

God Gives A Land

Year 1, Quarter 2

This study covers Joshua, Judges and Ruth with a special emphasis upon God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. We will study the conquest and settlement of the land by Israel and their failure to fully subdue their enemies because of persistent disobedience.

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Day 1: Joshua Receives His Marching Orders

The time has finally come for Israel to make its assault upon Canaan. Though Joshua has spent years preparing for this moment, he is in need of some final reassurances from God. Three times during the issuance of orders to march on Canaan, God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous (Jsh 1:6, 7, 9). He further promises Joshua, *“As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you ... the LORD your God is with you wherever you go”* (Jsh 1:5, 9). Regarding the land, God reminds Joshua that his success is tied to the promise of inheritance made to the fathers hundreds of years earlier (Jsh 1:6). Thus, God is the One giving the land (Jsh 1:2-3). It is to be won by Joshua’s obedience to the laws of God, not his military strategies and expertise (Jsh 1:7-8).

1. Since Joshua’s success depended upon obedience, what should he do day and night?
2. Israel is to cross the Jordan River within ____ days (1:11).

Day 2: Two Spies Bring a Good Report

Joshua had sent two spies on a reconnaissance mission into Canaan, but while scouting Jericho their true identities become known to the king (Jsh 2:1-3). Rahab, a harlot in the city, hides the spies in exchange for their promise of protection when Jericho falls (Jsh 2:12-14). Rahab’s comments are revealing (Jsh 2:8-11). First, the Canaanites are very aware of Israel’s history, even the manner in which they were delivered from Egyptian bondage. Second, she admits the terror which has filled the people of Canaan at the approach of the Israelites (comp. Dt 2:25). Third, she acknowledges the superiority of Israel’s God over Canaanite deities: *“He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”* And, finally, she concedes that God has given the land to Israel. In all of these admissions, Rahab has demonstrated a degree of faith that was even lacking at times among the Israelites. This is truly amazing coming from a Canaanite, and a harlot at that. This is why Rahab is praised for her faith (Jas 2:25; Heb 11:31).

3. T/F Rahab thought the Israelites made it across the Red Sea because of a low tide.
4. T/F Fear of God caused the Canaanites to repent and put away their idols.
5. Who does James pair Rahab with as an example of active faith?

Day 3: Crossing the Jordan

Israel’s crossing of the Jordan River into Canaan is rich in symbolism. Naturally, it is a vivid reminder of the parting of the Red Sea some 40+ years earlier and the birth of the nation amid extraordinary circumstances (Jsh 4:22-24). Further, the ark of the covenant

goes before the people and the Jordan parts when the priests bearing the ark step into the river (Jsh 3:3-4, 6, 13-17). *“By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites ...”* (Jsh 3:10). The events also confirm Joshua as the divinely appointed leader of the people: *“This day I will begin to magnify you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you”* (Jsh 3:7; 4:14). When Israel left Egypt, the waters of the Red Sea closed on their enemies. But as they enter Canaan and the Jordan resumes its flow, Israel’s enemies lie ahead. The miraculous events give them confidence in the leadership of both God and Joshua as they march into battle.

6. In what state was the Jordan River at this time of year (Jsh 3:15)?
7. Israel crosses the Jordan four days before what feast begins (Jsh 4:19; 5:10)?
8. In what two places are memorial stones set up (Jsh 4:9, 20)?

Day 4: Circumcision Renewed

Circumcision was instituted by covenant between God and Abraham (Gn 17:9-14) and had been observed throughout Israel’s generations until their sojourn in the wilderness (Jsh 5:2-7). Their uncircumcised state would have served at least two purposes: 1) it would be a reminder of their disobedience to enter the land and fulfill the covenant, and 2) it would clearly identify the generation which God had marked for destruction and would indicate that the sentence had been carried out. There should not be a circumcised male over the age of 60 among the Israelites (except for Joshua and Caleb). Joshua now circumcises all the males whom God has raised up in the place of those who had been disobedient.

9. The name “Gilgal” means “Rolling.” Why was the camp called by this name?
10. Why didn’t Israel’s enemies attack while they were sore from circumcision (5:1)?

Day 5: The Commander of God’s Army

God gives Joshua a final dose of confidence before the battle for Jericho commences. In a vision, Joshua sees a man with a drawn sword who identifies himself as “the Commander of the LORD’s army” (Jsh 5:13-15). As with Moses at the burning bush, Joshua is told to remove his sandal for he is on holy ground.

11. What made the ground “holy” upon which Joshua stood?
12. Discuss the proposition: God gives those who are assigned difficult tasks all the help they need to accomplish them. How might this apply today?

Day 1: The Fall of Jericho

While the march around Jericho excites the imagination of young Bible students, the original event must surely have been a test of faith for Israel (Jsh 6). The only “weapons” they are told to use are their feet (for marching), their lungs (for blowing trumpets) and their voices (for shouting). To their credit, there is no mention of murmuring among the Israelites as might have been expected from the previous generation. They have learned the lessons of God’s benevolent power, respect for His approved leadership and the importance of obedience.

The fall of Jericho also clearly illustrates the relationship between faith, works and grace. God had said, “*I have given Jericho into your hand ...*” (Jsh 6:2; also 6:16); it was a gift which Israel neither deserved nor earned (grace). However, this gift was conditioned upon their obedience; specific instructions were given which, if followed, would cause the walls of Jericho to fall down. But Israel would not have obeyed if their faith and trust in God had not grown. A long, drawn-out siege was **man’s** way of destroying a city like Jericho, not marching, blowing horns and shouting. Faith, works and grace are compatible terms whether the subject is Jericho’s fall or salvation from sin.

1. Joshua said, “Shout, for _____.”
2. What were the accursed things that Israel was not to take from Jericho (Dt 7:25-26)?
3. What does Rahab’s deliverance say about the integrity of the Israelites? From whom had they learned the importance of keeping their word?

Day 2: Defeat at Ai

Joshua does not have long to savor his first victory before he faces his first leadership crisis (Jsh 7:1-9). A small army of Israelites is defeated at Ai sending both Joshua and the people into shock. Joshua does not handle this setback well, even complaining after the fashion of those who murmured in the wilderness. God had made it clear that success would follow obedience; thus, Joshua should realize that disobedience in some form has occurred. This episode demonstrates the tremendous stress which comes with leadership. One tends to respond to challenges differently when in a position of responsibility rather than looking on from the sidelines.

4. In what way did Joshua overreact to the failure at Ai?
5. What effect did the defeat have upon Israel?

Day 3: Achan's Sin Exposed

God rebukes Joshua for his weak response and explains what he should have concluded for himself (Jsh 7:10-13). He issues this do-or-die challenge to Joshua: *"Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you."* Achan confesses his sin but only after he has been singled out by lot (Jsh 7:19-21). Note carefully his actions: *"I saw ... I coveted ... (I) took ... (I have) hidden."* This is a crucial time for Israel; their success depends upon their obedience, and this flagrant act of disobedience must be publicly punished. Too, God must impress upon the people their uniqueness and dull their attraction to the things of the Canaanites. The stoning and burning of Achan, his family and all their possessions is a vivid lesson that if Israel adopts the ways of the Canaanites they will suffer the same fate as the Canaanites.

6. From whom did Achan really steal (see Jsh 6:19)?

7. Who died as a result of Achan's theft?

Day 4: The Fall of Ai

The previous victory of Ai against Israel became its undoing, for it created an overconfidence that caused the Aites to be careless (Jsh 8:1-29). Joshua sets an ambush behind the city and engages the army of Ai on the other side. Israel then retreats, feigning defeat, which entices all in Ai to pursue while leaving the city undefended. This makes for easy entry to the soldiers in hiding. All the inhabitants of Ai are killed, the city burned and its king hung upon a tree.

8. What did God command about taking spoils from Ai?

9. Compare the taking of spoil from Ai and Jericho with the firstfruit principle.

10. What action, similar to that of Moses, did Joshua do to ensure victory?

Day 5: The Renewal of the Covenant

After these initial battles, the Israelites pause to observe the command of Moses to gather at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim to offer sacrifice and renew the covenant (Jsh 8:30-35; Dt 27). An altar is built and the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy are read to remind the people of their responsibility to obey God.

11. What is the first curse read by the Levites?

12. This was to be a day of _____ (Dt 27:7).

13. What did God specify about the stones to be used in building this altar?

Day 1: Covenant with the Gibeonites

After witnessing the destruction of Jericho and Ai, the inhabitants of Gibeon and the neighboring towns Chephirah, Beeroth and Kirjath Jearim realize that they are no match for these Israelite invaders. The Gibeonites know that God has commanded the whole-sale slaughter of the Canaanite population (Jsh 9:24), so their only recourse is to secure a peace treaty through deception (Jsh 9:1-15). Joshua is aware of the prohibition against making any covenant with the Canaanites (Jsh 9:7), but *“they did not ask counsel of the LORD”* (9:14). The covenant is made and is considered binding in spite of the trickery of the Gibeonites because Israel had sworn the oath by the name of God (Jsh 9:19-20). The Gibeonites are spared but are made slaves which they considered preferable to death (Jsh 9:21-27).

1. How does the adage “two wrongs don’t make a right” fit these circumstances?
2. What spiritual application can be made from the Gibeonites’ deception and the failure of Joshua to seek counsel from God?

Day 2: Defeat of the Amorite Kings

Even though the treaty with the Gibeonites had been made against God’s wishes, He uses the situation to further His purpose. A confederation of five kings from the cities of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon attack Gibeon for their treason, and the Gibeonites appeal to Joshua for help (Jsh 10:1-7). God reassures Joshua of success in the upcoming battle. Thus, *“the LORD routed them ... the LORD cast down large hailstones... the LORD delivered up the Amorites ...the LORD fought for Israel”* (Jsh 10:10-12, 14). In order to kill as many people as possible before they reached their fortified cities, God answers Joshua’s prayer for an extended day (Jsh 10:12-14). The five kings are executed (Jsh 10:22-27), and Israel gains an easier victory than if they had attacked each city individually.

3. Where was Joshua when the call for help came from Gibeon?
4. How would the lengthening of the day affect Joshua’s stature among the people?
5. Why were the kings taken down from the trees at evening (Dt 21:22-23)?

Day 3: Conquest of Southern Districts

Consult the map on page 11 for the location of the prominent cities mentioned so far in the conquest. On this southern campaign, Joshua takes successively the cities of Makedah, Libnah, Lachish (where Hiram, king of Gezer, is also destroyed), Eglon, Hebron

and Debir. He also takes control of all the southern districts from Kadesh Barnea in the far south to Gaza near the coast (Jsh 10:28-43). “All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel” (Jsh 10:42).

6. Trace on the map the route of the southern conquest.

7. Why did Joshua slaughter everyone in these cities?

Day 4: Conquest of Northern Districts

Rather than a city-by-city campaign as in the south, Joshua faces a huge combined force in the north in one gigantic battle (Jsh 11:1-15). At the instigation of Jabin, king of Hazor, kings from Madon, Shimron, Achshaph and all the surrounding regions gathered against Joshua at the waters of Merom. Their horses and chariots, superior numbers, not to mention their familiarity with the territory, gave them a decided military advantage over Israel. But the Lord again reassures Joshua of victory (Jsh 11:6), and thus encouraged the Israelites go on the offensive and rout the enemy. Consult the map for cities mentioned.

8. How is the number of enemy forces described?

9. What did Israel do with the spoil from the cities?

10. Discuss the quality of faithful leadership indicated in Jsh 11:15.

Day 5: Summary and a Question of Ethics

It is important to understand Joshua’s **full compliance** with God’s will regarding the conquest of the land of Canaan (Jsh 11:16-23). One of the chief tenets of premillennial doctrine is that God never fully gave Israel the land and, therefore, the struggles of national Israel to reclaim their territory today are in fulfillment of prophecy. The following statements from a well-known premillennial author are typical:

“Then they conquered Jericho, Ai, and a large portion of the Promised Land. The hope of Israel had been *partially fulfilled*, and the promise had been clearly restated. Yet the early conquest *never reached into all the land* that had been promised ... Israel under Solomon controlled most of the land God had promised Abraham ... but *the land was never fully possessed* by the Jewish people, and this was clearly not the time the land was to be claimed and kept as an ‘everlasting possession’ ... From the time of the promise to Abraham to the present hour, the prophecies about Israel’s total possession and blessing in the land *have not yet been fulfilled* ... The most dramatic events, however, are still ahead. Is the present return of Israel the beginning of the last and ultimate regathering of Israel? ... It is important to realize that after the Time of the Gentiles ends *Israel will*

finally experience all that has been promised and hoped for since the time of Abraham” (Walvoord, **Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis**, pp 71-72, 79; italics added by jj).

But the **inspired record** says, “*As the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did. He left nothing undone of all that the LORD had commanded Moses ... So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD had said to Moses; and Joshua gave it as an inheritance to Israel*” (Jsh 11:15, 23). The fact that Israel will fail to fully exterminate all the inhabitants of Canaan does not constitute a shortfall in the promise to inherit a complete measure of the land. Remember, the reception of the land was an unconditional promise; retaining the land was conditional upon their continued obedience.

A question of ethics also arises when reading of the total annihilation of these cities - men, women and children. This becomes a stumbling block to many who cannot conceive of a God who promotes such barbarity. But it must be remembered that these people were involved in every kind of wicked, cruel and debased practice as a result of their idolatry. They were no different than the people destroyed in the flood or the Sodomites upon whom God rained down fire and brimstone. The only difference in this case is that God’s instrument of judgment is people (the Israelites) rather than inanimate forces.

From our modern, Western point of view, such violent warfare is hard to imagine. Indeed, we should be glad we are not Israelites and, therefore, charged with carrying out death sentences upon God’s enemies. Let us be thankful that we do not live in a culture and an era when bloodshed was commonplace. Nevertheless, God is within His sovereign rights to punish the Gentiles as He chooses even as He punished the Jews - Achan, Korah and the whole multitude in the wilderness - according to His will.

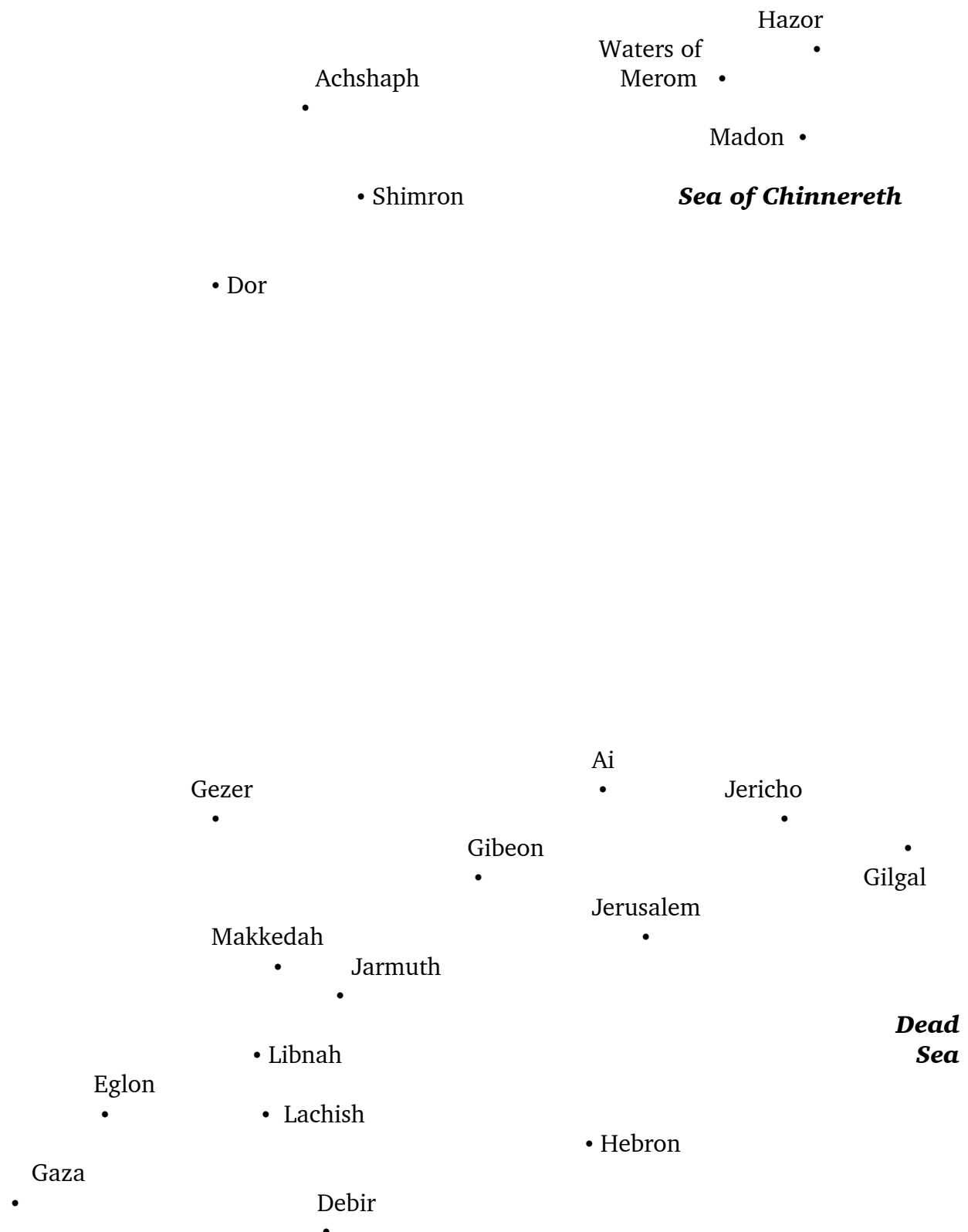
The military successes, along with miraculous assistance from God, not only constitute God’s righteous judgment against these degenerate people but also serve to highlight that Israel is a special, chosen nation belonging to God. He fights their battles, not because they are intrinsically superior, but because this is in keeping His own vows and covenants.

These terrible judgments against God’s enemies merely foreshadow the final, eternal punishment that awaits all disobedient people. They instruct us on how God truly feels about sin and exhort us to live in an acceptable manner. God has not softened His stance against sin under the New Covenant, but He has brought clearly into view His grace, mercy and patience which provide opportunity and incentive to repent.

11. Why did God harden the hearts of the people of Canaan?

12. Answer this statement: “The Arabs don’t belong in Israel today. That land rightfully belongs to the Jews because God promised it to them and never fully gave them possession of it.”

The Military Conquest



Day 1: Joshua Commanded to Apportion the Land

As God had indicated before (Dt 7:22), the conquest of the land would be gradual. Joshua has now fought the primary battles and gained control of the main portion of the land. However, some areas remain Canaanite strongholds: the land of the Philistines, along the coast to the west/southwest; Geshur, an area east of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee); and the region from the Lebanon coast eastward to Mt. Hermon and beyond (Jsh 13:1-7). God tells Joshua to apportion all of the land to the remaining nine and a half tribes, reaffirming that He will be with them to drive the enemies out.

1. What does God say about Joshua's age?
2. The conquest to this point had taken a long/short time (Jsh 11:18).

Day 2: The Inheritance of Caleb

Caleb and his family are given a special inheritance in Judah "*because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel*" (Jsh 14:6-15; 15:13-19). As a faithful and trusting spy along with Joshua, Moses had promised Caleb the area in Canaan which he had surveyed (Jsh 14:8-9). This promise is now kept. The elapse of forty-five years or 450 years does not alter the certainty of God's word.

3. Compare Caleb's time reference in Jsh 14:10 with question 2 above. About how long was the "long time" that Joshua warred against the kings?
4. Who still remained in the cities given to Caleb? What were they like (Dt 2:10-11)?
5. What two cities were taken by Caleb?

Day 3: The Land of Judah

The borders and cities allotted to Judah are found in Jsh 15:1-12, 20-63. Note that the Philistine cities are included in the inheritance though all the Philistines have not been driven from the land. The same is true of the Jebusites (Jsh 15:63). They will not be completely conquered until David makes Jerusalem the capital city. Over a hundred cities are listed indicating a more dense population in Canaan than generally thought.

6. Consult the map on p 14 for the general location of Judah.

Day 4: The Land of Ephraim and Manasseh

The borders of Ephraim and Manasseh are described in Jsh 16-17. The Ephraimites fail to drive out the inhabitants of Gezer, and the tribe of Manasseh (the half-tribe west of the Jordan) also falls short in ridding some of their northern cities of Canaanites (Jsh 17:11-13). Both made slave-laborers of the Canaanites, “*but they did not utterly drive them out*” as God had commanded. The responsibility for this failure lies in the lack of faith and resolve of the people, not in some delayed fulfillment of God’s promise as suggested by premillennial doctrine. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh complain to Joshua that their portion is not large enough for all of them and they fear the Canaanites in Beth Shean and the Valley of Jezreel because of their iron chariots (Jsh 17:14-18). This attitude is reminiscent of the original hesitation to enter the land and is in direct contrast to Caleb who, at 85 years of age, retained his unwavering confidence in God and drove the Anakim out of Hebron.

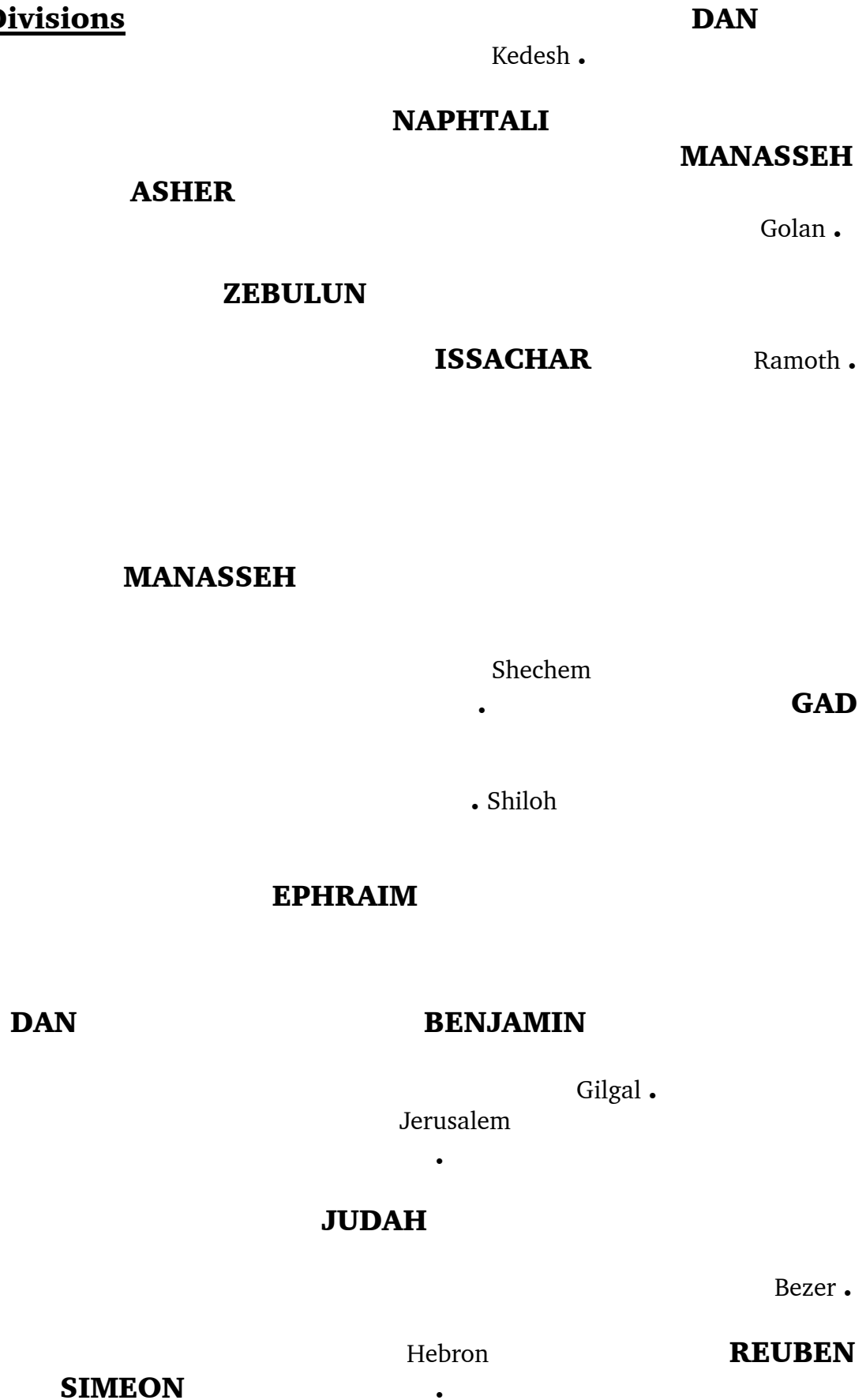
7. Consult the map for the location of Ephraim and Manasseh.
8. Who had earlier threatened Israel with chariots and was destroyed?
9. Discuss the concept of driving out most of the Canaanites but leaving some alive. What spiritual applications can you make from this to the life of a Christian?

Day 5: The Tabernacle at Shiloh

Now that the land has been secured, the tabernacle is erected in Shiloh, a more central location (Jsh 18:1). The ark will remain in Shiloh until it is captured by the Philistines in the days of Eli. Although the land has been divided by lot, Joshua rebukes the seven remaining tribes for not taking greater initiative in requesting their inheritance (Jsh 18:2-10). They are instructed to send out three surveyors from every tribe and chart the land in seven parts by cities. Joshua then casts lots for the division of the land.

10. The city of Shiloh is located in the land of which tribe (consult map)?
11. Who chose Shiloh as the home for the tabernacle (Dt 12:5, 10-11)?

Tribal Divisions



Day 1: The Land of Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun and Issachar

Joshua 18:11-19:23 gives the borders and cities of these four tribes. The specific criteria God used in granting the land by lot is not clear. Numbers 26:54-56 states that “*to a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance ...*”. But a simple population/acreage ratio doesn’t match. Compare the following census figures from Num 26 with a map: (ranked by population, males over 20)

1) Judah - 76,500	5) Asher - 53,400	9) Reuben - 43,730
2) Dan - 64,400	6) Manasseh - 52,700	10) Gad - 40,500
3) Issachar - 64,300	7) Benjamin - 45,600	11) Ephraim - 32,500
4) Zebulun - 60,500	8) Naphtali - 45,400	12) Simeon - 22,200

Note, for example, that Manasseh, ranked sixth in population, receives two huge tracts of land on both sides of the Jordan River. Dan, Issachar and Zebulun, ranked two, three and four, receive three of the smaller parcels of land. Perhaps the ratio involves the productivity of the land assigned; a smaller population would need more acreage in an area that was less fertile. Simeon, the smallest tribe, receives an undefined area in the southern inheritance of Judah, “*for the portion of the children of Judah was too much for them*” (Jsh 19:9).

1. Which two of these inheritances are nearest the Sea of Chinnereth? (consult map)
2. How many other tribes border Benjamin?
3. How did Jacob’s prophecy of Simeon come true (Gn 49:5-7)?

Day 2: The Land of Asher, Naphtali, Dan and Joshua

Asher and Naphtali receive their inheritances side by side in northern Canaan between the Sea of Chinnereth and the Mediterranean (Jsh 19:24-39). Dan’s original inheritance is wedged between northern Judah, western Ephraim and Benjamin, and southwestern Manasseh (Jsh 19:40-48), but they will later take additional territory in the far north (Jud 18). When all the land was partitioned off among the tribes, Joshua is then given the city of his choice, Timnath Serah, in the land of Ephraim. “*So they made an end of dividing the country*” (Jsh 19:51).

4. List the tribes that received their inheritances when Israel was in the Trans-Jordan.
5. List the inheritances given while Joshua was headquartered in Gilgal (see Jsh 14:6ff).
6. Which tribes were assigned land after the tabernacle came to Shiloh (see Jsh 18:1ff).

Day 3: Cities of Refuge and Levite Cities

The law had made a distinction between intentional killing (murder) and accidental killing (manslaughter). In the case of manslaughter, six cities were designated safe-havens where the killer would be given asylum (Jsh 20:1-9). The three cities of refuge in the Trans-Jordan were assigned by Moses (Dt 4:41-43): Bezer, Ramoth and Golan. The three cities west of the Jordan are now given: Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron.

The six cities of refuge were part of the forty-eight given to the tribe of Levi (Jsh 21), which God had earlier said would not inherit land. God had set them apart unto religious service saying, *“I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel”* (Num 18:20); *“the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance”* (Jsh 13:14); *“for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance”* (Jsh 18:7). This scattering of the Levites among Israel also seems to fulfill Jacob’s prophecy in Gn 49:5-7.

7. Locate the cities of refuge on a map. What does Dt 19:3, 6 say about access to them?
8. T/F The Levites were given cities in every territory except for Asher.

Day 4: Complete Fulfillment of the Land Promise

At this moment in history, the first two promises of God to Abraham stand completely fulfilled. A great nation has been formed from the descendants of Abraham, and they have been given possession of the land in which the great patriarchs of old had so-journed (Jsh 21:43-45; 22:4). *“So the LORD gave to Israel **all the land** of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they **took possession of it and dwelt in it.** The LORD gave them rest all around, according to **all** that He had sworn to their fathers ... **Not a word failed** of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. **All came to pass.**”* Of course, the seed has been sown for future trouble because some of the Canaanite population had been left alive, and God will fan these embers into a persecuting flame against disobedient Israel. **But at this moment,** God has kept His unconditional, unilateral promise to give the land to Abraham’s descendants.

Day 5: Early Threat of Civil War

Now that the land is secure, the Trans-Jordan tribes return to their inheritance. But at the Jordan, they build a great altar which their brethren take to be a sign of apostasy (Jsh 22:10-12). The altar, they explain, is not a token of rebellion but a witness to future generations that the eastern tribes retain all the rights and privileges of their brethren west of the Jordan (Jsh 22:22-29). This episode highlights an early fidelity to God and a militaristic aversion to idolatry. Unfortunately, this sentiment will not endure.

9. Why did Israel gather at Shiloh?
10. What two historical precedents against idolatry are cited by Phinehas (22:17, 20)?

Day 1: Joshua Warns Israel

In words reminiscent of Moses' blessings and cursings in Moab, Joshua warns Israel to finish the job of exterminating the Canaanites so that they will not pollute their worship of Jehovah (Jsh 23). The chapter is a summary of the great themes of Joshua:

- 1) God had fought for them and had given them the land - 23:1, 3, 9-10.
- 2) The Canaanites who remain can still pollute Israel - 23:4, 7, 12-13.
- 3) Adopting the ways of the Canaanites is national suicide - 23:15-16.
- 4) Their love for and obedience to God would secure ultimate victory - 23:5-6, 8, 11.
- 5) God has fully and completely kept His promises to them - 23:14.

Note especially 23:11 - *"Therefore take diligent heed to yourselves that you **love the LORD** your God."* Some people are under the impression that love for God is a new testament principle and that under the old covenant all God expected was mechanical obedience. This is simply not so; any concordance will reveal that God expected the Israelites to love Him for what He was as God and for all the goodness He had shown to them. Moses, in his closing speech, said, *"I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments ... choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice ..."* (Dt 30:16, 19-20). When asked about the greatest commandment of all, Jesus quoted Moses in Dt 6:5 - *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might"* (Mt 22:37-38). Genuine love for God is the foundation for obedience in any age.

1. What would be snares, traps, scourges and thorns to Israel?
2. If God keeps His promises to bless, what other promises will He keep (23:15-16)?

Day 2: Joshua's History Lesson

Joshua then meets with the leaders of Israel in Shechem and gives them a history lesson from God (Jsh 24:1-13). Covering hundreds of years from Abraham in Ur to the recent conquest, God reviews what He had done. He uses the personal pronoun "I" 17 times (NKJ): *"I took ... I gave ... I sent ... I brought ... I destroyed ... I delivered ... I have given."* Truly, as a nation in a land now their own, they were what God had made them.

3. Who had Abraham's family originally served in Ur?

Day 3: Choose Whom You Will Serve

Joshua then builds upon this foundation of history a soul-stirring exhortation which is designed to excite both the emotions and the will of the people in favor of God (Jsh 24:14-18). Joshua urges the people to be singular in their devotion, to sear their minds toward false gods and serve the God who had proven Himself in history *“in sincerity and truth.”* Should they serve the gods their fathers had abandoned? Should they serve the gods of the people they had defeated in battle? Israel must make its own choice, ***“but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*** When all is said and done, even the mightiest leaders of God’s people cannot force faith upon others. All any man can do is choose to serve God and then encourage others to do the same.

4. Discuss: What was the value in God spending hundreds of years to bring Israel to this point in time? Could He not have made a nation and given them a land in less time?

Day 4: Joshua Challenges Israel’s Declaration of Faith

Though Israel had demonstrated through the period of conquest a much greater faith in and devotion to God than before, Joshua seems to sense that it does not run deep enough. He challenges their resolve: *“You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God ...”* (Jsh 24:19-20). This bit of reverse psychology nearly whips the people into a frenzy as they adamantly affirm their faith in God (Jsh 24:21). Having elicited such a strong declaration of faith, Joshua then adds this renewed covenant acceptance to the Book of the Law and sets up a memorial stone as a witness against the day when they would abandon their faith (Jsh 24:22-28).

5. Joshua tells the people to incline their _____ to God.
6. What had the stone “heard”?

Day 5: The Death of Joshua

Israel suffers the loss of its two great leaders, Joshua (civil, military) and Eleazar (spiritual), even as it had lost Moses and Aaron earlier. Joshua leaves behind the most substantive legacy possible for a human: not money, not a building, not a monument but **spiritual influence**: *“Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel”* Jsh 24:31). As a footnote, the bones of Joseph are buried at Shechem, the very place which Jacob had purchased upon his return from Padan Aram (Gn 33:18-20) and near to the place where Abraham had built an altar to God (Gn 12:6-7).

7. What can you say about ancient practices of land ownership from 24:32?
8. How does the burial of Joseph’s bones speak well for the Israelites?
9. Discuss the importance of investing in spiritual influence. How is such an influence built?

Day 1: The Canaanite Remnant

Following the death of Joshua, Israel enters “a transition period, the time of free, unfettered development, in which the nation was to take root in the land presented to it by God as its inheritance, to familiarize itself with the theocratic constitution given to it by the Mosaic law ... This task could be accomplished without any ruler directly appointed by the Lord” (**Keil & Delitzsch**, Vol 2, p 239).

Unfortunately, this ideal is ruined by the failure of the Israelites to completely exterminate the native inhabitants of Canaan (Jdg 1:19, 21, 27-36). God had appeared in the days of Joshua and laid the blame for this directly at the feet of Israel (Jdg 2:1-4), and in His anger God determined to leave this native remnant in the land as a test of Israel’s obedience (Jdg 2:20-23).

1. By leaving Canaanites in the land, what had the people done to the covenant?
2. How did the people react when God chastised them at Bochim?

Day 2: The Worship of Baal and Ashtoreth

While the immediate consequences of Israel’s failure were not felt, “*another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel*” (Jdg 2:10). The warnings of both Moses and Joshua go unheeded as Israel falls into idolatry (Jdg 2:11-15). This weakness will plague Israel for the next several hundred years, ebbing and flowing, until God finally removes them from the land.

Baal was the dominant Canaanite deity and was worshipped in various forms in different locales. His connection with nature is apparent: he is the supreme god of fertility and a storm-god with power over wind, rain and clouds. “His control over nature, however, fluctuates in accord with his victories or defeats in his encounters with Mot, god of death, sterility, and aridity. During these periods of aridity Baal’s power is eclipsed, but only temporarily. Baal will be victorious again; he will defeat Mot and return to grant rich, fertile fields to his people” (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol 1, p 378). Unlike the true God, Baal’s fortunes rise and fall with the weather; he is but a mere reflection of observable environmental cycles.

Not much is known of the particular Canaanite character of the goddess Ashtoreth. “Generally, however, she was worshipped locally as the consort of Baal, depicted in the nude with horns on her head, and was thus a member of the fertility cult” (ibid, p 320). Whatever the case, the myths and legends surrounding these deities were markedly inferior to the true nature of Jehovah which had been graphically demonstrated throughout history. The power of God was superior to the gods, but so was His morality. It is this latter consideration that probably drove the people into the arms of the idols.

3. Discuss: How can apostasy and digression grow with successive generations?
4. During the time of the judges, how did God punish the people for idolatry?

Day 3: God's Use of Judges

Though Israel was irresistibly drawn to the idols, the nations who worshipped the idols treated Israel terribly when God allowed them to gain the upper hand. As Israel suffered at the hands of their enemies, *"the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them"* (Jdg 2:18). In response, *"the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them"* (Jdg 2:16).

The term translated "judge" means "to exercise the process of government" (**Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament**, Vol 2, p 947). "Since ... the ancients did not always divide the functions of government, as most modern governments do, between legislative, executive, and judicial functions the common translation, "to judge," misleads us. For, the word, judge ... in modern English, means to exercise only the judicial function of government" (ibid). Military deliverance was only a part of the function of a judge. Consider the note in Jdg 2:17: *"Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods."* Evidently the judges also taught and exhorted the people, though not always with good effect.

5. How did a judge come to power?

Day 4: The Inevitable Return to Idolatry

After this cycle of idolatry => punishment => repentance => deliverance had run its course, the people invariably fell back into idolatry (Jdg 2:19). This cycle well describes the pattern of the book, a pattern that portrays God as a patient and tolerant parent trying to instill certain characteristics in a child through consistent discipline. We must remember that God's patience grows out of His ultimate purpose: to create a nation fit for the honor of presenting God's Savior to the world.

6. What would the death of the judge produce?
7. From what did the Israelites not cease?

Day 5: Learning to Make War

Again, Israel's obedience is to be tested by her enemies (Jdg 3:1-6), for this generation of Israelites did not know how to war according to God's tactics. Joshua and his armies were successful because they knew **obedience**, not **strategy**. Therefore, in all the upcoming cycles of the judges, God is trying to instill obedience in His people. Without obedience, the covenant will become invalid and Israel will lose her special place before God.

Day 1: Othniel

The first judge whom God raised up to deliver Israel also happened to be the nephew and son-in-law of Caleb (Jdg 3:7-11). Othniel had proven his military prowess when he had taken the city of Debir during the conquest, thus winning the daughter of Caleb in the process (Jsh 15:15-17). *“So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD”* is a common refrain throughout Judges. As punishment for their idolatry, God allows Cushan-Rishathaim, king of distant Mesopotamia, to afflict Israel. This is just the first of many armies from this region that God will use to chastise His people in the future.

1. How many years did Cushan-Rishathaim afflict Israel?
2. What help did Othniel have in defeating Cushan-Rishathaim?
3. How long was the land at peace?

Day 2: Ehud

The next enemy that God brings against Israel is Eglon, king of Moab, in alliance with the Ammonites and Amalekites (Jdg 3:12-30). The Moabites had already caused great trouble for Israel when their women seduced them and led them into the worship of Baal Peor during the wilderness wandering (Num 25:1-3). Now, they have infiltrated the land west of the Jordan and have taken possession of Jericho (“the city of palms” - see Dt 34:3; II Ch 28:15). The story of Ehud’s deliverance centers upon his assassination of Eglon and the subsequent slaughter of 10,000 Moabite soldiers.

4. What had God forbidden Moses to do to the Moabites and Ammonites (Dt 2:9, 19)?
5. How long did Israel serve the Moabites?
6. What was the reason for Ehud’s visit to Eglon?
7. What strategy helped Ehud slaughter so many Moabites?
8. How long did Israel have peace after Ehud’s deliverance?

Day 3: Shamgar

One sentence is devoted to the deliverance of Shamgar (Jdg 3:31).

9. Who was the oppressing force against Israel?

10. What mighty feat was Shamgar remembered for?

Day 4: Deborah

The situation in Israel was dire in the time of Deborah (Jdg 4). First, Jabin, the Canaanite king in Hazor, had oppressed them for twenty years. Secondly, there was a vacuum of male leadership and Deborah acted as judge over Israel. (Here, the broader meaning of “judge” is apparent; Deborah was serving in a general leadership capacity in which she is identified as a prophetess.) Thirdly, as a commentary on the faithlessness of Israel, God gave victory over the Canaanite commander, Sisera, to a non-Israelite.

This battle takes place in Galilee in the vicinity of Mt. Tabor, where the borders of Issachar, Zebulun and Naphtali join. It is Deborah who summons Barak and relays God’s instructions to gather an army. The weakness of Barak is seen in his response: *“If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go”* (Jdg 4:8). This is hardly the courageous attitude of a Moses or a Joshua. Consequently, Deborah informs Barak that a woman would steal his glory in the upcoming battle (Jdg 4:9). When Barak looks down from Mt. Tabor and sees the army of Sisera and his 900 chariots of iron, it is Deborah who urges him to join the fray: *“Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?”* (Jdg 4:14).

As Israel routs the Canaanite army, Sisera flees on foot to the tent of Heber, a Kenite, and is hidden by Heber’s wife, Jael. This offer of refuge is in reality a deadly trap, for after an exhausted Sisera falls asleep, Jael sneaks in and assassinates him.

11. Who are the Kenites and what is their connection with Israel? (See Jdg 1:16)

12. Why would Sisera come to Heber and why would he trust Jael?

13. Discuss: The example of Deborah supports female authority/leadership over men.

Day 5: The Song of Deborah

The song of Deborah commemorates Israel’s victory over Jabin, Sisera and the Canaanites (Jdg 5). Deborah reflects upon the sad state of affairs during the oppression (Jdg 5:6-8), commends and condemns the various tribes for their response to the crisis (Jdg 5:13-18), reviews the battle (Jdg 5:19-27), and imagines the distress of Sisera’s mother over his delayed return from battle.

14. Why were the highways deserted?

15. T/F Deborah praised Dan and Asher for their courage in battle.

16. How did Sisera’s mother comfort herself over his delayed return?

17. How long was Israel at rest after the deliverance of Deborah?

Day 1: The Call of Gideon

After the inevitable rekindling of disobedience, God chastises Israel with Midianite oppression (Jdg 6:1-6). So severe was the invasion of the nomadic tribes that Israelites sought refuge in dens and caves of the mountains. Further, the “milk and honey” of the land was being consumed by the hordes of easterners, and Israelites had taken to threshing in secret what little grain they could salvage (Jdg 6:11). In response to the outcry of the people, the Angel of the LORD commissions Gideon as Israel’s deliverer (Jdg 6:11-24). Gideon’s humility is similar to that of Moses at the burning bush, and his response concerning God’s abandonment fulfills the warning of Moses (Dt 31:17). This was not the future that God had desired for His people, but, indeed, it is the future He foresaw.

Before Gideon was ready to deliver the nation, God challenges him to deliver his own family from Baal’s influence (Jdg 6:25-35). The strength of Baal’s hold on the people is seen in Gideon’s well-founded fear of repercussion from destroying his father’s altar and image. As expected, the men of Ophrah demanded Gideon’s death when they discovered God’s altar and offering in the place of Baal’s.

1. How does God make use of a prophet before delivering Israel (Jdg 6:7-10)?
2. Give three responses by Gideon to the commissioning Angel (Jdg 6:13, 15, 17).
3. How does Gideon’s father react to the destruction of his altar and image of Baal?
4. What two miraculous signs are given to Gideon in Jdg 6?

Day 2: Attack on the Midianites

The military “draft” of Gideon creates a problem only faced by an army of God: **too many** soldiers respond (Jdg 6:34-35; 7:1-8). God wants the numbers reduced “*lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’*” Thus, after thinning out the ranks, Gideon is left with an army of **300** against a force of **135,000**. God recognized that such overwhelming odds could paralyze even “*a mighty man of valor*” (Jdg 6:12) like Gideon, so He devises another sign to assure Gideon of victory (Jdg 7:9-15). Rather than mount an all-out assault on the enemy, Gideon chooses a tactic designed to terrorize them and throw them into disarray. This is successful and the entire camp of Midianites - really a mobile city - is put to flight (Jdg 7:16-25).

During the pursuit of the Midianites, Gideon is confronted with completely opposite attitudes among his brethren. First, the Ephraimites are angry with him for not calling them into battle sooner (Jdg 8:1-3). Then, his requests for help from the towns of Succoth and Penuel are rebuffed because of their lack of confidence in his success, a short-sighted

attitude in view of the fact that Gideon had already destroyed 90% of the Midianite force (Jdg 8:4-17). As it was then, so it is today: Even success doesn't satisfy everyone.

5. What caused 22,000 Israelite soldiers to go home?
6. T/F Gideon asked God for a third and final miracle of reassurance before the battle.
7. How would you characterize Gideon's response to the ungrateful, selfish Ephraimites?

Day 3: Gideon's Retirement

The people's desire for a permanent, visible, human ruler is evidenced by Israel's offer to make Gideon and his descendants a royal family (Jdg 8:22-23). Admirably, this honor is refused by Gideon, but he then strangely falls victim to another temptation (Jdg 8:24-27). The great man whose character was crystallized by opposition to idolatry, yea whose name was even changed in commemoration of the event (Jdg 6:32), erects a golden ephod in his hometown, *"And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house"* (Jdg 8:27). Perhaps Gideon made the mistake of many successful people: success, in their minds, exempts them from following the rules.

8. Whom did Gideon say was the ruler over Israel?

Day 4: Abimelech Declared King

Israel gets its first taste of rule by king when Abimelech, Gideon's son by concubine, persuades his relatives in Shechem to enthrone him (Jdg 9:1-6). Funded by proceeds from Baal's temple, Abimelech hires a gang of thugs who help him execute his seventy brothers. The rest of Israel, which had fallen into Baal-worship (Jdg 8:33-35), acknowledges the rule of Abimelech for three years before his downfall begins (Jdg 9:22).

9. What reason is given for Shechem's willingness to follow Abimelech?

Day 5: Abimelech's Death

Special-interest politics are inherently fickle, and Shechem's loyalty to Abimelech is accordingly unstable. Gaal, a drunken, big-talking opportunist, capitalizes on this political instability and woos the Shechemites to his side (Jdg 9:23-29). This leads to a war of vengeance in which both Abimelech and Shechem are destroyed (Jdg 9:30-57).

10. Who truly caused Shechem's disloyalty to Abimelech (Jdg 9:23, 56-57)?
11. Where did the inhabitants of the tower of Shechem seek refuge? What happened?
12. How did Abimelech not want to be remembered? Did his solution solve the problem (2 Sam 11:21)?

Day 1: Tola, Jair and the Ammonite Oppression

Little more than passing mention is made of Gideon's successors, Tola and Jair, who judge Israel 23 and 22 years respectively (Jdg 10:1-5). Following their tenure, Israel again plunges even deeper into idolatry, and God responds with a dual chastisement: the Ammonites afflict Israel from the east and the Philistines from the west (Jdg 10:6-9). It takes 18 years of suffering before Israel cries out to God for relief, but when they finally do so, God chides them and tells them to petition their beloved idols for help (Jdg 10:10-14). God's mercy is rekindled as the people abandon the idols (Jdg 10:15-18).

1. From what region was Jair?
2. From what kind of family was Jair? (Comp. Dt 3:13-14)

Day 2: Jephthah's Victory Over Ammon

The events of Jephthah's early life set the stage for his later deliverance of Israel (Jdg 11:1-11). Because his mother was a harlot, his half-brothers drove him out of his homeland of Gilead in order to exclude him from their inheritance. While exiled in the land of Tob, Jephthah became a renowned rogue warrior. The elders of Gilead, who were particularly suffering under Ammonite oppression, now swallow their pride and beseech Jephthah to deliver them.

Jephthah first takes the diplomatic approach and tries to reason with the Ammonites, asking for justification of their hostility (Jdg 11:12-28). They answer that they are simply trying to regain territory wrongfully taken from them by Israel - the stated reason for much aggression even in our own day. Jephthah responds by reviewing the historical facts: 1) Israel took the land of the Amorites, not the Ammonites, for they were forbidden to do that by God, 2) their possession of Amorite land was by decree of God, 3) Balak and the Moabites did not try to reclaim territory even though the Amorites had earlier taken part of their land, and 4) 300 years of Israelite settlement in Gilead had passed without protest or attack from the Ammonites. Jephthah's reasoning, however, falls on deaf ears, and he routs the Ammonites in the ensuing battle (Jdg 11:29-33).

3. What do the elders of Gilead offer Jephthah to persuade him to fight for them?
4. What does Jephthah suggest the Ammonites should be satisfied to possess?
5. Whose help did Jephthah have in fighting against the Ammonites?

Day 3: Jephthah's Vow

The story in Judges 11:34-40 has sparked centuries of debate: did Jephthah actually offer his daughter as a burnt offering to God? The vow as stated in Jdg 11:31 seems to clearly indicate Jephthah's intention to offer a **person** since he dedicates "*whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me.*" Further, what great offering would it be if Jephthah promises any old animal that may happen to wander out upon his return?

But the story is so offensive to common sensibility that other alternatives have been suggested. Some, for instance, say that the daughter's request to lament her virginity and the notation that she remained a virgin (Jdg 11:37, 39) indicate that Jephthah dedicated her to a lifetime of exclusive service to God. Others note that the idolatrous practice of sacrificing children as burnt offerings was not mentioned in Israel until Ahaz and Manasseh. Yet others feel that a perpetual memorial of such an horrendous event as human sacrifice would not have arisen among Israelite women.

Certainly, it seems clear that Jephthah **could have** been shortsighted enough in a time of war to make such a rash vow (Saul did something similar, insisting upon the death of his son, Jonathan - I Sam 14:24, 39, 43-45). However, it seems incongruous that Jephthah would have been spiritually depraved enough to vow a human sacrifice (which God detested and forbade) and then considerate enough to God to follow through with it (see Jdg 11:35-36). It must be emphasized that Jephthah made his vow **to God**, not to Baal, Asherah or one of the other idols. An important lesson from this event is that **the vow did not need to be made in the first place**. God had always given victory to His people upon the basis of faithful obedience to His stated laws, not some grand scheme of their own imagination. It was Jephthah's own weakness of faith which led to the vow.

6. Describe Jephthah's daughter's reaction to the vow. For whom did she have respect?

Day 4: Civil War Between Gilead and Ephraim

Jephthah's victory is spoiled both by his rash vow and envy of the Ephraimites (Jdg 12:1-7). They hold the Gileadites in contempt (Jdg 12:4) and accuse Jephthah for fighting the Ammonites without inviting them - apparently a false claim. Ephraim makes a big mistake in picking on the battle-proven Gileadites, losing 42,000 soldiers in the war.

7. Against whom had the Ephraimites filed a similar complaint?

8. How were escaping Ephraimites identified?

Day 5: Ibzan, Elon and Abdon

These three judged Israel a total of 25 years but no details are given.

9. Which judge imported thirty daughters-in-law?

10. What might be the significance of riding on donkeys (Jdg 5:10; 10:4; 12:14)?

Day 1: The Birth of Samson

In the midst of Israel's next affliction, a 40-year plague of the Philistines (Jdg 13:1), God raises up a judge who is peculiar in many ways, beginning with the circumstances of his birth (Jdg 13:2-7). First, the Angel of the Lord appears to a barren woman and announces that she will have a son "*who will begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.*" Then, the Angel stipulates that the son shall be a Nazirite and forbids even his mother to defile herself. The conditions for entering a Nazirite vow are found in Num 6, although God apparently waives the prohibition against contact with the dead as Samson will kill a great number of Philistines. In a second visit of the Angel to the woman and her husband, Manoah, the Angel ascends to heaven in the flame of a sacrifice (Jdg 13:8-23). These events make a great impression on this godly couple and they raise their son accordingly (Jdg 13:24-25).

1. Why does the Angel of the Lord return to Manoah and his wife?
2. What question of Manoah to the Angel is not answered?
3. Contrast the reactions of Manoah and his wife after the ascension of the Angel.

Day 2: Samson's Marriage to a Philistine

Samson's peculiarities are further revealed in the first story from his adulthood (Jdg 14). His weakness for Philistine women, his childish and impetuous reactions, and his shallow frivolity are all uncharacteristic of God's typical leader. In this story of Samson's wedding feast, the viciousness of the Philistines is seen in their threat to murder Samson's bride for the sake of a lost bet. Samson's personal war against the Philistines begins with his killing of thirty men of Ashkelon in order to pay the debt of the riddle.

4. Where did Samson get the strength to kill the lion and the thirty Philistines?
5. Do you think Samson's wife did the right thing by revealing the riddle's answer?
6. What kinds of feelings are aroused by gambling (the riddle was a gamble)?

Day 3: Samson's War with the Philistines

There are three occasions of war against the Philistines in Jdg 15: 1) Samson's wife had been given to another man (15:1-5), 2) Samson's ex-wife and father-in-law are murdered on Samson's account (15:6-8), and 3) the arrest of Samson by the Philistines and the tribe of Judah (15:9-17). Again, note the utterly selfish outlook of Samson in his altercations with the Philistines: "*As they did to me, so I have done to them*" (Jdg 15:11).

Samson never fights with the Philistines on the grounds of God's honor or for the sake of the nation. Note also the cowardice and capitulation of the tribe of Judah: "*Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us?*" they ask of the very one who had just slaughtered many of them by his singular efforts (Jdg 15:8). It doesn't dawn on them that, if one man can do this by the Spirit of God, their combined effort could defeat the Philistines.

7. The lives of Samson's ex-wife and father-in-law were worth less than what two things (Jdg 14:12; 15:5)?

8. What childish complaint is made after Samson's victory (Jdg 15:18)?

Day 4: Samson and Delilah

Samson's weakness for Philistine women is again the highlight of Jdg 16 and leads to his ultimate downfall. First, he takes up with a prostitute in Gaza but delivers himself by his mighty strength (Jdg 16:1-3). Then, Samson falls in love with Delilah who schemes to discover and sell the secret of Samson's strength to the Philistine rulers (Jdg 16:4-5). It is difficult to imagine the denseness of a man who falls for a trick used four times in a row (Jdg 16:6-20). But Samson has shown himself to be ruled by his passions and lusts, and such carnality is devoid of wisdom and foresight and often behaves in a reckless manner. Too, Samson has taken for granted his strength; it has remained intact through twenty years of foolish bets, betrayal by his own brethren, prostitution and who knows what else. But God was willing to overlook Samson's vices and use him for His own purposes so long as he remained a Nazirite and thus identified as set apart by vow unto Jehovah. The cutting of Samson's hair is a public declaration that the vow with God is broken; thus, God removes the strength that was dependent upon the vow.

9. What are some of the weapons of an unscrupulous woman (Jdg 16:15-16, 19)?

10. What does Jdg 16:20 show about Samson's attitude toward his strength?

Day 5: Samson's Death in Dagon's Temple

Since Samson had such a love for Philistine women it is only fitting that he dies in one of their temples (Jdg 16:23-31). True to form, Samson's cry for one last infusion of strength is not to vindicate God's honor but to "*take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!*" Thus ends the life of a peculiar judge who represented two things: 1) the general ungodly character of Israel at this time, and 2) the available power of God at Israel's disposal to cast off the yoke of the Philistines. Samson never raised an army against Philistia but single-handedly killed thousands, demonstrating that Israel remained oppressed by the Philistines not through a lack of power but of courage.

11. Whom were the Philistines praising as they rejoiced over Samson's defeat?

12. How was the collapse of the temple a great blow to the Philistine people?

Day 1: Micah's Idolatry

The closing chapters of Judges (chs 17-21) give specific examples of Israel's digression before the time of the judges and serve to amplify the description in Jdg 2:11-23. After the time of Joshua the nation plunged swiftly and deeply into the ways of the Canaanites: *"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (Jdg 17:6; see also 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). This appendix to the record of the judges serves to highlight the spiritual weakness of the people and the need for strong, visible leadership.

One family's religious corruption is told in Jdg 17. Micah, an Ephraimite, builds a private shrine in his own home, complete with idols, an image of the ephod, and his own son serving as a priest (Jdg 17:1-5). He later hires a Levitical priest, thinking that obtaining a priest from the proper tribe would legitimize his whole illegal scheme (Jdg 17:7-13). Micah's acts are particularly inexcusable considering that the tabernacle is in Shiloh, his very own tribal land.

1. How did Micah feel about the Levitical priest whom he hired?
2. Discuss: What principles from this story explain how people can fall into false religion while thinking that God approves of them?

Day 2: The Spread of Micah's Idolatry

The condition in the tribal land of Dan (Jdg 18:1-2) places this story at an earlier time than Samson (comp. also Jdg 18:12 with 13:25). We learned in Jdg 1:34 that the children of Dan were being harassed by the Amorites and forced to dwell in the mountains. Dissatisfied with their situation, a small band of Danites locates a suitable area in the far north and goes forth to conquer it (Jdg 18:3-13). On the way, however, they stop at Micah's house, steal the articles from his shrine, and hire away the priest (Jdg 18:14-21). Their attack upon the city of Laish is successful, but they fully adopt the idolatry of Micah (Jdg 18:27-31). Thus, idolatry of one man in Ephraim spread through the northern branch of Dan and had a lasting effect upon them. In fact, Dan will be idolatrous through most of its history.

3. What was the priest of Micah primarily interested in?
4. How might the victory of the Danites have encouraged them in their idolatry?

Day 3: The Gross Immorality of Gibeah

In addition to spiritual decline, a second story is appended to the book of Judges in order to describe the moral decay of the period (Jdg 19). The tribe of Benjamin had sunk as low as Sodom and Gomorrah, those cities for which Abraham vainly interceded many hundreds of years before. The Levite's confidence in his brethren is misplaced (Jdg 19:11-12), and his preference to lodge in a city of Israelites costs him the life of his concubine. But this story not only demonstrates the depravity of Gibeah. What can be said for the man who heartlessly casts his concubine to the wolves and then, seeing her the next morning lying at the door, is only concerned about beginning his journey? And what of her dismemberment and distribution throughout Israel? Indeed, in the generation following Joshua and Eleazar (see Jdg 20:28), the nation is already infected with sin that makes them to a degree indistinguishable from the Gentiles.

5. How did the Levite's father-in-law unwittingly contribute to his daughter's death?

6. What tribal land lies between Ephraim and Judah?

7. What did the old man of Gibeah and the Levite have in common?

Day 4: War Against the Benjamites

The rest of Israel is outraged at the behavior of the Benjamites and gathers for war against them (Jdg 20:1-11). A diplomatic solution fails when Benjamin refuses to extradite the guilty parties of Gibeah (Jdg 20:12-17). God then directs Israel to attack Benjamin but Israel suffers two costly defeats against the smaller foe (Jdg 20:18-28). Apparently, these defeats represent God's punishment against all the tribes for an unexplained reason. But God's favor returns and the third attack proves successful (Jdg 20:29-48).

8. How did the Benjamites respond to Israel's demand to surrender the wicked men?

9. How many soldiers did Israel lose in the first two battles against Benjamin?

10. How many Benjamites survived the massacre?

Day 5: Rebuilding the Tribe of Benjamin

In the aftermath of the civil war, Israel is grieved over its extreme punishment of Benjamin (Jdg 21:1-7). Before the battle, Israel had overzealously taken two severe oaths which further complicate the situation: 1) no daughter could be married to any Benjamite, and 2) any city which did not send delegates to the war would be utterly destroyed. Israel held steadfastly to the first oath, refusing to voluntarily give any of their daughters to the 600 remaining Benjamites. But they selectively enforced the second oath in order to save the tribe they had nearly wiped out. Since Jabesh Gilead had not attended the meeting at Mizpah, soldiers are sent to destroy the city, sparing only 400 virgin women who were given to the Benjamites as wives (Jdg 21:8-15). How-

ever, this only solves two-thirds of the problem, for 200 Benjamites yet remain without wives. This leads to another contrived circumvention of the oath: a plot is laid to enable the Benjamites to kidnap 200 virgins from the town of Shiloh during an upcoming feast (Jdg 21:16-25). Perhaps it is the carnality of such foolish oath-making by Israel which God punished by the two defeats at the hands of Benjamin. At any rate, the whole affair seems to be mishandled and injustice rules in the resolution of the situation. Consider the following observation:

“However just and laudable the moral indignation may have been ... the oath itself was an act of rashness, in which there was not only an utter denial of brotherly love, but the bounds of justice were broken through ... ‘Wherefore they would have acted far more uprightly, if they had seriously confessed their fault and asked forgiveness of God, and given permission to the Benjamites to marry freely. In this way there would have been no necessity to cut off the inhabitants of Jabesh from their midst by cruelty of another kind’ (Baddeus). But if they felt themselves bound in their consciences to keep the oath inviolably, they ought to have commended the matter to the Lord in prayer, and left it to His decision; whereas, by the advice given to the Benjaminites, they had indeed kept the oath in the letter, but had treated it in deed and truth as having no validity whatever” (Keil and Delitzsch, Vol. 2, p 464).

At any rate, we have here the historical background behind Saul’s humility when Samuel anoints him as Israel’s first king: *“Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?”* (I Sam 9:21).

11. The people lamented because what was missing in Israel?
12. What should we learn from this incident and the later vow of Jephthah about our speech during a crisis or a highly emotional situation?

A note on the period of the judges:

Almost from the very moment that the inheritance of Canaan is received, Israel begins a spiritual and moral decline which will eventually lead to exile. They reflect more of the idolatrous character of the Gentiles than the nature of the true God who gave them law and life. This is not what God had envisioned: *“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God (who) has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth”* (Dt 7:6).

The wonder of this persistent unfaithfulness is only surpassed by the patience and mercy of God which lasts not only through the centuries of the judges but will continue for several hundred more years. Israel will rise from the disarray and disunity of the judges to a pinnacle of glory under its two illustrious kings, David and Solomon. But, alas, this is only a fleeting flash of brilliance in a long history of darkness and despair. From the valley of the judges, we can already sense the ultimate failure of God’s chosen people.

Day 1: Naomi and Ruth

The story of Ruth is a warm glow amid the darkness of the era of the judges. We first learn from Ruth that, as in the case of Rahab, the Gentiles were not unable to recognize godly principles or adopt godly character. Secondly, Boaz reminds us that not all Israel was like Micah, and Bethlehem reminds us that not all Israel was like Gibeah. The book of Ruth is a glimpse of what God intended: peaceful pastoral life, brotherly love, honor, obedience to law, family honor, self-sacrifice and generosity.

The book, however, begins in darkness as Elimelech flees a famine in Israel and settles in Moab with his wife, Naomi, and two sons (1:1-5). Sometime thereafter Elimelech dies, and ten years later his sons die, leaving only Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. Naomi then decides to return to Bethlehem which sets the stage for one of the most tender and noble exchanges in all the Scriptures (1:6-18). Though Naomi feels that God's hand has been against her (1:13, 20-21), her faith in Him is such that Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, declares *"Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me"* (1:16-17).

1. What is Naomi's stated reason for sending her daughters-in-law back to Moab?
2. Naomi said, "I went out _____, but the LORD has brought me home _____."
3. Naomi said that Orpah had returned to her people and her _____.

Day 2: Ruth Meets Boaz

Ruth demonstrates her loyalty to Naomi in that she, without complaint, accepts the life of Bethlehem (ch 2). This means volunteering to glean the leftovers of the field so that she and Naomi may eat. Fortunately (or providentially?) Ruth happens upon the field of Boaz, a relative of Elimelech, who instructs his servants to treat her kindly and leave extra for her to gather.

4. What were some of the common greetings of the time?
5. What encouraged Boaz to show Ruth kindness?
6. How is Naomi's faith in God's goodness revived (2:20)?

Day 3: Ruth's Appeal to Boaz

The events of chapter 3 are certainly unusual from a Western point of view but were quite in keeping with the laws and customs of the day. At the advice of Naomi, Ruth makes an appeal to Boaz to redeem her rightful inheritance as Mahlon's widow (the land that was sold by Naomi - 4:3) and to take her as a wife under the principle of Levirate marriage. It is likely that Ruth and Naomi suspected a favorable response from Boaz, for he receives Ruth's appeal with joy (3:10-11).

7. What had the town come to think of Ruth?
8. What leads to the conclusion that Boaz is significantly older than Ruth?
9. What is Boaz's only concern before taking Ruth as his wife?

Day 4: Boaz Clears the Legal Hurdles

More interesting insight into the customs of Israel is afforded by the events of 4:1-12. Boaz is a man of law and principle and he must resolve the matter of a closer relative to Ruth who has the right of redemption. The "court" is convened in the gate of the city and the opportunity for redemption is presented to the closer relative. He is willing to buy the property but is not willing to take Ruth as a wife. He thus concedes the right of redemption to Boaz. The matter is legally resolved and Boaz receives the blessings of the elders. The issue of marriage to a Gentile seems mitigated by the fact that Ruth has adopted both the worship and the character of an Israelite; i.e., she is a proselyte.

10. What was the custom of the day in confirming the legality of an exchange?
11. What, according to 4:10, was more important than the nationality of Ruth?
12. The elders and the people prayed that Ruth would be made like whom?

Day 5: The Family of Ruth and Boaz

The story of Ruth is not told merely as cultural insight but to enlighten us to the ancestry of both David and Christ. Naomi's husband and two sons had been taken away, but in their place she was given a grandson who would become the grandfather of a king (4:13-22). Further, in Ruth a Gentile enters into the lineage of Christ.

13. Ruth was said to be better than what to Naomi?
14. Who will be the son of Obed? And who is the noteworthy grandson of Obed?