

STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

**JOSHUA
JUDGES
RUTH**

**VICTORY, DEFEAT,
AND HOPE IN AN AGE
OF HEROES**

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Dedicated to
my Hero,
the Lord
Jesus Christ

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INTRODUCTION

I love stories about heroes. Perhaps that is what attracted me to a career in the fire rescue arena. For 29 years I was given the opportunity to work side by side with and, eventually, to lead a group of modern day heroes.

I grew up on the narratives of the Old Testament and especially on exploits of those of whom we read in Joshua, Judges, and to a lesser extent, Ruth. These are stories that capture the imagination as they present real people in a way that, at first glance, seems larger than life. Joshua's conquests, Caleb's stout-heartedness, Gideon's victory in the face of overwhelming odds, and Samson's might all serve to rouse a basic level of testosterone. Yet a closer examination of these and other characters within these books reveal that the real hero is to be found, not in these individuals, but the One whom they sought to serve and who was the source of their strength, their determination, and their sometimes faltering courage.

Even before Joshua leads his forces against Jericho, he is confronted with the “captain of the host of the Lord” and we get the sense that there is a greater hero who is working behind the scenes. This is the hero who brings down the walls of Jericho, who stops the sun and the moon in their course, who overturns Israel’s enemies and who plants the people of God in their new land.

When we come to the book of Judges, we see times of great victory, but we also see corresponding epochs of defeat and of misery. It is in the midst of such darkness that a heroic act can shine brightly and we follow the exploits of Ehud and his homemade sword, of Deborah and her co-leadership with Barach, of Gideon’s band of three hundred, of Jephthah’s valiant deliverance, of Samson’s mighty hand, and of Ruth’s determination to follow the God of her mother-in-law to a foreign land. Yet as we take a closer look, we see the flaws that are all too commonplace among the lives of real heroes when we take them off the pages of comic books and theater fantasy and put them into the harsh light of reality. The Biblical narrative does not hesitate to give us this realistic appraisal of their lives to show us the chinks in their armor or the stains in these stained glass saints. Thus we are told how Joshua

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and the Israelites failed to drive the Canaanites out of the lowlands. We read of Barach's hesitancy and of Gideon's faltering fear and of the later failure of his descendants. We read of Jephthah's foolish and tragic vows and we see Samson's weakness in the presence of women and of Ruth's questionable actions with a man. It is when we focus upon the failures and follies of the key characters of these narratives that we realize they are given to make us see the need for a Greater Hero, one who can be trusted to succeed where they have failed and who goes before us in the harsh light of our own realities.

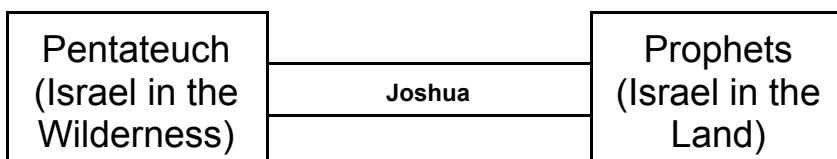
The books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth will ultimately drive us to take a closer look at the One who is greater than Joshua, who is a more just Judge than any of those in the book of Judges, and who is the ultimate descendant of Ruth and Boaz and whose love, devotion, and sacrifice for His church far outshines those characters of his human ancestry. As we read these books, our focus will turn to the better Joshua, the One whom we know today as Jesus.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

The Book of the Conquest

THE PLACE OF JOSHUA IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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.

Introduction to Joshua

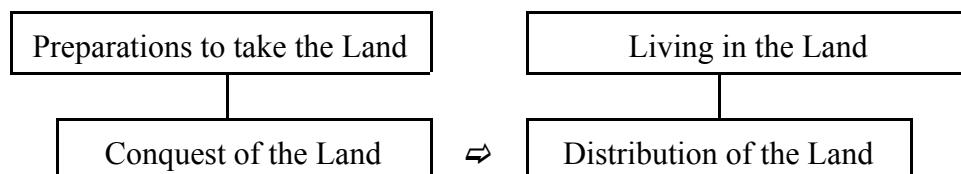
Israel promised an inheritance.	Israel takes possession of its inheritance.
Faith in principle.	Faith in action.
Possibility.	Realization.

Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses. 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. It provides both the preparations that are made for the conflict as well as relating the battle campaigns of Joshua.
2. The second part deals with the distribution of that land to the various tribes of Israel.

Joshua - The Book of Conquest			
1:1	6:1	13:1	22:10
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.
 - a. Caleb's conquest of Hebron (Joshua 15:13-14 with Judges 1:1, 10, 20).
 - b. Othniel's capture of Debir (Joshua 15:15-19 with Judges 1:1; 1:11-15).
 - c. 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).

- d. 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 describes 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).
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).	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).
Moses mediates a covenant; the people say: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Ex 24:7).	Joshua mediates a covenant; the people say: “The Lord our God we will serve him we will obey” (Joshua 24:24).

JOSHUA THE MAN

1 Chronicles 7:27 mentions Joshua as the only son of his family. It is possible that he was trained in Egyptian culture, perhaps even serving for a time in Pharaoh's army and learning about military matters.

Introduction to Joshua

1. Joshua is first introduced to us in Exodus 17:9. The incident takes place soon after the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea into the Sinai Wilderness. The Israelites were being attacked by Amalek and it is Joshua who is commissioned to lead the army of the Lord in defense of this attack.
2. Joshua is described as the servant of Moses (Exodus 24:13) and as a young man (Exodus 33:11). He accompanied Moses onto Mount Sinai to receive the Law, during which time Joshua was left alone for 40 days as Moses met with the Lord.
3. When 12 spies were chosen to go into Canaan, Joshua was chosen to represent his tribe, the tribe of Ephraim. It seems to be at this time that Joshua was given this name by which we know him.
 - a. He was originally named Hoshea (Numbers 13:8). This name means “salvation.”
 - b. It was Moses who changed his name to Joshua (Numbers 13:16). The name Joshua means “Yahweh saves.”

It was Caleb and Joshua who returned with the minority report. While the other 10 spies said, “The people in that land are too big,” Joshua and Caleb said, “It is a wonderful land and our God is bigger than they are!” As a result of Israel’s unbelief, that entire generation was condemned to die in the Wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb would be permitted to enter into the land.

4. One of the provisions of the covenant was for a dynastic succession - that the mantle of leadership would be passed from Moses to Joshua. This was accomplished through a rite of ordination. It is described here in the words “Moses had laid his hands on him.”

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Deuteronomy 34:9).

This event has a corresponding pattern in the New Testament when Jesus breathed upon His disciples and told them to receive the Holy

Introduction to Joshua

Spirit. There is a sense in which Jesus was showing Himself to be the better Moses who commissions, not merely a single Joshua to continue the work of ministry, but twelve “Joshuas.”

Moses and Joshua	Jesus and His disciples
Took place prior to the death of Moses.	Took place in the Upper Room.
Moses laid his hands upon Joshua.	Jesus breathed on His disciples.
Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom.	The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and with power.

When Moses died, Joshua took over as leader. In the same way, the apostles continued to serve as the leaders of the church in the physical absence of its head - Jesus. The pattern between Joshua and Acts continues throughout the early period of the church.

Joshua	Acts
God told the people to prepare for the conquest.	Jesus told the disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
Israel crossed the Jordan and circumcised themselves.	The Holy Spirit baptized the church.
Jericho was conquered.	Jerusalem witnessed the power of God as many came to faith.
Achan stole from the Lord and was punished.	Ananias & Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and were punished.
The Gentile Gibeonites joined with Israel.	Hellenistic Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles came into the church.

While there are some parallels, there are also some differences. In

the book of Joshua we see Gentiles sneaking in versus Gentiles being welcomed into the Kingdom as in Acts 10-11. In the book of Joshua, the movement is to bring God's people into the land. In Acts the people of God begin in the land and the movement is to disperse them out of the land and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

THE AMARNA TABLETS

A series of letters were discovered at the ancient Egyptian city of Akhenaton, located on the east bank of the Nile midway between Giza and Thebes. The city has since become known as Tell el-Amarna by the combining of two names:

- El-Til is the name of the modern-day village in the area.
- El-Amarna is one of the Arab tribes which has settled in the area.

In 1887, a peasant woman found some tablets in the ruins of Tell el-Amarna. She sold them for ten piastres. The tablets were offered to European scholars, but were suspected of being forgeries and were rejected. The tablets were taken to Luxor and sold to tourists. By the time that scholars realized the tablets were genuine, a number of the tablets had been sold.

Excavations began in 1891 and a total of 400 tablets were eventually uncovered. The tablets date to the 18th dynasty of Egypt, specifically during the reign of Akhenaton. These tablets consist correspondence between the Pharaoh of Egypt and the kings of the cities of Jerusalem, Gezer, Lachish, Jarmuth and Eglon. However, they are written in Akkadian, demonstrating that this was the language of international diplomacy.

In several of these letters, there are complaints and requests for protection from invading Hapiru, a nomadic people who were overrunning the land. Some of these Hapiru had been joined by the Canaanites and some had offered their services as mercenaries. The interesting thing about these Amarna Tablets is what they do not mention. There are no letters from Jericho, Ai, Bethel, or Gibeon, those cities which were destroyed by Joshua.

There are some scholars who have identified these Hapiru as the Hebrews of the Old Testament. Others have suggested that this is a more general term that could have included the Hebrews but which was not limited to them.

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

1. Joshua teaches us about the Lord.
 - a. It teaches us about the faithfulness of God. In this book we see that God keeps His promises. God had promised the land to Moses (Exodus 6:4) and promised that Joshua would lead the people into it (Deuteronomy 3:27-28).
 - b. It teaches us about the will of God. Joshua emphasizes that God wanted his people to take full possession of the land (Joshua 13:1; 18:3).
 - c. It teaches about the power of God. Joshua shows that the Lord is more powerful than the armies and cities of the land. He is even greater than His people's disobedience or other people's trickery.
2. Joshua teaches us about the People of God. They need to be...
 - a. People with an aim. We need to determine what is the will of God for us and then attain that goal.
 - b. People of obedience (1:7-8).
 - c. People of faith (3:15; 6:16,20).
 - d. People without compromise. One of the most dangerous traps that faces us is compromise with the enemy. When the Israelites did not totally drive out the Canaanites, this compromise led to their eventual defeat.

JOSHUA 1-5

Preparations to Take the Land

The first five chapters of the book of Joshua deal with the preparations of the people as they ready themselves to take the land. We have already noted the general outline of the book as seen in the following chart:

Joshua - The Book of Conquest			
1:1	6:1	13:1	22:10
Preparations to take the Land	Conquest of the Land	Distribution of the Land	Living in the Land
Initial Appeal	In the Land		Closing Appeal

This first section is made up of five parts, corresponding to the first five chapters of the book.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Charge to Joshua	Spying Jericho	Crossing Jordan	Memorial Stones	Circumcision & Passover
Preamble	Preparation	Passage & Remembrance		Precepts
Task identified	Enemy studied	Barrier crossed	Crossing memorialized	People prepared

Joshua is a tremendous type of Christ. Indeed, the name “Jesus” is merely an anglicized form of the name “Joshua.” We will see a continuing flow of parallels throughout this book.

Joshua	Jesus
Servant to Moses	Took on the role of a servant
His public ministry begins at the Jordan	His public ministry began at the Jordan
He proclaims death to the nations	He proclaims the gospel to the nations
All against whom this message is directed are under the ban	All to whom this message is proclaimed are called to be baptized

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).

It has been said that 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 or the Ammonites or the Edomites or 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 theirs. While they were there, they would see what they had given up.

I have seen far too many girls who married the first guy who came along and who, in doing so, got what seems to me to have been 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 worst.

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.

This cord would accomplish for Rahab and her family what the blood on the doorposts accomplished for the Israelites in Egypt at the time of the Passover.

Matthew tells that Rahab was a part of Jesus's genealogy 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 covenant 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 carpenter turned 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.

“Hang tough!”
“You 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 and 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.

How many times do you find the Millennium mentioned in the Bible? One part of one chapter. And yet, churches have split over whether people are Premillennial, Postmillennial or Amillennial. When God was writing the Bible, He didn't include any "filler material." How much space did He spend on tongues? How about Pretribulational rapture?

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).

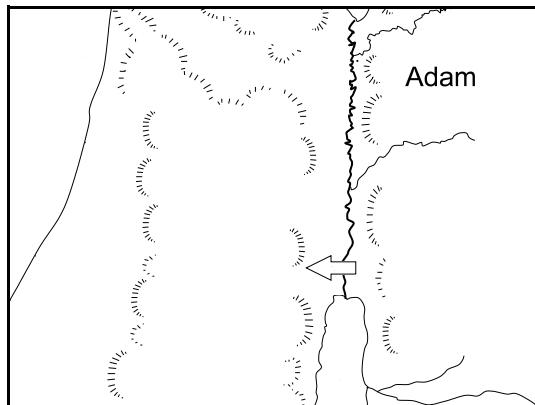
The phrase “consecrate yourselves” is translated from *hithkadashu* - the Hithpa’el imperative of *kadash*, “to make holy.” The Israelites were called to be holy - set apart to God. They were cut out from the rest of the world and separated to be a special people. They ate different food. They wore different 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. Archaeologist John Garstang documented reports that during an earthquake on July 11, 1927, these banks saw a collapse, reducing the flow of the river for a time. Such stoppages of the Jordan at this location have also been reported at previous times in history.

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 a group of 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. Perhaps you ought to pause and reflect. Are there any memorials of the grace of God in your life that you have been treating as just another stack of rocks?

It seems from the Hebrew text that 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.

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.

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 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 and 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. 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 confrontation reminds us of a similar confrontation that took place between Moses and the Lord at the burning bush.

Moses	Joshua
Presence of the Lord in the burning bush	Presence of the captain of the host of the Lord
Moses told to remove his sandals because this was holy ground.	Joshua told to remove his sandals because this was holy ground.
Moses given instructions to confront the Pharaoh of Egypt.	Joshua given instructions how to take the city of Jericho.

The parallel between Moses and Joshua does not stop here. The entire chain of events surrounding the entrance of the Israelites into the Promised Land is given in such a way as to call to mind the events of the Exodus from Egypt.

- In each case, there was a call from God.

- In each case, the people were to be circumcised.
- In each case, there was a Passover observance.
- In each case, there was a passing through the waters; the Israelites escaped from Egypt through the Red Sea while the Israelites were led by Joshua across the Jordan River.

The point that we are to see is that the same God who brought the Israelites out of Egypt is the same God who will bring this next generation of Israelites into the Promised Land.

CONQUEST OF THE LAND

Joshua 6-12

The Israelites had entered into a covenant with God. That covenant defined who they were and it defined their relationship with the Lord. It also outlined certain promises which God had given to them.

- The promise of a multiplied nation.
- The promise of a blessing from the Lord.
- The promise of a land.

The nation had been multiplied in Egypt. But now was the time for the promise of the land to be fulfilled. The good news was that God was going to give them the land. The bad news is that He had given it to someone else, first. They would have to fight for that land. Joshua 6-12 relates the account of that fight.

This section is made up of three major campaigns, followed by a summary. The fact that there is such a summary statement seems to indicate that there were other campaigns conducted by Joshua, but that only these three are chosen for this narrative.

6:1	Central Campaign	Jericho	Victory through Faith
7:1		Ai	Defeat through Sin
8:1			Restoration
9:1	Southern Campaign	Gibeon	Deception
10:1		Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, Eglon	The Sun & Moon Stand Still

11:1	Northern Campaign	Hazor, Madon, Shimron, Achshaph	Surprise attack by the Waters of Merom
11:16	Summary	<i>"There was not a city that made peace"</i>	<i>"It was of the Lord to harden their hearts"</i>

We should note that we are not given a chronology as to how much time passed between these various campaigns. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that considerable time passed from the outset of the taking of Jericho to the final destruction of Hazor.

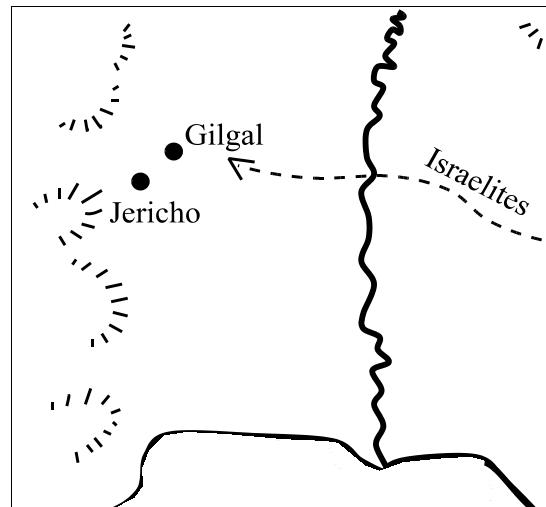
THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST JERICHO

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.

Jericho is one of the oldest known cities in the world, its earliest ruins dated at 7,000 B.C.

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.



Today the Jordan has all but dried up due to the diverting of its upper

waters for irrigation, but in that day, the waters were more seasonal.

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 in that day, comprising only 6 acres, but it held a strategic position at the hub of four major roads radiating outward to Bethel, Jerusalem, Hebron, and westward to the fords across the Jordan. Archaeological digs have been conducted by...

- a. Austro-German archaeologist Ernst Sellin and the Deutsche Orientgesellschaft from 1907-1909.
- b. John Garstang from 1930-1936.

He found scarabs of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III and Amenhotep III in a cemetery at Jericho, indicating that the city was intact in the period from 1450 to 1400 B.C. (a scarab of Hatshepsut would have been especially rare).

- c. Kathleen Kenyon, director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem from 1952-1958. She disagreed with the dates assigned by Garstang (her tendency was to deny any correlation between archaeology and the Bible). In more recent times, Bryant Woods has gone back over her notes and has shown how her observations can be understood in light of the Biblical fall of Jericho.

The following history was outlined by Garstang for the city of Jericho.

Designation	Description
Undesignated	Neolithic occupation (prior to 4500 B.C.). Already at this time the city was defended by a wall 12 feet high and 6 feet wide.
Undesignated	Chalolithic occupation saw a number of successive cities (4500-3000 B.C.).
City A	3000 B.C.

City B	Founded around 2500 B.C. Destroyed in 1700 B.C.
City C	Hyksos period. Larger than its predecessors. High walls and a moat. Destroyed around 1500 B.C., presumably by pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty.
City D	Constructed around 1500 B.C. Double wall system with a space of 12-15 feet between the walls. Walls were about 30 feet high. City only comprised about 6 acres. Evidence of violent destruction - outer wall has fallen down the slope.
City E	Constructed in 860 B.C. (1 Kings 16:34). The city was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.

The city was eventually abandoned and the New Testament city of the same name was built at a nearby location. There is today a village by the same name that occupies the valley floor.

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 21st 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 his 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 and a contagion that would spread were it not removed.

- 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. Such an outlook is blasphemy.

- c. Sin is only a manifestation of our human nature. 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.

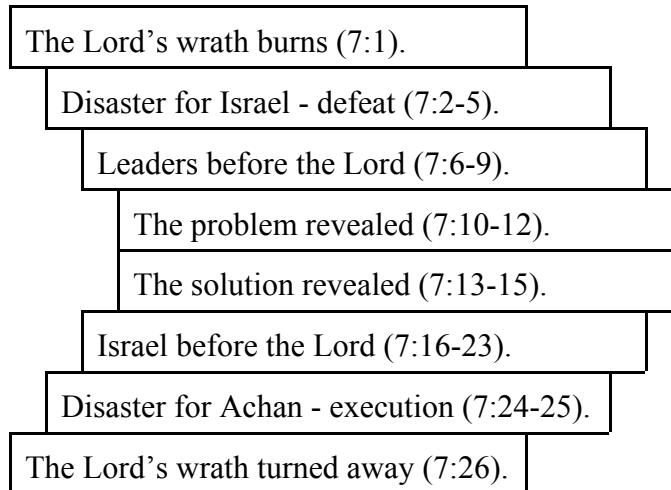
- d. Sin is your own business. It doesn’t affect others.

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 truth is that the Israelites did not destroy all of the people of the land and we know the results of their disobedience. It resulted in the cancer of sin and idolatry growing and spreading until the Israelites themselves were removed from the land by still another foreign power.

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 (it is within a mile and a half of Bethel).

3. Israel’s Defeat at Ai.

Ai was so small that it was considered to be not 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 didst Thou 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. A total of 36 men had just died for Achan's sin.
- b. His family had participated in his crime (he buried the items in their midst).
- c. 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 this is a fight that calls for our commitment.

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 into 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. Psalm 23 makes reference to the presence of the Lord as we walk through the "valley of the shadow of death." The Lord is with us because He went there ahead of us. He did so when He went to the cross and it was there that our valley of death

was turned into a valley of life and 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 also have 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. You need regular times of rededication.

d. The necessity of reaffirmation.

You need to constantly reaffirm the truths that we hold. In a society which bombards you with all sorts of ungodly thinking, you need to tell yourself and remind yourself what you 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 introduce her to the water of life.

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 reads the blessings of the covenant. The other side reads the curses of the covenant (see the instructions given in Deuteronomy 27:11-14). Their voices bear witness to the fact that they have bound their very lives to that for which God has called them.

This is a covenant ceremony. Remember that the ancient custom of covenant-making required animals to be cut into two parts and placed in two heaps and then those who were making the covenant would pass between the pieces of the animals as they recited the terms of the covenant. This ceremony is seen in Genesis 14 where the Lord Himself passes between the pieces of the animals as He makes His covenant with Abraham. Now we see the Israelites gathered on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal as they recite the terms of the covenant. They are echoing the same sort of covenant ceremony and they are playing the part of the sacrificed animals of the covenant.

This covenant ceremony is a reminder to us of the coming of the One who took the place of the animal sacrifice when He gave His own life in order to meet the demands of the covenant. He became a curse for us so that we could enter into the blessings of the covenant. It is through His blood that we enter into a New Covenant, not based upon the blood of bulls and goats, but based upon the blood of the Son of God.

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. To this end, 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 they did not ask of the Lord. 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 in that marriage 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 be honored and that they 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.

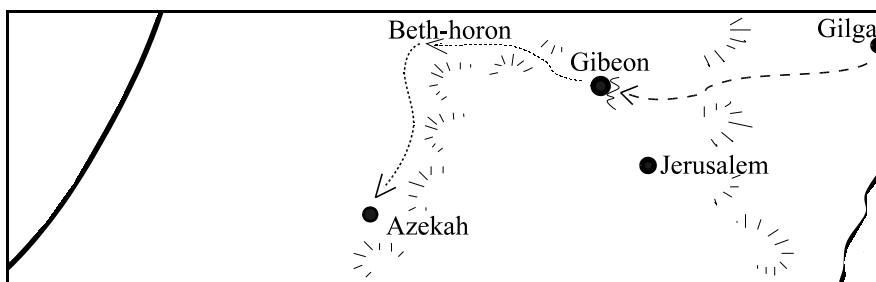
It was not long before this new treaty between Gibeon and Israel brought a swift retaliation from the kings of southern Canaan.

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. Accordingly, they gathered their forces and moved against the Gibeonites. In turn, 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 descend 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” or “from the sky.”
- 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).*

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.
 - (1) The command to “stand still” is the Hebrew Qal Imperative of *damas*. It can mean both “be still” or “be silent.”
 - (2) 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.

(3) 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.

The solar eclipses in Palestine between the years 1500 to 1000 B.C. were as follows:

August 19, 1157 B.C.
September 30, 1131 B.C.
November 23, 1041 B.C.

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?

(1) 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.

(2) 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?

Sometimes we get what we expect. We don't expect to receive power from God and so we don't. 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's intervention is an outward sign of His grace. God did not 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 also 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.

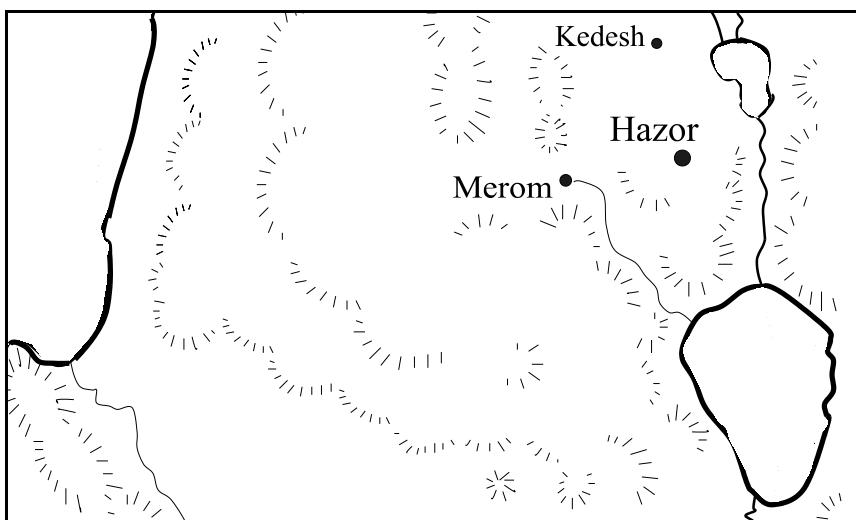
To make matters worse, the Northern Federation was able to field horse-drawn chariots. These were light chariots with spoked wheels and had an incredible mobility. They were to ancient warfare what the armored tank was to modern warfare.

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 would have started watering. We can imagine him saying 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 in the form of family, church, and 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 did not. 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.

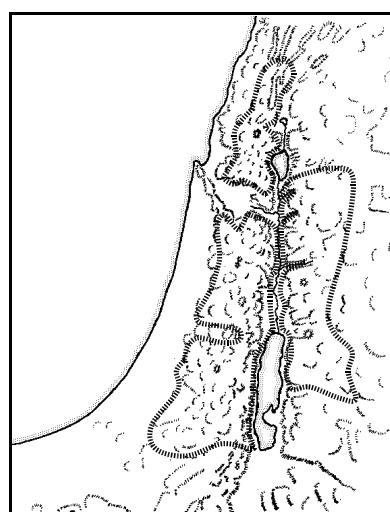
SUMMARY OF THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

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



Areas of Israelite control in the days of Joshua

cities of the lowlands - possibly due to the fact that these cities often had both high ramparts and iron chariots.

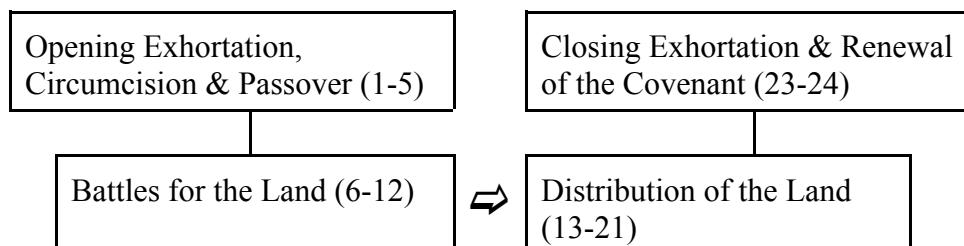
2. There is no record of Egyptian interference, even though Egypt was still one of the leading world powers of the day. The Amarna Tablets bear witness of the lack of action taken by Egypt toward the threat of the Habiru.¹
3. It has been noted that there is something of a correlation between the lands taken by Joshua and those taken by Israel in the Six Day War in 1967.

¹ Among the inscriptions of the Amarna Tablets are a number of letters from the king of Jerusalem to Amenhotep 3rd 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).

JOSHUA 13-24

Disposition of the Land & the Covenant

We have already suggested that the book of Joshua is chiastic in its arrangement, Our study in this section will be the last half of that chiasm.



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. This is admittedly not as exciting as the clash and the clamor that were evident in the first part of the book, but there are still lessons that can be learned from this section.

The Distribution of the Land			
13:1	Introduction	Special Allotments	East of the Jordan
13:8	Two & a half Tribes		West of the Jordan
14:1	Caleb		
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.

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).

SPECIAL ALLOTMENTS (JOSHUA 13-14)

Constable points out that Joshua had subdued the whole land "in the sense that there were no more pitched battles by the combined Israelite tribal forces following Joshua's conquests. God expected individual tribes to subdue the remaining towns and pockets of resistance" (2005a:49).

1. We have already seen the story of the 2½ 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. In the future, there would be times when they would act as though they were two separate nations.

2. Caleb.

Then the sons of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea." (Joshua 14:6).

Calab had some unique characteristics. He was...

- a. Scornful of danger.
- b. Submissive to the will of God and to the leadership of Joshua, even though he and Joshua had once been partners. Joshua and Caleb were the two oldest men in Israel. They had a friendship that went back over 40 years.
- c. Single-minded in desiring to obtain the inheritance of God. For 45 years Caleb had recognized that he was right and everyone else was wrong.
- d. Sure of God's ability to give him what had been promised.

"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).

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. This is a reminder of something we read in the epistle of James.

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.

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 humorous 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.

MAJOR ALLOTMENTS (JOSHUA 15-19)

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.

1. The Complaint 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.

2. 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).

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.

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.

3. 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.

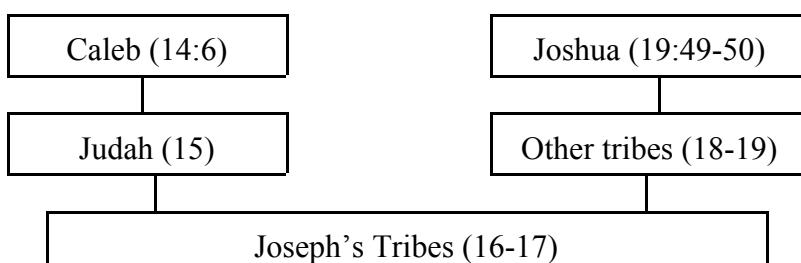
When the job was completed, these descriptions were brought back to Joshua and he cast lots before the Lord. The implication was that the Lord was making the decision as to where each tribe would live.

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

4. 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.



The tribes of Joseph are given a place of prominence in this section. They were given the inheritance of the double portion and thus they are central within this section.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS (JOSHUA 20-22)

1. 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 of 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.

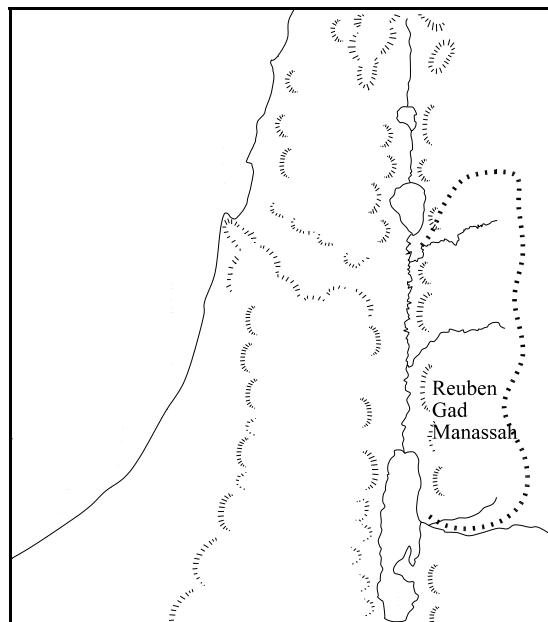
- The city of refuge became a virtual prison for the one who had taken a life.

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.

2. 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 law of 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 of 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 (JOSHUA 23-24)

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

1. Joshua's Charge to the Leaders of Israel.

As Joshua is soon to die, he gathers the leaders of the nation together to give them a closing charge.

23:3	<i>What God Has Done</i>	Fighting for you
23:4		Giving you an inheritance
23:6	<i>What You Are To Do</i>	Be firm to keep what is written in the book of the Law
23:8		Cling to the Lord your God
23:11		Love the Lord your God
23:12	<i>A Warning Against Apostasy</i>	If you... go back cling to them intermarry with them They will be a snare and a trap to you
23:14		God's word has never failed
23:15		His word will not fail either for good or for bad

These are the reflections of an old man. They are lessons for leaders. And they are also lessons for life.

- a. God is central.

Both this chapter and the next begin with what God has done. This is the basis for everything else Joshua has to say.

- b. History is important (23:14).

Look at how much Joshua talks about remembering. He points to the promises of God and shows how they have not failed.

- c. Compromise is evil.

When Joshua names sin, he does not mention murder or

stealing or fornication. He mentions compromise (23:11-14). The thing that Joshua feared the most for his people is that you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between them and the inhabitants of the land.

2. The Covenant Renewal.

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 seen in expanded form in the entire book of Deuteronomy).

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

3. “I Sent the Hornet before you...” (Joshua 24:12).

In Joshua 24:12, the Lord is describing how He had fought for Israel and He says, *“I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you...”* There are two ways of looking at this:

- a. They could be literal hornets that God caused to swarm, chasing these Canaanites from their land. Interestingly enough, ancient historical accounts make this a possibility. There are ancient records of groups being chased from their country by swarms of wasps.
- b. This could be speaking figuratively to describe the aggressiveness with which God strengthened the Israelites as they drove out these Canaanites from their land. It would be a metaphor. The Israelites were "like hornets" in their swarming and stinging capability.

It should also be noted that this was a fulfillment of a prophecy given at the outset of the Wilderness Wanderings.

“I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you.

“And I will send HORNETS ahead of you, that they may drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.” (Exodus 23:27-28).

4. Closing Notes.

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

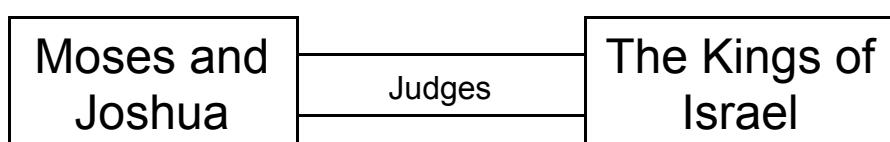
Both the title found in the Greek Septuagint as well as our common English title of this book are taken from the Hebrew Title.

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

The Shophatim were 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 PLACE OF JUDGES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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. On the other hand, 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*

Introduction to Judges

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
Possible Periods of the Writing of the book of Judges				

On the other hand, Jewish and early church tradition points 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.

2. 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).

- a. Without a king the tribes faltered in their conquest of the land.
- b. The office of judge was only able to bring sporadic relief from the cycles of apostasy.
- c. 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 THEOCRATIC RULE OF ISRAEL

The nation of Israel was first established as a Theocracy. This means that God was seen as its king.

Democracy	Rule by the people
Monarchy	Rule by a single king or monarch
Theocracy	Rule by God

Introduction to Judges

The judges were the spokesmen for the Lord along with the prophets. While the priest provided the structure of worship to the Lord. The prophets spoke the message of the Lord and the judges served as leaders for the Lord.

JUDGES 1-2

A Faltering Conquest

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	Failure
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	

A PARTIAL CONQUEST

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.

In the absence of Joshua, the Israelites requested of the Lord what they should do. They knew that they were to fight the Canaanites, but they had no plan of attack. And so, they looked to the Lord for their leadership. This book begins on a positive note. Unfortunately, it will not end upon such a note.

1. Judah's Alliance.

And the Lord said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand." (Judges 1:2).

Judah had already begun to show certain aspects of leadership among the tribes of Israel. This tribe had been promised a scepter and a ruler's staff (Genesis 49:10).

Judah exercised this quality of leadership by being the first to take up the continuing work of driving the Canaanites from the land.

Then Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I in turn will go with you into the territory allotted you." So Simeon went with him. (Judges 1:3).

Simeon was the smallest of all the tribes - numbering only 22,200 at

the second Wilderness census (Numbers 26:14).

And Judah went up, and the Lord gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hands... (Judges 1:4).

Notice that Judah didn't win because of the bravery of its men or because of a great strategy. Judah won because the LORD gave the victory.

This is repeated again in verse 19 which says that “the Lord was with Judah” as they took possession of the hill country. And yet, the fact that they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley and the lowlands was “because they had iron chariots” (1:19).

Is this a discrepancy? Not at all. The victory of the people of God was because God was with them. And the failure of the people of God was because they did not take advantage of the fact that God was with them. The enemy in the lowlands “had iron chariots.” Do you see what had happened? The iron chariots of the enemy became more real to the men of Judah than the power of the Lord who was with them.

What is more real to you? What are the “iron chariots” in your life right now? What is it in your life that threatens to be more real to you than the power of God? It might be a problem. It might be your career (that tends to be common among men). It might be your family or your finances or your future. Be sure to take time occasionally for a reality check. Reality is that God is here and He is greater than your “iron chariots.”

2. Adoni-bezek.

But Adonai-bezek fled; and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes.

And Adonai-bezek said, “Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather up scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me.” So they brought him to Jerusalem and he died there. (Judges 1:6-7).

The cutting off of thumbs and toes rendered a warrior useless in

battle. But this is not all. It also rendered him useless as a priest (Leviticus 8:23-24 describes the initiation rite of a priest - it involved placing blood upon the thumb and the big toe).

It was often the case in the ancient world that a king served a dual function both as priest and king. Indeed, many years before there had been such a priest-king at Jerusalem by the name of Melchizedek (Genesis 14).

3. Caleb & Othniel.

And Caleb said, “The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will even give him my daughter Achsah for a wife.”

And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, captured it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah for a wife. (Judges 1:12-13).

This is our introduction to Othniel. He will be seen in chapter 3 to be one of the Judges of Israel. He was a nephew to Caleb. He also becomes Caleb’s son-in-law (perhaps this is where we get the term “kissing cousins”).

The significant thing about Caleb and Othniel is that they were not pure Israelites by birth. They were Kenizzites (Numbers 32:12). The Kenizzites were descendants of Esau. There had been Kenizzites in the land of Canaan for a long time. Indeed, the Kenizzites were one of the peoples which were in the process of being dispossessed by the Israelites.

When God gave His promise of a land to Abraham, He told him that he would be given as his inheritance the land of the Hittites and the Perizzite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the KENIZZITE (Genesis 15:18-21).

At some time in their lives, these men had disassociated themselves from their fellow Kenizzites and had identified themselves with Israel. They were not Israelites by birth, but they did receive an inheritance in the promised land.

Why is this important for me to know? Because I am not an Israelite by birth. I’m not even related to Esau. And yet, I have received an

inheritance. I have been grafted into the commonwealth of Israel in the same way that Caleb and Othniel have been grafted in.

Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field, Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, “What do you want?”

And she said to him, “Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs. (Judges 1:14-15).

Caleb had already been given the area around Hebron for his inheritance (Joshua 14:13-15). This had been the land of the Anakim. The Anakim were some very BIG people who had very big walls around their cities. These were the men of whom the 10 spies had reported, “They make us look like grasshoppers!”

Hebron was the burial place of Abraham and Sarah. As such, it was a special place both to the Israelites as well as to the Edomites.

At the urging of his new bride, Othniel asks and receives a field as his inheritance in the new land. She goes one step further and asks for an additional inheritance - “springs of water.” You see, the inheritance that was given to Othniel was located in the Negev - in the desert. Desert property isn’t of much value without springs of water to go with it.

Is there a principle here? Perhaps there is. Perhaps it is that we are not to be satisfied with the inheritance given to us - we are also to seek “springs of water.” What are the “springs of water” for which we ought to seek?

- The one who meditates upon the Word of God is likened unto a tree which is planted by streams of water (Psalm 1:2-3).
- Jesus spoke of the Spirit flowing from the life of the believer in terms of living water (John 7:37-39).

4. Failure to Drive Out the Inhabitants of the Land.

Verses 27-36 list failure after failure of the various tribes to drive out the inhabitants of the land.

If you've ever done any gardening, then no doubt you have encountered those ugly, fast-growing blights upon the landscape known as weeds. When you have weeds in your yard, there are one of two things you can do.

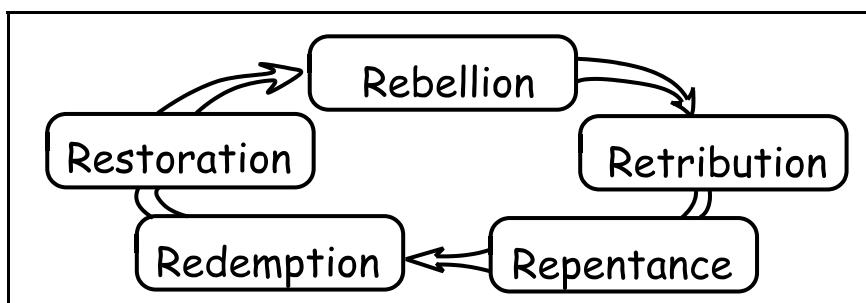
- Pull them out, roots and all.
- Cut off the weeds at ground level.

The second of these two practices isn't very successful. Why not? Because the weeds grow back. And that is what happened to the "weeds" in the land of Canaan. The Israelites became half-hearted in their work of weeding out the Canaanites from the land. And the results would eventually be devastating.

Do you have any weeds growing in the garden of your life? Make sure that you deal with the roots and not merely with the visible symptoms.

A PATTERN FOR FAILURE

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 was 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.

They did not make the same decision to follow the Lord which 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 that 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 to 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. A part of this leadership involved the hearing of legal cases.
- b. Another part of this leadership sometimes involved military action - delivering the people of God from their oppressors..
- c. 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 CAREER OF THE JUDGES

JUDGES 3-17

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.

PROLOGUE

Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan); 2 only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly.

These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.

And they were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. (Judges 3:1-4).

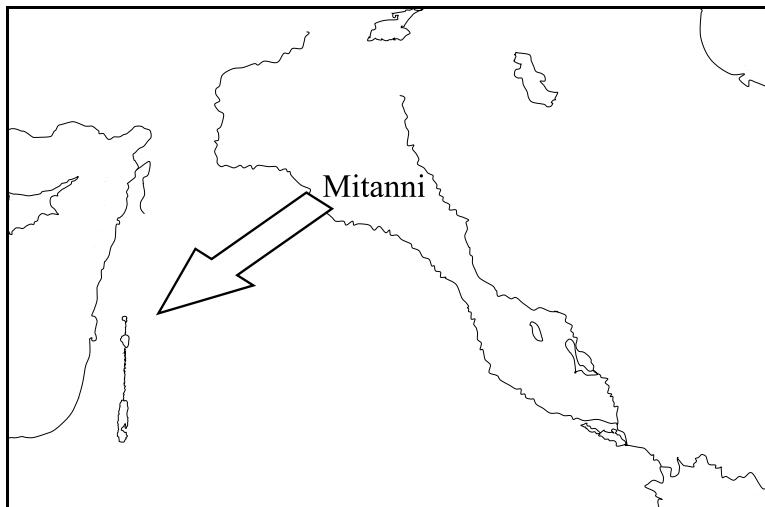
The nations which were left in the land of Canaan were left for a purpose. Chapter 2 gives one such purpose. They were to be a thorn and a snare to Israel (Judges 2:3). But that is not all. Two other reasons are mentioned in this passage.

1. They were to give the Israelite militia “battle experience” (that they might be “taught war” - Judges 3:2).
2. They were for “testing Israel” to determine if they would obey the Lord or not (Judges 3:4).

OTHNIEL

Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia, and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. (Judges 3:8).

The word translated “Mesopotamia” is the Hebrew *Aram Naharim* - “Aram between the rivers.” Indeed, our word “Mesopotamia” is derived from the Greek term meaning “between two rivers.” The rivers in view here were the Tigris and the Euphrates. During this period, northern Mesopotamia was ruled by the Kingdom of Mitanni. There is now archaeological evidence that at the close of the 19th Dynasty of Egypt, Mitanni forces were strong enough not only to enter Canaan, but to go all the way to Egypt.



For eight years, the Israelites found themselves under the shadow of these oppressors from the north.

And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. (Judges 3:9).

Othniel had been introduced in chapter one. He was not only the nephew of Caleb, he had become his son-in-law as well. It should be noted that the Hebrew word translated “deliverer” and “deliver” come from the root *Yasha*, “to save.” It is from this root that we obtain the name *Yashua* - “Yahweh saves” - its English form being “Jesus.”

And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went to war, the Lord gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died. (Judges 3:10-11).

This is the first of seven times where we read in the book of Judges that the Spirit of the Lord comes upon someone. It will happen on a number of other occasions.

- Othniel (3:10).

- Gideon (6:34).
- Jephthah (11:29).
- Samson (13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14).

The Lord gave His Spirit in these instances to enable His people to accomplish special tasks. He does the same thing today.

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.

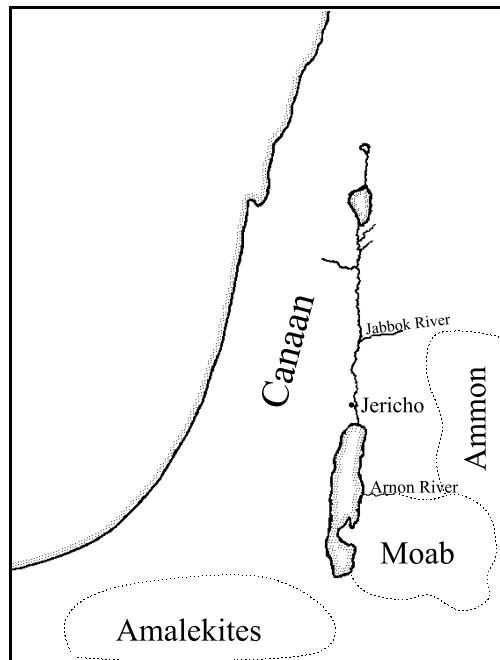
b. Ammon.

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 Ammon.

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. You see, 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, 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

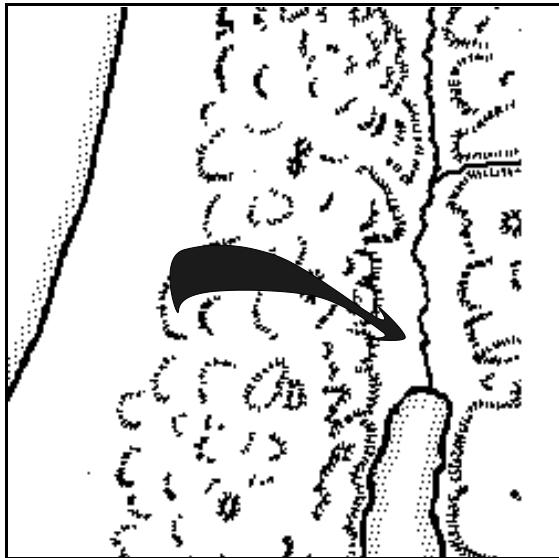
no one escaped.

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 here. It is a principle of leadership. 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

SHAMGAR

And after him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad and he also saved Israel. (Judges 3:31).

Shamgar is not a Hebrew name. It seems to be of Mitanni origins. Anath is the name of the Canaanite goddess of sex and war. This is all we are told about Shamgar. It isn't much, but it does remind us of one important truth

regarding historical narrative. It is that not all of the details are provided. The Bible isn't meant to be a history book. There are a lot of things about which it is silent. Its purpose is to provide a history of redemption - of how God has saved His people. One such instrument that was used is Shamgar and his oxgoad.

If Ehud was an example of how God can use the unusable, Shamgar is an example of how God can use the mundane. You don't normally think of an oxgoad as an instrument of salvation. Or a feeding trough for animals as the cradle of a King. Or a fisherman's boat as a pulpit. Or a crucified carpenter as the Savior of the World.

DEBORAH

1. The Oppression of Hazor.

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. Excavations began on this site in 1955 under Yigael Yadin.



Stratum	Date	Description
1		Destruction by Deborah
2		City was not as strong as Stratum 3 - the plateau was not rebuilt.
3	1400	Destruction by Joshua. Archaeology shows massive burning on the plateau.

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.

2. The Ministry of Deborah.

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.

3. Deborah and Barak.

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).

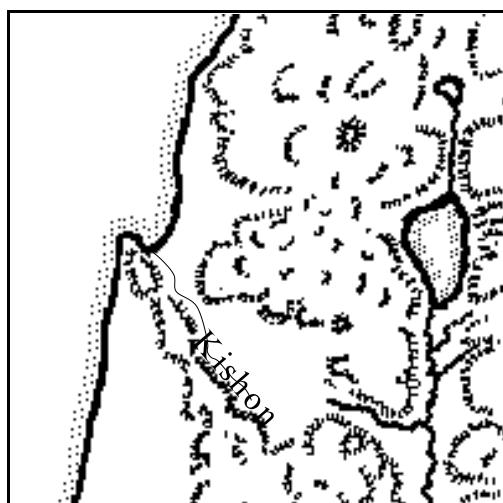
Barak said that he would go, but only on one condition. He would only go if Deborah would come along. Barak believed that the Lord was with Deborah. He wasn't so certain that the Lord was with him. And so, he wanted to bring someone along who would guarantee the presence of the Lord. By insisting that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

4. The Battle.

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.

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

It seems as though the imagery for the spiritual battle of Armageddon is drawn from this historical battle.

4. Sisera’s Defeat.

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.

5. Jael — a Faithful Wife with a Faithless Husband.

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 there is. 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.

6. The Song of Deborah (Judges 5).

Chapter 5 contains the “song of Deborah.” It is a song of victory, praising the Lord for what He had accomplished.

- a. Deborah opens with a refrain which blesses the Lord for the fact that “the leaders led” and that “the people volunteered” (5:2). This refrain is repeated again with a slight variation in verse 9.

It is always a good thing when leaders lead in the right way.

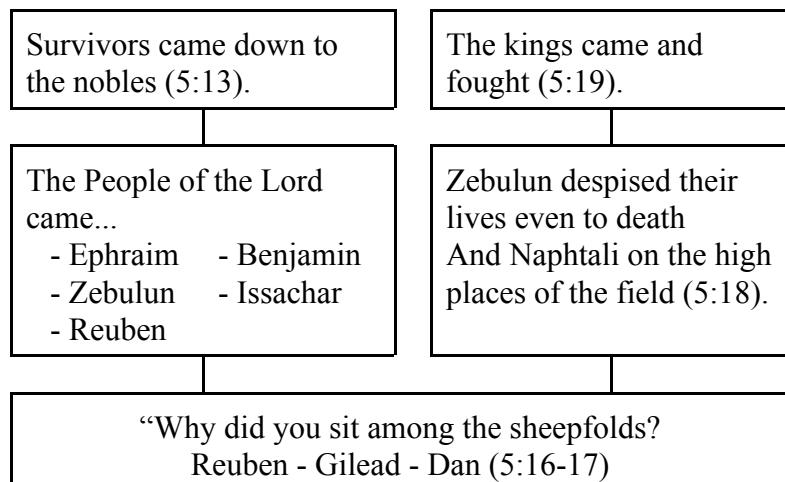
The truth is that leaders will always lead. The only question is whether or not their leadership will be good. We can bless the Lord when our leaders lead in a godly manner.

b. Verse 12 calls Barak to “take away your captives” - literally “to lead captivity captive.”

The Hebrew of this passage corresponds to the Greek of Ephesians 4:8 which describes how Jesus “led captive a host of captives.” Some have mistakenly sought to make that phrase a picture of Jesus moving His saints from one locale to another, but the use here makes it clear that the figure of speech describes one who is leading conquered enemies in a victory parade.

c. Verses 12-15 praises the victory of the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun and Issachar.

Then in verses 16-17 the other tribes are questioned and castigated for their lack of involvement in this battle. Reuben went through “searching of heart” but that did not translate into action. The two and a half tribes from the land of Gilead on the eastern bank of the Jordan stayed safely out of the way. Dan and Asher stayed by the seashore and did not come to help. Verse 18 comes back with more praise for Zebulun and Naphtali as they committed themselves to the cause of the Lord.



d. 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.

e. 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 is the 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

What is it that scares you to death? Is the Lord calling you to face that fear today?

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 and 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. And 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.”

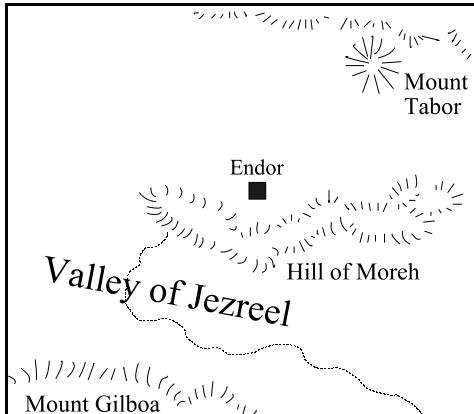
But Joash said to all who stood against him, “Will you contend for Baal, or will you deliver him? Whoever will plead for him shall be put to death by morning. If he is a god, let him contend for himself, because someone has torn down his altar.”

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. 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 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.

Lessons Learned

- God's battles can be won by the few as well as by the many.
- The quality of the soldier is more important than the quantity.

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? They 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 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 70 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 70 sons? The answer is - Trouble!

1. King at Shechem.

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. 70 pieces of silver are used to hire these men who help to murder 70 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.

2. Curse of Jotham.

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

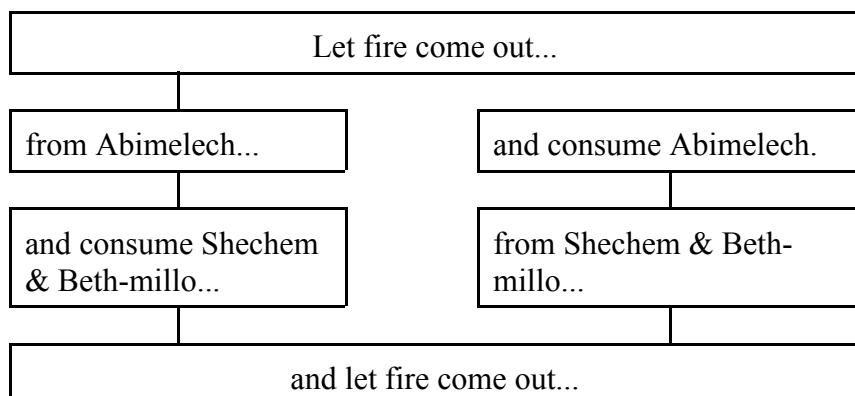
There is a motif established here of a false anointed one.

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 is 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.

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 curse is pronounced as a chiasm, reflecting both upon the king and the cities who had determined to follow him.



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.

TOLAH & JAIR

1. Tola.

Now after Abimelech died, Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, arose to save Israel; and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.

And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir. (Judges 10:1-2).

Though Tola was from the tribe of Issachar, his ministry was based at Shamir within the area belonging to Ephraim. “Shamir” might be an early form of “Samaria.”

Why didn’t he live in the land allotted to Issachar? Perhaps it was because that particular land lay in the Valley of Jezreel where the Canaanites were at their strongest.

Tola is said to have arisen “to save Israel.” The area of his ministry is within the same area which Abimelech had ruled. Perhaps he was involved in restoring order after the death of Abimelech.

2. Jair.

And after him, Jair the Gileadite arose, and judged Israel twenty-two years.

And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. (Judges 10:3-4).

Jair is described as a resident of Gilead. Gilead was the name of the region on the east bank of the Jordan River. While Tola was ministering on the west bank of the Jordan, Jair was ministering on the east bank. His legacy is the cities which were the birthrights of his sons. They became known as *Havvoth-jair*, “the Encampments of Jair.”

We know very little about the judgeship of Jair except that he seems to have exercised significant political control over this area - controlling 30 cities of Gilead.

JEPHTHAH

1. The Judgment of God.

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.

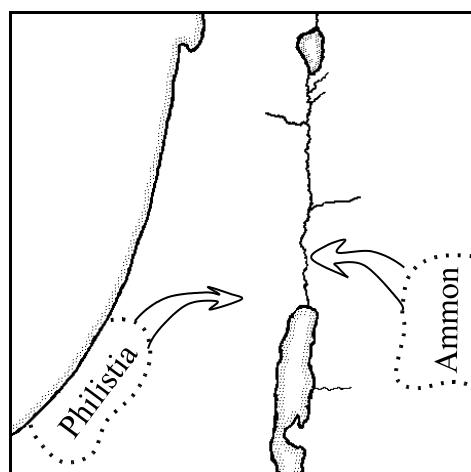
a. The Philistines.

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.

b. 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.



2. Jephthah - A Man Rejected.

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).

2. An Invitation to Leadership.

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.

3. Initial Negotiations.

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.

- a. 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).
- b. 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).
- c. This land had now been the uncontested property of the Israelites for the past 300 years (Judges 11:26).

4. Victory of Jephthah.

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 Mizpah 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 11:12-13).

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.

5. Jephthah's Vow (Judges 11:30-31; 11:34-40).

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:

- a. 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.

b. 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.

6. The Ephraim Incident.

Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you." (Judges 12:1).

This is the second time that the tribe of Ephraim had brought a complaint against one of the Judges. They had spoken in a similar manner to Gideon for not having been invited to the battle against Midian (Judges 8:1). The difference is that this time the complaint led to an armed conflict.

Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh."

And the Gileadites captured the fords of the

Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would say to him, "Say now, 'Shibboleth.'" But he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim. (Judges 12:4-6).

In the battle which followed, Jephthah was successful in capturing the vital fords across the Jordan, thus cutting off the escape route of the men of Ephraim (Ehud had done the same thing in his battle against Moab).

As Ephraimite refugees attempted to escape back into their own territories, they were put to a language test. It is apparent from this that the tribes on the eastern and western banks had become so distant that even their accents were different from one another.

IBZAN, ELON & ABDON

Three Judges are now mentioned in rapid succession. Very little is said of them aside from their name, place of ministry and the duration of their tenure. They lived, they judged Israel, and in some cases, they seem to have prospered.

Name	Ibzan	Elon	Abdon
Place of Ministry	Bethlehem	Zebulun	Ephraim
Length of Ministry	Seven years	Ten years	Eight years
Remarks	30 sons 30 daughters given in marriage	None	40 sons 30 grandsons 70 donkeys

The significance of the number of sons, daughters, grandsons and donkeys is seen in that these were signs of their prosperity and of their influence in the land.

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.

1. The Philistines.

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.

a. 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.”

b. Their origins.

Genesis 10:14 identifies the tribal origins of the Philistines as a Hamitic people coming from the Casluhim (See also Jeremiah 47:4; Amos 9:7; Deuteronomy 2:23 and 1 Chronicles



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 3rd in 1188 B.C. It is probable that the Philistines were among these Sea Peoples.

c. 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.

The Scallion Onion derives its name from Ashkelon.

(2) Gaza was located 3 miles inland from the coast of the Mediterranean. The city was situated on a high hill 100 feet over 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.

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.

2. Promise of His 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 6:2-5. 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.

3. 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.

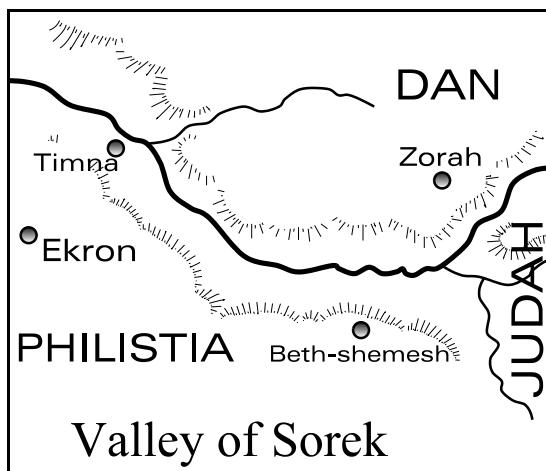
At some point in his life, the Spirit of God “began to stir” within Samson. Perhaps this stirring was with reference to his great strength. We should not necessarily think of Samson as a great muscleman. Rather, he seems to have been an ordinary man gifted with extraordinary strength.

4. 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. And 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 call upon the Lord (Judges 16:28). He wasn’t 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.

5. 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, solicits 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

6. 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.

7. 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.

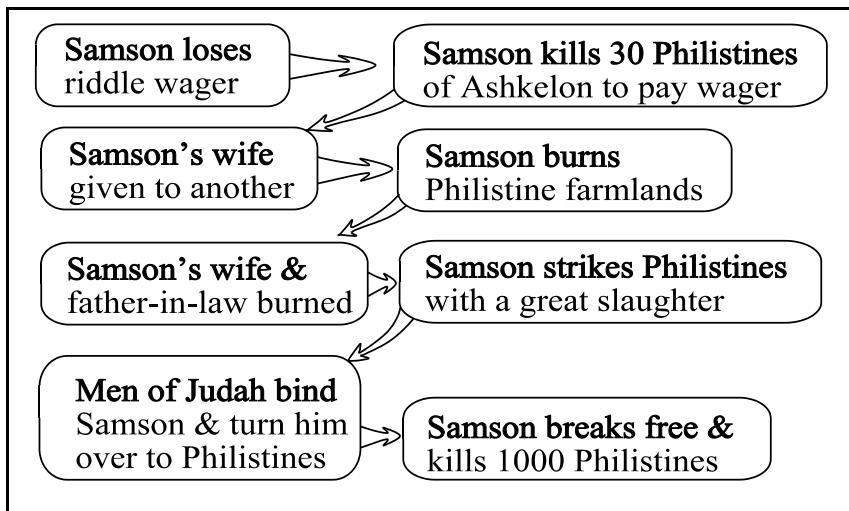
When he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted as they met him. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily so that the ropes that were on his arms were as flax that is burned with fire, and his bonds dropped from his hands.

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. We have already been told that the Lord

was bringing this about.



8. 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.

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.

9. 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.

And it came about when she pressed him daily with her words and urged him, that his soul was annoyed to death.

So he told her all that was in his heart and said to her, “A razor has never come on my head, for I have been a Nazarite to God from my mother’s womb. If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me and I shall become weak and be like any other man.” (Judges 16:16-17).

Delilah is quick to make use of this information and, while he is sleeping, she has his head shaved.

And she said, “The Philistines are upon you, Samson!” And he awoke from his sleep and said, “I will go out as at other times and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him. (Judges 16:20).

Samson had become so self-sufficient in his thinking that he no longer realized the presence of the Lord. He was completely unaware that the “Lord had departed from him.”

How would your life be different if the Lord departed from you? Have you been trying to live the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit? If so, then perhaps you can identify with Samson.

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 the mill by hand (the large animal-powered mills were not yet in use).

10. 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.

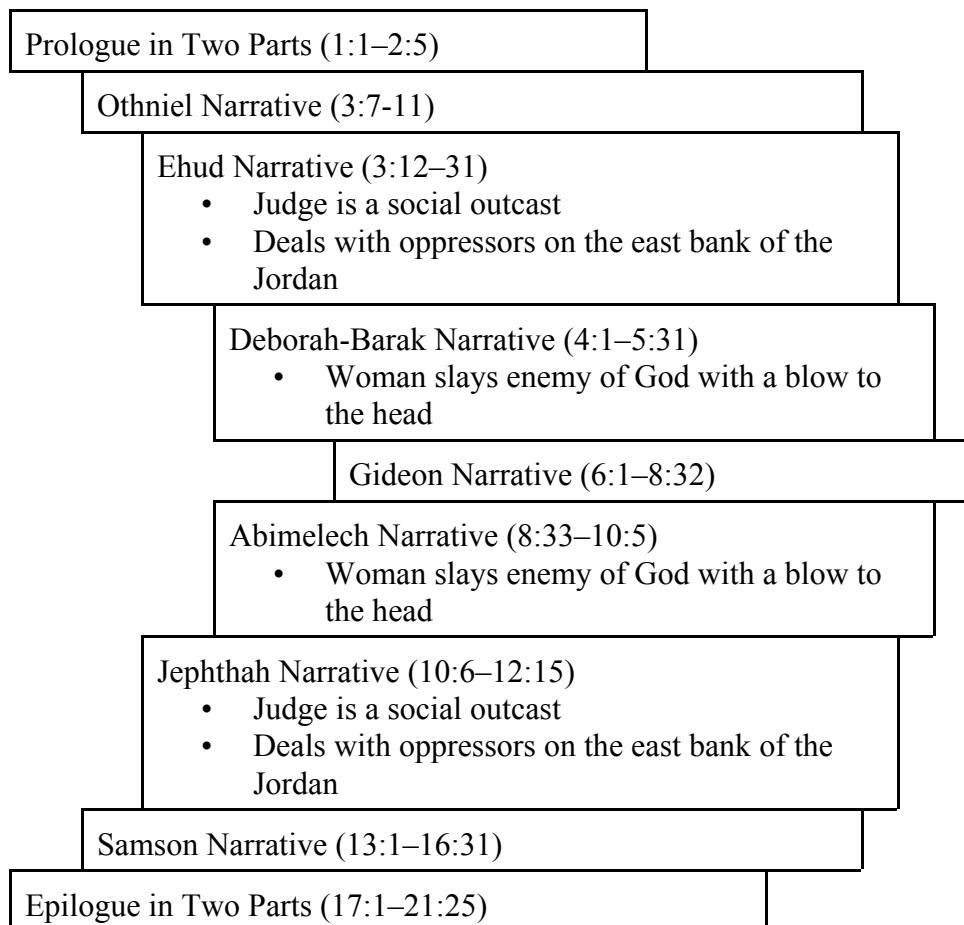
It is interesting to note the parallels as well as the contrasts between Samson and Jesus Christ. Both exhibited an impossible birth, both were deliverers, each was betrayed by a loved one, and each did his greatest work in his death. On the other hand, one came on the scene with his physical strength,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

JUDGES 18-21

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 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.

1. Neither story speaks of Baal worship. Where there is sin involving worship, it involves in worshiping the Lord in an improper way.
2. 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.
3. Both of these narratives seem to take place early in the period of the Judges. The sins which they illustrate would grow in severity as time passed.

MICAH AND THE TRIBE OF DAN

This narrative will tell the story of how the tribe of Dan relocated from their original inheritance near the land of the Philistines to move 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, so this story has its setting following the Samson narrative.

1. Introduction.

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).

2. Micah's Idolatry.

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.

3. Conditions in the Land - No King in Israel.

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.

Although we who live within the United States presently live under a governmental system, it can still be said that every man is doing what is “right in his own eyes.” This is the “American way.” It is the popular religion of this age in which everyone tries to approach God according to their own whims.

4. The Hiring of the Levite (Judges 17:7-13).

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.

5. The Danites' Quest for an Inheritance.

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 obtainable. 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.

6. The Taking of Micah's Priest and Images (Judges 18:7-26).

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.



Excavation of the gate at Laish, 2007

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 and 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.

7. Resettlement at Laish (Judges 18:27-31).

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 above) and this city was taken by the tribe of Dan and it 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).

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. (Judges 18:29).

This is the reading of the traditional Masoretic Text. However, some Hebrew manuscripts declare his lineage to be...

...the son of Gershom, the son of MOSES (Judges 18:29).

This would be a possible reading, since Moses came from the tribe of Levi and his son was named Gershom. Could it be possible that the grandson of Moses instituted this improper priesthood in Dan? Yes, I submit that it is possible. Having a godly grandfather is no guarantee that one will follow the Lord.

THE GIBEAH INCIDENT

The incident described in Judges 19-21 is perhaps the darkest ever described in the pages of the Bible.

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.”

2. Journey to Bethlehem.

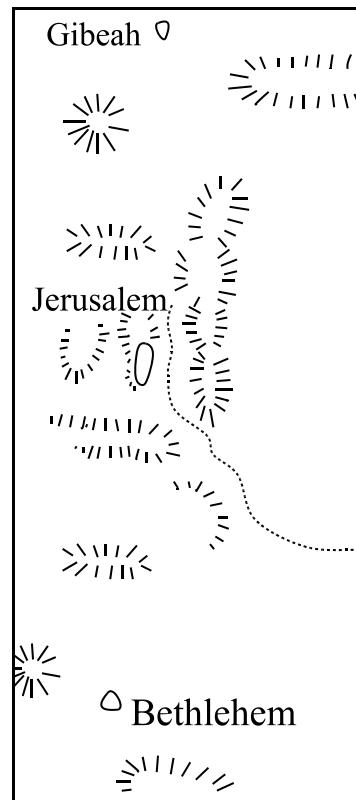
The Levite of this story has a concubine who “played the harlot,” ending up at her father’s home in Bethlehem. He goes to fetch her and ends up staying in the home of his father-in-law for several days. Finally getting a late start, he leaves with his servant and his concubine and begin their journey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

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF RUTH

1. Title of the Book.

Both the Hebrew, the Greek and the English title of this book are the same. It is named after the key character of the book. The name “Ruth” is not a Jewish name. Various meanings have been suggested as to the meaning of the name, but none are certain.

2. The Placement of Ruth in the Canon of Scriptures.

a. The Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts.

- Torah - the Law.
- Nabi'im - the Prophets.
- Kethuv'im (Hagiographa) - the Holy Writings

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.

b. 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	Naomi and her family were 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.

3. 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.

- a. The story is said to take place “in the days when the judges governed” (Ruth 1:1). This indicates that it is written in a time when the judges were no longer governing.
- b. Ruth 4:7 speaks of a custom “in former times in Israel” which was evidently no longer in practice at the time of writing.
- c. 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.

4. 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.

Naomi’s Bitterness (1:1-22)

Ruth discovers a potential Kinsman Redeemer (2:1-23)

Boaz agrees to be a Kinsman Redeemer (3:1-18)

Boaz acquires right to be a Kinsman Redeemer (4:1-12)

Naomi’s Blessing (4:13-21)

5. Purpose of the Book.

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.

- d. 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 Jesus. 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 **וְ** 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.



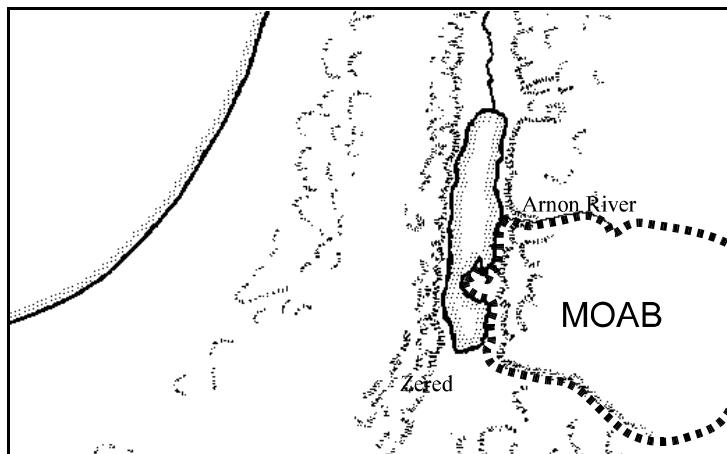
Modern Bethlehem

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, 1200 feet below sea level, the land rises up to a large plateau.



These 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.

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.

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 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 commends 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.

Here was a woman who had lost it all. People may have looked at her and said, “Your God must be judging you.” But not all bad things happen as a result of punishment.

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.”

What makes a place home? Not a house. Or familiar surroundings. It is the presence of those whom you love. You have a home. It is a city - the new Jerusalem.

3. Naomi’s Care for her Daughters-in-Law.

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. (Ruth 1:8-9).

Naomi is not acting out of self-interest. To have her daughters-in-law with her would be a financial advantage. They were young and marriageable.

We live in a society that teaches the looking out for “number one.” Even when people come to church, they are so often only looking for a place to meet their own needs. But the Bible never says that the church exists only to meet your needs. That ego-centric philosophy is merely a reflection of our society.

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.”

And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. (Ruth 1:14).

Most women would be weeping if they found that they were going to have to remain with their in-laws. In-law jokes are a reflection of our fallen nature. They go all the way back to the Garden of Eden when God said that a man would have to leave his father and mother (Genesis 2:21).

But it doesn’t have to be that way. We have a picture here of two daughters-in-law who loved their mother-in-law so much that they were willing to go and live with her in poverty. Perhaps the reason there are so few Ruths today is that today there are so few like Naomi.

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).

The book of Judges is a book of Heros. But the actions of Ruth are no less heroic. She is turning her back on her family, her people, and the country of her birth to go and live in a place where she shall be considered a second-class citizen. There is a principle here. It is that Biblical heroism is not confined to the dramatic and the spectacular. Sometimes it is seen in the mundane endurance of God's people.

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 is *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.

We read of no condemnation from the people. Home is where you can be yourself and not be condemned for it. We aren’t home yet. Our home is in heaven. But we have a home away from home. It is called the church.

Neither do we read of any condemnation from the Lord. To the contrary, the Psalms give us examples of God’s people in the midst of difficulty who are able to fully express the hurt and the emotional upheaval they are experiencing. Christianity does not look at evil and pain and call it good. Christianity is realistic about pain and suffering. But it also calls us to look and to realize there is a bigger picture, even if we cannot see all of it at the present.

One of the most often asked questions that skeptics have of Christianity revolves around the problem of evil. The question asks: “How can a good and powerful God allow so much pain and suffering?” It must be understood that the question itself assumes certain things that can only rightfully be assumed by the Christian world view. It assumes there is something wrong with pain and suffering and that these are not merely to be accepted as the way things are. The very attitude that questions the existence of pain and suffering assumes there must necessarily be the possibility of something better. That is a Christian assumption that we have no

right to make apart from the Christian world view.

The truth is that the Bible does not tell us all of the answers as to why pain and suffering take place. It does give us some of the answers and it also lets us know that things sometimes happen, the reason for which will be unknown this side of eternity.

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.

Barley is typically harvested a month prior to the wheat harvest. Barley was cheaper than wheat. It was used for the feeding of animals. It was also eaten by the poor.

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. If Ruth had been of a different character, Naomi might have prayed, “Lord, will you take her, too?” But Ruth was a blessing, not a curse.

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.

1. Boaz Introduced.

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.

2. Ruth’s Request.

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, not 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 illegal 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.

3. Boaz’s Inquiry.

Boaz arrives and sees Ruth working in the fields. We can tell from his statements that he is immediately interested in 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.

4. Words of Blessing.

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* - **לְהַפִּירְנִי** (LeHakkiyreni), since *I am a foreigner* (נָכְרִיָּה - Nakkiyah - foreigner, one who is conspicuous or noticeable)?"

Ruth is cognizant of the special attention which is being accorded her. She knows that she is a foreigner. And to make matters worse, she is from Moab. Moab has been an enemy of Israel.

Ruth is...

- Moabite
- Poor
- Unmarried

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
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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, he pronounces the Lord's blessing upon Ruth. As we read this, we should remember that these are not the words of a seminary theologian. These are farmers.

Boaz isn't trying to impress anyone. This is how he defines himself. There is a lesson here. If Christ is a part of your life, then He will also be a natural part of your conversation. This shouldn't have to be forced. It is a testimony to our fallen nature that we have to learn a system for presenting the gospel.

“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).

Notice the lack of division between the secular and the sacred. Ruth hadn't been doing church work. She had been working in the field. Common labor.

We need to recognize God's sovereign working in every facet of our lives. He is interested in your work, your chores, and your play. He really is.

Notice also who was it who rewarded Ruth's work. It looks from the passage as though Boaz did. It was his field, his servants, and his grain. But he gives the credit to God. Why? Because that is how God works.

Remember when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush? He announced that He would deliver Israel.

And the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have

given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.

“So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land...” (Exodus 3:7-8).

Who was going to deliver Israel? God was! He said it very clearly. But then he says to Moses, “I will send YOU to Pharaoh.” Moses says, “I thought that you were going to go!”

There are times when we see the burning bush or the pillar of fire. But more often than not, He works through the familiar. And He usually acts through people. If God is going to work in your church, He is going to do it through you.

5. Ruth's Report to Naomi.

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

And she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied.

Her mother-in-law then said to her, “Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.” (Ruth 2:17-19).

Ruth returns to the city where she and Naomi are staying, sharing her meal with her and reporting on the day's activities. Naomi reveals that “*the man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives*” (2:20).

The phrase “*He is one of our closest relatives*” (**מְגַלֵּנוּ הוּא**) is literally, “He is our redeemer clan.” It means that Boaz was, by virtue of his relationship with Elimelech, in the position to redeem the estate of Elimelech and to fulfill the duty of a kinsman redeemer by marrying Ruth.

You see, the custom both among the Jews and throughout the ancient world was that, if a man died without having any heirs, it was the duty of his younger brothers or his nearest surviving male relative to take his widow and have children by her who would carry on his family name.

When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.

And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel." (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

Boaz was one of those surviving male relatives. But as we shall see in the next chapter, he was not the closest.

So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law. (Ruth 2:23).

In spite of their intentions to be married, that did not mean that Ruth would now take up residency with Boaz. They both understood the importance of morality and propriety. Ruth continues to live with her mother-in-law as they await the time when she can be married to Boaz.

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.

1. Naomi's Plan.

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 out 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.

Christians ought to be the most practical people around (“wise as

serpents, innocent as doves"). Naomi knows how men think. It has been said that the reason most women would rather have beauty than brains is because most men can see better than they can think. So she tells Ruth to wait until Boaz has finished eating and drinking and to arrange herself so that she looks good.

It seems that she 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).

2. The Threshing Floor.

- a. 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.
- b. 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.

- c. The threshing floors of Palestine were found in an open, level, outdoor area which had been stamped down to make the ground hard.

3. A Meeting in the Night.

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.

The word “softly” means “quietly”. It was used of David when he stole in and cut a piece from Saul’s robe (1 Samuel 24:4). 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” (כָּלֹעַ) 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” (כָּ�ָר). 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 “skirt” 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” (**אִשְׁתַּחַיָּל**). 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.

4. Departure.

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.

There is a principle here. Christians are not merely to do what is right. They are also to avoid the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

Again he said, “Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.” So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley, and laid in on her. Then she went into the city. (Ruth 3:15).

Boaz does not want Ruth to go back empty-handed; so he provides her with another generous gift of grain. The amount mentioned is, literally, “six of barley”, with no unit of measure given.

And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did it go, my daughter?” And she told her all that the man had done for her.

And she said, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, ‘Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

Then said she, “Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not be in rest until he has settled it today.” (Ruth 3:16-18).

Naomi would also have been encouraged to see another gift of grain from Boaz, which would mean that Boaz certainly would carry out the matter to the end they wanted.

Boaz had said “Go not empty-handed to your mother in law.” Remember that Naomi said that “the Lord had brought me home again empty” (Ruth 1:21). Now Naomi's empty days were over.

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

The final chapter is the story of Ruth deals with the act and the results of redemption. We will also see within this chapter a beautiful picture of what Christ has done for the church.

1. Legal Codes within the Book of Ruth.

This chapter contains some rather quaint customs. But the principles go back to the Mosaic Law.

a. Land Ownership and the Law.

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 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.

b. Levirate Marriage.

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.

But if the man does not desire to take

his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, "My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me."

Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, "I do not desire to take her," 9 then his brother's wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, "Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house."

And in Israel his name shall be called, "The house of him whose sandal is removed." (Deuteronomy 25:7-10).

c. The Kinsman-Redeemer.

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.

Note: 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.

The period of exile gave an even greater force and meaning to the term "redeemer" than it had before; and the book of Isaiah contains nineteen of the thirty-three Old Testament references to God as Israel's covenant redeemer.

2. The Meeting at the Gate.

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.

- a. The gate was the place for any important assembly, but it was primarily for legal business.
- b. The kings of Judah and Israel sat on thrones "in the entrance of the gate of Samaria" (1 Kings 22:10). Similarly, King Zedekiah sat "in the gate of Benjamin" (Jeremiah 38:7). When Absalom wanted to take advantage of the way justice was administered, he "rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate; and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, that Absalom called unto him..." (2 Samuel 15).

- c. The gate was the place to find the men with whom you had to do business.
- d. Amos speaks of “him that rebukes in the gate,” and of the unjust judges who “take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right.” He exhorts the people, “Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate.” (Amos 5:10-15).

People were condemned before the elders of the city “in the gate” (Deuteronomy 22:15). The gate is mentioned in connection with executions (Deuteronomy 22:24).

- e. It is seen as a supreme tragedy when “the elders have ceased from the gate” (Lamentations 5:14).
- f. In Deuteronomy 25:7, when a man refused to marry the widow of his brother, the woman was bidden to “go up to the gate unto the elders” to begin the process of public humiliation of the offender.

Boaz was in the right place to conduct legal business.

And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, “Sit ye 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 is a quorum.

3. Boaz and the Kinsman.

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.*”

We are not told how the land might have changed hands over the years; it may be that Elimelech sold the land to someone just before he took his family to Moab.

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 directly 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.

There is a lesson here. It is that if you desire to be a part of God's eternal program, you must give up your own program. For what are you searching? Look to His lineage.

Whatever the reason, the kinsman was emphatic about it, even repeating his statement so there would be no doubt.

4. Ritual with the Sandal.

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.

5. The Blessing of the People.

And all the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephratah and become famous in Bethlehem.

"Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the Lord shall give you by this young woman." (Ruth 4:11-12).

The court session ends with a statement from all the witnesses, the people and the elders. First, they affirm that they are indeed witnesses. This seems very much like jury proceedings in which the jury announces a decision.

It is interesting, that although they are citizens of Bethlehem, and thus descended from Judah, son of Leah (Genesis 29:35), they place Rachel before Leah.

The reference to Perez is especially interesting, because Perez is not usually regarded as an example of fruitfulness. But there is a reason that Perez is mentioned. It is because the circumstances of his birth are similar to these circumstances.

Tamar (Genesis 38)	Ruth (Ruth 1-4)
Canaanite	Moabitess
Judah is seduced under the cover of a disguise worn by his daughter-in-law	Ruth approaches Boaz to propose marriage under the cover of the darkness of night

After it becomes apparent that Tamar is pregnant, Judah brings her before the village tribunal in order to accuse her formally of prostitution and seek her death	Boaz and Ruth appears before the elders to announce his redemption of her and their impending marriage
Instead, he himself was found out and became the object of shame and condemnation	The couple is praised and blessed by the elders of the city

In each instance, moreover, the “husband” was advanced in age and sired sons when the prospects for doing so would ordinarily be bleak. Both Tamar and Ruth bore sons in the Davidic/messianic line.

When Jacob was dying, he pronounced the following blessing upon Judah:

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” (Genesis 49:10).*

God delights in working through the one whom is normally considered to be rejected. This is seen in the genealogy of the Messiah as given in Matthew 1. There are four women mentioned in that genealogy.

- Tamar (mother of Perez and Zerah)
- Rahab, wife of Salmon
- Ruth
- Her who had been the wife of Uriah

There is also a double blessing directed toward Boaz. He is told in verse 11, “*May you achieve wealth* (עֲשֵׂה חִיל - “make strength”, same word which is translated “excellence” in Ruth 3:11) *in Ephratah and become famous* (קָרְאֵשׁ — “call a name”) *in Bethlehem.*”

NAOMI'S BLESSEDNESS (RUTH 4:13-12)

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).

Note that the child born is regarded as God's gift. This has a direct impact upon how we are to view such issues as abortion.

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

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* (אָמָר - “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. And 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.

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