



DISCOVERY

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1st Era of Judges: Deborah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Judges 1:1 through 5:31

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.” (Judges 2:16)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Judges covers the period between the death of Joshua and the birth of Samuel—a time span of approximately 300 years.

Several cycles of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance occur throughout this book. The first phase involves sin or backsliding, in which the people began to compromise with their enemies, and allowed them to coexist in the conquered land. This ultimately led to gross disobedience to God through Israel’s adoption of the pagan worship of Baal and Ashtaroth.

The second phase of the cycle is oppression. In His wrath and displeasure, God sent or allowed hostile nations (those Israel should have driven out) to oppress Israel by means of war, taxation, or occupation. When the people grew weary of the hardship and distress produced by the enemy, they cried out to God.

Phase three is marked by the repentance of God’s people. When their repentance was genuine, God heard their cry.

Deliverance is the fourth and final phase of this cycle. In His mercy, God answered their prayers and raised up a leader or “judge,” which “delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them” (Judges 2:16). Unfortunately, the repentance of the people tended to last only as long as their judge lived, and then they lapsed into rebellion, initiating the first phase of the cycle all over again. The most prominent aspect of their rebellion was found in their acceptance and worship of false gods—primarily Baal.

Baalism was a religion that deified various aspects of nature. Worship was tied to the seasons and natural phenomena such as rain and harvest. Baal, whose name means “lord” or “owner,” was the god of rain and thunder. Ashtaroth, his female counterpart, was the patroness of sex and war. Ritual prostitution was practiced by both men and women worshipers, in a desire to increase fertility in their lives. Because the Canaanites were farmers, the fertility of their land, wives, and herds was of utmost importance to them. In times of famine or drought, the people would sacrifice their children to Baal “through the fire,” in an effort to appease this god of rain and harvest.

Not only did the Canaanites take extreme measures to please their gods, they took extra measures to ensure success over their enemies. Canaanite chariots were equipped with sharp iron blades on their axles, which would have been terrifying to foot soldiers such as the Israelites. In addition, the horses’ hooves and bridles were also covered with sharp spikes, making them a formidable foe.

QUESTIONS

1. In Judges 2:1-3, an angel of the Lord told the Israelites that their covenant with God had been broken. What were the reasons for this? Judges 1:21-36; 2:10-23

2. Othniel, Israel’s first judge, is described in Judges 3:9-11. What was his relationship to Caleb? How do you think Caleb may have influenced Othniel?

3. How did Ehud, Israel’s second judge, overthrow the oppression of Moab?

4. After Ehud died, the Israelites again backslid into rebellion and idolatry, and God allowed Jabin, king of Canaan, to oppress them (Judges 4:1-3). Why do you think the Israelites waited twenty years before crying to the Lord for deliverance?

5. Who was Deborah, and what role did she have in Israel's government? Judges 4:4-5

6. What was Deborah's message to Barak (Judges 4:6-7)? What did God promise Deborah He would do?

7. Why do you think Barak wanted Deborah to go with him into battle? How can the support of a fellow Christian be an encouragement to us in our spiritual battles?

8. Barak's army of foot soldiers was, in the natural, no match for Sisera's 900 chariots of iron. What did God do to defeat Sisera and the army? (See Judges 5:4, 15-16, 20-22)

9. In five words or less, describe the character of each of the following people:

Ehud

Deborah

Barak

Jael

10. What must we do in order to be the recipients of God's help and favor, as were Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, and Barak?

CONCLUSION

God's promises have always been conditional upon man's obedience. If we choose to rebel and disobey, we will certainly face the consequences; however, if we trust God and obey Him, we can be equally certain of inheriting His promises.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

2nd Era of Judges: Gideon



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Judges 6:1 through 12:15

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.” (Judges 6:39-40)

BACKGROUND

The period of the Judges forms an important link in the history of the Israelites, carrying on the history of God’s chosen people through a period of roughly three centuries—the era from the death of Joshua to when Saul became Israel’s first king. The Book of Judges also demonstrates that defecting from God incurs severe punishment. Only by turning back to God can restoration be enjoyed. The judges were notable leaders, able to motivate the Israelites to turn back to God, and were used by God to deliver His chosen people. Only by heeding the judge’s Spirit-directed message and following it in withstanding their enemies could restoration be accomplished.

These Old Testament judges performed two functions. By divine power and Spirit-anointed leadership, they delivered the Israelites from enemy oppression. Having secured the freedom for these people, they then ruled over them and governed them in the name of Israel’s God. Although there were several judges during this period in history, Scripture provides details of only a few—Gideon being one of them.

The cycle of victory-apostasy-punishment-deliverance covered in this portion of text had lasted for seven years. Occurring more than a century after Joshua had conquered the land, this generation had not experienced the miracles of the past. Still, they cried out to God for deliverance from the invading desert horde.

Gideon, the man chosen by God to bring about deliverance, was also known as Jerubbaal. He was the youngest son of Joash, of the clan of Abiezer in the tribe of Manasseh. His home was at Ophrah, and his family an obscure one. Gideon was called to leadership through the message of an angel. Though slow to be convinced of his call and his ability to perform what God required, Gideon was persuaded through divine means, and eventually obeyed. He became the

chief leader of Manasseh and the fifth recorded judge of Israel. He is mentioned as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11.

QUESTIONS

1. Who was oppressing the Israelites as detailed in Chapter 6 of Judges? How did they execute their oppression?

2. What indication is given as to why the Midianites may have been allowed to oppress the Israelites? Judges 6:1

3. Why do you think Gideon asked God to let him put out a fleece? (Judges 6:37-40) For what purpose should a fleece be used?



3rd Era of Judges: Samson

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Judges 13:1 through 21:25

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”
(Judges 16:28)

BACKGROUND

By this time, the nation of Israel had been living in the Promised Land for a number of years. During those years, they had spiritual highs and lows. The spiritual low point in today’s lesson was brought on by disobedience. As a consequence God allowed the people to fall under the rule of the Philistines in the longest oppression Israel experienced during the time of the judges.

The Children of Israel cried out to God because of the oppression of the Philistines, and once again God raised up a deliverer. Samson was chosen before his birth to do a great work for God, and it was pronounced by the angel of the Lord that he would be a “Nazarite unto God” from his birth. To help him accomplish God’s plan, Samson was given enormous physical strength. He became the thirteenth Judge of Israel.

In spite of his godly heritage, Samson’s record was anything but exemplary. He grieved his godly parents, made friends with the Philistines, married a heathen woman, and alienated himself from those of his own nation.

Samson paid a great price for not following God’s perfect plan. He shared the secret of his great strength: his Nazarite vow to not cut his hair. Due to more of his poor choices, he found himself in the arms of his enemy (Delilah) who cut his hair. Immediately his strength was gone. Captured and blinded by the Philistines, he was forced to work turning a human-powered gristmill in a Philistine prison.

The Philistines credited their victory over Samson to their god Dagon, and they gathered at Gaza for a great feast to praise their god. (Dagon was a god of fertility whom the Philistines had borrowed from the Canaanites.) Samson’s hair had grown long again. In a final dramatic act, and through the help of God, Samson pulled down a building destroying many of the main people in the Philistine government and military.

These chapters also record instances of idolatry, a disturbing account of a rape, murder, and the civil war between Israel’s tribes. It is hard to believe that these were God’s chosen people, but this passage serves as a warning to us that sometimes what is right in a person’s own eyes can be far from God’s will, and even outright sin.

QUESTIONS

1. At Samson’s birth, how long had the Israelites been under the rule of the Philistines? (Judges 13:1) What are some possible reasons for such a long period of oppression?

2. What special instructions were given to Samson’s parents regarding his upbringing? Judges 13:7

3. Under the dispensation of grace, which of our three foundational experiences is most like a Nazarite’s vow? Why?

4. What are some of the heartaches Samson could have avoided if he had married a godly woman? (Judges 16:4-21) What are some contemporary parallels we can draw from this aspect of his life?

5. After Samson failed God, he was given another chance right at the end of his life to follow God's will. Does everyone get another chance? How can we best accomplish God's plan for our lives?

6. Judges 17 and 18 record a dispute between Micah and the soldiers from the tribe of Dan. What was it about? What sort of things do we see in our world today that parallels this kind of dispute?

7. In Judges 19, we read of a horrible crime that was committed by members of the tribe of Benjamin. What was the nation of Israel's response when the word got out? Judges 20:1-2

8. What did the army ask of the tribe of Benjamin? What happened as a result of their response? Judges 20:13

9. In an effort to salvage the tribe of Benjamin, what additional wrongs did the Israelites do as a means of trying to correct an earlier wrong?

10. What does this lesson teach us about the dangers of "toying" with wrong?

CONCLUSION

A key point that can be drawn from this lesson is the need to constantly seek God's will rather than to do what seems right at the moment. These three accounts are extreme examples that show it is much better when a person is acting within God's perfect will.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

The Book of Ruth



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ruth 1:1 through 4:22

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” (Ruth 1:16-17)

BACKGROUND

Ruth is one of two women in the Old Testament to have an entire book devoted to them. (Esther is the other.) The book provides a wonderful historical metaphor of the plan of redemption. It bridges the historic time between the period of the judges and when God granted the Children of Israel their request for a king. It also establishes the ancestry of Israel’s most famous king, David. This was a dark time in the history of Israel. We read, “In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

The setting for the beginning of the Book of Ruth is the land of Moab, which was located east of the southern part of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were descendents of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:30-38). The Moabites refused to give Israel passage through their land to Canaan during the Exodus from Egypt. For this refusal, they and their descendents for ten generations were excluded from gathering with the congregational assembly of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3-4).

The relationship between Boaz and Ruth is a developing theme in the narrative. The Hebrew word *ga'al* is translated as *kinsman* in most of the account. Implied in the translation is the responsibility of the kinsman, which was redemption. (See Leviticus 25:23-34 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10.) This act of redemption took on several forms: marrying a kinsman’s widow, freeing family members from bondage, purchasing a mortgaged piece of family property, and avenging the loss of family. Some translators have used the phrase “kinsman-redeemer” to show the fullness of the Hebrew meaning. Others have simply used the word *redeemer* in places.

The story begins in sorrow with a family fleeing a famine, three funerals, and the grief of separation. As the process of redemption beautifully unfolds

throughout the account, it ends with great joy, the provision of needs, an unexpected marriage, and the hope in a new baby’s birth.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem Ruth 1:1? Do you think this was a wise choice? Why or why not?

2. After the death of her husband and sons, Naomi determined to return to Israel. Why do you think she discouraged her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, from accompanying her?

3. Ruth was not deterred by Naomi’s comments. Which of Ruth’s actions showed a spirit of willingness?

4. Did Ruth just “happen” to glean in the fields of Boaz? Explain your answer. Ruth 2:3

5. One component of the Book of Ruth is the theme of redemption. Define the word *redeem* and explain how Boaz became a redeemer to Ruth.

6. The Book of Ruth can be used as a picture of how Jesus Christ came to redeem all of us from sin. What similarities are there between Boaz in this account and Jesus Christ? In what ways are they dissimilar?

7. During the time of Ruth, Israelite custom combined the laws of the kinsman-redeemer and the law for levirate marriage (marrying a deceased husband’s brother). Why do you think Naomi started the kinsman process by sending Ruth at night to the threshing floor? Ruth 3:1-4

8. Following the instructions of Naomi, who was taking the initiative to arrange for a possible marriage, Ruth made great preparation before presenting herself at the feet of Boaz. What were those preparations (Ruth 3:3)? Compare them to preparations we must make to qualify as part of the Bride of Christ.

9. Redemption is the key theme of Ruth, specifically the fourth chapter. The words “redeem,” “buy,” and “purchase,” are used at least fifteen times. What was the cost to redeem Ruth (Ruth 4:9-10)? Compare that to the price God paid to redeem humanity.

CONCLUSION

Because of Ruth’s choice to identify with Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God, she was rewarded not only with a godly husband and a son, but also with the privilege of being the great-grandmother of David, Israel’s greatest king. Ultimately she was included in the lineage of the Savior of all humanity, Jesus Christ.

The story of Ruth provides a beautiful parallel to how we come to faith in God. We begin as aliens with no part in His Kingdom. Then, as we risk everything by putting our faith in Christ, God forgives us, saves us, rebuilds our lives, and gives us blessings that reach forward into eternity.

NOTES



Samuel

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Samuel 1:1 through 7:17

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the LORD, and also with men.”
(1 Samuel 2:26)

BACKGROUND

In the history of Israel, the period of the Judges preceded the birth of Samuel. The Book of Judges tells of thirteen individuals who were appointed to rule and judge Israel. Some of these individuals were good, others were rebellious. This period lasted at least 300 years, and perhaps as long as 400, during which time Israel drifted far from the Lord.

Samuel was born, around 1100 B.C. of Levitical parents (1 Chronicles 6:33-38). Ramah, his birthplace, judicial residence, and place of burial, was about six miles north of Jerusalem (1 Samuel 1:19; 7:17; 25:1).

Hannah was the wife of Elkanah, and though he loved her, she was not able to bear children. This deprived her of more than the joy of being a mother. It also robbed her of her dignity and self-worth, for women were expected to bear children for their husbands. In Old Testament times, a married woman with no children was ashamed before her husband. She was thought to be under a curse from God. Peninnah, Elkanah’s other wife who had children, further provoked Hannah. Although Elkanah loved Hannah, and had done all he could to comfort her, he could not seem to understand the depth of her anguish.

Considering the spiritual destitution of the priesthood, and the widespread disobedience of Israel at that time, it is remarkable that Hannah determined to take her burden to the Lord and had confidence that God would answer. It is also noteworthy that Samuel had such openness and sincerity towards God, considering the poor examples of priesthood he was subject to. Certainly Hannah’s influence on him is evident, resulting in a man who was to become one of the purest characters in Israel’s history.

While Samuel was a judge of Israel, he was more than that. He was also a prophet and a priest. He was the “connecting link” between the time of the judges, or tribal period, and the Kingdom, when kings ruled Israel. Samuel would later appoint Israel’s first king, Saul.

QUESTIONS

1. Our lesson opens with Hannah in “bitterness of soul.” What was the result of her “pouring out her soul before the LORD” (1 Samuel 1:15)? Why was she willing to make a vow to the Lord that meant giving up the child she longed to have? 1 Samuel 1:11

2. Though it may have been difficult to give her child back to the Lord, Hannah paid her vow. Who benefited by her obedience in this matter?

3. According to 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22, what were Eli’s sons Hophni and Phinehas doing that displeased the Lord?

4. What was young Samuel’s response to God’s call and what can we learn from his example?
1 Samuel 3:1-10



Saul

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Samuel 8:1 through 15:35

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people.” (1 Samuel 9:17)

BACKGROUND

This portion of Scripture marks another great turning point in the history of the Children of Israel. After they possessed the Promised Land by the power of God under the leadership of Joshua, they lived for approximately 400 years governed by judges. God was their King and Supreme Commander. However, growing apostasy and involvement with other nations caused them to forget God’s covenant and desire an earthly king to “be like all the nations” and to fight their battles. The tribes of Israel had apparently forgotten that God called them to be a separate and unique people that would follow Him. In return, they would never be forsaken by the Lord.

Samuel explained to the people the negative consequences of having a king. However, they still cried out, “We will have a king over us.” Samuel rehearsed these words to the Lord, who then authorized Samuel to anoint them a king. The Lord led Samuel to Saul, a Benjamite.

Saul was not crowned in a coronation that would be typical of a political act to establish him as a ruler. Samuel anointed him with oil, which was a religious act that made the king a representative of God to the people. The anointing oil was made specifically of myrrh, olive oil, and other costly spices.

The Philistines were Israel’s chief enemy during Saul’s reign. Israel’s army was at a distinct disadvantage because they had no weapons and no ability to make any. The Philistines carefully guarded their technology in making iron and blacksmithing.

Even though Israel was not in a position to defeat anyone, through God’s help, they were able to rout the Philistines and achieve a victory without swords.

This portion of text gives the account of the end of Samuel’s ministry and the turbulent transition to a completely unfamiliar form of government for the tribes of Israel.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the reasons given by the elders of Israel for wanting a king (1 Samuel 8:4-5)? Were these claims legitimate? Why or why not?

2. What was God’s reaction to the people’s request? 1 Samuel 8:7-9

3. Samuel expressed to Saul that “all the desire of Israel” was on him, speaking about his upcoming responsibility. What was Saul’s response, and what does it show about his attitude? 1 Samuel 9:21

4. What three prophecies did Samuel make regarding the signs that would happen on Saul’s journey home (1 Samuel 10:2-6)? What can we learn from them for our lives today?

DISCOVERY



David

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Samuel 16:1 through 31:13

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him.” (1 Samuel 18:14)

BACKGROUND

Because of Saul’s disobedience to God’s clear commandments, and his subsequent lying about what he had done, God had rejected him from being king. Saul was still on the throne, but yet was unfit to lead the nation. For this reason, God instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king in Saul’s place.

Chapter 16 begins with Samuel anointing David to the throne. The narrative stresses that both Samuel and Jesse, David’s father, assumed that one of David’s older brothers would be chosen. However, the selection fell outside of human expectations. The Lord had chosen David in advance, and then confirmed His choice by sending His Spirit on David.

David’s confidence in God is apparent in his contest with the Philistine giant, Goliath. Armies of that day commonly pitted their strongest warriors against each other in order to avoid the high cost of a full-scale battle. After a forty-day standoff, in which no Israelite soldier dared to confront the champion of the Philistines, the youthful shepherd volunteered to face Goliath in a battle to the death. Fully trusting in God for victory, he faced the giant and felled him with a single stone. Realizing that their hero was dead, the Philistine forces retreated, followed in close pursuit by the Israelites, and a great victory was won.

As David rose in popularity as a hero among the people, Saul’s fits of insane jealousy produced a hatred for David that consumed him. Saul sought to put David deliberately in a position where he would be killed in battle, but those attempts failed. David ended up marrying the king’s daughter, Michal, and developing a deep bond of friendship with Saul’s son, Jonathan—in spite of the fact that Jonathan would have been the natural heir to the throne. Saul’s initial assassination attempts having been thwarted, the erring king took more overt measures and attempted to use his slaves, his oldest son, his soldiers, and his own efforts to kill David. However, God repeatedly and miraculously intervened to protect His chosen leader.

Chapters 21 and 22 record the beginning of David’s life as a fugitive. A group of Israelite men joined him, and God repeatedly helped David escape Saul’s men. Twice, when opportunity arose for

David to kill Saul, he refused to do so because Saul was God’s anointed leader over Israel. At last, convinced that David had no intentions of killing him, King Saul acknowledged his own wrongdoing and ceased his attempts to kill David.

When the Philistine troops gathered to fight against Israel, Saul responded by leading his army toward the battle. However, he sought insight from a witch regarding the battle—a practice strictly forbidden in God’s law. In the end, Saul’s sin drove him to suicide, and his sons were killed in battle.

The events in this text block cover a period of at least ten years, for David was not quite old enough to go to war when he was anointed by Samuel, and he was thirty when he ascended the throne of Judah (see 2 Samuel 5:4).

QUESTIONS

1. The Lord commanded Samuel to anoint one of Jesse’s sons to be Israel’s next king (1 Samuel 16). What characteristics did Samuel use to evaluate Jesse’s sons? What did the Lord use?

2. What kind of a person was David? Look up the following Scriptures and write a brief review on the character of David.

1 Samuel 16:18

1 Samuel 17:20, 26, 32-37, 45-47

1 Samuel 18:14, 22-23

1 Samuel 23:1-5

1 Samuel 24:1-11; 26:6-12

1 Samuel 29:3

3. Using the Scriptures in the previous question, along with the description of Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:4-10,42-44, contrast David and Goliath.

4. What was the secret of David’s success in battle (1 Samuel 23:1-5)? How can we, as Christians, possess the same kind of confidence and courage?

5. Jonathan, next in line for the throne of Israel, acknowledged David’s divine appointment when he gave David his royal robes and weapons. What qualities stand out in Jonathan’s character? 1 Samuel 19:2-7; 20:1-42

6. Jonathan secretly communicated Saul’s murderous designs to David, and as a result, he suffered the wrath of his insanely jealous father. What are some possible results when we take a stand for what is right?

7. David had several opportunities to take matters into his own hands (chapters 24-26). How did David “behave himself wisely?”

8. How did David demonstrate his faith and trust in God? 1 Samuel 22:5; 23:2

9. What was David’s attitude when Abigail confronted him and prevented him from acting rashly and unwisely (1 Samuel 25)? Name three things we can learn from his response.

CONCLUSION

Despite the trials and difficulties brought on by Saul’s persecution, David behaved himself wisely and trusted the Lord. Let us follow his example and trust the Lord in every circumstance, seek His guidance, and behave ourselves wisely in this present, evil world.



David's Successes

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Samuel 1:1 through 9:13

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.”
(2 Samuel 7:22)

BACKGROUND

The Book of 2 Samuel is really a continuation of the Book of 1 Samuel. Originally, the two were written together as a history for the people of Israel and Judah. Together, the two books chronicle the transition in Israel from the time of the judges to the rule of the kings. They specifically tell the accounts of Samuel, Israel's last ruling judge; Saul, Israel's first king; and David, Israel's second and greatest king.

The Book of 1 Samuel is concerned mostly with the reign of Saul, his downfall, God's appointment of David to become the next king, and how God put the shepherd boy David into a position to become king.

The Book of 2 Samuel records the culmination of God's plans for David. Finally, after David had spent many years running and hiding from Saul and his armies, the deaths of Saul and Jonathan had opened the throne to David. After asking God what he should do, he moved to Hebron and became king of Judah, but it was not until seven and a half years later (2 Samuel 5:5), that he finally was able to govern the unified kingdom of Israel. His reign lasted a total of forty years and six months.

Of note in this account is David's attitude. No matter what happened, he was determined to honor God, and to honor Saul as God's anointed king before him. This attitude is evident in the first chapter, when David learned of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. David tore his clothing as a sign of mourning, and wept and fasted to show his grief. In chapter 1, verses 19-27, the author included David's beautiful expression of honor and lament for the two men.

Although David had known for years that he would be Israel's next king, his patient attitude regarding his actual appointment was exemplary. During the years of civil war between Judah (who had installed him as their king) and Israel (who were following Saul's son Ish-bosheth and his advisors), David was willing to leave the matter with God. His attitude showed that he knew God would work it all out in His own time.

In chapters 6 and 7, the author tells how David brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem, and of David's desire to build a permanent house of God to replace the Tabernacle. God honored David's desire to please him by promising him that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

Chapter 8 tells of David's military victories, and chapter 9 tells the story of how David honored the descendants of Saul and Jonathan through Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth.

QUESTIONS

1. What was David's immediate reaction when he learned of Saul's death? What does this reveal about David's character? 2 Samuel 1:11-12

2. In 2 Samuel 1:17-27, the author included David's lament for Saul and Jonathan. Why do you suppose he did this?

3. In 2 Samuel 2:18-28 and 3:17-39, the author tells about the civil war between Israel and Judah, including the report of the deaths of Asahel and Abner. Asahel was fighting for David (Judah), and Abner was on the side of Saul's family (Israel). What is the end result of conflicts between individuals, families, and organizations?

4. The two traitors who killed Ishbosheth in chapter 4 expected to be rewarded by David for eliminating his rival. What was David's reaction when they brought him Ishbosheth's head?

5. In 2 Samuel 6:1-11, what was David's mistake in moving the Ark as he did? (See Exodus 25:10-22) In light of Exodus 25:22, why was it important for the Ark to be moved to Jerusalem?

6. In chapter 7, David expressed his desire to God to build a permanent dwelling for Him. What was God's response to David's desire?

7. In chapter 9, David sought out Saul's descendent, Mephibosheth. What was his purpose in this, and how might this meeting have been different than what Mephibosheth expected it to be?

8. Throughout the text of this lesson, there are many incidents that show the quality of David's character. What kind of person was David, and how did he please God?

9. In examining your own life, what are some elements of David's character that you could cultivate in your own spiritual walk?

CONCLUSION

Just as he did for David, God has a plan for each of us. Sometimes it takes a while for God's plan to come to completion. We can chafe at having to wait on God, or we can follow David's example and use our waiting time to carefully develop godly character in our lives.

NOTES



David's Sin

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Samuel 10:1 through 12:31

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.”

(2 Samuel 12:13)

BACKGROUND

The text for today's lesson finds David involved in yet another battle. Unlike many others, this one was not initiated by David, but was in response to the indignities his servants suffered at the hands of Hanun, the new king of Ammon. Mistaking David's offer of condolences for the recent loss of their king as nothing more than a ploy to spy out their city, the Ammonites proceeded to send David a message by mistreating his servants.

Inexperienced and vulnerable, Hanun hired mercenaries from the area north of Israel to fight for him. Their strategy was to hit Israel's army from the rear while Israel was engaged in battle with the soldiers of Rabbath-Ammon — modern day Amman, Jordan. Joab, David's trusted captain of the guard quickly realized what was happening and split their much smaller army with his brother, Abishai. While Joab and “all the choice men of Israel” fought the mercenaries, Abishai led the rest of the army in their attack against the Ammonite city. Joab and Abishai agreed that if either of them saw the other in need during the battle, they would join forces.

The phrase in the first verse of chapter 11, “at the time when kings go forth to battle,” refers to the specific time of year when armies went to war. In Biblical times, the large armies, often numbering in the hundreds of thousands, needed large quantities of food and water to simply sustain the soldiers. It was impractical or even impossible for armies to bring along enough to feed everyone. Instead of trying to bring provisions from the homeland, armies would wait until crops were ready to harvest in the territory where the conflict would be. In the ancient Near East, barley, the grain that ripened first, was ready for harvest in the spring. Spring also meant the end of the rainy season, thus making travel by foot much easier and faster.

Unlike current day battles, these men fought hand-to-hand. They typically fought during the day, and the battle lines moved depending on which side prevailed. On this occasion, the battle occurred outside the city walls of Rabbath-Ammon. Following their initial

defeat by Joab, the mercenaries regrouped and met David's forces in a place called Helam. This area was located several miles northeast of Jerusalem, a few miles east of the Sea of Galilee.

Chapter 12 records the prophet Nathan's confrontation of David. Despite David's steps at covering up his sin with Bathsheba, Nathan had a message from God to deliver to him. Nathan devised an allegory to show the king the error of his ways, and David passed judgment without realizing he was condemning himself. Nathan saw that the king, although angry, was also vulnerable at this point. With one direct statement, “You are the man!” David's heart was pierced with the words of the Lord. David knew that he was guilty, so without argument, he acknowledged his sin and repented sincerely.

The consequences of sin often have their fulfillment after an individual is reconciled to God, as was the case with David. The pronouncement found in chapter 12 verse 10, “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me,” followed David for the rest of his life.

Chapter 12 concludes with David going out to battle with his men. Joab had besieged the Ammonite city Rabbah, where Uriah had been slain, but sent word to the king requesting him to be there when they took the city so the credit would go to David and not to Joab. David went to Rabbah and led his men in the final attack that brought the city to its knees.

QUESTIONS

1. Why did David desire to show kindness to Hanun, the new king of the Ammonites? 2 Samuel 10:2

2. What happened as a result of Hanun, the new king of Ammon, listening to the poor advice of his counselors? 2 Samuel 10:3-7

3. At times, other people may misinterpret our actions. How should we respond?

4. In the episode with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11:1-5, what are three observations we can make about King David's behavior?

5. How might we learn from David's poor choices when it comes to temptation?

6. David took a number of decisive steps when he heard the news that Bathsheba was pregnant (2 Samuel 11:6-27). How did his first sin lead to the next sin and the next? What can we learn from this sequence that we can apply to our lives today?

7. The name Nathan means "God has given," and indeed God gave Nathan to David to be his prophet, counselor, and friend. Nathan was courageous and told David the truth, even when he did not know what the outcome would be. What creative means did God help Nathan utilize to make his point? 2 Samuel 12:1-4

8. Sin has consequences, and Nathan listed several for David (2 Samuel 12:10-12). What did God determine would happen to David and Bathsheba's child, and what was David's reaction to God's judgment? 2 Samuel 12:14-23

9. David repented once Nathan pointed out the error of his ways. As a result of his repentance, God spared David's life, but He did not mitigate all the judgment on David. What parallels can we draw for our own lives based on this account?

CONCLUSION

Living a godly life involves more than living clean while in public. God sees us wherever we are, and we place our integrity on the line when we choose to do in secret what we would not do in public. If at any point we realize we have made such an error, we can do as David did and sincerely repent. God will never turn any honest seeker away.



David's Struggles

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Samuel 13:1 through 24:25

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down the people under me, and that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name.” (2 Samuel 22:48-50)

BACKGROUND

David was a man of devotion to God, and had been anointed by God to be the leader over His chosen people. Although David was the most just of all Israel's kings, he was not perfect. After restoring the nation of Israel to peace and great military power, his personal life became entangled in sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then ordered the murder of her husband in an attempt to cover up his deeds. Through the prophet Nathan, God rebuked David and pronounced severe judgment upon his household. In chapters 13 through 24 of 2 Samuel, God's judgment against David's household was fulfilled. Amnon, David's son, molested his half sister, Tamar. Absalom publicly humiliated David's concubines. Both David's sons — Amnon and Absalom — were killed.

David had to face the consequences of his sins, even though he repented and his connection to God was restored. A string of tragic events befell David's family; the record of lust, murder, rebellion, and exile, added up to a price David probably never dreamed he would have to pay when he first fell into sin. He also experienced trouble and distress on a national level, having to flee for his own life when his kingship was challenged through the treachery of Absalom.

David lived with ongoing reminders of his sinful deeds for the rest of his life. This account of the final years of his life serves as a warning to us of the terrible consequences of sin, but also of the great mercy of God when one turns from sin in repentance.

The final four chapters of 2 Samuel give an “addendum” to David's life story, and are not necessarily in chronological order. His final psalm is given, and his best warriors are listed. The sad story is given of how David numbered Israel and the resulting judgment. But then the writer recounts David's beautiful declaration that he would only offer to God that which cost him something. David's life serves as an object lesson to us yet today.

QUESTIONS

1. In 2 Samuel 13:31, King David responds with deep grief over events that had occurred in his family. In two or three sentences, summarize the cause of his grief.

2. In our day of moral relativism, many people believe that their own behavior is a matter of personal choice. How do the consequences of sin, disobedience, and rebellion affect the lives of others? Cite specific examples to support your answer.

3. Following his murder of Amnon, Absalom was forced to flee from Jerusalem. In an attempt to have him restored to royal favor, Joab hired a “wise woman” of Tekoa to approach David with a contrived story paralleling David's own experience with Absalom. How did David respond? 2 Samuel 14:11-21

4. When confronted with his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, David acknowledged it and wholeheartedly repented. God forgave him, opening the way for him to begin life anew. Using 2 Samuel 13:28 and 15:2-4, 10,14, contrast Absalom’s behavior with that of his father.

5. In chapter 16, we read of Shimei’s verbal tirade against David. How did David respond to the insults and curses heaped upon him? What lesson can we learn from his attitude? 2 Samuel 16:5-14

6. In 2 Samuel 18:6-18, we read of Absalom’s death; verse 33 records David’s great anguish. Why do you think David was so upset over the death of his rebellious son?

7. David’s grief for Absalom was so intense that it appeared he did not appreciate the military victory that had been won. Joab pointed out that there would be terrible consequences if David did not commend the troops for their achievement. For the sake of political strategy, he urged David to go and “speak comfortably unto thy servants.” What was the result? 2 Samuel 19:8

8. In Chapter 24, David commanded that a census be taken, which brought the anger of the Lord against Israel and a pestilence resulting in 70,000 deaths throughout the land. When David pled with God for “these sheep,” God commanded him to make an offering in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Araunah offered to give David the property and the necessities for the offering. What was David’s response, and what can we learn from it? 2 Samuel 24:24

9. Chapter 22 is filled with significant insights into God and what it means to have Him as our God. What major themes are developed in David’s song as recorded in this chapter?

CONCLUSION

Through the help of God, David had accomplished what no other leader before him had accomplished — Israel was finally at peace after more than 400 years of political upheaval. Throughout his reign, the basis of David’s administration was dedication to God and the well-being of the people. Though he failed God, he admitted his guilt and repented. His devotion toward God ultimately earned him the honor of being called “a man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22).



Solomon's Reign

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Kings 1:1 through 11:43

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.” (1 Kings 11:2)

BACKGROUND

The first two chapters of 1 Kings give an account of the closing years of David's reign, concluding the account recorded in 2 Samuel. They cover the transition from his reign to the reign of his son, Solomon. The main events of this Book are the death of David, Solomon's reign and death, the division of the kingdom, and Elijah's ministry.

As David was on his deathbed, his fourth son Adonijah (the logical choice to succeed him as the first three sons, Amnon, Daniel, and Absalom, were dead by this time) attempted to seize the throne without David's knowledge and proclaimed himself king. When the news reached David, he declared that his son Solomon, born to him by Bathsheba, was to be the next ruler. He gave the order for Solomon's anointing, thus quickly instituting temporary co-regency. Immediately following the anointing, the trumpet was blown to alert the people that the king's choice had been anointed.

A mule was a prized animal, to be ridden by the wealthy and powerful. A strong message was sent when Solomon was given King David's mule to ride. (Only the king rode the king's mule.) Sacrifices were offered when a new king was anointed, demonstrating the nation's joy over a new king. These were called peace offerings, and were offered by the priest. Although Adonijah declared himself as king, he did not have the religious ceremony following, while Solomon did.

Solomon began his reign in the steps of his father David, acting in obedience to the Lord. Though he was given wisdom from God, he began making choices that would eventually lead to his downfall.

Chapters 3 and 4 relate the granting of wisdom to Solomon and the grandeur of his kingdom. Chapters 5 through 9 describe Solomon's building projects and the dedication of the Temple. Chapters 9 through 11 record his greatness, his ultimate downfall, and his death.

QUESTIONS

1. What was David's parting advice to Solomon?

1 Kings 2:2-4

2. Why was Solomon so swift to remove his adversaries at the beginning of his reign, and how did it benefit him? 1 Kings 2:13-46

3. What did Solomon request from God? Why was God pleased with Solomon's request? 1 Kings 3:5-14

4. What was Solomon's first demonstration of great wisdom? 1 Kings 3:16-28

5. According to 1 Kings 5:13-14, Solomon employed three times as many workers as were needed for the Temple project, and then rotated their schedules so they did not have to be away from their homes and families for long periods of time. Why do you think this was a wise move?

6. What was the intent of the Queen of Sheba when she came to visit Solomon? (1 Kings 10:1) What was her reaction after she had spent time with him?

7. How did Solomon's acceptance of wives from foreign religions affect the course of his life? Does compromise affect Christianity today? Explain.

8. How would you sum up the reign of Solomon? What were his strengths? What eventually led to his downfall?

9. What principles or precepts did you learn from the study of Solomon that you can apply to your own life?

CONCLUSION

While our start in the Christian life is vital, how we finish is of even greater importance!

NOTES



Divided Kingdom

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Kings 12:1 through 16:34

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.” (1 Kings 12:20)

BACKGROUND

Chapters 12 through 16 of 1 Kings record the division of Israel into the separate nations of Judah and Israel, and their respective histories up to the time of Elijah. God allowed this division to occur because of Solomon’s disobedience and idolatry. In 1 Kings 11:9-13, the stage is set for the events that followed.

Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, was heir to the throne of the united Israel. However, due to God’s judgment against Solomon’s idolatry, Rehoboam became king only of Judah, which included the absorbed tribe of Benjamin. Solomon’s servant, Jeroboam, became king of the ten northern tribes known as Israel. The two kingdoms were at war throughout the next 260 years.

For approximately three years, Rehoboam seemingly followed in the way of the Lord (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). Yet as soon as he became king, Rehoboam turned from God, and led Judah into deeper sin. Similarly, Abijam (Abijah), Rehobam’s son and successor, initially seemed to have respect for God (he brought freewill offerings to the house of the Lord and, according to 2 Chronicles 13:4-18, called on God to provide victory in battle), but was not a godly man. His true heart was revealed by his continued worship of false gods. Religious apostasy deepened under his rule.

Following Abijam’s short reign of three years, Judah enjoyed many years under the righteous reigns of King Asa and his son, Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 15:24). Asa’s steps to turn Judah back to the worship of God included driving out the male cult prostitutes brought in by his father and removing all the idols his father had made. He displaced Maachah as queen mother, thus removing her influence toward idolatry. He also began to replenish the treasury of the Lord’s house.

During this same time frame, Israel endured a series of kings whose hearts were far from God. Unlike Judah, who had some kings who were devoted to God, Israel never had a king that did right in the sight of God. This apostasy started with Jeroboam’s introduction of a substitute religion and calf worship.

God pronounced judgment against Jeroboam because he led the people into sin, and debauchery was widespread among the next kings in Israel. Each successor went to bloody extremes to rid himself of potential threat from any relative of the previous king. Following Jeroboam’s death, Nadab assumed the throne, but in fulfillment of God’s prophecy concerning the destruction of the house of Jeroboam, Baasha assassinated Nadab and went on to kill all the males of the house of Jeroboam.

Baasha reigned for twenty-four years and was succeeded by his son, Elah, who reigned only two years before Zimri, one of his military commanders, assassinated him. Zimri destroyed the house of Baasha, but only lasted seven days as king because the people proclaimed Omri, commander of the army, as king.

Following four years of struggle, Omri established himself as king over Israel. The rule of his house lasted for forty-eight years through his reign and the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram. These kings all followed after the evil practices of calf worship, which ultimately brought their destruction.

QUESTIONS

1. The nations of Israel and Judah were divided, partly because Rehoboam listened to the advice of the young men and gave a rough reply when the people asked him to lighten their yoke (1 Kings 12:1-16). Compare the advice of the old men in 1 Kings 12:7 to the advice of the young men in 1 Kings 12:10-11, and explain why the advice of the old men was superior.

2. Through Ahijah the prophet, God told Jeroboam that he would establish his house if Jeroboam would be obedient and keep God’s commandments (1 Kings 11:38). Read 1 Kings 12:26-33 to see Jeroboam’s response. Why did Jeroboam forsake God and set up golden calf idols in the towns of Bethel and Dan?

3. Three miracles were performed by the prophet of Judah (1 Kings 13:1-6), yet Jeroboam did not turn from his idolatry (1 Kings 13:33,34). Why do you think Jeroboam persisted in his disobedience even after seeing the miracles? Compare this to the reaction of unbelievers today when they observe God at work.

4. The prophet of Judah knew how important it was to obey God's instructions (1 Kings 13:7-10), and yet he was persuaded to disobey by the old prophet of Bethel. What arguments did the old prophet use to foster disobedience in the prophet of Judah? (See 1 Kings 13:15-19.) How might similar arguments be presented to tempt us to disobey God's commands today?

5. Why do you think the lion killed the prophet of Judah? (See 1 Kings 13:20-32.) What can we learn from this account?

6. Is the prophet of Judah's disobedience any more or less excusable than the disobedience of King Jeroboam? Explain your answer.

7. Under the reign of King Rehoboam, the nation of Judah also turned to idolatry (1 Kings 14:21-24). Of the ten kings mentioned in today's text, only two of the kings—Asa of Judah and his son Jehoshaphat—did "that which was right in the eyes of the LORD" (1 Kings 15:11). After reading 1 Kings 15:9-15, note the difficulties that Asa must have faced in trying to do right. How might we face similar difficulties?

8. There was no king in Israel who would stand up and stop the idol worship the country had fallen into; as a result, wickedness increased and Israel degenerated into gross sin (see 1 Kings 16:25-33). Wicked King Ahab "did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him" (1 Kings 16:33). Give three examples of times when you have seen the effects of unrestrained disobedience and sin sustained and magnified in a life, a family, or a nation.

CONCLUSION

The Book of 1 Kings weaves together an account of the moral choices made by individuals, prophecies which predict the consequences of these choices, and the actual political outcomes of these choices in Israel and Judah. The Bible clearly reveals that our response to God's commands affects our families, our nation, and ourselves.



Elijah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

1 Kings 17:1 through 22:53

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word.” (1 Kings 18:36)

BACKGROUND

Nothing is recorded about Elijah before he suddenly appeared before King Ahab, as recorded in 1 Kings 17:1. As one of the first in a long line of important prophets God sent to Israel and Judah, Elijah was a Tishbite of the land of Gilead, a mountainous area located on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

King Ahab was Israel’s seventh king, reigning from 919 B.C. to 897 B.C. He was influenced by his wife, Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Zidon, and introduced Baal worship to Israel (1 Kings 16:31-32).

Baal was worshiped for two reasons: generosity and anger. In generosity he supposedly gave light, warmth, and rain, but his anger was manifested in the fierce summer heat that destroyed the vegetation he had brought. Human victims, usually the firstborn of the sacrificer, were burnt alive to appease his anger in time of plague or other troubles. Such sacrifice is figuratively termed “passing” the victim “through the fire” (Deuteronomy 18:10; 2 Kings 16:3). Ordinary offerings to Baal consisted of incense and burnt sacrifices.

God directly confronted Ahab’s false religion with the appearance and message of Elijah. Since the name *Elijah* means, “Jehovah is my God,” the prophet’s very name pointed to the true and only God. Elijah announced, “As the LORD God of Israel liveth . . .,” drawing attention to the ever-present, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. He then exposed Baal as a lifeless and powerless idol by declaring there would be no “dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.”

During the three-and-a-half year drought, God sustained Elijah. Provisions were first supplied at the brook Cherith, a torrent-bed or wady, possibly located on the east side of the Jordan River. Elijah was then sent to a widow woman in Zarephath, the same area that Jezebel came from. During this time there was severe famine in Samaria where King Ahab dwelt.

Before Elijah prayed to end the drought, he called on the people to choose between God and Baal. Ahab

gathered the Children of Israel, 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 prophets of the groves. The Hebrew translation for *groves* is *asherah* (or Astarte), which was a Phoenician goddess (see “Pagan Gods” supplement). It was this idolatrous crowd that Elijah challenged to see whether Baal or God would consume a sacrifice using fire not created by man.

Following Elijah’s tremendous victory and the execution of the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled for his life from Jezebel’s wrath. He traveled over 300 miles in 40 days to Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai), where the Lord instructed him to anoint Hazael to be the King of Syria, Jehu to be the King of Israel, and Elisha to be his successor—instructions which Elijah followed. God later used these two kings to execute judgment on Ahab’s family and the idolatrous people of Israel.

The prophet Elijah confronted Ahab one last time to pronounce final judgment against him after the death of Naboth. Naboth the Jezreelite had refused to sell his property to Ahab because it had belonged to his family for some time. Therefore, Jezebel found two men (“sons of Belial” meaning evil, lawless, and wicked men) to falsely accuse him of blasphemy and he was stoned to death. Elijah told Ahab that, “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood.” Ahab was later killed in a battle, and as they washed his chariot in the pool of Samaria the dogs licked his blood, fulfilling Elijah’s prophecy.

QUESTIONS

1. Referring back to 1 Kings 16:33, why do you think God sent Elijah to King Ahab?

2. How did Elijah respond to God’s instructions? (1 Kings 17:1-5, 8-10; 18:1-2) What can we learn from this example?

3. What was God's plan in caring for Elijah during the drought? (1 Kings 17:2-16) How should this example encourage us today?

4. How many prophets did Obadiah hide? (1 Kings 18:3-4) Why?

5. How did the people respond at Mount Carmel when asked which God they would serve (1 Kings 18:21)? Why would they have responded in this manner?

6. Why did Elijah have water poured over the sacrifice? 1 Kings 18:33-35

7. After praying a short and simple prayer that caused fire to come down from Heaven and consume the sacrifice, why did Elijah need to pray seven times to cause the rain to come? 1 Kings 18:42-45

8. When Elijah fled to Mount Horeb, in what manner did the Lord speak to him? (1 Kings 19:12) How does God speak to us today?

9. Elijah cast his mantle onto Elisha signifying God's call on his life to be a prophet. List five areas in which God calls people to service, and indicate how He makes this known.

CONCLUSION

Elijah's example of faithfulness and obedience to God in difficult and wicked times should encourage all Christians to cultivate and maintain a close and personal relationship with the Lord.

NOTES

Pagan Gods

BAAL

Baal (Baalim in the plural) was a widely-worshiped pagan god of fertility. He was the principal male god of the Phoenicians and Canaanites. The wicked King Ahab and his wife Jezebel promoted Baal worship in Israel. The Book of Hosea describes the conflict between worship of the true God and this false god.

Baal worshippers believed he had power over wind, rain, and clouds. When crops were abundant, they worshiped him as the sun-god to give thanks. In times of drought, storms, or other crop devastation, they worshiped him as the storm-god to appease his wrath. The fact that his prophets could not end the three-year drought Elijah had proclaimed proved his lack of power, and the supremacy of the God of Israel.

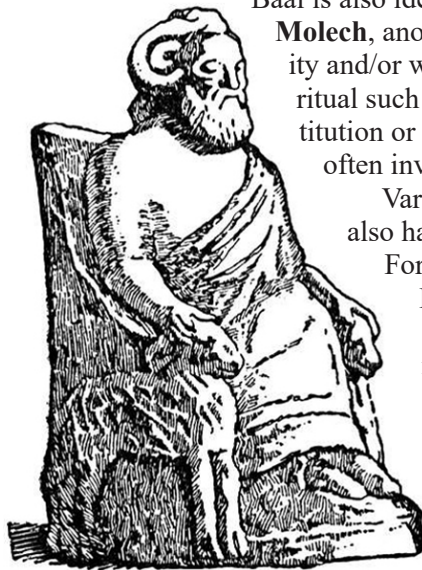
Baal worship involved extremely immoral practices including illicit sex and human sacrifice, usually by burning a worshiper's firstborn alive.

Baal is also identified with **Molech**, another pagan deity and/or wicked sacrifice ritual such as temple prostitution or human sacrifice, often involving children.

Various locations also had local Baalim. For example,

Baal-peor was a Moabite god, named so because his obscene rites were performed at Mount Peor. Sometimes compound

forms of the word were used to name locations where he was worshiped, such as **Baal-gad** and **Baal-hermon**.



ASHTORETH

Elijah requested that 400 "prophets of the groves" attend the showdown recorded in 1 Kings chapter 18. These individuals led the Israelites' worship of the pagan goddess **Ashtoreth** (Ashtaroth or Astaroth in the plural). The Greek form of her name is **Astarte**. The Hebrew name, **Asherah** (Asherim in the plural), referenced both the deity and the idols used in her worship. The King James Version of the Bible translated this simply "groves."

Ashtoreth was widely considered a goddess of love (fertility) and war, and also identified by some worshippers as a "moon goddess," the "goddess of the morning and evening star," or the "goddess of the sea." Her common names included, "Queen of Heaven," "Mistress of Heaven," "Lady of Heaven," and "Lady Asherah of the Sea."

Ashtoreth was often connected closely to Baal; many myths said she was his wife or mistress. Another tradition called her "the mother goddess," saying that she had 70 children and that Baal was one of them. The Mesopotamian version of this goddess was called **Ishtar** (or Ashtar) and they said Tammuz, god of vegetation, was her husband (Ezekiel 8:14). The Moabites called her the spouse of Chemosh, their national god. Later, Ashtoreth was identified with the Greek goddess **Aphrodite** and the Roman **Venus**.

An idol of Ashtoreth was possibly the stem of a tree without branches shaped into an image and planted in the ground (Deuteronomy 16:21) or a similar looking object carved out of wood, silver, or stone. Ashtoreth worship glorified sex and war and included temple prostitution.



DELIBERATE MISSPELLINGS

Scholars suggest that some of the variety in translation and resulting ambiguity in the names of these pagan gods comes from deliberate mispronunciations and misspellings. Biblical writers expressed contempt for pagan gods in this way. For example, the word *Molech* is a combination of the Hebrew words for "ruler" and "shame." Despite various titles, it is clear that all of these terms (Baal, Molech, Ashtoreth, Astarte, Ishtar, etc.) are used to reference the pagan worship detested by the God of Israel.

