

HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL PERIOD #4—THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

Emphasis: “There was no king in Israel every man did that, which was right in his own eyes.”

The fourth period of the Old Testament history of Israel is known as the period of “The Judges.” This period is recorded for us primarily in the book of Judges. The events of the book of Ruth also take place during this time and the first part of 1 Samuel is also included in this period. The period of the Judges covers a period of about 300 to 350 years from the death of Joshua’s generation (about 1391 BC) to the beginning of the United Monarchy under Saul (1051 BC).

During this period Israel was afflicted by neighbors, with local leaders (Judges) arising occasionally as deliverers and rulers. There was widespread chaos during this time as “*every man did that, which was right in his own eyes.*” There was also terrible apostasy and widespread wickedness as Israel absorbed the practices of the pagan peoples that they failed to drive out of the land. Finally Samuel brought Israel to a place of strength as he threw off Philistine domination.

The book of Judges describes this period as a period of decline due to their toleration of sin and their rebellion against God. There are approximately seven cycles of disobedience, oppression, repentance and deliverance. Israel moves from living with the Canaanites to living like the Canaanites during this period.

I. Chronological Considerations relevant to this period:

The beginning of this period is associated with the death of Joshua’s generation. According to the previous period the death of Joshua is approximately 1391 BC. Unfortunately the Bible does not provide chronological material related to the death of the elders of Israel. It is assumed by most scholars that their deaths followed on the heels of Joshua and that most had passed off the scene by 1360 BC. However, we will date the period from Joshua’s death 1391 BC to the beginning of Saul’s reign as King in 1051 BC. There does exist some difficulty regarding the chronology of this period and it is two-fold:

First—When the number of years given in the various chronological data is added up, there are too many years to fit! (407 years to be exact.) The solution as we will see is overlapping. Markers in the text itself suggest that we are dealing with overlapping. These are individual stories of judges from different tribes and different regions of Israel, thus some of their judgeships overlap and this accounts for the difficulty of too many years.

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Second—At the same time, the chronological notations found in the book of Judges are often times very difficult as they stand (i.e. so many multiples of 40 is difficult for some people to accept.)

The chart below represents two major ways of handling the data from the period of the Judges, that of Eugene Merrill (Kingdom of Priests) and that of John Whitcomb (Chart: “Old Testament Patriarchs and Judges”)

TWO VIEWS OF JUDGES CHRONOLOGY:	
Eugene Merrill	John Whitcomb
<p>AMMONITE OPPRESSION (1124-1106 BC) -Judges 11:26; 300 years = 1406-1106 BC -thus when Jephthah spoke, after 18-year oppression, in 1106 BC, he meant that the 300 years were over just as he spoke; thus, Merrill adds 18 years to figure dates of the oppression -1106 + 18 = 1124 BC (beginning of 18-year oppression) -so, 1406-1106 BC = 300 years of Judges 11:26 1124-1106 BC = Ammonite Oppression 1106 = time when Jephthah speaks 1106-1098 BC = Deliverance by Jephthah</p>	<p>AMMONITE OPPRESSION (1106-1088 BC) -notice that this is 18 years later than Merrill -Judges 11:26, Jephthah speaking after the 18-year oppression, but he is figuring 300 years till time Ammon retook the cities, which was 18 years earlier; thus no need to add the 18 years to figure the time of the oppression. -so, 1406-1106 = 300 years of Judges 11:26 1106-1088 = Ammonite Oppression 1088 = time when Jephthah speaks 1088-1082 = Deliverance by Jephthah</p>
<p>PHILISTINE OPPRESSION (1124-1084 BC) -Judges 10:6-8; taken as indicating that the Ammonite and Philistine oppression began at the same time -Philistine oppression lasted 40 years; thus from 1124-1084 BC. Note: Samson’s 20-year judgeship falls within this 40-year Philistine oppression (Judges 14:4; 15:20). -Biblical narrative makes clear that Philistines still oppressing after Samson dies until time of Samuel (1 Samuel 7).</p>	<p>PHILISTINE OPPRESSION (1087-1047 BC) -Judges 10:6-8 taken to indicate Philistine oppression followed immediately after the Ammonite oppression. -Philistine oppression lasted 40 years, thus 1087-1047 BC. Note: Samson’s 20-year judgeship falls within this 40-year Philistine oppression (Judges 14:4; 15:20). -The death of Samson, toward the end of the Philistine oppression, may explain why the Philistines were so nervous about gathering at Mizpeh, and why Israelites became willing to repent 1069-1049 BC (Judges 16:1).</p>
<p><u>Two Key Battles:</u> 1-BATTLE OF APHEK (about 1104 BC) 2-BATTLE OF EBENEZER (1084 BC) -1084BC = end of Philistine oppression, which occurred at Ebenezer -According to 1 Samuel 7:2 the Ark had been at Kirjath-jearim for 20 years; thus the date of Apeh above.</p>	<p><u>Two Key Battles:</u> 1-BATTLE OF APHEK (about 1068 BC) 2-BATTLE OF EBENEZER (1047 BC) -1047 BC = end of Philistine oppression -1 Samuel 7:2 events include: (1) ark captured at Apeh; (2) Ark in Philistia for 7 months; (3) Ark to Beth-Shemesh, then to Kirjath-jearim; (4) 20 years at Kiriath-jearim before gathering at Mizpeh.</p>
DISTINCTIONS:	
<p>1) Merrill has Ammonite oppression 18 years earlier, by assuming Jephthah was speaking of 300 years, which ended at the time he was speaking. Whitcomb assumes Jephthah is speaking of a 300 year oppression, which occurred for the last 18 years. So Merrill must add 18 years to figure the dates of the Ammonite oppression. 2) Merrill has the Philistine oppression 37 years earlier than does Whitcomb. Merrill had already had the Ammonite oppression 18 years earlier and now assumes that the Philistine oppression began at the same time as the Ammonite oppression rather than one year after it. So Merrill omits 18 + 18 + 1 + 37 years from his chronology.</p>	

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3) Both Merrill and Whitcomb have Samson late in the 40-year Philistine oppression, supposing that his exploits may have aggravated the Philistines and precipitated the encounter at Aphek. Furthermore, by that construction Samson died toward the end of the 40-year oppression and possibly prepared the way for the Battle of Ebenezer.

So how does this information fit the previous chronological material that we have already emphasized?

Remember that according to the Assyrian Eponym lists there was a solar eclipse on June 15th 763 BC as well as the mention of the reigns of Ahab and Jehu of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

By tracing the period of the Divided Monarchy backward we can determine the dates of the Kings of the United Monarchy:

Solomon—By working backward we can determine the death of Solomon to be about 931 BC just prior to the division of the kingdom and the reigns of Rehoboam in Judah and Jeroboam in Israel.

According to **1 Kings 11:42**, Solomon’s reign was 40 years, *“Thus the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.”*

So, Solomon must have taken the throne around 971 BC and ruled until 931 BC bringing the United Monarchy to a close.

David—This means that David’s death must have been in 971 BC. According to 2 Samuel 2:11 and 1 Kings 2:11, David reigned 40 years (7 ½ years in Hebron over the tribe of Judah only and 33 years in Jerusalem over all 12 tribes).

2 Samuel 2:11, *“And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.”*

1 Kings 2:11, *“And the days that David reigned over Israel {were} forty years: seven years he reigned in Hebron, and thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem.”*

So David would have reigned in Hebron from 1011 BC to 1004 BC and his reign in Jerusalem would have been from 1004 BC to 971 BC, resulting in a total reign from 1011-971 BC.

Saul—This means that Saul would have died in 1011 BC. His reign seems to have lasted for 40 years, according to Acts 13:21. This is a bit controversial due to the problem of 1 Samuel 13:1, which will be covered more thoroughly when we cover the period of the United Monarchy.

Acts 13:21, *“And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.”*

This would seem to place the beginning of Saul’s reign at about 1051 BC. If this is the case,

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then the chronological data would seem to favor Merrill’s Chronology of the Period of the Judges, because Whitcomb’s would place Saul’s reign later and therefore would not work as well with the archaeological data of the Assyrian Eponym lists. The following charts provide us with an overview of this period:

OVERVIEW OF THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES														
Joshua 24:31	Judges 1-21											1 Samuel 1-8	1 Samuel 8	
Death of Joshua’s generation.	O T H N I E L	E H U D	S H A M G A R	D E B O R A H	G I D E O N	T O L A R	J A I R	J I P H T H A H	I B Z A N	E L O N	A B D O N	S A M S O N	Samuel leads the nation of Israel.	Samuel anoints Saul as Israel’s first King.
About 1391 BC	About 340 years												1051 BC	

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES:			
EVENT:	REFERENCE:	YEARS:	DATE:
Oppression by the Mesopotamians	Judges 3:8	8 Years	1387-1379 BC
Deliverance & Rest under Othniel	Judges 3:10-11	40 Years	1379-1339 BC
Oppression of Eglon of Moab	Judges 3:14	18 Years	1339-1321 BC
Deliverance & Rest under Ehug	Judges 3:30-31; 4:3	80 Years	1321-1241 BC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note that it is during the 80 year deliverance and rest under Ehud that the judgeship of Shamgar and the 20 year oppression of Jabin take place. It is at this point that there appears to be some overlapping. 			
Deliverance & Oppression under Deborah/Barak	Judges 5:31	40 Years	1241-1201 BC
Oppression by Midian	Judges 6:1	7 Years	1201-1194 BC
Deliverance and Rest under Gideon	Judges 8:28-33	40 Years	1194-1154 BC
Usurpation of Abimelech	Judges 9:22	3 Years	1154-1151 BC
Judgeship of Tola	Judges 10:1-2	23 Years	1151-1128 BC
Judgeship of Jair	Judges 10:3-5	22 Years	1128-1106 BC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note that it is at this point that Jephthah refers to the 300 years in Judges 11:26. This 300 years would take them back to the point where they were camped out on the plains of Moab getting ready to conquer the Promised land. The description of Judges 11:26 actually mentions place names, which are located on the plains of Moab and remember we previously dated them there in 1406 BC, which just so happens to be 300 years earlier. The following events are not chronological in nature but have a great deal of overlapping: 			
Oppression by the Ammonites	Judges 10:8	18 Years	1124-1106 BC
Deliverance and Rest under Jephthah	Judges 12:7	6 Years	1106-1098 BC
Oppression by the Philistines	Judges 10:6-7, 13:1	40 Years	1124-1084 BC
The Judgeship of Ibzan	Judges 12:8-10	7 Years	1098- 1091 BC
The Judgeship of Elon	Judges 12:11-12	10 Years	1091- 1084 BC
The Judgeship of Abdon	Judges 12;13-15	8 Years	1084- 1076 BC
The Judgeship of Samson	Judges 16:31	20 Years	1104- 1084 BC

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The Judgeship of Samuel	1 Samuel 3:20ff	?	?-1051 BC
Samuel anoints Saul as first King			1051 BC

II. The Background to the Period of the Judges:

At the time of Joshua's death, the Canaanites were not completely destroyed throughout the land. Joshua had made this task possible, but he had not completed it on behalf of the nation. The Bible suggests at least four reasons why Joshua had not completely destroyed those Canaanite tribes.

1-God intended to use those tribes to punish Israel in the event of her faithlessness to His command (Judges 2:3, 20, 21)

2-Those Canaanite tribes were to be used to teach the new generation how to make war (Judges 3:2).

3-The presence of the residue of the Canaanite peoples was intended to prove Israel, to put the faith of the new generation to its most severe test (Judges 3:4).

4-Those Canaanite peoples were used to keep wild beasts from overrunning the land before the tribes settled in their inheritances (Deuteronomy 7:22-24).

As the period of the Judges begins, the hostile pagan Canaanite tribes remain scattered throughout the land (Judges 1-2).

Two primary sins, which resulted from this disobedience on the part of Israel:

1-Intermarriage with the Canaanites

2-Idolatry as Israel worshipped Canaanite gods

The character of the period of the Judges was largely characterized by a cycle of sin, suffering, supplication, and then return to sin once again. What was the reason for this period of cyclical wickedness. According to Judges 21:25, it was due to the fact that they had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

It is important to note however, that there were within the nation righteous individuals who served God and enjoyed His blessing, despite the prevailing wickedness around them. The book of Ruth, which is dated during the period of the Judges gives us an example of one such person, Ruth.

III. An Overview of the period of the Judges:

This period is called the period of the Judges because it is characterized by leaders/deliverers who rose up to throw off the oppression of Israel by her neighbors. Remember that during this period that there were no national leaders and that every man did what was right in his own eyes. While these men are called judges, because one aspect of their office is judging they really seem to function in a military role leading the various tribes of Israel against their oppressors.

Spiritually speaking these men were not great spiritual leaders. God is scraping the bottom of the barrel so to speak. Because it was a period of vast wickedness and sinfulness, there was not much to work with. At least these leaders were obedient even if they were not overly impressive spiritually speaking.

The following is an overview of the various judges mentioned in the book of Judges:

#1 OTHNIEL—delivers Judah from oppression by Cushan-Rishathaim (Judges 3:7-11):

Very brief narrative; Othniel lived at Debir (SW of Hebron); a Mesopotamian “kinglet” sacked the area for 8 years (raiding and pillaging, troubling but not controlling the region); Othniel routed the king, Cushan-Rishathaim, and the land rested for forty years.

#2 EHUD—delivers Benjamin from oppression by Eglon the Moabite (Judges 3:12-30):

Eglon, a king of Moab, put together a coalition of Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites and established supremacy over the Israelites in southern Transjordan. He crossed over the Jordan and made his headquarters at Jericho, intending to subjugate the Israelites on that side of the river.

Ehud, a Benjamite, was assigned the task of taking a “present” to Eglon—probably a tribute money demanded by Eglon. Ehud plotted to slay Eglon. He went with his companions to the palace, delivered the money, and then left. But when he got to Gilgal, he abruptly turned back, asked for a private audience with Eglon, and went alone into the “summer parlor.”

He had hidden a small dagger (about 18 inches) on his right thigh. As he drew near the king as if to deliver a secret message, he quickly drew the dagger with his left hand and plunged it into the midsection of the king. Eglon was a fat man, and the fat closed over the weapon so that Ehud was unable to pull it out. Ehud left quietly, locking the door behind him; the servants of the king found the door locked and deduced that the king must be “delicately engaged;” thus Ehud had time to escape.

Ehud hurried back to the hill country of Ephraim and rallied Israeli soldiers to fortify the fording places of the Jordan; as Moabite soldiers tried to flee across the river and home, they were slaughtered. Thus, 10,000 of the enemy were slain, and the land delivered by Ehud and was given rest for 80 years.

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#3 SHAGMAR—*delivers from the Philistines (Judges 3:31):*

Very brief (one verse, the shortest mention of any Judge in the book); probably during the 80 year rest provided by Ehud, early Philistines began to trouble Israelite cities near the coast. Shagmar took an ox-goad and single-handedly slew 600 Philistines, thus ending the (threatened) oppression.

#4 DEBORAH (& BARAK)—*deliver Ephraim from the Canaanites (Judges 4, 5):*

Jabin, Canaanite king of Hazor (far to the north) had accumulated a great host of soldiers and 900 chariots in the Valley of Jezreel, apparently under the command of a certain Sisera. They kept Israel in bondage for 20 years. During this time, Deborah served as a judge and prophetess in the hill country of Ephraim (Judges 4:4-5). YHWH led her to summon Barak as the deliverer of repentant Israel. When Barak refused to go to battle that the glory for the victory would not be his but would belong to a woman. 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulun rallied to the call of battle and led by Deborah and Barak they marched down the slopes of Mt. Tabor to meet Sisera's hosts in the Jezreel Valley.

Against incredible odds, God's forces prevailed through their personal heroism and an assist from the Almighty Hand, which caused a rain storm to come suddenly and fill the little River Kishon to overflowing. The chariots, the invincible weapons of the Canaanites, were bogged down in the mud and their crews had to flee for their lives on foot (Judges 5:21). Sisera himself ran to the tent of a certain Kenite whom he thought he could trust, but when he fell asleep in his hiding place from sheer exhaustion, the lady of the house, whose sympathies obviously were with Israel, drove a tent peg through his temples. Thus, Jabin and his forces were devastated by the weak hands of women. This event was celebrated by Deborah and Barak in one of the most beautiful and stirring songs in the history of literature recorded for us in Judges 5.

#5 GIDEON—*delivers Manasseh from oppression by the Midianites (Judges 6:1-8:32):*

Sometime after Deborah's judgeship, Israelite tribes to the north began to be troubled by the Midianites, fierce desert tribesman who would fall upon the inhabitants of the land and spoil them of their grain and wealth. (The Midianites were the first to use the camel in warfare.) God appeared to Gideon, a citizen of the tribe of Manasseh, and told him to lead the Israelites out of oppression. Gideon was fearful, but he hurried to make an offering on a nearby altar. When the sacrifice was prepared, the angel who had appeared to Gideon touched it with his staff and fire leaped from the crude altar and consumed the sacrifice.

YHWH now instructed Gideon to tear down his father's altars to Baal and build an altar to YHWH. Gideon did so by night, and when the men of the area discovered it and came to Joash, Gideon's father, Joash insisted that Baal ought to be able to defend himself. Gideon then gathered an army of Israelites, demanded two signs from YHWH to assure him that He was in

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this (dew only on the fleece –sign #2, and dew everywhere but on the fleece, and then set out to meet the army of the Midianites in the Valley of Jezreel.

On the way, YHWH instructed Gideon to reduce the size of his army from the 32,000 he had gathered, in order that the credit for the victory might go to YHWH alone. Gideon offered his soldiers the opportunity to go home, and 22,000 did so. Then by rejecting all those who did not watch as they drank at the spring of Harod, the army was reduced to 300 men. ON the night before the battle, Gideon is directed to take his servant and sneak into the camp of the enemy; there he overhears an enemy soldier relating a dream he had in which Gideon was seen as completely victorious over the Midianites.

That same night, bearing only torches concealed in pitchers in one hand and trumpets in the other, Gideon and his army of 300 men surrounded the camp of the Midianites. Suddenly, in the thick of the darkness the trumpets blared, the pitchers were shattered, and the brilliant light of the torches stabbed the blackness in all directions. Thinking they had been set upon by untold thousands, the Midianites began to strike out in all directions but succeeded only in decimating their own ranks until only a handful were left. The kings of Midian fled to the east over the Jordan, but all four of them were eventually captured.

Because of Gideon’s marvelous victory, the nation offered to make him king. He refused this offer, but did take to himself the honors of a king and married many wives. One of his illegitimate sons, Abimelech (“My father is the king”) established himself as king in Shechem and slew 70 sons of Gideon (his half brothers). He lasted onl 3 years, after which the city rebelled against him. He destroyed the city as punishment, but when he turned against a nearby village of Thebez, evidently suspecting sedition there, a woman cast a millstone from the top of a tower and slew Abimelech.

#6 TOLA—*delivers Issachar after the usurpation by Abimelech (Judges 10:1-2):*

Since Tola was a deliverer of the hill country of Ephraim, but was a man of Issachar, his judgeship may have affected the adjacent tribe of Manasseh where Abimelech’s petty kingdom had been established. Since no foreign oppressors are mentioned, his acts of deliverance (“he rose to save Israel”) may have related to internal strife and the sad state of affairs (including Abimelech’s rule), which followed the positive influence of Gideon. Tola judged Israel for 23 years before his death. The site of Shamir, his place of residence and burial, has not been identified.

#7 JAIR—*delivers Gilead after the usurpation by Abimelech (Judges 10:3-5):*

After Tola’s judgeship, Jair “...led Israel 22 years in Gilead,” in the Transjordan area of Manasseh. His noble status is evidenced by his large progeny of 30 sons, who each had a donkey as his status symbol.

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#8 JEPHTHAH—*delivers Gilead from the oppression of the Ammonites (Judges 10:6-12:7):*

By about 1100 BC, apostasy again prevailed as Israel turned to Baal and other pagan deities. This time oppression came from two directions: the Philistines pressed in from the southwest and the Ammonites invaded from the east. Deliverance in the Transjordan area came under the leadership of Jephthah. Because he was the son of a harlot, Jephthah had been ostracized from his home community early in life. He had become a leader of a band of marauders in the region of Gilead. When the Gileadites began to look for a leader to deliver them from the Ammonites, they invited Jephthah back. Before he accepted this assignment, a solemn compact was made whereby the Gileadite elders recognized him as leader.

Before going to battle against the Ammonites, Jephthah tried to negotiate for peace, but that offer was rejected. Anxious for the blessing of YHWH in the battle to come, Jephthah made a vow to consecrate to YHWH the first thing that emerged from his house when he returned. Jephthah vanquished the Ammonites, and when he returned home, his one and only daughter came out of the house to meet him; obligated by his vow, Jephthah “did according to his vow.”

The men of Ephraim accosted Jephthah for not inviting them to go with him to the battle, and in the ensuing acrimony Jephthah used a linguistic peculiarity of the Ephraimites to slaughter 42,000 of them.

#9 IBZAN—*delivers Judah (Judges 12:8-10):*

Nothing is recorded of Ibzan except that he judged in Bethlehem, that he had a large and honored family, and that he judged for 7 years.

#10 ELON—*delivers Zebulun (Judges 12:11-12):*

Of Elon we learn only that he judged Israel for 10 years and that he was buried in Aijalon (an unidentified city) in the land of Zebulun.

#11 ABDON—*delivers Ephraim (Judges 12:13-15):*

Abdon was from Pirathon in Ephraim (near Schechem), had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, each with his own donkey (the status symbol of nobility), and judged Israel in the area of Ephraim for 8 years. It is conjectured that he may have struggled against the Amalekites.

#12 SAMSON—*delivers Dan from the Philistines (Judges 13:1-16:31):*

During the days when the Ammonites were oppressing Israel in the east, the Philistines began to seriously trouble the nation in the west. While Jephthah defeated the former (the Ammonites), Samson is the hero who resisted and challenged the power of the latter (the Philistines).

Samson was a great hero endowed with supernatural strength; we remember him primarily for his military exploits. He was a Nazarite from birth, as the Angel of the LORD had commanded

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this before he was born. The Angel had also foretold that he would begin the deliverance of Israel from Philistine oppression.

Numerous stories, which may be but a sample of all that Samson did, are recorded in the book of Judges. On his way to Timnah he ripped a lion apart with his bare hands. When he was obliged to furnish 30 festal garments to the Philistines only because they had dishonestly gained the answer to the riddle he posed at his wedding at Timnah, he killed 30 of the Philistine people at Ashkelon. When his Philistine wife was given to another, he released 300 foxes with burning fire brands to destroy Philistine crops. In response to their reprisal, Samson slaughtered many of them at Etam. When the men of Judah, horrified at what the enraged Philistines might do because of Samson, delivered Samson bound into the hands of the enemy, his bonds were loosed as the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. Single handedly he slew 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. When he was trapped in the Philistine city of Gaza, he removed the gates by night and carried them nearly 40 miles east to a hill near Hebron.

Samson's downfall was the result of his entanglement with Delilah, whose sympathies were with the Philistines. Three times he successfully repulsed the Philistines when the woman betrayed him into their hands. However, when he revealed the secret of his power to her and his hair was cut, Samson lost his strength. The Philistines gouged out his eyes and forced him to grind in the mill as a slave. YHWH restored Samson's strength for his final feat, as he pulled down the pillars of the temple of Dagon, killing more Philistines than he had killed during all of his previous encounters.

EPILOGUE: *Two Anecdotes Illustrating the Conditions during the Period of the Judges (Judges 17-21):*

The story of an idolatrous priest (Judges 17-18)—demonstrating the religious apostasy of the nation; and then the story of a Levite's concubine and the slaughter of Benjamin (Judges 19-21)—demonstrating the moral degradation of the nation. These disgusting accounts are appendices; they are actually out of chronological order.

RELIGIOUS APOSTASY: The idolatry of Micah and the migration of the Danites (Judges 17-18)

1. The idolatry of Micah the Ephraimite (Judges 17):

Micah, an Ephraimite, restored 1,160 stolen shekels to his mother, and she responded by giving 200 shekels to a silversmith, who made a graven image carved out of wood and overlaid with silver, as well as a molten image made entirely out of silver. With these idolatrous symbols, Micah set up a shrine to which he added an ephod and teraphim and made one of his sons a priest. When a Levite from Bethlehem chanced to stop at this "chapel" on Mt. Ephraim, Micah made an agreement to hire him as his official priest, hoping the Lord would thus bless the enterprise.

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2. The migration of the Danites to the north (Judges 18):

Five Danites sent to spy out land for their tribe stopped at Micah's shrine to ask advice of this Levite. The Levite blessed them, and they went on and succeeded in settling in Laish, a city near the headwaters of the Jordan River. 600 Danites migrated there, and on the way they convinced the Levite that it would be better to serve a clan than an individual. Micah and his neighbors objected, but the Danites, being more powerful, simply took the Levite and Micah's gods and set up a shrine as a substitute for Shiloh (traveling to the tabernacle at Shiloh was deemed to difficult).

MORAL DEGRADATION: The atrocity of Gibeah and the war with Benjamites (Judges 19-21)

1. The atrocity against the concubine of the Levite (Judges 19):

A Levite and his concubine, on returning from a visit to the woman's parents in Bethlehem, stopped at Gibeah for the night. They had passed Jebus, hoping to receive better hospitality in Gibeah, which was a Benjaminte city. During the night the men of Gibeah demanded and then seized the Levite's concubine. In the morning she was found dead at the door. The Levite took the corpse to his home and cut it into 12 pieces, which he sent throughout the land. All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, was so shocked at this atrocity that they gathered at Mizpah, where, before 400,000 men, the Levite told of his mistreatment by the Benjamites.

2. The war against the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 20):

When the tribe of Benjamin refused to surrender the men of Gibeah who had committed the crime, civil war ensued. The Benjamites mustered a fighting force of 26,000 men. The rest of Israel then met at Bethel, where the ark of the Lord was located, and received battle briefing from Phinehas the high priest. Twice the Israelite forces were defeated in their attack on Gibeah. The third time, however, they conquered and burned the city, killing all the Benjamites except 600 who fled.

3. The preservation of the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21:1-24):

Realizing that the tribe of Benjamin was in danger of extinction, the other tribes took steps to provide wives for them. 400 wives were found in Jabesh-Gilead, and the balance were found at a feast in Shiloh.

4. The divine analysis of the period of the Judges (Judges 21:25):

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

IV. Cultural Considerations relevant to this period:

GOVERNMENT—The government during this period remained a Theocracy, however there was no central or unifying leadership. God continued to make His presence known. The

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primary human leadership was through Judges, who although they were divinely enlisted leaders almost never gained control over all twelve tribes. They were primarily regional leaders. Most tribes governed their own affairs during this time period.

RELIGION—Religiously conditions changed during the days of the judges from what they had been for the preceding generations of the conquest and wilderness wanderings. No single dynamic figure called the people to serve God. Judges 2:10-13 gives us an indication of the religious state of affairs during this time frame:

“All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals, and they forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the LORD to anger. So they forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtaroth”

Now scattered all over Canaan, the people had not systematically destroyed the pagan altars and images along with the cursed people themselves. All sorts of pagan influences remained among them. Although the central sanctuary continued to function at Shiloh, with its priesthood and sacrificial system, it seems to have had little influence on the people. In fact as Judges 2:13 clearly reveals they followed after the gods of the people around them.

Worshipping the Canaanite gods usually involved a great deal of religious prostitution because Canaanite worship was heavily laced with fertility deities and cultic fertility rites. It was a sad time for Israel religiously.

WARFARE—Warfare during this time frame consisted of throwing off the yoke of Canaanite oppression. Some have suggested that the Israelites were particularly cruel in light of Judges 1:5-7, where they captured Adoni-Bezek, king of a town, and cut off his thumbs and toes. This action was probably taken because it incapacitated men for ancient warfare because they could no longer handle weapons or pursue an enemy.

The types of weapons used by the Israelites likely included some swords that they brought with them from Egypt, slings, wooden clubs with sharp stones tied to them to form battle axes, bows with arrows, or parts of animal bones (i.e. Samson used a jawbone of a donkey).

HOUSING—Excavations reveal two kinds of houses in general: a one-two room style home and a four-room or courtyard style home.

1-The one-two room style home had a thick exterior wall consisting of two parallel courses of field stone with a core of rubble for stability. A row of stone pillars placed about five feet from one wall dividing the interior into the main room and a side area. There was no furniture except for stone ledges along the wall. Bedrolls were rolled out on the floor to sleep on and there was a

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central fire pit for warmth. Cooking was usually done outside. There were no bathrooms so people went outside to make their own toilets. Cisterns were used to collect rain water.

2-The courtyard style home had a door that led to a courtyard area with a room on one side for storage. On the opposite side there would be room for an animal like a cow or mule. There was also a room on the end for living and sleeping. Pillars rather than walls often separated the rooms from the courtyard. The courtyard had a fire pit and commonly served as a kitchen, dining room and work room.

DIET—There is not much information available about the diet of this time period except what is mentioned in Scripture. Deuteronomy 8:7-8 provides us with a list of seven main crops that are most abundant in the land.

“For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;”

Both wheat and barley were winter crops that provided grain for bread and baked goods. Red grapes seem to have been the dominant if not the exclusive variety grown in Canaan. Grapes were used to make wine, dried for raisins, eaten fresh and used to produce vinegar. Figs produced two crops a year; the first crop harvested in June were eaten fresh, while the second harvested by September were usually dried and saved for use in the winter and for trips. Pomegranates were eaten fresh or dried and stored. Olives were used for oil in food, for burning in lamps for light, or for the treatment of wounds. Honey seems to be that of the date palm tree, in which the juice was extracted from the trunk as a sweetener, a fresh drink or fermented.

Other produce likely included the apricot, almond, pistachio and walnut. There also was the used of beans, lentils, chick-peas, peas, onions, garlic, cucumbers, leeks and watermelon. In addition to produce many Israelites raised large numbers of sheep and goats. The goats were used to produce milk, butter and cheese. The poorer element of society did not eat much meat if any, while the wealthier element would eat meat from sheep and occasionally cow. Of course, some Israelites had access to fish.

DRESS—There is not much mentioned in regard to the type of clothing that the Israelites wore, however most believe that the primary material used was that of linen made from flax (cf. Joshua 2:6; Judges 14:12).

CONCLUSION:

The period of the Judges is often referred to as the dark days of the Judges. It was a period of affliction by neighbors, terrible apostasy, widespread wickedness, and absolute chaos. The character of the people had deteriorated considerably because they had not completely eliminated the Canaanites. Instead they became influenced by these pagan peoples and turned from God to worship the false gods of the Canaanites. The concluding verse in the book of Judges clearly says, *“every man did that, which was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 21:25).