

BIBLE PROJECT 2.02

JUDGES—Theological Confederation



Othniel

Ehud

Deborah

Gideon

Jephthah

Samson

George Washington

John Adams

Betsy Ross

Ben Franklin

John Paul Jones

Sam Adams

BIG IDEA 1) God’s timing: Israel entered Canaan at the time of a power vacuum among the world’s empires.



John Bright: History would “scarcely have noticed” Israel entering the promised land, “had not these people brought with them onto the stage of history a religion quite without parallel in the ancient world.” *Old Testament History*, 4th Ed., p. 144

A note on the biblical names of this country: The names reflect the history of who controls the land. *Canaan*—when under control of the Canaanites and all their associated “ites”. *Israel* under the Kings up to the split in the Kingdom. Then 2 Kingdoms *Northern—Israel*; *Southern—Judah*. Then upon the return from Exile—*Judea, Samaria and Galilee*. Then under Roman control *Palestine*. Israel comes from the new name of Jacob. The sons of Israel become the Israelites.

World situation

Egypt defeated and impotent. Hittites driven out of Hattusas and lost in history for at least three centuries. Assyrians crushed by an early Babylonian uprising that also abates.

Egypt

- A Egypt impotent—Merneptah 1224-1211 had beaten back the “peoples of the sea”
- B 19th dynasty collapsed and Israel could come into its own
- C Rameses III 1183-1152 did succeed, according to his records in rebuilding **Bethshan**
But sustained massive assaults by *people of the sea—forerunners of the Philistines* who were now moving east.
Thus Philistines appear in the eastern Mediterranean –attacking even the delta of the Nile very nearly at the same time as Israel came into Canaan.
Ramasses III died and the empire collapsed – claims were not backed by power in Canaan.

Western Asia (modern Turkey)

- A No rival could claim Egypt’s influence in Canaan. [SLIDES] Hittites driven out of Hattusas, the massive center of their Empire. They are then lost in history for at least three centuries.
- B Assyrians crushed by an early Babylonian uprising that also abates.
- C Arameans in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia – Sham’al, Carchemish, Beth-edon and Damascus.

Canaan

- A Began to be squeezed between Philistines along coast through the Esdraelon plain and down the Jordan
- B Syria rising in the east

Philistine Pentapolis

Gasa, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath – each ruled by a “tyrant”
Rubbed Israel up the valleys: Gezer, Bethshemesh, etc
Monopolized manufacture of iron. Iron was the great technological and engineering advance of that age. Compare with nuclear versus conventional weapons in our time.

BIG IDEA 2)



THIRTEEN JUDGES [like 13 Colonies in America’s founding]; six are prominent (bold type below). *Students fill in the highlighted of the chart.*

Judge/Hero	Tribes	Enemy	Bible Loc.
Othniel (Caleb’s nephew)	Israel general	Aram/Syria	Jdg 3
Ehud			Jdg 3
Shamgar		Philistines	Jdg 3
Deborah			Jdg 4-5
Gideon			
Abimilech			
Tola			
Jair			
Jephthah			
Ibzan			
Elon			
Abdon			
Samson			

BIG IDEA 3) ISRAEL A CONFEDERACY FOR THE FIRST 2 CENTURIES—Tribal League -

Confederacy like the 13 colonies from 1783-1788



- A. 12th and 11th centuries archeologically show to be as disturbed as any in the history of Palestine. Most of its towns suffered destruction – some [Bethel] repeatedly.
- B. Israel holds mountainous areas
Israel fought only on foot; therefore could not fight effectively against chariots useful in flat territory.



Life Application Bible

Coastal Plain and Esdraelon (Jezreel Valley) remained out of Israel's control. -- Canaanites
Galilean tribes separated by Esdraelon (Jezreel Valley) from central hill country
Terrain in middle hill country produced local dominance
Local interests quite naturally tended to take precedence over the common good. Indeed, but for the spiritual power of the covenant league with its peculiar institutions, Israel would scarcely have held together at all. – Bright, p. 177

Most Israelites were from lowest, abused strata of society, desperately poor. No feudal aristocracy and few artisans among them.

Earliest Israelite towns were exceedingly crude with little material culture. Baked lime plaster for the lining of cisterns ... enabled the mountain ridge to support increased population as time went on and towns were built there which had not existed previously.

Faith VS Culture → YHWH vs Baal [JND Anderson pp. 181 ff]

- Movement from wanderers in desert to sedentary farmers
Could the God who directed wandering and conquest also be the God who made farming possible with seasons, rainfall and fertility?
- Each generation must either renew or repudiate the covenant and Jdg 2.10 implies repudiation.
- Rise and fall of Israel tied to the extent of faithfulness to God – history does connect the moral/faith power of a nation to its national existence.

Canaanite religion ... presents us with no pretty picture. It was, in fact, an extraordinarily debasing form of paganism, specifically of the fertility cult. Nominal head of the pantheon, but playing a rather inactive role, was the father-god, El. The chief active deity was Ba'al (Lord), a title of the ancient Semitic storm-god Hadad, who reigned as king of the gods on a lofty mountain in the north. Female deities included Asherah (in the Bible also the name of a wooden cult object: Judg. 6:25 ff, etc.) Astarte (in the Bible Ashtaroth or

Ashtoreth,) and Anat (in the Ras Shamra [Ugaritic] texts the consort of Ba'al, but known from the Bible only in place names, eg, Beth-anath). These goddesses, though fluid in personality and function, represent the female principal in the fertility cult. They are portrayed as sacred courtesans or pregnant mothers, or with a surprising polarity, as bloodthirsty goddesses of war. Important in Canaanite myth was the death and ["resurrection"] of Ba'al, which corresponded to the annual death and [re-activation] of nature.* As the myth was reenacted in the mimetic ritual, the forces of nature were thought to be reactivated and the desired fertility in soil, beast and man thereby secured. As in all such religions, numerous debasing practices, including sacred prostitution, homosexual prostitution and various orgiastic rites were prevalent. It was the sort of religion with which Israel, however much she might borrow of the culture of Canaan, could never with good conscience make peace. John Bright, *History of Israel*, pp. 118f. [see * below]

* John Bright used the word "resurrection." **We need to understand that this term "resurrection" is used loosely, not technically, here in Bright and other scholars when they talk about the natural cycle of winter into spring. A more accurate term might be "re-activation" since it simply the returning to the same life, not a new life of the old nature.**

Baals and Ashtarts [IND Anderson] (Asherah & Astaroth)

Ba'al means "Lord", "owner", "husband" – male deity who owns land and controls fertility—Consorts with female Ashtarts (Ishtar, Anath, Astarte, Astoroth)

Localized into particular places therefore numerous as locations. The astonishing revival of nature in spring was thought to be due to intercourse between Baal and Ashtart. Therefore, worship using ritual sex could bring Baal and Ashtart together in the intercourse that mattered for agriculture.

Temple sex was therefore sacramental.

Ras Shamra texts [Ras Shamra is a place on the northern coast of Syria—ancient city of Ugarit] Texts date from 1400 BC

El (High God, King, Father of years) → Asherah/ (consort) also Ashtarts (Ishtar, Anath, Astarte, Astoroth) Baal, god of rain and fertility [bull] → Anath violent sexual passion, brutality.

The epic shows Baal killed by Mot [summer drought—death] Anath searches for him, kills death and resurrects Baal. Farmers re-enact ritually these epic events to control nature in its cycles.

- In the view of the times, for farmers in Canaan to have ignored Baal would be as impractical as for modern farmers to ignore scientific soil studies and weather forecasts.
- Israelites seemed to add Baal to Yahweh worship almost like compartments between secular and sacred life. Science and religion are separate.

Certainly the two faiths did not need to be exclusive? How judgmental of YHWH TO THINK SO.

Even children like Gideon had two names: Jerub-Baal – *let Baal contend*

Families had their own Astartes, Ashtaroth. Saul and David gave Baal names to their children: Mephibaal, and Ishbaal; David named a daughter Beeliada (1chr 14.7)

- But YHWH had revealed himself as a JEALOUS God—that was a new concept in religion that was not readily grasped or practiced. Joshua's appeal was something strange against the cultural background of the time – Choose this day whom you will serve.
- **Israel's God was not controlled by ritual but served by obedience.**
- Yahweh was beyond consort, and sexual analogy debased his sovereignty over all of life.
- Israel's God was God of history, not nature.

Judges is testimony to the "theological irregularity."

- Rule of Charisma – ***Judges chosen for their singularity, not necessarily good character.***
(Only the names change—same for our leaders)

- **No one ever led a united Israel ever into battle.**

Each stepped forward in times of danger, gave evidence that in some way YHWH was with them & rallied the clans against the foe.

BIG IDEA 4) The Individual judges



1. Othniel Jdg 3
Against Cushan-rishathaim [“Cushan of double wickedness”] Bethel – Mesopotamians – either the Arameans (Syrians) or the Edomites – confused in Hebrew.



2. Ehud – Moab Jdg 3. 12-30
Moabite land had been seized by Sihon, then taken by Israel and given to Reuben; Now the Moabites seem to have crossed Jordan, having pushed Reuben out into Benjamite territory. Moabites were driven back, but what happened to Reuben? Maybe permanently crippled.



3. Deborah & Barak Jdg 4,5 around 1125 BC; 12th Cent Canaanite Confederacy controlled Esdraelon (Jezreel). Deborah and Barak were able to rally clans from Benjamin north to Galilee – some less affected were less enthusiastic. VICTORY came when rains bogged down chariots causing Sisera to flee on foot—the torrents of the Kishon. Other chariots in the plain were likewise useless in the mud.
Israel did not control Beth-Shean but could come and go with impunity.



4. Gideon Jdg 6-8 – 12th Cent – Camel riding nomads from desert—Midianites –earliest record of this phenomenon. Gideon triumphs and is offered Kingship but refuses in spirit of early Israel: 8.22ff



5. Jephthah Jdg 11-12.
Gileadite freebooter – ie thug. Repelled the Ammonites.
Human sacrifice could still be practiced – even in Israel
Tribal jealousy could flare easily into civil war.



6. Samson Jdg 13-16 – stories illustrate authentically the situation on the Philistine frontier before open war. Could have been incidents like this that provoked Philistine concerted war.

Tribal System (Confederacy) Holds ON – HOW?

- All wars were defensive
- Israel holds less territory at end of the Judges period than at beginning. **Reuben** gone.
- **Dan**, probably ultimately because of Philistine pressure had not held its position in the central Plain (Jdg 1.34-36, Jdg 18) and had been forced to migrate to far north and seize new territory there.
- Nor was tribal organization able to restrain the centrifugal forces that operated.
 - No purity to Yahwehism
 - No concerted action
 - Could not prevent intertribal rivalries from flaring into war
 - No means to redress crime against members one tribe or another (Jdg 19,20)
 - YET it survived 200 years [*cf* American confederacy!]

Partly because its emergencies were not national

Did not follow Canaanite pattern of city state – except for ill-fated Abimelech

Monarchy was anathema:

Gideon's rejection of crown—Jdg 8.22

Jotham's fable [Jdg 9]

BUT Israelites end up in **civil war** –

It is impossible, even for God, to govern those who refuse to submit to his covenant law.

True or false?

Civil breakdown left Israel vulnerable. JUDGES 19-21

Some external discipline was required by the failure of internal discipline.

Simply charismatic leadership was neither sufficient nor reliable enough to govern sinners.

BIG IDEA 5) The theme of Judges is EVERYONE DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES.

Relativism is not new.

Applications:

- ✓ God uses terrible people
- ✓ God never leaves his people despite their unfaithfulness
- ✓ God always uses the weak and foolish to overcome evil.
- ✓ The “Spirit of God” is a regular visitor to the “judges.”

**THINK ABOUT THIS: What is the relationship between the LAW, Government and humanity?
IS GOVERNMENT NECESSARY? Why or why not?**

Philistine crisis caused the change to come—NEXT WEEK'S LESSON.

The Bible Project 2.02

OT 12

BIG IDEA REVIEW:

BIG IDEA 1) GOD’S TIMING: ISRAEL ENTERED CANAAN AT THE TIME OF POWER VACUUM AMONG THE WORLD’S EMPIRES.

BIG IDEA 2) THIRTEEN JUDGES

BIG IDEA 3) ISRAEL CONFEDERACY FOR THE FIRST 2 CENTURIES—TRIBAL LEAGUE

BIG IDEA 4) THE INDIVIDUAL JUDGES

BIG IDEA 5) THE THEME OF JUDGES IS EVERYONE DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES.

Consider the following if you choose to prepare for next class:

Ruth through 1 Samuel 12, including the *Chronological Bible* extra Scripture passages. The time has come to use the *Chronological Bible*, which will include more material on the genealogical development. It will also include some Psalms.

It is impossible to give page numbers for everyone’s Chronological Bible—in the editions I have they are:

NIV CB (April 7-14) 395-430

NLT CB (April 7-14) 371-405

Ruth 1-4

1 Chronicles 2.9-55, 4.1-23; Genealogies

1 Samuel 1-12

1 Chronicles 9.35-39—Genealogy of Saul

1 Samuel 13-19

Psalms 59 Deliver me from my enemies

MARKERS:

1 Sam 2 Hannah’s prayer

1 Sam 11 Saul anointed King

1 Sam 12 King and Nation to follow God