

Old Testament #2: History Books, Part I

JOSHUA – THE CONQUEST OF THE PROMISE LAND

BACKGROUND

The work is anonymous, but tradition credits Joshua, and the textual evidence makes the supposition plausible.

1. Joshua was Moses's servant for forty years in the desert and the man chosen by God to lead His people into the Promised Land.
2. The book of Joshua covers the period from the beginning of the conquest of Canaan (c. 1410 BC), to the death of Joshua (c. 1365 BC).¹ It records both the faithfulness of God to fulfill all his promises to Israel, and the failure of Israel to complete the Conquest.

Even though much of the land was taken during Joshua's lifetime, there were enclaves of natives who were still there when David took the throne over 350 years later. (Joshua 15:63)

"Judah could not dislodge the Jebusites, who were living in Jerusalem; to this day the Jebusites live there with the people of Judah." (Joshua 15:63)

"They did not dislodge the Canaanites living in Gezer; to this day the Canaanites live among the people of Ephraim but are required to do forced labor." (Joshua 16:10)

3. Joshua and Deuteronomy are closely related. Deuteronomy prepares Israel for entry into the Promised Land; Joshua describes that entry.

PURPOSE

1. The book of Joshua was written as a memorial to the Lord's faithfulness for subsequent generations to read and believe. (Joshua 4:21-24)

¹ These dates are based on the date of the Exodus. There is considerable disagreement on the date even among evangelical scholars. Some hold to an early date (mid-15th century), while some hold to a late date (mid-13th century). The biblical evidence seems to favor the early date, but the archeological evidence seems to favor the late date. It seems safest to hold to an early date, but not too tightly.

“In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.” (Joshua 4:21-24)

JUDGES – THE BOOK OF APOSTASY

BACKGROUND

The book of Judges is anonymous, but Jewish tradition attributes it to the prophet Samuel.

1. The book of Judges covers the period from the death of Joshua to the death of Samson. Samuel was probably born either during the life of Samson or right after his death.

The number of years listed for the 13 judges totals 410, but the chronology from Joshua to Samson only supports around 300 years. The discrepancy is produced by the overlap of the reign of several of the judges.

2. Some of the judges ruled the entire nation (Othniel, Ehud, Gideon, Samson, Deborah, and Barak), and some of the judges only ruled certain tribes or portions of Israel (Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Shamgar, and Abimelech).

If Samuel was the author, then it was probably written during Saul’s kingship or at the beginning of David’s, somewhere during the last half of the 11th century BC.

“Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook Him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. In His anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat them, just as He had sworn to them. They were in great distress. Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. Whenever the Lord raised up a judge for them, He was with the

judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the Lord had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.” (Judges 2:11-19)

3. The book portrays the state of the nation of Israel through a fourfold cycle: Sin, Subjugation, Supplication, and Salvation.

PURPOSE

1. The book of Judges was a warning against idolatry and tribal factions. The final verse is the book’s thesis statement.

Judges 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Judges reveals the social and moral deterioration that results without central authority. The thesis statement is, “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The underlying premise is: “Left on our own we will become hopelessly corrupt, but a king will show us the way and provide what we need.”

RUTH – THE BOOK OF COVENANT LOYALTY

BACKGROUND

Although the book of Ruth is anonymous, an early rabbinic tradition attributes it to Samuel.

The primary purpose of the book of Ruth is to record an important event in the lineage of David, Israel’s greatest king.

1. The events in Ruth took place during the days of the judges.
2. The time of the judges was Israel’s low point. Apostasy and idolatry were rampant in the land. In the midst of such darkness, the story of Ruth shines even more brightly.

“The Book of Ruth gleams like a beautiful pearl against a jet-black

background.”² The general outline of the story is as follows. Elimelech, a man from Bethlehem, moved to Moab with his wife Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Kilion, to escape a famine. Elimelech and his sons died in Moab, leaving Naomi alone with her two daughter in-laws, Ophrah and Ruth. Naomi returned to Bethlehem and Ruth followed Naomi. Naomi’s wealthy relative Boaz negotiated with another relative for the right to redeem Naomi and marry Ruth. A son was born to Ruth who became the grandfather of David, the greatest king in Israel.

THEMES

1. Loyalty and covenant faithfulness. Ruth, a foreigner exemplifies loyalty in contrasts with the unfaithfulness of Israel at this time; and the story of Ruth and Boaz reflects God’s covenant loyalty.

Ruth 1:16, 17

“Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”

2. God’s love and desire for all the nations. Ruth, a Moabite excluded from the commonwealth of Israel gained full acceptance within Israel, even to become part of the lineage of king David.

The third theme is the kinsman-redeemer. Boaz is a picture of Christ, the great kinsman-redeemer, who became like us so He could redeem us. “For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17)

I & II SAMUEL – TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

BACKGROUND

The books of I and II Samuel were one book in the original Hebrew bible. They were named after the prophet Samuel because of his prominent role in them.

Tradition ascribes the work to Samuel and the prophets Nathan and

² John W. Reed, The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

Gad. “Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the chronicles of Gad the seer.” (I Chronicles 29:29)

The book of Samuel opens with the birth of Samuel and closes with David preparing for his son Solomon to accede to the throne – a period covering approximately 150 years.

The book of Samuel tells the story of the establishment of the Monarchy through the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David.

1. The life of Samuel.

- Samuel’s mother Hannah was barren. So she prayed to the Lord. (I Samuel 1:11)

“O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”

- After Samuel was born, Hannah fulfilled her vow and gave him to the Lord. (I Samuel 3:19, 20)

“The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and He let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord.”

Samuel, however, failed to pass his legacy to his sons. “But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.” (I Samuel 8:3)

- Samuel was the first of the major prophets. He defined the role the future prophets would have as guardians of the theocracy.

2. The life of Saul.

- Despite Saul’s physical appearance (I Samuel 9:1, 2), he was fearful and insecure. But he was changed into a different person after Samuel anointed him. (I Samuel 10:1, 8)

“Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head and kissed him, saying, ‘Has not the Lord anointed you leader over His inheritance? The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will be changed into a different person.’” (I

Samuel 10:1, 8)

- After Saul defeated the Amelekites he disobeyed the Lord, keeping Agag and the best of the sheep alive. (I Sam. 15:22, 23)
“But Samuel replied: ‘Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king.’”
- After the loss of his kingdom, Saul spent the rest of his life tormented by the fear of his rival David, eventually consulting a witch for direction because the Lord had departed from him.

“He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, ‘Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.’” (I Samuel 28:6, 7)

3. The life of David.

- God sovereignly chose David to lead His people.

I Samuel 16:13

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

- David showed faith in God when he was confronted with the threat of Goliath and the Philistines. (I Samuel 17:32-37)

“David said to Saul, ‘Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him... Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.’ Saul said to David, ‘Go, and the Lord be with you.’” (I Samuel 17:32-37)

- Despite David’s great achievements, his shameful sin against Bathsheba and Uriah haunted him all his life. His remaining years were filled with betrayal, intrigue, and sorrow.

Some of the events that caused him the most pain were: (1) Amnon's rape and rejection of Tamar, the sister of Absalom; (2) Absalom's revenge murder of Amnon; and (3) Absalom's treachery and betrayal.

- David is idealized as the model king because he always submitted to the office of the prophet. Yahweh was the true king, and David was merely his vice regent.

PURPOSE

Samuel is history with a teaching aim. It shows the transition from a loose federation of tribes to a united monarchy, and the moral and spiritual lessons learned along the way. The theme might be best expressed by this verse from Proverbs: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14:34)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. God's command to Israel to destroy the inhabitants of the Promised Land is considered by some to be cruel and inhumane. Why did God command complete annihilation of the occupants of the Promised Land?
2. What was the advantage of the people of Israel being ruled by a series of judges instead of a king?
3. In the conquest of the land of Canaan, what was the determining factor for victory or defeat? Explain how this is a significant factor in the Christian experience.

HOMEWORK

Choose one of the following:

1. Read the book of Ruth. Write down the providential events in the story.
2. Read 1 Samuel 10, 13, 15, 17:20-58, 24; 2 Samuel 4, 6; Psalm 51. What were the main differences between Saul and David?