

The Time of the Judges

Judges 1-21

Introduction

The generally accepted date for the Conquest of Canaan by archaeologists today is around 1230 to 1220 BC.

Most archaeologists do not believe in a *conquest* per se, which is not surprising, as there is very scant evidence if any at all, for a *conquest* in Canaan at this time. They would rather speak of the *emergence* of Israel in Canaan.

Modern archaeologists, therefore, generally reject the descriptions of biblical events in the Bible, saying they are mostly made-up stories written in retrospect to give Israel a glorious past.

In contrast, the Biblical account details some major periods and events in Israel's early history. Some of these periods and events include:

- The Sojourn in Canaan and the Oppression in Egypt,
- The Exodus,
- The 40 years of Wilderness Wanderings,
- The Conquest,
- **The Judges Period** and
- The United Monarchy.

Not only can the times of these events fairly easily and accurately be determined by the internal Biblical chronology, but the actual historical events themselves are described, sometimes in great detail, in the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

The Biblical Chronology

To be able to date events such as the Sojourn in Canaan, Israel's Enslavement in Egypt, the Exodus, the Wilderness Wanderings, and the Conquest, one has to be sure which periods of early Israelite history are under scrutiny. There is therefore a need to find Biblical reference points.

Here are six such biblical reference points to help us date these events or periods: ¹

- **Genesis 15:13, 16** Abraham was told of 400 years as an alien in Canaan, as well as being oppressed in Egypt. After four generations in the land of slavery, his descendants would return.
- **Exodus 12:40-41** Israel spent 430 years in Canaan and Egypt.
- **Numbers 14:33** Israel wandered for 40 years in the wilderness.
- **Judges 11:26** From the time of Jephthah it was 300 years back in time to the beginning of the Conquest.
- **2 Samuel 5:5** David reigned for 33 years over all Israel.
- **1 Kings 11:42** Solomon reigned for 40 years over all Israel.
- **1 Kings 6:1** From Solomon's 4th year of reign, it was 480 years back in time to the Exodus.

¹ **Six Biblical Reference Points:**

Genesis 15:13 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be **strangers in a country not their own**, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated **four hundred years**. ¹⁶ In the **fourth generation** your descendants will come back here ...

Exodus 12:40 Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived *in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan (according to the LXX)* was four hundred and thirty years.

⁴¹ At the end of the **430 years**, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt.

Numbers 14:33 Your children will be shepherds here for **forty years**, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.

Judges 11:26 For **three hundred years** Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time?

2 Samuel 5:5 In Hebron he reigned over Judah for **seven years** and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for **thirty-three years**.

1 Kings 11:42 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel for **forty years**.

1 Kings 6:1 In the **four hundred and eightieth year** after the Israelites had come **out of Egypt**, in the **fourth year** of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.

To determine the Biblical chronology for the Sojourn in Canaan, the Oppression in Egypt, the Exodus, the Wilderness Wanderings, the Conquest, the Judges Period, and the United Monarchy, the starting point has to be 1 Kings 6:1.

Solomon's reign was approximately from 971 to 931 BC. In the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the temple building began. The 4th year of his reign would be in 967 BC. From the commencement of the temple building back into time to the Exodus was 480 years (1 Kings 6:1).

This gives a date for the Exodus of approximately 1447 BC, given that the Wilderness Wanderings lasted 40 years.

So, the beginning of the Conquest had to be around 1407 BC. If we take that Israel was in Canaan and Egypt for 430 years, this would take us back to around 1877 BC (Exodus 12:40-41).

A Biblical chronology of the events described by these time indicators is found in the table below.

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time Span</u>
Israel in Canaan and Egypt.	1877 – 1447 BC	430 years as strangers in Canaan and Egypt. Genesis 15:13, 16 Exodus 12:40-41
Exodus.	1447 BC	480 years before Solomon's 4 th year. 1 Kings 6:1
Wilderness Period.	1447 – 1407 BC	40 years in wilderness. Numbers 14:33
Conquest.	1407 – 1402(?) BC	The Conquest started when Joshua was about 80 years old. Numbers 14.33 Joshua 14:7,10 Rest after 5 years. Joshua 14:10, 15b
Judges.	1377 – 1053 BC	Joshua died at 110. Joshua 24:29 Judges period started after Joshua's death, up to Samuel the last Judge.
Time of Samuel.	1053 – 1011 BC 1011 – 1004 BC	Saul's reign: 42 years. 1 Samuel 13:1 David's reign: 7 years.
United monarchy.	1004 – 971 BC 971 – 931 BC	David's reign: 33 years 2 Samuel 5:5 Solomon's reign: 40 years 1 Kings 11:42

Table 1: Chronology from the Covenant with Abraham to the Monarchy.

The periods and dates for the Biblical events are approximations depending on the accuracy of Solomon's reign, as well as the fact that the Biblical authors might have rounded off certain numbers.

From the internal Biblical witness, it is abundantly clear that the Biblical Conquest described in the book of Joshua, could not have taken place around the generally accepted date of 1230 to 1220 BC. The conquest began almost one hundred and eighty years earlier from 1407 to 1402 BC.

To follow the 430-year chronology of the events in Canaan and Egypt, see: **Appendix A: From God's Promise to Abraham to the Exodus.**

The Disobedient Generation**Judges 1:1-2:5****Introduction**

Judges is a dark book about dark days. This book charts the decline of the Covenant people of God, for the period from about 1377 BC (the death of Joshua) to 1011 BC (the beginning of the reign of David).

The Covenant Community of God were the recipients of God's promises of blessing for covenant obedience. Their task was to drive out Canaanites; to make no treaties with them; not to intermarry with them; to break down their altars and not to serve their gods.

However, they departed from the covenant, giving themselves over to the same wickedness of the very peoples they were to destroy. The result was that the covenant blessings of God turned into curses. Judges deal with sin explicitly, not making it attractive. It shows sin with all its repulsiveness and ugliness, as well as God's reaction to it.

Despite it being so ancient, we are never left outside of the story. These stories speak to our lives in the modern world in an astounding manner.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 1:1-2:5

1. What did God tell Israel to do with the inhabitants of Canaan? (Numbers 33:51-53, Deuteronomy 4:38; 7:16, 22; 9:3-5; 11:23; 18:12; Joshua 1; 13:6; 23:5; 13)
2. What were they not supposed to do? (Joshua 1:7-8; Numbers 25:1-3; 33:55, Deuteronomy 7:2; 23:6; 28:14-15, 58ff)

3. What was the Joshua generation called? (Joshua 24:31)
4. How does the book of Joshua connect with Judges? (Judges 2:7)
5. What did Israel not do? (Judges 1:19, 21, 27, 28-31, 33-35)
6. What was God's reaction? (Judges 2:1-3; cf. also Numbers 33:55)
7. Who is 'the angel of the LORD'? (Judges 2:1)

Reflection & Application _____

1. How does this apply to us today?
2. Can we sin and get away with it?
3. What is the effect of sin?
4. Is sin only a personal matter?

The Pattern of Evil**Judges 2:6-3:5****Introduction**

There were two generations: the generation of Joshua and the elders who outlived him and had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel (Judges 2:7), and a new generation *‘who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.’*

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 2:6-3:5

1. What would be a good name for the new generation? (Judges 2:10)
2. What did they do? (Judges 2:11-12a)
3. What were they supposed to do? (Judges 2:12b-13)
4. What was God’s reaction? (Judges 12b-15)
5. How do the people repent? (Judges 2:18b)
6. What is God’s response? (Judges 2:16, 18)

7. What happened once the Judge died? (Judges 2:19)
8. What is the pattern in Judges 2?
9. What did God turn the lure of temptation into? (Judges 2:22)
10. Did Israel pass the test? (Judges 2:22; 3:5)

Reflection & Application _____

1. Why did God not drive out the nations completely in the time of Joshua? (Judges 2:23; 3:1, 3-4)
2. How does this apply to us today?
3. Does the lure of temptation always remain attractive?
4. What does temptation become when we give in?
5. Why does God test us, and if so, does he test us beyond our power? (Deuteronomy 7:16, 22)
6. Who are the judges a type of and why?

Study 3

Judges

Othniel, Ehud & Shamgar

Judges 3:7-31

Not much is said about Othniel except that he was the nephew of Caleb, and that he was given Caleb's daughter Acsah in marriage because he conquered Kiriath Sepher (Judges 1:13-14; 3:9-11).

The Pattern of Evil Restated

Judges 3:7-11

Once again, the people of Israel did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherah (Judges 3:7) and there was once again a repeat of the same pattern of evil as in Judges 2:6-3:5.

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 3:7-11

1. What was the pattern of sin? (Judges 3:7-9, 12)
2. What did God do when they cried out? (Judges 3:10)
3. What does "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him so that he became Israel's Judge" mean? (Judges 3:10)

Reflection & Application

1. How was the Spirit of the LORD descending upon a deliverer in the past, fulfilled in the NT? (cf. Isaiah 63:1-3; Luke 4:18; Matthew 12:18, 28)

2. What is the difference between The Spirit of the LORD coming down upon a judge or king and baptism in (or with) the Holy Spirit?
1 Samuel 16:13; 1 Corinthians 12:13

Ehud – the Left-handed

Judges 3:12-31

What was the significance of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites? (Judges 3:12-13)

They were three stark reminders from Israel's sinful past. All three nations arose from the backslidings of Israel's sinful past. Two nations were conceived in sin by Lot's daughters, namely Moab and Ammon. The Amalekites were descendants of Esau, the reprobate son of Abraham.

What was the significance of the City of Palms or Jericho?

Jericho was the first city Israel destroyed when they crossed the Jordan. The city was a symbol of Israel's victory, only about 100 years earlier (Joshua 6). The city was cursed by Joshua (Joshua 6:26).

What was the significance of the Idols at Gilgal? (Judges 3:19)

Gilgal was the place where Joshua circumcised the new generation. A cairn of twelve stones was placed there to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan, as a sign of the fulfilment of the Covenant promise of the LORD that Israel would enter and conquer the land. The Moabites placed some stone idols at Gilgal, to demonstrate in their minds, the superiority of the Moabite gods over Israel's God.

What was the LORD telling the people of Israel?

The LORD was saying, "I gave you the land. If you continue like this, it will take it from you as I warned in the covenant curses for disobedience." (Deuteronomy 28:15-68)

Study Questions

Read Judges 3:12-31

Note: **The City of Palms** in **Appendix B**.

1. What was Ehud called? (Judges 3:15)

2. What was distinctive about Ehud? (Judges 3:15)
3. What would be the practical implications of this distinction in the Ancient Near East?
4. Does it say something about the kind of people that God uses?
5. Why did they send Ehud to Eglon? What did this practically mean? (Judges 3:15)
6. Would you consider Ehud to be courageous?
7. Who was the real source of power? (Judges 3:15)
8. How did Ehud gain this power? (Hebrews 11:32-34)
9. What message from God did Ehud deliver?
10. What connected Ehud with Joshua? (Judges 3:27)
11. What had changed from 3:15 to 3:28?

12. Where in the NT do we read of a certain deliverer's thigh? (Revelation 19:11-16)
13. Who else in the NT was 'unclean' that became a Saviour? (Isaiah 53:4-6; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
14. Who do you think Ehud is a type of?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What has replaced the sword in our battle against evil? (Ephesians 6:17)
2. To be freed from sin, what do we need?
3. What is the message from God against those who oppress his people?
4. How does Jesus differ from the Judges as far as the Holy Spirit is concerned?
5. What is the difference between the Old and the New Covenant?

Notes: Ehud (אֶהוּד), meaning, "I will give thanks: I will be praised"
Not much is written about Shamgar, except for the fact that he too saved Israel (Judges 3:31).

Deborah & Barak**Judges 4-5****Introduction**

The next Judge (deliverer) the LORD raised up was Barak. The LORD sent a message through Deborah the prophetess. She must have been a remarkable woman, as she was leading Israel at that time.

Barak (בָּרַק) had a powerful name, which meant '*flash of lightning*'. However, he was a very timid fellow, as he only agreed to lead the people of Naphtali and Zebulun in battle, if Deborah accompanied him.

Barak - the 'Mommy's Boy'**Judges 4:1-23****Study Questions**

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 4:1-23

1. What happened soon after Ehud died and what was God's reaction? (Judges 4:1-2)
2. Who oppressed them? (Judges 4:2)

Note: Harosheth Haggoyim means 'Harosheth of the Heathen!' *Goyim* was a derogatory term used for the Gentiles.

3. Where did Deborah hold her court? How does this connect with Joshua? (Judges 4:5)
4. What did God tell her? (Judges 4:6-7)

5. Did Barak trust the Lord? (Judges 4:8)
6. Do you think Barak was a very courageous man? (Judges 4:8)
7. Because of Barak's timidity, to whom would the LORD give the honour of victory instead? (Judges 4:9)
8. Did Barak have to be encouraged again after this? (Judges 4:14)
9. What does this story of Jael and Sisera remind you of? (Judges 4:21-22, 5:24-27 cf. Genesis 3:15)
10. What is significant about Jael and her husband? (Judges 4:11)
11. Who are the Kenites? (Genesis 15:18-21)

The Song of Deborah **Judges 5:1-31**

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 5:1-31

1. Why is Jael called 'blessed'? (Judges 5:24-27 cf. Genesis 3:15)

2. Who won the battle for Israel? (Judges 4:15) Whose power was at work? (Judges 5:3-5)
3. Who therefore is the one who works salvation?
4. Who is righteous? (Judges 5:11) What 'righteousness' of God is in view here?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What does the story of Jael and Sisera story bode for the future?
2. What is significant about Heber and Jael and the nations of the world? (Genesis 12:3)
3. Who is this pointing to? (Genesis 3:15)

A Special note on Ephraim

1. Why is Ephraim so important? (Genesis 48:11-20)
2. Why is Judah important? (Genesis 49:8-12)
3. What are the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel called later in the Bible? (Ezekiel 37:16; Isaiah 11:13; Zechariah 9:10, 13)

Introduction

For the individual, the message of Judges is about judgement and salvation. But it is also a message to the whole covenant community today, which is the church.

We as the covenant community:

- Must not allow evil in the church,
- We must prophetically fight against evil in the land,
- We must destroy the Canaanites in the land,
- And we must destroy the remnants of Canaan in ourselves.

If we do not, the church will suffer, just as Israel did!

What did Israel do when they were suffering? Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help. When the Israelites **cried to the LORD** because of Midian, he sent them a **prophet**, who said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I snatched you from the power of Egypt and from the hand of all your oppressors. I drove them from before you and gave you, their land. I said to you, 'I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.' But you have not listened to me" (Judges 6:6-10).

Crying out was not enough: repentance was needed. Only when there is true repentance, God will send deliverance. But first God sends a preacher (Judges 6:8-10).

The Pattern of Evil Restated**Judges 6:1-5**

1. What was the recurring pattern in Judges and what was God's reaction? (Judges 6:1-5)
2. What does the phrase "like swarms of locusts" remind you of? (Judges 6:5)

Gideon – the Fearful

Judges 6:7-40

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 6:6-40

1. What did Israel do when they were suffering? (Judges 6:6)
2. How did God rebuke the Israelites? What is the work of the prophet? (Judges 6:8-10)
3. Who came to speak to Gideon? (Judges 6:11)
4. Do you think the angel of the LORD was poking fun at Gideon by calling him a 'mighty warrior'? (Judges 6:12)
5. Did Gideon sound like a 'mighty warrior' at all? (Judges 6:15, 26-27) Who was Manasseh?
6. Do you think Gideon's question was a valid one? (Judges 6:13)
7. Did he have to go it alone? (Judges 6:14-16)
8. Did Gideon believe? (Judges 6:17)

9. Who do you think the angel of the LORD is? (Judges 6:11-12, 14, 16, 18, 21-24) How does Gideon address Him? (Judges 6:22)
10. What does the statement in Judges 6:23 mean? (Cf. Exodus 33:20)
11. Whose honour was at stake in Manasseh's clan? (Judges 6:30-31)
12. When the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, in which manner did Gideon change? (Judges 6:34)
13. In which manner did he remain the same? (Judges 6:14-17; 36-40; 7:10-11; 13-14) Did God have to encourage Gideon a lot?

The Saviour **Judges 7:1-25**

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges Judges 7:1-25

1. Why did Gideon have to use so few men? (Judges 7:7)
2. Who was going to win the battle for Israel? (Judges 7:14)
3. Did the message finally come home? (Judges 7:15)

4. What was Gideon's attitude after he heard a man in the Midianite camp's dream? (Judges 7:16-18)

Reflection & Application _____

1. What happens when we get involved in doing evil? (Judges 6:1)
2. How do we then live? (Judges 6:2)
3. Does anything happen without God's knowledge? (Judges 6:8-10)
4. Do we experience certain suffering because of our own doing? (Judges 6:13)
5. What happens if we cry out to God?
6. Does God need a lot of help to save us? (Judges 6:15; 7:7, 18-22)
7. Can we trust God?
8. What is God's ultimate answer to evil? (Habakkuk 2:3-4)

God's answer to evil is a _____. Though **he** lingers, wait for it; **he** will certainly come and **he** will not delay. **Habakkuk 2:3**

And a _____.

The righteous by his faith shall live. **Habakkuk 2:4**

Notes: God's answer to evil is:

- 1st: **A Person.** God's answer to evil in Habakkuk 2:3 is a **person!**
The verbs for **linger**, **come**, and **delay** are all 3rd person, male, and singular. **'He' is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ!**
- 2nd: **A Trust.** Those who have faith in the LORD's answer; i.e. those who would place their trust in God's solution...
They will be counted righteous because of their faith in God's answer.
And they shall live, even though they may physically die.

Abimelech, the Evil Seed**Judges 8-9****Introduction**

Gideon, although fearful at first, proved himself as a Judge in Israel, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Judges 6:34). However, as the story of Gideon unfolded, he made some wise, but also some very foolish decisions.

Two of these were the making of a golden ephod and naming his son Abimelech, *my father is king*, after the people requested him to be their King. These two actions led to a major catastrophe in Israel.

Gideon's foolish Acts**Judges 8:1-35****Study Questions**

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 8:1-35

1. What was the response from the men of Succoth and Peniel when Gideon asked for help? (Judges 8:4-6, 8)
2. What was Gideon's reaction? (Judges 8:7-9)
3. Did he carry out his threats? (Judges 8:14-17)
4. What did the Israelites want from Gideon? (Judges 8:22)
5. What was wrong with this request? Did Gideon answer wisely? (Judges 8:23)

6. What very foolish thing did Gideon do? (Judges 8:24-26) What was the result? (Judges 8:27) Did it happen in Gideon's lifetime?
7. Which other episode in Israel's history does this sound like? (Exodus 32:1-6)
8. What was the name of Gideon's son? Did he choose a good name, considering it meant 'my father is King'? (Judges 8:31)
9. What happened as soon as Gideon died? (Judges 8:33-35)
10. How does this match up with the pattern in Judges? (Judges 2:19; 4:1; 6:1)

The Judgement on Shechem

Judges 9:1-56

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 9:1-56

1. What was Abimelech up to? (Judges 9:1-10; cf. 8:22)
2. Was Abimelech chosen by God as judge or king? Do you think this was his original name?

3. Who was Jotham? (Judges 9:5) What is the point of Jotham's parable? (Judges 9:7-20)
4. Were Jotham's words prophetic? (Judges 9:22-24)
5. What happened when Gaal and his brothers moved to Shechem? (Judges 9:26-41)
6. Why did God not give Gaal success? (Judges 9:27, 37)
7. What happened to the people of Shechem? Why did God allow this? (Judges 9:42-49)
8. What happened to Abimelech at the tower of Thebez? (Judges 9:52-53)
9. What event in the Bible does this remind you of? (Genesis 3:15)
10. Who was Abimelech? (Judges 9:56)
11. Did Jotham's prophecy against Shechem and Abimelech come true? (Judges 9:56; Cf. Judges 9:20)

Reflection & Application _____

1. What happens when we get involved in doing evil? (Judges 9:19-20)
2. Does God sometimes use evil men to achieve his purposes? (Judges 9:26-27, 41)
3. What will eventually happen to the seed of the serpent? (Judges 9:53)
4. Who is ultimately in control? (Judges 9:56)
5. Do you believe this with all your heart?

Introduction

In this passage, we read that the Israelites did evil by serving foreign gods. These gods are named the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines (Judges 10:6)

These were fertility or nature gods. In Canaanite religion, Baal was known as *the Rider of the Clouds* and he was the god responsible for the rain and the crops. The reason for this was the fact that he was a fertility god and provided the rain. The lighting and the thunder announced his presence. The name Baal meant *master* or *lord* and Ashtoreth was the mother goddess of fertility. Worship of these gods was depraved in the extreme.

Because of the rebellion of the Israelites, the LORD became angry with them and handed them over into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites. (Judges 10:7)

Application.

The standard pattern of sin in our lives is the same as in ancient Israel. False gods and idols can never save us! Baal and Ashtoreth in today's terms equate to materialism, self-worship, power, and pleasure. Sin becomes our master (Baal) when we sin. Jesus: "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin!"

As then, so today. God did not simply deliver the Israelites when they cried out. God wants not only repentance *for* sin but repentance *from* sin! God will never let us get away with sin and rebellion, as God wants true repentance, not only crying out when times are tough. Acknowledge that sin is against God alone. Do not only plead for deliverance. Change! Get rid of your idols and false gods. Serve the LORD!

Tola and Jair
Judges 10:1-6

In this passage, we read of two little-known judges, Tola and Jair who led Israel for twenty-three and twenty years respectively.

The Pattern of Evil Restated

Judges 10:6-18

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 10:6-18

1. What was the recurring pattern of evil in the Judges period? (Judges 10:6-10)
2. Does God reach a point where he abandons a people to their own devices? (Judges 10:13-14)
3. What does God want from his people? (Judges 10:15-16)

Jephthah - son of a Prostitute

Judges 11:1-29

When the people of Israel got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD, he could bear their misery no longer (Judges 10:16). The LORD raised up Jephthah (יִפְתָּח), pronounced *Yiphtach*, meaning 'he opens', as the next Judge of Israel.

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 11:1-29

1. What characterised Jephthah? (Judges 11:1)

2. What was his handicap? Was it courage? (Judges 11:1)
3. How was this characteristic typical of all the main Judges?
4. How did his family treat him? (Judges 11:2)
5. Who does this remind you of? Can you think of an OT example? (Matthew 1:5-6)
6. Who was Jephthah a type of an antitype in the NT?
7. What did Jephthah have in common with this NT example?
8. What happened when his clan, as well as Israel, realised their mistake? (Judges 11:4-8)
9. Where did Jephthah realise his real courage and strength came from? (Judges 11:9-11)
10. Did this kind of action by Jephthah bode well for his future and does it give you heart today? Did it sound as if God would honour him?
11. How did Jephthah answer the Ammonite king's accusation in Judges 11:13?

12. What demonstrated Jephthah's understanding of God's sovereign power? (Judges 11:14-23)
13. Did Jephthah sound like a believer? (Judges 11:24, 27)
14. What event signed the destruction of the Ammonites? (Judges 11:29) Do you think God had decided in whose favour the dispute would be settled?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What is the standard pattern of sin in our lives?
2. Will God ever let us get away with it? Who becomes our 'master' when we sin? Can these false gods ever save us?
3. What does God want from the Christian?
4. What kind of people does God use?
5. If Jephthah's action (Judges 11:9, 11) gives you heart, is this how you go about challenges in your life? If not, why not and why do you admire him? (Cf. also Judges 11:24, 27)

A Foolish Vow

Judges 11:30-12:7

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 11:30-12:7

1. Did Jephthah always act wisely? (Judges 11:30-34)
2. Did God need this?
3. Did God give him victory?
4. Did Jephthah keep his promise? (Judges 11:34-39)
5. What is very sad about this episode?

Reflection & Application _____

1. Does the believer always act wisely?
2. Do we need to make rash promises to God? Why not?

Izban, Elon and Abdon

Judges 12:8-15

These three Judges are briefly mentioned in Judges 12:8-15 and not much is known about them. The tone of this passage is really nondescript. It is as if the author almost wanted to convey either a hopeless situation where no great works of deliverance were being done, or it could possibly mean that this was a very peaceful period and no great acts of deliverance were necessary.

Samson – the Narcissist**Judges 13-16****Introduction**

In Judges 13 to 16 we find the account of a remarkable deliverer or Judge, named Samson (שִׁמְשׁוֹן), pronounced *Shimshon*.

Although Samson throughout his life showed a serious disregard for his commission and time and again plunged headlong into sin and disaster, the LORD still used Samson in a mighty way to deliver Israel.

Reading the passage, it becomes clear that Samson loved himself above all else. He exhibited a narcissistic character and showed very little remorse for any of his actions. In every aspect of his life and society, he was number one, as far as he was concerned. Despite all of his rebellious and self-centred actions, the LORD blessed him and the Spirit of the LORD empowered him (Judges 13:24-25).

Miraculous Birth and Childhood**Judges 13:1-24****Study Questions**

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 13:1-24

1. What was the repeating pattern in the Judges period? (Judges 13:1)
2. Who appeared to Manoah's wife and what did he say? (Judges 13:3)
3. Do angels have wings? (Judges 13:3, 6)

4. Looking back to the past, what did this encounter remind you of?
5. Who do you think Manoah's and his wife were a type of?
6. What is a Nazirite? (Judges 13:4-5; Numbers 6)
7. Who is the angel of the LORD? (Judges 13:21-22)
8. What does Judges 13:25 indicate?

Illegitimate Marriage **Judges 14:1-20**

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 14:1-20

1. What was Samson's handicap? (Judges 14:1-3)
2. What were the people of Israel not supposed to do? (Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Numbers 25:1-3)
3. Did Samson court disaster with his actions?

4. May God use even our rebellion for his own purpose? (Judges 14:4, 19; Genesis 50:20)
5. What was the source of Samson's power? (Judges 14:6, 19)

Self-focused Vengeance

Judges 15:1-20

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 15:1-20

1. What did the Philistines do with Samson's wife?
2. What was his reaction?
3. What was the final outcome to his former wife and family?
4. Whose honour was at stake in this story? (Judges 15:7)
5. Did God use Samson anyway? (Judges 15:14-15)
6. Did Samson give God the honour for the victory or did he act insolently? (Judges 15:18-19)

Downfall and Victory

Judges 16:1-31

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 16:1-31

1. What was still Samson's handicap? (Judges 16:1, 4)
2. Who was still the centre of Samson's universe?
3. Did his sin eventually cause his downfall? (Judges 16:16-17)
4. What does the Lord do when we repeatedly go our own way? (Judges 16:20)
5. Even in his final moments, was God's honour at stake for Samson? (Judges 16:28)
6. Did Samson taste success in his death?
7. In this final act, who was he a type of?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What happens when we dabble in sin?
2. Will God ever let us get away with sin?
3. What does God want Christians to do regarding temptation?
4. If we do not flee temptation, what will be the final outcome?
5. Does God use adverse circumstances and still achieve his own purposes?

Micah's Idols**Judges 17-18****Introduction**

The books of the Former Prophets, namely Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings provide us with a track record of covenant people. The book of Judges especially, paints a very bleak picture of the moral and spiritual decline of the covenant community. The narrative does not make for very encouraging reading. There are multiple grim stories of moral and spiritual breakdown in the covenant community.

In Judges 17-21 we find two harrowing accounts describing the terrible spiritual and moral decline of the covenant community. The repeated refrain throughout this period of time was, *'In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.'* (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)

The first account of such moral and spiritual decline concerns a man by the name of Micah, an ungodly eloped Levite, and a murderous and idolatrous Israelite tribe.

The Ungodly Levite**Judges 17:1-13****Study Questions**

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 17:1-13

1. What was the significance of Ephraim? (Judges 17:1) (see p.15)
2. What did Micah's mother do? (Judges 17:3) How did this compare with Exodus 20:3-5?
3. What did Micah do? (Judges 17:4-6)

4. What was the repeated refrain in Judges 17-21? (Cf. Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)
5. How did the young Levite respond to Micah's request? (Judges 17:10-12)
6. Does it seem if there was any knowledge about God in Ephraim? (Judges 17:3; 13)

Reflection & Application _____

1. What was a Levite supposed to be like? (cf. Exodus 32:27-29; Numbers 25:10-13)
2. What was a priest supposed to do? (Malachi 2:5-8)
3. How did this particular Levite match up?

An Unsuspecting People **Judges 18:1-31**

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 18:1-31

1. What is significant about Judges 17:6, 18:1?

2. What did the Danites request of the Levite? (Judges 18:4-5)
3. Did the priest give them the Lord's answer? (Judges 18:6)
4. What kind of people lived in Laish? (Judges 18:7)
5. Did God give the Danites this land? (Judges 18:9; Joshua 19:40-47; Judges 1:34)
6. What did the Danites then do? (Judges 18:11-14)
7. What were they after from Micah's house? (Judges 18:15-18)
8. Do you think they understood anything about God?
9. How faithful was this priest to his master? What do you think counted the most for him? (Judges 18:19-20)
10. What is stressed about the people of Laish and why? (Judges 18:27-28)
11. What did the Danites do as soon as they had a city of their own? (Judges 18:30)

12. Where was the house of God and why is this mentioned? (Judges 18:31)
13. How do the Ephraimites and Danites compare with their forefathers under Joshua?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What happens when we do what is right in our own eyes?
2. Is this kind of religion pleasing to God?
3. Does sincerity in worship mean anything if the object of worship is wrong?
4. How did these people see God? How does it compare with the way many people see God today? Is it any different?
5. Do you think the fact that our forefathers may have built churches wherever they set their foot in this land has any significance in and of itself?
6. Do you think there may be some parallels with the actions of the Danites in this story?
7. How do we have to worship God? How do we find out how?

Man's vs. YAHWEH's Honour**Judges 19-20****Introduction**

Notice that these events happened during the early part of the three-hundred-year Judges Period. Later on, things would get much worse. How do we know this? Because Phinehas was still around! (Judges 20:28) Who was Phinehas? He was a Levite who was as zealous for the honour of YAHWEH among the people of Israel, as YAHWEH was for his own honour (Numbers 25:10-13). It was Phinehas who ensured a lasting priesthood for the Levites according to YAHWEH.

In contrast to Phinehas, this account tells the story of a very different kind of Levite, totally the opposite of Phinehas. A Levite with an unfaithful concubine; a live-in girlfriend.

The reaction of the whole of Israel to the Levite's story depicts a very wicked and depraved society, willing to fight their people, instead of waging war against the Canaanites who were supposed to be the real enemy, and driving them out of the land.

This story completes the two sides of Israel's depravity; spiritual depravity and moral depravity. It is the same today. Tolerance for every conceivable lifestyle has become the measure of all things. All views are tolerated, except that the Bible is God's word.

The Wicked Levite**Judges 19:1-20:1****Study Questions**

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 19:1-20:1

1. What was the repeated refrain in Judges 17-21, according to Judges 19:1? (Cf. also Judges 17:6; 18:1; 21:25)
2. What is a concubine?

3. Why do you think this story of the Levite was chosen out of all the other available stories?
4. Which city did the Levite and his servant move towards after leaving his father-in-law's house?
5. Who lived in Jebus? And why were they still there? (Judges 1:21)
6. Why did the Levite not want to spend the night there? (Judges 19:12)
7. Where did they stay for the night instead? Why? (Judges 19:14)
8. Where was the house of the Lord? (Judges 19:18)
9. With whom did the Levite and his companions spend the night? (Judges 19:20-21)
10. What happened while they were in the old man's house? (Judges 19:22-24)
11. Which other story in the Bible does this remind you of? (Genesis 19:1-8)

12. What did the people of Benjamin do to the concubine? (Judges 19:25)
13. Who were they like?
14. What happened to the concubine? (Judges 19:25-28)
15. What did the Levite then do?
16. What reaction did he hope for and what was the response?
17. Who rallied to his cause? (Judges 20:1)
18. What do you think about it?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What is a Levite? (cf. Exodus 32:27-29; Numbers 25:10-13)
2. Whose honour should be at stake for a true Levite?
3. Who was included in '*all the Israelites*' in Judges 20:1?

4. What was significant about Dan? (Judges 18:28-31)
5. Whose honour was actually at stake?

Israel Fights their Own **Judges 20:1-17**

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 20:1-17

1. Who gathered before the Lord? (Judges 20:1)
2. Who did Israel represent? (Judges 20:2)
3. What did the Israelites want to hear from the Levite? (Judges 20:3)
4. What did they hear? (Judges 20:4-7)
5. What was Israel supposed to hear from a Levite? (Cf. Malachi 2)
6. What did Israel decide to do, after hearing the story? (Judges 20:8-13)
7. What did Benjamin do? (Judges 20:14-17)

8. Was this what God had in mind when the Israelites moved into Canaan?

Reflection & Application _____

1. What happens when we do what is right in our own eyes?
2. Do we feel injustice done to us, more easily than injustices against God?
3. Whose honour often counts the most in our own lives?
4. Are we blind to our own sins?
5. Do you think there may be some parallels between this story and our own lives?

Summary _____

Notice the moral depravity and spiritual darkness!

- There was a false centre of worship at Dan / Laish.
- There was no correction of the spiritual wickedness and bloodguilt of the Danites.
- There was no correction of the immoral Levite.
- There was no correction when they set out to murder the Benjamites.

The main work of a priest was to teach the covenant people the knowledge of God and his ways (Malachi 2:7). Instead, they **had turned from the way** and **by their teaching caused many to stumble**; and they had violated the covenant with Levi, according to the LORD of Hosts (Malachi 2:8).

Sin in the Camp**Judges 20-21****Introduction**

We heard of:

- the killing of the people of Laish by the Danites;
- the stealing of Micah's idols and setting up a false centre of worship in Laish; the immoral Levite and his girlfriend;
- the people of Benjamin acting like Sodom and Gomorrah and;
- the nation from Dan to Beersheba gathering before the LORD to fight their own people, the Benjamites.

God had commanded the people of Israel to fight the Canaanites, yet the Covenant people fought each other. Likewise, the Church has to 'slay' the people of the world by the sword of the Spirit and the gospel, yet there is no unity and we 'slay' each other by 'killing and wounding' each other through 'friendly fire'.

The Destruction of Benjamin**Judges 20:18-48**

The battle described in this section sounds much like the battle against Ai and the loss of life in Israel because of Achan's sin (Joshua 7).

Study Questions

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 20:18-48

1. Who gathered before the Lord? (Judges 20:1)
2. What was significant about this?

3. What happened in Exodus 32 to those who worshipped the golden calf? (Cf. Exodus 32:25-35 esp. v.28, 35)
4. What do you expect was going to happen, considering Joshua 7?
5. What happened to the Israelites in battle? (Judges 20:21)
6. Do you think it is significant that Judah had to go first? (Judges 20:18)
7. What did Israel do when they were beaten? (Judges 20:23)
8. How many died the second time? (Judges 20:25)
9. What did they do then? (Judges 20:26)
10. What happened when they enquired again? (Judges 20:27-28)
11. How many Benjamites died? (Judges 20:35, 44-46)
12. What else did Israel do? (Judges 20:48)
13. What do you think God was doing to them?

Wives for Benjamin

Judges 21:1-25

Study Questions _____

Note: Answer questions from the text.

Read Judges 21:1-25

1. Did the victory give any satisfaction? (Judges 21:3, 6, 15)
2. Was this what God had wanted for his people?
3. What was significant about Bethel? (Judges 21:2, 20:27)
4. What did they do to get around their silly oath? (Judges 21:1, 10, 18, 20)
5. How does the book of Judges end? (Cf. Judges 17:6; 18:1; 21:25)
6. Do you think matters were going well in Israel?

Reflection & Application _____

1. Does God want the best for his people, or does he want to destroy them?

2. Considering the book of Judges, especially Judges 17-21, does God let his own covenant children get away with sin?
3. What does it mean for us as Christians?
4. Does God bless us when we do what is right in our own eyes?
5. Does God punish us only as individuals or will he punish a nation?
6. What does it mean for the church as the body of Christ?
7. Do you think there may be some parallels between the covenant people in Judges 17-21, and with the church today?

The Need for a Spirit-filled King

In the book of Judges, we repeatedly see the pattern of evil restated, again and again. The pattern is as follows:

1. The lure of sin.
2. Yielding to temptation.
3. Provoking God to anger.
4. Delivered over to the power of sin.
5. Cry for help.
6. Deliverance through YAHWEH's Spirit-filled Judge.
7. Return to evil.

As the years wear on and the book progresses, we see that the situation was becoming dire. We hear the refrain, *'there was no king and everyone did as he saw fit.'*

The reality was that the Judges were temporary deliverers. We know from the book of 1 Samuel that the LORD raised up an exceptional Judge in the person of Samuel. He was a prophet, judge, and priest, all at the same time, and a really remarkable person.

However, the people increasingly demanded a king such as the nations surrounding them. What they really needed was a Spirit-filled King (1 Samuel 16:13) that would be sent as a permanent deliverer to the people, living constantly under God's rule. This future kingship was prophesied by Jacob or Israel on his deathbed, back in Genesis 49:10.

^{NAS} **Genesis 49:10** "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.

The Kingship would prepare the way for the ultimate King of God, to whom not only the rule of Israel belonged, but also the rule over every nation.