

God's Big Picture 4 Joshua to II Chronicles The Partial Kingdom

Introduction

There is a difference between walking by faith and reckless folly, but the boundaries between the two may be smaller than we realise! Where, for example, would you place the actions of Robert Park, an American of Korean descent, who walked into North Korea from China over the frozen Tumen River on Christmas Day, 25 December, 2009 with a letter for its President Kim Jong Il asking him to stop persecuting Christians? Mr Park wished to highlight the suffering of Christians and was willing to risk his own life to accomplish that goal. [*The Times* 30 Dec. 2009] He was immediately imprisoned by the North Korean authorities, but released on 5 February 2010 following representations by the Swedish embassy that handles all matters in that country relating to America [BBC News website 5 Feb. 2010]. Or the actions of Moscow mayor Boris Yeltsin, standing in front of the tanks in Russia, when a Communist coup was unsuccessfully attempted between 19 and 21 August 1991? Yeltsin's decision, that day, to defy an attempt by old-line Communist Party officials to overthrow Mikhail Gorbachev came at a moment as crucial as any in Russia's long and violent history. The leaders had failed to gain control of the White House, the Russian Federation's parliamentary building and the main rallying point for pro-democracy Muscovites. When army tanks rolled up to the building on the morning of Aug. 19, Yeltsin, then the recently elected President of Russia, seized the moment. He strode outside, leapt atop an armoured vehicle and delivered a speech in the fiery tradition of the old Bolsheviks whose communist heritage he was at that moment dismantling. "Soldiers, officers, generals," he boomed. "The clouds of terror and dictatorship are gathering over the whole country. They must not be allowed to bring eternal night." Some of the soldiers, already doubtful of the coup's legality and loath to open fire on unarmed fellow citizens, trained their guns away from the building and joined in its defence. The coup collapsed, and within a year the Soviet Union was no more. [*Time Magazine* 23 April 2007] Would this second generation of Israelites accept the promises and obey the commands of the God who called them out of Egypt? God had guaranteed that the Israelites would take possession of the Land of Canaan, but that first generation did **not** have the faith to believe that it would happen and He allowed them to die without seeing the blessings that could have been theirs. This is a salutary lesson for us all. Will you /will I receive or lose the blessings God has prepared for us? A true believer is secure in their salvation because of Christ –though there will be some evidence of the Holy Spirit's work within them, but we can miss the rewards of faith and the encouragements He has for us if we fail to live for Him as we should.

1. Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan (Joshua)

(a) Entering the Land (1-5) Joshua who had been called a generation earlier as Moses' servant and who had successfully led the Israelites in battle against an Amorite army (Exodus 17:8-16), shortly after their departure from Egypt, was now given the ultimate responsibility as the leader of the nation. Joshua 1 speaks of his call to office and the challenge to live in strict conformity to the Word of God and to exhibit the necessary courage to lead the people forward into the inheritance God had prepared for them. Joshua 1:7-9 gives the key words of his commission: *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.*⁸ *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*⁹ *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*" The Lord granted a big encouragement to him and the nation in the report of the spies sent to gather information on the big city state of Jericho that stood in their pathway, across the River Jordan. This encouragement was needed because

the problems before them seemed insurmountable. The river was at its height –too deep for them to cross and the city of Jericho had huge thick walls and they had no siege weapons to enable them to conquer a fortified city. What they didn't know, but archaeologists discovered in the last century, was that the King of Jericho had stockpiled enough food in the city to withstand a siege far longer than the Israelites could have mounted. However, Rahab, the owner of a House of ill repute told the spies that she hid on her property these words: *Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof⁹ and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.¹⁰ We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below* (Joshua 2:8-11). It appears that this woman had become a believer in the most unlikely location. Her life was spared when Jericho fell and remarkably she became an ancestor of our Lord. Matthew 1:5 records that she married a Jew named Nashon, the granddad of Boaz, who is a central character in the book of Ruth. It is remarkable that of the significant people highlighted by Matthew in his genealogy (which in that social context usually only included men) listed four Gentile women believers: Tamar (Genesis 38 – a single parent); Rahab (Joshua 2); Ruth (Book of Ruth) and Bathsheba (II Samuel 11; I Kings 1). God can use the most unlikely people to do His work – don't think what you can do is not potentially significant for God's kingdom! The first miracle here was the stopping of the water when they wished to cross. They could not see that a blockage at a place upriver had allowed them the necessary time to cross before the water surged back. The miracle was in the timing for this vast multitude of people. They had to walk **into** the water (Joshua 3:14-17), their part, **then** God did the rest. (b) **Conquering the Land** (6-12) the hardest challenge was the first one –taking Jericho. What did God tell them to do –march round the walls (Joshua 6)! He did the rest –a mighty earthquake at the very time the trumpets blew knocked the walls down outwards (confirmed by an archaeological team from Toronto University in the 1980s); the question was this: would they trust God enough to take the rest of the land? Sadly at little Ai (Joshua 7-8) and with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9) they failed to seek the Lord and act as He had commanded them. The lesson was clear –will we put our lives totally in His hands in our generation? God has not changed. (c) **Dividing up the Land** (13-24) The rest of the book is mainly taken up with the division of the land amongst the different tribes. The first map shows which parts of the territory were given to which tribe: Gad, Reuben and part of the tribe of Manasseh were given land outside of Canaan on the east side of the Jordan – fertile farming land but very vulnerable to attacks from raiders and invading armies. The land settled by the tribes of Asher, Naphtali and Dan is today southern Lebanon.

MAP OF ISRAEL DURING JOSHUA'S TIME



2. Judges and the Cycle of Sin Grace and Deliverance (Judges and Ruth)

The period from Joshua to the exile in Babylon at the end of this study covers the best part of 900 years. In terms of Scotland's history this would cover a period of time equivalent to 1110AD to the present day – i.e. 162 years before the birth of William Wallace (1272-1305) and slightly longer before that of Robert the Bruce (1274-1329), to 2010. The era of the Judges covered approximately 400 years. It was a cyclical round of apostasy against God resulting in occupation by a neighbouring power, followed by a cry to God for help and repentance from sin and the deliverance under the leadership of various courageous individuals. (a) **Apostasy** six main eras (i) Judges 3:5-8: for eight years occupied by an Iraqi King (ii) Judges 3:12-14: ruled by the king of Moab for eighteen years; (iii) Judges 4:1-3: under the control of the king of Canaan, Jabin, who ruled a city-state around Hazor (North-west of the Sea of Galilee) for twenty years; (iv) Judges 6:1-10: for seven years terrorised by the Midianites, a nomadic tribal confederation; (v) & (vi) Judges 10:6-18 and 13:1: ruled by the Philistines, a people of Greek ancestry, who lived in five coastal city states in the south west of Canaan, for eighteen and forty years respectively. (b) **Deliverance** God used thirteen key leaders to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. (i) **Othniel** (Judges 3:9-11), younger brother of Caleb, the colleague of Joshua, rescued them from the Iraqi King Cushan-Rishathaim. (ii) **Ehud** (Judges 3:15-20) delivered them from the King of Moab; another leader **Shamgar** (Judges 3:31) defeated a Philistine invasion, saving the nation from occupation after Othniel's death. (iii) **Deborah** (Judges 4-5) was a lady prophetess and ruler who organised the opposition to Jabin King of Canaan. **Barak**, the army commander, declined to go into battle unless she stood next to him. She was clearly a lady of authority who was not impressed by weak men! (iv) **Gideon** (Judges 6-8) won a great victory against the odds, because God was with him against the Midianites. **Tola** (Judges 10:1-2) and **Jair** (Judges 10:3-5) were also able leaders in Israel. (v) **Jephthah** (Judges 11-12) had a traumatic childhood, but God enabled to overcome this disadvantage, become the leader in Israel and win a dramatic victory over the Ammonites (modern day Jordan). After him **Ibzan** (Judges 12:8-10); **Elon** (Judges 12:11-12) and **Abdon** (Judges 12:13-15) were appointed to serve as the national leader. The final named judge was **Samson** (Judges 13-16) whose lifestyle was more in keeping with Hollywood than as a man of God. Yet God used this extremely flawed character to win victories over the Philistines. He was closer to mythical American war hero 'John Rambo' than the kind of man or woman we might want to see serving in our churches today. However, God had a work for him to do, as He does for each and every one of us. (c) **Key verse Judges 21:25** the later chapters of Judges are bleak and give us a glimpse of life without God's moral law. Judges 21:25 stated: *In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.* Yet not everyone was like that. The short book that follows Judges gives an unexpected example of a model believer. (d) **The Model Believer (Ruth)** She was a Moabite girl yet she came to faith in the God of Israel and her devotion to the Lord was a shining light in a dark place. In time she met an Israelite man Boaz, the grandson of Rahab, and their marriage produced a son Obed, who would become the grandfather of the greatest Israelite king David. Ruth, a Gentile, an ethnic minority woman, was the example of faith in that generation.

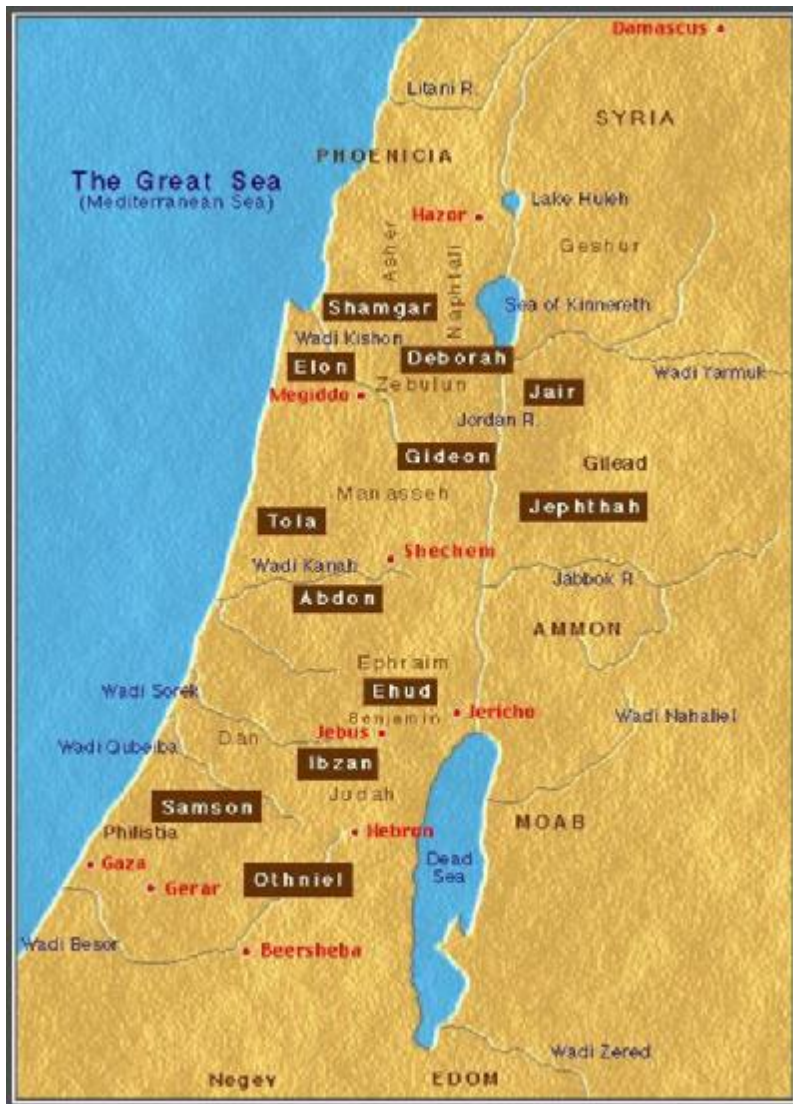


Fig 3. The 12 Judges and Locations

3. Samuel and Saul and the Creation of the Kingdom (I Samuel)

(a) Samuel the last of the Judges (I Samuel 1-8) the figure of Samuel was the link between the old largely lawless era of the Judges to the new period of the rule of the Kings of Israel and Judah. It begins with the remarkable story of his birth and how as a young boy he was given a revelation by God of the forthcoming judgement on the nation and in particular on the family of Eli, the priestly leader of the Israelite people (I Samuel 3). It was a time of national crisis when one thing went wrong after another. The Ark of the Covenant was lost in battle to the Philistines, although it was eventually returned and the Philistines subdued (I Samuel 6-7). However, the clamour rose up for a king to lead them (I Samuel 8). Samuel warned them that setting up a system with kings and politicians would make matters worse rather than better –but the people were not convinced. I Samuel 8: 19-22 reported: ¹⁹ *But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us.* ²⁰ *Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.*"²¹ *When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. ²² The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go back to his town."* The era of the Jewish Kings and their kingdoms was now beginning. However, it would at best be

a partial kingdom, falling well short of the ideal Davidic kingdom where justice and righteousness would reign supreme. (b) **Saul the first King of the United Kingdom** (I Samuel 9-31) A shy and extremely tall young man from the tribe of Benjamin was chosen for this important position. In his early years things appeared to go well, especially in the great military victory over the Ammonites (I Samuel 11). However, in later years the spiritual mistakes increased –from taking Samuel’s place in offering a sacrifice at Gilgal (I Samuel 13); to ridiculous vows about fasting in a war zone (I Samuel 14) and especially his disobedience regarding the judgement on the evil Amalekites (I Samuel 15), led to his removal from his post. I Samuel 15:22-23 records Samuel’s sad declaration from God concerning the end of Saul’s reign: *But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."*²³ *For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king."* In the language of school reports it could have been said of him. ‘Saul had great gifts but he never achieved his full potential’. What about you and me –God has gifted us and blessed us with opportunities for service in our generation –what judgement will God make on our ‘report card’?

4. David and the Consolidation of the Kingdom (I Samuel 16-31 / II Samuel / I Chronicles)

(a) **David’s Formative Years** (I Samuel 16-31) The story is well-known of David’s call from serving as a shepherd boy to rule his country (I Samuel 16). It was not an unexpected appointment in many ways. He had shown extraordinary bravery in fighting the Philistine warrior Goliath (I Samuel 17), a giant of a man at over nine feet tall, with the strength to match, in one-to-one combat. Probably even more nerve-racking were Saul’s many attempts to kill him (I Samuel 18-31); this crisis only ended when Saul and his closest male relatives and army were slaughtered in battle on Mount Gilboa. David and his growing army appeared to be taking charge of running parts of the country, while Saul’s involvement in the occult (I Samuel 18:10; 19:9; 28) led to a complete loss of focus by the first King of Israel. However, God honed David’s leadership skills and extraordinary self-discipline to prepare him to take over as the second king of Israel. Although his reign began with much sorrow when Jonathan, Saul’s eldest son and David’s best friend, was killed in the same battle in which Saul had died (I Samuel 31-II Samuel 1), the nation recognised that he was God’s man for the new era ahead. David would never have desired to experience the huge difficulties he had passed through in those years, yet through them he gained the wisdom and insight that proved vital during his reign as King. Many of the songs he wrote, recorded in the book of Psalms, are a testimony to his growth in the faith at this time. God can bring good out of the difficult times we go through as well. The events themselves may be sad or bad, but like Joseph (Genesis 50: 20) in time we can come to see how God has worked in us and through us for our good and for His glory. (b) **David’s Triumphant Years** (II Samuel 1-10) After his appointment as ruler over Israel and Judah was confirmed the early years saw many great military victories and national pride and morale had never been so high. Yet at the time of his greatest triumphs the seeds of David’s downfall were sown. His famous self-discipline began to slip and a catastrophic decision to pressure a neighbour’s wife, Bathsheba, into an affair led to the murder of her husband Uriah and a loss of respect for David amongst the people closest to him. It led into (c) **David’s Troubled Years** (II Samuel 11-24) The kingdom was salvaged

by Nathan, David's pastor, daring to challenge him about his misconduct, using a story that led David to own up to what he had done. II Samuel 12:7-10, the prophetic judgement upon David certainly came true. *Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'* One tragedy after another befell his household and is recorded in the remaining chapters of II Samuel. How did it come about? Like the revelations about the England football captain John Terry (in February 2010) it appears he had completely lost a sense of perspective on life. Power and status had seduced him into thinking because he could do something right or wrong, it didn't matter which he chose, because he was the king after all and the rules only applied to other people. It is a salutary warning to us all to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus not on the declining moral standards around us. Paul told the Colossian Church: *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:2-3). God is always watching us urging us on to be the best that we can be for Him. May we not disappoint Him.

5. Solomon and the Climax of the Kingdom (I Kings 1-11 / II Chronicles 1-9)

(a) **The Wisdom of King Solomon** (I Kings 1-10; II Chronicles 1-9; Proverbs; Song of Solomon) The person chosen by David to succeed him as king was not one of his older sons which led to serious tensions in the family for some years. Bathsheba's son Solomon was chosen to fulfil this calling. He was a well-educated man, but more importantly was a particularly wise ruler –most of the time. His judgment in a maternity case (I Kings 3) was celebrated throughout the land. He was credited with writing many of the sayings recorded in the book of Proverbs and the love song in the appropriately named Song of Solomon. His reign was peaceful. David's army had defeated all their enemies and for a generation its fruits were enjoyed throughout the land. It was a period of material prosperity with many public buildings being erected, not least the first Jewish Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 6-9. Material goods in abundance and guests, including the Queen of Sheba (called Yemen today -I Kings 10), came on visits to the land, something not experienced before in Israelite history. Yet all was not well. At the height of his fame and success –like his father – Solomon made choices that were disastrous not only for him and his family but also for the nation. (b) **The Folly of King Solomon** (I Kings 11; Ecclesiastes). The book of Ecclesiastes, essentially a series of sermons on what life would be like without God and why this is not a suitable lifestyle to lead, attributed to King Solomon, appears as a wise older man reflecting on the folly of indulging in a hedonistic lifestyle of the proverbial 'wine women and song'. I Kings 11 records how he sought innumerable sexual relationships with women from a wide variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds who influenced him to turn away from the Lord. [The yellow area on the map shows the extent of the territory conquered by David and ruled over by Solomon.]

**United Israelite Kingdom,
Israel in the Time of Kings Saul, David and Solomon, 1000 to 924 B.C.**



God's judgement was prophesied to him in I Kings 11:9-13: *The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.* ¹⁰ *Although He had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command.* ¹¹ *So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept My covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates.* ¹² *Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.* ¹³ *Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."* This judgement was fulfilled early in the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam. Are there particular temptations that could tempt you to take your eyes off the Lord and His standards for your life? If there are - deal with them quickly and avoid the consequences of painful moral failures.

6. Kings of Israel and Judah and the Crumbling of the Kingdom

(I Kings 12-II Kings / II Chronicles 10-36)

(a) **The First Eighty Years of the two kingdoms** (I Kings 12-22) The remainder of I Kings covers the reigns of eight kings in the larger northern kingdom where **Jereboam, Omri** and **Ahab** were the most significant rulers. What they had in common was little regard for the God of Israel. In the same time period there were only five kings of Judah with two lengthy reigns for the devout monarchs **Asa** and **Jehoshaphat**. The future was becoming increasingly ominous for the Northern kingdom as the mighty Assyrian Empire that encompassed parts of four modern countries, Turkey Syria, Iraq and Iran had begun to consolidate its power.



(b) **An Account of the Kings of Israel –till the Assyrian Captivity in 722BC** (II Kings 1-17) Twelve kings of Israel followed Ahab, but none seriously followed the Lord as He desired. II Kings 17: 18-23 summed up the reason for Israel’s judgement and exile: *So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from His presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left,¹⁹ and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced.²⁰ Therefore the Lord rejected all the people of Israel; He afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until He thrust them from His presence.²¹ When He tore Israel away from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat their king. Jeroboam enticed Israel away from following the Lord and caused them to commit a great sin.²² The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them²³ until the Lord removed them from His presence, as He had warned through all His servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.* These are very solemn words. God takes sin seriously and it has its consequences. Are there lessons we need to learn for our lives in the twenty-first century from this appalling tragedy? (c) **An Account of the Kings of Judah –till the Babylonian Captivity in 587/6BC** (II Kings 11-25 / II Chronicles 10-36)

Although far from an ideal situation Judah had some good kings in **Joash, Azariah** (Uzziah), **Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah**, yet the others dishonoured God and turned the hearts of the nation away from God. Three waves of exiles in 605BC; 597BC and finally 587/6BC led to the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah by the new superpower the Babylonians.



Was this the end? The people whose thoughts were reflected in Psalm 137 probably thought so. *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.*² *There on the poplars we hung our harps,*³ *for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"* The partial kingdom was coming to a close. One greater than King Solomon would teach God's people (Luke 11:29-32); Before His coming, though, a whole series of prophets would speak His Words to the nation, but not only to the Jews, but to all the people of God who were willing to heed what God had to say. Will we heed His message in the twenty-first century and live our lives in a manner honouring to Him? I hope and pray we will for Jesus' sake, Amen.

