

Bible 101

Lesson 33 - Introduction to Joshua, Judges, and the Unified Kingdom

Introduction

With the death of Moses and the completion of Deuteronomy, we enter the portion of the Bible commonly known as The Books of History. Consisting of Joshua - Esther, these books record the history of Israel from the invasion of Canaan through the restoration of the nation and rebuilding of the temple following the Babylonian captivity.

The Jews called Joshua, Judges/Ruth, the Samuels, and the Kings “The Former Prophets.” The Jews view these narratives not just as history but as accounts of God's prophetic activity and guidance through leaders and events, emphasizing their theological and moral lessons. Jeremiah is regarded as the author/compiler of 1-2 Kings and probably served as the final editor for Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and the Samuels.

In this next section of our study, we will examine the nearly 500-year segment of Israelite history that begins with Joshua and concludes with Solomon's death. After Solomon's reign, the nation was divided into Israel (sometimes called Ephraim) to the north and Judah to the south. We'll discuss the divided nation in the next section.

Joshua

The Book of Joshua narrates Israel's conquest and settlement of the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. After Moses' death, Joshua leads the Israelites across the Jordan River and captures Jericho through divine intervention, followed by Ai. The conquest was divided into three phases: central, southern, and northern Canaan, with key victories in Gibeon and Hazor. Joshua allocates territories among the twelve tribes, establishes cities of refuge, and distributes Levitical towns. The book concludes with Joshua's farewell speeches, a covenant renewal at Shechem, and an exhortation to remain faithful to God. Joshua's death marks the end of the conquest era.

The man himself likely wrote the majority of Joshua, though another prophet must have certainly inserted the last few verses since they recorded Joshua's death. Samuel is a likely candidate.

Judges and Ruth

THE ERA OF THE JUDGES

The Book of Judges recounts Israel's cyclical pattern of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance following Joshua's death. Israel repeatedly turns to idolatry, prompting God to allow surrounding nations to oppress them. In their distress, the Israelites cry out

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to God, who raises up judges—military leaders and deliverers such as Deborah, Gideon, and Samson—to rescue and lead them. Despite temporary peace under each judge, Israel consistently falls back into disobedience after a judge's death. The book illustrates the moral and spiritual decline of the nation, encapsulated by the repeated phrase, "In those days, there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The period is marked by lawlessness and chaos, setting the stage for the eventual demand for a monarchy,

The Book of Ruth is a story of loyalty, redemption, and God's providence. During the time of the judges, a famine forces Naomi and her family to move to Moab. After her husband and sons die, Naomi plans to return to Bethlehem. Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law, insists on staying with her, declaring, "Your people will be my people, and your God my God." In Bethlehem, Ruth gleans in the fields of Boaz, a relative of Naomi. Boaz acts as a kinsman-redeemer, marrying Ruth and ensuring the family lineage. Their son, Obed, becomes the grandfather of King David, placing Ruth in the Messianic line, highlighting God's inclusive plan of redemption.

Jewish tradition held Samuel to be the author of both Judges and Ruth. Samuel was the last judge of that era and a prophet.

1 Samuel

THE END OF THE JUDGES, THE BEGINNING OF THE MONARCHY UNDER SAUL

The Book of 1 Samuel marks the transition from the period of the judges to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. It begins with the birth of Samuel, the last judge, prophet, and priest, born to Hannah after her fervent prayers. Samuel leads Israel, guiding them back to God. The people, desiring to be like other nations, demand a king. Despite Samuel's warnings, God instructs him to anoint Saul as Israel's first king. Saul's reign starts well but declines due to his disobedience to God. God then directs Samuel to anoint David, a shepherd, as the future king. The latter part of the book details the growing tension between Saul and David, David's rise as a warrior and hero, and Saul's eventual downfall and death in battle.

The prophet Samuel likely wrote most of 1 Samuel, but he died in 25:1. It was probably finished by another prophet like Nathan or Gad (see 1 Chronicles 29:29).

2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles

THE REIGN OF DAVID

The Book of 2 Samuel chronicles David's reign as king. Following Saul's death, David became king over Judah and later united all of Israel under his rule. He captures Jerusalem, making it the political and religious center. David's reign is marked by military

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victories, national expansion, and the establishment of a covenant with God, promising that David's descendants will rule forever. However, David's failures, including his sin with Bathsheba and the subsequent turmoil within his family, bring significant strife. Despite these challenges, David's reign is foundational for Israel's history and the future Messianic hope. The book ends with David consolidating power and preparations for the future temple.

Nathan or Gad likely wrote this account of David's reign.

The Book of 1 Chronicles, written for the Jewish community after the Babylonian exile, focuses on Israel's history from Adam to King David, emphasizing David's reign. It opens with extensive genealogies, tracing the lineage of the twelve tribes. The narrative highlights David's ascent to kingship, his military successes, his central role in establishing Jerusalem as the political and religious capital, and his preparations for building the temple. However, the actual construction is left to his son Solomon. The book underscores God's covenant with David and the importance of proper worship, offering hope and continuity to the returning exiles.

Ezra, the great prophet following the Babylonian captivity, wrote 1-2 Chronicles.

1 Kings 1-11, 2 Chronicles 1-9

Solomon, son of David, ascended to the throne of Israel and is renowned for his wisdom, granted by God. His reign, marked by peace and prosperity, included significant achievements such as constructing the First Temple in Jerusalem, a pivotal center of worship for Israel. Solomon expanded the kingdom's trade and wealth, establishing strong international relations. His writings include Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. However, Solomon's later years saw a decline due to his marriages to foreign women, leading to idolatry. His reign is remembered as a golden era and a cautionary tale of straying from God.

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Introduction

1. Which books are included in the portion of the Bible known as The Books of History, and what period do they cover?
2. How do the Jews perceive the narratives in Joshua, Judges/Ruth, the Samuels, and the Kings, and what term do they use to refer to these books?

Joshua

1. What were the three phases of Israel's conquest of Canaan under Joshua's leadership, and what key victories were achieved in these phases?
2. How does the Book of Joshua conclude, and who is believed to have written the final verses of the book?

Judges and Ruth

1. What cyclical pattern does the Book of Judges describe in Israel's behavior, and which judges are highlighted as deliverers?
2. What significant lineage is established through Ruth's story?
3. According to Jewish tradition, who is believed to have authored both the Book of Judges and the Book of Ruth, and what was his role in Israel?

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1 Samuel

1. What key events and transitions are narrated in the Book of 1 Samuel, starting from Samuel's birth to Saul's reign and eventual downfall?
2. Who is believed to have written most of the Book of 1 Samuel, and who likely completed it?

2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles

1. Who became king over Judah and later united all of Israel after Saul's death as described in the Book of 2 Samuel?
2. What significant achievements and failures mark David's reign according to the Book of 2 Samuel?
3. Who is believed to have written the Book of 2 Samuel, and who wrote 1-2 Chronicles?

1 Kings 1-11, 2 Chronicles 1-9

1. What notable achievements is Solomon known for during his reign as king of Israel?
2. What led to the decline of Solomon's rule in his later years?