

## Studies in the Books of Joshua and Judges

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### The Book of Joshua

For the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, we have now before us the history of the Jewish nation as Joshua brings it forward, and those that follow it to the end of the book of Esther. To the end of the books of the Kings, the Jewish theologians call the first book of the prophets to bring them within the distribution of the books of the Old Testament, into the Law, the Prophets, and the Chetubim, or Hagiographa:

“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. (Luke 24:44)” (KJV)

In the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch or Torah, we have a very full account of the rise, advance, and constitution of the Old Testament, the Tenach (the Jewish Bible), God’s Assembly, the family out of which it was raised, the promise, that great charter by which it was incorporated, the miracles by which it was built up, and the laws and ordinances by which it was to be governed, from which one would conceive, very different from what we find in ordinary history.

As a history book, the book of Joshua marks a departure from previous Five Books of Moses. The emphasis here is on the conquest of Canaan and the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel, rather than on laws and commandments. There are, however, some strong links between this book and the Pentateuch. The first link appears in Chapter 1, when God tells Joshua to be strong and of good courage, adding:

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1: 8)” (KJV)

Furthermore, from here to the end of the book, Joshua tries to transmit Moses’ teachings, by reminding the people of the imperative to follow God, not the idols of their neighbours; by renewing the covenant through circumcision and through a solemn oath; and by implementing Mosaic laws, such as the establishment of cities of refuge.

This book tells us nothing about its authorship, but in Joshua 15: 63 we have a clear indication that it was written before David’s capture of Jerusalem.

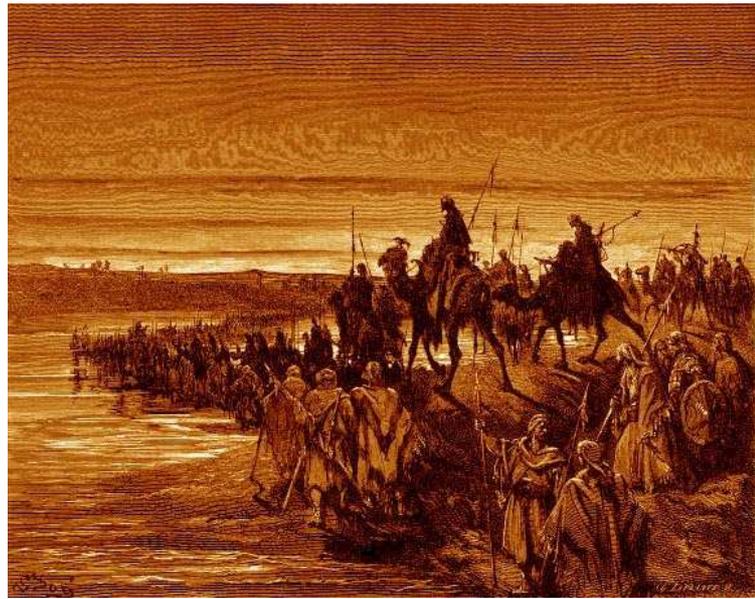
“As for the Jebusites the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out: but the Jebusites dwell with the children of Judah at Jerusalem unto this day. (Joshua 15:63)” (KJV)

The apparent discrepancy between the seemingly universal conquest of Palestine (chapters 9 to 11), and the stubborn, and often unsuccessful fighting referred to in the latter part of the book and in the early part of Judges, is explained by the fact that in chapters 9 to 11 the united army of Israel was meeting and crushing organised resistance.

But, after the division of the land, the Israelite army broke up into its component tribes, each of which attempted to possess its own lot, meeting with a stubborn resistance from those who had fled from the united army or had to come in its way. The discrepancy is further explained by:

- (1) The spiritual declension of the people.
- (2) The ruling geographical factor of Palestine, the division into the hill country and the coastal plain. The latter remained unconquered until David’s time.

“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan. (Joshua 3:17)” (KJV)



The book of Joshua, especially in its early chapters, is full of most valuable spiritual teaching. The land of Canaan is to be regarded, not as a type of heaven, but rather as symbolising God’s promised blessings in Christ.

The entry of the Israelites into the land becomes for us a picture of the life of victory over our spiritual enemies, and of the Christian’s appropriation, through the fight of faith, of all God’s blessings. Viewed in this light the story of Rahab and the spies, the crossing of Jordan into the promised land, the circumcision at Gilgal, the vision of the captain of the Lord’s host, the fall of the walls of Jericho, the consequences of Achan’s sin, the destruction of the Canaanites, all these incidents have a meaning which goes far beyond the historical facts, telling us of the conditions under which God’s greatest spiritual blessings are gained or forfeited.

Anticipation marks the book of Deuteronomy, and realisation the book of Joshua. Redemption out of Egypt under Moses gave the Israelites a redeemed position. Redemption into the Promised Land under Joshua gave God’s people a redemption experience of victory and conquest in taking hold of their possessions. “Position and Experience”, are inseparable in salvation. Salvation is basically a position or status, but it is also an experience of the blessings involved in possessing that very position. The book of Joshua may rightly be called the Ephesians of the Old Testament. The heavenly realms of Ephesians are duly recorded in Paul’s epistle.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. (Ephesians 1:3)” (KJV)

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)” (KJV)

The verses from the New Testament are illustrated by the land of Canaan, which brings forth a picture of the experience of victory and conquest belonging to those positionally redeemed. Those who have been redeemed out of the bondage of Egypt by the Passover's blood now claimed the blessing of that redemption by possessing the land of promise.

### **A quick outline of the book of Joshua, before going into detail:**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Chapters 1-12</b>  | Entrance into Canaan and its conflicts |
| <b>Chapters 13-22</b> | Division and settlement of the land    |
| <b>Chapters 23-24</b> | Joshua's final words and death         |

### **Study Outline**

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>Chapter 1</b>    | <b>Joshua assumes the command</b>                        |
| <b>Verses 1 - 9</b> | Joshua's commission                                      |
| <b>Verses 10-18</b> | Joshua takes his responsibilities in charge              |
| <b>Chapter 2</b>    | <b>The spies and Rahab's faith</b>                       |
| <b>Verse 1</b>      | The spies and Jericho                                    |
| <b>Verses 2-14</b>  | Rahab's faith  |
| <b>Verses 15-24</b> | The scarlet line   |
| <b>Chapter 3</b>    | <b>The Jordan crossing</b>                               |
| <b>Verses 1-6</b>   | The Ark of the Lord leads the way                        |
| <b>Verses 7-8</b>   | Joshua begins to be exalted                              |
| <b>Verses 9-13</b>  | Joshua directs the crossing                              |
| <b>Verses 14-17</b> | The crossing is done                                     |
| <b>Chapter 4</b>    | <b>The memorial stones</b>                               |
| <b>Verses 1-18</b>  | The two memorials  |
| <b>Verses 19-24</b> | What mean these stones <sup>1</sup>                      |
| <b>Chapter 5</b>    | <b>Israel at Gilgal</b>                                  |
| <b>Verse 1</b>      | Israel's terror-stricken enemies                         |
| <b>Verses 2-8</b>   | The new generation circumcised                           |
| <b>Verses 9-10</b>  | Reproach of Egypt rolled away                            |
| <b>Verses 11-12</b> | Manna and the land's produce                             |
| <b>Verses 13-15</b> | Joshua's vision of the divine captain of the Lord's army |

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<sup>1</sup> We died in Christ: Romans 6:1-10.

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| <b>Chapter 6</b>      | <b>Jericho occupied</b>                                    |
| Verses 1-19           | Divine instructions followed                               |
| Verses 20-21          | The fall of the city                                       |
| Verses 22-25          | Rahab remembered   |
| Verses 26-27          | The curse on Jericho                                       |
| <b>Chapter 7</b>      | <b>Achan's sin</b>   |
| Verses 1-15           | Defeat of Israel with the reason                           |
| Verses 16-26          | The sin judged   |
| <b>Chapter 8</b>      | <b>Ai taken</b>  |
| Verses 1-17           | Joshua's strategy  |
| Verses 18-27          | The capture of Ai  |
| Verses 28-29          | The destruction of the city                                |
| Verses 30-35          | The altar at Ebal  |
| <b>Chapter 9</b>      | <b>Deception of the Gibeonites</b>                         |
| Verses 1-2            | The confederacy of the enemy                               |
| Verses 3-15           | The ruse of the Gibeonites                                 |
| Verses 16-27          | The mistake discovered                                     |
| <b>Chapter 10</b>     | <b>Southern Canaan taken</b>                               |
| Verses 1- 6           | Adoni-Zedek and his alliance                               |
| Verses 7-15           | The war and the miracle                                    |
| Verses 16-43          | A great victory and subsequent conquests                   |
| <b>Chapters 11-12</b> | <b>Further conquests of Canaan</b>                         |
| Chapter 11:1-15       | Conquest of Northern Canaan                                |
| Chapters 11:16-12:24  | Summary of the conquest                                    |
| <b>Chapter 13</b>     | <b>Joshua instructed to apportion the land</b>             |
| Verses 1-7            | The Lord's message to Joshua                               |
| Verses 8-33           | The inheritance of Reuben, Gad, and half tribe of Manasseh |
| <b>Chapter 14</b>     | <b>Caleb's request and inheritance</b>                     |
| Verses 1-5            | Summary of the apportionment of the land                   |
| Verses 6-15           | Caleb's request  |
| <b>Chapters 15-16</b> | <b>Judah's and Ephraim's portions</b>                      |
| Chapter 15: 1-63      | The portion of Judah                                       |
| Chapter 16: 1-10      | The portion of Ephraim                                     |

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|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Chapter 17</b>       | <b>Manasseh's portion</b>                             |
| <b>Verses 1-13</b>      | The names and boundaries                              |
| <b>Verses 14-18</b>     | Manasseh's complaint and Joshua's reply               |
| <b>Chapters 18-19</b>   | <b>The portion of the other tribes</b>                |
| <b>Chapter 18: 1</b>    | Tabernacle erected at Shiloh                          |
| <b>Verses 2-10</b>      | Failure of the seven tribes to claim their possession |
| <b>Verses 11-28</b>     | Portion of Benjamin                                   |
| <b>Chapter 19: 1-51</b> | Portion of the remaining tribes                       |
| <b>Chapter 20</b>       | <b>The cities of refuge</b>                           |
| <b>Verses 1-6</b>       | Repetition of the provision                           |
| <b>Verses 7-9</b>       | The cities précised                                   |
| <b>Chapter 21</b>       | <b>The Levites' portion</b>                           |
| <b>Verses 1-42</b>      | The portion of the Levites                            |
| <b>Verses 43-45</b>     | The Lord's faithfulness was renewed                   |
| <b>Chapter 22</b>       | <b>Return of the Transjordan tribes</b>               |
| <b>Verses 1-9</b>       | Joshua sends the tribes home                          |
| <b>Verses 10-29</b>     | The great altar and the controversy                   |
| <b>Verses 30-32</b>     | The controversy settled                               |
| <b>Chapter 23</b>       | <b>Joshua's farewell admonitions</b>                  |
| <b>Verses 1-13</b>      | Exhortations of fidelity to the Lord                  |
| <b>Verses 14-16</b>     | Concluding appeal                                     |
| <b>Chapter 24</b>       | <b>Covenant at Shechem, and Joshua's death</b>        |
| <b>Verses 1-15</b>      | Historical retrospect and Joshua's eloquent challenge |
| <b>Verses 16-28</b>     | Covenant accepted                                     |
| <b>Verses 29-33</b>     | Joshua's death  |

### **The Ark of the Lord leads the way**

As the Israelites begin to cross the Jordan River on their way into the Promised Land, the priests carry the Holy Ark which appears to perform a miracle similar to the crossing of the Red Sea. The waters of the Jordan part, and the people are able to cross without any difficulty.

While this history does not have the epic proportions of the Red Sea crossing, it is clearly reminiscent of it, if only on a much smaller scale. Do we really need a rational explanation for it? Should we point out that the Jordan, for the most

part, is not a particularly deep river, and crossing it is usually not a big problem. Today, the River Jordan is dry, and not wide at all. In any case, Joshua, according to this story, uses the Holy Ark as a magic tool to persuade the people to cross Jordan, by showing them that God is on their side. No doubt, they are very apprehensive about entering a settled land full of fortified towns and organising a campaign against the various Canaanite nations, who have better weapons and are technologically more advanced than the Nomadic Hebrews. They need a sign from heaven, and Joshua provides it.

## **Rahab's faith**

Joshua knew that he lacks weapons and resources to launch a frontal attack on his first objective, and this is to say, the town of Jericho, which stands in the way as he crosses the Jordan and enters the Land of Canaan. His approach from the moment he starts his invasion is one of stratagems rather than conventional military strategy. Therefore, he starts by sending two spies to Jericho, and finds out what can be done to bring down this heavenly fortified town.

The spies find their way to the house of Rahab, the harlot, located in the wall surrounding the town. They gather their information and leave, with the promise to spare Rahab and her family when they conquer Jericho.

The story, told at some length, also raises some questions. Why a harlot? Why play up this part of the story, while most of the following conquest stories are brief and lacking in human interest? This is not easy to answer, and we can only speculate.

The first and most likely possibility: it just happened that way, and the story was preserved. Secondly, it does show that in order for a small nation to overcome numerous enemies, many unconventional methods must be utilised. The Book of Joshua, and of Judges which follow each other, provide several examples of innovative military strategies.

## **The fall of the city**

What kind of intelligence did the spies gather regarding the walls of Jericho? For one thing, they were high and thick, and could not be easily stormed. Joshua, like other biblical figures before him, is in a quandary, and as he turns inwardly to search for a solution, the angel of God (or, his own inner self?) appears to him, telling him to bring down the walls of Jericho not by attacking them but by having the priests circle the city and blow their horns, which would result in the walls tumbling down.

Really, what are we to make of this story? For one thing, we know that in antiquity the Jordan valley was visited by earthquakes. We also know that Jericho, maybe the oldest city of the world, was destroyed many times and rebuilt, stone upon stone. We can also speculate that the spies who visited Rahab's house in the wall found out that the walls were already full of cracks, possible from previous earthquakes, and with the vibrations produced by some good blasts of the horns of the horns one could precipitate the impending crumbling of the walls. As we have seen in the story of the burning bush and the water coming out of the rock, there are natural phenomena in the Holy Land, which, to a stranger, may appear to be miracles.

## **The war and the miracle**

“So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee. Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night. And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword. Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal. (Joshua 10: 7-15)” (KJV)

Having conquered Jericho, Joshua continues his campaign up the foothills near Jerusalem and finally reaches the Valley of Ayalon to the west, having virtually severed the south, or the Negev, from the centre of the land and the Galilee. As he prepares for the next battle, he is helped by a storm with large hailstones showering down on his enemies, and when the sun finally comes out, Joshua commands the sun to stand still in the sky until he finishes the battle. The sun obeys by standing still a whole day in the middle of the sky, “until a nation is done avenging its enemies.”

Obviously, here we cannot possibly resort to a natural explanation. We have long known that the sun does not rise and set, but rather the earth rotates, making the sun appear to rise and set. Could it be that this single statement renders the Holy Scriptures unreliable?

In the book of Ecclesiastes, which is attributed to King Solomon, the wisest man, we read:

“The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. (Ecclesiastes 1:5)” (KJV)

We do know that, scientifically speaking, none of this is correct. And yet, even up to this day we keep talking about the sun rising and setting. What we actually refer to is the appearance, rather than the actual event, of rising and setting. As for Joshua, having just experienced the phenomenon of hailstones helping him win a battle, he must have shouted at the sun in the heat of the next battle to stand still. Did nature obey? Not likely. However, Joshua might have inspired his troops to fight more decisively, so that time appeared to have stopped. Once again, we see a natural phenomenon dressed in an ancient people’s imagination as a miracle.

## **Further conquests of Canaan and Summary**

“And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, And to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth, and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west, And to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them. And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining. And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire. And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor

beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms. And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn. And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe. As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses. So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war. (Joshua 11)” (KJV)

In one of his last battles, Joshua reaches the fortified town of Hazor, north of the Sea of Galilee. Here, we are told he scores a great victory, killing its king, Jabin, and burning the town of Hazor to the ground.

This particular story has given biblical scholars many headaches, since we later learn in the book of Judges, in the story of Deborah and Barak, that Jabin was defeated in their day, some decades later, and was killed then.

“And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan. (Judges 4:24)” (KJV)

How do we solve this chronological contradiction?

Let us now enter into archaeology. In his work on Hazor, the archaeologist Yigael Yadin writes on his excavations in this Galilee site, where the digging unearthed many town layers going back to Abraham's time. In the layer corresponding to Joshua's conquest in the thirteenth century B.C.E., Yadin and his companions found a town layer devastated by fire. This provided proof that the story in Joshua is historically justified, while the version in the book of Judges may be an unedited inclusion of the original story in a somewhat later event.

It is essential to note in this regard that the first historical record of the actual existence of a people of Israel appears around this time in an Egyptian inscription of the period, in which the Pharaoh refers to a battle in the south of the Land of Canaan where he defeated or actually "routed for good" the "People of Israel." So, in effect, with Joshua we are for the first time on firm historical ground, whereas the stories of the Patriarchs and Moses still remain shrouded in the mists of history.

As we can see, the book of Joshua is not free from difficulties for today's readers, Joshua commanding the sun to stand still, as for example. However, it is more than poetic and imagery, like with the "darkness over the land" at the crucifixion, the miracle cannot be dissociated from the importance of the occasion. Whatever, there no need to doubt its incidence. Another difficulty, as we have seen, is felt concerning the command for the wholesale destruction of the Canaanite population as at Ai (Joshua 8: 2-3 and 6: 21).

*"And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it. So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. (Joshua 8: 2-3)" (KJV)*

*"And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. (Joshua 6: 21)" (KJV)*

Yet no thoughtful believer in God Almighty can survey the field of history without seeing that God does judge nations as well as individuals, not only Assyria and Babylon, as foretold by the prophets, but even the peoples of our modern world. The Lord Jesus Christ, whose tenderness cannot be impugned, teaches that quite plainly, and the sins of the Canaanites were no less heinous than those of the cities of the plain.

“And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. (Luke 17: 26-30)” (KJV)

The same Son of Man revealed to His servant John the Divine, the apostle of love, that He goes forth “in righteousness to judge and make war”.

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19: 11-16)” (KJV)

When studied in the light of the New Testament books, passages which were once a difficulty may be found to teach us humbling lessons of our own shortness of vision, of our inadequate ideas of God’s holiness and hatred of sin, and of God’s infinite mercy in Christ in sparing us from those evils which we must correctly have deserved.

In general we may say that the book records the “acts” in which Joshua was conscious of divine help; the facts concerning the progress made towards the final goal; and finally the effects of permanence significance. Joshua’s headquarters were first located at Gilgal, and afterwards advanced from there to Shiloh, and Shechem.

“And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. (Joshua 4: 19)” (KJV)

“And the men went and passed through the land, and described it by cities into seven parts in a book, and came again to Joshua to the host at Shiloh. (Joshua 18: 9)” (KJV)

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

The sacred ark, the symbol of the presence of God, is moved forward to each of the stations in turn, to be found, after the period of the Judges, at Shiloh (1 Samuel, chapter 1).

The book of Joshua teaches the importance of obedience to the divine law with its moral requirements for those who would be instruments of the divine will; and further, of the necessity of complete self-dedication to that end.

“And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD my God. (Joshua 14:9)” (KJV)

In the early part especially, the book of Joshua is full of most valuable teaching. The story of Rahab and the spies, the crossing of Jordan, and other stirring events all have meaning beyond historical facts, telling us of the conditions under which God's greatest spiritual blessings are gained or forfeited.

The treatment of the Old Testament history by Christ should be carefully studied. Jesus never cast doubt either on its main outlines or its minutest details. He mentions the incident of David and the showbread (Mark 2:26), the glory of Solomon (Matthew 6:29), the visit of Queen of Sheba (Matthew 12:42), Elijah's mission to the widow of Zarephath (Luke 4:26), and the healing of Naaman (Luke 4:27). Even liberal critics admit that Jesus the Messiah believed in its historical truthfulness, and we may unhesitatingly do the same.

It is not as history, but as revelation that these books are mainly treated in the New Testament, and should be studied by Messianic Jews as well as Christians. They are cited as revealing God's character in His deeds, His gracious promises from generation to generation, and His redemptive purpose in Christ, the Son of David; and finally they tell how the sending of His prophets and the rejection of their message (Matthew 21: 33-46) led on to the sending of the Messiah.

## **Your self-examination or written work.**

1. List God's promises to Joshua and note the conditions on which they depended. Study the Promised Land as the type of the Spirit-filled life.
2. What do you consider is the spiritual meaning of the "crossing of Jordan"? Note that it is the necessary condition before God can do wonders in us. What is its relation to the two main purposes of the miracle as stated in Joshua 3: 10 and 4: 23-24?
3. Examine the spiritual dangers of compromise as illustrated in the story of the Gibeonites. Note Joshua's faithfulness and compare with Psalm 15.
4. Examine Joshua as a type of Christ (Hebrews 4:8). Consider his name, his leading the people of God to the land of promise, his succeeding Moses, as Christ's teaching succeeds the law. (Acts 13:39)
5. What New Testament parallels are suggested by the stones of witness, the promised possession, circumcision, and the cities of refuge (Joshua chapters 20-22)?

# The Book of Judges

One may call the book, “The Book of Judges of the Children of Israel”. The judgments of Israel being peculiar, so were their judges, whose office differed vastly from that of the judges of other nations. This book is occupied with the period from the death of Joshua to the time of Samuel. Joshua, the man of faith, before he died gave God’s people good advice and solemn warnings. The people answered:

“And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. (Joshua 24:24)” (KJV)

They had now under the guidance and power of the Almighty God, to work out their own salvation. They served the Lord as long as Joshua lived, and the elders he had appointed, forsaking God afterwards, allied themselves by marriage with the Canaanites, and turned to idolatry. It is a vivid illustration of any established and professed church institution, which after the times of the apostles, rapidly became worldly, and had to be disciplined by God as seen today, church buildings being empty on worship days, and people’s disinterest in religious practice and affairs. Yesterday and today, people need to be disciplined by God, in spite of the revivals here and there as in the times of the Judges.

A long catalogue had to be made of the districts from which the tribes did not drive out to the Canaanites. Israel being unfaithful made a league with the inhabitants, regardless of their evil. The Angel of the Lord was at Gilgal during the book of Joshua, to which place the Israelites should in spirit have constantly returned: it is the place of circumcision. Now, being in Bochim, God reminded them that they were delivered from Egypt, and had declared that He would never break His covenant with Israel. They were to make no league with the people of the land. They did not obey God’s voice. The failure was irretrievable. The people wept and sacrificed there.

In spite of all this, God’s people formed alliances with the Canaanites, and sacrificed to Baalim. Then, they were oppressed by their enemies; but, as often as they turned to the Lord, He rose up a judge who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors. Yet, when the judge died, they returned again to the evil ways. This experience of evil doing, oppression, repentance and deliverance occurred again and again during a period of over three hundred years.

The term “judges” is in fact misleading, since, with the exception of Deborah, who was both a judge and a prophet, the remainder of so-called judges in this book did not judge, but were rather an odd assortment of warlords, appearing in

different Hebrew tribes at different times, especially in time of trouble, and acquiring the local status of a tribal leader by virtue of maintaining a state of non-belligerence for a certain number of years.

The chronology of the book of the Judges presents some difficulties. It is clear from various passages that the periods during which the judges ruled could not all have been consecutive. The 480 years from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon necessarily shortens the period of the judges, and one passage of the book itself implies that two of the oppressors were going on at the same time, namely that of the Philistines and of Ammon.

“And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. (1 Kings 6:1)” (KJV)

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. (Judges 10: 7)” (KJV)

This would agree with the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1, but there is a different reading in Acts 13, which has been adopted by the editors of the Greek Testament, irrespective of all questions of chronology.

“Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, **he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges** about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. (Acts 13:16-20)” (KJV)

So, the 450 years are not applied to the duration of the judges. This period may have been made up in this way, counting from the birth of Isaac, because the promise was to the “seed” of Abraham, while Isaac was the child of promise.

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| Age of Isaac, when Jacob was born (Genesis 25: 26) | 60 years               |
| Age of Jacob when he stood before Pharaoh          | 130 years              |
| Age of Israel in Egypt                             | 215 years              |
| Age of Israel in the wilderness                    | 40 years               |
| Age to the division of the land                    | 7 years                |
| About 450 years                                    | <hr/> Total: 452 years |

Whatever, the period of the Judges from Hebrew angle, which lasted roughly for one century, precede the time of the Israelite monarchy, which lasted for about five centuries as above. It could be referred to as the pre-monarchic period. The first thing this book makes perfectly clear is that Joshua's conquest of Canaan was far from complete. Local Canaanite towns and town alliances continued to exist and kept attacking the new settlers. To make things worse, new invaders called Philistines arrived from across the sea and settled on the coast, from where they would challenge Hebrew tribes for over a century. Old invaders, such as the Midianites and the Amalekites, arrived from the desert. And, nations from the other side of the Jordan, such as the Ammonites, joined in the battle.

To summarise, while Joshua won some spectacular victories that enabled the Israelites to settle in parts of the Promised Land, he left the tribes with many unresolved territorial as well as internal problems, not at the least of which was the lack of unity, which would continue to plague them for generations.

### **The necessity for judges**

The pre-monarchic period is characterised in the Old Testament as a time of lawlessness, with everyone doing what seemed right to him. There is disunity among the tribes, and none seems to be able to fend for itself. The more, the time of the "judges" is portrayed as a time of constant attempts by the tribes of Israel to assimilate in the local pagan cultures, dominated by deities such as Baal, Ashtaroah, Moloch, Dagon, and others. These attempts never seem to work, causing the tribes conflicts with and subjugation by their pagan neighbours. God, however, mindful of the covenant, "made judges to arise and save them from their persecutors".

Once the twelve tribes of Israel began to settle in what will become the kingdom of Israel, much of the unity and cohesion that emerged at the end of the desert years and during the time of Joshua seem to have disappeared. Each tribe found its own place and became isolated from the rest, and although all continued to share a common religion with such unifying elements as priests, Levites, as well as a common history, they are all plagued by local as well as common enemies, they are not all to join together effectively to defeat those enemies, they sometimes even turn on one another, and they remain small tribes who are unable to build a strong political or religious culture.

Unlike the brilliant military campaigns in Joshua's time, now most of the action is more on the order of guerrilla warfare, as in the case of Gideon, or even the exploits of a single larger-than-life individual, such as a Samson. It appears that what saves the day during this time is the fact that the Hebrew tribes do not face

a strong alliance of enemies or a major power, such as Egypt or Babylonia, and are able to get by. Later on, during invasions by major powers such as Assyria, Babylonia, and eventually Rome, the balance of power will shift against the now unified tribes.

## List of Judges

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Othniel</b>   | Son of Kenaz – first of the judges, fought Aram in the North.     |
| <b>Ehud</b>      | Son of Gera, fought Moab in the East.                             |
| <b>Shamgar</b>   | Son of Anath, fought the Philistines in the West.                 |
| <b>Deborah</b>   | Guided Barak in defeating the Canaanites in the Valley of Jezreel |
| <b>Gideon</b>    | Son of Yoash, fought the Medianites in the northwest.             |
| <b>Abimelech</b> | Son of Gideon, the only judge to gain leadership by treachery.    |
| <b>Tola</b>      | Son of Puah, of the tribe of Ephraim. No battle mentioned.        |
| <b>Yair</b>      | The Gileadite, no battle mentioned.                               |
| <b>Jephthah</b>  | Son of Gilead, fought the Ammonites in the northeast.             |
| <b>Ibzan</b>     | From Bethlehem, no battle mentioned.                              |
| <b>Elon</b>      | The Zebulunite, no battle mentioned.                              |
| <b>Abdon</b>     | Son of Hillel, no battle mentioned.                               |
| <b>Samson</b>    | Son of Manoah, fought the Philistines single-handedly.            |

Of the above names, the best known are Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. In the following, the First Book of Samuel, we have two more judges: Eli, the priest, and Samuel, the prophet, before the monarchy is finally established.

## Controversies

| Time of Joshua           | Time of the Judges     |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Victory                  | Defeat                 |
| Freedom                  | Servitude              |
| Faith                    | Unbelief               |
| Progress                 | Declension             |
| Spiritual vision         | Earthly bounded        |
| Truthfulness to the Lord | Apostasy from the Lord |
| Joy                      | Sorrow                 |
| Strength                 | Weakness               |
| Sense of unity           | Declension, anarchy    |
| Sin judged               | Sin lightly regarded   |

## A quick outline of the book of Judges, before going into detail:

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Chapters 1:1- 2:5</b>     | <b>Introduction to the period of the Judges</b> |
| <b>Chapter 1: 1-36</b>       | Political setup from Joshua to the Judges       |
| <b>Chapter 2: 1-5</b>        | Israel weeps in failure                         |
| <b>Chapters 2:6 – 16:31</b>  | <b>The period of the Judges</b>                 |
| <b>Chapters 2:6-3:6</b>      | Religious character of the period               |
| <b>Chapters 3:7- 16:31</b>   | List of the Judges                              |
| <b>Chapters 17:1- 21:25</b>  | <b>The double appendix</b>                      |
| <b>Chapters 17:1- 18:31</b>  | Idolatry of Micah and the Danites               |
| <b>Chapters 19:1 – 21:25</b> | The crime of Gibeah and its punishment          |

## Study Outline

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Chapter 1</b>        | <b>Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites</b>       |
| <b>Verses 1-4</b>       | The problem of confronting the tribes                     |
| <b>Verses 5-20</b>      | Incomplete victory of Judah                               |
| <b>Verse 21</b>         | Incomplete victory of Benjamin                            |
| <b>Verses 22-36</b>     | Failures of other tribes                                  |
| <b>Chapters 2:1-3:4</b> | <b>Consequences of Israel's failure</b>                   |
| <b>Verses 1-5</b>       | The angel of Bokim  |
| <b>Verses 6-15</b>      | Israel's earlier obedience contrasted to present apostasy |
| <b>Verses 16-19</b>     | Summary of Israelite history under the Judges             |

**Chapter 2:20-3:4** Nations left to prove Israel

**Chapter 3: 5-31** **Judgeships of Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar**

**Verses 5-11** First apostasy, servitude, and Judge Othniel

**Verses 12-30** Second apostasy, servitude and judge Ehud

**Verse 31** Shamgar

**Chapters 4 - 5** **Deborah and her feats**

**Chapter 4:1-3** Third apostasy, servitude, and judge Deborah

**Verses 4-24** Deborah and Barak in victory

**Chapter 5:1-31** The song of Deborah

**Chapter 6** **Gideon and Midianite oppression**

**Verses 1-24** Fourth apostasy, servitude, and judge Gideon

**Verses 25-40** Gideon's initial exploits

**Chapter 7** **The victory of Gideon's three hundred**

**Verses 1-8** The reduction of the army

**Verses 9-14** The Midianite's dream

**Verses 15-25** The victory of faith

**Chapter 8** **Gideon's failure**

**Verses 1-3** Jealousy of the Ephraimites

**Verses 4-21** Complete victory over the invader

**Verses 22-32** Gideon's failure

**Verses 33-35** The fifth apostasy

**Chapter 9** **Abimelech and his wickedness**

**Verses 1-5** The murder of Gideon's sons

**Verses 6-57** Abimelech's pretensions and end

**Chapter 10** **Tola, Jair and the sixth apostasy**

**Verses 1-5** Tola and Jair

**Verses 6-18** The sixth apostasy and servitude

**Chapter 11** **Jephthah delivers from the Ammonites**

**Verses 1-11** Jephthah rejected but called to be leader

**Verses 12-28** Jephthah negotiations with Ammon

**Verses 29-40** Jephthah's vow and its fulfillment

**Chapter 12** **Jephthah's war with Ephraim**

**Verses 1-7** The quarrelsome Ephraimites punished

**Verses 8-15** The Judges Ibzon, Elon, and Abdon

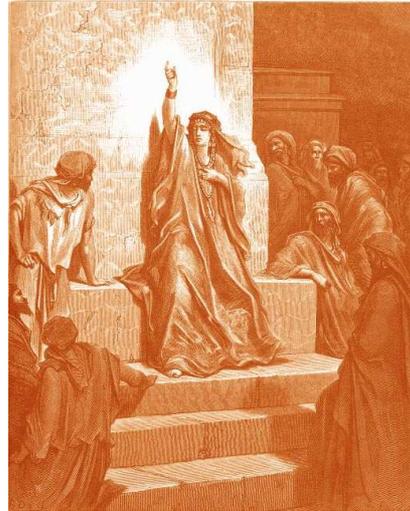
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|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Chapter 13</b>       | <b>Philistine domination; birth of Samson</b>   |
| <b>Verse 1</b>          | The seventh apostasy                            |
| <b>Verses 2-23</b>      | Philistinism and Naziritism                     |
| <b>Chapter 14</b>       | <b>Samson's early exploits</b>                  |
| <b>Verses 1-7</b>       | Samson kills the lion                           |
| <b>Verses 8-9</b>       | Honey in the lion's skeleton                    |
| <b>Verses 10-20</b>     | Exploits despite compromise                     |
| <b>Chapter 15</b>       | <b>Samson in conflict with the Philistines</b>  |
| <b>Verses 1-8</b>       | Samson's revenge                                |
| <b>Verses 9-13</b>      | Bound by his own                                |
| <b>Verses 14-17</b>     | The exploit with the ass's jawbone              |
| <b>Verses 18-20</b>     | Samson's prayer and its answer                  |
| <b>Chapter 16</b>       | <b>Samson and Delilah, and his death</b>        |
| <b>Verses 1-3</b>       | Samson at Gaza                                  |
| <b>Verses 4-19</b>      | Samson and Delilah                              |
| <b>Verses 20-25</b>     | Results of Samson's violation of his separation |
| <b>Verses 26-31</b>     | Samson's death                                  |
| <b>Chapters 17-18</b>   | <b>Idolatry of Micah and the Danites</b>        |
| <b>Chapter 17:1-13</b>  | Micah and the Levite                            |
| <b>Chapter 18:1-31</b>  | The Danite migration                            |
| <b>Chapters 19-21</b>   | <b>Gibeah's crime and its punishment</b>        |
| <b>Chapter 19:1-30</b>  | The deed of lust and violence                   |
| <b>Chapter 20: 1-48</b> | The harvest of war and bloodshed                |
| <b>Chapter 21: 1-25</b> | Repentance concerning Benjamin                  |

## **Deborah, a woman in the book of Judges**

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Chapters 4 - 5</b> | <b>Deborah and her feats</b>                 |
| <b>Chapter 4:1-3</b>  | Third apostasy, servitude, and judge Deborah |
| <b>Verses 4-24</b>    | Deborah and Barak in victory                 |
| <b>Chapter 5:1-31</b> | The song of Deborah                          |

“Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. (Judges 5:12)” (KJV)

“The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. (Judges 5:7-9)” (KJV)



Deborah is the first woman in the Old Testament, as well as one of the first in recorded history, who assumes a leadership role over her people and wins a spectacular military victory. She is also a prophet, a judge, and a poet. As read above, her victory song is one of the most stirring poems in world literature. Moreover, she has everything working against

her, but she always found a way to prevail. Firstly, she is facing a numerically and militarily superior enemy, armed with iron chariots, while her people only have bows and arrows. To win, she must form a coalition of tribes, at a time when the tribes are not only divided, but several of them even refuse to deal with the dire reality facing them and join her campaign. At the end, she selects Barak as her general, but he is hesitant about taking charge, and asks her to assume command. Luckily, she does.

The army of Israel gathered on Mount Tabor, overlooking the Valley of Jezreel. Deborah knew that the ground down the valley is soft, and that on a rainy winter day the chariots will become bogged down in the mud. She waits for exactly this kind of a day. She gives Barak the order to attack, as the Canaanite iron chariots sink in the mud and the archenemy is routed.

## **Gideon’ campaign**

### **Chapter 6**

#### **Gideon and Midianite oppression**

**Verses 1-24**

Fourth apostasy, servitude, and judge Gideon

**Verses 25-40**

Gideon’s initial exploits

### **Chapter 7**

#### **The victory of Gideon’s three hundred**

**Verses 1-8**

The reduction of the army

**Verses 9-14**

The Midianite’s dream

**Verses 15-25**

The victory of faith

### **Chapter 8**

#### **Gideon’s failure**

**Verses 1-3**

Jealousy of the Ephraimites

**Verses 4-21**

Complete victory over the invader

**Verses 22-32**

Gideon’s failure

**Verses 33-35**

The fifth apostasy

The story of Gideon’s campaign against the Medianites is one of the first stories of brilliant guerrilla warfare in recorded history. Gideon could not win this battle by sheer numbers, since he was facing the combined forces of Midian, Amalek, and the “children of the east.” Instead Gideon chose to form a small yet superior unit, consisting of only three-hundred exceptional warriors. One of the tests he used to select the kind of force was to bring all the volunteers to a brook where they were told to take a drink. Those who went down on their knees to drink were disqualified, and only those who scooped the water with their hands while standing were selected.

Rashi interprets the act of kneeling down as typical of idol worshipping. It is also, we should say, a sign of servitude. Gideon was looking for truly free and independent individuals, who were always vigilant. He would need them to outsmart the unholy alliance he was taking on, and win the battle of the few against the many.

## **The daughter of Jephthah**

### **Chapter 11 Jephthah delivers from the Ammonites**

**Verses 1-11** Jephthah rejected but called to be leader

**Verses 12-28** Jephthah negotiations with Ammon

**Verses 29-40** Jephthah’s vow and its fulfilment

### **Chapter 12 Jephthah’s war with Ephraim**

**Verses 1-7** The quarrelsome Ephraimites punished

**Verses 8-15** The Judges Ibzon, Elon, and Abdon

“Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast

brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon. And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year. (Judges 11: 29-40)” (KJV)

One of the better known judges is Jephthah, mainly because of the most unusual story of his vow and the sacrifice of his daughter. Briefly, as Jephthah starts his campaign against the Ammonites, he vows that if he returns victorious, the first to come out of his house would be sacrificed to God.

The first question here is, was he referring to a farm animal, which was commonly sacrificed in those days, or did he also mean a person? If a person, then it would mean human sacrifice, which was forbidden to Jews. Lo and behold, as he returns home victorious from the battlefield, the first to come out of his house to greet him is his daughter, who is his only child. Jephthah is devastated, but he cannot go back on his word. His own daughter would not let him break his vow, and she lets herself be sacrificed.

God, the main character in the book of Judges as anywhere else in the Old Testament, remains silent. We are left with a painful question, reminiscent of the question of the sacrifice of Isaac, yet more tragic in its consequences. Why such a sacrifice? Why punish a father who just won a great victory for his people? The question remains open.

## **Samson, a serious Nazirite or just not**

|                     |                                |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 14</b>   | <b>Samson’s early exploits</b> |
| <b>Verses 1-7</b>   | Samson kills the lion          |
| <b>Verses 8-9</b>   | Honey in the lion’s skeleton   |
| <b>Verses 10-20</b> | Exploits despite compromise    |

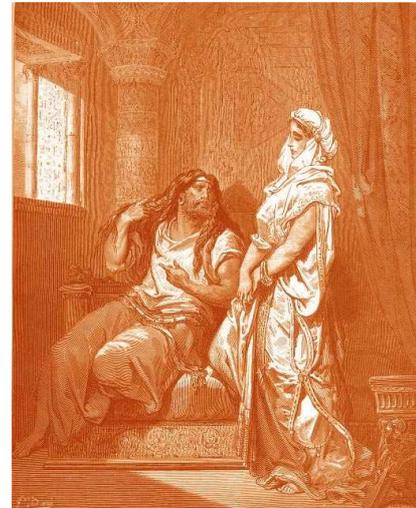
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| <b>Chapter 15</b> | <b>Samson in conflict with the Philistines</b> |
| <b>Verses 1-8</b> | Samson’s revenge                               |

|                     |                                    |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>Verses 9-13</b>  | Bound by his own                   |
| <b>Verses 14-17</b> | The exploit with the ass's jawbone |
| <b>Verses 18-20</b> | Samson's prayer and its answer     |

## **Chapter 16 Samson and Delilah, and his death**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Verses 1-3</b>   | Samson at Gaza                                  |
| <b>Verses 4-19</b>  | Samson and Delilah                              |
| <b>Verses 20-25</b> | Results of Samson's violation of his separation |
| <b>Verses 26-31</b> | Samson's death                                  |

“That he told her all his heart, and said unto her. There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. (Judges 16:17)” (KJV)



One of the judges in the book, Samson, is one of the most colourful and contradictory characters in the entire Bible. At birth, he is dedicated to a life of abstinence, by becoming a Nazarite, commanded not to ever drink wine, and never to cut his hair. The Hebrew word ‘nazir’ is derived from the verb “to practice abstinence.” The Nazarite's counterpart in the Christian Faith, Catholic or Orthodox, is the monk. There must have been many types of Nazarites in ancient Israel. Here, their status is regulated by biblical law, prohibiting them from cutting their hair and drinking wine.

One famous Nazarite in the Bible is Samson, whose fabled strength resided in his long hair. Another famous Nazarite was King David's son Absalom, whose long hair, after he rebelled against his father, became his undoing, when it got caught in the branches of a tree as he was pursued by David's soldiers.

As Samson grows up, “the spirit of God began to move him.” What follows completely contradicts this early report about his life. Samson, rather than lead a life of abstinence, associates himself with the Philistines, who at that time oppress his tribe, the tribe of Dan, leads a dissolute life with Philistine friends, and falls in love with a Philistine woman who he marries. His parents oppose the marriage, but the biblical narrator tells us that his father and mother did not know it was God's will. He was looking for a pretext against the Philistines.

We soon find out what was meant by “it was God's will.” Samson, who is never really accepted by the Philistines, begins to retaliate, and becomes a one-man

guerrilla force. He ties burning torches to foxes' tails and lets them loose in the Philistine wheat fields. He smites one thousand Philistine soldiers with the jawbone of a donkey, and so on.

Enters Delilah on his playground, the Philistine seductress. She pries the secret of Samson's strength out of him. The rest is mere history. He falls asleep in her lap. His hair is shorn. He is arrested and blinded. He is put on display in the Philistine god's temple. He prays to God for a last outburst of strength. His wish is accepted. He pushes the two main pillars of the temple apart, the temple collapses as Samson cries, "Let me die along with the Philistines," and so "those he killed in his death exceeded the ones he slew in his life."

"And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. (Judges 16:30)" (KJV)

## **The tribe of Benjamin and the Concubine**

### **Chapters 19-21      Gibeah's crime and its punishment**

**Chapter 19:1-30**      The deed of lust and violence

**Chapter 20: 1-48**      The harvest of war and bloodshed

**Chapter 21: 1-25**      Repentance concerning Benjamin

The book of Judges ends with several unusual stories that help dramatise the state of lawlessness and chaos that prevailed among the tribes of Israel prior to the time of the monarchy, when "everyone did what seemed right to him." These stories reach their climax with the story known in Jewish tradition as the "Concubine in Gibeah."

According to the story, a Levite residing in the land of Ephraim went to Bethlehem to acquire a concubine. On their way back they stopped in Gibeah, north of Jerusalem, in the land of Benjamin. There some hot headed Benjaminites took the concubine and raped her all night long, leaving her dead in the morning. Apparently, this crime broke some code of hospitality or immunity that must have existed among the tribes. The bereaved Levite cut the dead woman's body into twelve pieces and sent the pieces to the twelve tribes of Israel, asking them what to do. The tribes gathered and asked the Benjaminites to turn over the offenders, but they refused. What followed was a long series of battles in which nearly all the Benjaminites were killed. The tribes now realised that one tribe was about to disappear, and arranged for the surviving Benjaminites to kidnap young women in the town of Shiloh, so that they may start over again.

The closing chapters of Judges 19, 20, and 21 reveal several things. Firstly, there were indeed some common ties among the various tribes of Israel. Secondly, this did not prevent them in an extreme situation from turning on one of their own. Thirdly, the tribes were in urgent need of unifying themselves under one authority. It took an act of violence for them to make a common cause, and take joint action to protect their common interest. The groundwork was now laid for further unification and for forging a nation out of the disparate tribes.

The book of Judges concludes:

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes. “ (Judges 21: 25)” (KJV)

There is a wild barbarity about the stories of the book of Judges which, while they vividly depict the rude age to which it belongs, cause us to ask what place these chronicles have in the story of redemption. Apart from the part played by the judges in the historical development of Israel, and the function of the written word in the achievement of the purposes of God, the answer is perhaps to found in the very bareness of the history, in that it reveals God Almighty in His work.

“This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. (Psalm 102: 18)” (KJV)

The long periods of rest are passed over in a comparative silence which is broken only when God intervenes to visit for sin, or to raise up saviours in answer to the cry of His people. His acts reveal Him as the God of mercy and judgment ‘forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty’.

“Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:7)” (KJV)

His wrath falls on the children of disobedience.

“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:6)” (KJV)

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. (Judges 2:14)” (KJV)

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice. (Judges 2:20)” (KJV)

“Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years. (Judges 3:8)” (KJV)

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. (Judges 10:7)” (KJV)

However, when they cry to God in their trouble, he raises up deliverers, forerunners and types of the Saviour, to overthrow their enemies and to give rest to the people of God.

### **Your self-examination or written work.**

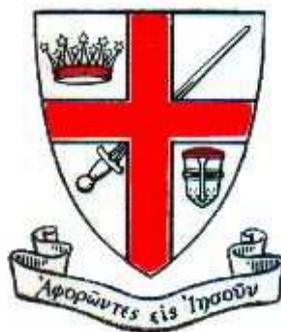
1. Examine the teaching of the book of Judges on the working of God's Providence, especially in regard to the strange instruments He can use in effecting His holy purposes.
2. Notes the reasons for human failure. What are the relating dangers in the spiritual life. (Judges 2: 11-19, and Matthew 9:29)?
3. What spiritual meaning lies behind the reduction of Gideon's army? (Deuteronomy 20:8; 1 Samuel 14:6; Mark 6:7; and, 1 Corinthians 1:26)
4. Study the angelic appearances in Joshua and Judges, as well as their relation to the incarnation (Exodus 34: 5).
5. Note the selection in Hebrews 1:32-34 of instances of “faith”, and develop how this faith was displayed.

## Main sources for consultation only

1. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, complete and unabridged. (Hendrickson Publishers).
2. Gaebelein's Concise Commentary on the whole Bible, by Arno C. Gaebelein (Loizeaux Brothers).
3. New Bible Commentary – Consulting Editors: D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer & G.J. Wenham (IVP Reference Collection).
4. Key Word Study Bible – Key insights into God's Word, Hebrew-Greek, AMG Publishers. Greatly recommended. The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible identifies the key words of the original languages and presents clear, precise explanations of their meaning and usage. Those who love God's Word will treasure this Bible, for it contains a whole library of biblical helps within its covers.
5. Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties, by Gleason L. Archer (Regency Reference Library, Zondervan Publishing House).
6. Holy Bible (King James Version and New International Version) Thompson Chain Reference Edition, Hodder and Stoughton, for the NIV version.

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