

“Survey of the Scriptures”

Session #3 – THE RISE OF THE HEBREW NATION

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” Paul wrote to Timothy. It is the **Word** which is recognized as authoritative and divine, not the *writer*. Old Testament books record history with a divine purpose – to tell of God’s dealings with His people.

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel give the historical record of the rise of the Hebrew nation, primarily from a religious viewpoint. We are not sure of the names of the writers of some books.

Joshua recorded Israel’s history and wrote his covenant with the people in the book of the law. Judges may be the work of Samuel or one of his prophets. History was also written by Jasher, Nathan the prophet and Gad the seer.

This part of Israel’s history may be divided into five chapters:

- the Conquest of Canaan;
- the Division of the Land;
- Dark Days of Judges;
- the First Monarchy, and
- David’s Rise and Reign.

Some of this history, but from a different viewpoint, is repeated in Chronicles.

The land into which the Israelites marched was not under a united government but was ruled by many hilltop cities with a king over each city state. God’s instructions to His people were to overcome and occupy, and their success depended on their obedience to His commands. The first walled city to fall before them was Jericho.

Under **Joshua**, their campaign strategy was to advance westward across Canaan, thus forestalling any alliance between enemies to the north and south. The second campaign took them south and the third to the north. Many Canaanites were not exterminated but permitted to live among the Israelites.

Maps showing the land divided among the tribes are often misleading. These were their portions, but over and over again the words appear: *“There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.”* The Israelites claimed all that was rightfully theirs according to God’s promise.

Following the conquest, the whole nation of Israel gathered together at Shiloh to set up the tabernacle in the heart of their new land. “Shiloh” means peace, but there was little peace. When they were not fighting off their enemies, the Israelitish tribes were squabbling among themselves.

Between the campaign conquests and rise of Israel as a nation, our survey of the Bible brings us to the dark era in their history recorded in the Book of **Judges** when decline, disorder and demoralization set in.

The story of Judges is like a theme with variations. Idolatry and immorality brought oppression; the people repented and God sent a deliverer. Following wars of deliverance, there was peace until the people drifted back into their old sins. The same story was repeated over and over again.

Who oppressed the Israelites? The neighbors whom (in disobedience to God's command) they had never destroyed: the Midianites, Moabites, Canaanites and Amorites. Israel was saved by judges who were not as our judges today but rather deliverers or military leaders. Four of these earned a place in the book of faith in Hebrews 11 – Gideon, Samson, Barak and Jephthah.

Teraphim were household gods worshipped by the Canaanites. By the time of the closing chapters of Judges, the Israelites had fallen into similar depths of idolatry with their own household teraphim. These were days of religious confusion and civil wars and the demoralization of God's people was complete.

"In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." The book of Judges closes with these words, *"The laws of Jehovah were forgotten."*

A bright picture on the dark pages of the time "when judges ruled" is the story of **Ruth**, the Moabite girl who chose to belong to God's people. She married the kind and noble Boaz and became part of the godly line through which were to come David, the king, and Christ, the Savior.

Last and greatest of the judges was **Samuel**. Brought up in the tabernacle at Shiloh, Samuel was both judge and prophet. Under him there was soon marked improvement in the religious, moral and political life of the nation.

From his home in Ramah, Samuel judged wisely and well. As he aged, it became apparent that there was no leader to take his place, and the Israelites came to him demanding that they have a king to reign over them. God acceded to their request.

But there was a difference between the kings of Israel and the kings of neighboring nations who were despots, absolute in power. While Israel's anointed kings ruled over the people, they were at the same time subject to God's commandment as given to them through the priests or prophets.

Saul was Israel's first king. A man of imposing stature and a brilliant strategist in battle, Saul was readily accepted by the people but because of self-will and disobedience was soon rejected by God.

God's choice for the next king of Israel was David, the young shepherd boy of Bethlehem.

The rejected king, Saul, became mad with jealousy and hate and sought to take the life of the king elect. The young man who had been a sweet singer in Israel, then a brave soldier in the king's army, now became a fugitive in the Judean hills.

After Saul's death on the battlefield, David was made king over the tribe of Judah and established himself at Hebron. Seven years later, he was accepted as king over all Israel. David was almost forty years old, toughened by years of wilderness life and a seasoned soldier. History tells of his exploits and his psalms reveal his noble character.

David and his mighty men captured the stronghold of the Jebusites and the fort was renamed the city of David. This fort's ancient name was Salem – the city of peace – and it soon became known as Jerusalem.

Israel's great warrior king extended the borders of his domain and subdued the countries round about – Edom, Ammon, Moab and Philistia.

Perhaps the greatest day in David's life was when the ark was brought in triumph to Jerusalem. God set His seal of approval on this great king in the Davidic Covenant found in 2 Samuel 7.

The so-called tomb of Absalom which stands just outside Jerusalem is a reminder that David's reign had internal strife. His own son Absalom was leader in a rebellion which drove David from Jerusalem. This and other revolts were put down by force.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation,” and the reign of David saw the nation of Israel exalted. David made mistakes, but on the whole he was a good king. There is no doubt of his greatness, generosity, outstanding character and desire to serve God.

For Israel's next king God chose Solomon – a man of peace. Just before his death, David saw this favorite son crowned as his successor. The nation had now reached maturity, was recognized as a power by surrounding nations and was rapidly increasing in wealth and influence.

Through the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth and Samuel the amazing **unity of the Scriptures** is maintained. God's righteousness shines forth in contrast to man's sin. God's love and grace toward His people are unchanging.

The attitude of writers toward sin also remains unchanged. Even Bible heroes who take their place in the hall of fame – Gideon, Samson, Saul and David, are not eulogized; rather, the record of their sins is freely and frankly given. In the Bible record, glorious lives often close in shadows.

Through these pages of history we find many **types of Christ** and His work. The name “Joshua” means “God’s salvation,” reminding us of Matthew’s words “*call His name Jesus for He shall save.*” Joshua was captain of Israel’s host; Jesus is Captain of our Salvation. He is also the Righteous Judge, the Great Deliverer.

For all their splendor and fame, Israel’s kings such as David and Solomon were but faint pictures of Christ, the King of kings. His kingdom shall be established forever, and as prophesied in the time of David, His throne shall be everlasting.

In the book of Samuel we read that Hannah foretold the coming of this King of kings in her song of rejoicing: “*The Lord ... shall give strength unto His king and exalt the horn of His anointed*”. This was the first time Christ was called “The Anointed” or “the Messiah.”

David sang and wrote of the coming Messiah. His psalms contain many prophecies of Christ’s death and resurrection.

These first books of history tell of the conquest of Canaan and how the land was divided. They take us through the dark days of Judges, and then we follow the Hebrew nation on the upgrade from the time of Samuel to the illustrious reign of David.

While this is the history of a nation, the names of many individuals stand out. Joshua teaches us courage; Gideon, dependence upon God; Ruth causes us to marvel at God’s grace; and Saul reminds us of the importance of obedience. By further searching, we will find rich treasures for our spiritual enlightenment.

“*Righteousness exalteth a nation*” ... We have seen this truth illustrated as Israel rose to become a great nation. In the second part of our historical survey, we shall see the second part of the proverb fulfilled: “*but sin is a reproach to any people.*” Material splendor brought apostasy and ruin to the nation of Israel.

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