. minus 37 years of captivity = 560 B.C.]. This marks the earliest date that Kings could have been completed in its present form.

Since there is no mention of a return to Jerusalem after the captivity, it seems probable that the book was written before that event in 538/539 B.C. This marks the latest date that Kings could have been written. It is written in the Captivity. The author has just seen the final remnant of the nation of Israel destroyed. He sits down to relate the account of how that took place. The purpose is two-fold:

1. To Answer the Question: “How did we get here?”

The Northern Kingdom of Israel had long ago been taken into captivity. The Southern Kingdom of Judah is now in its own captivity. It seems as though the promises of God have failed. What went wrong? This book answers that question.

2. To Give a Warning of the Consequences of Sin.

This book tells of the disastrous consequences of Israel’s love affair with idolatry. The Jews learned their lesson from this experience. Though they struggled with other problems, overt idolatry was never again an issue among the Jews.

THE SUCCESSION OF SOLOMON

Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. 2 So his servants said to him, “Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm.” 3 So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 The girl was very

beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her. (1 Kings 1:1-4).

As the book opens, we are struck by David's feebleness and apparent inability to act decisively. This is the man who...

- Killed Goliath with a simple sling.
- Eluded the wrath of Saul for so many years.
- United all of the Kingdom of Israel.
- Conquered all of the surrounding enemies of Israel.

"Shunammite" is the same as "Shulammite" in Song of Solomon 6:13. Shunem was a town to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of Little Hermon.

At this point, David is barely 70 years of age (2 Samuel 5:4-5 says that he became king at the age of 30 and ruled for 40 years). But these years have not been kind to him. His years in exile and his years on the battlefield have taken their toll. And perhaps the worst of all have been the series of disasters which have involved his own family. It had begun with his sin with Bathsheba and his vain attempt at a coverup. The years which followed saw family tragedy.

- The rape of Tamar by her half-brother.
- The murder of Amnon at the hands of Absalom.
- The rebellion of Absalom.

There is a lesson here. It is that sin, while it can be forgiven, still carries its negative consequences. As a result, David was now a broken man. He seems to have been well past his prime, both physically as well as mentally. He has deteriorated to the point of no longer being able to keep warm in the chilly Jerusalem nights. To this end, his attendants obtain the services of a Shunammite girl who will be able to keep the old king warm.

Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. 6 His father had never crossed him at any time by asking, "Why have you done so?" And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom. 7 He had conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest; and following Adonijah they helped him. (1 Kings 1:5-7).

Adonijah was one of the sons of David. Verse 6 specifies that he had been born after Absalom and, by saying this, compares his actions to those of Absalom who attempted to overthrow David. Adonijah was aided in his quest for the throne by several of David's longtime associates.

- Joab was the nephew of David (Zeruiah was David's sister) and had served for many years as the commander of David's army.
- Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech, the high priest of Nod who had been put to death by Saul when David was a fugitive.

These two leaders in the nation now throw their support behind Adonijah who is seeking to make certain that he will be the successor to the throne. There were certain men who had been specifically excluded from the plans of Adonijah.

- Zadok the priest: In 1 Chronicles 12:26-28 he is listed as a warrior of the house of Levi. He had served jointly with Abiathar as chief priest under David's rule.
- Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was the head of the 30 most valiant of David's men.
- Nathan the prophet.
- The mighty men who belonged to David.

Nathan is the man of the hour. He comes to Bathsheba with the situation and they plan how they are going to make David aware of the problem. Nathan was a good friend. He had called David to repentance when he sinned with Bathsheba. And now he comes to David's aid with Bathsheba to warn of impending danger. But he does so in a way designed to catch his attention, reminiscent of the previous time when he had captured David's attention with a story. Nathan sends Bathsheba to the King to warn him. Then he comes in himself to back up her story.

David orders immediate action to be taken in confirming Solomon as king. Solomon is to be given the mule of the king to ride and brought down to the Gihon, the main spring supplying water to the city of Jerusalem.

The king said to them, “Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there as king over Israel, and blow the trumpet and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ 35 Then you shall come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne and be king in my place; for I have appointed him to

be ruler over Israel and Judah.” (1 Kings 1:33-35).

The Gihon Spring had been instrumental in the original conquest of Jerusalem at the beginning of David's reign. 2 Samuel 5:8 indicates that the city was taken “through the water tunnel.” I have had opportunity to follow the route down the steep tunnel that is cut through Mount Ophel, the site of the original city. This tunnel allowed the inhabitants of the city to travel under the city walls to get water from a natural spring which flowed on the lower slopes of the mountain. Now David orders that Solomon is to be taken to this same spring to be anointed and proclaimed master of the city and king of the nation.

So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the Cherethites, and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and brought him to Gihon.

39 Zadok the priest then took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!”

40 All the people went up after him, and the people were playing on flutes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth shook at their noise. (1 Kings 1:38-40).

The instructions of David are carried out. Solomon is brought on David's mule to the Gihon spring, much the same way that a later Son of David will be brought to Jerusalem riding upon a donkey and receiving the same accolades. Indeed, it will be very close to this same location where Jesus shall make His own triumphal entry into the city. This was Solomon's triumphal entry. And lest there be any doubt as to David's intentions, he also bowed himself in the presence of his son.

Moreover, the king's servants came to bless our lord King David, saying, “May your God make the name of Solomon better than your name and his throne greater than your throne!” And the king bowed himself on the bed.

48 The king has also said thus, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted one to sit on my throne today while my own eyes see it.” (1 Kings 1:47-48).

David viewed Solomon's ascension to the throne of Israel as a fulfillment of the covenant promise which God had made concerning the continuation of a descendant of David upon the throne of Israel. In 2 Samuel

7, God had promised that the throne of David would be established forever. This promise has been ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

Adonijah's supporters are quick to distance themselves from him and scatter to the four winds. Adonijah himself seeks refuge at the horns of the sacrificial altar which stood before the Tent of Meeting. His safety is guaranteed by Solomon as long as he acts in an appropriate manner.

Horns were a sign of strength and potency. To hold onto the horns of the altar was to appeal to the Lord.

Evidently, Adonijah expected to be put to death as a rival claimant to the throne - an action that he himself would have taken against Solomon had he been successful. Such actions were not unknown in the ancient world.

Chapter 1 of 1st Kings closes with Adonijah being left on probation. He is allowed to live, providing he takes no further action against the king. This comes to fruition in the following chapter. In his exposition of 1st Kings, Ralph Davis points out that the first two chapters of 1 Kings form a couplet. They are given to us in something of a parallel.

1 Kings 1	1 Kings 2
Nathan approaches the king through Bathsheba.	Adonijah approaches the king through Bathsheba.
David swears an oath in response to Bathsheba (1:29-30).	Solomon swears an oath in response to Bathsheba (2:23).
Focus is upon the succession of the kingdom.	Focus is upon the security of the kingdom.

In chapter 2, Adonijah goes to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, and seeks her intercession to obtain as his wife the former nurse of David.

Then he said, “Please speak to Solomon the king, for he will not refuse you, that he may give me Abishag the Shunammite as a wife.” (1 Kings 2:17).

On the surface of things, this seems to be a harmless request. Perhaps Bathsheba thought this to be the case, for she agreed to make the request on Adonijah's behalf. Evidently she did not know what it signified. In ancient

times, the king's harem would pass to the king's successor. Take a man's kingdom and you would also take his wives. When David had taken Saul's kingdom, he also took the wives of Saul into his keeping (2 Samuel 12:8). When Absalom drove David out of Jerusalem, he made it a point to go among the concubines of David in the sight of all Israel (2 Samuel 16:20-22).

Now Adonijah is requesting one of the members of the harem of David. Perhaps he is using the excuse, "She did not actually enter into sexual relations with him, she merely was there to keep him warm." But the implications would be present nonetheless. And Solomon sees through the request and even recognizes the conspirators involved.

King Solomon answered and said to his mother, "And why are you asking Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? Ask for him also the kingdom - for he is my older brother - even for him, for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah!"

23 Then King Solomon swore by the Lord, saying, "May God do so to me and more also, if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life." (2 Kings 2:22-23).

Accordingly, both Adonijah and Joab who has evidently been partners in the conspiracy are put to death. Abiathar is banished from the priesthood and permitted to return to his own home in fulfillment of the prophecy originally made to Eli (Abiathar was the great, great grandson of Eli through Phinehas).

SOLOMON'S REIGN

The reign of Solomon saw a remarkable period of peace in that portion of the ancient world. Assyria was in a state of decline as it wrestled with internal strife and was further weakened with battles against Aram. Egypt also suffered the effects of a general decline, never again reaching her former dominance as a world power. Into this power vacuum rose the kingdom of Solomon who entered into a prosperous alliance with King Hiram of Tyre. The Phoenicians were the masters of the Mediterranean Sea.

1. Solomon's Wisdom.

In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish

me to give you.” (1 Kings 3:5).

When the Lord said to Solomon, “What do you want me to do for you?” He was probing Solomon’s heart. “Solomon, what is it that is important to you? What is your goal in life? For what are you aiming?” Have you ever asked yourself that question? What is important to you? What do you want out of life? Most of us think in terms of power or wealth or long life, or some variation of those themes.

That is a great way to open a conversation in which you can share your faith. Merely ask someone, “For what are you living? What are your goals?” It is a question with which many people struggle. And when they answer it, their answer often comes out in such a materialistic way that it frightens even them. For what are you living? If you were to take a piece of paper and write down what your goal in life is, what would it be?

Someone once asked Major Ian Thomas what he was living for. His immediate response was, “To make visible the invisible Christ.” Is that your goal?

“So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (1 Kings 3:7-9).

Solomon asks for “an understanding heart” — literally a “hearing heart.” This is a request for discernment, the ability to look at the world and to understand it. Yet this was not a request simply for theoretical understanding. Solomon desires a wisdom which shall enable him to:

- Correctly lead the people of God.
- Discern between good and evil.

God has always desired that his people know the difference between good and evil. Adam and Eve learned that difference the hard way - by engaging in evil and learning first hand of its deadly effects.

God agrees to grant the request of Solomon. He gives him a “wise and discerning heart” - literally, a “wise and understanding heart.” By this, the Lord gave Solomon the ability to judge and rule well. But that is not all. He went beyond this to give Solomon an

understanding in areas beyond those having to do with rulership. We need only read through the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to find that Solomon was given wisdom, the skill of living.

2. The Extent of Solomon's Rule.

Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. (1 Kings 4:21).

“The River” refers to the Euphrates. It was commonplace among ancient empires that when the old king died, the subject nations would withhold tribute and challenge the new king in rebellion. This necessitated repeated punitive expeditions to reinforce the former king’s terms and to prove the ability of the new king to enforce his will. Solomon did not have to do this. Instead, God gave to him a peaceful reign.

3. The Prosperity of Solomon's Reign.

So Judah and Israel lived in safety, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (1 Kings 4:25).

It was not only Solomon who amassed riches. The people of Israel in his day also enjoyed a great amount of prosperity. The statement that "every man under his vine and his fig tree" became a favorite catch phrase used by the prophets to indicate the ideal conditions prevailing in Messiah’s kingdom (Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10). The fact that a man could enjoy the fruit of the vine and the fig tree meant that there was a complete absence of warfare and its ensuing economic disruption.

4. Solomon’s Temple.

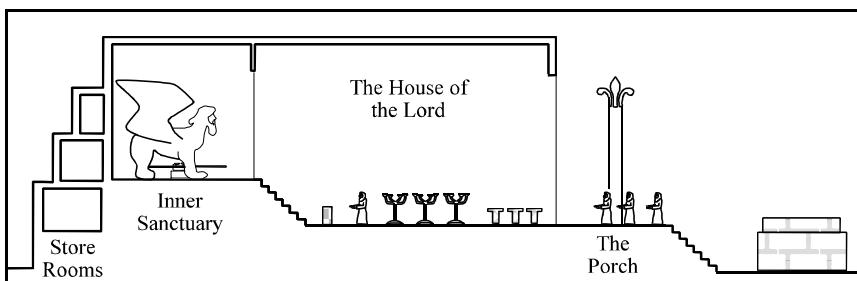
Construction of the Temple began on the fourth year of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 6:1). The building project took seven years and was climaxed with the dedication of the Temple.

- **Location:** The site for the Temple was high atop a threshing place at the top of Mount Moriah, located just north of the old Jebusite

city of Jerusalem.

- Structure: The Temple was patterned after the same structure of the Tabernacle, except that it was bigger. Because it was built upon a mountain, you went up a series of stairs till you came to the highest part of the Temple -- the Holy of Holies.

The Temple was a rather small structure when compared to many of the modern churches of today. But it was not designed to hold an assembly of people. The congregation was not supposed to meet within the Temple - they were to direct their worship toward the Temple and the One whose presence was signified therein.



There were windows in the upper part of the Temple (6:4) as well as storerooms surrounding the Temple. The main structure was built of stone. But the stone was not shaped at the construction site. Each stone was prepared at the place of quarrying so that *there was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard in the house while it was being built* (6:7). One can imagine this structure being raised in a reverent silence.

The Holy of Holies was in the shape of a perfect cube. The original Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle had been 10 cubits by 10 cubits by 10 cubits (a room 15 feet cubed). The Holy of Holies in the Temple was twice the size - 20 cubits by 20 cubits by 20 cubits (a room 30 feet cubed). It is interesting that these are the same proportions of the dimensions given for the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:16.

Most Holy Place	New Jerusalem
Signified the presence of God	Signifies the Bride - the wife of the Lamb.

Overlaid with pure gold (1 Kings 6:20)	Made of pure gold (Revelation 21:18)
Filled with the glory of God (1 Kings 8:10)	Illuminated by the glory of God (Revelation 21:23)

Just as the creation of heaven and earth and the Sabbath rest that followed had taken seven days, so now the work of the building of the Temple took a corresponding seven years. There is a sense in which the Temple was to serve as a prototype of the earth that served as God's footstool.

And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, 11 so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. (1 Kings 8:10-11).

This was the same cloud that had led the Israelites through the wilderness. It was the same cloud that had filled the Tabernacle as the time of its inauguration (Exodus 40:34-35). This was the cloud which the rabbis called "the Shekinah Glory," from the Hebrew root meaning "to dwell." It signified that God had taken up residence within the Temple, dwelling in the midst of His people.

5. God's Covenantal Promise to Solomon.

Now it came about when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all that Solomon desired to do, 2 that the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon. (1 Kings 9:1-2).

This marks the second time that the Lord had appeared to Solomon. This was not a common occurrence. God did not do a lot of appearing to people in the Scriptures. Such appearances were very rare and special. Solomon had been greatly blessed in the fact that God had appeared to him. There is a principle here. It is that great privilege is accompanied by great responsibility. When you have been greatly blessed by God, it is also true that you have a greater responsibility to act in accordance with that blessing.

Verses 4-9 contain a repetition of the promise originally given to Solomon in 1 Kings 6:12-13. However this time there is a difference. This time the promise is accompanied by a warning:

9:4-5	Promise	<p>IF you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all I have commanded keeping my statutes and ordinances THEN I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever</p>
9:6-9	Warning	<p>IF you or your sons shall turn away from following Me shall not keep My commandments & statutes go and serve other gods and worship them, THEN I will... Cut off Israel Israel will be a proverb & a byword This house will be ruined Everyone will be astonished</p>

There is a principle here. It is that God will always be glorified in His people. He will either be glorified when they are obedient or else He will be glorified when they are disobedient. Notice that it was not mere outward obedience that was required. God is not only interested in outward actions. He is also interested in what goes on in the inside. He is interested in “integrity of heart and uprightness.”

This marks a high point in the career of Solomon. The later years of his reign were to see a turning away from the Lord.

Contrasting Elements in Solomon's Career	
His Early Years	His Later Years

Political Realm	Nation unified and Solomon exalted on the international scene	Tribes rebellious and loss of influence in Egypt, Edom, and Syria.
Economic Realm	People willing to donate time and money. Silver “as common as stones.”	Heavy taxes and forced labor becomes burdensome.
Social Realm	Focus on building the Temple.	Focus upon other building projects of Solomon.
Spiritual Realm	Dedication to the Lord.	Other gods are worshiped.
Military Realm	Israelite military is exclusively infantry (cavalry not permitted under Mosaic Law).	Large chariot corps developed.

SOLOMON'S SINS

The Law of the Lord had given some very specific requirements for how the king of Israel was supposed to conduct himself.

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, and you possess it and live in it, and you say, “I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me,” 15 you shall surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses, one from among your countrymen you shall set as king over yourselves; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman. 16 Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, “You shall never again return that way.”

17 He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself. (Deuteronomy 17:14-17).

These laws were given in the days of Moses, hundreds of years before Israel ever had a king. Notice the specific prohibitions.

- Multiply horses or cause people to return to Egypt for horses (17:16).
- Multiply wives (17:17).
- Greatly increase silver and gold for himself (17:17).

We have already seen how Solomon had transgressed two of these prohibitions in the previous chapters. Now we come to the third and perhaps the most serious of the forbidden things.

1. The Sin of Having Foreign Wives: *Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love.* (1 Kings 11:1-2).

The multitude of wives which were accumulated by Solomon were the result of the many marital alliances with surrounding cities, nations, and kingdoms. But this was no excuse for breaking the explicit command of God.

There is a principle here. Expediency is never an excuse for doing wrong. Solomon might well have tried to justify his actions by saying it was a means to fulfilling God's promise to raise up the kingdom of David. But it is never right to do wrong.

Verse 2 says that Solomon held fast to these in love - his affections for them would lead to a corresponding decrease in his affections and his love for the Lord. Sin always does that. You cannot love sin and still love the Lord. They are opposites. The more you love sin, the more you will move away from the Lord.

But it is not merely outward or overt sin that pulls you away from God. There can be things which, of themselves, are merely neutral and amoral which can compete for your affections. Money is one of these things. Jesus warned that you cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:13). The more you love money, the less you will love the Lord.

2. The Sin of a Turned Heart: *He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. 4 For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.* (1 Kings 11:3-4).

Verse 4 says that Solomon’s heart was not “wholly devoted” (perfected). This is the same word that was used in 1 Kings 8:61 where Solomon called the people to be “wholly devoted to the Lord.” There is nothing more tragic than one who started on the right path but who later turned away. In Solomon’s case, it was his many wives who were instrumental in turning his heart away from the Lord.

This is why it is so important that believers marry believers. The Bible speaks explicitly against Christians marrying unbelievers.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

How many times have I heard the plaintive wail, “Perhaps I can bring him to Christ!” It rarely works that way. Usually it has the opposite effect. Usually such a relationship results in the Christian being pulled away from the Lord.

This “turning away” did not happen all at once. It was a gradual thing. We see this by the fact that it happened “when Solomon was old” (11:4). He began by merely allowing his wives to worship in their accustomed manner. But he eventually found himself joining in their idolatrous worship.

3. The Sin of Idolatry: *For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. 6 Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not follow the Lord fully, as David his father had done. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. 8 Thus also he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. (1 Kings 11:5-8).*

What started as mere political expedience took Solomon to the point where he was bowing down and worshiping false gods.

Ashtoreth	Plural form of Ishtar/Astar, literally, “Goddess.” In the Canaanite pantheon, Ishtar was the female consort of Baal. As such, she was a fertility goddess and her worship involved certain fertility rites.
Milcom	Also known as “Molech” - literally, “King.” This was the god of the Ammonites.
Chemosh	This was the national god of Moab. The meaning of the name is uncertain (“Conqueror”?). His name is found on the Moabite stone describing him as a war god.

The mountain which is east of Jerusalem seems to be a reference to the Mount of Olives. This had formerly been a place where God was worshiped (2 Samuel 15:32). But now it was taken and made a place of apostasy.

It is not that Solomon renounced the Lord. It is that he tried to worship God and the other false gods. And in doing so, he tried to relegate God to the position of being only one god among others. God will never take second place. He wants to be first place in your life.

GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST SOLOMON

Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded. (1 Kings 11:9-10).

The writer does not tell us that God was angry with Solomon because of the amassing of riches or because he had developed a chariot corps or even because of his many wives. The anger of God was due to his sin of idolatry.

There is a lesson here. It is that God takes worship very seriously. He has ordained how He is to be worshiped and He does not permit that worship to go to another. Solomon was all the more culpable because the Lord had appeared to him twice (11:9). Greater revelation always results in greater

responsibility. We today have been given greater revelation, for we have the completed Scriptures. Because of that, we have a greater responsibility.

So the Lord said to Solomon, “Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant.” (1 Kings 11:11).

The covenant which had been given to Solomon contained conditions. The promises which were a part of that covenant were conditional in nature. If Solomon obeyed, then the kingdom would continue. If Solomon disobeyed, then the kingdom would be taken from him and given to another.

“Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.” (1 Kings 11:12-13).

There is a temporary respite in this judgment. It is not carried out upon Solomon; it will be carried out upon his son. The reason for this is not because Solomon deserves the respite. The reason is because of David. Here is the principle. Our obedience sometimes results in blessings for our children. And the reverse is also true; our disobedience sometimes results in negative consequences upon our children. Sin always bears children. And our sins affect the lives of our children. The popular idea that a sin between two “consenting adults” affects no one else is a myth. It is a lie and has led to great sorrow.

THE RISE OF JEROBOAM

When Solomon was building up the fortifications in and around the city of Jerusalem, he appointed Jeroboam as the overseer for the forced labor crews over the house of Joseph - the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

It came about at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him on the road. Now Ahijah had clothed himself with a new cloak; and both of them were alone in the field. 30 Then

Ahijah took hold of the new cloak which was on him and tore it into twelve pieces. 31 He said to Jeroboam, “Take for yourself ten pieces; for thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I will tear the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give you ten tribes 32 (but he will have one tribe, for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel), 33 because they have forsaken Me, and have worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the sons of Ammon; and they have not walked in My ways, doing what is right in My sight and observing My statutes and My ordinances, as his father David did.’” (1 Kings 11:29-33).

God sends a prophet to Jeroboam with a message. This message is conveyed with a graphic picture. The prophet is wearing a new cloak. He takes the cloak and begins to rip it apart. He continues to rip until there are twelve pieces. The clothing is ruined. He then gives to Jeroboam ten of these pieces. It is a picture of what God is going to do to the nation of Israel. Ten tribes will be ripped from the house of David and given to Jeroboam because of the idolatry which Solomon has brought into the land. The son of Solomon will be permitted to retain a single tribe (Levi doesn't count as a separate tribe as the Levites have no separate inheritance).

The tearing of this cloak is reminiscent of the time that Saul tried to hold onto Samuel and tore his cloak. Samuel used that instance to illustrate that the kingdom would be torn from Saul. There was also a tearing when Jesus died upon the cross. In His case, it was the veil of the Temple which was rent, demonstrating that the way to God had been opened for all. What Solomon lost in the dividing of the kingdom, Jesus repaired, not only in the restoring of the breach between Israel and Judah, but in restoring the breach between men and God, thus tearing down the dividing wall between all men.

This is meant as a punishment against Solomon for his idolatry. But Solomon's punishment brings both privilege and responsibility to Jeroboam. He will have the privilege of being king over the northern tribes. He will also have the responsibility of following the Lord.

“I will take you, and you shall reign over whatever you desire, and you shall be king over Israel. 38 Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did,

then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.” (1 Kings 11:37-38).

Jeroboam is given essentially the same promises and the same responsibilities which had first been given to Solomon. If he will follow the Lord, then God will be with him and build for him “an enduring house” in the same way He built such a dynasty for David. There is a lesson which the writer of Kings is seeking to impart to his readers, those who are facing the prospect of a Babylonian Captivity. It is that God is able to take cursing and to turn it into blessing.

Historical Lesson	Immediate Lesson	Today's Application
Solomon's curse was that all but one of the tribes would be taken from his son.	Judah's curse was that the Temple was destroyed and her people carried to a foreign land.	Jesus came to His own and His own did not receive Him (John 1:11).
Jeroboam was given 10 tribes and the promise of an enduring house.	Judah was given the opportunity to return and rebuild.	As many as did receive Him have been given the right to become sons of God (John 1:12).
Jeroboam would continue to be blessed as long as he obeyed.	The restoration of worship and of relationship would only take place through obedience.	If we continue to walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another and cleansing from sin (1 John 1:7).

Romans 11 tells us that the unbelief in Israel has made it possible for the gospel to go to the Gentiles. This does not mean that we should take up an attitude of anti-Semitism or of smug self-righteousness. The church only continues to enjoy the benefits of blessing as she is obedient to the same terms of the covenant - believing and obeying the commands and the promises of God.

Solomon sought therefore to put Jeroboam to death; but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt to Shishak king of Egypt, and he was in Egypt until the death of Solomon. (1

Kings 11:40).

The inclusion of the word “therefore” makes it appear that the reason Solomon attempted to put Jeroboam to death was because he had heard about this prophecy. This is certainly possible. However the word “therefore” is absent from the Hebrew text. The Hebrew contains only a conjunctive (“and”). It seems more likely that Jeroboam used this prophecy as an excuse to attempt to incite a revolution. Verse 27 specifically states that Jeroboam rebelled against the king. The account which follows relates how it came about that this rebellion took place.

Verse 26	Verse 27	Verses 28-39	Verse 40
Jeroboam rebelled against the king	This was the reason why he rebelled against the king...	Ahijah’s Prophecy	Solomon sought to put Jeroboam to death

In this regard, Jeroboam stands in marked contrast to David who also had received a prophecy that he would be king. While David was willing to trust the Lord for His timing, Jeroboam takes matters into his own hands.

David	Jeroboam
Told by Samuel that he would replace Saul as king.	Told by Ahijah that he would be given 10 tribes from Solomon’s son.
He was content to wait for the Lord to bring this about.	He determined to fulfill the prophecy by inciting a revolt.

From this, we can already see that Jeroboam will eventually take the northern tribes in a direction away from the Lord. His is the way of self-will. It leads ultimately to captivity. Note that Jesus is the One who restores the spiritual captivity of His people. He did so by being submissive to the Father’s will and the Father’s timing. When Satan offered to give to Jesus the kingdoms of the world, He refused the temptation. As a result, there will come a day when the Father will deliver all things over into His hand (1 Corinthians 15:23-25).

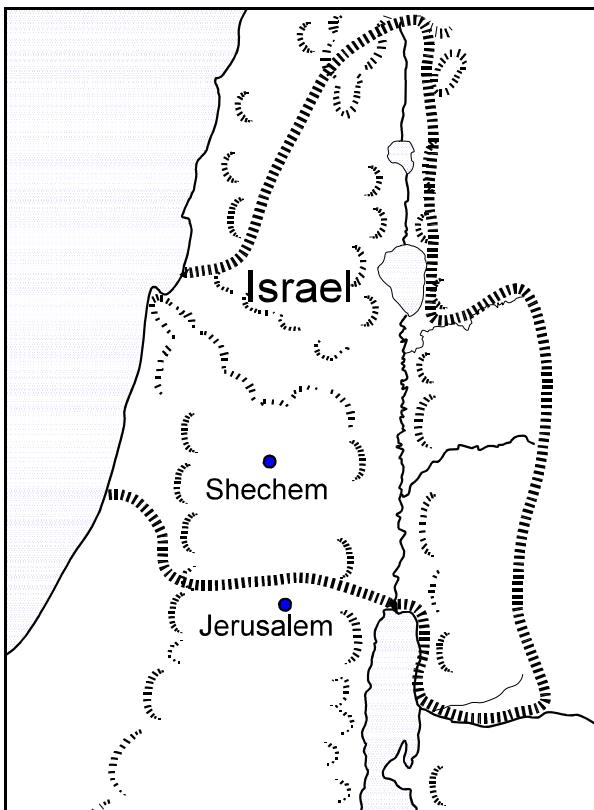
THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

The promise of kingship from the line of Judah had a long tradition, going back all the way to the prophecy of Jacob. Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob, had sinned against his father and lost the birthright. Simeon and Levi had also disqualified themselves from leadership. This promise of leadership had come to Judah.

Judah was the tribe from which David had come. Because of this, when the other tribes split off and went their own way, Judah remained faithful to the lineage of David. Even though Jerusalem was thought of as a neutral city, it still lay within the boundaries of the lands of Judah. Furthermore, Judah had been exempted from the forced labor which Solomon demanded of the rest of Israel.

The land of Judah was geographically divided from the rest of Israel by the deep valley of Sorek. It was bordered in the east by the Dead Sea, on the west by the lands of the Philistines and in the south by Edom and the Sinai Desert.

The history of the northern and southern kingdoms would run in parallel courses. Though both of these kingdoms would see periods of rebellion against the Lord, Judah's history would be marked by occasional periods of repentance and return.



REHOBOAM

Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon reigned in Judah.

Rehoboam was forty one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the Lord had chosen from all the tribes of Israel to put His name there. And his mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. (1 Kings 14:21).

Rehoboam was the son of Solomon. His mother was of the country of Ammon - presumably one of the 700 foreign wives which Solomon had married. Theirs had been a political marriage and it had produced this young man.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 11:17 tells us that the people of Judah served the Lord for three years. It was only after Rehoboam felt himself secure and established as king of Judah that he led the nation in forsaking the way of the Lord (2 Chronicles 12:1).

Rehoboam's story is one of good beginnings but poor endings. It is a pattern which we shall see repeated in a number of the kings of Judah. It began with Solomon. Now it is seen in his son. It is often seen in people today. The Christian life has been likened to a race. Paul said that we all run. But it is not a sprint; it is a marathon. We are in for the long haul. We are running for eternity. No one ever won only the first half of a race. You only win if you cross the finish line.

1. The Sins of Judah: *Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked Him to jealousy more than all that their fathers had done, with the sins which they committed. 23 For they also built for themselves high places and sacred pillars and Asherim on every high hill and beneath every luxuriant tree. 24 There were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord dispossessed before the sons of Israel. (1 Kings 14:22-24).*

Judah actually seems to have descended more readily into idolatry and the worship of false gods than did Israel. This process had begun with Solomon and the pagan practices of his foreign wives. It now returned with a vengeance.

- High Places: It was the custom throughout the entire fertile

crescent to conduct worship in a “high place.” The origin of this practice may go back all the way to the Tower of Babel.

- Sacred Pillars: This is an obelisk. They were used by the Canaanites as fertility symbols.
- Asherim: An Asherah was a tree which was used for worship. Asherim (plural) were an entire grove of such trees.
- Male Cult Prostitutes: A part of the pagan worship involved homosexual acts within the places of worship. It was thought that participation in such actions would incite the various gods who ruled over the wind and the rain to participate and thus bring fertility to the land.

The people of Israel had been forbidden from participating in these pagan practices. But now they entered into them with a passion. As a result, the Lord soon brought judgment upon the land.

2. Invasion from Egypt: *Now it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, that Shishak the king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. 26 He took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house, and he took everything, even taking all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. 27 So King Rehoboam made shields of bronze in their place, and committed them to the care of the commanders of the guard who guarded the doorway of the king’s house. 28 Then it happened as often as the king entered the house of the Lord, that the guards would carry them and would bring them back into the guards’ room. (1 Kings 14:25-28).*

The body of Shishak was discovered at an intact burial tomb at Tanis in 1938. The 21st Dynasty of Egypt had been friendly to Israel to the point of Pharaoh's daughter being wedded to King Solomon. However these good relations did not last past Solomon's death. Now there came a Libyan to the throne who founded a new ruling family - the 22nd Dynasty. He is known in historical records as Sheshonq (the Biblical Shishak). He was able to reunify the country which had been previously divided and brought a certain amount of stability to the crown. He then turned his attention to foreign policy, renewing an alliance with Byblos and regaining control of Nubia. It is likely this same Sheshonq who had given refuge to such enemies of Israel as Jeroboam and Hadad the Edomite. Now he marched into Judah. Archaeological records list 150 cities which he claimed

We know from Egyptian records at Karnak that this raid extended all the way into Galilee.

to have taken in this campaign. Among the cities which were looted was Jerusalem and its temple.

Egyptian records list the thousands of pounds of gold and silver that the son of Shishak offered to the Egyptian gods following his raid into Canaan. This was the plunder which he had taken from Solomon's Temple. From this time on, the reign of Rehoboam would be only a shadow of its former glory. The golden shields of Solomon were replaced by shields of bronze, a less-valued commodity. The old forms continued, but they lost some of their luster.

JEROBOAM & THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel. (1 Kings 12:25).

Shechem was already an ancient city, nearly a thousand years old dating back before the days of Jacob. Jeroboam built up this city and made it his initial capital. Later he built a secondary palace at Penuel, the place where Jacob had wrestled with the angel on the Jabbok River. These two sites were located amidst the center of the Northern Kingdom and were designed to unify the people under his rule. To further cement this unity, Jeroboam determined to change the manner of worship in Israel.

Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. 27 "If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah."

28 So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." 29 He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. (1 Kings 12:26-29).

Jeroboam was now the king of the Northern Kingdom. But he was a king with a problem. The law of the Lord mandated that all Israelites make a pilgrimage three times a year to worship the Lord in His Temple. And here lay the problem. The Temple was in Jerusalem. And Jerusalem was in

Judah. And this land was under the domain of Rehoboam. This state of affairs would give Rehoboam ample opportunity to wage a propaganda campaign which could ultimately result in Jeroboam being removed and the Kingdom being reunited.

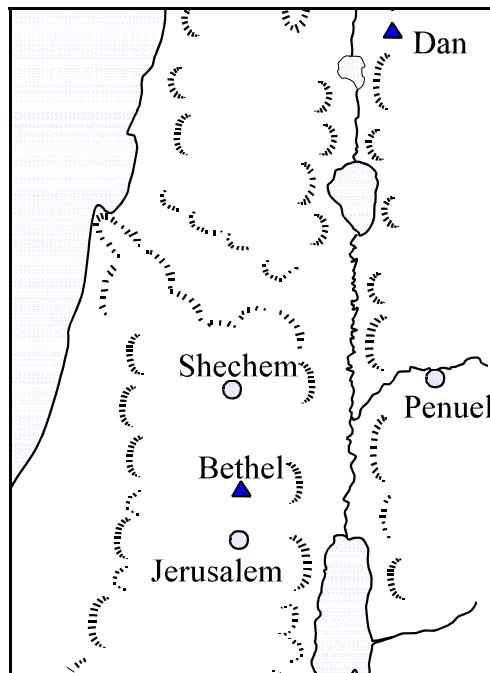
Jeroboam came up with an alternative plan of worship. It was a plan which appealed to convenience. The plan was for two centers of worship to be set up within the Northern Kingdom. They would be located at the extreme northern and southern borders of the kingdom.

1. Bethel (“House of God”).

This was the place where Jacob had his vision of a ladder reaching to heaven (Genesis 28:11-19). It was located a mere 12 miles north of Jerusalem and sat atop a bare mountaintop.

2. Dan.

The tribe of Dan had originally been given an allotment of land between Judah, Ephraim and Benjamin. This location was uncomfortably close to the Philistines and, in the days of the judges, they migrated northward to the area north of the Sea of Galilee on the slopes of Mount Hermon (Judges 18). Capturing the Canaanite city of Laish, they renamed it Dan and made it their religious center with their own Levitical priesthood descended from Moses (Judges 18:30).



At each of these two locations there was erected a golden calf. Perhaps it was reasoned that such a means of worship had been instituted by Aaron at Mount Sinai. In actuality, both Aaron and Jeroboam had borrowed this calf worship from Egypt where the sacred cow was the symbol of the goddess Hathor.

Many of the Hebrews who remained faithful to the teachings of the Law fled to the south to where they could worship in peace. Included in this exodus were many of the Levites. As this strong core of faithful moved out,

the Northern Kingdom would find itself subject to apostasy and eventual ruin.

SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH	CATEGORY	NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL
19 Kings, 1 Queen	Kings	19 Kings
Jerusalem	Capital	Samaria
1 Dynasty	Dynasties	5 Dynasties and several independent kings.
Judah & Benjamin	Tribes	10 Northern Tribes.
Most were unstable; some were good & some were bad.	Character of the Kings	All were bad, but only Ahab and Ahaziah were Baal worshipers.
By Babylon in 586 B.C.	Conquered	By Assyria in 721 B.C.
Returned to the land.	Afterward	No return.

THE PROPHECY AGAINST THE ALTAR OF BETHEL

Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. (1 Kings 13:1).

The altar against which this prophecy is pronounced is one of two altars that Jeroboam had caused to be set up. One altar was at Dan on the northern border of Israel. The other altar was here at Bethel on the southern border of Israel. His religious program seems to have been generally accepted by the people of Israel. But then a day came when a "man of God" arrived from Judah.

1. The Pronouncement: *And he cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" 3 Then he gave a sign the*

same day, saying, “This is the sign which the Lord had spoken, ‘Behold, the altar shall be split apart and the ashes which are on it shall be poured out.’” (1 Kings 13:2-3).

The man of God speaks directly to the altar. After all, the altar is the visible sign of Jeroboam's transgression. There ought not to have been an altar here. The fact that there was an altar here was a sign that Jeroboam had instituted a religious system different than that which had been established by God.

The prophecy foretells the coming of a son of David - Josiah by name. This man would offer a sacrifice where Jeroboam was now offering a sacrifice. But his sacrifice would be the lives of the false priests whom Jeroboam had established.

Jeroboam	Josiah
King of Northern Kingdom of Israel	He would be king of Judah
Took the throne via rebellion	He would be a legitimate descendant of David
Set up an altar at Bethel and offered sacrifices on it	He would slaughter the false priests upon this altar
Ruled from 931 to 910 B.C.	Ruled from 640 to 609 B.C.

This prophecy was given nearly 300 years before Josiah would come on the scene. There is a lesson here. It is that God uses a calendar, not a stopwatch. There are promises in the Scriptures which were made thousands of years ago and which still have not yet been fulfilled. But they will be. Just because Christ does not come back tomorrow does not mean that He is not coming back.

2. Jeroboam's Response: *Now when the king heard the saying of the man of God, which he cried against the altar in Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, “Seize him.” But his hand which he stretched out against him dried up, so that he could not draw it back to himself. 5 The altar also was split apart and the ashes were poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. (1 Kings 13:4-5).*

Jeroboam was furious over this prophecy. He pointed at the man of God and ordered that he be arrested. But no sooner had he done this when the hand with which he had pointed was itself “dried up.” This king who “took a hand” in establishing his own religious system found that his own hand completely impotent before the presence of the Lord.

3. Jeroboam’s Request: *The king said to the man of God, “Please entreat the Lord your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me.” So the man of God entreated the Lord, and the king’s hand was restored to him, and it became as it was before. (1 Kings 13:6).*

Jeroboam quickly changes his tune. He goes from threatening to pleading. But this is not true repentance. This is seen in the manner of his request. He asks the man of God to intercede on his behalf: “Please entreat the Lord **your** God, and pray for me.” He seems to recognize that the God of Abraham is not his God. God is the prophet’s God, but He is not the God of Jeroboam. True repentance takes place when God becomes **your** God.

4. Jeroboam’s Invitation.

Once he had been healed, Jeroboam took a different track - if you can’t beat them, then join them. He invited the man of God to eat with him. But the man refused. He had been given some very specific instructions from the Lord.

- Don’t eat with anyone in Israel.
- Don’t drink with anyone in Israel.
- Don’t even travel home the same way.

5. The Failure of the Man of God.

Having refused Jeroboam’s offer of hospitality, the man of God began making his way back to Judah. He had been told not to eat or drink or even to travel along the same path in Israel. But while he was on his way, something happened to change his resolve. It was an old prophet who lived in Bethel. He intercepted the man of God and spun a yarn about an angel having brought a change of plan.

He said to him, “I also am a prophet like you,

and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.’” But he lied to him. (1 Kings 13:18).

This old prophet was lying through his teeth. What was the purpose of this deception? He wished to bend the man's will to his own, so he made up a story about an angel appearing to him. There is an important lesson here. God's truth remains true. It remains true even though an angel might be claimed to have brought a contradicting message.

The Mormon church preaches such a message. They claim that an angel named Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith with some new revelation which changed that which was previously taught. Many people have unwittingly followed this message. They have followed in the tragic path of this man of God. The apostle Paul reminds us of the importance of holding to the plain truths of God even in the face of the claim of contradicting supernatural revelation.

But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8).

The man of God accepted the prophet's words at face value. And in doing so, he departed from the clear revelation of God.

Now it came about, as they were sitting down at the table, that the word of the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back; 21 and he cried to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Because you have disobeyed the command of the Lord, and have not observed the commandment which the Lord your God commanded you, 22 but have returned and eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which He said to you, “Eat no bread and drink no water”; your body shall not come to the grave of your fathers.’” (1 Kings 13:20-22).

This time the Lord really does speak to the old prophet. The message is one of judgment against the man of God. He is judged because he disobeyed the clear command of the Lord. As he

continues on his way, he is met by a lion which kills him.

Now I have to ask a question. What is the point of this story? Why is it inserted in this narrative of kings and kingdoms? The man of God is a microcosm of the people of Israel. They had been given clear instructions from the Lord as to how He was to be worshiped and how they were to live. Jeroboam has come on the scene and has established an alternative means of worship. It is not that Jeroboam is telling people to worship a different God - he is merely telling them to worship the Lord in a different way. His is the religion of pragmatism. It is the way of convenience. Who wants to travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship when you can do it without ever leaving the comfort of your own home?

The Man of God	The People of Israel
Given specific instructions as to how he was to travel through Israel.	Given specific instructions as to how they were to worship God.
He followed the old prophet's alternate instructions.	They followed Jeroboam's alternate method of worship.
He was killed by a lion.	They would ultimately be taken into captivity by the lion of Assyria.

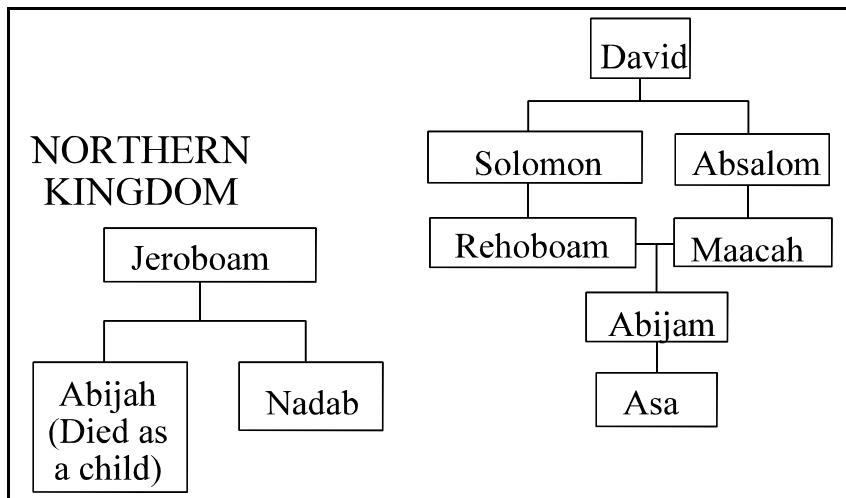
ABIJAM'S EVIL REIGN OVER JUDAH

Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, Abijam became king over Judah. 2 He reigned three years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Maacah the daughter of Abishalom. 3 He walked in all the sins of his father which he had committed before him; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, like the heart of his father David. (1 Kings 15:1-3).

Our story now moves from Jeroboam in the north back to the Kingdom of Judah in the south. The reader should take care not to confuse Abijah, son of Jeroboam with Abijam, son of Rehoboam.

We are specifically told that Abijam followed in the sins of Rehoboam and Solomon. There is a lesson here for fathers. It is the lesson

of the harvest. You always sow what you reap, but you often reap more than what you sow. If you are setting an example of sinfulness, then your children will take that example and will often surpass it. On the other hand, if you teach your children to serve the Lord and to follow Him, they will often not only follow your example, but will surpass it.



ASA'S REFORMATION IN JUDAH

So in the twentieth year of Jeroboam the king of Israel, Asa began to reign as king of Judah. (1 Kings 15:9).

Asa would bring about the first of four revivals in the Kingdom of Judah. His reign of 41 years would mark a returning to the Lord.

Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father. (1 Kings 15:11).

Throughout the rest of the book of Kings, we will read of each of the kings of Judah a summary statement of the way in which he conducted himself. This summary will say one of two things.

- a. He walked in the sins of his fathers.
Or...
b. He walked right in the sight of the Lord like David.

There are two ways in which you can live. You can live in sin, or you

can live in the sight of the Lord, determined to obey Him and please Him. Asa was such a man. He wished to do right in the sight of God.

He also put away the male cult prostitutes from the land and removed all the idols which his fathers had made.

He also removed Maacah his mother from being queen mother, because she had made a horrid image as an Asherah; and Asa cut down her horrid image and burned it at the brook Kidron. (1 Kings 15:12-13).

The writer of Kings makes no mention of the prophet Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1-7) who was a moving influence in the life of Asa. There are times when God will use a man or a woman as an influence for good behind the scenes. 2 Chronicles 15 relates how Asa called an assembly of the people in which all were invited to renew their covenant with the Lord.

But the high places were not taken away; nevertheless the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the Lord all his days. (1 Kings 15:14).

Although Asa was *wholly devoted to the Lord*, it did not necessarily follow that all of his subjects were equally devoted to God. While it is true that you can legislate morality, you cannot legislate devotion. You can make a person to act in the appropriate manner, but you cannot make a person believe. You can govern outward actions, but you cannot govern attitudes. Only the Lord can do that.

The reforms which Asa brought about in Judah served as a beacon for the worship of the Lord to all Israelites. He gave an open invitation to members of every tribe of Israel to come and worship in the Temple.

And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord was with him. (2 Chronicles 15:9).

This was seen as a threat to the continued security of the Northern Kingdom and the response was an embargo against all traffic coming from or going into Judah.

Now there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. 17 Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah in order to prevent anyone from

going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah. (1 Kings 15:16-17).

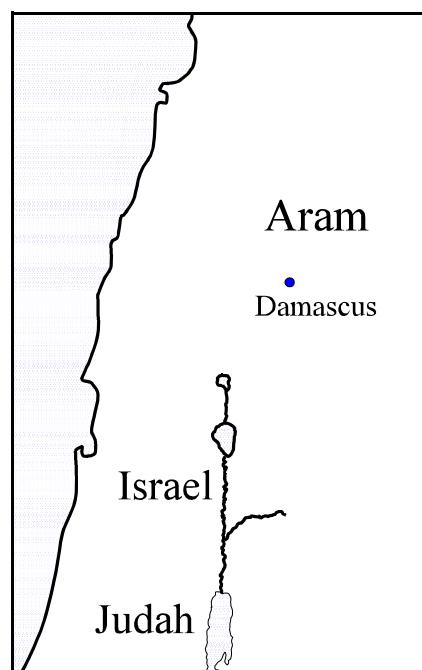
Baasha had murdered all of the dynasty of Jeroboam (we are told that story in the latter part of this chapter). He invaded Judah and captured the city of Ramah, a scant 5 miles north of Jerusalem. There are several different cities in Palestine by this name. The name means “high place.” Those towns with this name were all built on top of a mountain. The purpose of Baasha’s taking of this city was *to prevent anyone from going out or coming in to Asa king of Judah.* It was not enough for Baasha to walk in the path of idolatry. He also wanted to stop others from worshiping the Lord. Evil is like that. Evil always wants company.

Then Asa took all the silver and the gold which were left in the treasuries of the house of the Lord and the treasuries of the king’s house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants. And King Asa sent them to Ben-hadad the son of Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, saying, 19 “Let there be a treaty between you and me, as between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you a present of silver and gold; go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so that he will withdraw from me.”

20 So Ben-hadad listened to King Asa and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel, and conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah and all Chinneroth, besides all the land of Naphtali. (1 Kings 15:18-20).

Instead of turning to the Lord for help, Asa responds to the incursion by soliciting assistance from the King of Aram (modern Syria), the country to the northeast of Israel.

The Aramaeans had been long-standing enemies of Israel. David had subdued the Aramaean tribes, occupying Damascus (2 Samuel 8:6), but in the days of Solomon, Rezon ben Eliada had



retaken Damascus, being “Israel’s adversary as long as Solomon lived” (1 Kings 11:23-25).

Now there was a new dynasty in Damascus headed by Ben-Hadad (there will be several kings of Damascus with this name. Hadad was the name of one of the pagan deities of that day). Asa stripped the treasures of the Temple and used them to bribe Ben-Hadad into invading Israel from the north.

Why would Asa turn to Aram for help instead of turning to the Lord? Perhaps he had been infected with the idea of a dichotomy between the spiritual realm versus the social and political realm. He was willing to turn to the Lord for spiritual matters but sought to handle secular matters on his own. We are often tempted to do the same thing. We trust in Christ for eternal life, but we won’t trust Him to deal with a difficult situation at work.

“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.” - Hanani the Seer to Asa (2 Chronicles 16:9).

THE HOUSE OF BAASHA’S EVIL REIGN IN THE NORTH

Once again, our scene shifts back to the northern kingdom of Israel. We have already seen Baasha as the king who was pitted against Asa, but now we are told of his origins.

Now Nadab the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel two years. 26 He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father and in his sin which he made Israel sin.

27 Then Baasha the son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar conspired against him, and Baasha struck him down at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, while Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon. 28 So Baasha killed him in the third year of Asa king of Judah and reigned in his place. (1 Kings 15:25-28).

Baasha was a usurper to the throne, an assassin-turned king. This sets the tone for the rest of the history of the northern kingdom of Israel. There

will be a number of different dynasties which rule over Israel and each will end with the assassination of a king and the murder of his progeny.

It came about as soon as he was king, he struck down all the household of Jeroboam. He did not leave to Jeroboam any persons alive, until he had destroyed them, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, 30 and because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, because of his provocation with which he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger. (1 Kings 15:29-30).

The execution of the entire family of Jeroboam was a punishment for the sins of Jeroboam in leading Israel into idolatry. However Baasha proved to be no better at following the Lord than Jeroboam. He seems to have continued in following the same spiritual idolatry which had been instituted by Jeroboam. As a result, he was confronted by the prophet Jehu.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2 “Inasmuch as I exalted you from the dust and made you leader over My people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made My people Israel sin, provoking Me to anger with their sins, 3 behold, I will consume Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4 Anyone of Baasha who dies in the city the dogs will eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens will eat.” (1 Kings 16:1-4).

As the house of Jeroboam had been removed for its idolatry, so the house of Baasha would be removed for continuing in the same idolatry. Elah was the son of Baasha and succeeded him to the throne of Israel. It was after a reign of only two years that he was assassinated by Zimri, one of his military commanders.

House of Jeroboam	House of Baasha
Founder of the dynasty rebelled against Rehoboam and reigned for a long period - 22 years.	Founder of the dynasty murdered Nadab and reigned in his place for a long period - 24 years.

Jeroboam instituted idolatry in the land.	Baasha continued the program of idolatry.
Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, succeeded his father and reigned only 2 years before being assassinated.	Elah, the son of Baasha, succeeded his father and reigned only 2 years before being assassinated.

THE RISE OF THE HOUSE OF OMRI

The assassination of Elah and its resulting execution of all of the members of the house of Baasha left a power vacuum. Zimri may have thought to become king himself, but he was unable to gain a following and his reign lasted only a week. Following his untimely death, there arose two contenders for the throne of Israel.

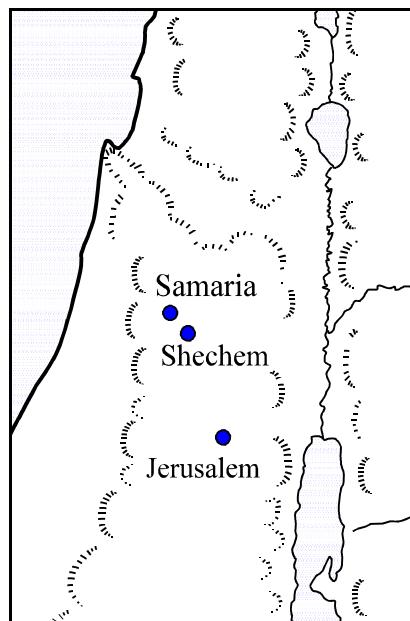
- Tibni, the son of Ginath.
- Omri, commander of the army.

After a civil war which lasted 6 years, it was Omri who came out as the winner in this conflict - he seems to have had both the military expertise as well as the support of the army it taking the throne.

1. Samaria: *He bought the hill Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; and he built on the hill, and named the city which he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill. (1 Kings 16:24).*

Samaria was to become the new capital city of Israel. It was located on a large oval hilltop, from the top of which the Mediterranean Sea was visible to the west. It lay 6½ miles northwest of Shechem and along the major north-south highway.

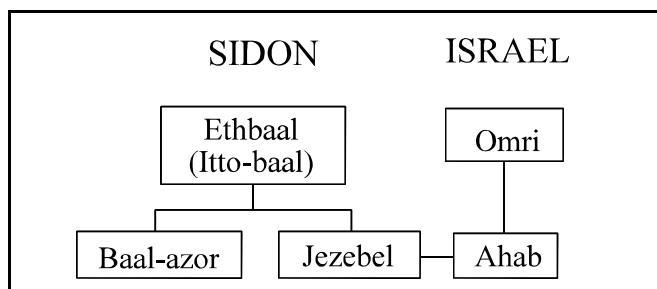
Samaria was surrounded



by a double wall with towers and bastions. Its main gate faced east where a low ridge joins the hill of Samaria to the major north-south mountain range.

2. Ahab's Marriage Alliance: *Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. 31 It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. 32 So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria.* (1 Kings 16:30-32).

Ahab, the son of Omri and successor to his throne, entered into an alliance with the Phoenicians, sealing it by taking a Phoenician princess to be his wife. This alliance would have long-lasting repercussions in Israel.



It is because of this Phoenician influence that Ahab soon finds himself engaged, not only in idolatry, but in the worshiping of Baal, the god of the Phoenicians. Up to this time, the Israelites had been guilty of attempting to worship Yahweh in an improper manner - through the use of idols which had been established at Bethel and at Dan. But now they turned away completely from any attempt to worship the Lord and turned instead to a false god.

3. The Rebuilding of Jericho: *In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.* (1 Kings 16:34).

Jericho had been destroyed in the days of Joshua. It had been the first city of Canaan to fall to the Israelites when they entered into

the land. As such, it had been accursed, all its inhabitants and even the plunder of the city given over to be burned. Achan's sin had been that of attempting to take some of that plunder for himself and he had paid with his life.

Joshua had issued a decree that Jericho was not to be rebuilt. With his decree came a curse that the man who would attempt to rebuild Jericho would suffer the loss of both his firstborn son and his youngest son (Joshua 6:26).

Apparently with the full blessing of Ahab, Hiel set out to rebuild Jericho. In keeping with the ancient curse, he seems to have deliberately sacrificed both his oldest and his youngest sons. This was the sort of activity which was commonplace among Baal worshipers.

THE MINISTRY OF ELIJAH

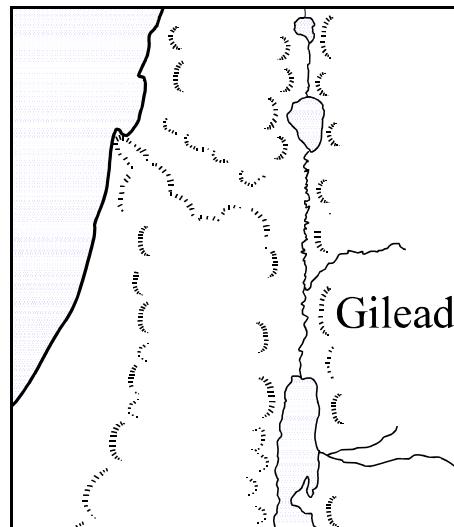
Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.” (1 Kings 17:1).

Elijah comes out of the pages of obscurity and onto the scene of ministry in a single sentence. We know only that he was from *the settlers of Gilead*. Gilead was the designation for the lands of Israel on the east side of the Jordan River. These were the lands which had been taken by the two and a half tribes.

- Reuben
- Gad
- Half of the tribe of Manasseh

When Moses had led the Israelites to the Jordan, these tribes had looked at this land and they had said, “We don't need to go any further. We don't care what the promised land looks like, we will settle for this land.”

Elijah now comes on the scene from Gilead. His name means “my



God is Yahweh.” And he is a man with a message. His message is one of the judgment of God. “*There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word*” (17:1) James tells us that this lack of rain was in answer to a prayer that was prayed by Elijah (James 5:17). Why would Elijah pray such a prayer? We normally pray for that which is good for our country. But Elijah prayed for the judgment of God to fall on his land and on his people. In doing so, he was praying in accordance with the Scriptures.

And it shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul, 14 that He will give the rain of your land in its season, the early rain and the late rain, that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil.

15 And He will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied. 16 Beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them. 17 Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain, and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you. (Deuteronomy 11:13-17).

The covenant that God made with Israel consisted of both blessings and cursings. If they would be obedient to serve the Lord, then He would bless them with rainfall and cause their crops to grow and to prosper. If they would turn away from the Lord, then rain would be removed from the land and they would see a lack of prosperity.

Now we can understand why Elijah prayed this prayer. He was a man for his times. The glory days of Solomon had come and gone. The kingdom was now a divided kingdom. Although the southern kingdom of Judah had enjoyed an occasional good king, the northern kingdom of Israel had not. Each king had been progressively worse than the one before. Omri had been the worst of an entire line of bad kings. And now Ahab was a man after his father’s heart. He had gone so far as to marry a Phoenician princess named Jezebel. Her name meant “Helper of Baal” and she was as good as her name. Under her influence, Baal had become the god of Samaria and the prophets of the Lord had been persecuted and scattered.

Now comes Elijah. His name means “My God is Yahweh.” He stands before Ahab and he invokes a solemn oath in the name of the Lord. “As the Lord lives” — if this oath does not come to pass, then God will cease to live. When we were kids, we said things like, “I cross my heart and hope to die.” God says the same thing, only He means it.

The promise of the Lord is that there will be *neither dew nor rain*. This is the worst weather forecast in history. But it is more than that. It is a challenge. Baal is a god of fertility, a rain god. He will be seen to be impotent before the God of Israel.

At the end of this three year period, we read of a climactic confrontation between Elijah and Ahab, the king of Israel.

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is this you, you troubler of Israel?”

18 He said, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals.

19 Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” 20 So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. (1 Kings 18:17-20).

Ahab has been searching for Elijah these past three years. He has sent envoys to every surrounding kingdom and has even gone so far as to solicit oaths from surrounding kings to the effect that they have no knowledge of his whereabouts. Finally his enemy stands before him. Notice the accusation.

Ahab	<i>“Is this you, you troubler of Israel?”</i>
Elijah	<i>“I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have”</i>

Ahab felt that Elijah was a troubler because his prayer had brought a drought. But the real troubler of Israel were those who had brought about a spiritual drought over the land. There is a contrast between these two men.

Ahab	Elijah
King of Israel	Prophet of God
A man of the world	A man of the Word
Walked independently of God in open rebellion	Walked dependently on the Lord in humble submission
Angry and frustrated.	Bold and effective.

Now Elijah gives certain instructions to Ahab. He who has searched far and wide for the prophet now finds himself obeying the instructions of that prophet. All of Israel is to be gathered together. They are coming to witness a challenge — a battle of the Gods.

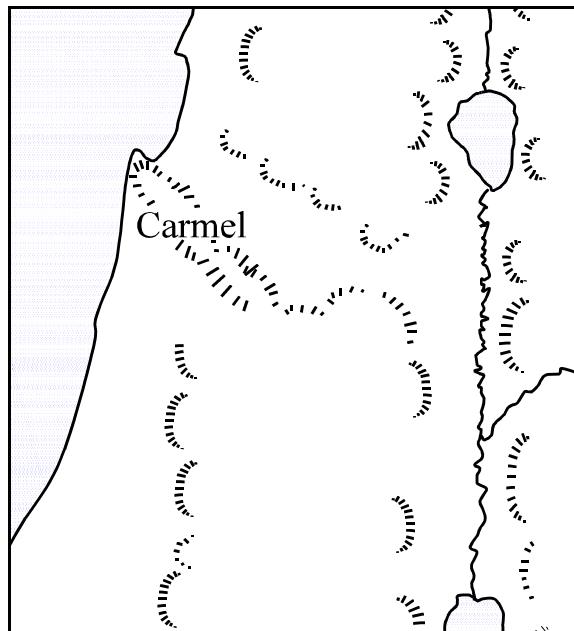
The place of this confrontation would be Mount Carmel. This is a long ridge, rising up in a sharp promontory from the Mediterranean Sea and running twelve miles toward the southeast where it connects with the central mountain ridge that runs the length of Israel.

The Hebrew word “Carmel” means “garden.” The Song of Solomon (7:5) uses the imagery of the lush trees atop Carmel to describe the beauty of the beloved’s head.

Imagine the scene. A national holiday has been declared. People from all over Israel begin to gather to Mount Carmel with its commanding view of the Mediterranean Sea. They have come to see an epic battle between the God of Israel versus the gods of the Canaanites.

Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. (1 Kings 18:21).

The people of Israel are pictured as being at a crossroads, hesitating and pondering which path to take. Elijah calls the people to make a commitment. It wasn’t that they were against God. It is that they were trying to worship both God and Baal. People often try to do the same thing today. They go to church on Sunday morning and live for the devil the rest of the week. They are like a fan that oscillates back and forth. They are the double-minded man of James 1:8. To such a one there is a warning:



“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matthew 6:24).

Is God the complete and total Lord of your life? If not, then I ask you the same question that Elijah asked: “How long?” What are you waiting for?

Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. 23 Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.”

25 So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.” (1 Kings 18:22-25).

Here is the way in which the battle will be fought. Two altars will be erected. Two animals will be killed and placed upon the altars. Then each group will pray that fire might come down from heaven and consume the sacrifice. Whichever altar begins to burn will be considered to be the winner.

1. In the Old Testament fire was used as a sign of the presence and supply of the Lord.
 - The Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2)..
 - The Pillar of Fire (Exodus 13:21-22).
2. Fire from heaven was a sign that God had accepted the priests, their sacrifices, and their service.
 - When the first sacrifices were offered upon the Tabernacle altar in the wilderness, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering (Leviticus 9:23-24).
 - When the first sacrifices were offered in Solomon’s Temple, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering (2 Chronicles 7:1).

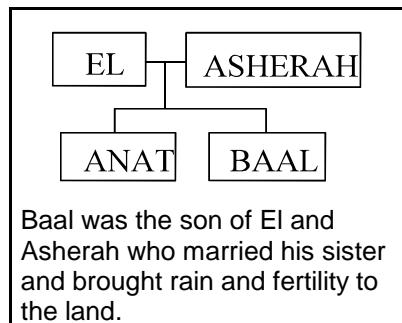
In the same way, fire from heaven would now demonstrate the Lord's acceptance of Elijah's offering.

3. Fire was a sign of divine judgment and wrath against sin and rejection of God's plan.

- The flaming sword at the entrance to the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24).
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven (Genesis 19:24).

The people are in favor of this test.

They think that it is a fair test. If anything, it is possibly rigged in favor of the prophets of Baal since he was believed to be the storm god. He made the lightning and the thunder. He is the fire god. If there is anything that a fire god should be able to do, it is to make fire.



Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made.

27 It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened."

28 So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them.

29 When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention. (1 Kings 18:26-29).

The people watch as the 450 prophets of Baal begin to cry out to their god. An hour passes, then two and then three. The sun climbs into the sky and the shrieks of the prophets of Baal echo over the mountain. But nothing happens. Finally, in the heat of the day, Elijah decided to have some fun.

- *“Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god...”*
Perhaps the batteries in his hearing aid need recharging and he can’t hear you. Cry a little louder.
- *“Either he is occupied or gone aside.”*
He is indisposed and can’t take any incoming calls at the moment.
- *“Or is on a journey.”*
Maybe he has packed his bags and taken a vacation to the Bahamas.
- *“Or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.”*
Perhaps he took a couple of sleeping pills and you will have to pray really loud if you are going to wake him up.

Elijah’s words have the effect of driving these prophets into a wild religious frenzy. They begin to cut themselves with swords and spears. There is a principle here. It is that sincerity is no substitute for truth. These false prophets were completely sincere in their belief - but they were sincerely wrong. I know a lot of people who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are very sincere in their beliefs. Some are even willing to die for their beliefs. But such sincerity is not a proof that they are right in their beliefs. It is possible to be sincerely wrong. You might be thinking, “This has no relevance to me. I have never bowed down before an idol or prayed to Baal.” But there are other forms of idolatry.

- Pleasure and comfort.
- Business and the making of money and the security which comes from such activity.
- Social standing.
- Covetousness (Colossians 3:5 equates covetousness with idolatry).

The day was far spent and now it was past *time of the offering of the evening sacrifice* -- in the late afternoon with the sun heading for the horizon. The prophets of Baal have exhausted themselves with their prayers and their sun god is heading for the sea. It is now that Elijah prepares to pray.

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down.

31 Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, “Israel shall be your name.”

32 So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed. (1 Kings 18:30-32).

Elijah takes great care in the building of this altar. It is constructed with twelve stones. These twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Even though the kingdom has been divided, the Lord sees all of Israel as His people.

Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.”

34 And he said, “Do it a second time,” and they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time,” and they did it a third time.

35 The water flowed around the altar and he also filled the trench with water. (1 Kings 18:32-35).

As Elijah gives his instructions for the soaking of the altar, I imagine the people looking at one another in amazement. Has the sun finally gotten to this old prophet of God? The contest is to be won by producing fire. The last ingredient you need to produce fire is water. In obedience to his command, they carry four pitchers of water down the mountain to the Mediterranean Sea and fill them with salt water. These are brought back up the mountain and poured onto the altar. Elijah looks at the result, shakes his head, and says, “No, it isn’t wet enough. Do it again!” A second time and then a third time the process is repeated until the altar is soaked in water.

Why the water? Because Elijah wanted there to be no mistake in the people’s understanding that a miracle was about to take place. He was making certain that any skeptics in the crowd would be silenced. The miraculous nature of what was about to take place would be obvious to all.

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (1 Kings 18:38).

The fire that came from the Lord was special. It not only consumed the offering, it also consumed the wood and the stones and the dust and the water. It was an all-consuming fire.

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.” (1 Kings 18:39).

In verse 21, Elijah had set the proposal before the people that if Yahweh is God, then He is to be followed. They now respond to the miracle with a

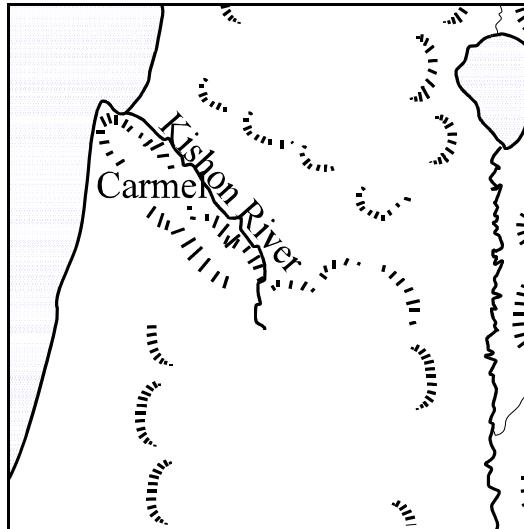
statement of faith. “*Yahweh, he is Elohim.*” This was in direct answer to the prayer of Elijah. He had not only prayed that the Lord would send fire down from heaven, he had also prayed that the people would repent and return to the Lord.

Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there. (1 Kings 18:40).

The false shepherds of Baal were taken and put to death. Why? Because they bore the responsibility of deliberately leading the people of God in the worship of idols.

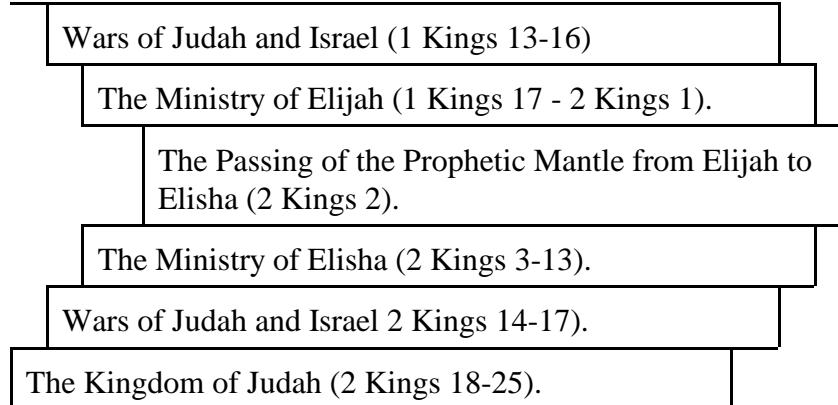
There is a principle here. It is that leaders are more liable. They bear a greater responsibility. James 3:1 warns, “*Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.*”

The scene of this execution is the brook Kishon. The brook Kishon flows down from the Central mountain range and then meanders along the foot of the Carmel Range as it makes its way northwest to the Mediterranean Sea. It was here that Gideon had once slaughtered the Midianites. It is here that Elijah has all of the prophets of Baal put to death. Subsequently, Elijah prays and the rains come once more.



The closing chapters of 1st Kings take us back and forth between the perspective of the king and the prophet. We see Elijah's dejection and the Lord giving promises to him and we see Ahab's sin and repentance. When we come to 2nd Kings 2, we come to the transition between the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. This marks a pivotal point for the entire two volumes.

The United Kingdom of Solomon (1 Kings 1-12)



Elisha asks for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah — literally a “double mouthful” (בְּרִישָׁתִים). The double portion was always the portion of the firstborn. It was the inheritance of the heir of the family. Elijah had no children that we know of. Elisha wished to be his spiritual heir. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the firstborn Son who gave us the privileges that were rightly His own. He has given us of His portion. He has given to us the fulness of His Spirit.

Elijah makes no guarantees. He does not answer the request of Elisha because he cannot answer his request. The Spirit is not Elijah’s to give. Only God can give His Spirit. But he can give him a sign by which he will know whether the Lord has granted his request. The sign will be whether or not he sees Elijah caught up to heaven.

As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. 12 Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. (2 Kings 2:11-12).

The image of the chariot of the Lord is a common one among the writings of the prophets. The chariot was a symbol of strength, of protection and of judgment.

The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness. (Psalm 68:17).

For behold, the Lord will come in fire

*And His chariots like the whirlwind,
To render His anger with fury,
And His rebuke with flames of fire. (Isaiah 66:15).*

*Behold, he goes up like clouds,
And his chariots like the whirlwind;
His horses are swifter than eagles.
Woe to us, for we are ruined. (Jeremiah 4:13).*

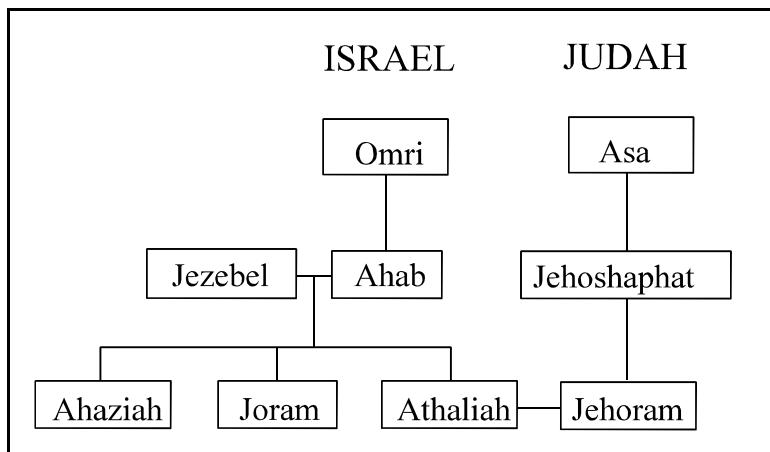
*Did the Lord rage against the rivers,
Or was Thine anger against the rivers,
Or was Thy wrath against the sea,
That Thou didst ride on Thy horses,
Or Thy chariots of salvation (Habakkuk 3:8).*

The chariot was a tool of war. It was to the ancient world what the armored tank and the jet aircraft are to the modern mechanized world. If Elijah had been caught up today, he would have been accompanied by a nuclear missile or a military bomber.

Elisha had been promised that he would have his request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit fulfilled if he saw Elijah being taken up. The spirit of Elijah was one that was able to see past the physical world to the spiritual realities which go unseen by most. The seeing of Elijah's going was the first such use of that spirit. The ministry of Elisha is one of continued miracles. It is as though the Holy Spirit has been poured out in an overflowing manifestation.

KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH

On the political scene, there was a movement toward alliance and even unification as Ahab, king of Israel, approached Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, with the offer of an alliance. The alliance was sealed by the marriage of Ahab's daughter to Jehoshaphat's son. This was to have long reaching implications:



Later in the same year, Ahab and Jehoshaphat marched against Damascus and were defeated. Ahab was killed in the battle and Jehoshaphat barely escaped.

Returning to Judah, Jehoshaphat was rebuked by the prophet Jehu for having entered into the alliance with an enemy of Yahweh. Jehoshaphat repented of his sin and continued his religious reforms, establishing a judicial system invested in the Levites and priests.

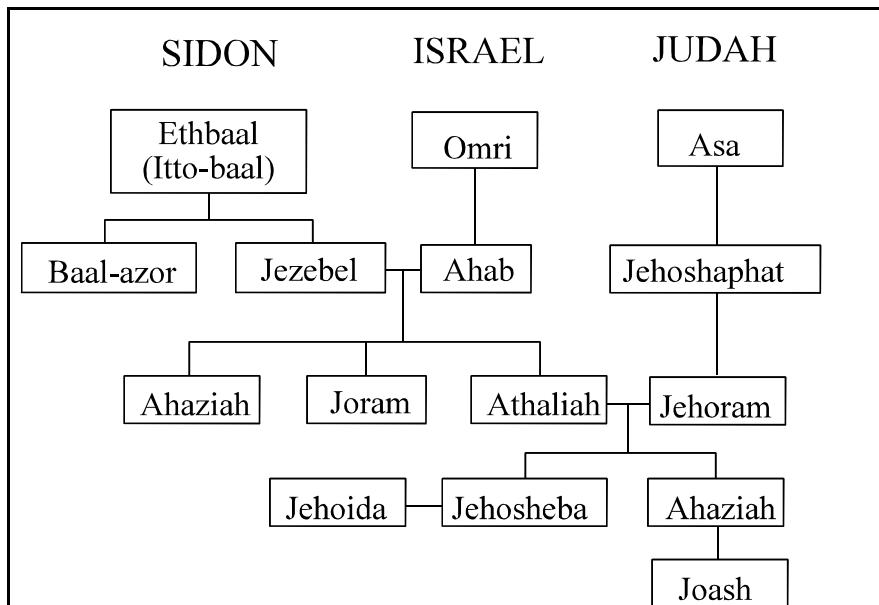
Jehoshaphat had several sons. Jehoram, as the firstborn, was made coregent for several years and then became king upon the death of his father. The first thing that Jehoram did upon coming to the throne was to murder all of his brothers and other high-ranking nobles so that none might pose a threat to his authority. Jehoram had married Athaliah, daughter to Ahab and Jezebel. He followed after his wife in the Canaanite religious system. Shrines to Baal were set up in the high places around Judah.

During his reign, Edom revolted and became an independent state. Perceiving this weakness, the Philistines and the Arabs raided Judah, murdering and pillaging. They even plundered the king's own palace and put to death most of his sons. Ultimately, the Lord judged Jehoram with a disease which caused his bowels to fall out. He died a terrible and painful death.

The young son of Jehoram came to the throne at the death of his father. Like his father and mother, Ahaziah worshiped false gods and practiced the Canaanite cultic rituals. He joined with his uncle Joram, king of Israel, in a war against Aram. The battle ended in defeat and Ahaziah was wounded. He was convalescing in Jezreel when a palace revolt broke out in Israel, led by Jehu. Ahaziah sought refuge in Samaria, but was captured, brought before Jehu, and put to death.

Athaliah, the queen mother used this opportunity to seize power, murdering all of her children and grandchildren. However, one of her daughters took her infant nephew and hid him in the temple, a building that had been all but deserted by the Jews. His name was Joash.

The young crown prince Joash was raised in the temple by Jehoida, a faithful priest. After six years, a coup successfully placed the young prince upon the throne. Athaliah was put to death.



Joash was only 7 years old when he came to the throne of Judah. For many years, Jehoida, the high priest who had raised him, was the ruling power of Judah. As long as Jehoida lived to guide the young king, the nation prospered. Under his direction, the Temple was cleansed and restored. The sacrifices which had been abandoned were reinstated. After the death of Jehoida, Joash was swayed by the opinion of the young liberal party and began to worship false gods. He even went so far as to have Zechariah, the son of Jehoida, stoned when he spoke out against this idolatry.

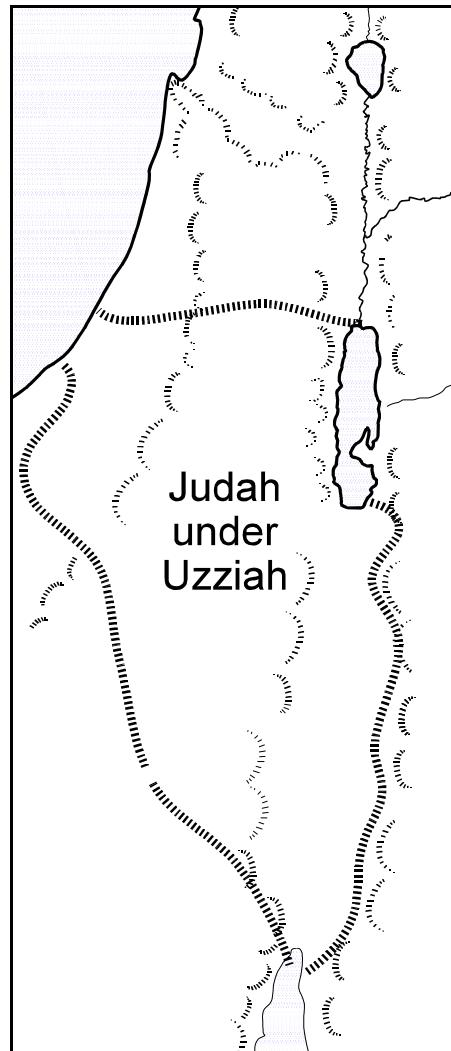
The Arameans invaded Judah and Jerusalem, pillaging the city and killing many of the king's officers. What was remarkable about this invasion is that the victorious invaders were vastly outnumbered by the military forces of Judah.

Indeed the army of the Arameans came with a small number of men; yet the Lord delivered a very great army into their hands, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash. (2 Chronicles 24:24).

This military defeat was a judgment from the Lord against Judah and her wayward king. Joash was finally assassinated by his own servants and his son, Amaziah, reigned in his place. Amaziah was 25 years old when he came to the throne, he was to rule Judah for the next 29 years. He was a good king, obeying all of the commands of Yahweh during the first part of his reign. But after a successful expedition into Edom, he brought back the idols of the Edomites and set them up for display. It was not long before they were being worshiped. Soon after this, Amaziah was defeated in battle against the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom. The Israelites led Amaziah in chains back to Judah. They pillaged Jerusalem, tearing down a portion of the wall and looting the gold and silver in the Temple.

When a conspiracy was uncovered, Amaziah fled to Lachish to escape assassination. The conspirators followed him there and put him to death. Apparently this was not considered to be a move against the Davidic Dynasty, but rather was designed to place a worshiper of Yahweh upon the throne (2 Chronicles 25:27).

Uzziah had already served as co-regent with his father for 23 years when he was crowned king of Judah. Like his father before him, Uzziah began his reign with a return to Yahweh. Uzziah concentrated on building up a very strong, professional military. He used this to conquer the Philistines



and the Arabians. He also built up much of Jerusalem, adding towers, gates and war machines to protect the city. However, in his pride, he entered into the temple and tried to offer incense upon the altar, something that was only to be undertaken by the priests. As a result, he was stricken with leprosy.

Jotham followed his father's example by obeying the Law of the Lord. However, it is notable that he never entered the Temple. There are several possible reasons for this. He may have been showing respect for his father who had been judged for his sin in the Temple. Or he may have been superstitious about entering the Temple, thinking that he might also contract leprosy.

As soon as he came to the throne, Ahaz began to follow the Canaanite religious practices, even sacrificing his own children to the false gods. Because of the sins of Ahaz, the Lord allowed the Philistines, the Edomites and the Syrians to invade and conquer the border cities of Judah. It was at this time that Judah lost the port of Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba.

Because of these military threats, Ahaz made an alliance with the Assyrians, robbing the Temple to send money to bribe Tiglath-Pileser. In return, the Assyrians offered to attack Aram and Israel (they had been planning to do so anyway). Isaiah confronted Ahaz and advised him to trust in the Lord instead of Assyria. He even offered to give Ahaz a sign from the Lord to prove the truth of his words. When Ahaz refused to choose a sign, the Lord Himself chose one, promising that a child would be born and that, before the child had reached a certain age, the kings of Aram and Israel would be overthrown. It is in the midst of this prophecy that Isaiah tells of a Child whose name would be Immanuel, literally "God with us."

Tiglath-Pileser III died in 727 B.C. and Israel took this opportunity to revolt, stopping payment of the annual tribute. Ahaz wisely continued to pay the required tribute as the Assyrians swept down from the north, laying siege to the capital city of Samaria. For three years, Samaria held out under the siege until famine and disease had decimated the population. When the city fell in 721 B.C., the surviving population was deported. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist.

The Jews of the Southern Kingdom were terrified as they watched the inhuman cruelties which the Assyrians inflicted upon their captives. Now the Assyrians began to eye the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was only a matter of time before they attacked.

HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah was 25 years old when he came to the throne. The prophet Isaiah had already been ministering for 35 years. With the advent of

Hezekiah, a great revival began. He began his reign by destroying all of the Canaanite idols and then repairing the Temple of God.

1. Envoy from Merodach-baladan.

Merodach-baladan had managed to snatch Babylon and hold it from the Assyrians. Looking for allies against Assyria, he sent envoys to Hezekiah, king of Judah. In a moment of pride, Hezekiah foolishly showed these envoys all of the treasures of the temple. As a result, the word got out of the great wealth that was stored up in Jerusalem.

2. Solicitations to rebellion.

Philistia, Egypt and Ethiopia sent envoys to Hezekiah, urging him to join in a rebellion. Isaiah warned him not to put his trust in Egypt.

And the Lord said, “Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot three years as a sign and token against Egypt and Cush, 4 so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Cush, young and old, naked and barefoot with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.

“Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and Egypt their boast.”
(Isaiah 20:3-5).

Hezekiah listened to the warning of Isaiah and continued to pay homage to Assyria.

3. Revolt against Assyria.

When Assyria was drawn into an extended conflict with Merodach-baladan, Hezekiah was persuaded to join Egypt; in a revolt. The cities of Philistia also joined in, along with Tyre and Sidon. In 701 B.C. Sennacherib conducted a massive campaign against this western alliance. The Phoenician cities each submitted or were destroyed. The Egyptians were routed and Judah was left to face Sennacherib alone.

Hezekiah offered to pay any tribute in return for peace. Sennacherib set the price at 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold

(in that day even a single talent was considered to be a fortune).

And Hezekiah gave him all the silver which was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasuries of the king's house.

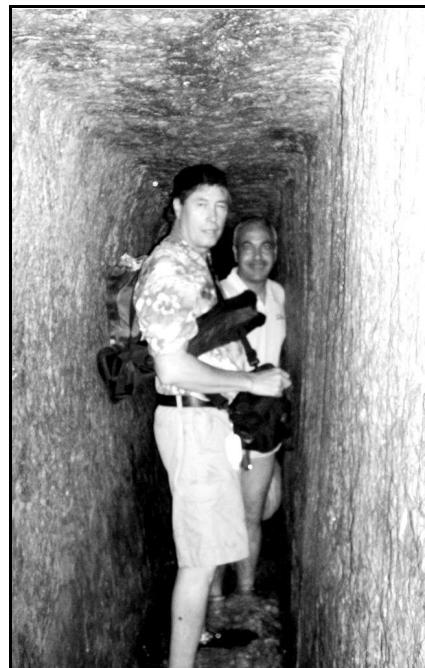
At that time Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Kings 18:15-16).

Instead of keeping his agreement, Sennacherib changed his mind and decided to try to take Jerusalem.

4. Hezekiah's Tunnel and the Siloam Inscription.

Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? (2 Kings 20:20).

It was Hezekiah who stopped the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all that he did. (2 Chronicles 32:30).



Author and guide in Hezekiah's Tunnel

Hezekiah ordered a tunnel to be cut through the mountain on which Jerusalem rests. This tunnel served to bring water from the Gihon Spring down into the city. The conduit, cut from solid rock in a rather circuitous route, was 1,750 feet long, with an average width of two feet, and an average height of six feet. In 1880 a boy was

wading in the pool of Siloam and entered Hezekiah's Tunnel. Nineteen feet inside the entrance, he noticed marks on the wall of the tunnel. It was an inscription. It was later cut out and taken by the Turkish government to the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul where it can be seen today. It relates how a team cut through each end of the mountain to some together at a point in the middle:

The boring through is completed. And this is the story of the boring through: while yet they plied the drill, each toward his fellow, and while yet there were three cubits to be bored through, there was heard the voice of one calling unto another, for there was a crevice in the rock on the right hand. And on the day of the boring through the stone cutters struck, each to meet his fellow, drill upon drill; and the water flowed from the source to the pool for a thousand and two hundred cubits, and a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the heads of the stone cutters.

While the Biblical narrative recounts Hezekiah's part in the construction, this inscription tells the same story from the point of view of the workers who dug the tunnel.

5. Jerusalem delivered.

This time, Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help and was promised deliverance. In a single night, the Assyrian army was overthrown.

Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead.

So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. (2 Kings 19:35-36).

The palace of Sennacherib was discovered in 1847 by the English archaeologist Austen Henry Layard at Kuyunjik. A total of 71 rooms were uncovered. Many of the walls were lined with sculptured slabs. One of Sennacherib's campaigns is described on the Taylor Prism, a clay octagonal cylinder which today resides in the British Museum (an even better copy is on a prism at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago). It contains the following:

As for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number, by escalade and bringing up siege engines, by attacking and storming on foot, by mines, tunnels and breaches, I besieged and took 200,150 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. Himself, like a caged bird, I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. Earthworks I threw up against him. The one coming out of his city gate I turned back to his misery. The cities of his which I had despoiled, I cut off from his land and gave them to Mitinti king of Ashdod, Padi king of Ekron, and Silili-bel king of Gaza. Thus I diminished his land.

It is interesting to note Sennacherib's description of this campaign. He brags about how he had besieged the city of Jerusalem, closing up Hezekiah as a bird in a cage, but makes no mention of the outcome of the battle. The remaining years of Hezekiah's life were peaceful and prosperous as the Lord continued to bless him.

The reformation brought about in the days of Hezekiah did not last beyond his life. His son, Manasseh, has the distinction of being one of the worst kings that Judah ever had. One of Manasseh's first acts was the arrest and execution of the prophet Isaiah. The old prophet was placed inside a hollow tree trunk and then sawn apart. Manasseh was involved in all of the practices of the Canaanite religious system.

- Worship of false gods.
- Child sacrifice.
- Sorcery.
- Idols in the Temple of God.

Because of Manasseh's sin, the Lord allowed the Assyrians to invade Judah. The Scriptures tell how Manasseh was captured and taken in chains to Babylon. At this time in history, Babylon was a part of the Assyrian Empire and Esarhaddon, the king of Assyria, used it as his southern palace.

In Babylon, Manasseh repented and turned back to God. Soon after this, he was released and allowed to return to Jerusalem. He now led Judah back to the Lord, tearing down the false idols in the land.

Amon (642-640 B.C.) was 22 years old when he came to the throne. He quickly undid much of what his father had accomplished, leading the

Jews back into idolatry. He was murdered by his own servants after a short reign of only two years.

JOSIAH

Josiah was only an eight year old boy when he came to the throne. Even as a boy, he served Yahweh and began to bring a revival to Judah. As he grew older, Josiah began a program of reforms, breaking down the idols and executing the Canaanite priests. Then he began the work of rebuilding the Temple. While the Temple was being restored, a copy of the Scriptures was located. It was brought to Josiah and read to him.

Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.

And it came about when the king heard the words of the book of the law, that he tore his clothes. (2 Kings 22:10-11).

When Josiah heard the terms of the covenant of Yahweh read, he was struck with the realization that Judah had transgressed that covenant. Accordingly, he now led the nation in a prayer of repentance. For this, he was informed by the prophetess Huldah that the nation would not be judged in his lifetime.

The final years of Josiah's reign saw a great number of changes on the international scene. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell to the combined assault of the Medes and the Chaldeans in 612 B.C. A remnant of Assyrians escaped to Carchemish where they allied themselves to the Egyptians in an attempt to hold off the Medes and the Chaldeans. When Pharaoh Necho, the king of Egypt, began to march through Palestine toward Carchemish, Josiah tried to intercept him at Megiddo.

After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt came up to make war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him.

But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, “What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? I am not coming against you today but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from interfering with God who is with me, that He may

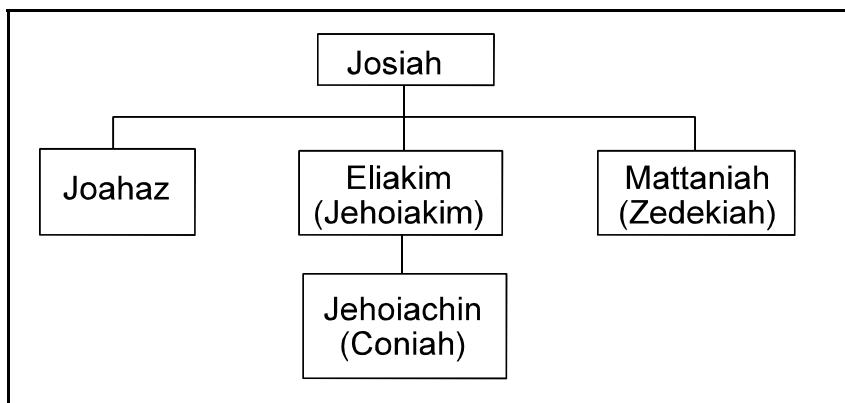
not destroy you.”

However, Josiah would not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to make war with him; nor did he listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to make war on the plain of Megiddo. (2 Chronicles 35:20-22).

In spite of the warning of Necho that he had been sent by God, Josiah met him in battle in the Valley of Megiddo. In the heat of the battle, Josiah was shot by a stray arrow and he ultimately died from his injury.

THE SONS OF JOSIAH

Josiah had left three sons and a grandson. Each one of them would sit for a time upon the throne of Judah.



With Josiah dead, the people of Judah placed Jehoahaz (also known as Joahaz) upon the throne.

1. Joahaz (609 B.C.).

Joahaz (also known as Jehoahaz) remained on the throne for three months. At the end of that time, Pharaoh Necho came to Jerusalem and deposed Joahaz, placing a tribute on the land of Judah of 100 talents of silver and a talent of gold. Joahaz was taken to Egypt for the remainder of his life.

2. Jehoiakim.

Necho now placed Eliakim upon the throne of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim's first act was to raise a levy of taxes to pay a bribe to the Egyptians. Jeremiah had been prophesying for nearly 20 years when Jehoiakim became king. The prophet denounced the wickedness of the leadership of Judah and warned that Jehoiakim would die and, instead of a royal burial, he would be given that accorded to a beast of burden.

a. The Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.).

Pharaoh Necho met Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish on the Euphrates in 605 B.C. The Egyptians were defeated with enormous losses. They retreated south with Nebuchadnezzar hot on their heels.

b. Nebuchadnezzar in Palestine.

Prince Nebuchadnezzar pursued the Egyptian forces all the way down to Palestine, encountering no serious resistance along the way.

As Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Canaan, he called for Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to swear allegiance to him and pay a tribute. Jehoiakim complied and was permitted to retain his throne.

Nebuchadnezzar also took hostages from among the Hebrew nobility at this time. Among these hostages was Daniel and his companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These were taken to Babylon to receive a Chaldean indoctrination.

c. The Chaldean/Egyptian War.

Nebuchadnezzar mounted an invasion into Egypt in 601 B.C. The outcome of this campaign was indecisive with each side inflicting heavy casualties upon the other. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to regroup and strengthen his forces.

d. Judah's Rebellion (597 B.C.).

Jehoiakim saw this and interpreted it as a defeat for

Nebuchadnezzar. He promptly rebelled and allied himself with the Egyptians. Retribution from Babylon was quick in coming. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and threw Jehoiakim into chains, and placed his 18 year old son Jehoiachin on the throne.

3. Jehoiachin (597 B.C.).

Jehoiachin, also known as Coniah, was only 18 years old when he became king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar set him upon the throne and then moved down against Egypt. While he was in Egypt, young Jehoiachin foolishly rebelled, contrary to the advice of Jeremiah.

Nebuchadnezzar returned, recaptured Jerusalem, and took Jehoiachin, his family, servants and princes, threw them into chains, and marched them away to Babylon. This second deportation was made up of about 10,000 of the nobles of Judah. Among them was the prophet Ezekiel.

4. Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.).

Having deposed Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar now placed Zedekiah, uncle to Jehoiachin, upon the throne of Judah.

a. Intrigue with Egypt.

Zedekiah was constantly vacillating between Egypt and Babylon. In 593 B.C. when Pharaoh Necho died, representatives from the city-states of Edom, Moab, Ammon and Tyre met in Jerusalem, hoping that the new Egyptian ruler would join them in a new rebellion against Babylon.

However, the new pharaoh, Psammetichus II, adopted a policy of non-interference. The plot against Babylon left Zedekiah on the spot and he had to travel to Babylon where he swore allegiance once again to Nebuchadnezzar.

b. Rebellion.

In 588 B.C. Psammetichus II died and Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) came to the throne of Egypt. He immediately persuaded the countries in and around Palestine to join him in

a revolt against Babylon.

- c. Jerusalem under siege.

Nebuchadnezzar assembled his army and invaded Palestine, setting up his headquarters at Riblah on the Orontes River. From there, he launched simultaneous invasions of Judah, Ammon, Edom and Tyre with a small reconnaissance patrol to the Egyptian border.

Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah, asking for help from the Lord. Jeremiah's response was that the city of Jerusalem was doomed.

You shall also say to this people, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. 9 He who dwells in this city will die by the sword and by famine and by pestilence; but he who goes out and falls away to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live, and he will have his own life as booty. 10 For I have set My face against this city for harm and not for good,' declares the Lord. 'It will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire.''" (Jeremiah 21:8-10).

Judah was quickly overrun except for the cities of Jerusalem, Lachish, and Eziekah. The siege of Jerusalem began on January 588 B.C. It would be another year and a half before the city was taken.

- d. The siege lifted.

The siege of Jerusalem was temporarily interrupted when Pharaoh Hophra led the Egyptian army up into Palestine in an attempt to relieve Tyre and Sidon. When the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they lifted the siege from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37:5). Many of the inhabitants of the city were heartened by this, thinking that it indicated a turn in their fortunes. Instead of heeding the warnings of Jeremiah, they strengthened their resolve to hold

out against Nebuchadnezzar.

As Pharaoh Hophra marched up along the Way of the Philistines, the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem pulled out and hit the Egyptians, driving them back into Egypt. Having defeated the Egyptian threat, they returned to Jerusalem.

e. The fall of Jerusalem.

The siege continued for many long months as the food ran out and disease and starvation spread through the city. On July 10, 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's forces broke through the northern wall of Jerusalem. It would be another month before the southern wall could be taken.

On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him. During this siege, Zedekiah and the remnants of his army broke out of Jerusalem and fled east toward Jericho, only to be captured and brought to Riblah where Nebuchadnezzar still maintained his headquarters. When he was come. Nebuchadnezzar began to call him a wicked wretch and a covenant-breaker and one that had forgotten his former words, when he promised to keep the country for him. (Antiquities 10:8:2).

Zedekiah was forced to watch his sons being executed and then his eyes were put out. He was thrown into chains to be dragged back to Babylon where he would die in prison. The Jewish survivors were hauled across the Syrian Desert to Babylon, many of them perishing en route. Jerusalem was

burned and the walls of the city were torn down. All military, civil, and religious leaders were either executed or carried away into captivity. The Southern Kingdom of Judah had ceased to exist.

1st & 2nd CHRONICLES

A View from the Temple

When we come to the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles, we find ourselves in familiar territory. It is familiar because much of this same material has been covered in the pages of the books of 2nd Samuel and 1st and 2nd Kings. At the same time, there are some distinct differences in outlook between these books. The most distinctive difference is that the books of Chronicles have a temple outlook. Everything in Chronicles is stated from the perspective of the temple. The relationship of the books of Samuel and Kings to Chronicles is similar to the relationship of the Synoptic Gospels to the Gospel of John.

Samuel and Kings	Relates historical fact with little commentary	Synoptic Gospels
Chronicles	Tells meaning of the fact	John

If the books of Samuel and Kings have their focus upon the kings and prophets of Judah and Israel, the books of Chronicles have their focus upon the tabernacle and the temple. Kings relates the political and royal fortunes of the nation while Chronicles focuses upon the sacred and ecclesiastical aspects of the nation.

Kings	Chronicles
Prophetic Perspective: Judgments	Priestly Perspective: Hope
Wars are prominent	Temple is prominent
History of the thrones	Continuity of the Davidic line
Record of both Israel & Judah	Mostly Judah
Morality	Redemption

The books of Chronicles will give a particular perspective. It is a perspective that sees the history of the kings of Israel as seen from the temple in Jerusalem. As a rule, if something cannot be seen from the temple, it is

generally not emphasized, even if it is mentioned at all. While the ministries of Elijah and Elisha occupied a position of prominence in the books of the Kings, they are barely even mentioned in Chronicles.

PURPOSE OF CHRONICLES

The books of Chronicles are written to those who have returned from Babylon. The return itself is mentioned in the last two verses of the book. It begins with a series of genealogies that go all the way back to Adam and it closes with the Israelites back in their own land. We could say by inference that it begins in the Garden of Eden and it ends with the people of God back in the place where God had planted them. The following reasons can be surmised:

1. To set forth a record of the priestly worship of God's people from David to the exile. This is seen by way of the temple perspective we mentioned earlier. The temple was the place of worship and there is a special emphasis upon worship within this book.

God takes worship seriously. He gives an entire book of worship music in the Psalms; He gives an instruction manual of worship in the book of Leviticus; and He gives a history of worship here in the Chronicles.

2. To show the fulfillment of the promises of the Mosaic Law regarding faithfulness and unfaithfulness to the covenant. The Law had foretold what would be the penalty for the transgressing of the covenant. It would bring travail and invasion and ultimately it would bring removal from the land. This is all described in the books of Chronicles.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES

The first nine chapters of Chronicles are largely made up of genealogical lists. These genealogies begin with Adam and echo those which are found in Genesis, taking all the way to the establishment of the twelve tribes of Israel. There is a sense in which these chapters are a genealogical recapitulation of everything from Genesis to 1st Samuel.

1 Chron 1-9	1 Chron 10-29	2 Chron 1-9	2 Chron 10-28	2 Chron 29-36
Genealogies of Israel	The United Kingdom		Divided Kingdom	Reunited Kingdom
	King David	King Solomon	Kings of Judah	
Genesis to 1 Samuel	2 Samuel	1 Kings		2 Kings

The beginning of the book is similar to the beginning of the book of Matthew and is given for the same reason. Both books establish the genealogy of the king; Matthew does this by going back to Abraham, but the Chronicles do it by showing the line of the king all the way back to Adam. We are then given a thumbnail sketch of the table of nations before Israel in particular is singled out.

The rest of these genealogical records take us through all twelve of the tribes of Israel, though there is no mention of the tribe of Dan. Instead the sons of Joseph are each laid out.

1	Adam to Abraham and his sons	Lineage of David
2	Sons of Israel down to David	
3	Sons of David and Solomon	
4	Sons of Judah and Simeon	
5	Sons of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh	
6	Sons of Levi, their musicians, and their settlements	
7	Sons of Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Asher	
8	Sons of Benjamin (given in greater detail)	
9	Summary of Jerusalem after the exile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Priestly families Levitical families 	

Following this long and extended genealogical record, our narrative opens with the death of King Saul. The writer assumes that you are already familiar with Saul, so he is given no extended introduction. His mention is to provide a backdrop for the introduction of the kingship of the house of David. The rest of 1st Chronicles is taken with the reign of David.

KINGS AND CHRONICLES IN PARALLEL

2nd Chronicles contains a parallel history with that which is found in 1st and 2nd Kings. Because of this, we shall not spend a great deal of time repeating an overview of that period of history except to point out the very important difference between these two accounts. It is one of perspective. As we have already noted, the perspective of the books of Chronicles is always from the vantage point of the Temple. It is this temple perspective that is the particular distinctive of this book.

		United Kingdom	1st Chron	1 Adam (Genealogies)
1st Kings	1 Reign of Solomon			10 Reign of David
		Divided Kingdom	2nd Chron	1 Reign of Solomon
12 Jeroboam	10 Focus on the Southern Kingdom of Judah to the Captivity			
2nd Kings	17 Elijah & Ahab			No mention of the ministries of Elijah or Elisha
	1 Elijah & Ahaziah			
	2 Elisha			
	17 Fall of Samaria			
	18 Hezekiah	Judah Alone		
	25 Babylonian Captivity	Exile		36:22 Return from Babylon

The reformations under Hezekiah and Josiah are described in terms of a reformation of both Israel as well as Judah, even though the northern kingdom of Israel had by this time been taken away into captivity.

Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote

letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. (2 Chronicles 30:1).

This indicates that a remnant had escaped the Assyrian deportation of the northern kingdom and that the ten lost tribes were not as lost as some today suppose. When Josiah calls the people to celebrate the Passover, we read that all Judah and Israel were involved in this celebration (2 Chronicles 35:18).

The writer of the Chronicles draws our attention to the importance of a right relationship with the Lord in the area of worship. The high points of the book are those times when God's people are devoting themselves to returning to a worship of the Lord. That an entire book of the Bible is concerned with the history of worship suggests how we ought to evaluate our own lives. Do we count success in terms of worship?

1 Chron 1-9	1 Chron 10-29	2 Chron 1-9	2 Chron 10-28	2 Chron 29-36
Genealogies of Israel	The United Kingdom		Divided Kingdom	Reunited Kingdom
	King David		Kings of Judah	
	Preparations for the temple	Construction of the temple	Temple forgotten	Temple restored & destroyed

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

And Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, “Because I bore him with pain.” 10 Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my border, and that Thy hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from harm, that it may not pain me!” And God granted him what he requested. (1 Chronicles 4:9-10).

There is a typical play on words with the name of Jabez. He asks that the Lord would keep him from harm that it may not pain me! Literally, that it might not *jabez* me. We are not told all that much about Jabez but we are

told some rather significant things.

1. We are told that he was an honorable man in an environment that was not honorable.
2. We are told the meaning of his name and this is evidently meant to have significance.
3. We are told the details of his prayer for blessing. He asked for the blessing of God. He asks specifically for an enlarging of his territory and that God's hand would be with Him. He asked that the Lord would keep him from evil and that he would not be the cause of pain.
4. We are told that God answered his prayer.

Bruce Wilkinson's little book "The Prayer of Jabez" is only 90 pages and they are small pages with fairly large print. The book is about prayer and specifically uses the Prayer of Jabez as a model for prayer in much the same way that we typically use the Lord's Prayer for such a model. There is nothing in itself wrong with this as there are a lot of prayers in the Scriptures that could serve as similar models.

Why do the Scriptures give us this information? Are we to think of it as mere interesting Bible trivia or are we to do as Wilkinson has done and ponder the message found here and apply it to our own prayer life? I can not fault him for wishing to apply the Scriptures, though we ought to use due caution in not making this the only prayer that we pray.

THE REIGN OF DAVID

1 st Chronicles					
1-9	10	11-12	13-16	17-27	28-29
Genealogies	Histories				
	Death of Saul	Reign of King David			
		Mighty men	Ark & worship	Covenant promises	Temple site

1. David's Mighty Men (1st Chronicles 11-12).

This section begins with all Israel coming and recognizing

David's kingship. *Then all Israel gathered to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. 2 In times past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel; and the Lord your God said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and you shall be prince over My people Israel.'"* (1 Chronicles 11:1-2).

Notice the reference to Israel being the “bone and flesh” of David. This is meant to remind us of the language of the first marriage in the Garden of Eden where the woman was to be bone of Adam’s bone and flesh of Adam’s flesh. The Israelites use that sort of marriage language to describe their relationship with David as their king.

We can understand this language to point ultimately to David’s better Son, the person of Jesus who is the bridegroom of the church. What Israel says of David, we say to the Son of David — we are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh.

From here, we are taken on a brief tour of the exploits of some of David’s mighty men. Particularly heroic is the story of a time when David was campaigning against the Philistines in the area near Bethlehem. David longed for a drink of water and three of his mighty men fought their way through the Philistine lines to obtain for him a drink of water from the well in Bethlehem. Rather than drink it, he poured it out as an offering and a testimony to his concern for the lives of his men. The story reminds us of the One who was greater than David who also came from Bethlehem.

David	Jesus
Born in Bethlehem.	Born in Bethlehem.
His mighty men put themselves at risk.	He is the “mighty man” who gave of Himself for others.
Poured out the water they brought because of their sacrifice.	Poured out His own blood for us as the ultimate sacrifice.

2. Ark of the Covenant and Worship of God (1st Chronicles 13-16).

We have already been introduced to the ark of the covenant. This represented the throne of God upon earth. It had been lost to the Philistines in the days of Saul, but then had been returned when the

Lord brought signs of judgment against those people. It was returned to the Israelites, but they kept it in Kiriath-jearim in the territory of Judah. David resolved to bring it up to Jerusalem.

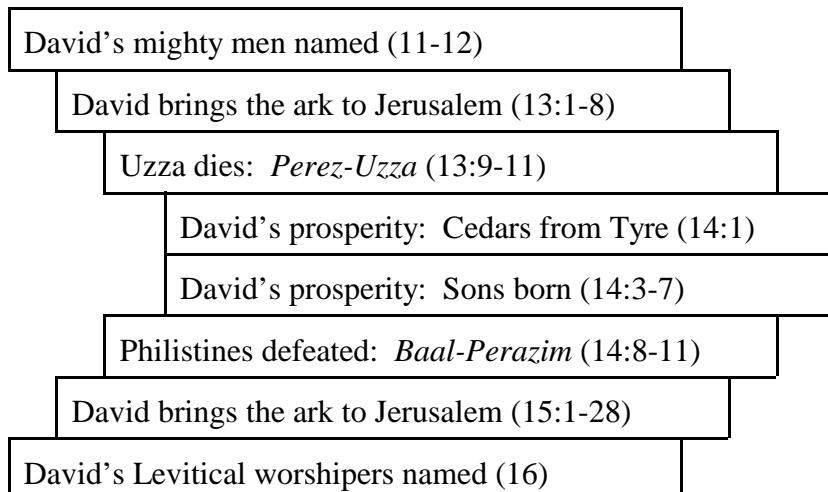
David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim, which belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, the Lord who is enthroned above the cherubim, where His name is called. 7 They carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. 8 David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals and with trumpets. 9 When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it. 10 The anger of the Lord burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark; and he died there before God. 11 Then David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzza; and he called that place Perez-uzza to this day. (1 Chronicles 13:6-11).

As the ark was being brought to Jerusalem, an unfortunate tragedy took place. Instead of transporting the ark in the manner that had been prescribed, it was placed on an ox cart like a piece of furniture. It was much more than that; it represented the throne of the Lord of heaven.



As the cart was jostled, Uzza put up his hand to steady the ark and he was struck dead by the Lord. David named the place Perez-

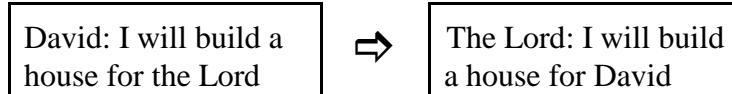
uzza because the Lord had *perez* against Uzza. The word *perez* means “outburst” and Uzza had suffered the affects of that outburst. The transportation of the ark is halted here and not resumed until chapter 14. In the interim, we are told of David’s other activities and this forms a chiastic outline for this section.



After relating David’s overthrow of the Philistines at a place that is given the name *Baal-Perazim* (“outburst of Baal”), David moves to bring the ark the rest of the way to Jerusalem. This time he is careful to have the ark moved in the proper way: *Then David said, “No one is to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for the Lord chose them to carry the ark of God and to minister to Him forever.”* (1 Chronicles 15:2). The entire section is concluded as David names the various Levitical worshipers who will care for the ark and for the temple.

3. Covenant Promises (1st Chronicles 17-27).

This section begins with David making plans to build a house for the Lord. The Lord responds through Nathan the prophet with a message that it is the Lord who will build a house for David (17:10).



The Lord goes on to tell of how David will have a descendant whose kingdom will be established and whose throne will be forever

(17:11-14). As we read the details of this prophecy, we can understand it being fulfilled in the person of Solomon, the son of David who succeeded him to the throne. At the same time, we are given to understand that the prophecy does not conclude with Solomon. It suggests the coming of One who will be greater than Solomon.

Solomon	Jesus
Son of David.	Ultimate Son of David.
Established united monarchy of Israel.	Established kingdom of God on earth.
He built the temple.	He is the temple.
Established a kingdom that would last until 586 B.C.	Established a kingdom that will never end.
Chastened because of his iniquity.	Chastened because of our iniquities.

4. David's Census: *Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel (1 Chronicles 21:1).*

The account of David's census is repeated in 2 Samuel 24, but it is only here that we learn that Satan was the instigator of this census. This brings up the question: why was it wrong for David to take a census of the people? It seems to have been a matter of pride on the part of David but, more than that, the numbering of the people stands in opposition to the promise that had been given to Abraham that there would come a day when the descendants of Israel would be unable to be numbered (Genesis 15:5; 26:4).

Though he is warned by Joab, his chief of staff, against this course of action, David's will prevails and the numbering takes place. As a result, judgment is pronounced against Israel and David is given three choices as to the form that judgment will take:

- Three years of famine.¹

¹ 2 Samuel 24:13 reads "seven years of famine." This may be due to a scribal error, though we have no direct manuscript evidence that this is the case.

- Three months of military defeat.
- Three days of pestilence.

David chooses the last of these alternatives, considering it better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hands of his enemies. Accordingly, a pestilence comes upon Israel so that 70,000 die. It is as this destruction comes upon Jerusalem that there is a reprieve.

And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but as he was about to destroy it, the Lord saw and was sorry over the calamity, and said to the destroying angel, “It is enough; now relax your hand.” And the angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16 Then David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, with his drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, covered with sackcloth, fell on their faces. 17 David said to God, “Is it not I who commanded to count the people? Indeed, I am the one who has sinned and done very wickedly, but these sheep, what have they done? O Lord my God, please let Your hand be against me and my father’s household, but not against Your people that they should be plagued.” (1 Chronicles 21:15-17).

As the angel of the Lord moves against Jerusalem and comes to the site of the future temple, there is a reprieve. David makes intercession for the nation, asking that the hand of God be against his own life instead of against the lives of the people. He offers his own life as a substitute. In this offering, we are reminded of another time when the angel of the Lord came as a messenger of death. It was the time of the Exodus when the Passover was instituted. At that time, the blood of the Passover lamb availed to cause the angel of death to pass over each house where the blood was applied. This time there is no Passover lamb. This time it is the king who is offering his own life as a substitute.

Jesus fulfills both these types. He is both our Passover lamb as well as the king who offers Himself in place of His people. He is the One whose sacrifice is prefigured in all of the sacrifices that would ever take place within the temple.

Passover	The Census	The Cross
Egypt	Jerusalem	
Angel of Death coming upon all of Egypt	Angel of Death coming upon all of Jerusalem	Penalty for sin coming upon all of the world
Blood of the Passover lamb allows the angel of death to pass over each house	David intercedes for the people of Jerusalem and offers a sacrifice to the Lord	The Better David offered Himself as the ultimate interceding sacrifice

David subsequently purchased the threshing floor of Ornan where the pestilence ceased its deadly advance and here he built an altar to the Lord. It would be on this same site that the temple would ultimately be constructed. You will recall that Abraham's offering of Isaac took place in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22:2). We learn here in 2 Chronicles 3:1 that the setting for the temple site was on Mount Moriah. Tradition has it that it was on the exact same location where Abraham had offered his son Isaac. It is fitting that the place where God initially offered a ram as a substitute for the ancestor of the Israelites should also be the location for the construction of the temple. It would be within eyesight of that temple that Jesus would hang upon a cross, serving as the ultimate substitute to pay for the sins of the world.

THE ARK BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM

The focus of Chronicles quickly turns to the Temple and its furnishings. Notable among those furnishings was the Ark of the Covenant.

And David said to all the assembly of Israel, “If it seems good to you, and if it is from the Lord our God, let us send everywhere to our kinsmen who remain in all the land of Israel, also to the priests and Levites who are with them in their cities with pasture lands, that they may meet with us; 3 and let us bring back the ark of our God to us, for we did not seek it in the days of Saul.” (1 Chronicles 13:2-3).

The ark was a wooden chest overlaid with gold. It had a top of solid gold on which were mounted the figures of two cherubim - two angels perched as an honor guard. The ark represented the throne of God. It was the place where God was said to be “seated above the cherubim.”

The ark had been lost at the Battle of Ebenezer (1 Samuel 4). The Philistines had taken it and had placed in one of their pagan temples. But then they found their idols falling apart and plagues breaking out in their city. They had moved the ark from city to city and had experienced this same phenomenon in each city into which they brought the ark.

Finally, the Philistines had returned to ark to Israel. But the Israelites had no better luck. Some Levites had taken in upon themselves to look inside the ark and a number of men had died. The ark had now sat in the house of Abinadab for nearly 70 years. Saul had not sought to change its place of residence. But David did. And by so doing, David demonstrated a care for the things of the Lord.

And they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. 8 And David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, even with songs and with lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and with trumpets. (1 Chronicles 13:7-8).

David and the Israelites were doing the right thing, but they were doing it in the wrong way. In the midst of their celebration, they were sowing the seeds of disaster. God had given explicit instructions as to how the ark was to be handled. No one was to touch the ark. It was to be carried by two wooden poles which ran through rings along the side of the ark. These poles were never to be removed (Exodus 25:15). But when the Philistines had sought to return the ark to Israel, they had placed it onto a cart. The Israelites had now adopted that method of moving the ark. They even went so far as to obtain a brand new cart. But they ignored God's design.

We can fall into the same snare. We do this when we adopt the world's methods and ignore God's timeless truths concerning how we are to worship Him and how we are to do His work. A lot of people want to love God without obeying His precepts. But when God says to do something a certain way, we need to do it that way.

When they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, because the oxen nearly upset it. 10 And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzza, so He struck him down because he put out his hand to

the ark; and he died there before God. (1 Chronicles 13:9-10).

Uzza was the son of Abinadab, the high priest. He had grown up in the house with the ark. And it seems as though he had grown a little casual about the presence of the ark. And so, it did not seem an important thing to touch the ark. After all, he didn't want to see the ark bouncing down the street.

Then David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzza; and he called that place Perez-uzza to this day. (1 Chronicles 13:11).

There is a play on words here. It reads literally that “David became angry because of the PEREZ of the Lord PEREZED against Uzza, and the place is now called PEREZ-Uzza to this day.” David’s reaction to God’s outburst was anger.

People sometimes become angry with God. They forget that we do not worship a little God. He is holy. He is other than we are. The question is not why did God kill Uzza, but rather why He does not kill us, too.

There is a lesson here. It is that we can get so used to God’s grace that we come to take it for granted. The disciples did that. They ate with Jesus and talked with Him and walked with Him. And then one night in the middle of a storm-tossed sea, they watched Him still the storm with a single word and they were startled with the terrifying realization that He was different.

The ark is not mentioned again until chapter 15, but when it is finally moved to Jerusalem, David gives some very explicit instructions as to how no one is to carry the ark except the Levites (1 Chronicles 15:2).

DAVID’S DESIRE FOR A TEMPLE

And it came about, when David dwelt in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet, “Behold, I am dwelling in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord is under curtains.” (1 Chronicles 17:1).

David’s next concern was a permanent dwelling in which to house the ark. Since the days of the Wilderness Wanderings, the ark had been kept within the Tabernacle - a tent designated as the “Tent of Meeting.” In those early days, it was necessary for this structure to be a tent, for the Israelites

were a nomadic people and they required a portable place of worship.

That had now changed. They now had a land in which the Lord had given them rest. They had a capital city. And David felt that it was appropriate that a permanent place of worship be established - a House of God. He begins making plans to build such a house for the Lord.

The Lord comes through Nathan the prophet and says that David is not to build a house for the Lord. Rather, it is the Lord who will build a house for David.

“...Moreover, I tell you that the Lord will build a house for you. 11 And it shall come about when your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who shall be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. 12 He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. 13 I will be his father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. 14 But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.”
(1 Chronicles 17:10b-14).

The promise to David revolves around the establishment of a seed (the word translated “descendant” in verse 11 is literally “seed”). This takes us all the way back to Genesis 3:15. It was there that the Lord had promised Adam and Eve that there would come One who would be of the seed of the woman. This Seed would crush the serpent's head. He would be the destroyer of the works of Satan. This promise is fulfilled in two parts. The immediate fulfillment will be in the person of Solomon. He will be the seed who will build a house in the name of the Lord. It will be Solomon who constructs the temple of God in Jerusalem. Solomon will found the Davidic dynasty. But the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is seen in Jesus.

Dead Sea Scroll 4Q Florilegium, a midrash scroll, shows that the Qumran scribes took the “son” in verse 13 to be a reference to Messiah.

THE DIVISION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

In 1st Chronicles 24 we read of how David divided the priests by lot into 24 families. The priestly service would be rotated among these families so that each family would serve in the temple twice a year. All of the priests

would come together at the special feast days. This system of 24 courses would continue in the days of the New Testament and is mentioned in Luke 1 where Zacharias was of the division of Abijah (Luke 1:5).

In the following chapter, there are a corresponding division of 24 groups of singers and musicians. Their duty was to accompany the daily times of worship with a symphony of praise and to prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals (1st Chronicles 25:1).

We see this same grouping of 24 elders in the book of Revelation where 24 elders are pictured in heaven around the throne of God as the worship and honor Him and sing praises to Him. We are called to the same service of worship. We are called today as a people who have been set apart for worship to the Lord. This involves a praise of music and of prayer.

PLANS FOR THE TEMPLE

Throughout 1st Chronicles 28, David sets forth what will be the plans of the new temple that will be built by Solomon and then he concludes in verse 19, “All this,” said David, “the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern.”

This is significant. Both the plans of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and now the temple in Jerusalem had a heavenly architect. They were both planned and designed by the Lord. Hebrews 8:5 says that Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

Why was it so important that the tabernacle and the temple be built according to such exact specifications? It is because both the tabernacle and the temple were to serve as a picture and a type of the Messiah who was to come.

SOLOMON’S TEMPLE

At the time of the death of David, the ark of the covenant was residing in a tent in Jerusalem that had been set up for that purpose while the tabernacle was still located in Gibeon.

Then Solomon, and all the assembly with him, went to the high place which was at Gibeon; for God’s tent of meeting was there, which Moses the servant of the Lord had

made in the wilderness. 4 However, David had brought up the ark of God from Kiriyath-jearim to the place he had prepared for it; for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 1:3-4).

Chapters 3-7 of 2nd Chronicles is given over to the building of the Temple. We are given details of both its construction as well as the worship and celebration that takes place once it is completed.

- The construction and furnishing of the Temple (3-4).
- The ark is brought to the Temple (5).
- Solomon's prayer of dedication (6).
- The celebration of dedication (7).

Construction of the Temple began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 6:1). The building project took seven years and was climaxed with the dedication of the Temple.

- Location: The site for the Temple was high atop a threshing place at the top of Mount Moriah, located just north of the old Jebusite city of Jerusalem. The name *Moriah* (מוריה) seems to carry the idea of "the place where it shall be seen." The name was significant because it had been here that Abraham had offered up Isaac and it had been seen that he was faithful.

And Abraham called the name of that place The Lord Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the Lord it will be provided." (Genesis 22:14).

This is one of those cases where the King James Version has given us a more exact translation: *Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the*



Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem

Lord it shall be seen. The Hebrew word רָאַה (ra'ah) means “to see” and the use of the Qal imperfect as found in יְהִי רָאָה is better translated, “The Lord will see.”

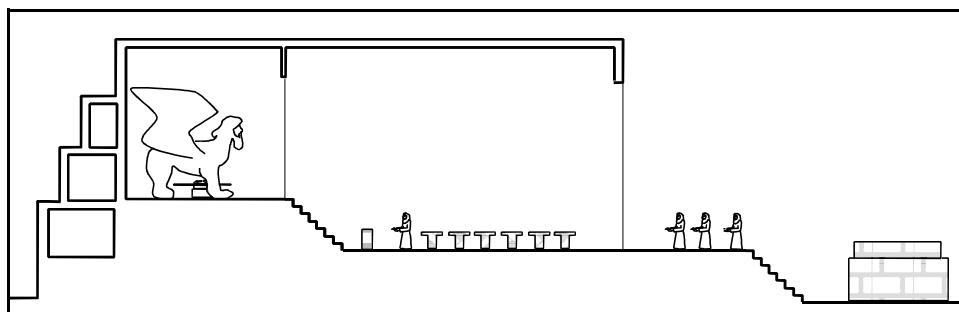
- Structure: The Temple was patterned after the same structure of the Tabernacle, except that it was bigger. Because it was built upon a mountain, you went up a series of stairs till you came to the highest part of the Temple -- the Holy of Holies. The highest part of the mount today is that portion of the bedrock around which is built the Dome of the Rock.
- The Bronze Altar: The altar was a huge structure measuring 20 cubits square and 10 cubits in height. This would be the scene of the daily sacrifices.
- The Sea: Outside the temple was a great laver of water known to the Jews as “the Sea” measuring 10 cubits in diameter (4:2). This laver stood on the backs of 12 oxen. When Revelation 4 pictures the elders gathered around the throne of God and a great crystal sea, this is an image from the temple.
- The furniture: Instead of a single lampstand and a single table of showbread, the temple held ten lampstands and ten tables of bread.

When the work was completed, Solomon called for the ark of the covenant to be brought and housed in the temple.

Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple.

And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. (2 Chronicles 7:1-2).

In the same way that the Lord had moved into the Tabernacle in the days of Moses, so now His presence was manifested in the Temple. Thus was fulfilled the promise that God would be with His people.



There are no remains of Solomon's Temple. It was destroyed by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. A second temple was rebuilt on this same spot, but that was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. Today there stands on that same site the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test Solomon with difficult questions. She had a very large retinue, with camels carrying spices, and a large amount of gold and precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was on her heart. 2 And Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from Solomon which he did not explain to her. (2 Chronicles 9:1-2).

Sheba was located in the southwestern area of Arabia; in the land today known as Yemen. It is the most fertile area of Arabia and sat astride the trade routes bringing wares up and down the coasts of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The queen of this country travels to Israel because she has heard of the fabled words and wisdom of Solomon. She comes to meet him and to hear about the God he worships. At the end of her visit, she praises Solomon for his greatness and his wisdom and she blesses the Lord for the way in which He has provided.

A thousand years later, Jesus would speak of the encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and He would make an application from it. The application is to ask whether you will see what she came to see.

The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:42).

The Queen of Sheba came to see a man of great wisdom and great wealth. But that is not all she came to see. She also came to see what God had done. Have you seen it? Have you seen what God has done in the coming of the One who was greater than Solomon? If you have not seen Him and given your life to Him, then there is coming a day when the Queen of

Sheba will rise up and condemn you because you have the opportunity to see what she saw.

REHOBOAM

The writer of the Chronicles sets forth the career of Rehoboam in a chiastic outline that begins with the same revolt of the ten northern tribes as we have already seen in 1 Kings. This event and a summary statement of the reign and wars that he had with Jeroboam serve as bookends to look at the reign of this king.

Introduction: Revolt of Jeroboam & 10 northern tribes (10)

Invasion of Israel by Judah forbidden (11:1-4)
– Prophecy of Shemaiah

Establishment of fortified cities in Judah (11:5-10)

Support of Priests & Levites (11:13-17)

Placement princes of Judah in fortified cities of Judah
(11:18-23)

Invasion of Judah by Egypt (12:1-12)
– Prophecy of Shemaiah

Conclusion: Summary of reign & warfare with Jeroboam
(12:13-16)

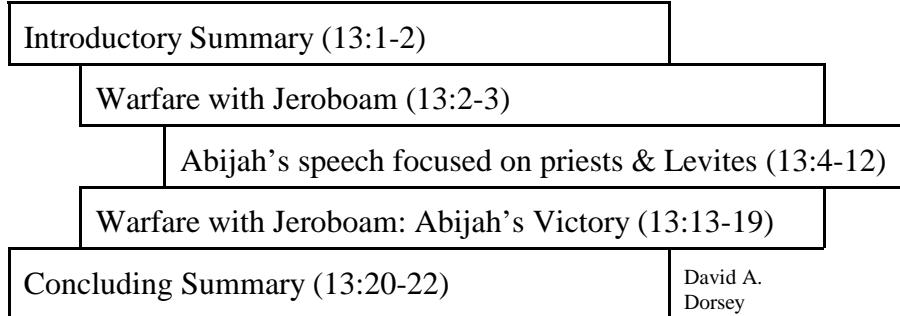
David A.
Dorsey

Notice that the fulcrum of this chiastic parallel is not on Rehoboam's political career, but on his establishment of the priests and the Levites in Jerusalem as seen in contrast to Jeroboam who had excluded them from worship. This serves to remind us that the Chronicler is concerned primarily with the priestly life of the nation rather than its political or military life. To be sure, the actions of prophets and kings will be given, but it will regularly be the ministry of the Levitical priesthood that is made central and pivotal.

ABIJAH

As we saw with the life of Rehoboam, so also the life and career of

Abijah is given in a chiastic format with the priests and Levites occupying the central, pivotal place in the narrative. In this case, that central place is given to a speech of the king that has the ministry of the priests and the Levites as its focus.



ASA

The reign of Asa was marked by a period of reformation and restoration as he removed the foreign altars and high places, leading the people of Judah back to the Lord. This reform was followed by an invasion from a giant army from Ethiopia.

Now Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and he came to Mareshah. 10 So Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up in battle formation in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. (2 Chronicles 14:9-10).

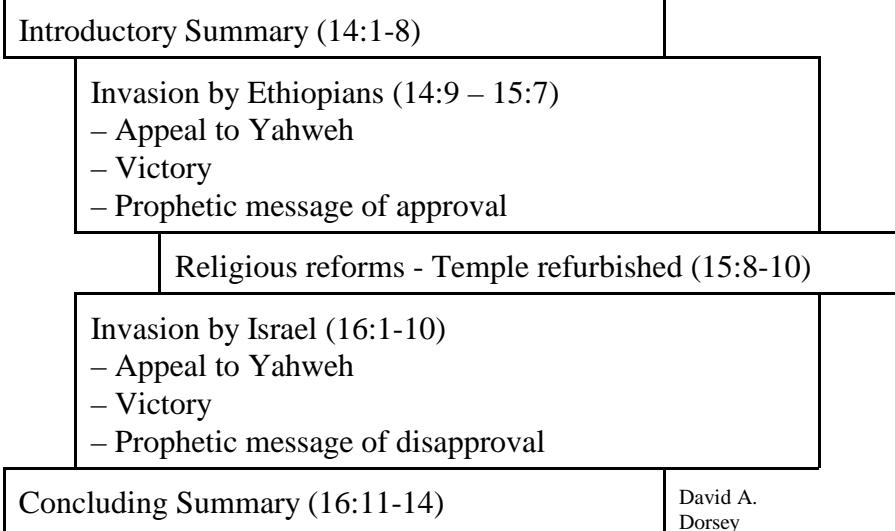
Egyptologist Flinders Petrie felt this to be a reference to Osorkon I of the 22nd Dynasty of Egypt. This was the dynasty that united Egypt after the 3rd Intermediate Period. It was a dynasty made up largely of Libyans and they ruled for 200 years, running at the same time as the 23rd and 24th Dynasties and would be followed by a Dynasty from Nubia to the south.

In any case, we are given to understand that a massive Ethiopian army marched against the kingdom of Judah. Asa led his forces out and then called upon the name of the Lord for deliverance.

Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, "Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come

against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You." 12 So the Lord routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. (2 Chronicles 14:11-12).

Following this great victory, the revival in Judah spread to the northern tribes to that Asa *gathered all Judah and Benjamin and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.* (2 Chronicles 15:9). This announcement becomes the pivotal fulcrum of the Ada narrative:



The latter part of this narrative also gives a story of victory, but it is a political victory, even as it is also a spiritual defeat. Instead of trusting in the Lord against the attacks of Israel, Asa puts his trust in a military alliance with Ben-Hadad of Damascus, bribing him to attack Israel. The plan is militarily successful, but Asa is rebuked by Hanani the seer for having trusted in men rather than in God. This legacy is followed to the end of his days.

JEHOSHAPHAT

Jehoshaphat had seen the results of his father's failures as he wasted away with a disease that started in his feet and which eventually took his life (2 Chronicles 16:12).

1. Jehoshaphat's Faithfulness.

And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David's earlier days and did not seek the Baals, 4 but sought the God of his father, followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did. 5 So the Lord established the kingdom in his control, and all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. (2 Chronicles 17:3-5).

Jehoshaphat did not have a good example in his own father, but he nevertheless determined to follow the godly example of his forefather, David. I have had the good fortune to have godly parents who sought to follow the Lord. Perhaps you did not have parents like that. If that is the case, you can “borrow” the heritage of your spiritual ancestors and you can pass it on to those who come after you.

2. Jehoshaphat's Training Program.

Then in the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah; 8 and with them the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests. 9 And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. (2 Chronicles 17:7-9).

Jehoshaphat began an extensive discipleship program by sending out both officials and Levites and priests to teach the book of the Law to the people of Judah. There was apparently

a plan and a program to this discipleship and it involved a training program.

3. Jehoshaphat's Tribute from his Neighbors.

Now the dread of the Lord was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. 11 And some of the Philistines brought gifts and silver as tribute to Jehoshaphat; the Arabians also brought him flocks, 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats. 12 So Jehoshaphat grew greater and greater, and he built fortresses and store cities in Judah. (2 Chronicles 17:10-12).

When we read that *the dread of the Lord was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah*, we are inclined to think that those kingdoms were being terrorized by Judah. But that is not what the passage says. It says that *the dread of the Lord* was upon them. This same word that here is translated “dread” is often rendered “fear.” The motivation behind their tribute was the fear of the Lord.

4. Jehoshaphat's Ill-advised Alliance: *Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself by marriage with Ahab.* (2 Chronicles 18:1).

Ahab's father, Omri, had established a similar marital alliance with the king of Sidon when Ahab was married to Jezebel. This brought the worship of Baal into Israel, a situation that was faced by Elijah.

Now we read of Ahab and Jehoshaphat making an alliance. This involved the marriage of the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel to the son of Jehoshaphat and would ultimately result in Baal worship being introduced in Judah.

1 Kings 22:20 tells us that it was the Lord who sent a deceiving spirit to entice Ahab into this war with Ramoth-geliat and thus meet his death.

JOASH

The marriage alliance with Israel resulted in Athaliah murdering all of the family into which she had married. Only young Joash escaped: *He was hidden with them in the house of the Lord six years while Athaliah reigned over the land* (1 Chronicles 22:12). At the end of that period, Joash comes to power. By contrast with the 1 Kings account, the Chronicler gives us all the details of this rise to power; yet in keeping with the theme of the book, these details are all seen from the perspective of the temple.

The actual reign of Joash is given to us in the typical chiastic format with the pivotal event being the death of his mentor, the high priest Jehoiada.

Good beginning: Joash begins his reign, does what is right with Jehoiada's help (24:1-3)

Joash decides to restore the temple; confronts Jehoiada (24:4-7)

Joash influences princes: Temple repaired (24:8-14)

Jehoiada the priest dies (24:15-16)

Princes influence Joash: Temple abandoned (24:17-19)

Joash confronted by Zechariah, son of Jehoiada; Joash kills Zechariah (24:20-22)

Bad Ending: Joash is killed because of his sin of killing Jehoiada's son (24:23-27)

David A.
Dorsey

The reign of Joash is described in positive terms until the death of Jehoiada. From this time, he takes a turn for the worse as he is influenced by ungodly officials so that the temple is abandoned as they turn to follow idols. Even when prophets are sent to bring them back to the Lord, Joash gives them no heed but even has the prophet Zechariah (not the same one who wrote the book by the same name) put to death.

AMAZIAH

Amaziah is the story of a king who started right in the sight of the Lord, *yet not with a whole heart*, literally, “not with a heart of shalom”

(25:2). He raised a huge army to march against the Edomites and had even hired a group of mercenaries from Ephraim until he was warned by a man of God not to do so. Accordingly, he won a great victory over Edom, but he then brought back Edomite idols, *set them up as his gods, bowed down before them and burned incense to them* (25:14).

Amaziah was warned by a prophet, but paid no heed. Judah suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of Israel and a portion of the defensive wall of Jerusalem was torn down and the temple was robbed of its gold and silver utensils. Those who were disenchanted with Amaziah's poor leadership assassinated him.

UZZIAH

Uzziah was only sixteen years old when he came to the throne and his reign would prove to be long and prosperous. It is set forth in the typically chiastic style that we have come to expect.

Introductory Summary (26:1-3)

Good beginning: Early years of godliness & resulting prosperity (26:4-5)

Uzziah's successes (26:6-15)

Uzziah's pride: Enters the temple to usurp the priests' work (26:16)

Uzziah's disaster: Struck with leprosy (26:17-20)

Bad ending: Final years of shame because of his sin (26:21)

Concluding Summary (26:22-23)

Dorsey

The pivotal point in the reign of Uzziah is depicted when *he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense* (26:16). Rather than an act of reverence, this was perceived as an act of pride. As a result, he was struck with leprosy and so lived with the disease to the end of his days, unable to even approach the house of God. His death would take place on the same year that the prophet Isaiah would begin his ministry (Isaiah 6:1).

JOTHAM

Jotham served as regent during the days of his father's leprosy and then ruled as king after the death of his father. His rule is described as one of prosperity and obedience to the Lord, but we read that *he did not enter the temple of the Lord* (27:2), possibly as a reflection of what had happened to his father.

AHAZ

Not only did Ahaz fail to do right in the sight of the Lord, he went to the other extreme and made molten images of the Baals, sacrificing some of his male children in the fires of the Hinnom Valley on the west side of Jerusalem.

Introductory Summary (28:1)

Evil practices of Ahaz (28:1-4)

Military disasters at the hands of Aram and Israel because of the wickedness of Ahaz (28:5-8)

 Judah spared through a prophet's message (28:9-15)

Military disasters at the hands of Assyria because of the wickedness of Ahaz (28:16-21)

Evil practices of Ahaz (28:22-25)

Concluding Summary (28:26-27)

David Dorsey

The pivotal point in the story of Ahaz comes when Judah has suffered a great defeat at the hands of Israel, taking a massive number into captivity. A prophet is sent to Samaria and warns that the Israelites are in danger of bringing upon themselves the judgment of God. Accordingly, the captives are released and escorted home.

Instead of trusting in the Lord, Ahaz turns to the Assyrians for help against the double-pronged threat from Edom and Philistia. The Assyrians were not much help as their invasion did not distinguish between Edom, Philistia or Judah, but pillaged all parties before returning home. Instead of turning to the Lord, Ahaz continued in his idol worship, going so far as to close the doors of the house of the Lord (28:24).

HEZEKIAH

If Ahaz was among the worst of the kings of Judah, Hezekiah was one of the best. The beginning of his reign saw him undoing a great deal of the evil that which had been accomplished by his father.

1. Restoration of the Temple.

The chronicler gives us a thorough description of the cleansing of the temple, how the unclean things that had accumulated there were carried out to the Kidron Valley for disposal. The sacrifices were restored and a great celebration of worship held. So many offerings were brought that the priests were not able to keep up with them and the Levites were required to help with the priestly work, a task to which they gave themselves wholeheartedly.

2. Passover Observance.

Hezekiah called for a Passover celebration and sent invitations to all of Israel from Beersheba to Dan (30:5), that they should also be allowed to come and participate. While this invitation was met with scorn and rejection on the part of some, there were *some men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem* (30:11). This is significant because it means the revival under Hezekiah extended to the whole house of Israel. Because of time constraints, the celebration was moved to the second month rather than at its normal time in the first month.

3. Sennacherib's Invasion.

The Assyrians had already taken the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity in 721 B.C. Samaria had been laid waste and the kingdom was no more. Two decades later, the Assyrians were back under king Sennacherib. City after city fell before his onslaught and soon he had surrounded Jerusalem. Hezekiah turned once again to the Lord who *sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria* (32:21). The Assyrians departed, but they would return.

MANASSEH

Manasseh was only twelve years old when he came to the throne and the early years of his reign marked a falling away from the Lord. Once again, there were altars for the worship of Baal, even bringing such pagan altars into the temple of God. Tradition has it that Isaiah was put to death during this period.

Because of his sin, the Lord brought the Assyrians back, capturing Manasseh and taking him away in chains to Babylon. This proved to be a time of repentance as, only now, he turned toward the Lord. Though we are not told the details of how it took place, Manasseh was released and permitted to return to Jerusalem where he again took up the mantle of the kingship.

The rest of Manasseh's long reign was the spiritual opposite of his early years. Foreign gods and idols were removed and the repentant king sought for the rest of his life to lead his nation back to the Lord.

His son, Amon, reigned only a brief two years, but they were two years in which he turned away from the Lord to sacrifice to graven images. He was assassinated by his own servants and in his own house.

JOSIAH

The reign of Josiah is reminiscent of the days of Hezekiah. Once again, there was a turning back to the Lord. Once again, the word went out to the scattered remnants of Israel, calling for them to come and to celebrate a Passover to the Lord.

It was while the temple was being cleansed that a copy of the scroll of the law was discovered in the temple and brought to the king. When it was read in his presence, Josiah realized the magnitude of the sin of the nation and he sent an inquiry to the prophetess Huldah. The prophecy came back that the wrath of God was ordained to fall upon Judah, but because of the King's repentant spirit, that judgment would not come in his lifetime. His reign was to last for 31 years.

Meanwhile, there were world forces on a collision course that would eventually impact the tiny kingdom of Judah. A coalition of Babylon, the Medes, and the Scythians brought an end to the Assyrian Empire, destroying the city of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Into this power vacuum came Egypt as Pharaoh Necho sought to march against the forces of Babylon. To get there, it was necessary for his armies to pass through Israel, something which Josiah perceived as an act of war.

But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, “What have we to do with each other, O King of Judah? I am not coming against you today but against the house with which I am at war, and God has ordered me to hurry. Stop for your own sake from interfering with God who is with me, so that He will not destroy you.” (2 Chronicles 35:21).

Was the Egyptian pharaoh telling the truth? Had God actually ordered his march? It is true that he does not use the name of Yahweh, but only refers to God (Elohim), a reference that could refer to any one of the false gods of Egypt.

Josiah marched to intercept the Egyptian forces at Megiddo since it protected a narrow pass in the steep hills and would tend to bottleneck the large Egyptian force and render their chariots useless. We are not given much in the way of details of the actual battle, but it was a crushing Jewish defeat. It would become something of a byword in the same way we speak of Napoleon’s Waterloo. The book of Revelation makes reference to a great battle that culminates at Armageddon, literally, “Mount of Megiddo.”

THE SONS OF JOSIAH

We have already noted the careers of the sons of Josiah in our treatment of 2 Kings. There is little that is added by the chronicler as he depicts the continuing unfaithfulness of the ensuing kings. The chronicler gives this summary:

The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; 16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy. (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

The end came when the Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and captured it, pulling down its walls and burning the temple to the ground. The people were carried off into captivity. It is here that the chronicler adds a significant detail not previously given.

Those who had escaped from the sword he carried

away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

We learn here that the seventy year captivity was enforced so that the land could enjoy its sabbaths. This is a reference back to Leviticus 26:35 that warns Israelite unfaithfulness in keeping the ordinances of God which, among other things, included the command to observe a sabbatical year, would result in a captivity in which the people would be removed from the land so that the accumulated sabbatical observances could eventually be applied. It may be surmised that the Israelites had failed to observe the sabbatical years since the days of the judges.

What is interesting about this reference to seventy years and the corresponding sabbatical years that would have been involved in its calculation ($70 \times 7 = 490$) is that these same numbers appear in Daniel 9, not to look back at a past infraction of the covenant, but to look forward to the coming of God's Messiah who would bring an end to the old covenant and institute a new and better covenant through His death on the cross. When we see this correlation, we can understand how the entire Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Jesus, the King of the Jews who would bring a lasting Sabbath rest to the people of God.

EZRA

This book is named after the person who appears in chapters 7-10 of the book. Both the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the Greek Septuagint use Ezra (or Esdras) for the title. In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ezra was joined to the book of Nehemiah. This was done so that the number of the books of the Hebrew Bible would correspond to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, twenty-two.

Jerome divided the books into two separate books in his Latin Vulgate and our English Bibles follow this tradition. There seems to be some evidence that they were originally written as two separate books. Ezra 2 is repeated in Nehemiah 6:7-70 and this likely would not have been the case had they been written together.

The Septuagint included the books which we know as the Apocrypha. These were books which were reckoned by the Jews not to have the same authority as those which had been written by the prophets. The Septuagint contains an Apocryphal book of Esdras while the Latin Vulgate contains two such additional books.

Hebrew Bible	Septuagint	Vulgate	Apocrypha
Ezra	Esdras B	1st Esdras	—
Nehemiah	Esdras B	2nd Esdras	—
—	Esdras A	3rd Esdras	1st Esdras
—	—	4th Esdras	2nd Esdras

This is simplified chart gives only a general outline and does not take into account that parts of the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Apocrypha do not have an exact correlation with the Hebrew Bible.

Esdras A in the Septuagint seems to date to the 2nd century B.C. and is an addendum to the book of Ezra. It deals with events from Josiah to Ezra and contains portions of our book of Ezra, though they are not exact duplicates.

The Apocryphal Second Esdras was written in the late first century A.D. and contains no connection with our book of Ezra (it is apocalyptic in nature, made up of seven visions and set in the days of the Persian Empire). All of our copies are in Latin and no Greek manuscript has thus far been located.

EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER

DATE	LEADER	TASK	BOOK	EVENTS
537	1st Return under Zerubbabel	Return & Rebuild Jerusalem	Ezra	
			1	Proclamation by Cyrus
			2	Census of returned Exiles
			3	Worship & Rebuilding of Temple
			4	Opposition from Samaritans
520			5	Temple construction resumed
516			6	Temple completed
473	Esther	Deliver Jews	Esther	Esther is Queen of Persia
458	2nd Return under Ezra	Return & Reform	7	Ezra Investigates Resettlement
457			8	Ezra's Return with Second Group
			9	Ezra's Prayer of Anguish
			10	Reforms on Mixed Marriage
537	Nehemiah	Rebuild the Walls of Jerusalem		Nehemiah
			1	Nehemiah's grief
			2	Permission to Rebuild Walls
			3	Work Progressing
			4	Opposition by Outsiders
			5	Nehemiah's Provisions
			6	Completion of the City Walls
	Ezra	Revival	7	Census of First Exiles
			8	Revival through God's Word
			9	Repentance
		Reform	10	Commitment
			11	Leaders in Jerusalem
433			12	Dedication of the Wall
			13	Reforms on Foreign Marriages

The book of Ezra spans 92 years of Jewish history from the decree of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to the land (539 B.C.) to the decree of Artaxerxes which halted the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem (446 B.C.).

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther all deal with the story of Israel following the Babylonian Captivity. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon did not long outlive that king. It was soon replaced by the empire of the Persians. The Persians had a different method of maintaining their empire. They determined that a happy and prosperous people made better taxpayers, so they permitted dispossessed peoples to return to their homelands. Under the Persian rule, there were three specific returns of Jews to the land of Judah.

- The first was led by Zerubbabel and involved an initial rebuilding of Jerusalem.
- The second was led by Ezra who oversaw the rebuilding of the Temple and the re-institution of the sacrifices.
- The third was led by Nehemiah and involved the rebuilding of the defensive walls of Jerusalem.

The story of Esther takes place in the interim between Ezra and Nehemiah. However it is a separate narrative as its focus is not upon the land of Judah but deals with the Jews throughout the Persian Empire.

OUTLINE OF EZRA

1	First Return under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel	Return from Babylon	The Edict of Cyrus
2			The Exiles who returned
3		Rebuilding of the Temple	Construction begun
4			Construction opposed
5			Construction delayed
6			Construction completed
7	Second Return under Ezra	Return from Babylon	Decree of Artaxerxes
8			The Journey
9		Restoration of the People	Mixed marriages
10			Solution to the problem

RETURN TO THE LAND

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing (Ezra 1:1).

This book starts out with a conjunction. It is translated here as “now” but could just as easily have been translated “and.” There is a point being made. This is a continuing saga. Ezra is not a “stand-alone” book. It takes up the thread of history set down by the books of Kings and Chronicles. By opening with this conjunction, the author shows that this is a continuing story.

The first 2 or 3 verses of Ezra are nearly identical with the closing verses of Chronicles. This book is telling the rest of the story.

The nation of Israel was a nation desolate. The northern 10 tribes had been taken into captivity by Assyria in 721 B.C. and foreigners had been settled in their place. Then in three successive deportations, the southern kingdom of Judah had been taken away to Babylon and the land left a desolated waste.

With this conjunction, the story continues. Cyrus the Great comes on the scene and issues a proclamation which allows the Jews to return to their land. There is a lesson here. It is that God has a continuing story. There are times when it looks as though that story is going to end. The Babylonian Captivity seemed to be such a time. The temple was destroyed, the land desolated, the people decimated. But that isn’t the end. It is only the beginning of a new chapter in God’s continuing story. What is going on in your life? Problems that threaten to destroy and desolate and decimate? Situations that seem insurmountable? The tapestry of your life becoming unraveled? Take hope! There is a continuing story.

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle,

together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.” (Ezra 1:2-4).

When we first read this, we are inclined to think that they are the words of a believer. Cyrus is attributing his victories over the Babylonian Empire to Yahweh and describes himself as an agent of the Lord in decreeing that the Temple of God be rebuilt in Jerusalem. From archaeological records, we learn that this was the policy of Cyrus toward all religions and people groups. Cyrus had his own reasons for instituting his political policy and they were not God’s reasons. Nevertheless, the actions of Cyrus were also fulfilling the plan of God for His people. The actions of the king were doing the will of God even though that king was working on his own agenda.

The phrase “the God of heaven” tends to be used much more in the Exilic and post Exilic writings.

“It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’” (Isaiah 44:28).

Over a hundred years before the coming of Cyrus, God declared through the prophet Isaiah that this same Cyrus would perform His will by ordering the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Cyrus had not even been born when this was written.

“For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel, My chosen one, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor though you have not known Me.” (Isaiah 45:40).

The Lord states that He chose Cyrus to perform certain things even though Cyrus himself was an unbeliever who did not know the Lord. God is not restricted to using believers to carry out His plan. In the same way that He used Cyrus, so also He used the pharaoh of the Exodus.

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.’” (Romans 9:17).

It was the Lord who raised up the unbelieving pharaoh of the Exodus to his position of leadership over Egypt. He did this so that, by bringing him

to defeat through the plagues and through the incident at the Red Sea, the name of the Lord might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.

Are we to take these instances of Cyrus and the pharaoh of Egypt as being the exceptions rather than the rule? Does God's plan only extend to the great and the powerful while ignoring the humble and the weak? Not at all! If there were anyone who was said to have "free will," it was the king. He could point to someone and say, "Off with his head" and that head would topple. Thus, when the book of Proverbs states the principle of God's sovereignty over rulers as a general principle, the implication is that God is sovereign over all men.

"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes." (Proverbs 21:1).

It has been said that man's free will flows in the channels which have been dug by the sovereignty of God. Such a concept is presented here. The Lord carries out His plans and protects His people, not merely in spite of a pagan king, but He actually uses that pagan king to work out His will. Paul takes this principle a step further to teach that the rulers themselves are placed in their positions of authority by the Lord.

"Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." (Romans 13:1).

Paul was not speaking in the context of a Christian king or governor. It was during the reigns of the Roman Emperors that he penned these words. He did not say that only those authorities which are obedient to divine laws

The Babylonian Empire did not last very long past the death of Nebuchadnezzar. It began a steady decline with his successors and, in the ensuing vacuum, there arose a king from the east whom we know as Cyrus.

Cyrus was the product of a union between the nobility of Media and Persia. Both the Medes and the Persians lived to the east of Mesopotamia. Cyaxeres of the Medes entered into an alliance with the Persians who lived to the south of him, having one of his daughters marry a Persian king. The resulting union brought about Cyrus, a man who was both a Mede and a Persian.

Cyrus began as a vassal to his grandfather Astyages, but soon set out on a campaign of conquest. Anatolia fell to him when he conquered Croesus (known to the Greeks as Midas) and the kingdom of Lydia. Then Gobryas, the king of Elam, revolted and came over to him. The only resistance left was at Babylon.

Over a hundred years later, the Spartan General Xenophon relates a story how that Cyrus diverted the Euphrates River and marched a force up the dried up riverbed and into Babylon (the river ran through the city). Whether or not the story is true, we do know from records that he took the city without a fight.

are established by God, but all authorities. This means that, whether a leader has taken a throne by force of arms or through inheritance or even through a national election by the vote of the “free will” of the populace, it is ultimately the Lord who places in office those whom He has chosen.

Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

All those about them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering. (Ezra 1:5-6).

As the call went out for people to return and rebuild the Temple, there were two responses which are mentioned in this passage. First, there were those who went. We are told specifically that God had been at work in stirring up their spirit to go and to do this work. We have already seen how God can motivate a pagan king to accomplish His will. Here we see how He also motivates His own people to do His will.

The second group is made up of people who did not make the journey, but who nevertheless supported the word with gifts and offerings. There is a lesson here. Not everyone is called to be a missionary to a foreign country. But those who do not go themselves are nevertheless able to support those who do go.

REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

As the Jews returned to the land, one of their early priorities was the rebuilding of the temple. This was seen as the physical place where the presence of God was to be manifested. It was not long before opposition arose to this project.

Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, 5 and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia. (Ezra

“To discourage” is literally “to weaken the hands,” a Hebrew idiom (Jeremiah 38:4). As a participle, the verb *rapah* indicates a continuing process. The opposite idiom is “to strengthen the hands” (Ezra 6:22; Nehemiah 6:9; Isaiah 35:3; Jeremiah 23:14).

4:4-5).

This is a blanket statement which covers the history of the reigns of Cyrus, Cambyses and finally Darius. Some Bible scholars see in verse 6 a primarily a parenthetical statement regarding the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, which takes place later on in time, and then picks up again with verse 24 about the rebuilding of the temple.

I don't believe this to be the case. The problem is that there were three different Persian kings as well as a governor by the name of Darius. The second problem is the use of Ahasuerus in verse 6. We are used to seeing it used in the book of Esther where it refers to Xerxes, but it is not a name, it is merely a title and can refer to any of the Persian kings. The summary statement is made in verse 5 that the Jews had construction problems from the days of Cyrus to the days of Darius. The line of kings for this period was as follows:

King	Date of Reign	Actions Taken
Cyrus	539-530	Granted permission for the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple
Cambyses	530-522	Put a stop to the reconstruction
Smerdis	522	He was a pretender to the throne and quickly overturned
Darius	522-486	Granted permission for the reconstruction of the Temple to continue
Xerxes	486-464	He was the King who elevated Esther
Artaxerxes	464-423	Granted permission for Nehemiah to return and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

What has thrown Bible students astray is the mention of "Artaxerxes." The name translated "Artaxerxes" here in Ezra 4-6 is spelled slightly different than the Artaxerxes found in Nehemiah 7-8 (the difference is the kind of "s" used). I would suggest that the "Artaxerxes" mentioned here in Ezra is really a reference to the ruler which we know as Cambyses. Thus, it was under Cambyses that the building of the Temple was halted, contrary to the

previous orders of his father, Cyrus. It remained halted for a period of close to ten years when it was taken up again, not at the behest of a king, but as a result of the preaching of two prophets.

When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, 2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them. (Ezra 5:1-2).

As we read this, we must understand that the books of the Bible are not arranged in an exact chronological order from Genesis to Revelation. There are occasional overlaps. This is one of them. As we turn from the end of Ezra 4 to begin chapter 5, we must understand that the books of Haggai and Zechariah have been written in the interim.

Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?” (Haggai 1:3-4).

Haggai describes the situation that existed among the people of the land. There were housing shortages, disappointing harvests, lack of clothing and jobs, and inflation had taken its toll. People were working more and more for less and less.

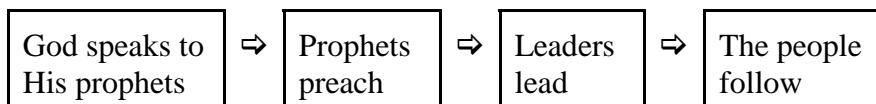
Haggai uses a play on words as he proclaims that because the Lord's house had remained “a ruin” (*hareb*, Haggai 1:4, 9), the Lord would bring “a drought” (*horeb*, Haggai 1:11) on the land. The reason that things were going hard for the Jews was because they were not giving their full devotion to the Lord. Ezra's account does not give us the exact dates of when this took place. But we do find that information provided in the books of Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai is very down-to-earth and is to this era what the epistles are to the New Testament.

Zechariah, by contrast, contains a great many symbols and visions and is to this era what Revelation is to the New Testament.

Prophet	Date of his Ministry	
Haggai	2nd year of Darius, in the 6th month (Haggai 1:1).	August - December, 520 B.C.
Zechariah	2nd year of Darius, in the 8th month (Zechariah 1:1).	October, 520 B.C.

Notice what is the mechanism that the Lord uses to renew the work of construction on His Temple. It is the prophetic revelation which brings about a renewed leadership to the task at hand.



The Lord works to move the leadership of His people to bring about His work. This is the normal pattern in which God works.

Prophets	Priest	King
Zechariah & Haggai	Jeshua	Zerubbabel, though technically not a king, was a descendant of the royal line.

Both the prophets and the priests and the descendant of the king had a role in the completion of the work of the Temple. They were working together and there is no indication of any jealousy or friction between any of them.

In obedience to the instructions of the prophets, the people resume the work, even though no permission had been given by the Persian governors. There is a principle here. It is that we ought to obey God rather than man. This is not an excuse for rebellion against authority, but it does mean that we recognize the Lord as a higher authority.

When the Persians learn of the work of rebuilding, an appeal is made on the basis of the initial decree of Cyrus. A search is made and the decree is located. As a result, the present king of Persia issues a decree that the work on the Temple is to be continued to completion.

Then Tattenai, the governor of the province beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues carried out the decree with all diligence, just as King Darius had sent.

And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and

Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. (Ezra 6:13-14).

Once permission has been given, the full weight of the Persian government lends itself to assist in the project. There is a symphony of effort as the elders and the prophets and the Lord and even the kings of Persia combine their mutual efforts to rebuild the Temple of God.

This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. (Ezra 6:15).

Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6
The work of rebuilding is BEGUN	The work of rebuilding is HALTED	The work of rebuilding is RENEWED	The work of rebuilding is COMPLETED

And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy.

They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel.

Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. (Ezra 6:16-18).

Now the Jews enter into a service of dedication as they present the results of their labors to the Lord. It is a joyous time of sacrifice and worship as the priests are appointed to their appropriate divisions. The priesthood was divided into 24 courses so that each course would officiate twice per year in the temple. All of the courses would come together at the times of the great feasts.

As they come, it is for a time of celebration to the Lord. We are told the number of sacrifices that are brought and the number is considerably less than was brought for the initial dedication of the Temple in the days of Solomon. There are significantly less worshipers gathered and the Temple

may be considerably smaller. But that is okay. The issue is not the size of the offering, the number of people, or the size of the structure. The issue is the heart of worship.

One key thing that is lacking in this dedication which was observable in the previous dedications of the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple was the visible presence of the Lord in the Shekinah Cloud. After the Tabernacle was erected, we read that the cloud of the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle so that even Moses was not able to enter in (Exodus 40:34-35). In the same way, when Solomon's Temple was dedicated, the cloud of God filled the Temple so that the priests were for a time unable to minister (2 Kings 8:10-11). But this time there is no mention of the cloud. There is no visible presence of the Lord. The people celebrate, but there is silence from heaven. The book of Malachi contains a promise of the coming of the Lord's presence.

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:1).

The promise was that the Lord would one day come to His temple. But that coming would be preceded by a messenger who would prepare the way before Him. This was literally fulfilled in the persons of John the Baptist and Jesus. John was the messenger of God who broke the prophetic silence after 400 years. And Jesus is the Lord incarnate who came suddenly to His Temple, overturning the tables of those who had defiled it and presenting Himself as the very Messiah of God.

THE MINISTRY OF EZRA

The phrase “after these things” in Ezra 7:1 moves us forward in time to the year 458 B.C. This was almost 60 years after the events of the previous chapter. A great deal had taken place in the interim. The Temple had long since been rebuilt. The sacrifices had long since been underway. All of the events in the book of Esther had taken place. Not only that, the events that are recorded in the book of Esther had also taken place during this interval. The Jews had been threatened with genocide and had survived in a marvelous manner.

1 st Return under Zerubbabel	Events of the book of Esther	2 nd Return under Ezra	3 rd Return under Nehemiah
Ezra 1-6	Book of Esther	Ezra 7-10	Book of Nehemiah
537-516 B.C.	473 B.C.	458-457 B.C.	537 B.C.

Because of this, chapter seven might seem to be anticlimactic - a bit like the cavalry that arrives only after the battle has been completed. After all, the work has been completed. The opposition has been overcome. The sacrifices have been re-instituted. What more is there to do? But I want to suggest that, rather than being anticlimactic, Ezra's ministry marks a new page in the spiritual life of Israel.

There is a principle here. It is the principle of generational spirituality. It means that each generation is responsible for developing its own spiritual relationship with the Lord. I can not rest upon the spirituality of my parents. My children cannot rest on my spirituality. To be effective, the faith of our fathers must become my faith as well.

This does not mean that we can therefore neglect the spiritual upbringing of our children. Far from it! It means that we must bring our children up, not only to worship the God which we worship, but to do so in a way that is fresh and exciting and real and relevant to them. I may experience a generation gap, but such a gap dare not enter into the spiritual lives of my children.

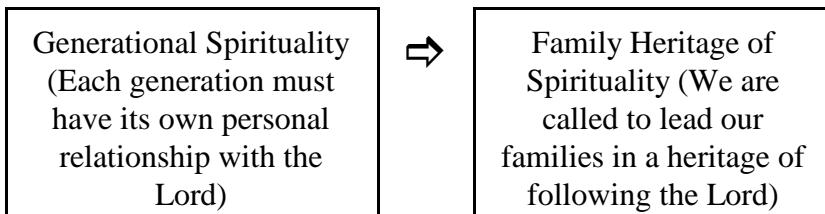
Are you leaving a godly heritage for your children? My parents did that for me. There were several means by which they did it.

- We had a tradition of daily Bible-reading in which our entire family would sit around the dinner table and read the Scriptures together.
- We had a regular attendance in church. It was unthinkable to skip church attendance if you were not on your sickbed and virtually at death's door.
- Any time that we were going out the door, my mother would call out a blessing upon us.

As we were raising our daughter, we also had some similar family traditions. There were regular Bible Studies in our home. There was the memorization of Scriptures. And there was the regular teaching of the doctrines of the faith.

Now that I am a grandparent, I have come to find a renewed consciousness about such a family heritage. It involves a commitment that you and your family and all of your descendants shall follow the Lord.

Joshua did that. He stood before all of the tribes of Israel and he urged them to follow his example as he said, “As for me and my house, we shall follow the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Both of these aspects, a generational spirituality as well as a family heritage of spirituality must be held in tension. They are both important.



1. Ezra's Commission.

As chapter 7 opens, we are introduced to Ezra the scribe. He is both a scribe and a priest and receives a commission from King Artaxerxes to lead a group of Jews back to the land. The actual words of the decree are given in Ezra 7:12-26. These verses switch to the Aramaic language, it being the language in which the decree would have been originally penned.

There had already been an initial return of Jews to the Land. That had taken place 80 years earlier. Now an edict is provided to permit a second return from among the ancestors who did not elect to return with the first group. The specific mention of the priests and Levites indicates that this second return is for the purpose of reviving and reforming the Temple worship.

These returnees were not made up only of the tribes of Levi and Judah. They are said in Ezra 7:13 to include any of the people of Israel. There is a lot of talk today about the “lost tribes of Israel.” But the truth is that there were was a representative remnant of all of the tribes to be found in the land in a later age.

2. Ezra's Controversy.

When he comes to the land, Ezra encounters a problem there. Introduced in the ninth chapter, it is the problem of intermarriage with the people of Canaan.

Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me, saying, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not

separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. 2 For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness.” (Ezra 9:1-2).

The issue here reminds us of the downfall of King Solomon. Though he had begun well, Solomon had taken wives from among the surrounding pagan nations. They had exerted an influence upon him so that he found himself worshiping their false gods. Now the Israelites who have returned to the land are in danger of doing the same thing.

Ezra goes before the Lord and prays a prayer of repentance as he intercedes for the people of God. Meanwhile, outside the Temple, the people have gathered and are formulating a plan of action.

Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. 3 So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. 4 Arise! For this matter is your responsibility, but we will be with you; be courageous and act.” (Ezra 10:2-4).

The situation was serious. As we have pointed out, the spiritual future of the entire nation was at stake. The drastic situation called for an equally drastic solution. The question that we must ask is whether this was the correct solution. Were the Israelites right in divorcing their pagan wives? The passage does not specifically say and there are arguments for either side.

The Plan was of God	The Plan was a Mistake
The absence of condemnation indicates approval, especially in light of the fact that Ezra closes on this note.	There is no editorial confirmation. If Nehemiah is seen as the continuation of Ezra, then it is possible that this was merely a problem along the way which was not satisfactorily resolved at the time.
Ezra agrees to the plan after a long time of prayer.	The Lord did not reveal the plan to Ezra as a prophecy; it was suggested by someone who was not a prophet.
The nation was in danger of falling into idolatry and Deuteronomy 7:2-3 specifically forbids such intermarriage.	It is never right to do wrong so that good may come of it. Malachi 2:14 contains a scathing indictment against Israel for its practice of divorce.
Nearly the entire nation agreed to the proposal.	Majority opinion is no guarantee of righteousness (an example is the case of the 10 spies who gave a report at Kadesh Barnea).
The actions of Ezra and the nation marked a return to the observance of the Law. There was already a new generation growing that would have pagan roots.	The New Testament confirms that believers are to remain married to an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-14). 1 Corinthians 7:14 tell how maintaining such a mixed marriage can have a positive effect upon the children.

The book of Malachi was written only a few years following the decisions that were made within this chapter. It therefore can be considered to be a commentary upon the actions of which we read.

Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. (Malachi 2:11).

This is an indictment of the very condition that is described in this chapter. Apparently the problem did not immediately disappear following the mass divorces at the end of this chapter. Nehemiah 13:23 tells us that the same pattern of intermarriage with pagans began to be adopted by some of the Israelites in Nehemiah's day. Nehemiah's reaction was not to order the same mass divorces, but instead, to urge the people to stop entering any future marriages with pagan Gentiles. He also deposed the high priest who had become a relative through marriage to one of the pagan enemies of Israel (Nehemiah 13:28). Malachi goes on to address the particular problem of divorce.

This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 But no one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. 16 “For I hate divorce,” says the Lord, the God of Israel, “and him who covers his garment with wrong,” says the Lord of hosts. “So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.” (Malachi 2:13-16).

This passage could almost be taken as a direct indictment against the decision and decree of Ezra. Under the cover of their tears of repentance, fraught with weeping and with groaning, the Jews made a grave decision to divorce their Gentile wives, even though they had entered into those marriages by covenant (2:14).

It is in the midst of such actions that the Lord stands as a witness against them, proclaiming in no uncertain terms that He hates divorce and that one who proceeds with such a divorce is doing it quite apart from the leading of the Spirit. In conclusion, we must cite two possible interpretations:

- Interpretation #1: The decision of Ezra and the people of Israel was a correct, though difficult one. Although they did the right thing, it carried its own negative consequences as later generations used this as an excuse to casually divorce their own wives.

Viewed in this regard, the Malachi passage would then point out a problem which the next generation saw as they used the divorces of the previous generation to participate in unwarranted divorces.

- Interpretation #2: Though they had the best of intentions in seeking to repent and return from their sinful attitudes, Ezra and the people of Israel took a bad situation and made it worse by this instigation of across-the-board divorces. As a result, they lost the opportunity to be an influence for righteousness in this lost generation.

NEHEMIAH

Rebuilding the Walls

Ezra was already in Jerusalem, but God needed someone else. He needed a politician. Imagine that! God used a politician named Nehemiah to do great things. We ought to pray for our leaders to be anointed with this Spirit of God. Nehemiah was such a man.

Under the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, the people had rebuilt the Temple. Then Ezra had led a return to the land with a second group of returning Jews and had instituted a revival in the land. Nehemiah came on the scene about 12 or 13 years after Ezra had made his return to the land. The book of Nehemiah can be divided into two major parts:

1	2:1-10	2:11-20	3-6	7	8-12	13			
Nehemiah talks to God	Nehemiah talks to the King	The work planned	The work completed	Number of the people	Covenant renewal	Further reform			
Conception			Complete	Consecration					
Work			Worship						
Rebuilding the Wall			Revival of the People						

The book of Nehemiah begins and ends with prayer. The prayer at the beginning of the book takes place when Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king of Persia, hears of the sad state of affairs back in Jerusalem.

- The Jews have returned to the land.
- The Temple has been rebuilt.
- The people in Judah are in distress and reproach (1:3).
- The wall of Jerusalem is broken down and the gates are burned with fire (1:3).

Nehemiah responds by going before the Lord with a prayer of repentance. That is striking because Nehemiah wasn't a party to the sins that had resulted in the scattering of the nation and the destruction of Jerusalem. They had taken place long before he was born. But he nevertheless realizes the truth of a national guilt.

REBUILDING THE WALL

1. Nehemiah before the King (Chapter 2:1-10).

Nehemiah makes his request of Artaxerxes, the king of the Persian Empire. He specifically requests letters of authorization for his travels as well as for the acquisition of the building materials he shall need to perform the task.

When he is asked by the king how long this project would take and how long it would be before Nehemiah could return to his palace duties, we read that Nehemiah “gave him a definite time.” This tells me something about Nehemiah. He was a man both of prayer as well as of planning. He was not “shooting from the hip.” He had carefully thought through what would be needed.

2. Reconnaissance by night (2:11-16).

So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. 13 So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. 14 Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. 15 So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the rest who did the work. (Nehemiah 2:11-16).

We are given some considerable detail as to the reconnaissance. We are specifically told that Nehemiah was in the city for three days. This is striking because he has been waiting to get to Jerusalem for over four months and he gets the permission and he gets the funding and he finally arrives at the city and then, for three days, there is no apparent activity. Why?

There is a lot that goes on in ministry behind the scenes. A lot of it is planning. Nehemiah is seen to be the master planner. A part of that plan involves going through the city by night and developing a vision. He then will go on to share that vision with the people.

Here is the principle. You must have the vision yourself before you can give it to others. Don't try to infect others with your Christian faith unless you have the real disease yourself. If it is not real in your life, then don't try to export it.

3. Delegation of Labor (Chapter 3).

Throughout chapter 3 we are given a listing of each section of the wall and the names of those to whom that portion of labor was assigned. Why is this included? I'm not certain, but I find it interesting that Nehemiah knew their names. That tells me something about leadership. It has to be personal.

4. Opposition (Chapter 4-6).

Opposition comes in each of these three chapters. It comes both from without as well as from within.

Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6
Opposition from Without	Opposition from Within	Opposition from Without
Sanballat and Tobiah conspire against the work with a planned attack	Jewish nobility taking financial advantage of their Jewish brothers	Sanballat and Geshem plot to assassinate Nehemiah

And it came about from that day on, that half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows, and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. 17 Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. 18 As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. (Nehemiah 4:16-18).

The fact that Nehemiah and the people of Israel were trusting in the Lord did not mean that they did not make careful preparations against the attacks of their enemies. Have you ever known someone who was described as being so heavenly minded that he was of no earthly good? We ought to be Street-smart Christians.

COVENANT RENEWAL OF THE NATION

The first part of the book of Nehemiah deals with the rebuilding of the wall of the city of Jerusalem. The latter part of the book deals with the rebuilding of the spiritual life of the nation.

1. The Place of Revival: *And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. 2 Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. (Nehemiah 8:1-3).*

Where do you go to find revival? I would expect it to be in the temple. That was the place of Jewish worship. It was the place where the sacrifices were made every morning and every evening. It had been rebuilt in the years prior to Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem.

Yet this revival did not begin at the temple. It started at the *Sha'ar Ha-Mayim* - the Gate of the Water. This gate faced eastward toward the Mount of Olives. Its name came from the fact that it was near to the Gihon Spring and people would go out this gate to get water.

Where do you find real revival? In the parking lot of a shopping mall? On a wilderness mountainside by a burning bush? In a lion's den of Babylon? In the belly of a whale? With a Samaritan woman by a well? Jesus said that the place is not important. What is important is that you learn to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. This revival began with:

- A hunger for the Word: *They asked Ezra the scribe to bring the*

book of the law of Moses (8:1).

- An attention to the commands of God: *All the people were attentive to the book of the law (8:3).*
- An attitude of worship: *Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. (8:5-6).*
- An understanding of God's truth: *They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading (8:8).* It is noteworthy that the Scriptures had to be translated for the people because many of them had grown up in a foreign land and were unfamiliar with the Hebrew language.

2. A Celebration of Revival: *And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them. (Nehemiah 8:12).*

The initial reaction to the reading of the law was anything but joyful. The people heard the law and they recognized that they had fallen far short and this led them to mourn and to grieve. But then Ezra and Nehemiah called them to rejoice and to celebrate. Why? The answer is seen in verse 10: *"Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

The bad news is that you are not good enough or strong enough or righteous enough to stand in the presence of God. But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus was good enough and strong enough and righteous enough. He was strong in your place. His strength is such that He took your sins upon Himself on the cross.

ESTHER

God's Providential Salvation

The book of Esther follows a chiastic outline with the central actions of Esther being the pivotal point of the book. As such, there is both a rising action and a descending action.

1:1 - 2:18	2:19-23	3:1-15	4:1 - 7:10	8:1 - 9:17	9:18-32	10:1-3
Esther becomes Queen	Mordecai saves the King's Life	Haman plots against Jews	Esther acts to deliver her people	Jews to defend themselves	Jews celebrate	Mordecai rewarded
Esther & Mordecai in the Persian Court		Trouble for the Jews		Victory for the Jews	Esther & Mordecai in the Persian Court	

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

Esther is the only book of the Bible that makes no mention of God. Yet the Lord is seen behind the scenes throughout this entire narrative. There are four main characters in this narrative. Two of them are Jewish and two are Gentiles.

1. Esther.

Esther is a Jewish orphan who is living in the kingdom of Persia. She is raised by her cousin Mordecai and finds herself at the center of events where she is able to play a key role in the delivering of her people from the threat of destruction.

The name Esther (אֶسְתֵּר) sounds similar to the Persian word for “star.” Her Jewish name is *Hadassah*. It is similar to the Akkadian word *hadassatu*, meaning “bride.”

2. Ahasuerus.

This seems to be a Persian title rather than a specific name. It is also used in Ezra 4:6 and in Daniel 9:1 in contexts that refer to other Persian kings. This king has traditionally been taken to refer to the Persian King known in Greek writings as Xerxes. He is known in Greek writings because he conducted an invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. While the account in Esther makes no mention of this invasion, it is likely that the events in this book take place after the forces of Xerxes had been repulsed in Greece.

Secular writings make no mention of Esther. Herodotus and Ctesias identify the wife of Xerxes both before and after the Persian expedition into Greece as Amestris. This is presumably a reference to the Biblical Vashti. This fits in with the Biblical account that tells us Esther did not become queen until the seventh year of the reign of Ahasuerus (Esther 2:16).

3. Mordecai & Haman are seen in contrast to one another. They serve as protagonist and antagonist.

Haman	Mordecai
A descendant of Agag (Esther 3:1), the king of the Amalekites whose life Saul spared in disobedience to the command of God	From the tribe and family of Saul (Esther 2:5).
Enemy of the people of God	Savior of the people of God
Saul did not recognize the danger that Agag posed to the people of God. He was blind to the real issues.	Mordecai was alert to the real issues and overheard that which brought salvation to the people of God and death to the evil Haman.

Was Haman a literal descendant of the king of the Amalekites, or was this a reference to some other Agag? We cannot be certain, but at the very least it seems obvious that we are to make the connection and see in him a symbol of evil and one who is to be

judged by God.

THE NARRATIVE

1. The story begins with the reigning queen coming under the king's disfavor and being deposed. To take her place, the palace holds the ancient equivalent of a beauty pageant with the winner to become the new queen. Esther wins the contest and becomes the new reigning queen, but she keeps her Jewish heritage a secret.
2. Esther's older cousin Mordecai overhears a plot against the king and relays it to Esther who sends the warning to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. The plotters are captured and executed.
3. Haman the Agagite is promoted to a position of authority and he becomes incensed when Mordecai does not pay to him what he considers to be appropriate homage. Haman determines to take his revenge, not only upon Mordecai, but against all of the Jews.
4. Haman prevails upon the king to institute a policy of ethnic cleansing that will result in all Jews within the Persian Empire being put to death and their possessions going to the Persian Treasury.
5. Mordecai sends word to Esther to go into the presence of the king to intercede for the Jews. She at first is reluctant since it is the death penalty to go uninvited into the presence of the king and her predecessor was deposed over this same issue of going and/or not going into the presence of the king. Mordecai ultimately prevails upon her to go and she does so on the condition that the Jews will fast and pray on her behalf.
6. Esther throws a series of banquets for the king to which she also invites Haman. Haman is so pleased at being invited that he is bursting with pride and finds himself even more chaffed at what he considers Mordecai's insulting behavior. At the urging of his wife, he has a gallows constructed upon which he plans to have Mordecai executed.
7. During a sleepless night, the king has his palace scribes read some of the historical records and is reminded of the service that was done to

him by Mordecai. He decides to repay Mordecai. He asks Haman what shall be done for one who has done great service to the crown. Thinking that he is the one of whom the king is considering for this great honor, he responds that the honored one should be treated with all of the royal honors normally due to a king. Only then does he learn that it is Mordecai who is to be thus honored.

8. Before any action can be taken, Haman is summoned to Esther's banquet. It is there she reveals that the plan to exterminate the Jews will involve both her own death as well as the death of the man whom the king had planned to honor. When it comes to light that the king has been manipulated by Haman, the king orders Haman's execution on the very gallows that were constructed for Mordecai.
9. The Jews are given permission from the Persian crown to defend themselves against all who attempt to carry out the policy of ethnic cleansing. They do so on the appointed day and are thus delivered.

POINTS TO PONDER

- Esther is the book of God's providence. Although God is never mentioned within the book, He is behind the scenes bringing about deliverance of His people through the circumstances that are in His hand.
- The success of Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews would also exterminate the promised seed through which the Messiah was to come. At stake is not only the people of Israel but also the salvation of all mankind.
- When God wins, the person that He uses is often unexpected. You have only to read the resumes of people such as Moses, David, Peter, Paul, James, and John to see that God delights in using people that would be rejected by the world.
- When God wins, the person He uses is usually unpretentious. God raises up the humble and He brings down the proud. This does not mean that you ought to go out and try to look humble. Real humility is on the inside.

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