

#4 ... Story of the Old Testament (Fill in the blanks)

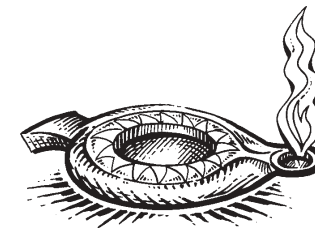
ERA	FIGURE	LOCATION	STORYLINE SUMMARY
_____	_____	_____	Adam is created by God, but he _____ and _____ God's original _____ for man.
_____	_____	_____	Abraham is _____ by God to _____ a people to _____ God to the world.
_____	_____	_____	Moses _____ the Hebrew people from _____ in Egypt and then gives them the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Joshua leads the _____ of the _____ .
_____	_____	_____	Samuel and others were chosen as _____ to _____ the people for _____ rebellious years.

BASIC BIBLE STUDY

An Introductory Guide To Understanding The Scriptures

PART EIGHT

The Judges Era



"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path"
PSALM 119:105

This was a dark period in the history of the Jewish people. After the death of Joshua (**Judges 1:1**) and of the elders who survived him, Israel lapsed into a sorry state of spiritual ignorance. They had lost their spiritual moorings and, as is recorded in the final verse of the Book of Judges, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." The result was a morally degraded, socially perverted, and spiritually bankrupt time of almost four hundred years. Israel had all the wealth of the promises of God at their disposal. Yet they scavenged through the garbage of life, eeking out a pitiful existence. They could have been kings but lived like paupers.

THE ARC OF BIBLE HISTORY
#5 ... THE JUDGES ERA



I. Review: (Fill in the blanks to bring the chart up-to-date with this era).

ERA	FIGURE	LOCATION	STORYLINE SUMMARY
_____	_____	_____	Adam is created by God, but he _____ and _____ God's original _____ for man.
_____	_____	_____	Abraham is _____ by God to _____ a people to _____ God to the world.
_____	_____	_____	Moses _____ the Hebrew people from _____ in Egypt and then gives them the _____.
_____	_____	_____	Joshua leads the _____ of the _____.
_____	_____	_____	To be completed in this study.

4. FRUITFULNESS: Ruth 4:13-22.

The blessings of the Lord were given to Ruth in a measure that no-one had ever dreamed. A son, Obed, was born ... and through him we can trace the family line through Jesse, David - and Jesus, the Messiah (**Matthew 1:1,5&6**)! How God had turned the wrath of man into His praise! Elimelech moved out of Bethlehem into Moab to save his life. He failed, but out of his failure God brought a Gentile girl into the royal line and, in this, reminded us that in His death He would bring in many Gentiles.

TESTS

#1 ... Four Major Subjects in the Judges Era

(Write the correct subject from the options at left)

OPTIONS:	SUBJECT:	DESCRIPTION:
The Judges	_____	The breaking of God's Law
Appendices	_____	Repetition of Israel's sins and calamities
Rebellion	_____	The leaders of Israel
The Sin Cycles	_____	Insight into family conditions during judges era

#2 ... Story-Line Summary (Fill in the blanks from memory)

ERA	STORYLINE SUMMARY
Judges	Samuel and others were chosen as _____ to _____ the people for _____ rebellious years.

#3 ... The Geography of the Judges Era

(Match the numbers below with the blanks on the map on the next page to see the countries who oppressed Israel during the Judges period).

- | | | |
|--------------|----------|----------------|
| 1. Philistia | 2. Moab | 3. Mesopotamia |
| 4. Canaan | 5. Ammon | 6. Midian |

It would have been tragic news for Ruth if Boaz had not desired to redeem her. That possibility certainly existed. One of his relatives - a kinsman "nearer" to Ruth than he was (**Ruth 3:12**) - had the right to redeem Ruth, but he did not have a corresponding desire to redeem (**Ruth 4:6**). He was interested in the property that had belonged to Elimelech. However, when he realized that he could not have the property without the person, his interest cooled immediately (**Ruth 4:4-6**). Perhaps it was the thought that he might contaminate his bloodline by introducing a Moabite into it. Readily, he submitted to the symbolic act of disinheritance (plucking off his shoe and giving it to his neighbour).



Bride Adorned

By way of contrast, Boaz had the right *and* the resolve to redeem. He was willing. There can be no doubt that the spur behind Boaz's resolve was love. He had fallen in love with that destitute widow from Moab. Therefore his willingness.

Christ's decision to become our Redeemer was made in eternity past. It was a voluntary decision, based on an eternal love (**Psalm 40:7&8** ... cf. **Hebrews 10:7**, **Revelation 1:5**).

iii. **He must be able to redeem.** Had Boaz been a beggar he could not have helped Ruth. Surely it is no accident that the first time Boaz is introduced to us, he is described as "*a mighty man of wealth*" (**Ruth 2:1**). Given the cost of redemption, he needed to be. To have the right and the resolve to redeem would not have been sufficient: he needed to have the resources (**2 Corinthians 8:9**; **Hebrews 7:25**). In **Revelation 5:1** there is an interesting reference to a book "*written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*" The scene glorifies Christ as our Redeemer - and couples *His ability* with His activity of redemption (**Revelation 5:1-9**).

Dr Alexander Whyte summarises: "... *The Church of Christ ... like Naomi and Ruth, was disinherited, disconsolate, despised, forgotten, and without kinsman-redeemer in her famine and all her deep distress, when His eye and His heart fell on her in the field. And how well He has performed a kinsman's part all the world has read in a Book that for truth and beauty far outstrips the Book of Ruth. How He has not only redeemed her, but has given her rest in His own house, in His Father's house, and in His own heart - what written book can ever fully tell?*"

II. Story-Line Summary:

**Samuel and others were chosen as judges
to govern the people
for four hundred rebellious years.**

III. Story-Line Expansion:

The Book of Judges commences by recapping on some of the events which had taken place during the days of Joshua. The recap period in this book ends at **Judges 2:10** with attention being devoted to the new generation. "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel."

THE NEW GENERATION

When the older generation died, the children who succeeded were ignorant concerning the things of God. They forsook the Lord and served Baalim (**Judges 2:11-13**) - the 'gods' of the people they failed to drive out of the land. They surveyed the stories of the workings of Almighty God in a former generation with disrespect and disbelief (cf. **Joshua 4:6&7**) ... an illustration of a failure on the part of the parents to communicate the truth to their children!

CHANGE ... COMPROMISE!

A change in attitude emerged when the Israelites became strong in the land of Canaan - **and this change in attitude led to compromise and disobedience.** **Judges 1:27-33** details the sorry tale of Israel's failure to obey God's command and drive out the inhabitants of the land.

Israel began to intermingle with the enemy - and allowed them to occupy part of the land. This was when their problems began.

There are four main subjects in the Judges Era:

1. Rebellion
2. The 'Sin Cycles'
3. The Judges
4. Appendices - Family Life

1. REBELLION: THE BREAKING OF GOD'S LAW (Judges)

Just before Moses dies, he instructs Israel (**Deuteronomy 7:1-5**) to do three things:

1. **Destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan.**
2. **Avoid intermarriage with the Canaanites.**
3. **Shun worship of the Canaanite gods.**

Israel fails on all three accounts. The record of both **Joshua** and **Judges** provides us with proof that Israel did not fully accomplish this. Nine times in **Judges 1** we read the words, "They did not utterly drive them out."

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AT BOCHIM

Compromise robs people of their power. Disobedience spells the disappearance of God. This is clearly demonstrated in **Judges 2:1** when the angel of the Lord (another theophany) appears at Bochim and:

- remonstrates with the people because of their shattering of the covenant they had made with the Lord;
- warns them that the people they had failed to drive out of the land would be "thorns" in their sides and their 'gods' would be "a snare" to them;
- and assures them that the Lord will not be fighting for them (**Judges 2:1-5**).

A THORNY PROBLEM

This toleration of their and God's enemies became a persistent source of trouble.

- An immediate effect is noted in **Judges 1:34**, "And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountain: for they would not suffer them to come down to the valley." Israel's disobedience allowed her enemies to regain some of their former power - and they were not slow to show their intolerance of Israel by driving them out. How ironic that the people God told Israel to drive out now end up driving Israel out!

experience. But from the day that Ruth began to scavenge in the fields of Boaz (a humiliating experience; **Leviticus 19:9&10**), rays of light began to come through.

3. RESTORATION: **Ruth 3-4:12.**

Boaz promises to act the role of the near kinsman for the benefit of Ruth and Naomi (cf. **Deuteronomy 25:5; Leviticus 25:25**).

THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

The right of redemption was quite complicated in the days of Boaz and Ruth. When a parcel of land was lost because of bankruptcy, certain stringent conditions were attached to the redemption of the land. On many occasions, the conditions for redemption were written on the inside and outside of a scroll. That scroll was sealed with seven seals and placed within the temple / tabernacle / other legal repository. When anyone made the decision to redeem the land, they were obliged to come to the holder of the scroll (i.e. the priest) and ask to read on the outside the conditions for the redemption which were duplicated on the inside.

The role of redeemer was not open to everyone. Three criteria had to be met if a person was to qualify as a redeemer.

i. The redeemer had to be a relative - a near kinsman (cf. Boaz - **Ruth 2:20** - and Christ, **Galatians 4:4&5**).

- In the case of *misfortune*, a kinsman had to watch for the forced sale of an impoverished relative's property and purchase it so that it would remain in the family. In time, that property would be restored to its rightful owner.
- In the case of *marriage*, a kinsman had a responsibility to his brother's wife. If she were left as a childless widow, he was obliged to marry her. Children born from this union were to be treated as the brother's children. The sons of such a Levitical marriage inherited the property of the one who would have been their father, had he lived.

With the concept of *the near kinsman*, we touch on the genius of the gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ became near of kin to Adam's ruined race so that He might have the right to redeem (**Galatians 4:4&5; Hebrews 2:14-17**). It is worth noting that *at this very place* - Bethlehem - nearly 2000 years ago, the second person of the Godhead entered this earth in a body of perfect humanity to become our next of kin and have the right to redeem us.

ii. The redeemer had to be willing (ct. the nearest potential redeemer for Ruth, **Ruth 4:6**; cf. **Psalm 40:7&8, John 10:18** in Christ's case).

the God-rejector and idolater ... war, famine, pestilence, and death. Due to the sins of Israel in the days of the judges God sent a famine. It affected Bethlehem ("the house of bread").

Elimelech, whose name means "My God is King," along with his wife Naomi ("pleasantness" or "favour"), instead of accepting this punishment as something that God had sent and repenting as a result of it, tried to flee from the punishment by going down into the alien land of Moab. They take their two sons with them, Mahlon ("joy, song") and Chilion ("ornament, perfectness"). They feared death, but in resorting to an expedient involving compromise, they ran straight into it: all three men died in the land they thought would provide their escape. This family discovered they would be no more successful in running away from God than Adam or Jonah. The essence of Elimelech's trouble was that he moved to Moab without seeking the will of God. By the time of their deaths, Mahlon and Chilion had married (contrary to God's command) two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. The family is reduced to three widows ... a tragic scenario in the East where widows are blamed for their widowhood, despised and neglected.

2. RETURN: RUTH 1:6-2:23.

In these bitter circumstances, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem: **Ruth 1:6** reveals it was not because of any repentance of heart, but the result of a selfish motive that drew her back.

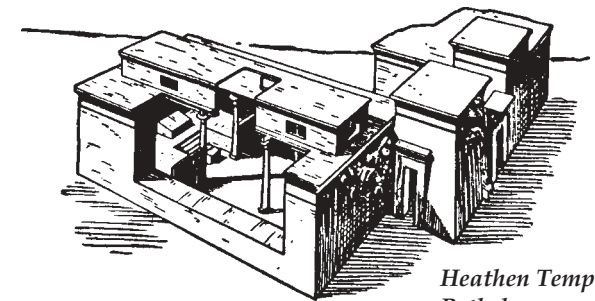
Naomi painted a very black picture of the future for her daughters-in-law ... no prospects, no home, no husbands - nothing!

• **She made the mistake of blaming God for her misery, Ruth 1:20** - and failed to confess that it was her sin that had been bitter (There are five examples of this in **Ruth 1**). She was right to return to Bethlehem, but she was wrong in blaming God - and wrong to insist that Orpah and Ruth should return to an idolatrous country after all she and her sons had told them about Israel and the love of Jehovah.

• **She made the mistake of forgetting about the true facts of life in her grief.** God had given a law to Israel to ensure that poor persons did not lose permanently their inheritance: the year of jubilee brought back to them what they may have forfeited temporarily. There was also the law of the kinsman redeemer: a near kinsman could buy back any property that had been sold and restore it to a widow. Naomi had forgotten all about her near kinsman when she painted a picture of hopelessness and instructed the girls to return to Moab.

Life in Bethlehem began as Naomi had said - a dark and hard

• Some of the areas where Israel failed to eliminate the heathen peoples and their worship became centres of shameful defeat and humiliation for Israel in days to come (cf. Bethshean: **Judges 1:27** with **1 Samuel 31:10**).



*Heathen Temple,
Bethshan*

Tragically, the same fault has characterised the Church of God (cf. **Revelation 2:14; Revelation 2:20**). This double compromise in doctrine and in practice has been a constant thorn in the side of the people of God.

INTERNAL FEUDING

The other part of Israel's rebellion was that **they strove with their brethren**, e.g. the case of:

- Ephraim with Gideon (**Judges 8:1**);
- Ephraim with Jephthah (**Judges 12:1**);
- and of the eleven tribes with the Benjamites (**Judges 19-21**).

Fellowship with the world outside, invariably (and inevitably) breaks the fellowship of the Church within.

**2. THE 'SIN CYCLES':
REPETITION OF ISRAEL'S SINS & CALAMITIES
(Judges)**

Judges 2 introduces us to a concept that frequently recurs throughout the book. We may term it "The Sin Cycle." Much of the Era of Judges involves a series of cycles that are recorded in the Book of Judges. Each cycle has four component parts, illustrated in **Judges 2:13-18**. Basically, these are:

(1) REBELLION / SIN.

The people forsook the Lord and worshipped the false gods of the

land (v13). "And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."

(2) RETRIBUTION / SERVITUDE.

Rebellion leads to retribution. God judges His people, delivering them into the hands of oppressors (vs14&15). Sometimes God sent bands of plunderers against Israel, on other occasions armies of soldiers; either way, these nations became an increasing menace to Israel. God uses Moab, the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Amalekites and other nations as His rod to oppress and scourge His disobedient people.



These judgments are remedial in nature: they are administered with the object of

bringing His people back to Himself.

The tribes of Israel spent 93 years in servitude during the Judges Era (the 18 years of **Judges 10:7&8** refer to the two-and-a-half tribes who lived East of Jordan). All of this was time spent outside the circle of God's will ... utterly wasted years (cf. **1 Kings 6:1 and Acts 13:18-21**).

(3) REPENTANCE / SUPPLICATION.

Eventually, under the heavy hands of their oppressors, the people cry out for mercy, pledging themselves not to sin against the Lord in this fashion again (v18). In reality, it would seem that the people cried out for help to the Lord, not so much because they were convicted of their sin, as because they found their sufferings intolerable ... and in infinite grace, the Lord heard their cry, and brought deliverance to them.

(4) RESCUE / SALVATION.

The Lord raises up deliverers for His people (v16). The people are delivered from bondage - and God frees the land from military oppression for the remainder of that judge's life. These deliverances were wholly of grace, and do not indicate that the heart of the people was turned to God, (as a comparison of **Judges 1:21, 3:5, 21:25 and 10:6** will show. These references are in their chronological order, and mark definite steps in the downward course of the people).

THE CYCLE REPEATS ITSELF!

However, once delivered, the people rebel again (v19). The Israelites

J. Sidlow Baxter is in full agreement. "It comes as a kind of redeeming contrast after our painful reading in the book of Judges."

The book of Ruth is a narrative which features those virtues that were in such short supply in the era of the Judges - piety and purity. It is the story of the faithfulness of the few in days of darkness and decline. If Judges is all villainy, Ruth is virtue; if Judges is a record of disloyalty, Ruth is devotion; if Judges is war, Ruth is peace!

Instead of hatred there is love.

Instead of army life there is family life.

Instead of battlefields there are cornfields.

Instead of attacking and counter-attacking, there are love, courtship and marriage.

VARIOUS AVENUES OF STUDY

Ruth can be studied from a variety of perspectives. It may be approached from the standpoint of:

- HISTORY. It can be used to show the ancestry of the tribe of Judah, of David - and the Messiah (**Ruth 4:18-22**).
- THEOLOGY. The doctrine of redemption is clearly found within it.
- CULTURE. References to the customs and tradition of the Jews (Levirate marriage system and the social welfare which was in existence during this time period may be gleaned from this Book).
- PASTORAL. The common people and their interaction with one another may be noted.
- SPIRITUAL. God may be seen, supervising and organising all things. His sovereignty is conspicuous! Even when wrong decisions are made, God will still bring about His sovereign will. John Phillips has remarked: "The goodness, grace and godliness of Boaz are a reminder that God has His people in key places, through whom He can pursue His purposes."
- TYPOLOGY. Christ, the Church, the children of God may all be viewed in the Book.
- APPLICATION. The biographies of the main individuals in the book teach many lessons about Christian behaviour.
- LITERATURE. Filled with plots, subplots, potential 'bad-ends' and ironic twists to the six stories contained within the book, this book is a tremendous piece of literature. Professor R. Moulton has said that "if the chief distinction of the Idyll be its subject matter of love and domestic life, then in all literature there is no more typical Idyll than the Book of Ruth."

OUTLINE OF RUTH

1. BACKSLIDING: **Ruth 1:1-18**

God had four sore punishments that He declared He would use upon

terrible loss of life, to the extent that the tribe of Benjamin was almost obliterated (not only by loss in battle, but because the rest of Israel pledged themselves not to marry the women of Benjamin).

TWO MAIN STREAMS

All history proves that God never leaves Himself without witnesses.

The times of the Judges is no exception to that rule. "One might say that the Book of Judges has been written, not only that none of the Lord's children may presume, but also that none of them might despair."

You can trace two streams flowing through the entire period:

- i. The corruptness of human nature, and
- ii. The tender mercies of the Divine nature.

While the book of Judges reveals the utter failure of Israel, it also emphasizes the persistent grace of God. The divine patience sparkles as a priceless diamond against the black backcloth of the activities of men during this era.

The people were in the land of rest, but the experience of that rest depended on their waging ceaseless war with their enemies; when they failed to do this, they lost the enjoyment of their rest. They had been slowly moving from the ideal of theocratic government, had attempted to make Gideon their king, and had actually crowned Abimelech - and now they are on the eve of a massive change and within sight of the visible kingdom.

(3) The Story of Naomi and Ruth.

It was often the case that the Hebrew Old Testament Canon linked the Book of Ruth with the Book of Judges to arrive at an overall figure of 22 books. **The Book of Ruth** can be viewed as 'Appendix 3 to the Book of Judges'. **The author of the Book of Ruth makes a clear connection with the period of the Judges (Ruth 1:1).**

This Book, however, appears like an oasis in the desert - like some grains of salt, standing out in its stark whiteness from the black corruption that surrounds it on every side. It is "a shining example of spiritual light in the dark days of the judges."

Dr. William Graham Scroggie has expressed it well when he says: "After reading Judges 17-21, Ruth is like a lovely lily in a stagnant pool. Here, instead of unfaithfulness, is loyalty, and instead of immorality, is purity. Here, instead of battlefields are harvest fields, and instead of the warrior's shout is the harvester's song."

fall into sin again, followed by conquest, followed by repentance, etc. Consequently, the sin cycle has commenced again! Seven such cycles are recorded spanning the time of the Judges (**Judges 3:7-11; 3:12-15; 4:1-4; 6:1-11; 10:6-11:1&32; 13:1-5; 1 Samuel 3-7**).

SEVEN SPECIFIC SIN CYCLES

<u>CYCLE</u>	<u>ENEMY</u>	<u>SERVITUDE</u>	<u>JUDGE</u>	<u>REST</u>
1. 3:7-11	Mesopotamia	8 years	Othniel	40 years
2. 3:12-30	Moab/Ammon/Amalek	18 years	Ehud	80 years
3. 3:31-5:31	Philistines & Canaanites	20 years	Shamgar/ Deborah	40 years
4. 6:1-8:32	Midianites	7 years	Gideon	40 years
[8:33-10:5	Usurpation of Abimelech	3 years	Tola/Jair	45 years]
5. 10:6-12:15	Ammonites	18 years	Jephthah/ Ibzan/ Elon/Abdon	31 years
6. 13-16	Philistines	40 years	Samson	20 years
7. 1 Sam. 3-7	Philistines		Eli/Scamuel	

SIN CYCLE DEGENERATES

This sin cycle not merely perpetuates itself; it degenerates! At the beginning, when God raises up a judge to march out against the oppressor, the people of Israel support him. However, as time progresses, so national support for the judge lessens. By the time Samson is raised up, he is standing alone! Not only so, Samson was bound by his own people and handed over to the enemy (**Judges 15:10-13**).



Philistine Water Jug

Due to the recurring 'sin cycle,' few days were darker in the history of Israel than the days of the Judges. Well has it been said of these days: "The two outstanding features of this period are the sinful incorrigibility of the people and the persistent mercifulness of the Lord."

3. JUDGES: THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL (Judges)

These judges are not men who wear long, flowing black robes, sit on high benches, and make legal decisions. Rather, they are political-military leaders of Israel who exercise near-absolute power because of their office and abilities. These judges were more than judicial. The word "judge" in the Hebrew language has a wide meaning, suggesting both their role to defend and deliver and to avenge and punish.

There were 14 judges: some who were afforded a detailed mention; others are barely named!

DETAILED MENTION

1. Othniel
2. Ehud

4. Deborah
5. Gideon

8. Jephthah

12. Samson
13. Eli
14. Samuel

BRIEF MENTION

3. Shamgar

6. Tola
7. Jair

9. Ibzan
10. Elon
11. Abdon

OVERLAP IN JUDGESHIPS

If all the numbers in the Book of Judges relating to years of rest and oppression are added up, we arrive at a figure of 410 years. **However, the judges did not exercise their role of deliverers of the nation sequentially: some judged simultaneously in different geographical areas in the land of Israel** (e.g. Samson and Samuel evidently lived during the same period of Philistine ascendancy in the land of Israel). This could compute to a figure of 355 years for the entire judges period.

WEAKNESS OF THE HUMAN INSTRUMENTS

An underlying theme that travels throughout the book of Judges is that the weakness and inadequacy of the human instrumentality

without; these three individual incidents speak of troubles which arose from within.

(1) Micah, his Priest, and the Danites; Judges 17&18.

This is a bitter story of apostasy - of idolatry and infidelity. It reflects the religious corruption of the times.

DEMISE OF DAN

The Danites had apparently lost some of their inheritance to the Philistines - and their land was virtually absorbed by Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah. In a bid to secure a permanent inheritance, the men of the tribe of Dan despatched five men to spy out the entire land. **Judges 18:5** informs us that they came to a location north of the Sea of Galilee, approximately 125 miles away. The people who lived in this region were an isolated company, with no dealings with the nations surrounding them. According to the terms of the 'Military Manual,' these people came into the category of those who were "afar off." Therefore the Danites were obliged to go to the city, proclaim peace to it, and offer them the chance to surrender to them and serve them. However, the Danites determined to go in and possess the land (**Judges 18:27&28**). As a result of this evil activity, the tribe of Dan positioned itself to the far north of Galilee. Its ensuing history tells a sorry tale in that the tribe further degenerates into a company of idolaters. (As an indication of their love of idols, it emerges that, years later, in the reign of Jeroboam I, one of two golden calves to be introduced into the kingdom was set up in Dan).

Perhaps it is not without significance that in the list of the twelve tribes which are to be sealed during the tribulation period, the tribe of Dan is missing (**Revelation 7:5-8**). Such has been the dishonour they have accrued through their ungodly activities that God has refused to acknowledge them when the tribes are counted in **Revelation chapter 7!**

(2) The Levite, his Concubine, and the Benjamites; Judges 19-21.

Essentially this incident is about revenge. **It plumbs the depth of the peoples' immorality, emphasizing the truth that where idolatry abounds, immorality is never far away!** This vulgar incident reflects the social corruption of the times: it specifies the sodomy and incest which were prevalent in the land in those days when there was no king in Israel, and everyone did that which was right in his own eyes (**Judges 17:6; 21:25**).

When the tribe of Benjamin identified themselves with the horrible crime by refusing to produce the criminals for punishment, a civil war was declared ... the rest of the tribes against Benjamin. There was a

Among Samson's most noble and heroic acts were:

- Killing a lion with his hands (**Judges 14:5&6**),
- Slaughter of 30 Philistines at Ashkelon and taking their clothes to reward those who interpreted his riddle' (**Judges 14:19**),
- Catching 300 foxes, tying them tail to tail, placing a firebrand between the tails and setting the corn of the Philistines on fire (**Judges 15:3-5**),
- Smiting the Philistines with a great slaughter (**Judges 15:7&8**),
- Killing 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (**Judges 15:15**),
- Pulling down the massive amphitheatre, thus killing thousands of Philistines - and himself! (**Judges 16:21-31**).

John Milton, in 'Samson Agonistes,' pictured Samson's final act in these words:

**Straining all his nerves he bow'd
As with the force of winds and waters pent,
When mountains tremble, and two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro,
He tugg'd, he shook, till down they came and drew
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder,
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath -
Lords, ladies, captains, counsellors, and priests,
Their choice nobility and flower**

**Samson, with these unmix'd, inevitability
Pull'd down the same destruction on himself.**

It was a sad end for a judge who, though a Nazarite, leaves only one prayer to his name (**Judges 16:28**). The one mitigating factor was that Samson's last act was his best act in the world.

4. APPENDICES: INSIGHT INTO FAMILY LIFE DURING JUDGES PERIOD (Judges 17-21; Ruth)

The appendices in the Book of Judges, (while they do not advance the history of the judges), give **specific examples of the general malaise sweeping across the nation of Israel during the period of the judges**. Therefore they are very important. While the main narrative of the Book of Judges concentrates on troubles which came from

which God uses to deliver His people from the clutches of their enemies only serves to emphasize the power of God. The individuals used by God in the book of Judges are persons who would not, in ordinary circumstances, be expected to be champions of justice, military strategy or, indeed, inspirational leaders. There is a wonderful illustration of the words of **Zechariah 4:6** in the choice of the judges: "This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." For example,

- Ehud wielded nothing more than a dagger,
- Shamgar had an ox-goad,
- Gideon had to operate with 300 men.

The truth of our responsibility with respect to the gifts which God has given to us is brought forcibly to our minds as we study the Biblical accounts of the lives and exploits of the Judges.

Few of the judges (apart from Samson) actually looked like a champion. Yet Samson was the least morally qualified to be a judge. None may have matched him for strength - but then none would have matched him for sensuality and sin either!

TRUE SOURCE OF STRENGTH

The source of the ability and achievement of the judges is found in the fact that it is said of Othniel (**3:10**), Gideon (**6:34**), Jephthah (**11:29**), and Samson (**14:6&19**): "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him." God has never chosen men because of their exceptional wisdom or military might, their political ability, their skilful leadership, their scientific genius, or their noble birth. God has always chosen very ordinary men with common talents - but He has refined and empowered them (**1 Corinthians 1:26-29**). The lesson which comes through in the choice of judges appears to be that God can choose and use anyone, regardless of background and commitment - highlighting His own sovereignty. God will fulfil His will, no matter what gifts - or lack of them - those whom He chooses as judges have.

SOME PROMINENT JUDGES

OTHNIEL (#1): Judges 1.

Othniel is introduced as the first in the line of judges in **Judges 3:9**. He was the nephew of Caleb - and, also, his son-in-law (**Judges 1:12-15; Joshua 15:16-19**). Before he rose to the status of judge in Israel, Othniel had distinguished himself for his valour in the estimate of no less a man than Caleb (**Judges 1:12&13**).

Othniel's time as judge over Israel is summarized in **Judges 3:7-11**: when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, Othniel led the children of Israel to a great victory over the forces of Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. During his judgeship, Israel was delivered from 8 years of servitude to Mesopotamia and enjoyed rest for 40 years.

DEBORAH (#4): Judges 4&5.

After 20 years of terrible oppression at the hands of the Canaanites (3rd sin cycle), Israel cried unto the Lord. He raised up Barak (soldier) to deliver them - and Deborah to judge them. (It is strange to note that Barak is named in **Hebrews 11:32** in the list of the heroes of faith, but not Deborah, though in the record in the book of Judges, Deborah certainly appears as the more prominent character; **Judges 4:8&9**).

Deborah was the only female judge. She was a wife, a prophetess, a poet and a person endowed with massive public spirit and courage. The 'Song of Deborah' (**Judges 5**), is the third great Song in the scriptures up to this point - the first was that of Moses at the Red Sea, **Exodus 15**; the second, Moses' farewell song, **Deuteronomy 32**).

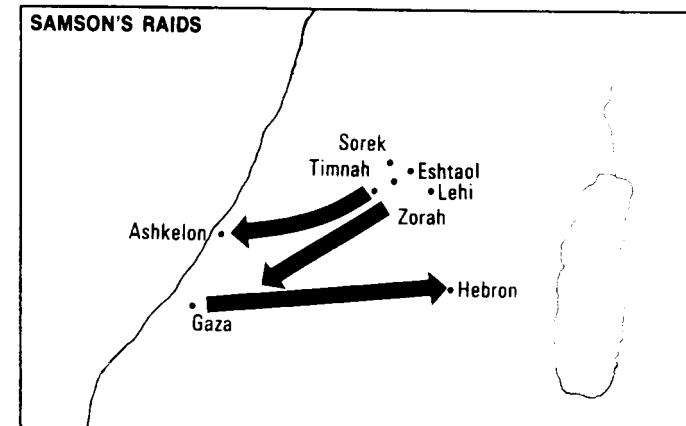
Judges 5:14&15 identifies the tribes who went with Deborah into battle. It appears strange that the tribes which were particularly known on account of their military prowess were not present in the battle. Those which were more agrarian (agricultural) in occupation (and the scribes) were present. Therefore the battle against the Canaanites was waged primarily by 'office workers' and farmers. Deborah chides those who refused to come to war (**Judges 5:16&17**), yet enthuses concerning the valour of those who did commit themselves to the fight (**Judges 5:18**). Despite the colossal strength of the enemy, with their fiercesome armaments, the pitchfork-wielding farmers of the children of Israel won the day ... or, rather, the Lord again intervened to secure the battle against impossible odds. **Judges 5:20** records: "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera."



The conclusion of Deborah's song (Judges 5:31) is a good summary of God's intentions for the inhabitants of the land of Canaan. "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years."

judgeship occurred *during* the Philistine oppression; not after it!

- While other judges were raised up at moments of extreme crisis to deliver Israel from their enemies, Samson was dedicated to his task before he was born (**Judges 13:5**).
- Of the 7 references in the book of Judges to "the Spirit of the Lord," 4 of these occur in connection with Samson (**Judges 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14**).
- Of the 23 references in Judges to "the Angel of the Lord," 13 are found in connection with the birth of Samson (**Judges 13**).
- Samson was the only judge not backed by an army of Israelites - and the only one who was betrayed into the hands of the enemy by the men of Israel (**Judges 15:9-13**).
- Samson was the only Nazarite of all the judges.
- Samson was the only judge who entered into disastrous liaisons with the enemy.
- Samson was the only judge who was expressly said to have been forsaken of the Lord (**Judges 16:20**).
- Of all the judges, Samson was the only one who died in captivity, and left Israel in servitude to the enemy, the Philistines.



Samson was a man with a weakness - and while that weakness was kept under control most of the time (in keeping with his Nazarite vow), there were sad occasions when that weakness defeated him (i.e., his marriage to a Philistine woman, **Judges 14**; his liaison with a harlot in Gaza, **Judges 16:1-3**; his love for Delilah, **Judges 16:4-21** ... 'the final straw' that robbed him of his power and sent him - the judge who should be delivering his people from servitude - into slavery himself!

Jephthah agreed - but on certain conditions (**Judges 11:5-11**). His remonstrance with the king of the Ammonites displays his caution (**Judges 11:12-28**); the battle against the Ammonites which ensued demonstrated his courage (**Judges 11:32&33**).

Hebrews 11:32 places Jephthah in the distinguished company of the heroes of faith. Being one of only four judges of whom it is said that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (**Judges 11:29**), and attaining a great defeat of the Ammonites, Jephthah stakes a claim to be spoken of in the same breath as the other members of this distinguished company.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW

However, Jephthah's rashness and folly come into view in the vow that he made; **Judges 11:30,31;34-40**. This passage has been the subject of much scholarly speculation. Some hold the view that Jephthah did not kill his daughter, but that she was appointed to perpetual virginity.

The controversy may be settled if the precise meaning of the word "lament" in Judges 11:40 were known. The word signifies "to talk with" and, in **Judges 11:11** is translated "uttered." This would favour the view that Jephthah's daughter did not die as vowed. Yet the sense of the record in **Judges 11:31&39** seems to point in the other direction.

Whatever the proper interpretation, the making of such a vow and the execution of it, cannot be justified. God had never been a party to it (cf. **Judges 11:36**); therefore Jephthah was not compelled to be! The only person to emerge from this gloomy scene with credit is Jephthah's daughter.

SAMSON (#12): Judges 13-16.

Scripture has more to say about Samson than any of the other judges. This is not because Samson was the best of the bunch of judges, but due to the fact that special features and circumstances surrounded his life and labours. These facts should be considered:

- The period of oppression and subjection to enemy forces was twice as long *before* Samson's rise to judge in Israel than at any other time. Prior to Deborah assuming the role of judge in Israel, the Canaanites had oppressed the people of the Lord for 20 years (cf. **Judges 4:1-3**): by the time Samson appeared, the Philistines had been in control of Israel for 40 years (**Judges 13:1**).
- While Othniel, Ehud, Deborah and Barak, Gideon and Jephthah delivered Israel from the clutches of their enemies, Samson did not deliver them from the Philistines. The 20 years which comprised his

GIDEON (#5): Judges 6:1 - 8:28.

Perhaps Gideon is the most heroic of all the judges. **It is notable that it was to him only of all the judges, that the Angel of the Lord appeared.**

In excess of 80 references to the Angel of the Lord occur in the Old Testament: 20 of these references appear in the book of Judges.

REFS. TO ANGEL

- 7
- 10
- 2 (**Judges 2:1&4**)
- 1 (**Judges 5:23**)

PERSON(S) CONCERNED

- Gideon
- Manoah and his wife
- Joshua and people of Israel (Bochim)
- Deborah's Song

The fact that the Angel appeared, directly and visibly, to Gideon in order to call and commission him, gives him a unique place in the ranks of the judges.

Add to this the fact that Gideon is one of only four on whom the Spirit of the Lord came; **Judges 6:34**. (The others were Othniel, Jephthah and Samson).

The Midianites, wild nomads, greatly impoverished the children of Israel by stealing their crops and cattle (**Judges 6:1-6**). The Israelites were forced to take refuge in dens and caves. Therefore they cried unto the Lord. In response, the Lord sent an unidentified prophet to them, to remind them of what the Lord had done for them in former years - and of their subsequent disobedience.



Then, in a little town on the south-western border of Manasseh, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon as he threshed wheat for his family in the winepress and called him to be the deliverer of Israel. (This is an indicator of the oppression that was taking place: wheat was usually threshed on the top of a hill where there was plenty of wind to blow away the chaff; the winepress was a hollowed area where grapes were mashed and the juice of the grape was 'stored'). Although the angel of the Lord addressed Gideon as "thou mighty man of valour" (**Judges 6:12**), given Gideon's practice at that time the description is somewhat ironic. The call of God to Gideon was authenticated by the consuming of a "present" by fire. An altar

was built - and named 'Jehovah-Shalom' by Gideon, meaning, "The Lord is peace" (**Judges 6:11-24**).

With the assistance of ten men, Gideon went out by night and destroyed the altar and grove of Baal in his home town of Ophrah: the name 'Jerubbaal' - "Let Baal plead/contend against him" was therefore given to him (**Judges 6:25-32**).

As the hosts of the Midianites assembled to oppose him, Gideon asked for further assurance that he was the man for the massive task on hand. The sign of the dew on the fleece and on the ground was given to him (**Judges 6:33-40**).

Gideon was then told that his army was too large. By two tests, he whittled his force down from 32,000 to 10,000 and then 300. These have been described as:

- 22,000 who dreaded,
- 9700 who delayed,
- 300 who dared.

The small number of Gideon's force ensured that the Lord would get the glory for the victory. A dream, overheard by Gideon on the margin of the camp of the Midianites while he was on a spying mission, completed Gideon's preparations for the offensive against Midian. Again the sovereign hand of the Lord was in evidence, causing the two Midianites to talk within the hearing of Gideon at the precise moment Gideon went down to their camp (**Judges 7:9-15**).

The battle is briefly, yet graphically, told. The 300 men who remained in the army were divided into three companies: each was given a trumpet, and an empty water pitcher, in which was hidden a lighted torch. These companies came down on three sides of the Midianite camp in the middle of the night and - at a given signal - they blew the trumpets (testimony), broke the pitchers (self), revealing their torches (flame of God's Spirit) and shouted, "the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon" (the sword of the Spirit). This prompted immediate panic. The Midianites fled ... onto the swords of Gideon's noble band (**Judges 7:15-22**).

**Who ordered Gideon forth
To storm the invader's camp,
With arms of little worth,**

**A pitcher and a lamp?
The trumpets made his coming known,
And all the host was overthrown.**

The rout of the Midianites was followed up by the slaughter of the kings and princes of Midian and the punishment of the men of Succoth and Penuel who had refused to assist Gideon and his men in the hour of great need for the nation.

It is significant that before Gideon, it was over 200 years since the Midianites had attacked Israel (**Numbers 31**); after him, they are never mentioned again in scripture in the role of enemies!

THE NECESSITY OF A GOOD FINISH

Two major incidents are recorded to conclude the story of Gideon. One is to his credit; the other is not. Enthused with their victory over the Midianites, the people made an attempt to get rid of the Theocracy and establish a monarchy, with Gideon the first to hold the position of king. Gideon's noble refusal sets him in a very favourable light. "And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you" (**Judges 8:23**).

Tragically, Gideon was to quickly fall from that lofty eminence. **Judges 8:24-27** reveal how Gideon collected the spoil of golden earrings and made an ephod from them for use in Ophrah. There is no doubt that idolatry would not have been in Gideon's mind as he pursued this activity - however, idolatry was the result (**Judges 8:27**). He, having so valiantly destroyed idolatry in Ophrah (**Judges 6:25-27**), left his people very much as he had found them (**Judges 8:27**)! Gideon's action brings to mind the poetic lines:

**The grey-hair'd saint may fail at last,
The surest guide a wanderer prove.**

It was a sad end to a tremendous career - and delivers a solemn warning to all of God's children about, first, the peril of success and second, the danger of using illegitimate means to fulfil proper intentions.

JEPHTHAH (#8): Judges 11 - Judges 12:7.

Born of a strange woman (**Judges 11:1&2**) and thrust out of his father's house by the legitimate sons in the family, one has described Jephthah as "a wild lawless freebooter living in the land of Tob." The elders of Gilead filed a request to Jephthah to become their captain when the Ammonites marched against Israel in the east of Jordan.