

Readings: Joshua chapters 1,6,23 and 24; Judges chapter 1 and 21v25; Ruth chapters 1-4; Hebrews 11v30-38.

So far we have looked at Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which in the Scriptures Jesus knew were called the Torah, or the Law.

Here we have three Bible books that, in the Scriptures Jesus knew, were separated into two different kinds of writing. Joshua and Judges were included in the Neviim, or The Prophets, and Ruth was included in the Ketuvim, or The Writings. The difference is that The Prophets was made up of historical records that interpreted as well as documented history, as well as the predictions of the future we normally understand as prophecy found in prophetic books like Isaiah. Prophecy in Jewish eyes was "an exegesis of existence from a divine perspective" (quoted from Abraham Heschel), or about God speaking into the realities of life. The Writings, on the other hand, were made up of people reflecting on suffering and pain in the context of the covenant.

So the books of Joshua and Judges both record the historic events that took place, and interpret them in the context of God's covenant relationship with Israel.

Joshua's task was to take the people of Israel into the land that God had promised them.

Joshua, Judges and Ruth, in the Promised Land

"The Lord said to Joshua ... 'Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go'" (Joshua 1v1-7)

Chapter 1 is a record of God's exhortation to Joshua to be strong and courageous, and to obey God's law. In chapter 2 the action begins as spies are sent to the city of Jericho, and in chapter 6 the fall of Jericho is recorded.

The record of the fall of Jericho is an inspirational one, as the people obeyed God's command to circle the city a certain number of times carrying the Ark of the Covenant, and to blow their trumpets at certain times, and the walls of the city fell. God was teaching His people that He won their victories for them. They were called upon to obey God by going into battle, but again and again God was showing them that He was going before them, and it was He who won the victories for them. In one of his last speeches in chapter 23 Joshua sums it up like this: "You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you ... The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no-one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for

you, just as He promised" (Joshua 23v1-10).

Joshua chapter 12 lists the kings defeated by Israel in the power of the Lord. Chapter 13 lists the land yet to be taken at that point, and chapters 14-19 detail the division of the land between the tribes of Israel. In chapters 23 and 24 Joshua sums up all that God has done for His people, and calls on them to renew their covenant with the Lord and to obey Him. The people commit themselves to serving the Lord wholeheartedly, but shadows of the tragic failure to follow are reflected in what Joshua says next: "You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, He will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after He has been good to you". The people reply "No! We will serve the Lord". Joshua says, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord." (Joshua 24v19-22).

In Judges chapter 2 we read "After that whole generation had been gathered to their

fathers" [*the generation that took the land under Joshua*], "another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel" (Judges 2v10). The cycle that is repeated again and again in the book of Judges is summed up in these words: "Then the Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. 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 worshipped them. Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands. 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 worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways" (Judges 2v11-19).

There was a cycle of idolatry and disobedience by the Israelites, followed by the Lord judging them by sending an enemy to defeat and oppress them, followed by the Israelites repenting and turning back to the Lord. The Lord would then raise up a Judge to deliver them, and they would have peace for the lifetime of the Judge, but then they would return to idolatry and disobedience and the whole cycle would start all over again. This is repeated again and again throughout the book of Judges.

In the book of Judges we meet characters such as Gideon, Samson and Jephthah. What they did was not always impressive, but God used men with feet of clay to bring deliverance to His people, and Hebrews 11 gives us God's verdict on their lives.

In every case the Israelites learned that God would respond to disobedience and rebellion with judgement, as He had promised He would, and that when they repented He would have compassion on them and deliver them. When a human Judge was raised up to deliver the people, God always made it

clear that it was in His power and His strength alone that deliverance came.

The book of Judges is summed up in chapter 21v25 where it says "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit". Israel's King should have been the Lord, but they rejected His Lordship over them and the turmoil recorded in the book of Judges was the result.

After Joshua and Judges in the Bible comes the book of Ruth, which looks at the lives of a few people living during the time of the Judges. Ruth was a Moabite woman who came to trust in the God of Israel, and traveled to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi after the death of Naomi's husband and two sons. Ruth meets Boaz, who under Israelite law was a kinsman-redeemer for her (he was in a position to marry her and to carry on the family line of her deceased husband). Boaz is both a historical figure and a 'type' of Jesus, our Redeemer.

Boaz says of Ruth "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2v12). Boaz ends up marrying Ruth, and becoming the ancestor of King David, and ultimately of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a wonderful book about the providence of God at work in the lives of individuals who loved, honored and obeyed Him.