



Session Seven

HISTORY AND SOME FAMOUS NAMES (The Historical Books)

Dear Lord,

*You parted the Red Sea and the Jordan River as your people
Journeyed to the Promised Land.*

*Lift away those things that keep us from you today
As we continue that journey. We ask this in your name, and with the
Father and the Spirit, Amen.*

Adapted from Hovhannes Garnetzi



Word Watch**Yahweh:**

YHWH is called the tetragrammaton for the four consonants that meant God, a word too sacred to be uttered (there were no written vowels in ancient Hebrew).



Warriors, Judges and Kings

In this session we will look at part of a group of Old Testament books called the *Historical Books*. These books take us from the time when the Hebrew people, under the leadership of Joshua, conquered and settled in the land of Canaan, up to the time of the great king David. Along the way we will meet some interesting people, men and women whose names are still well-known because they shine out as people who changed their world because of their love for God. We will also see how some of these people prefigured (do you remember that word?) the saving work of Jesus Christ. And one of the first people we will hear about has the same name as Jesus, but in a different language. God made it easy for His people to get prepared—all they had to do was to be willing.

The Book of Joshua

There are three major sections to this book. **First** is the invasion and conquest of Canaan (the Promised Land) by the Israelites. **Next** we read how the land was partitioned among the tribes of Israel. **Finally** comes the farewell address of the now-aged Joshua to his people. He reminds them how necessary it is for them to be faithful and obedient to God, and some dire warnings of what can happen if they fail to be so. In Joshua's words we see again that people are free to choose to follow God.

Read what he says in *Joshua 24:14-15*. Write the famous last phrase of these verses here.

The name Joshua is a Hebrew word which means "Yahweh is salvation." (Yahweh is the title with which the Hebrews addressed God, not daring to call Him by any name.) In Greek, the name Joshua translates as Jesus. So for Christians, Joshua leading the people of Israel to victory in Canaan prefigures the victory of Jesus Christ, leading the new Israel (the Church) to the true Promised Land, which is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Book of Judges

For almost 200 years (about 1200 to 1025 B.C.) the twelve tribes of Israel, to which Joshua had given parcels of land when they reached Canaan, lived as a loosely organized group, pledging support and protection to each other. Some Bible scholars call this the "tribal confederacy."

All was not well among them. Years went by, and still they failed to complete the occupation of Canaan, begun in the days of Joshua. They had forgotten their promise to God that they would "make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land" and began venerating the pagan deities of their Canaanite neigh-

bors, especially Baal and the goddess Astarte (the equivalent in pagan Armenia of the goddess Anahit). Anarchy, confusion, and a lack of faith in their God made a mess of the Hebrews' lives.

But once again, God did not abandon His people, despite their infidelity. The title "Judges" refers to an extraordinary group of leaders—spiritual, military, and political—whom God sent to lead and help His people. They were not so much "judges" in the sense of presiding in a court of law as they were counselors and leaders. Part of their function was, however, to settle disputes or questions.

The Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth is set in the time of the Judges, though it was actually writ-

Three of the judges stand out: Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

In your group study of one of these Judges, produce a brief biographical sketch and answer these questions:

- What character traits stand out in this person? (Good or bad)
- What do you think is the most important thing this person did?
- If you could meet this person and ask one question, what would it be?

ten several centuries later. It tells the story of a family of Israelites who, to escape famine in their Bethlehem home, move to the country of Moab. The Moabites' worship of pagan gods sets them very much apart from the worship of the Hebrews. In fact, the Hebrews consider them to be alien and untrustworthy.

The father of the Israelite family dies in Moab, and the two sons marry Moabite women named Ruth and Orpah. The sons die also, and their widowed mother, Naomi, decides to move back to Bethlehem.

To see how Naomi's daughters-in-law react to her decision, read *Ruth 1:6-18*. Ruth's words in verse 16 are some of the most famous in all of literature. Write them here:

Ruth and Naomi go to Bethlehem, where they live together in harmony but without much money. However, a wealthy and generous relative named Boaz takes compassion on Ruth when she goes to glean (pick up what the reapers have left behind) in his field. Read what they say to each other in *Ruth 2:8-12*.

Finally, Ruth and Boaz marry. In *Matthew 1:1-6* Ruth is named in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. This woman who is a stranger, a foreigner, an immigrant

The Armenian Angle

Ancient Armenia had a pantheon of gods and goddesses similar in nature to others in the Mediterranean and Near East. These included Aramazt (Zeus), Asdghig (Aphrodite), Anahid (Artemis), Mihr (Hephaestus), Vahagn (Hercules), Dir (Hermes), and Nané (Athena). Pagan roots still make their appearance in our Christian faith. For example, the Feast of the Transfiguration is called Vartavar, recalling how Armenians used to adorn the altar of Aphrodite with roses (vart means rose). Also, underneath the altar of Holy Etchmiadzin in Armenia is a remnant of a pagan altar from earlier times.



from a country whose people were looked down on by many of the Hebrews, is chosen and named in the Gospels as a human ancestor of the Son of God.

The First Book of Samuel; The Second Book of Samuel

Though the Book of Judges tells us about many impressive leaders, conditions in Israel remained unsettled and disorderly. The very last sentence in *Judges* (21:25) describes the situation: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." The last of the judges was Samuel, and finally the people appealed to him with a radical idea. Read about it in *1 Samuel* 8:1-22.

Then choose the best answer to each of these questions:

Why do the people want a king?

- a. They have a lot of extra money and want to spend it building a castle.
- b. They want to be like everybody else.
- c. Samuel really thinks they should have one, and they want to respect his wishes.

What does God tell Samuel when Samuel prays about this idea of having a king?

- a. God tells Samuel to forbid the people to have a king.
- b. God tells Samuel that if there is to be a king, it must be Samuel himself.
- c. God tells Samuel that the people have rejected Him as their divine king so that they can be like everybody else and have a human king. Samuel should allow this.

What does Samuel tell the people about having a king?

- a. He tells them it will be great—lower taxes, higher prestige, plenty of banquets.
- b. He tells them it will be terrible; the king will use and abuse them.
- c. He tells them he doesn't have a clue what it will be like.

Samuel anoints Saul to be king, according to God's command. Saul was able to consolidate the Hebrew monarchy, and was a well-regarded warrior. But in the end he was defeated by the Philistines (despite David's famous victory over Goliath) and the strife between the Hebrew tribes continued. Saul became emotionally unstable, wildly jealous of the successful young warrior David, and subject to irrational fears and suspicions. He would later commit suicide after losing the Philistine war, and the country would be left vulnerable to foreign conquest. So in wanting to "be like everybody else" and have a human king, the Israelites had turned their backs on God again. They had ignored His will for them, which was that they would have Him as their divine King, putting their trust and faith in Him. Not only that, they had put their country in a situation that

was no less dangerous and difficult than the time of the Judges had been.

David Becomes King

God still did not abandon His beloved people. Read *1 Samuel 16:1-13*. Answer these questions:

- Why was Samuel not sure about whom he was supposed to anoint?
- How did God answer his uncertainty?

We know a great deal about David, who began as a young shepherd and became the greatest king in Israel's history. He was a poet who both wrote and sang psalms. He inspired great loyalty, and had many deep friendships. Under his excellent military and political leadership, the Philistines and other enemies of Israel were driven back, and the quarrelsome tribes came together to be a unified nation, prosperous and strong.

Still, David was far from perfect. We know of his great sin, for example, in having his own soldier Uriah killed so that he could marry Uriah's beautiful wife, Bathsheba. His own son, Absalom, rose against him and was killed by his soldiers. (Read the few words that convey David's deep grief in *2 Samuel 19:4*.)

David was a highly emotional person, and sometimes became angry and spiteful. He had established the capital of the nation in Jerusalem, and had brought the Ark of the Covenant to his new capital with much pomp and celebration. (Read about this in *2 Samuel 6:3-5*.) His ambition was to build a beautiful temple for the Lord around the Ark. But God told him that it would be David's son, not David himself, who would have the honor of completing the temple.

Yet David was beloved of God, because he recognized his sin, repented, and struggled to do better. He also was willing to take counsel from other people. Read the story of David and Abigail, one of his wives, in *1 Samuel 25:2-35*.

The rest of the two Books of Samuel deal with David's life and the life of Israel while he reigned over it. At the beginning of the next book, the First Book of Kings, we find out what happened after David died.

Looking In

If you looked at others as God does, how would that change some of your relationships right now?

Did You Know?

Our word "philistine" means someone who is smug and ignorant, often antagonistic to artistic and cultural values. This comes directly from the Old Testament notion that the Philistines were a barbarous enemy.

Quick Quiz #7

① to ⑤ **Put the following in chronological order, 1-5:**

- ___ David becomes king of Israel.
- ___ Samuel anoints Saul.
- ___ Land is divided among the twelve tribes of Israel.
- ___ Joshua enters the Promised Land.
- ___ The period of the judges.

⑥ to ⑩ **Identify the following people (put the correct letter in the blank):**

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| ___ Ruth | a. a judge |
| ___ Deborah | b. an ancestor of Jesus |
| ___ Mihr | c. a pagan god |
| ___ Saul | d. a king |
| ___ Samson | |